

Growing the desert: Educational pathways for remote Indigenous people—Support document

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The Murdi Paaki Healthy Housing Worker program— replicable outcomes

Introduction

As part of a project funded by the National Centre for Vocational Education and Research (NCVER) and the Desert Knowledge CRC (DKCRC), the ‘Growing the desert’ research team have conducted a broad-ranging analysis of the role of formal and non-formal training opportunities that lead to employment and enterprise opportunities in the desert region of central Australia. In the third and final stage of the project, the team has prepared four case studies of Indigenous training exemplars. This case study documents the story of the Murdi Paaki Healthy Housing Worker Pilot Project, initiated and managed by the Murdi Paaki Regional Housing Corporation. Training for the Project has been conducted by the Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education.

The purpose of this case study is

- a) to investigate and report on the outcomes of training conducted for the Murdi Paaki Healthy Housing Worker program and
- b) to identify features of the program that could enable replication of the concept to other Indigenous housing contexts within Australia.

The ‘outcomes’ to be considered are those impacting on the trainees, the Murdi Paaki organisation, the communities in which the trainees work, and other stakeholders identified. Consideration of ‘features’ will focus on aspects of partnerships, training provision, community engagement—in terms of both factors that enhance the probability of success and factors that may limit the opportunities for replication to other contexts. Answers to questions about the sustainability of the program, while discussed, will not be the focus of this paper.

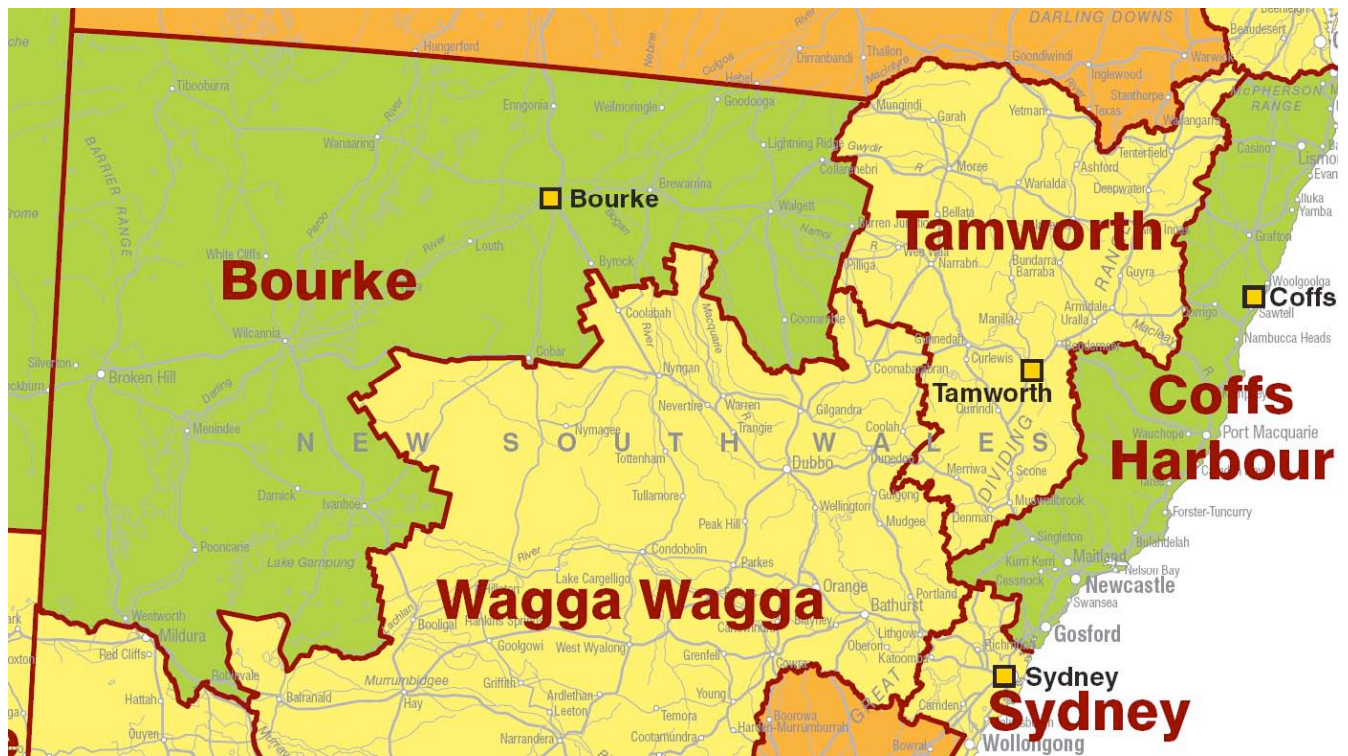
Background

The Murdi Paaki Healthy Housing Worker (HHW) Pilot Program is an initiative of the Murdi Paaki Regional Council. The Program is managed by the Murdi Paaki Regional Housing Corporation (MPRHC), which was an initiative of the former Murdi Paaki ATSIC Regional Council. The functions of the Council in relation to MPRHC have now been assumed to a large extent by the Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly (MPRA). MPRA is the first such Indigenous representative organisation to be involved in a Council of Australian Governments (COAG) trial site.

Murdi Paaki Regional Housing Corporation

The Murdi Paaki region covers much of western New South Wales. Figure 1 shows the extent of the region and indicates locations of some key communities. The Murdi Paaki Regional Housing Corporation owns and manages about 600 houses within the region. The MPRHC provides support for a Shared Responsibility Agreement (SRA) with Healthy Housing Workers.

Figure 1 Murdi Paaki region map (based on the Bourke Indigenous Coordination Centre Region)



Source: OIPC 2005

Program background

The Healthy Housing Worker Program had its genesis following the recognition of the needs associated with Aboriginal housing in the then ATSIC region. In 1997 the MPRHC managed four houses. Balding and Graham (2005) describe the process as follows:

In 1999, the Murdi Paaki Regional Council established an Aboriginal Environmental Health Forum to bring together representatives from the Regional Council of ATSIC, Indigenous housing agencies, State and Commonwealth agencies and the community through a Community Working Party structure. A priority of the Murdi Paaki Aboriginal Environmental Health Forum was to look at ways to address environmental health issues through a housing repair and maintenance program that would work well in the Murdi Paaki Region.

Today, the Corporation manages about 600 houses. The Healthy Housing Worker program currently operates in six communities within the region: Enngonia, Weilmoringle, Ivanhoe, Dareton, Gulargambone and Coonamble. Expansion of the program into three other communities is currently being considered. The program is consistent with the goals of the *NSW Aboriginal Health Strategic Plan* (NSW Health Department 1999) and a related strategy called *Housing for Health* (NSW Health 2006). However it is the Commonwealth's *Maintaining Houses for Better Health* (MHBH) program within the *Fixing Houses for Better Health* (FHBH) program with strategies embedded in the *National Indigenous Housing Guide* (FaCS 2003) that 'forms the front end of the HHW Pilot Project in the Murdi Paaki Region' (MPRHC 2004:1).

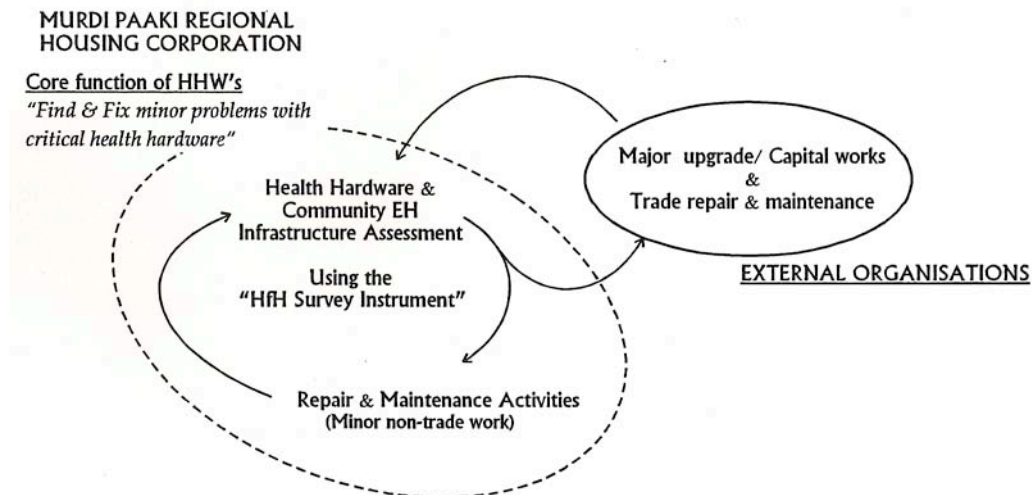
The MHBH component of FHBH projects employs and trains local community members to maintain health hardware in working order and encourages communities to take responsibility for ongoing maintenance once the health hardware has been fixed.

(McPeake & Pholeros 2005, p. 3)

The Healthy Housing Worker program Pilot extends and formalises this training under the management of Murdi Paaki Regional Housing Corporation so that workers can achieve formal environmental health qualifications. The operational model is shown in Figure 2. It shows how the

core function of the Healthy Housing Worker is to ‘find and fix minor problems’. External organisations are called upon for major repairs, upgrades and capital works.

Figure 2 Healthy Housing Worker model



Source: MPRHC 2004

Rationale: connections between health, housing and training

The Australian Bureau of Statistics and Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (ABS/AIHW 2005) state that:

Overcrowding, poor dwelling condition and inadequate basic utilities such as facilities for washing clothes, sewerage systems or safe drinking water have all been associated with higher rates of infectious and parasitic diseases. (p. 37)

The link between quality of housing and occupiers' health is well documented in the international literature (BMA 2003; Jacobs 2003). The issues of inequality and inadequate maintenance apply to Indigenous peoples in other countries (Dunn 2002). More specifically, in Australia recent research conducted in the Northern Territory shows the direct connection and measurable links between 'Healthy Living Practices' described by Pholeros et al. (1993)—on which the Healthy Housing Worker concept is based—and child health outcomes, particularly skin diseases (Baillie et al. 2005).

Drawing from research evidence it is possible to see several potential health impacts of the Healthy Housing Worker program. Firstly, the skills developed in the Workers may contribute substantially to the capacity of the community they live within, to address the basic environmental health and maintenance needs of housing in their community. This in effect becomes a 'capacity building process' with direct consequences for community and individual health (Bauert et al. 2001; BHC 2003; HRSCATSIA 2004). Secondly, in ways similar to the ways that Aboriginal Health Workers operate in many Indigenous communities, Healthy Housing Workers may act as mentors and role models within their communities. In a sense these trained people become the experts in their field and are relied upon within their communities (Collier 2005; Kral & Falk 2004). Thirdly, if sustained over the longer period, the program has the potential to facilitate intergenerational change within Indigenous communities. Within Australia there is a well-documented connection between community health and educational outcomes (e.g. ATSI 1999; CDU/NTDEET 2004; HREOC 2000; NTDE 1999; SCRGSP 2003). Healthy Housing Workers will arguably contribute to healthier local environments that will in turn impact on the propensity of children to attend school by minimising the risks associated with poor housing maintenance, sanitation and infectious diseases.

Social context and basis of need

Table 1 shows selected statistics comparing Indigenous and non-Indigenous social indicators for remote New South Wales, New South Wales as a whole and Australia. While most of the data are from the last Census, in comparative terms the changes could be expected to be minimal over the five year timeframe. These indicators highlight a number of issues related to the Healthy Housing Worker program and highlight to some extent the basis for the need of the program. The statistics firstly show the relatively high proportion of Indigenous people in the population. In terms of housing, the Census data suggests that Indigenous households in the region are notably larger than non-Indigenous households within remote New South Wales and across the State more generally. In terms of housing maintenance though, the data points to the relative success of Indigenous Housing Organisations in remote NSW maintaining housing stock despite the additional pressure of the larger households. In terms of health, the self-assessed status of Indigenous people in remote New South Wales tends to be poorer than the State and Australia as a whole, highlighting the health issues associated with Indigenous communities. Participation in employment (excluding CDEP) is lower than for New South Wales and for Australia. Indigenous people were half as likely to have attained Certificate qualifications than those in New South Wales as a whole.

Table 1 Selected statistics comparing Indigenous and non-Indigenous social indicators for remote New South Wales with the State and Australia as a whole.

Indicator	Remote New South Wales	New South Wales	Australia
Total Indigenous population 2001 (ABS 2002)	8550*	119865	410003
Per cent Indigenous population 2001 (ABS 2002)	13.4%*	1.9%	2.2%
Median Indigenous household size 2001 (ABS 2002)	3.5*	3.2	3.4
Median non-Indigenous household size 2001 (ABS 2002)	2.5*	2.7	2.6
Per cent of 15+ Indigenous population employed (excluding CDEP) 2001 (ABS 2002)	25.8%*	37.0%	33.2%
Per cent of 15+ non-Indigenous population employed (excluding CDEP) 2001 (ABS 2002)	55.1%*	57.5%	58.1%
Per cent of 15+ Indigenous population with certificate qualifications 2001 (ABS 2002)	5.5%*	11.4%	9.4%
Per cent of 15+ non-Indigenous population with certificate qualifications 2001 (ABS 2002)	16.0%*	17.1%	16.4%
Self-assessed health status fair or poor of 18+ Indigenous population (ABS 2004a)	37.4%	37.3%**	32.7%
Self-assessed health status fair or poor of 18+ non-Indigenous population (ABS 2004b)		16.1%	16.1%
Dwelling has major structural problems (Indigenous households) (ABS 2004a)	34.8%	35.8%**	39.6%
Per cent of 15+ Indigenous population living in Indigenous Housing Organisation houses (ABS 2004a)	43.2%	12.5%	24.3%

Sources: ABS 2001 Census *Indigenous Profile* (ABS 2002); ABS 2002 *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey*, (ABS 2004a), ABS 2002 *General Social Survey* (ABS 2004a)

Notes: * estimate based on agglomerated SSDs approximating Murdi Paaki geographic area

** reported as non-remote

Training program

Training for the Healthy Housing Worker program is delivered by Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education, based in the Northern Territory. Units of competency are drawn from Certificate I in General Construction and Certificates II and III in Environmental Health (BIITE 2006). Delivery is based on a combination of on-the-job learning and classroom training. Underpinning the skills taught is a framework of 'nine Healthy Living Practices' developed by

HealthHabitat (1993) (Cited in MPRHC 2004:2). These are detailed in the *National Indigenous Housing Guide* (FaCS 2003) under headings of:

- ✧ Washing people;
- ✧ Washing clothes and bedding;
- ✧ Removing waste;
- ✧ Improving nutrition;
- ✧ Reducing crowding;
- ✧ Separation of dogs and children;
- ✧ Controlling dust;
- ✧ Temperature control; and
- ✧ Reducing trauma

Methods

The methodology employed in this case study follows a mixed methods approach, drawing on a combination of quantitative and qualitative data to arrive at conclusions based on the research findings (Tashakkori & Teddlie 1998). While the focus of this paper is this single case—that is training conducted for the Murdi Paaki Healthy Housing Worker program—the research belongs to a broader research agenda under the banner of ‘Growing the desert’ and therefore forms part of a ‘collective case study’ or ‘multi-site qualitative research’ (Stake 2000:437, 449) from which generalised principles will be made using ‘inductive logic’ (Miller 2003:428). This case relies primarily, though not solely, on a series of nine semi-structured interviews conducted on-site in Broken Hill (NSW) and Darwin (NT) and by telephone with ten key stakeholders. As a case study it contributes ‘to our knowledge of individual, group, organisational, political, and related phenomena’ (Yin 2003:1).

Sample selection for the interviews followed a ‘purposeful’ or ‘purposive’ sampling strategy (Patton 2002:230) identified cooperatively with the Murdi Paaki Regional Housing Corporation manager. Data was collected over a four week period in June and July 2006. Interview data was supplemented with support material sourced from BIITE and MPRHC along with literature available from government departments. Interviews were audio-recorded (where permission was granted) and transcribed for later analysis. A total of nine formal interviews were conducted with ten representatives from Murdi Paaki Regional Housing Corporation (trainees and management); the Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly; New South Wales Greater Western Area Health Service (Population Health Unit); and Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education. Analysis of the interview data was conducted manually according to standard text and content analysis techniques (Bernard 2000:444–455). Thematic patterns were identified in this process and summarised.

The case study focuses on two main research questions:

- 1 What are the outcomes of training conducted for the Healthy Housing Worker program (with a particular focus on health and community outcomes)?
- 2 What are the features of the Healthy Housing Worker program that would enable it to be replicated in other Indigenous communities in Australia?

Findings

Findings are here discussed in terms of the research questions. The first section discusses the outcomes of the training. The second discusses the issue of the possible replication of the program.

Outcomes of Healthy Housing Worker training

Respondents identified outcomes that broadly fit under four headings. These are outcomes relating to 1) housing and maintenance; 2) trainees; 3) the Murdi Paaki organisation; and 4) the community more generally. This breakdown recognises that training benefits extend well beyond the individual participating and the host organisation.

Housing and maintenance outcomes

The Healthy Housing Worker program was designed to impact on nine ‘healthy housing’ areas as discussed in the literature review. Consistent with these goals some respondents identified outcomes in terms of improved maintenance and functionality of houses. By ‘functionality’ they meant that the basic living conditions of the house were improved consistent with the healthy housing indicators. In particular there was a reported improvement in the response to housing issues as a result of training. One respondent described this outcome as follows:

I do believe that because there is someone in community and someone following them up in terms of looking at the houses there is definitely a rapid response... compared to previously when there wasn't a structure in the community to deal with the issue the time taken to repair there is much improved.

It is important to note that training forms a part of the ‘structure’ that facilitates this ‘rapid response’. A related ‘housing for health’ component of Murdi Paaki’s housing strategy is designed to bring houses up to a standard where houses are effectively functional. Trainees then take over to fulfil the ongoing auditing and maintenance response role, addressing basic maintenance needs themselves and calling on tradespersons where major works are required.

There is an expectation that this improved level of maintenance response will translate into improved housing longevity. Of course, while it is too early to assess whether this is being achieved—it will take another five to ten years to demonstrate this—the intent and aim of the program is certainly about this. A member of the Assembly commented on this issue:

If we are losing houses and it takes you 10 years to get money. For example if we are getting money this year the housing needs addressing that need were identified 10 or 15 years ago. So if we can expand the longevity or the lifespan of the house to give it maybe 30 years or 35 or 40 years because of some constant maintenance around the functionality of the house—they are the areas of the house that always contribute to its demise—and they are the areas that we are concentrating on.

Trainee outcomes

Trainee outcomes were described both in terms of skills and qualification as well as person benefits such as self-confidence. Trainees saw the value of the training qualification as a pathway to ongoing employability:

We will be Cert III, just about finished Cert II, just started Cert III then doing Cert IV next year and then we will be qualified to do repairs up to \$10000. You could nearly start your own business. Its something you could look forward to. You are getting something out of it yourself.

The link between the skills gained and this employability was noted by several respondents. There was a recognition that even if Murdi Paaki Housing was unable to employ them, there were real

opportunities for them to use their skills to run their own businesses. One Murdi Paaki employee described this as follows:

They now have qualifications which makes them readily employable anywhere in Australia. They have their Construction Certificate I and their Environmental Health Certificate III which would make them employable and if we can't employ them they can hang out their own shingle to do this sort of work like minor repairs and the things that have a detrimental effect on health and safety...

Beyond the tangible construction and environmental health skills that trainees had acquired during their training there was also a recognition that they benefited through their own identity formation, both as individuals and as part of their community. Trainees themselves identified self confidence as an important outcome. One trainee, commented about his new-found self-confidence in relating to different people:

I would say confidence is the biggest thing I've learnt in the last four and half years. From where I come from I just used to work out bush all the time, never had much to do with people but now I can sit here and talk to you fellas or I can go and talk to anyone about it whereas before I wouldn't get anywhere near it.

It was evident that others observed similar outcomes. One of the Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly members commented that this confidence led to an increased capacity to compete in the broader labour market:

Training has given them more confidence. Something to get up for in the morning. The Certificate enables them to go on further, to do bigger and better jobs. And to be able to compete with other people who are trained in those areas to pick up jobs.

Another Murdi Paaki employee suggested that one reason for this increased self-confidence and pride was about the place they now had within their community. The training clearly had an impact on their identity within the community:

They can see that what they are doing is giving something back to their own people. I think they are very proud of it.

Organisational outcomes

The benefits to Murdi Paaki Regional Housing Corporation that resulted from the training could be grouped under three headings. Respondents identified the following outcomes flowing from the training a) improved management and administration; b) improved relationships with tenants; and c) reduced housing maintenance costs.

The benefit to the organisation was associated with having someone 'on the ground' to address the immediate maintenance issues. While the trainees did not bypass the head office administration, having someone to attend to minor repairs and assess the need for jobs requiring 'tradies' was clearly a distinct advantage to the administrative staff. One employee described the contrast that staff experienced in the Broken Hill office after the training had commenced.

Our phones were ringing continuously before those blokes started. Once we got three or four months into the program they quietened down because they were on top of those issues in the communities and everyone took notice in the office because we were answering the phones continuously. And that put a lull on it. We still have a lot of phone calls but not as many as were used to receive because they are on top of that and reporting and getting the tradies in those areas.

In terms of the Murdi Paaki–tenant relationship, respondents saw distinct advantages of having a Healthy Housing Worker in the community. Rather than having to deal with the organisation from a distance, tenants had an immediate contact with an employee within their own community. This, according to one Murdi Paaki employee had distinct advantages for the organisation:

One of the big advantages from our point of view and from the tenant's point of view is that there is an employee of Murdi Paaki housing in the township... The people of that community... are more inclined to talk to them than they would be to us.

The third area of benefit was in relation to housing maintenance costs. This, according to a Greater Western Area Health Service employee was related to complaints—and this in turn had an impact on the costs associated with calling in licensed tradespersons.

Again they have less complaints. There is less been reported to us from Murdi Paaki Housing. And less money being spent on calling in licensed trades people who are expensive. They are difficult to find: Indigenous or not Indigenous.

Community outcomes

Given that one of the main objectives of the Healthy Housing Worker program was related to community health outcomes, this issue was explored in the interviews. The most important community outcome related to this was described in terms of 'having an Indigenous worker, working within the local community'. The value of having the worker in the community is reflected in part in terms of better living conditions. Other outcomes were less tangible but were also related to the presence of workers within the community. One Murdi Paaki employee observed:

The living conditions have improved for the people living in the houses because their house is being surveyed by their own people and these young men have got the skills to undertake the work and it's a great service which a lot of the communities need... We have now given an opportunity for people to better themselves within their communities.

An alternative, though similar perspective was given by a Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly member who commented on the trusting nature of relationships between the Healthy Housing Worker and the community:

Just knowing that they are there. People know what they are about and what they are doing. They have one of their own community, someone they can trust. You feel comfortable having them come into your home.

Some of the community outcomes were on the surface hard to pin down. Another Assembly member described outcomes very broadly in terms of 'networks', 'pride' and 'ownership'. While these outcomes could be considered to be somewhat amorphous as they are described in the following quote, the combination of outcomes described translates as increases in the community's social capital.

And I suppose it would be under another heading of capacity—it empowers people to do things differently... There are new networks being opened up and there might be new opportunities created for them also... It's hard when you are living and breathing a life in an Aboriginal community sometimes there is no value or precedence placed on what those [housing] assets actually mean to them and I think there's a greater sense of pride in taking some ownership of their own development and some of the development that is happening in the community.

Summary of outcomes

Summarising the above then, the interview responses indicate a range of outcomes across several areas. It is evident that the training has improved responsiveness to housing needs thus producing a net benefit for the maintenance of housing stock. While it is too early to definitively say that housing stock longevity has been increased, there is a clear intent on the part of stakeholders to ensure that this occurs. The training has resulted in tangible outcomes for the trainees themselves, particularly in terms of their skills, which contribute directly to their employability. Their roles as Healthy Housing Workers has helped trainees' confidence and self-esteem improve. This in turn contributes to their capacity to either be employed or—in the event that this is not possible within

Murdi Paaki—to become self-employed or be more competitive in the mainstream labour market. Organisational outcomes are reported in terms of improved efficiency and responsiveness and improvements in management and administration. Community outcomes are described in terms of improved living conditions and improved social capital.

Replicable features of the Healthy Housing Worker program

The Healthy Housing Worker program is a partnership involving several stakeholders: government (state and Commonwealth) departments; a training provider; the housing organisation (Murdi Paaki Regional Housing Corporation); an Aboriginal regional council (Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly); and five local communities (including the housing workers themselves). The dynamics of this partnership are complex but the program hangs together because of a well-developed and long-standing relationship between the various stakeholders. An assessment of the replicability of the program must bear this complexity in mind. The assessment uses a framework developed by Guenther et al. (2006) following the assessment of principles of practice of several learning partnerships in northern Australia. Respondents contributed several ideas about the application of the Murdi Paaki model to other locations in Australia and there was no single feature that stood out from others.

Leadership (brokering and vision)

It is evident that leadership has contributed to the formation, development and support of the program. There was a view expressed by some respondents that a long term vision was very important for the program. The concept of 'healthy housing' preceded the Healthy Housing Worker program by several years and to some extent the latter emerged as Murdi Paaki stakeholders took hold of opportunities and offered the idea in a coordinated, strategic manner to funding providers. A Batchelor representative made these observations:

I think one of the big ones is having a long term view of what they are trying to achieve. My understanding of the early players in Murdi Paaki was that they were big thinkers. They were looking at 5-10 years. With this you can put in place some kind of long term training venture that will have a training pathway that gets the right mix of skills in the organisation.

What is also significant is that the program concept was developed out of a shared vision among several people. While the following respondent from a government agency suggested this may have been more good fortune than good planning, what is important in his comment is the recognition of the combined strength of three key leaders:

It was luck if you like, that three strong people with a single vision came together all there at the same time. It may not have occurred if those three people had different views.

There is also strong evidence that another factor that has contributed to the ongoing development of the program is the brokering role that the leadership play. This includes engaging with various partners, negotiating funding and adapting to changing circumstances as they arise—for example with the abolition of ATSIC, renegotiating funding to take into account the changed relationships with government funding bodies. A Council member described this process as follows:

When we first started we had all the different government agencies contributing and partnering up with the ATSIC Regional Council. Then when the abolition of ATSIC came along and the disbursements of the programs across the mainstream agencies and that proved a difficult task because [those] who were some of our partners didn't exist anymore. And that's a bit of a complication for us now in how do we get back into the fold of what were the partners but under the new arrangements. And that's part of our negotiation arrangements now. We are using their healthy housing worker strategy as a major strategy of the COAG trial...

This dual brokering and visioning role was critical to the establishment of the program and critical to its ongoing continuation.

On the ground coordination and local support

At another level, enabling leadership occurs at the local level and this is expressed in local coordination, support, liaison and encouragement of the Healthy Housing Workers themselves. A key component of the management of the program is the employment of a local coordinator. This role bridges the gaps between the Greater Western Area Health Service, the Murdi Paaki Regional Housing Corporation, Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education and the workers themselves. The role was also described as a mentoring role. A representative from Batchelor summed up the strength of the program by describing the multiple levels of support trainees received.

The main strengths of the program would have to be the support networks at the guys have had on the ground. Murdi Paaki have been very supportive, they have three or four people that they can go to, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous and that left the guys with the situation where they had an option, the best person to go to in one situation would be... the operations manager... or they would go to the mentor... if it was something to do with study... and then there was a regional manager that would help out as well and basically they were there when needed and travelled around to make sure that they saw the guys regularly so the guys didn't feel as though they were out there on their own.

This high level of support was largely necessary because of the geographically dispersed nature of the program.

Relationships and trust

The importance of the relational aspects of the operation of the program were not often explicitly described by respondents as such. However, it is apparent that without a strong commitment to working together with a variety of stakeholders the program would not have continued. It is highly dependent on the goodwill of people within organisations who are willing to build on relationships despite the changing organisational structures. This was reflected in the earlier quote from the Council member, who described the complications of the changed structures following the abolition of ATSIC. The development of trust however is not restricted to the leadership/organisational level—it also applies at the community level, where the relationship between the Murdi Paaki Regional Housing Corporation and local communities is described in terms of better relationships between the organisation and the tenants. The reason for this improved relationship, according to a Murdi Paaki representative, is because of the presence of a Murdi Paaki employee, who is also a member of the community:

One of the big advantages from our point of view and from the tenant's point of view is that there is an employee of Murdi Paaki housing in the township. They are more inclined to talk to them then they would be to us. Quite often there are things wrong with the house

An Assembly member's comment supports this idea:

The Healthy Housing Worker is one of their own community. Someone they can trust and you feel comfortable having them come into your home.

The Healthy Housing Worker then becomes a trusted, local representative with who tenants can more easily relate. It is evident then that the Worker being a member of the local community has improved the relationship between the tenant and Murdi Paaki Regional Housing Corporation and they in effect become the trusted broker for the local community.

Local community capacity building

One of the stronger themes in relation to the replicability of the program related to the idea that the skills gained by the Healthy Housing Workers contributed to the capacity of the whole community, not just to the individual trainees. The idea, reflected in the following quote from a Murdi Paaki representative suggests that the program is effective because they have skilled local people contributing to the needs of the local community.

The living conditions have improved for the people living in the houses because we have people there regularly, their house is being surveyed by their own people and these young men have got the skills to undertake the work. We haven't had one bad feedback in regard to their local boys who have come from the community and they've got an opportunity to do something and it's the best that I've seen. To have our people on the ground and doing the actual work. In the past we used to rely on the mainstream. We have now given an opportunity for people to better themselves within their communities. Its more beneficial for everyone in the long term.

Commenting on the single most important outcome, an Assembly member commented:

[The most important outcome is] local people employed maintaining the houses which their community people are living in. They got skills that they can be employed in other fields like maybe with local governments around environmental health, doing water quality testing like those sorts of things. Just the capacity that has put into those individuals, those workers, the capacity that is put into housing organisations, being able to address that need that continually arises.

From these two observations, along with other similar comments, it would be reasonable to deduce that one of the significant factors then is that a sense of ownership of the program is developing because of the local involvement in the training. While on the one hand the skills gained are essential for the housing needs of the community there is also another dynamic at play. Local people are supported to take responsibility for their own needs rather than relying on external maintenance resources. It is important to recognise that building the capability of the individuals in the community is critical in the processes of 'taking responsibility'.

Access to external resources (funding and support)

There was acknowledgement that without the significant and sustained resources applied to the program then it could not be maintained. Several respondents expressed concerns that the program might not continue once the training finished, despite the support received from a variety of stakeholders and the perceived effectiveness of the program in terms of what it had achieved. This view is represented by a comment from a Murdi Paaki representative.

We are dependent upon funding from the various government agencies—both state and federal and if that funding is not available then the program will stop. We have put in a submission to continue the program and they are not committing themselves... until such time as the review has been completed.

Another respondent from Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education suggested that what was important for the replication of this was the multiple layers of support that the Healthy Housing Worker program had.

There are training initiatives [like this] around the country. This one has levels of support that the others don't with the exception of Queensland, where their focus on housing is less, where their focus is more on community infrastructure and environmental management is higher. In terms of housing and maintenance I am not aware of anything of this sort. The ability to be replicated is dependent on a critical mass. You are talking about a mini workforce here. You need a reasonable number of people well supported by way of real job money, as

well as structural support and organisation, as well as policy support, within the organisation as well as in government.

It is evident—even if only from the number of organisations involved—that the Healthy Housing Worker program has been very well supported. Another respondent commented on the uncertainty around the future of funding of the program beyond the training:

It's put in jeopardy the tenure of employment of the workers because of the uncertainty of funding... I'll say to them if you don't support this type of strategy how do you maintain—what you do as government to ensure that houses are starting to get some sustainability around them and get some longevity if you are not investing in innovative strategies like this one.

The issues here then, which impact on the replicability of the program are described in terms of the need for: a) relatively high levels of funding support; b) managing a range of support stakeholders; and c) building some certainty into funding so that it is not just seen as a training exercise.

While the purpose of this case study is not to justify the financial viability of the Healthy Housing Worker program or to argue for additional financial support it may well be argued that there is indeed a case for this. An opportunity cost analysis similar to Taylor and Stanley's (2005) analysis of the Thamarrurr Region in the Northern Territory may be a useful starting point for the MPHRC to determine what impact withdrawal of the program and the current concomitant funding would have for the communities of the Murdi Paaki Region.

Summary of replicable features

From this case study a number of features of the Healthy Housing Worker program were identified, that contribute to its ability to be replicated to other Indigenous housing contexts around Australia.

Firstly—and possibly most importantly—the Healthy Housing Worker program has been built on the shared vision of key leaders from a number of stakeholders. These leaders provided the vision to drive the program forward but also provided a brokering role that has drawn in support from communities, government agencies and a key training provider. Without this leadership it is doubtful if the program would have been developed and sustained as it has.

Secondly, the Healthy Housing Workers (who are the trainees in the program) have received considerable support in terms of mentoring and coordination. This support has come from Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education, the Greater Western Area Health Service and the Murdi Paaki Regional Housing Corporation. The geographically dispersed nature of the training context added to the need for high levels of local coordination and support.

Thirdly, the Healthy Housing Worker program is built on long term and trusted relationships. This trust is demonstrated in the commitment of several organisations to the concept and the resources that have been applied to it.

Fourthly, the program is built on principles of building local capacity for local communities. An important aspect of the program is the way it has trained Workers from within the community to address environmental housing and maintenance needs within the community. This has built a sense of ownership within the community and has reduced reliance on external skill resources.

Finally, the training program is built on a base of considerable financial and in-kind support. The transition from training to 'normal' employment arrangements remains uncertain and is dependent on a number of yet to be resolved factors. A failure to resolve these things may jeopardise the many positive outcomes that have been achieved.

Implications

Implications of outcomes

Many of the outcomes reported by respondents are what may reasonably be expected from any training program. These include: a) increased employability and confidence among trainees; b) improved skills and qualifications among participants; and c) improved organisational capacity for the employer. One would also expect that a training program aimed at improving health housing outcomes would achieve some results in this as well, and indications from all the respondents are that the program has done that. However, of note in this program are the outcomes related to ‘the community’.

What is significant—and may warrant further investigation—is the reported impact the program is having on the community’s relationship with Murdi Paaki Regional Housing Corporation and their ‘ownership’ of housing they occupy. While it is too early to assess the impact of the program on the longevity of housing stock managed by Murdi Paaki, it may well be that the improved relationship and that sense of ownership—along with the resulting increased community capacity—will do as much to contribute to housing maintenance as the skills imparted by the Healthy Housing Workers.

Also of interest, is the link between education, housing and health. There would be considerable value in documenting and qualifying—if not quantifying—the impacts of environmental health training on the indicators of health within the community. It is noted also that there has been something of a shift in emphasis towards housing maintenance in the program. While this may be part of a natural development in response to the perceived needs of the stakeholders it would be useful to be able to support other evidence for the education-housing-health link (e.g. shown by Gutheridge et al. 2005) to provide further justification for sustained funding.

As noted in the Background of this case study, the program does have the capacity to contribute to the environmental health and well-being of communities in the Murdi Paaki region. While the frame of reference for this case study was a consideration of the qualitative outcomes of the training program there is arguably considerable scope to demonstrate outcomes that show to what extent this is occurring. A part of this process would be the identification of appropriate indicators that demonstrate the ‘logical’ connection between the inputs of the program (e.g. funding and infrastructure) to processes (e.g. training activities) to outputs (e.g. maintenance activities) to low level outcomes (e.g. environmental housing standards) through to higher level outcomes (e.g. health and disease indicators). By ‘logical’ reference is made to ‘program logic’ used as a basis for assessing impact of many government funding initiatives (Chesson & Whitworth 2005; Palmer 2005; SPRC/AIFS 2005). While it makes assumptions about the linear progression of interventions in terms of inputs, processes, outputs and outcomes it has several advantages, which are summarised by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation (2004:5):

In Program Design and Planning, a logic model serves as a planning tool to develop program strategy and enhance your ability to clearly explain and illustrate program concepts and approach for key stakeholders, including funders.

For Program Evaluation and Strategic Reporting, a logic model presents program information and progress toward goals in ways that inform, advocate for a particular program approach, and teach program stakeholders.

Implications of replicable features

It is recognised here that many of the features observed in this Murdi Paaki case are unique to the local context. However the key program features identified and described in the Findings may provide some guidance for other Indigenous Community Housing Organisations and training providers considering a similar approach. Some suggested implications are offered here for consideration.

1. **Without a strong and united leadership base a program like The Healthy Housing Worker program will have little chance of getting off the ground.** It is evident that leadership in the Murdi Paaki case has contributed to the development and support of the vision and has acted to broker external resources.
2. **Strong organisational support and coordination is required to maintain and sustain healthy housing employees, especially in dispersed geographic contexts.** The lessons from Murdi Paaki suggest that this support is aided by positive mentor roles, good infrastructure support and a supportive government and non-government organisational structure. Funding applications need to factor this level of local support in for effective short to medium term outcomes.
3. **A strong collaborative network, built on multiple long-standing trusting relationships will contribute to success.** These relationships are built over time and between stakeholders at a variety of levels: between the housing organisation and training provider; between the housing organisation and government agencies; and between the housing organisation and the tenants in communities.
4. **Capacity building goes beyond the skills and qualifications attained by the healthy housing workers.** One of the important results of the training provided in the Murdi Paaki case is that it had an important impact on the development of relationships between the community and the housing organisation, which in turn increased the responsiveness of the organisation to tenants' housing health and maintenance needs.
5. **Funding must extend beyond the training.** While the Murdi Paaki Healthy Housing Worker program was reportedly well resourced as training program, the uncertainty surrounding the future employment of the Workers suggests that other organisations planning similar programs should—if at all possible—source funding (or obtain agreements to do so) to transition the program from a skill development phase to a 'normal' employment phase.

These implications are based primarily on the findings of the case study interviews. It is acknowledged that there may be other factors that contribute to the ability of other Housing Organisations to replicate the Healthy Housing Worker program. For example, the critical mass of the Organisation itself—in terms of housing stock managed—may be important.

Conclusions

This case study has outlined the background and development of the Healthy Housing Worker training program, sponsored by Murdi Paaki Regional Housing Corporation. The basis for the need of 'healthy housing' skills has been demonstrated in relevant statistical data. Statistics for the remote area of New South Wales show that the region has a relatively high proportion of Indigenous people living in Indigenous Housing Organisation houses; relatively high household size; relatively poor levels of self-assessed health; relatively low uptake of vocational qualifications and relatively low levels of participation in the labour market. Further, the link between education, housing and health has been shown to be well documented in the literature reviewed.

The case study findings are based on a largely qualitative case study approach that used nine semi-structured interviews with ten key stakeholder representatives from the training provider (Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education); the Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly; the Greater Western Area Health Service; the Murdi Paaki Regional Housing Corporation; and trainees. The findings are grouped around two main questions: 1) what are the outcomes of the Healthy Housing Worker training program? And 2) what are features of the program that would make it replicable in other parts of Australia.

In terms of outcomes, it is evident that the training has improved responsiveness to housing needs thus producing a net benefit for the maintenance of housing stock. While it is too early to definitively say that housing stock longevity has been increased, there is a clear intent on the part of stakeholders to ensure that this occurs. The training has resulted in tangible outcomes for the trainees themselves, particularly in terms of their skills, which contribute directly to their employability. Their roles as Healthy Housing Workers has helped trainees' confidence and self-esteem improve. This in turn has contributed to their capacity to either be employed or—in the event that this is not possible within Murdi Paaki—to become self-employed or be more competitive in the mainstream labour market. Organisational outcomes are reported in terms of improved efficiency and responsiveness and improvements in management and administration. Community outcomes are described in terms of improved living conditions and improved social capital.

The case study has highlighted several features that may be of use for those considering replicating the model in other parts of Australia. Implications of these features are summarised in italics. Firstly, the Healthy Housing Worker program has been built on the shared vision of key leaders from a number of stakeholders. The implication of this is that *without a strong and united leadership base a program like The Healthy Housing Worker program will have little chance of getting off the ground*. Secondly, the Healthy Housing Workers (who are the trainees in the program) have received considerable support in terms of mentoring and coordination. It is suggested that a foundational feature of this kind of program will be inclusion of *strong organisational support and coordination to maintain and sustain healthy housing employees, especially in dispersed geographic contexts*. Thirdly, the Healthy Housing Worker program is built on long term and trusted relationships. For other programs it is suggested therefore that *a strong collaborative network, built on multiple long-standing trusting relationships will contribute to success*. Fourthly, the program is built on principles of building local capacity for local communities. It follows that this *capacity building goes beyond the skills and qualifications attained by the healthy housing workers*. Finally, the training program is built on a base of considerable financial and in-kind support. As a consequence, *funding must extend beyond the training*.

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DESART – Building on strengths: arts cultures, futures

Introduction

This report documents one of the case studies undertaken during Stage three of the *Growing the Desert: effective educational pathways for remote Indigenous peoples* project. This case study explores issues of training, enterprise and employment in the Aboriginal Arts industry of central Australia through the lens of its peak advocacy body. DESART, the Association of Central Australian Aboriginal Arts and Craft centres was established in the 1980s and is a representative, advocacy and support organisation for (currently) thirty-seven Aboriginal owned and controlled art centres across central Australia and across three jurisdictions – the Northern Territory, Western Australia and South Australia. DESART's key organisational objectives are to support

- ✧ Authenticity of art works
- ✧ 100% returns to Aboriginal people and their organisations
- ✧ Promotion of professional art practice and ethical dealings with artists.

In this case study we profile two key initiatives of DESART. The first is the DESART Training needs initiative initially scoped as part of a Reframing the Future Project and which forms part of the Business Development Project being instigated by DESART. The second is the Information Technology (IT) Training and Support initiative, funded through the Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts, that aims to develop computer, internet and new media skills across communities within the central Australia region, with an integral focus on supporting the work of Aboriginal Art Centres including developing e-commerce capacity. These initiatives are spurred in part by the recognition that the Aboriginal Art industry is undergoing significant generational change and operating in a new environment in terms of industry expansion and the shifting political and policy initiatives impacting largely on remote Indigenous Australia.

From humble beginnings as small enterprises emerging at the interface of remoteness, diverse cultures and market engagement to being the defining expression of Australian contemporary as opposed to 'primitive' art, the Aboriginal Art sector of central Australia is estimated as being worth \$28 million in central Australia alone. As such it is attracting genuine interest and commercial opportunities as well as the attention of unscrupulous dealers and exploitative practices. At the heart of the Aboriginal Art industry of central Australia are small community based social enterprises – Art Centres – and their constituents, the artists themselves. The success of the Art Centre model in supporting art practice and artists and in brokering connections to the commercial and fine art realms is unprecedented. But success brings new challenges. As the industry builds, issues of sustainability, unregulated industry practices and capacity development loom as significant challenges, especially where the core players within the industry are Indigenous peoples living on small remote communities with all the attenuating experiences of disadvantage associated with such contexts. The need to develop not only opportunities for individual artists but greater capacity for local people in working in and governing their own organisations is paramount to reaping local benefits from industry growth. Similarly ensuring that industry practices are based on the principles of fair trading and ethical engagement with artists and their Art Centres is critical to the sustainability of industry.

Developing an understanding the training and learning needs of the sector and situating these within a vision of business sustainability underpin the DESART initiatives investigated in this case study. Both initiatives support artists and the Aboriginal arts industry and are important to ensuring the diversity and integrity of Aboriginal art, the culture and connections from which this stems and building the professionalism and sustainability of the sector.

The case study phase of the Growing the Desert project sought to capture innovative practice occurring in education with desert Indigenous peoples. Specifically this case study addresses the following research questions:

- ❖ How effectively does Vocational Education and Training (VET) supply match demand across the desert and respond to new livelihoods opportunities? What other educational service such as Adult and Community Education (ACE), meet demand?
- ❖ What are the emerging models of flexible delivery, including those utilising ICTs, across the desert and what are the key issues and opportunities in these models
- ❖ What myriad of experiences and realities impact on effective provision and improved Indigenous learner outcomes in post compulsory education including VET and ACE?

The report begins with an overview of the Aboriginal Arts industry and an outline of the role and structure of DESART, before outlining the methodology and approach utilised in the case study. It then outlines the two initiatives discussed above, situating them within the context of exponential industry growth and sector vulnerability. The report concludes by discussing how DESART's initiatives inform the research questions identified above and respond to the key issues for education within desert contexts with specific reference to lessons from the arts enterprise endeavour.

Aboriginal Art

The Industry

The Aboriginal art industry is highly regarded nationally and internationally. The national value of Indigenous visual arts is between \$100 and \$300 million with a significant proportion of this being generated in the Northern Territory and across the desert region. Whilst it is difficult to enumerate the number of Aboriginal artists, estimates suggest that nationally there are up to 5000 Indigenous visual artists alone, with significant proportions of these residing on their country and in remote areas, particularly the Northern Territory. As such art provides a critical, and often the only, local option for mainstream market engagement and earning of income beyond income support programs (Altman 2003). It also preserves and promotes traditional cultural practices and provides highly valued and contemporary mediums for expression of those practices.

Whilst Aboriginal art has a high profile across the nation and the world, the social and economic circumstances in which the art is produced sits at odds with perceptions surrounding that profile. Most artists work with and through small social enterprises on their community - Aboriginal Art and craft centres – and receive on average around \$1400 per artist per year (Altman 2003). The Art Centres are based on small dispersed communities, with varying but mostly stressed facilities and infrastructure far from markets and business support activities such as training. Some art centres receive core funding, additional royalties from the community or industry support to function, some receive very little at all. Some Art Centre's have 30 artists some may have only 5 and only a small proportion of all of these will be earning significant money from their work. As social enterprises profits made from arts sales are returned in diminishing proportions to firstly the artist themselves and secondly to support the ongoing activities of the art centre - buying materials, packaging, marketing, additional labour, maintaining vehicles and buildings and trips to country. Successful artists thus subsidise the work of others and the vibrant activities of the Art Centre, from their earnings. They also invest in retaining and building the cultural and social capital of their communities and young people. Art Centres are thus both hubs for arts practice and hubs of cultural and social sustenance.

Whilst in recent times there has been much commentary about the apparent failure of the self determination era (Hughes & Warin 2006, Vanstone 2005) chronologically attributed the period from the early 1970s to the mid 1990s, it is precisely this period and the associated cultural and social policy frameworks that were embraced, that spearheaded the contemporary Aboriginal Arts industry. Land rights legislation in the Northern Territory enabled people to move out of missions and ration stations and back to 'country' which provided significant opportunities for cultural revival. The establishment in the early 1970s of the Aboriginal Arts Board and the later provision of discretionary funding to this Board saw a burgeoning investment in Aboriginal Art's promotion, development and marketing, including the provision of support for local artists cooperatives – arts centres - especially in central Australia and Arnhem Land (Altman 2005:5). The parallel emergence of new art styles such as that associated with the Western Desert art movement (Papunya Tula) heralded the arrival of the contemporary Aboriginal fine art industry that has been expanding exponentially ever since.

However, the emergence of the Aboriginal Arts industry and its mediating intercultural institution – the Art Centre – has been quite ad hoc. The unregulated nature of the industry means that anyone can deal in Aboriginal art, and Art Centres are as likely to have been established on the whim of an idea as much as on a good enterprise footing. Some Art Centres have been extremely successful, some flounder, some close and then reopen, but overall the numbers of Art Centres continues to expand. Many artists work through Art Centres, many also choose to deal directly with agents and many others are being exploited as has been recently revealed in the lead up to the current Parliamentary inquiry into the Indigenous Visual Arts industry (http://www.aph.gov.au/Senate/committee/ecita_ctte/indigenous_arts/tor.htm).

Aboriginal art has strong connections to and evolving expressions of cultures, kin and country. As noted by Altman,

Indigenous Australians have always produced art in ceremonial and secular contexts and have produced and traded artefacts and commodities for millennia (2005:3).

Much of the first contact between Indigenous peoples and settlers involved the exchange and sometimes apprehension of artefacts often then exported to enhance the collections of museums overseas. Many of the early settlers in central Australia, especially along the Adelaide to Darwin telegraph line, were involved in collecting artefacts and providing information for anthropological studies (see for example Mulvaney, 1997). As the first missions were established in central Australia, Aboriginal arts practice and sales became both a means for introducing traditional peoples into the cash economy and a means of profiling the good work of the missions (Altman 2005). They also kindled the experimentation by Indigenous people with non traditional art forms, the work of Albert Namatjira from Hermannsburg mission being a high profile example. New forms and styles of Aboriginal art across the desert over time emerged in response to diverse local opportunities for skill development and product diversity - canvas, batik, wood work (punu), glass making, basketry (tjanpi) and ceramics. This transpired alongside the development of the current Art Centre model and the employment of successive Art Centre managers with different skills, interests and networks in the visual arts field. Art was also intricately embedded in political and inter-cultural negotiations. As noted by Howard Morphy (2006)

From the beginnings of colonisation art has been used by Aborigines as a means of establishing relations with Europeans in trying to get them to understand the values and laws of their society.

Whilst there is great diversity amongst Aboriginal artistic expressions across Australia, in the desert art is embedded in cultural practices and knowledge of country albeit represented in new styles, mediums and products. In these contexts, art centres play a critical role in redressing the 'market failure' usually associated with enterprises in far flung remote regions and in negotiating the balance between marketing, exhibiting and sales, artist development and technique and facilitating connection with country and tradition. Eight core roles of Arts centres have recently been identified (Desart Inc, 2006, p10). These are

✧ Places for the creation and development of Aboriginal Art

- ✧ Places for cultural maintenance
- ✧ Places where culture, law, values and economic integrity are renewed and engagement with the mainstream occurs on the basis of achievement and strength.
- ✧ Places of work and earning an income
- ✧ Places from which markets are located and nurtured and work is distributed
- ✧ Places of community strengthening, where young people can be engaged and from where social activities and community initiatives are fostered and supported
- ✧ Places of learning where artists and executive members learn, mentor, teach and facilitate and are engaged in learning to ‘walk in two worlds’.
- ✧ Places of respite and care where older artists and women find care and support and access to a range of other social services like transport, accommodation and financial support.

Most Art Centres are small incorporated organisations managed by local governing boards drawn from the art centre membership. In this sense the artists themselves are the ‘industry’ and thus the key people to drive the nature and type of training and support required to build both their own skills and the sustainability of their centre. The majority employ one Art Centre manager, and have diverse and varying arrangements for the employment of other staff, including through the use of Community Development Employment Program (CDEP) workers.

The multifunctional role played by Art Centres in remote desert communities creates some tension when the economic potential of Aboriginal art industry is prioritised over and above social and cultural roles. Whilst there are some particularly successful Art Centres renowned for their fine art and with national and international market reach (for example Keringke Arts and Papunya Tula Artists) many Art Centres are primarily sites of community strengthening through arts practice working slowly towards increased economic returns for their artists but indentured to supporting the social nature of the enterprise. In recent times recognition of escalating economic success of the Aboriginal Arts industry has led to the release of two Indigenous Arts strategies one in the Northern Territory (NTG, 2003) and one from the Commonwealth (Australian Government, 2003) which is currently under review. The former recognises the unique and special place of Aboriginal art within the Northern Territory and its links to tourism, one of the mainstays of the economy. The latter targets the strengthening of the Indigenous visual Art Centre sector aiming to support a stable and profitable base of Indigenous Art Centres producing and distributing works of artistic excellence and providing community capacity development and education and training. Both strategies also support the work of DESART and its top end based sister organisation ANKAAA (The Association of Northern, Kimberley and Arnhem Aboriginal Artists), in promoting, resourcing, educating and protecting the work of Indigenous artists and Art Centres.

Sited in some of the remotest and harshest geographies of Australia and in conditions of social and economic hardship unrepeated elsewhere in Australia, the Aboriginal arts industry is a remarkable story of success. Indeed some of the more successful arts centres and artists hail from the same communities that have been decried in the media recently for the levels of family violence and dysfunction experienced. The complexities of such apparent contradiction are difficult to disentangle. However, if the blame for family and community dysfunction is to be laid at the door of culture (see Vanstone 2005, Martin, 2006) and the realities of customary law, mourning traditions, and rites on and for country are disparaged, the very roots of the desert Aboriginal Art movement are undermined. Whilst there needs to be great caution in positioning Art Centres and artists as a central plank of Indigenous economic development, given the vulnerabilities inherent to the industry (Desart Inc, 2006, p 13) there similarly needs to be caution exercised in deliberating the focus of the major changes underway in Indigenous affairs policy lest new directions undermine the successes and gains achieved to date, particularly in the visual arts sector.

DESART

DESART is the association of central Australian Aboriginal Art and Craft Centres. It is a voluntary association and represents art centres, its membership, on an industry level. DESART has no controlling say in any of the Art Centres and all decision making powers in Art Centres is vested in Art Centres themselves. DESART is governed by an Executive Committee with two members drawn from Art Centres from each of the five regions of the association and the Chairperson, Deputy Chairperson and treasurer elected from this group. The regions are:

- ✧ The Barkly region (NT)
- ✧ The Central Desert United region (NT)
- ✧ The North West region (NT)
- ✧ The Nyaanyatjarra region (WA)
- ✧ The Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Lands Region (SA, NT)

DESART is a small organisation with 4 (?) staff and a myriad of other workers or consultants who come and go as discrete projects are funded and undertaken. DESART staff travel extensively across the central Australian desert region, for rolling Executive meetings across each of the regions and to visit Art Centres, launches, exhibitions and meetings. Like most peak organisations DESART provides supports and advisory services to its members as well as assuming advocacy roles in relation to the promotion or protection of the sector they represent or in responding to media or policy issues. Its key organisational tasks are identified as:

- ✧ Communication and consultation with Aboriginal owned Art Centres
- ✧ Advocacy and promotion for Art Centres
- ✧ Resourcing and assistance to Art Centres including training in governance, arts practice and professional development
- ✧ Providing liaison, networking and referral services to member Art Centres
- ✧ Providing a point of contact with Art Centres for Governments, the private and public sector and other Aboriginal organisations. (<http://www.desart.com.au/about/index.htm>)

The geographic spread of Art Centres across remote communities in the central Australian desert and the isolation experienced by Art Centre managers renders the support and advocacy role of DESART critically important. With the Aboriginal Art industry now well established and expanding fast there is a need to establish regulatory processes, systems for protection of intellectual and cultural property and build sustainability, business savvy, professional development and employment pathways for local people within the sector. DESART is a keen contributor in current negotiations around the development of an Art Industry Code of Practice being led by the National Association of Visual Artists (NAVA) and the Arts Council.

Acting as an intermediary and service broker between arts centres, artists and external agencies be they governments, the private sector or service organisations, DESART aims to strategically and innovatively respond to the challenges currently facing their membership. Two key initiatives already undertaken or underway are the Training needs initiative linked with the Business Development Project and the IT training and support initiative. Discussion of these and their links training and employment pathways for Indigenous desert peoples is the core focus of this case study.

Methodology

The approach utilised in this case study consisted primarily of interviews with key personnel of DESART and identified Art Centre managers. Sample selection for the interviews followed a 'purposeful' or 'purposive' sampling strategy (Patton 2002:230) identified cooperatively with the Executive officer of DESART. Interviews followed a semi structured topic outline and where

permission was granted the interviews were taped and later transcribed. The case study researcher also attended a two day DESART Executive meeting held at Maruku Arts, Mutitjulu, providing an opportunity to meet and talk with Executive members and artists from a range of central Australian communities. Further information and literature was accessed from DESART and some of the interviewees.

A total of six interviews were conducted each averaging between one and two hours in length enabling an in depth discussion of the topic areas outlined. Discussion topics focused on both the Training needs and Business Development initiative as well as the IT training and support project and included:

- ✧ History of the initiative
- ✧ Analysis of need and evidence base supporting investment in the initiative
- ✧ Key issues underpinning or being addressed by the initiative
- ✧ Challenges being faced
- ✧ Aims and goals of the program and progress to date
- ✧ Actual or potential impact of the initiatives in supporting employment, sustainable business practices and cultural maintenance.

Further topics directed specifically at Art Centre Managers included:

- ✧ Overview of art centre development
- ✧ Business practice – artists, products future development
- ✧ Arts centre relationship/linkages with DESART
- ✧ Support strategies (eg training, marketing)
- ✧ Issues and challenges

Analysis of the interview data was conducted manually according to standard text and content analysis techniques (Bernard 2000:444–455). Themes were identified relating to each of the initiatives being explored in the case study and these guide the discussion in the following sections of the report.

Training needs and Business Development Project

The thirty seven active Art Centres operating across the central Australian desert each pursue the development of local and niche arts practice and interact with varying and multiple industry contacts and markets as dictated by both opportunity and occasionally, business strategy. Understanding the diversity of the sector, the challenges and issues unique to each Art Centre and indeed the varying histories of the people and communities they relate to, is core business for DESART. Issues of recruitment, retention and the burn out of Art Centre staff is also a key issue, leading to Art Centre instability and the loss of corporate memory in the organisation (Altman, 2003 p 21). This often means that Art Centres are periodically reinvented and redirected and knowledge of what has come before easily lost. The need to build a clear picture of the professional and business development needs and experiences of artists and Art Centre managers led to the research underpinning the Training needs initiative and informed the Business Development Project. These initiatives emanate from the strategic objectives of DESART to both support and nurture Artists, Art Centres and the industry and strengthen the sustainability of the sector and support pathways for Aboriginal people into a variety of roles within the industry.

The DESART training needs initiative was in part supported by the Reframing the Future program, a professional development initiative of the Department of Education, Science and Training. It aimed to map the training and learning needs of artists and workers across the central Australian Aboriginal Art industry and also build knowledge within the industry, that is with the artists,

management committees and executive members, about training options, and assess what an 'industry' led training response would mean in the context of the Aboriginal Art Centre sector. The research underpinning the development of the DESART training network was thus an assessment of needs *and* a professional development activity.

The research identified five key skill areas of training need and a range of innovative approaches to meet those needs. The five key areas are Skills for our Art, Skills in the office, Skills for Art workers, Working with Community and Working with galleries, culture centres and other outlets. These areas articulate the social enterprise nature of Art Centres and whilst some skill areas support learning as artists and the range of task to do in an art centre, other areas reflect a learning vision for strengthening communities through organisational collaborations and working with and teaching young people. These skill areas have been matched against nine different training packages, recognising both the breadth of industry identified need and also the unwieldy fit between work in the mainstream (to where the content of Training Packages is targeted) and work on remote communities and at the cultural and development interface. The research also noted restrictive funding regimes, limited accessibility to training and often inappropriate training delivery when it did occur.

There is a stark contrast between accessibility of training for people who live in major centres along the Stuart Highway, and those who live on remote communities. The longer the dirt track, the less training they are likely to have received, and the experience of training is very different. (Desart Inc, 2006, p27)

The spread and diversity of Art Centres manifests not only in the artistic works they produce but also the range of skills, knowledge and experiences able to be brought to bear in developing the business and skills base of the Art Centre. Across DESART's remit there are many different language groups, massive variations in English literacy and very different ways of understanding training. For artists and Art Centre members living near larger townships where Registered Training Organisations are based, knowledge of the range of Certificates they may have undertaken and specific training organisations was very apparent. Those living more remote tended to talk about training as learning side by side and with the Art Centre manager, learning from each other, learning from visits to country and teaching young people. Formal training programs had made little if any mark even if there had been a TAFE or other provider on site at some point.

A suite of issues and challenges around formal training provision arose from the research into training needs undertaken by DESART and from the case study interviews. These were English literacy and numeracy and language and cultural differences, training delivery including both content and structure, training access, recognition of prior skills and competencies, informal training and training for artists versus training for work in the industry.

The limited English literacy and numeracy skills of remote Indigenous peoples are well documented (Guenther et al 2005; Storey, 2006). However, significant variation in these skills and knowledges exists across regions of the desert and certainly within DESART's footprint. The history of the community, the nature of educational service provision on site, the proximity to larger towns, and the ability to access appropriate training programs, all impact on current skill levels. However, even where Indigenous people have relatively good English literacy and numeracy skills challenges exist in translating concepts and understanding across cultures and in negotiating protocols, norms and expectations.

The first language is definitely not English and the literacy levels are really, really low. That doesn't necessarily inhibit training but does present a whole new set of challenges in how we deliver training of value to Aboriginal people on their community...its not just an issue of language, its an issue of interpreting context that we take for granted constantly (Interview 5)

You have to start where the learner is coming from, from the basis of the learner's culture and learner's language and move out from there. So that they learn from that basis how to engage with us. And how to engage with the people who have all the power, who see training as a solution to some of it and who think a 3 day training course in governance is going to

skill up people with minimum literacy skills and no confidence in English into being accountable at as national level for a sort of corporate business company (Interview 4).

One of the impacts of limited English literacy and numeracy skills is the channelling of learners into lower Certificate level courses, or to courses where assessment is less likely to require reading or writing skills, or to courses for literacy learning rather than courses with a vocational focus. This has led to an over supply of courses for artists.

They will have done these Certificates anyway because they have been bumping out the same Certificate courses out here for years. So they will all probably know. So let's move them on into doing something that could be developed up into being sustainable for the arts centre (Interview 3).

The easiest need for RTO's to meet is the training of artists. And that has to do with the capacity of training organisations to actually go out and deliver. When we start talking about other sorts of training it is more difficult. And that's why we see other training areas as more important to address because they haven't been addressed in the past and we need to find other ways of addressing them (Interview 1).

The formal training system is not particularly helpful and there is a whole lot of reasons why. The first thing is Aboriginal pedagogy. How Aboriginal people learn and want to learn is by looking and listening and showing each other and working side by side. So that doesn't mean you can't have a three day workshop and come in and deliver, but it means that once those training providers have gone, there needs to be a process of supporting that learning and giving people the opportunity to practice all the time (Interview 5).

Access to training was a particular issue. Remoteness from larger centres in desert Australia invariably meant less access to training. However Art Centres in or close to the larger centres also reported access issues, largely due to the fact that there were no training organisations with the scope to deliver the course that they wanted, or the trainers available had limited skills in working cross culturally or in being supported to work flexibility in and around the work of the Art Centre or the demands of the industry.

We had a bad experience where we had spent a lot of time talking with the trainer and had a verbal agreement about what training we needed. Then the person who came to deliver the training was not the one we had been negotiating with, and they came out with a formula like kind of set menu. They managed to put offside a lot of people and the training didn't help with product development (Interview 4).

Funding guidelines, training organisations registration procedures and institutional policies, affect how and what can be delivered. Whilst training organisations can access additional funds for remote area delivery, the viability of that training delivery will depend on numbers of students participating in the program. Numbers of students will in turn depend on learner interest, size of community and competing commitments.

They need a group of people in one place at one particular time. That means they need a core group of about 10. (Interview 1)

Instead of going in and asking for fifteen people to show up for a computer course, of which eight will maybe show up and then there remains one person after two days, you have to target this and build flexibility into it from the training organisations. You have to build learning these skills into work at the clinic, through the Art Centres, at the school and through the Council so people can practise these skills and use them on the community and take them out from the community if they want to (Interview 5).

DESART's objective of building the sustainability of Art Centres includes identifying strategies and processes for the employment of local Indigenous people within Art Centres. The reality that most Art Centres have only one full time employee, the Art Centre manager, fulfilling a suite of complex tasks across cultures and negotiating the distinctive pressures and stresses associated with living on remote communities (Altman, 2005) raises challenging issues for training up local staff.

What's happening in a lot of Art Centres is that there is a lot of teaching and learning going on. There is a lot of informal learning and some formal teaching. But the challenge for the Art Centre manager is actually to be overseeing training as well as overseeing the whole art centre organisation and the running of it on a day to day level (Interview 2).

An Art Centre is not just a production house for art. If we talk about informal training then, people learn in Art Centres a whole range of things because they are doing a whole range of activity other than art. There is a well developed practice when there are exhibitions in capital cities and Art Centre managers travel to those exhibitions, they take artists with them. So informally there is this osmosis about what curating and exhibiting is, what to hang, what sells, what marketing and promotion are about. Quite often artists are involved in selling (Interview 1).

Developing a pathway for local people into an Indigenous Art worker program requires innovative ways of negotiating a training system that struggles with issues of remoteness, small student numbers, unique workplace contexts and restricted scope in what they can teach. DESART is considering engaging their own training officer to support Indigenous Art Centre workers and developing a range of partnerships with Registered Training providers around delivery and assessment. Many comments were made about the potential of Recognition of Current Competency to support both flexible and appropriate learning practices and recognising the existing skills and strengths of those already engaged in aspects of Art Centre work.

You could support artists' in learning tasks or whatever in a side-by-side way. It could be with the Art Centre Manager, but where the manager feels it requires just too much work for them, you could have people going in to do that side by side learning. And what could be offered to remote communities is an RPL assessment approach. And people talk about that a lot but I have not seen it really happening. When people feel ready someone could go in and do a recognition of current competency workshop and that people could get the formal qualification which is important. But it is also important that those formal qualifications are shown to go somewhere for people (Interview 5).

If Art Centre managers do not have the capacity to deliver and supervise training than we need to offer support so that training can be delivered without their supervision. When we deliver training we need to deliver it in a particular way, there is no point trying to deliver training to one person in an art centre without them feeling supported. So quite often that means trying to build support within the art centre so three people are getting training and can support each other in that Art Centre. It means support from Registered Training Organisations that they are willing to be flexible about assessment (Interview 1).

A CD ROM resource supporting the development of skills in Art Centre work has recently been developed by CHARTTES (The Culture, Recreation and Tourism Training Advisory Council) with endorsement from DESART and ANKAAA and the involvement of many Art Centres and artists. Whilst aligned with the Certificate 111 in Arts Administration, it is structured so that content can be customised to reflect the type of art work and systems specific to each Art Centre and so that Art Centre workers can learn independently and at their own pace. Many issues around the use of computers and computer based learning were raised by respondents in this case study and they will be discussed in the next section of this report. Whilst many artists and Art Centre workers were identified as having good English and computer skills, the usefulness of computer based learning using such resources was welcomed in some contexts and considered unfeasible in others. This most likely reflects the diversity of educational and work histories and experiences across desert contexts.

When I ask them about people e-learning from a computer or CD ROM or something they would just say the amount of work that would go in for that to be a productive exercise in delivering long term outcomes is phenomenal (Interview 5).

The CD ROM is a simple tool that can empower people if they want to go that way and if they want to get recognition for there skills. It gives them all the paperwork in a way that is accessible to an RTO for assessment (Interview 4)

I think it's very valid to have the ability to increase people's skills within current technology. I think Art Centres need that because they are so remote they rely on electronic forms of transferring information and transferring actions and so on. I think it will become imperative that people do learn that sort of skill (Interview 6).

In building an understanding of training needs for artists and Art Centre workers, DESART is consolidating the base for implementing their Business Development Project. This entails "exploring initiatives with the Commonwealth Department of Employment and Workplace relations for a multifaceted project designed to increase the business capacity of Central Australian Art Centres so that growth can be focussed on the creation of new employment for Aboriginal people as arts workers in Aboriginal owned Art centres" (Oster, 2006). The project targets the development of business and marketing plans for Art Centres through the employment of a business development officer, improved business capacity through governance training and business mentoring and supports and a pilot Indigenous Arts worker program. The training envisaged is primarily that of brokering support and advisory services and on the job capacity building, rather than leveraging formal accredited training across all areas. An underpinning principle of the project is that increased business capacity and sustainability of Art Centres are linked with Indigenous employment outcomes. Improved local employment opportunities can address understaffing, workload and staff turnover issues within Art Centres, can respond to changes underway with the Community Employment Development Program by supporting work opportunities in the 'real economy' and can begin to address the development of younger and upcoming artists rather than holding forte with the existing cohort of senior artists. Sustainable employment means increased income from art sales and a commitment to utilise that income for the purposes of employment.

If we can first of all build the income through marketing and business development so that the economic performance of an Art Centre is improved, then we have to turn that additional income into a commitment to direct it towards the salaries for Indigenous Art workers rather than spending it on a motor car or some other particular need (Interview 1).

Developing business capacity and marketing processes is partly about planning and largely about implementation. One of the key planks of DESART's business development project is business mentoring involving strategic links and clear support structures to support the industry in the long term.

Business mentoring has to do with delivering a business plan, but also actually come into an Art Centre and helping with implementation. The business mentoring program would involve a one week intensive onsite delivery via mentor at the art centre. And then further fortnightly contact by phone to pick up on issues as they arise. So it is a long term support capacity about implementation of business plans so that they actually mean something and have an effect (interview 1).

Art Centre managers also saw the sustainability and professionalism of Art Centres as critical both for the protection and support of the artists themselves and for the future of the Aboriginal arts industry.

The industry has come a long way to be recognised as an industry from Papunya thirty years ago. In that time it has grown rapidly and dynamically. It is a very economically viable industry and proving very sustainable for the Art Centres and in economic returns for the artists. But there are many other types of operators in the industry now and some of those are independent, some of them are commercial galleries and some of them are wholesalers. So that means there is a lot more competition for the Art Centres and that artists are working with many different people on many different levels. And that's really what the Art Centres are up against – trying to work things out for themselves because of so many dealers being unscrupulous and operating not necessarily within the fair trade practices Act. Artists more than ever now need the support of Art Centres to know how to hold themselves strong and work within the industry and get a reputable position and fair remuneration for themselves (Interview 6).

As a peak organisation albeit with limited resources DESART has and continues to play a critical role in supporting, resourcing and providing a business vision for the industry that builds on the strength of culture and local aspirations for work and success. Mapping the picture of training needs has provided an unprecedented insight into the issues, skills and challenges of building capacity through training. It has also identified pathways for brokering better targeting and delivery of formal training including through establishing partnerships and networks with a range of training providers. From an industry perspective, the training needs initiative has consolidated an understanding of what industry driven training may mean within the Aboriginal Art sector, an understanding not dissimilar to that expressed by mainstream businesses and enterprises across Australia. Most businesses across Australia utilise a mix of formal, in house and informal staff training and development activities in building and sustaining their business capacity. One in three choose informal unaccredited training over formal training to meet their business skills development needs because they consider the content more relevant to their business, it is more cost effective, they can use their own trainers and it is more flexible and convenient (NCVER 2005).

DESART is involved in implementing and scoping a suite of professional development and informal training activities particularly in the areas of governance, business planning and the employment of Indigenous Art Centre Workers. The contracting by DESART of a private enterprise to deliver financial management training for their executive utilising real accounts information and graphic resources to present and discuss financial information at meetings is a tangible example business oriented but unaccredited professional development. One of the key challenges facing DESART, and indeed the industry, is facilitating the necessary skills and business development to reap local benefit from industry expansion within contexts where educational disadvantage is endemic and ongoing. Like many organisations and business sectors that work across remote Indigenous Australia, DESART has inevitably become engaged in trying to broker investments in capacity development to bridge the ever increasing disadvantage gap between Indigenous and non Indigenous peoples. A gap that must be addressed to in order to shape the sustainability of the Art Centre sector and reduce the vulnerability of artists to unethical business practices. The challenge is leveraging the range of supports and training needed over the long term from institutional systems that struggle to innovate and apply the flexibility needed to respond remoteness, cultural differences and educational neglect.

IT training and support

Over the past six or seven years DESART has been a leader in delivering IT capacity for Art centre in the bush. It began with a Networking the Nation program funded through the Department of Communication, Information Technology and the Arts (DCITA), which enabled infrastructure roll out to Art Centres and software and systems development to support the work of recording and cataloguing art works as well as developing the e-commerce capacity through web sites. The success of the project and the identified need for continued support, specifically technical support, has carried over into the IT training and support program, also funded through DCITA. This project delivers IT training and support to twenty communities in the NT and SA through Art Centres linked to DESART. Whilst it continues to support Art Centres its primary goal is to enable Aboriginal people on these communities to access IT capacity and develop skills in basic computer use and using email or the internet for services such as banking.

All training delivered is non-accredited and the technical support aspect includes periodic on site visits as well as a help desk facility. IT support is provided to community councils, Church groups and individuals and existing non Indigenous staff employed in these contexts. As noted by one of the case study respondents:

The great focus of what we are trying to do I guess is work with the community staff that are already there to try to make their life a little bit easier, to enable them to trust the technologies already evident and that they are using, so that they feel a whole lot more relaxed about allowing Indigenous people access to that technology (Interview 3).

There has been significant investment in IT infrastructure rollout across the desert in recent years (Young et al, 2005). Many Indigenous communities now have public internet access points on their communities and they are beginning to be used to access government and other services, although not always without difficulty. In some places, Centrelink's remote area agents or other staff, act as intermediaries for local residents in accessing information through the internet. In other circumstances issues with passwords and ID requirements have often meant that after initial enthusiasm Indigenous people stop using the facilities.

They started out doing a lot of training in internet banking. Everybody looked at it and said fantastic, yes, I am going to have all my wages put into my back account and I am going to use it. Then they forgot their password. Then there is a problem when they have to ring up the banks. Firstly there are only a few phones available for public use on these communities and maybe they aren't working. Secondly, when you get through to the bank you have to go through all this protocol hoo hah to get to a help desk and when you get to that help desk they can't help you because you can't identify yourself. We need another form of identification systems, thumb prints or fingerprints. So now we are finding less and less people are accessing the training because they have reached a threshold. They have seen websites, they have seen games, they have seen banking and it does not work anymore. What else are they going to do on a computer especially given the numeracy and literacy issues (Interview 1).

However, over the two years the program has been running indicators for success are beginning to be identified. Firstly, communities that have employed multiple access point strategies, so there are computer terminals in various workplaces, in the store, in the women's centre, the Art Centre and in the garage would seem to be reporting greater success in building capacity across the community than those with singular access points. People begin to utilise the technology for work activities and this builds familiarity and greater capacity to teach and assist each other. It also means that access is not restricted because the computer is in a women's place or because of issues arising from avoidance relationships with certain kin. Secondly, where computers are an integral part of work activities, people become familiar with both the work and the computer use and can practise their skills and build their capacities incrementally over time.

Technical support can be a particular issue for remote communities and one not limited to IT support but spread across the range of technologies in use on communities, from energy and water supplies to stoves. Standard models of technical assistance involve contractors arriving often after significant delays to repair or fix the problem, often at great cost and then leaving the community with little capacity or skill handover to address the problem if indeed it reoccurs. The model of technical support provided in the DESART program combines face to face visits and a remote help desk that aims to build skills with the end user in being able to fix the most common and most often reoccurring problems.

In this project we believe that repeat business as a result of the same fault twice is only going to give us a bad reputation. We go in and say don't ring us if this happens again until you have followed all these steps to try and fix it first. That way we hand over that capacity (Interview 3).

Poor installation and poor technology choice remains an ongoing issue for IT capacity on remote communities. Many computers utilised in public access centres are hand me downs or indeed the cheapest available on the market at that time. This is often in stark contrast to the type of equipment available to Council and other staff. Many of the technical issues that arise cannot be fixed through a support response but do require a replacement approach. The key is devolving knowledge about what is fixable locally, what is fixable but sits within the ambit of service providers such as Telstra and what just needs replacing.

The critical part of the DESART IT projects has been supporting the establishment of web sites and a common portal (www.aboriginalart.org) for Aboriginal Art centres across remote Australia. Web site management and updates remain the responsibility of each Art Centre and whilst some have well developed e-commerce strategies others have let that aspect of the marketing and promotion work wane.

The project provided the consultancy services and the advice to them, but the ongoing ownership and the building and everything was put into their name. As art centres have grown, they have found that it does not have to be direct sales, but a website. Even if it is out of date it will create referrals and will actually be better than not having one at all (Interview 3).

Art Centre managers have responded varyingly to the opportunity for e-commerce enabled through the DESART projects. Arguably the effectiveness of e-commerce will relate directly to the amount of business an Art Centre is already doing through other means, an indeed will be a function of the reputation of its artists and art. However the networks of support and contact facilitated through these DESART projects has been critically important in supporting the ongoing sustainability of Art Centres. As noted by one of the case study respondents, the facilitation of broader networks for staff, often very isolated professionally and personally, can provide a critical boost to the sector and indeed the commercial performance of individual Art Centres.

We need a whole battalion of hand on people who can actually become involved at some level in supporting the Art Centre and are there to respond to the needs of it, whether it is a business issues or governance issue or whatever. People who can give good advice, practical help and a hands on response if that is needed. Techlink¹ was a godsend (Interview 4).

The IT training and support initiative, following on as it did from the Networking the Nation program targeted at Art Centre in remote areas, provides a long term window into the issues and effectiveness of information and communication technologies in remote Indigenous domains. Considerations of technology choice, installation, siting, technical support and skills development remain key issues particularly for Indigenous residents. How these interact with cultural and language issues, including fluency in English literacy and numeracy, and how connectivity begs a reconsideration of how online services are scoped and delivered in these contexts are ongoing challenges. The successive roll out of technologies has been a rather expensive lesson in what systems and set ups will function in remote and unique cultural, institutional and geographic landscapes. The hiccups along the way have led to some caution and suspicion about the opportunities attributed to connectivity and particularly for Indigenous residents who are often at the periphery of their use and application. As a tool explicitly designed for literate western cultures, albeit capable of innovate graphic and audio interfaces, the potential of IT technologies in supporting the work on communities and the skills development of Indigenous residents, rest with enabling opportunities for day to day use and practice on 'real' tasks, utilising cutting edge software that bridges literacy shortfalls, and developing innovative online service interfaces that respond to the needs and requirements of remote area customers.

Good IT systems and processes, including e-commerce capabilities have provided an important boost to Art Centres. Cataloguing art works, taking digital photos, communicating with galleries, dealers, funders and support agencies and new avenues for sales, now largely occur online or on hard drive. Technical support and troubleshooting handover has been critical to building the capacity and sustainability of the day to day work that is undertaken. Nevertheless, new systems also incur increased side-by-side learning responsibilities for Art Centre managers rendering the range of tasks and skills needed to undertake those tasks of greater complexity. This in turn can increase the skills development needs of Art Centre workers. However, as enterprises embedded in the 'real economy', Art Centre's provide critical sites of practice, learning and skills development for local Indigenous people. With the IT training and support initiative heading to completion within the next 12 months, the identification of strategies for sustaining back up IT support, and building on the training undertaken to date will be necessary. This is particularly the case if familiarity and skill is to be devolved further to local Indigenous peoples.

¹ Techlink is the name of the company contracted to provide the Networking the Nation and IT training and support programs for DESART

Building on strengths

As noted in recent work into Indigenous businesses and learning (Flamstead & Golding 2005), Indigenous employment opportunities outside of the Community Development Employment Program (CDEP) become more critical the further Indigenous people are from population centres and VET is less likely to be providing appropriate and responsive interventions to support these opportunities. Indeed VET is more likely to be delivered in remote areas in response to the requirements and agenda of training providers (for funding or reporting requirements) and less likely in response to client demand or need (Flamstead 1999). Much of the research documented in this case study reinforces these findings. Whilst Art Centres are often one of the only business and enterprise opportunities on communities beyond CDEP, leveraging targeted and appropriate training and supports is a huge and often unfulfilling task. And yet the Art Centre industry has been hailed as the success story in remote community development activities and the model against which solutions to other ‘problems’ facing remote communities could be leveraged (Morphy 2006). A core factor in the success of Art Centres is that they provide a conduit into mainstream economic activities beyond small remote communities and are simultaneously sites of learning about business, about the ‘mainstream’ (Sydney, Paris, Berlin and New York), and about economics per se from a position of cultural and individual strength and achievement. As the industry grows and faces generational change maintaining the social enterprise nature of the sector and building business sustainability is a key challenge, and one made more complicated by VET sectors difficulty in responding with the flexibility and durability required particularly in areas other than Skills for artists.

The social enterprise nature of Art Centres reflects the contours of Indigenous led development activities that have evolved from the 1970s. These framed enterprise and development as building on traditional culture, community and land and in the Indigenous Arts sector the links between culture, land and the enterprise are definitive. However, tensions between the economic and social functions of community enterprises are increasingly apparent fuelled in particular by recent commentary decrying passive welfare, communalism and engagement with ‘real’ economies. In the words of Noel Pearson

Our failure to properly reconcile our social and cultural considerations with the imperatives of enterprise development, I suspect, is the greatest impediment to enterprise development in our communities and a central explanation for our failures to date (2000, p.89).

These tensions are surfacing in and around the Art Centre sector with pressure to capitalise on industry growth and consolidate greater economic returns for the businesses. Establishing industry codes of conduct and the background talk of regulation and industry accreditation push the social enterprise nature of the sector into the limelight. How can the welfare, social, community and culture work varyingly embraced by Art Centre’s alongside its economic activities be reconciled to the machinations of the economic world?

Conclusion

The Aboriginal Art Centre sector is a well established and expanding industry providing significant livelihood opportunities for remote Indigenous peoples across central Australia and beyond. There is consistent and increasing demand from the industry for effective and tailored training and capacity development options to support the work of artists and work for Indigenous peoples within Art Centres. Unfortunately the response of training providers to date has been constricted largely by the over emphasis of supply factors that drive training organisations funding and reporting regimes. Student numbers, course enrolments, a risk adversity to remote delivery given issues of attendance, literacy and numeracy, poor infrastructure and facilities, staff turnover, limits to the resourcing of course customisation and minimal arrangements for flexible assessment and recognition of current competency approaches all compound responsiveness to demand. This in turn reflects the fact that the VET system is a National and ‘mainstream’ system, geared to delivering training in mainstream work and education contexts. The systems of accreditation,

regulation, quality control and funding formulas tend to be applied regardless of location or client profiles developing significant inertia in regard to innovation and flexibility. These realities require vision and effort on the part of DESART, and indeed individual Art Centres, in developing the range of training responses needed to build business sustainability, employment for Indigenous people within the industry and transcend issues of remoteness and cultural difference. In particular, DESART's work will entail the development and maintenance of a range of partnerships with training and other organisations and the fostering of momentum for meeting expressed demand rather than supplying pre-ordained services.

The suite of training and capacity development responses to the needs of Indigenous learners straddles the informal and formal learning pathways. Many programs targeting stronger communities, local solutions and unmet need involve capacity development albeit often in an unsustainable way. The IT training and support initiative is thus somewhat unique in its longevity and in its provision of training outside the formal sector. The learning's from the project as it enters its final year of operation highlight the durability of commitment required to reach a threshold of knowledge and skills around new technologies and the associated innovations that need to be introduced by other stakeholders, both private enterprise and governments. The IT training and support initiative offers some key lessons for the use of IT in flexible delivery. IT connectivity and availability on a community does not necessarily mean Indigenous people are or can access and use them. If they are being utilised for accessing services, information or education, the appropriateness of the content and service interface become paramount to ongoing use.

The immersion of Art Centres and artists at the cultural interface, wherein in creating, buying, selling, exhibiting, and even travelling the world occur adjacent to trips to country, renewing cultural practice and traditional learning processes is indeed one of the strengths of the industry. As noted by Marcia Langton,

some commercialisation of Aboriginal cultural assets would help maintain them, just as the high regard for Aboriginal art in the global art market has enabled its cultural foundations to flourish (2002:19).

To a degree the commercial and economic value accorded to Indigenous Art has enabled the intrinsic values experienced in renewing, experiencing and depicting traditions and ties to country to be encompassed at the heart of the industry. This occurs despite the fact that the value accorded to the art by purchasers differs to the value and meaning accorded to the art by the creators (Polk, 2001). Sustaining these links whilst affording broader benefit and opportunity to local people from their enterprises beyond the creative role, is indeed the challenge being tackled by DESART. Leveraging benefit from industry growth and attention to the capacity development needs of its constituents requires not only embracing the generational change occurring within the industry, but fuelling generational change in the ways and means and outcomes of educational investment in remote Indigenous Australia.

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Waltja Tjutangku Palyapayi: organisational and individual journeys

Introduction

This report documents one of the case studies undertaken during Stage 3 of the *Growing the Desert: effective educational pathways for remote Indigenous peoples* project. This case study, *Waltja Tjutangku Palyapayi: organisation and individual journeys*, was undertaken as a research collaboration with Waltja Tjutangku Palyapayi (Waltja), an Indigenous family organisation servicing communities across central Australia. It documents an exciting and emerging initiative in education and livelihoods development for residents of communities across the central desert region of Australia. This initiative has been given the name Training Nintiringjaku (knowing and speaking up for training) by the Waltja Management Committee

The case study phase of the Growing the Desert project sought to capture innovative practice occurring in education with desert Indigenous peoples. Specifically this case study addresses the following research questions:

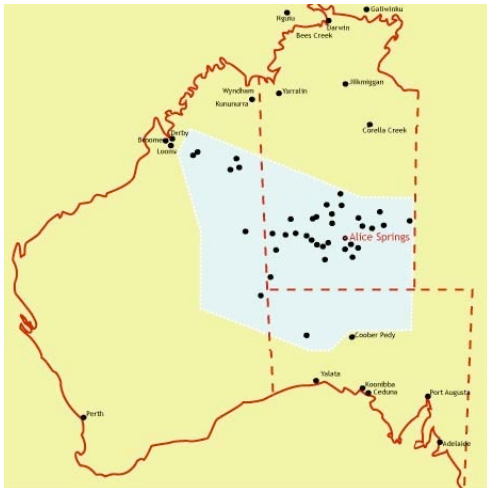
- ✧ How effectively does Vocational Education and Training (VET) supply match demand across the desert and respond to new livelihoods opportunities;
- ✧ What factors, such as mode of delivery, industry focused training packages, localisation of content and delivery, relationships between providers and learners, existing and potential partnerships, use of local knowledge systems and processes, impact on effective pathways for Indigenous learners; and
- ✧ What is working in VET provision across the desert and what needs to be put in place to foster successful engagement and outcomes through VET.

The report begins with an overview of Waltja, its vision, structure, constituency and service delivery strategies, before outlining the collaborative research methodology employed within the case study. It then outlines the research and practice journey undertaken by Waltja towards developing the Training Nintiringjaku initiative—the organisational journey—followed by a discussion of the learning journey undertaken by one of Waltja’s management committee members. The report concludes by discussing how the Training Nintiringjaku initiative informs the research questions identified above and responds to the key issues for education in desert contexts as documented in the Stage one report of the *Growing the Desert* research project (Guenther et al. 2005).

Waltja Tjutangku Palyapayi: The organisation

Waltja Tjutangku Palyapayi Aboriginal Association is a community based organisation working with Aboriginal families across central Australia. Waltja Tjutangku Palyapayi is Luritja (western desert language) for ‘doing good work for families’. Figure 1 below highlights the extensive reach of the services provided by Waltja, an area of over 900,000 square kilometres with approximately 13,000 Indigenous people and nine strong Indigenous languages spoken: Warlpiri, Luritja, Western Arrernte, eastern Arrernte, Pintupi, Keytej, Anmatyerre. Alyaware and Pitjantjatjara.

Figure 3 Waltja's footprint



Waltja was established as an incorporated Aboriginal Association in 1997 to provide services and support to Aboriginal families on remote communities. Waltja is a non government not for profit organisation that provides a range of diverse services for and on remote central Australian communities by tendering for project funding and working through strong partnerships with governments and other organisations. The objectives of the organisation as captured in its constitution (Waltja Tjutanku Palyapayi Aboriginal Association 1997) are as follows:

- ❖ To provide appropriate transportation, sporting, communications, health and disability, education and homemakers services to relieve the severe economic disadvantage and social, emotional and spiritual well being issues experienced by central Australian people. This includes substance misuse, child protection issues, and all forms of violence including suicide and clinical mental illness;
- ❖ To provide administrative and related resource and programs to develop members of the central Australian community's capacity for self-management and self-determination;
- ❖ Facilitate community participation in the planning, management provision and evaluation of community based services in the central Australian region;
- ❖ To secure the provision of training, employment and related programs to alleviate chronic unemployment experienced by central Australian people;
- ❖ To represent the views of central Australian families, from children to the elderly, to arrest cultural disintegration within the central Australian community;
- ❖ To provide and promote opportunities for member's cultural expression to arrest disintegration within the central Australian community;
- ❖ To undertake measures necessary to improve race relations and counter racial vilification and alleviate the social distress experienced by central Australian people;
- ❖ To provide resources, administrative and related support to members in the establishment of initiatives and organisations, the objectives of which will reduce the level of sickness, poverty, helplessness and distress experienced by central Australian people; and
- ❖ Identify opportunities and needs for the enhancement or extension of community based services to relieve the reliance on Alice Springs services.

Waltja operates across a suite of service areas including children, youth, aged care and disability as well as being a Registered Training Organisation that targets the development of its own staff and Management committee. Waltja undertakes consultancy work in a range of areas and also develops high quality key resources that provide critical culturally relevant products such as child rearing

practices, recruitment processes and home management. The approach Waltja takes to its work with remote communities and families operates on three tiers:

- ♦ Advocacy and ongoing negotiations with funding bodies and other agencies to ensure services provided align with the expressed aspirations of communities and families;
- ♦ Ownership and capacity development for community people through service delivery to secure local employment and leadership in community activities; and
- ♦ Developing strategic partnerships in order to create innovative programs that secure community development objectives.

In order to fulfil the objectives of its constitution Waltja has instituted a unique governance structure and process that gives practical expression to community control and capacity building in facilitating the delivery of appropriate community-based services. The Management Committee comprises 26 senior women drawn from the communities Waltja works with and advocates on behalf of. It meets four times a year and workshops in language, through art and in presentations the key issues, needs and services required to support families and communities and build local capacity. The Executive Committee is elected from this group. It meets every six weeks to make decisions and provide directions for Waltja staff and their activities. Well established protocols and procedures enable issues and needs around service provision to be first identified and workshopped at a community level, facilitated by Waltja, thus ensuring that responses to the issues and needs are directed and owned by community members. Waltja staff then develop and implement these ideas through existing or new programs and services or via partnerships with government and non government agencies. Such processes mandate the development of capacity, skills and knowledge of the management and executive members. This occurs informally through workshop sessions where ideas and information can be discussed in language, amongst and across different communities and language groups, and consolidates improved understanding of big words, foreign concepts and shifting policy regimes. More formally, Management Committee and Executive Committee members participate in a range of training and development programs including governance training, attending conferences, meetings and a host of other skill development opportunities.

Waltja delivers its services as community development activities. This means that most of the family and support activities occur on site on communities and with directed focus on supporting local people to assume many responsibilities within the programs. Many of the essential human services required on communities—child care, aged disability services and youth programs—are overseen by voluntary committees. The employed positions (youth worker, disability care worker) are being filled by non-Indigenous peoples from elsewhere. Whilst such voluntary work is essential in enabling culturally sensitive and responsive services, community members tend to get locked into volunteering without the clear pathways or skills development towards assuming such paid roles. Their depth of skills and knowledge also remains informal, unaccredited and unrewarded. Such patterns of service delivery, local oversight for externally structured and ‘outsider’ staffed programs, are repeated across the board with but a few exceptions. Waltja members are very clear that the movement of local people into existing community based jobs is essential for the development and improvement of their communities and that formal western skills development ‘on the job’ is a key enabling ingredient. They also voice strongly that the work they currently do is unrecognised and that job creation schemes are as critical as job replacement schemes.

There may be many more jobs on the community. Make this work real work. That’s what we been doing all our life. That’s what makes us leaders – we stood up for communities, talk up for Waltja – we get tired and still poor. (Management Committee member)

More than ten years of workshopping and reflecting on these issues has led to the development of the Training Nintiringtjaku initiative. Tracking the development of this initiative and the learning journey of a management committee member involved in Training Nintiringtjaku will be discussed in detail in this report.

Methodology

This case study has been undertaken as a research collaboration with Waltja. Nominated Waltja Executive, Management and Staff members have assumed roles of co-researchers within the project, grounding the research in the utilisation of ‘emic’ perspectives (an insiders view) rather than relying on ‘etic’ perspectives (an outsiders view) which tends to inform the bulk of research practice about Indigenous peoples (Mariappanadar 2005; NHMRC 2003). The case study process was underpinned by a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the broader Project research team and Waltja co-researchers outlining, tasks, responsibilities and rights and outcomes for the collaborative research process. The methodology adopted for the case study recognises the expertise and capabilities of Waltja co-researchers and explicitly addresses issues of capacity building and mutual benefit within the research process. Key aspects of the case study design include:

- ◆ Review of available documentation about Waltja’s Training Nintiringtjaku initiative;
- ◆ Focus group sessions with Waltja co-researchers to tell their stories about the training Nintiringtjaku initiative and more generally their perspectives on access, equity and career pathways through VET; and
- ◆ Individual research sessions with the Management Committee member to develop the story about a remote community resident’s pathway through work and learning, including through VET. This process enabled the development of a resume, a work history portfolio and the mapping of current competencies as a tangible expression of mutual benefit through research.

As the majority of the co-researchers speak English as a second language, focus group and interview sessions were taped. This enabled free expression in people’s language of choice and, where required, tapes were later translated into English and checked for accuracy by participants. Processes of free, prior informed consent, as per ethical guidelines were followed. Tapes and transcriptions remain the property of Waltja. The case study received ethical clearance through the Charles Darwin University Ethics Committee and the Central Australia Human Research Ethics Committee.

Both the focus group and individual research sessions utilised semi structured discussion topics and ‘yarn times’ (Rose forthcoming). Discussion topics included:

- ◆ Prior research undertaken by Waltja into community training needs;
- ◆ Issues and barriers with VET training - access, delivery and outcomes;
- ◆ Skills recognition, voluntary work and the role of VET;
- ◆ History of the Training Nintiringtjaku initiative;
- ◆ Aims of Training Nintiringtjaku;
- ◆ Meeting community needs and aspirations; and
- ◆ Support for Training Nintiringtjaku workers.

The concept of ‘yarn times’, as an appropriate Indigenous research methodology has been developed by Indigenous researchers and currently being utilised within VET sector research. The concept relates to the transfer of knowledge through narrative and storytelling that is integral to Indigenous cultures. Talking together and building up collective knowledge about training issues and opportunities is a core process utilised by Waltja and embedded in its governance practices. These processes translated readily as appropriate tools for collaborative research particularly within the focus group sessions.

The organisational journey

Whilst this case study focuses primarily on Waltja’s Training Nintiringtjaku initiative, its story is intricately interwoven with the development of Waltja as an organisation and the implementation of its community development approach and community governance mandate. It is also a story that

emerges out of Waltja constituents' vision for their families, their communities and the parameters within which they wish to engage with the 'mainstream'. It is a story that tells of community driven attempts to bridge the ongoing retreat of training services from remote communities. It is a story of taking responsibility.

As a community based non government organisation (NGO) Waltja, like many others, survives funding round to funding round, contract to contract in delivering against its organisational objectives. In an era where funding for NGOs is increasingly transforming into purchaser-provider arrangements as competitive tendering and free trade agreements impact on outsourcing arrangements for government services, the role of NGOs may become increasingly focused on the delivery of government required outcomes that may, or may not, align with NGO established practice or constitutional objectives of the organisations themselves. A key feature of NGOs within the Australian context is their ability to nurture social and human capital and provide services both flexibly and through participative processes (Butcher 2005). The role of VET organisations in building social capital, as well as human capital, for community development has also been identified (Kilpatrick 2003). Whilst Waltja is a Registered Training Organisation, it has limited scope in the range of formal training services it can deliver. It has tended to prioritise non accredited community development 'training' workshops that enhance knowledge and skills development, build on participants strengths and provide a pathway into formal training. Over the past 13 years however, Waltja² has also assumed a critical role in brokering alliances, partnerships and networks to facilitate a breadth of training and other services across the numerous remote communities it works with. As such Waltja has been a conduit for nurturing bridging and linking social capital between individuals, families, communities and a range of 'outsider' service and support organisations including governments themselves. Bridging and linking social capital refers to 'bridging ties with people from different networks [which] can provide access to opportunities, and links to institutions and systems can help people and communities to gain leverage and resources' (Stone 2003). The small size, dispersed geographies and cultural uniqueness of central Australian remote communities renders the development of networks and linkages critical to community development objectives and 'mainstream' participation, and the role of organisations like Waltja are an essential component in achieving this. The range of networks, linkages and partnerships fostered by Waltja also supports an understanding of issues and barriers that can lead to new and innovative interventions. The Training Nintiringtjaku initiative is an innovative intervention whose story will now be tracked, beginning with an outline of the research undertaken by Waltja into training needs and remote communities.

Training needs and remote communities

More than half of the Indigenous residents across desert Australia speak an Indigenous language as their first language and they are half as likely as their English speaking counterparts to participate in formal accredited training at any level (Guenther et al. 2005). This profile resonates with the training access issues experienced by Waltja's management and committee members.

Not many RTOs come out to communities. Waltja goes out but I don't see many. Some go to big communities near Alice Springs. One came to us a few years ago but not really any more. We don't see anyone on small communities. (Management Committee member)

In 1993 the Aboriginal Development Unit of the Northern Territory Department of Education in collaboration with Waltja undertook research into the training needs of Aboriginal women across 26 remote communities. The report (ADU & CAFRC 1993) identified that whilst the issues of training on remote communities were indeed complex there were a number of consistently highlighted issues including the need for English literacy and numeracy and governance training and a range of barriers to training including perceived relevance given limited pathways to

² The Central Australian Family resource Centre was incorporated in 1997 as Waltja Tjutanku Palyapai Aboriginal Association

employment as well as delivery modes and content issues. The report also identified that whilst job availability on remote communities was scarce, jobs did exist in within health, education, retail, art centres and Council run services, and that local people should be trained and supported to fill these roles rather than outsiders. The research also identified that Indigenous women recognised and valued formal training and professional development opportunities but also ‘emphasised the value of having their own experienced people as trainers, and the development of resource materials for, and from, their own communities’ (Waltja Tjutangku Palyapai 2005, p 11).

Research into the training needs of remote communities, particularly the training needs of Indigenous women from these communities, has been undertaken continually by Waltja. This research project draws upon four documented Waltja workshops involving training needs analysis; The Women’s Centre Workers Management Training Workshop in 1996, the Training Needs Assessment Workshops in 2001, the Culture and Careers Workshop for Young women in 2002 and the Waltja Training Nintiringtjaku workshop 2005. Regular scoping of training needs has also been undertaken at Management Committee meetings thus providing a rich collection of time series data about training need and issues spanning more than a decade. Collectively the research data gives a glimpse of the persistence of expressed demand from remote community residents, especially for training that provides a pathway into existing community based jobs. It also references the ongoing difficulties of accessing training as the escalating range of regulations and standards impacting on training organisations shapes a culture of risk adversity, wherein remote delivery is often avoided by training organisations because of high risk in terms of effective consultations, costs of travel and accommodation and problems with attendance, retention and completions.

These workshops and the suite of more informal training needs assessments undertaken by Waltja highlight the following:

- ◆ There is a need for both informal (non accredited) and formal (accredited) training whereby the former can provide a conduit into the latter;
- ◆ The outcomes of training, that is, the extent it provides a pathway into real work opportunities on communities, is as important as the quality of the training itself;
- ◆ Developing the capacity of remote community residents to facilitate training and act as leaders and mentors for other participants dramatically improves attendance, retention and completion;
- ◆ Training delivery models need to allow opportunity for discussions to occur and understandings to be developed, in language, across language groups and with full acknowledgement of the skills and capabilities adult learners bring to any learning context. Waltja has refined a process whereby large group workshops, cluster workshops (by service area or theme) and individual and small group training, are combined to support improved outcomes for all;
- ◆ Development of resources for and from participating communities enhances training outcomes;
- ◆ There are a range of constraints on training organisations about the training they can provide that can ‘change the direction and ownership of training’ (Waltja Tjutangku Palyapai 1996) and thus reduce effectiveness and outcomes. These restrictions include lack of childcare support, travel support and mandatory curricula;
- ◆ Training needs in governance and administration and functional literacies have been identified over many years and only intermittently, if at all, addressed; and
- ◆ Life skills training, such as home management, nutrition and healthy living remain top priorities but are now outside the scope of the formal VET sector.

In particular the report from the Training Needs Assessment Workshop (Waltja Tjutangku Palyapai 2001) identified the following specific issues:

- ◆ Training on remote communities is often dependent on non-Aboriginal staff of community organisations to organise and follow up, and courses preferred by community residents are sometimes ignored or fail due to lack of support;
- ◆ The high cost of delivering remote training has resulted in closer (to Alice Springs) communities having greater access than more remote communities;

- ◆ Lack of awareness of the types of funding support available for remote community training;
- ◆ Reliance of community upon specific training providers for information, hence limited options; and
- ◆ Lack of assessors for remote locations to encourage recognition of current competencies, leading to very few people gaining access to higher level courses.

Addressing these issues has depended largely on the willingness and capability of external training providers and decision makers to respond. The information and need is locally generated but responses are externally determined thus creating a mismatch between demand and supply and indeed a retreat from on site delivery. Whilst participation of desert Indigenous people in VET has been high (Guenther et al 2005), evidence from the ground would suggest that very little of this training is occurring on site in communities or aligning with pathways to existing jobs on communities. Recent data (Young et al 2006, forthcoming) also reveals a 25 per cent reduction in the VET participation of desert Indigenous peoples, a trend at odds with steady increases over the past four years and of significant concern given the impending changes to Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP) and the lifting of Centrelink's remote area exemptions. Whilst there are a number of accredited training providers in Alice Springs (ostensibly delivering across a catchment area covering a 500 km radius from the town and 15,000 residents, (Taylor 2003:14), many are field specific (health, technical, driver training) offer training in residential blocks on campus rather than on-site, cover a small number of communities for longer periods of time (Boyle et al 2004), or deliver in town only. A Waltja management committee member summarised this situation as such: 'Its getting tighter and tougher and we need to get more training but we are getting less'.

Recognition of the limited responsiveness of training organisations to expressed need as well as the responsibility community leaders and elders have to guide and support their families and young people and build and strengthen their communities, was the genesis of a new approach. As stated by management committee members from Waltja:

The idea for Training Nintiringtjaku came from all this research, came from Waltja talking with us. So people can work on the community and for the community. We are doing training for Training Nintiringtjaku now so we can work on the community and get a job. RTOs need to work with people in our community so they can get used to that community and people get used to training and learning.

Training Nintiringtjaku

Training Nintiringtjaku is in essence a job creation initiative. It is a response to the reality that 'real' job opportunities on communities largely sit at the interface between service provision and community life. Effectiveness at this interface in negotiating cultural issues, priorities and aspirations alongside the outcomes required by service agencies such as training organisations, will determine usefulness and benefit for providers and participants. Securing such effectiveness, for example around access to facilities and required participant numbers has usually occurred from a distance and with reliance upon a community based workers who are often non Indigenous. Involvement of Indigenous community residents in facilitating or mentoring participants does occur but usually in a voluntary capacity. It is rare that these 'volunteers' skills are further utilised in training delivery as, for example, interpreters, context experts or cultural authority figures let alone considered essential work in achieving better outcomes from training. Poor attendance, retention, clashes with other community events and the double booked facilities occurs regularly and further diminishes training organisations willingness to return.

Thus Training Nintiringtjaku is an initiative to establish employment for Aboriginal Community Training Facilitators in remote communities in central Australia. It is a community driven response to addressing the issues and barriers around training delivery as experienced by Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) and ensuring that the training provided on communities is responsive to the needs and aspirations of participants. Waltja has taken a threefold approach in developing the

initiative. One aspect has focused on harnessing the support of community governance structures in identifying potential Training Nintiringtjaku workers and gaining endorsement for the initiative. The second aspect has involved Waltja developing job roles and professional development required by these workers in relation to the VET system. The third aspect focuses on developing employment opportunities with RTOs and other training and research organisations for Training Nintiringtjaku workers.

The role of Training Nintiringtjaku workers

The Training Nintiringtjaku project was endorsed by Waltja Management Committee in May 2004. The role of and required skills for these workers was workshopped and potential participants identified through Waltja processes or through nominations from Community Councils. Workers are required to be strong in English and in community languages and have seniority and cultural authority within their community. Many of these workers have been involved in the governance and management of community and health services on their communities and thus have a wealth of prior skills and knowledge they bring to the new role. They have an interest in training and an understanding of the issues and needs of training participants from their communities. Mentoring and role modelling is implicit to the work role. As stated by Waltja's Training Support Worker:

Training Nintiringtjaku is starting with the really experienced people who have lived on the community and know everyone. It is a job for them, a job for senior people but then young people can learn and see that job for them too.

A three day workshop for nominated Training Nintiringtjaku workers was held in August 2004 with participants from eight communities. The work role and training needs and issues were discussed. The following comments from the focus group sessions held as part of this research, articulate some of the ideas and approaches to learning that can be facilitated by Training Nintiringtjaku workers.

When you have training out bush people stay. In town they may come the first day, the second day and then they go, they go to drink now. It is good to have workshops out bush—Hamilton Downs and Ross River. Lots of people who come and work together and help each other with language and doing group work.

It's good for people to start off (training) on the community for getting confidence in themselves and the trainer. But they can also talk in language with each other. Even if the training is delivered in English, if people are from one community or close communities all the learners can talk with each other in language and help interpret for each other. We also learn from each other.

If you have to travel for training into Alice Springs you might only have one or two people who can speak language together. The training is in English and there are not enough people to help each other out. Might get shame of saying the wrong thing or of not understanding. Maybe one doesn't hear properly and no one knows about that hearing problem and there is no-one to help out. You might go to a workshop at Batchelor College. You learn in English but you may be the only one speaking your language. You have no-one to help interpret then. People who know you, know that they might have to help each other, explain to each other in language.

The RTOs need help with language. Help to decide when to come. Who to talk to, who should go to training. That's why RTOs want to work with Training Nintiringtjaku workers. They are learning too. We can help explain what training is about when people don't understand.

A further Training Nintiringtjaku workshop was held in May 2005. A report by Waltja documents the issues raised at these workshops and reiterates the expressed demand for the

VET system to work with and on remote communities, to recognise that workplace learning and accreditation opportunities exist even on the poorest Aboriginal community, to equip

Aboriginal people to manage their own services and to create career entry points and pathways for their young people. (Waltja Tjutangku Palyapai 2005:15)

It is envisaged that Training Nintiringtjaku workers will play a critical role in facilitating training to meet these needs.

As well as facilitating timing, location and participants for training Training Nintiringtjaku workers are envisioned as assuming roles within training, as interpreters and as trainers and assessors themselves. This requires building knowledge of the VET system, training packages and delivery options. As such Training Nintiringtjaku workers have commenced training in units from the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment.

We learn a lot of different stuff in the training we are doing now. Make a meeting on a community. We were shown how to go about planning it properly. We will work with RTOs to get training happening on the community so we will organise the meetings and everything. We have a lot of prior knowledge too. We have been organising meetings and talking up for Waltja for a long time now.

This formal training builds on a series of workshops undertaken as part of the Community Training Partnerships discussed below that provided collaborative forums for community people and Registered Training Organisations to explore the national VET system and strategies for meeting the training needs of remote community residents.

Community Training Partnerships

In parallel with the development of the Training Nintiringtjaku initiative, Waltja successfully tendered for two rounds of funding through the Reframing the Future program (2004 and 2005). These projects aimed to support the role and employment of central Australian community leaders within the VET system by establishing networks, support systems, professional development and a community of practice focussed on improving training services to and in real collaboration with remote communities. They forged an inclusive and integrated approach to problem solving the issues around training including a place and case management process for identifying participants, location, interpreting, training methods, learning resources and assessment tools. They consolidated a pathway into employment within the VET system for Community Training Facilitators (Training Nintiringtjaku workers) by building relationships and sharing skills and knowledge and enabled Registered Training Organisations and their staff to structure innovative ways to meet both learners needs and training system requirements.

The first Reframing the Future project consolidated a partnership between Waltja and another Registered Training Organisation and through a series of planning sessions and workshops developed and problem solved pathways for skills recognition (via the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment) and the employment of Community trainers. The second project expanded the partnership to include a third RTO and specifically focussed on developing guidelines and strategies for Registered Training Organisations on how to address the underpinning required knowledge and required skills and attributes in the new Training and Assessment Training Package and particularly the English Language Literacy and Numeracy requirements. Through a series of workshops, meetings, formal training delivery and evaluations both projects facilitated a community of practice that enabled richer and deeper understandings of the VET system and new strategies for scaling up the participation of community people in training delivery as well as training participation.

The inclusion of people from remote communities in decision making about the services they require is usually limited to processes of consultation. That is, they may be asked what they want, but the decisions about potential participants, location, timing, teaching methodologies and resources occurs at a distance and is delimited by need to align with national recognised qualifications. The community of practice process instigated by Waltja has enabled a deeper penetration into strategies for effective training practice with people from remote communities and

embedded a leadership and mentoring role for senior people from remote communities as critical to that practice. The link between training and work, and the recognition of the prior skills and knowledge of Training Nintiringtjaku workers also tackles directly the perception that most training for remote community people is indeed training for training's sake. That is, most people from remote communities are considered 'in need' of training before even considering work, leading to a revolving treadmill of 'busywork' as trainees without linkages to real remunerated work on and even beyond their communities. This effectively means that training participants are locked out of the immersed and sustainable learning that occurs on the job and where skills and knowledge can be applied in meaningful settings with meaningful outcomes.

There is considerable pressure at a National policy and State or Territory implementation level, to increase the number of Indigenous participants at Certificate III levels. Similarly there is considerable pressure to ensure that Training Packages and the range of industry based competencies they describe remain current, leading to periodic reviews and revamping or scaling up of the range of skills and knowledge required by trainees. These processes have consequence for participants from remote communities particularly in relation to the increasingly weighty English literacy and numeracy requirements at higher Certificate levels. Participants in the community of practice workshops facilitated by Waltja investigated the implications of increased literacy and numeracy expectations embedded within the Training and Assessment training package. They identified that such 'implicit' competency expectations can function as 'gatekeeping' competencies with the potential to further exclude remote Indigenous people from employment opportunities. Explicit teaching of the range of functional literacies needed in the workplace, to utilise computer and internet technologies, to manage finances, contracts and community services, and to understand and use the 'big words' of government is critical and has implications for resourcing and professional development. Many trainers within the VET sector are content 'experts' as opposed to literacy and numeracy teachers and struggle with teaching work required competencies to people for whom English is a second or third language and whose accomplishments through the compulsory education years have been compromised by little if any access to secondary level education or dedicated attention to developing English literacy and numeracy fluency. Utilising the interpreting and translating skills of Training Nintiringtjaku workers within training sessions as a means to enhance the learning of English words and concepts has been identified as an important strategy to ensure engagement and relevance.

To date two Registered Training Organisations in the central Australian region have committed to employing Training Nintiringtjaku workers to help facilitate and deliver training programs on remote communities. A further four have expressed interest. Eight Community Councils have made a commitment to supporting the Training Nintiringtjaku role by supporting endorsed participants to attend the workshops and considering how they will work with and utilise the workers on their communities. The commitment to and consolidation of the training Nintiringtjaku worker role from Training Organisations and Community Councils is an important first step and one that can grow as opportunities are leveraged.

The work of Training Nintiringtjaku involves:

- ◆ Giving information to training organisations about what training is wanted on the community;
- ◆ Interpreting between community language and English in community meetings with training organisations, and during training sessions;
- ◆ Helping training organisations with ideas and feedback to get the right training for Aboriginal people;
- ◆ Talking up training so that people enrol and make good choices; and
- ◆ Helping the community give feedback to the training provider.

Discussions between Waltja and the Northern Territory Department of Employment, Education and Training (NT DEET) have identified processes whereby training organisations can apply for additional funding to deliver units from the Learner Support program within accredited training

delivery and apply for funds to support the employment of Training Nintiringtjaku workers to undertake the tasks outlined above. The Northern Territory Learner Support program is designed to be integrated within units from national Training Packages enabling trainers to extend and individually tailor the range of skills development required for learners to complete. Activities enabled by integrating this course within accredited training include the use of interpreters/translators, mentoring, co-operative learning methods and monitoring of learners progress. A workshop with NT DEET, RTOs and Waltja is planned for 2006 to progress the employment of Training Nintiringtjaku workers through this means.

From these small incremental steps a role for Training Nintiringtjaku workers within training delivery is being consolidated. Hopefully the involvement of NT DEET will enable the issue of funding to pay these workers to be resolved. Interestingly the developing capacity of Training Nintiringtjaku workers as facilitators, interpreters and locally based organisers is being recognised across sectors and a number have been engaged as workers within research projects underway on their communities.

The essential cog in the wheel is the ongoing support from Waltja as a contact and organising hub and as the driver for value adding to the initiative. Waltja will undertake the managing of fee for service contracts and payments to Training Nintiringtjaku workers as well as professional support for the workers within their new roles. Waltja has also been successful in leveraging substantial financial support from private enterprise to deploy information and communication technologies and training in these to further develop support networks amongst Training Nintiringtjaku workers and facilitate improved access to work opportunities.

Building on strengths

The Training Nintiringtjaku initiative attempts to explicitly value and build on the strengths of senior Aboriginal people from remote communities and provide a pathway into remunerated work. Whilst the initiative provides significant opportunity for individuals, it does so from the context of supporting the leadership responsibilities of these individuals to facilitate the community development needs and aspirations of their communities and their families. It also provides a peer support network wherein individuals can learn together and from each other and alongside Training Organisations and Community Councils in improving outcomes from training for remote community residents

At a time of significant changes impacting on the lives of remote Indigenous peoples, the need for innovative responses to address the systemic challenges facing people as they endeavour to improve their lives, is paramount. The journey underway in developing the Training Nintiringtjaku initiative and work opportunities that can make a difference to educational participation and outcomes, is a small beginning that can have a big impact.

The journey through the VET system of an individual, a Waltja Management Committee member and Training Nintiringtjaku worker, will now be discussed.

An individual's journey

Most discussions or writing about Aboriginal people from remote communities and their engagement with vocational education and training occurs at a collective or group level. We hear a lot about high participation rates, poor outcomes, high unemployment apart from CDEP and barriers such as access and English literacy and numeracy skills and issues such as cultural obligations or poor attendance. Such collective descriptions tend to mask the great diversity amongst Aboriginal people and negate the incredible persistence and dedication of individuals as they struggle against great odds to improve their own lives and secure better futures for their families and communities. The individual journey described in this section puts a human face to the

nature of engagement with the VET system and highlights both great accomplishments and ongoing struggles. One outcome of this journey has been the compilation of a curriculum vitae and work skills portfolio for the individual. Whilst nearly 60 years of age, this is the first time this individual's skills and work history have been documented.

The individual at the heart of this story is a long standing Management Committee member of Waltja and one of the key individuals involved in developing the Training Nintiringtjaku initiative. She will be referred to in this story as MC.

Born at the end of the second world war, in 1945, MC grew up on and around pastoral stations south east of Alice Springs. Her father worked on the stations and she grew up learning about her culture, learning about bush tucker, and fluent in Arrernte, Luritja and English. Like many Aboriginal people at the time survival was as much dependent on working on stations, as clearers or as cooks as it was dependent on hunting and gathering bush tucker. This was the era of missionaries and the 'welfare'. Formal schooling was sporadic, movement around country free but into townships restricted, and many people were being removed from their families. But then as now, the growing township of Alice Springs was a hub for accessing a range of services such as medical care and education. Then as now, Aboriginal parents were concerned that their children gain skills in English and get a good education so that they can get good jobs and movement from the bush into town, and back, became a feature of outback Aboriginal Australia.

The late 1960s and early 1970s heralded a new era in Aboriginal affairs and saw the establishment of a range of Aboriginal organisations such as the Institute of Aboriginal Development (IAD) and the Central Australian Aboriginal Congress medical service. Now married and bringing up young children MC had moved to town and secured work at IAD. Her language skills were soon recognised and she moved over to work in the language centre there, providing interpreting services including broadcasting information in language through the newly established Aboriginal Broadcasting service, CAAMA. The 1970s were a time of great optimism and political struggles for Aboriginal people. Land rights were recognised in the Northern Territory and later in northern South Australia and the establishment of Aboriginal organisations provided both employment opportunities and specialist services for Aboriginal people. These organisations operated at the interface of Aboriginal culture and the 'mainstream', helping people adjust to changing lifestyles, changing diets, as well as providing much needed health and legal services. The organisations also played a key role in supporting elders to maintain culture, languages and law.

MC moved over from IAD to work as a Family Support Worker in the Skinny kids program with Congress. Whilst not having formal qualifications in the field, her understanding of language, culture and good child rearing practices saw her assume responsibility for assessing kids at risk, running family education and nutrition programs and working with the hospital and other agencies to support families and their kids. Her training was largely on the job and with her peers. Her skills and abilities were indeed recognised and acknowledged but not at that stage backed by either formal qualifications or a CV.

After the passing of the Northern Territory Land Rights legislation there was a progressive movement of Aboriginal people from both towns and larger remote communities back to their traditional homelands or outstations. This was facilitated by some investment from ATSIC in outstation development but largely occurred due to the hard work and investment of the people themselves. Regaining land assets and connections to country was, and remains, very important for Aboriginal people. During the late 1980s MC and her family moved to their outstations about 100 km south east of Alice Springs. Building houses, developing roads and infrastructure such as bores and fencing and planting gardens consumed significant amounts of time. MC was however, still keen to remain involved with Aboriginal organisations and services in Alice Springs and in the early 1990s joined the Management Committee of the Family Resource Agency (incorporated as Waltja in 1997). This gave her the opportunity to maintain her skills and also further develop them whilst

working to support families and communities in learning, managing and developing their communities. The latter is her expressed objective for the type of work she wishes to do.

At various times MC has held the position of Chairperson on the Executive of Waltja and at others has worked as a child care support worker and as a contributor to resources developed by Waltja³. In her role as Chairperson, MC has assumed responsibility for leading good governance and decision making processes as required under the Aboriginal Incorporation Act, setting policy and strategic directions for Waltja, advocating for communities, providing advice to governments and selecting and inducting staff. Again many of these skills have been developed on the job and through professional development activities facilitated by Waltja. The child care work that MC has and continues to provide consists of visiting remote community child care centres and providing on the job assistance and training to child care workers, advising and mentoring Waltja's other child care staff and providing interpreting and translating services particularly around accreditation processes for child care centres. In 2000 MC also became a Cabinet member of the Congress Board of Management assuming similar policy, advocacy and decision making responsibilities to those of the role at Waltja.

There were some opportunities for MC to gain formal qualifications during the 1990s. These included participating in a 'Train the Trainer' workshop in Darwin and gaining her First Aid Certificate. She also participated in training and indeed facilitated a range of training workshops for women across Australia as part of the Women in Technology Workshop held in 1993. Further engagement with the VET sector has occurred more recently. In 2003 MC gained the Certificate II in Community Services (child care services) through Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education and more recently has undertaken a range of workshops in Governance Training both through Congress and through workshops organised by the Registrar of Aboriginal Corporations. Unfortunately, despite her wealth of experience at corporate governance level, both of the governance training workshops attended by MC were not accredited training, resulting in Certificates of Attendance rather than Attainment. More recently MC has completed units from the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment as part of the Training Nintiringtjaku initiative.

The roll out of the Training Reform Agenda from the mid 1990s and the adoption of competency based training has led to the development of national 'curricula' within the VET sector – training Packages. One impact of these changes has been the increased need for certification through acquiring nationally accredited certificates to gain even entry level employment. Another has been the escalation of the level of English literacy and numeracy skills required without a corresponding investment in schooling or adult literacy and numeracy training for remote community residents. And yet another has been the increasing need to retrain or update competencies against periodically revamped training packages. Gaining a qualification these days does not necessarily mean that that qualification will stand into the future. As noted by MC's experience, despite significant on the job and practical experience at senior governance levels, the perceived hurdle of literacy and numeracy fluency can often lead to the provision of introductory and non accredited workshops. Whilst useful, the skills gained in these workshops will need to be mapped against the Certificate and additional evidence compiled to support an application for recognition of prior learning (RPL). Even once gained, qualifications may need to be updated placing significant extra burden on Aboriginal participants given the difficulty they face in even getting one qualification at a Certificate III or higher level.

MC's work with Waltja and with Congress requires significant travel to and from Alice Springs and across communities in central Australia. Attending training programs requires additional travel. In this sense her experience is similar to that of other remote community residents across central Australia who take on the burden of travel in the hope that gaining skills and recognition will

³ 'Pirpirri Wiimaku: child care resource book'. Covering traditional child rearing practices, good nutrition, health and well-being. *The Workers Book* and *The Toilet Book*. Resource books outlining good recruitment practices and how to use and maintain a flushing toilet.

enable them to support families and communities in also accessing training and skills development. Despite a lot of talk about flexible learning and the role of information and communication technologies to support these, there is little penetration of flexible approaches into communities and even less into small outstation communities. This is of considerable concern given that more than two thirds of central Australia's Indigenous population lives on outstations.

MC's relationship with Waltja has helped her access training. She does have great concern about the access of her family members to training and the great difficulty they have getting help to support and maintain the infrastructure on their community and develop small and sustainable enterprises. It is certainly not they who are lacking vision and aspirations for work and community development.

In many ways MC's experience with work and training is typical of senior people across communities in central Australia. They assume significant responsibilities for community services, often unpaid, and diligently attend workshops and training when the opportunities arise. Outcomes from the training they participate in, however, rarely lead to greater skills recognition or pathways to real jobs.

MC has assumed a key role as mentor within the Training Nintiringtjaku initiative. In this role she works with other Training Nintiringtjaku workers, providing interpreting and other assistance to ensure training is good and outcomes are achieved. She works closely with Registered Training Organisations who work in partnership with Waltja. She has also undertaken extra roles that have emerged from the Training Nintiringtjaku initiative such as facilitating research on her community and hosting visiting delegates from the World Health Organisation and other agencies wishing to get an insight into remote communities in central Australia.

MC is a proud and strong Aboriginal woman whose dedication and persistence, skills and knowledge are a credit to her and an asset for both Waltja and Congress. That these have not easily translated into formal qualifications and recognition by the VET system highlights the difficulty the VET system and RTOs experience in working with cultural and language difference and adapting national industry standards to the work contexts in remote Aboriginal communities.

MC continues to advocate for learning opportunities for her family and community and speak strongly about the need for large group workshops out bush to bring people together to learn from each other and from trainers, and the need for this to be supplemented by training opportunities on communities. Her story draws attention to the extensive skills, knowledge and capabilities she has developed over many years of hard and committed work. It also throws out a challenge to the VET sector about the need to work to the strengths of remote Indigenous people, rather than to their perceived 'lack' of skills and knowledge which unfortunately remains the norm.

Conclusion

This profiling of Waltja's organisational journey in developing the Training Nintiringtjaku initiative and an individual's journey through the VET system has provided an in depth look at some of the key challenges facing education and employment services for remote Indigenous peoples and pathways for change. The challenges experienced by RTOs and communities in relation to vocational education and training are pervasive, and relate to the inflexibility of supply driven provision and limited inclusion of local people. The Training Nintiringtjaku initiative illustrates a grass roots response to addressing the opaque links between VET participation and employment opportunities in remote contexts and a collaborative problem solving approach to the barriers experienced in training delivery. Indeed it suggests what may need to be put in place to foster successful engagement and outcomes through VET. Clearly, informed demand and perseverance in undertaking training, as exemplified in the individuals journey, is insufficient to ensure that educational policies and practice at jurisdictional or national level address the needs and aspirations

of desert Indigenous peoples. Indeed the disturbing and sharp reduction in Indigenous VET participation across the desert in recent times underscores the need scale up innovative and effective responses as a matter of urgency.

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Newmont Tanami Case Study

Introduction

This case study traces the development of a partnership that has resulted in Indigenous people from remote communities being trained to a level where they can move into the permanent workforce, usually on a mine site. The case provides an industry/enterprise perspective and does not attempt to represent the views of local Indigenous participants involved in the training program.

The program has grown out of a partnership that includes the Newmont Mining Corporation (Newmont Tanami), the contractors to the mine, the Central Land Council that represents the land interests of Indigenous people in the area, a training provider (Industry Services Training, Darwin) and a consultancy that provides coordination services (Central Desert Training Pty Ltd). It has been designed to assist traditional owners from the land on which the mine is situated to move into mainstream employment. Initially, most of the participants came from Alice Springs but as some people from communities near the mine have completed the program and moved into permanent work, more of the target group have participated.

The case study includes a discussion of the context of the program, followed by a description of the program including information about the participants, the education and training components and work placement. There is also a discussion of the outcomes of the program, of the barriers to its implementation and factors in its success. The case study concludes with plans for the future development of the program and its replicability.

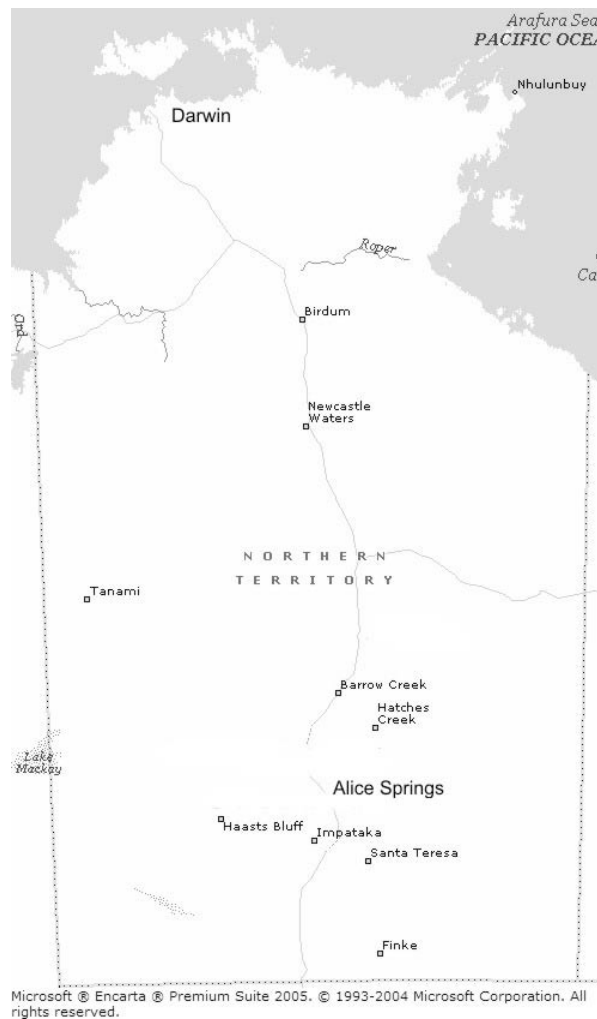
Context

Gold was discovered at Tanami in the Tanami Desert of the Northern Territory in 1900. Mining commenced in 1983, following negotiation of a formal agreement under the Aboriginal Land Rights Act between Normandy Mining Limited and the Central Land Council on behalf of the Warlpiri people. Newmont Mining Corporation acquired control of Normandy Mining, in February 2002, becoming the world's largest gold producer. Newmont Tanami operations include a processing facility at The Granites, 530 kilometres north west of Alice Springs, the nearest regional centre (see map below), an underground mine and open pits at Dead Bullock Soak, approximately 40 kilometres west of The Granites; the Groundrush open pit, approximately 100 kilometres northwest of The Granites, where mining was scheduled to cease in October 2004; and the Tanami mill, approximately 40 kilometres southwest of Groundrush. The company maintains two camps on site for over 600 employees and contractors who work on a fly-in, fly-out roster. Overall personnel turnover rates dropped from 25 per cent in 2003 to 17 per cent in 2005.

According to *Mining and Indigenous Peoples Issues Review*, 'successful community engagement in an Indigenous context was broadly recognised as critical to achieving a legal licence to operate in many areas and a social licence to operate in all areas' (Render 2005). Newmont sees its long term success as depending on creating value with the communities in which it operates and in 2003

introduced the Five Star Integrated Management System ‘to ensure effective management processes are in place at all of our operations to manage our health and safety, community and environmental responsibilities, and ensure corporate policies are implemented at our sites’ (Newmont 2004). Newmont considers it vitally important that the communities associated with its operations benefit ‘with a focus on building long-term value from jobs and new or improved infrastructure to improve healthcare, education and social services’ (Newmont 2004). Implementation of the Five Star standards is assessed annually by external experts.

Figure 4 Northern Territory, showing Tanami location



The training and employment program that has been instituted at the Tanami mine is part of Newmont’s Australian Indigenous Peoples Statement of Commitment to help ‘to identify and implement initiatives to develop sustainable...employment and career development opportunities’ and to actively work to ‘increase the number of Indigenous people employed within Newmont Australia’ (Newmont Australia 2003). As part of its commitment to ‘respect the social, economic and cultural rights of Indigenous people and ethnic groups’ (Newmont 2004), Newmont signed an agreement with the Australian Government in November 2003 to provide employment for 100 Indigenous Australians over two years. Since 2003, Newmont has recruited 139 Aboriginal employees and approximately 10 per cent of its Tanami workforce is Aboriginal.

The company sees the Warlpiri people, the traditional landowners, as the primary stakeholders in its Tanami operations and has developed a strong relationship with the Central Land Council (CLC), which represents the Warlpiri people. It has also worked with the community of Yuendumu on a range of projects, including the building of a new art centre/workshop, re-establishment of water

supply in five outstations and has partnered with government agencies and organisations to promote education.

Newmont Tanami 'also helped local Indigenous people manage their lands through the Warlpiri Rangers Programme' (Newmont 2004) and by inviting Warlpiri to work on various environmental projects around the mine for which training and payment are provided.

Methodology

This case study is one of four that contributes to Stage 3 of the 'Growing the Desert: effective educational pathways for remote Indigenous peoples' research project. It aims to elucidate the experience and learnings of mining enterprises in developing training and support programs that accord with their goals of enhancing economic and development opportunities through mining for the communities and residents within proximity of mining operations. It documents the key strategies and approaches undertaken by the Newmont Mining, through its strategic partnerships, in increasing local Indigenous employment at its Tanami operations.

Semi-structured interviews were undertaken with representatives of the mining company, Newmont Tanami operations and Newmont Corporate, including the Manager of Indigenous Affairs; representatives from the Central Land Council, including the Indigenous coordinator of the Mining Employment Unit; and the coordinator from Central Desert Training. The interview questions were clustered around the following key areas:

- ◆ History, aims and activities of education and training programs instigated by Newmont Tanami operations;
- ◆ Successes and lessons of the programs undertaken and underway;
- ◆ Barriers and issues experienced and the range of responses to these;
- ◆ The range and types of partnerships established;
- ◆ Consultation and decision making processes in relation to the local Indigenous peoples;
- ◆ Training program profiles and extent of ancillary support services offered; and
- ◆ Funding arrangements, statistics and program outcomes.

A suite of documents and reports were made available to project researchers. These included internal reports to Tanami management from Central Desert Training, as well as a range of publicly available reports from Newmont and elsewhere.

Training program participants were not interviewed for this case study. This is a critical limitation of the case study methodology in that the reported experience of industry and partners involved in training provision may not align with the experience of participants. A useful follow up exercise would be to capture the experience of participants in the programs over the past few years and test the apparent success of the training programs offered by Newmont against participant perspectives and experiences. Such an exercise would also enable a richer base from which to continually improve program approaches.

The Program

The participants

Newmont Tanami's Indigenous training and employment program has been designed to target Indigenous people from Central Australian communities, including Alice Springs. As the program achieves a profile among the communities closer to the mine, (e.g. Yuendumu and Lajamanu), it is hoped that more of the participants will come from these communities. Newmont Tanami personnel feel that they are still building relationships with the people in the communities, particularly those who are able to identify prospective participants. They also feel that as the

program achieves success and profile, it is generating its own word of mouth publicity and there are increasing numbers of people seeking to participate. The major difficulty for the local community people is that their schooling levels, particularly literacy and numeracy, are too low for them to undertake the program successfully.

Program Development

The program has undergone a series of changes since it was first introduced in 2001, as performance and feedback have been assessed. This is described as follows, in three phases. Phase 1 began in 2001; Phase 2 in 2003; and Phase 3, currently in operation, commenced in 2004. It consists of two components: the formal training program that includes both accredited and non-accredited units, followed by a series of work placements in various sections of the mine.

Phase 1

The first pre-vocational program was conducted in 2001 by Normandy Mining who then owned The Granites operations. Some training was held in the community of Yuendumu, home of some of the Warlpiri traditional owners, with the remainder being conducted at the mine site. The program consisted of three weeks' training following which graduates returned to their community until vacancies arose, usually with one of the contractors on the mine site. Out of a total of 16 participants, three moved into permanent work, with two continuing in permanent employment for over 12 months. The program was nationally accredited and consisted of units of competency from different national training packages as well as some non-accredited training. A Workplace English Language and Literacy (WELL) program was also being delivered through the Institute of Aboriginal Development.

The program was coordinated by the Community Relations Department on site at The Granites and with the CLC Mining Employment Unit, based in Alice Springs, who were responsible for the recruitment of the participants. A second program, which included participants from Nyrripi and Yuendumu, as well as other communities and Alice Springs was delivered in the same format. Two or three of the participants moved into permanent employment; one is still employed.

Phase 2

In 2003, there was a major review of the program to identify the barriers to Indigenous people participating, and to identify the skills required to gain employment with Newmont Tanami and/or the contractors. The revised program was developed in discussions between the CLC, Newmont Tanami and Industry Services Training (training provider). Pre-assessment of the participants was conducted by staff from the Mining Employment Unit within the CLC, the mining company and the Coordinator of the program.

Initially, an Australian College of Education Research (ACER) assessment was used to assess standards of literacy but it was found to be culturally inappropriate and unsuitable. It has been replaced by a literacy/numeracy assessment that determines whether or not the applicant has a literacy/numeracy level approximately equivalent to Year 8 which is required to manage safety issues, such as reading safety notices, associated with working on a mine site and indicates a capacity to manage the program.

The schedule for the program was nine blocks of nine 12-hour days followed by five days' break. Twelve participants were selected for the program; ten commenced and eight completed. Of those who completed the program, seven were employed on site and continue to be employed; one gained employment in another industry. Following a review of this program, further alterations were made to the scheduling of the first two blocks of training, which were reduced to eight hours per day for nine days followed by five days off. The remainder of the blocks were conducted over

12 hour days for nine days on, followed by five days off. The training program was also revised to include reverse cross cultural training and management of alcohol.

Twelve participants were selected, ten commenced the program, and seven completed. All were employed although one recently resigned, to return to a job in his community.

A Coordinator, from Central Desert Training Pty Ltd, was employed to provide support with lessons, act as a mentor and coordinate the program as well as to deliver some of the training, both non-accredited (including literacy and numeracy training and support) and some of the accredited units. On completion of the formal training, the Coordinator organised the rotation of the participants through various departments on site; liaised with the departments where the participants were working and the supervisors of the participants; provided ongoing training and support for the participants; and reported to management.

While the participants were undertaking formal training, the Coordinator was on site. On completion of this component of the program, he spent less time on site. While on site, the Coordinator contacted all of the graduates of the program regularly and delivered literacy/numeracy training as required. He supported one person who was enrolled in a geology degree and two people who were completing Year 12 while concurrently doing apprenticeships; and he was supporting one person who required literacy/numeracy and computer training for some time after completing the formal training

This phase of the program enjoyed greater acceptance from upper levels of management than the previous phases, perhaps because the training was much more extensive and provided greater exposure to living and working on a mine site. The previous programs had not given participants enough time to adjust to the long working hours and the length of time that mine workers are away from family.

Phase 3—The current program

Following further revision, the program was changed to spread the safety induction over five days, rather than concentrate it on one day. The scheduling of the training was also amended: the first 9-day block was split into two blocks of five days on, two off and five on, with participants working for eight hours per day. The other important change was to increase the level of support and the support mechanisms while on-site training was occurring.

A senior Warlpiri man has been employed to attend the mine while the first and second blocks of training were being delivered. He provides support for the local people on site and conducts cultural awareness training.

In order to commence the group with a full complement of 12 participants, additional participants were selected. However, 11 commenced the course, including three women. About half of the participants were from local communities, including Yuendumu and Willowra. Eleven participants completed the program and 10 were employed: the final graduate moved interstate to look after family. This program saw the participation of the partner of one of the graduates of an earlier program.

The program has become self-generating as Indigenous people believe that the training is 'fair dinkum' and leads to mainstream employment; and that the mine is committed to the program. The successful graduates have become role models and examples of what can be achieved and their success has encouraged other people to investigate the program as the beginning of a career.

On completion of their pre-vocational training, each of the graduates is scheduled into a minimum of 3 x 2-week rotations in various occupations on the mine site. Many of the participants complete four rotations, and they can elect to do more if they need more exposure to determine where they would prefer to work. Every graduate who wants a job is guaranteed a position.

The contractors who operate on the mine site have the opportunity to participate in the program and have the opportunity to ‘try before they buy.’ While the graduates are doing their rotations, they are paid through Newmont Corporate. When they are employed permanently, the local employer, either Newmont Tanami or a contractor, takes responsibility for employment and conditions. The graduates have moved into a range of employment positions including

- ✧ Flight coordinator in a centre that manages 1600 flights per month;
- ✧ Underground truck drivers; and
- ✧ Technical assistants in workshops.

Further education and training outcomes have also been achieved. One participant has commenced a geology degree, some have gone on to apprenticeships in refrigeration and boilermaking, and one participant has secured a traineeship in the mill.

The training program

The training program, which is undertaken by all participants, is nationally accredited as the Course in Pre-Employment for Mining Operations and is delivered by Industry Services Training, Darwin. It incorporates competencies from a range of training packages and includes forklift training, driver training, heavy vehicle driving licence, Senior First Aid Certificate, concreting units, basic computer skills, communication skills, as well as the core units from the Metalliferous Training Package. The training is supported by practical work that results in completion of projects on site, such as building a cage for eagles that have been injured to allow them to recuperate, and reinforces measuring, mathematical, communication and teamwork skills.

The program also includes a range of non-accredited training that includes site inductions and inductions for each area that the participants are likely to work in; literacy/numeracy assistance; workplace culture sessions specifically for the mine site; and cross-cultural training that is compulsory for all employees on site.

The extended period of training that the participants undergo allows them time to adjust to working on the mine site and to become familiar with the requirements of working long hours and being away from family for long periods. They are not so subject to family and community pressures; they are part of a group who are on site to do long hours of work and not much else; and their ability to manage the work and lifestyle during training provides an indicator of their suitability as permanent employees.

Recruitment process

The CLC estimate that it takes approximately six months to recruit a group of 12 participants for a program. Newmont Tanami is directly involved for approximately six to eight weeks before a program commences. The CLC plays an essential role during this time in keeping prospective participants informed about the progress of their applications, which also gives the Mining Employment Unit the opportunity to develop a relationship with the applicants, where one does not already exist.

The Community Development Employment Program (CDEP) Project Officer and other interested people in the target communities are notified that the recruitment group will be visiting the community to talk to prospective participants. The recruitment group includes a member from CLC Mining Employment Unit, the Coordinator of the program from Central Desert Training Pty Ltd and a mine representative. A senior person from the community is also consulted for advice. On arrival in the community, the group speaks to people who have expressed an interest in participating in the program and go through a literacy/numeracy assessment to identify whether the applicant will require support and, if so, how much. This is an indicative process and can assist in identifying the applicant’s level of interest as well as their ability to complete the program.

Prior to recruitment for a recent course, the Mining Employment Unit from CLC combined with Tangentyere Job Shop, a Job Network centre for Indigenous people, and Footprints Forward, a Northern Territory Government Indigenous Youth employment initiative, to conduct a career education day at one of the town camps in Alice Springs. Each of the providers presented information to the residents about the services they provide and illustrated their services with pictures of people who had accessed their services. The information and the pictures inspired some of the people to consider possibilities. Two of the men indicated interest in participating in the mining program. They commenced and completed the program, without missing any time.

Outcomes

The completion rates of the courses have been described as exceptional. The most recent course had a completion rate of 100 per cent. The graduates are moving into full-time employment and are being retained in employment.

The program aims to open up job opportunities for the participants, who identify the type of work they want to do. It also introduces people to the mainstream work culture because most of the participants have only ever been involved in Community Development Employment Project (CDEP) activities and have only been required to work for a limited number of hours, for example, four hours per day. The CDEP Program has been operating since 1977 to

‘provide unemployed Indigenous people with activities designed to meet community needs, develop participants skills and improve their employability in order to assist them to move into employment outside the Community Development Employment Project.’

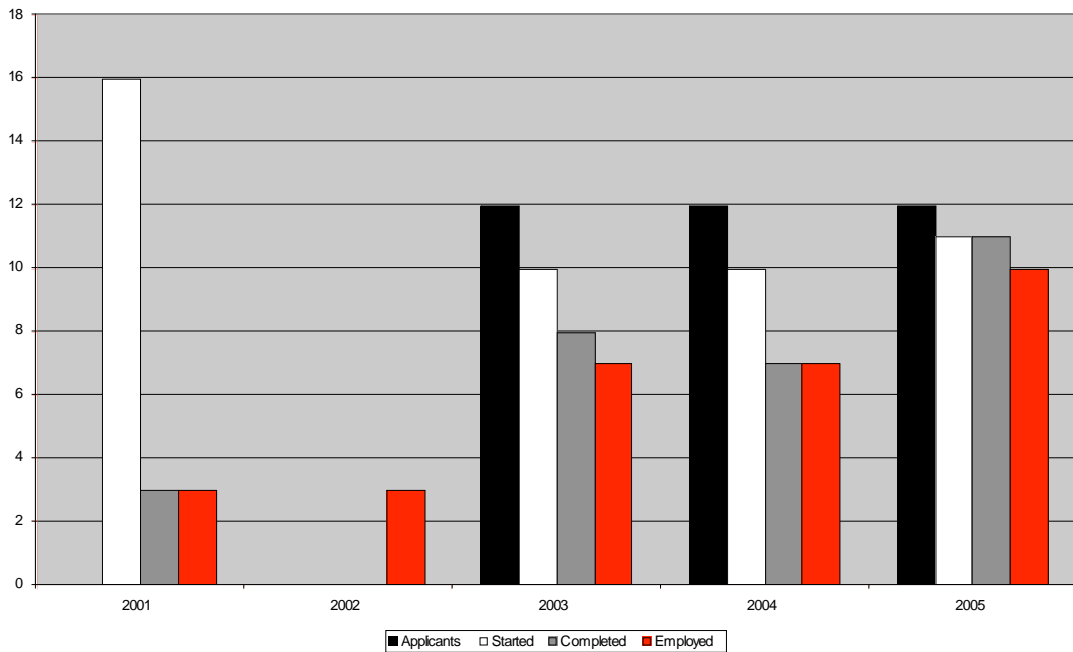
(Australian Government 2005)

The mining program aims to ensure that the graduates are safe on the mine site, that they can survive 12-hour days for two weeks straight, and that they learn about the mining culture. It also gives the participants skills that enable them to become employable anywhere—they are not limited to the mine.

As part of its commitment to the program, Newmont Corporate agreed to pay the participants who are undertaking training and the rotations through the various departments of the mine and/or with on-site contractors. This has encouraged departments on the mine, where cost control is a major focus, to participate in the program. The increased skill level as a result of the longer training program has also meant that the graduates are more ‘work ready.’

The number of graduates staying with the mine has increased markedly; employment of Indigenous people at the mine remains steady at approximately 80-90 and retention rates have increased steadily. The figure below shows the numbers of participants who were offered positions in the course, the numbers who commenced and completed and the numbers entering employment at the mine.

Figure 5 Program participation and completion trends: 2001–2005



Source: Newmont Tanami data

Barriers

Establishing and conducting the program has highlighted a range of barriers, some of which are particularly difficult to overcome. These barriers are briefly discussed in this section.

Perceptions about Indigenous people

Initially, there was some resistance to the program on the mine site. Many of the workers had worked on other mine sites and in situations where Indigenous training programs had been attempted and failed. One of the issues confronting the program was to change perceptions about Indigenous people. These perceptions have changed as the program has been shown to work.

English literacy and numeracy

English literacy and numeracy levels are too low among community members. The ACER literacy/numeracy assessment tool that was originally used was found to be inappropriate and has been replaced but there are still very few people in communities who have the literacy/numeracy skills to complete Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) Certificate I level courses.

Police clearances

Prior to placement in the program, prospective participants are required to get a police clearance. Many of the applicants are reluctant to seek the clearance for fear that they may have outstanding warrants for their arrest, which would see them being jailed. As part of the recruitment process, Newmont personnel undertook to advocate for them and to indicate to the police that the applicants were seeking permanent employment.

Drug and alcohol use

The issue of drug and alcohol use also needed to be confronted. CLC played an important role in ensuring that prospective participants are aware that use of drugs is not allowed on mine sites, although Indigenous people generally are aware that they would be required to undertake a drug test prior to employment on the mine. Use of alcohol presents some problems and this has been included in the formal training program.

Previous learning experiences of Indigenous participants

Many of the prospective participants have had difficulties with formal education and may be concerned about going into a classroom situation where there is potential for embarrassment. Although there is classroom training, much of the program is 'hands on' and focuses on practical skills.

Conflicting obligations

Participants, particularly those from communities, are faced with conflicting obligations – the obligation to work and the obligation to community. Resolution of these conflicts can be extremely difficult for the participants, especially as homesickness is also a problem. It is hoped that as more and more local people are employed on the site, support networks will be formed and homesickness will be reduced.

Recruitment processes

Some recruitment processes may also need to be changed. There has been a tendency to visit communities for a very short time when seeking participants. It may be beneficial to spend more time in the communities to provide a higher profile for and a greater level of understanding of the program. On the other hand, as more people from the communities are employed, there will be more word of mouth promotion within the communities.

It can be important to schedule recruitment visits to meet the needs of the communities. In one recruitment drive, the team arrived in the community to find that a group of rangers were working on site, away from the community. They may have been a group of potential participants for the program and, possibly, should have been targeted.

Program timing issues

There may also be an issue in timing the program to take into account the rhythm of community life. One program was conducted during football season, which is an important activity involving most of the young men in any community who would be reluctant to become involved in alternative activities away from the community. Scheduling the program away from football season may remove a disincentive and, once the participants had been acculturated into working on the site, may not be so much of a draw in the future.

Success Factors

Community Involvement

Newmont Tanami conducts an annual consultation process with the Traditional Owners of the land on which the mine operation is located. Two Newmont employees visit Lajamanu and Yuendumu about every 6-8 weeks to update the communities on what is happening at the mine. When the program was first considered, communities were consulted several months before the first course was conducted.

The local people are familiar with the mine and many visit the mine site when travelling between Yuendumu and Lajamanu. There is community discussion of the program and people suggest possible participants. Sourcing of participants is becoming self-generating as word spreads.

When the recruitment team has gone to a community to recruit and select participants, an elder has accompanied them and has been involved in the selection process. CLC has strong connections in the communities: they are a known and trusted organisation for many Indigenous people who feel comfortable going to their office to seek employment while they may be less confident approaching a company directly. One of the Warlpiri elders has been employed by Newmont Tanami to provide support and assist with training in the initial stages of the program.

The mix of town-based and community-based participants appears to work well because many of them are related and they can communicate in their local indigenous language which, for many of the participants, is their first language. It makes it much easier for those who speak the indigenous language as their primary means of communication because they can go and talk with somebody and feel comfortable to sit down and have a chat, which can reduce feelings of isolation.

Partnerships

The program depends on partnerships that include Newmont Tanami, CLC, the contractors who supply goods and services to Newmont Tanami, Central Desert Training Pty Ltd who provide the Coordinator, Industry Services Training, the training provider, and the Warlpiri communities.

Newmont Tanami and CLC work together throughout the program. Industry Services Training delivers the accredited training, with assistance from the Coordinator of the program and both Newmont Tanami and the contractors are involved with the rotation of the participants through various sections of the mine in preparation for deciding on the area where they would prefer to work. Newmont Tanami and the contractors have also been the employers of the graduates of the program.

CLC, through the Mining Employment Unit, provides support in Alice Springs. They are often the first point of contact for prospective participants; and they participate in the recruitment and selection of participants, as well as keeping prospective participants informed about the ongoing process.

When the program commences, the Mining Employment Unit ensures that participants catch planes to the site for the first couple of training blocks; they go out to the site to provide additional support to the participants; they stay in touch with the communities. If participants do not return to site, they follow up and try to sort out any issues to enable them to continue in the program. They also talk with contractors and supervisors if there are issues on site. During the first few months of the program, staff from the Mining Employment Unit usually contact the participants when they are off site to ensure that the program is proceeding satisfactorily.

Consultation between CLC and Newmont Tanami takes place regularly, even daily if required. The Mining Employment Unit and Newmont Tanami regularly evaluate the program to identify improvements that can be made, with the result that the program is regarded as being appropriate for Indigenous people with medium to low literacy and numeracy levels.

Central Desert Training Pty Ltd provides coordination services, assists with recruitment and selection of participants and provides literacy and numeracy support during and following the program, where required. Industry Services Training, Darwin, is the main provider of training. Newmont sourced the best provider they could find and they are key people in the success of the program. The trainer is highly respected by everyone associated with the program.

A senior Warlpiri man provides mentoring and support to the participants during the first two training blocks as well as delivering cultural awareness training. The one-to-one support and

mentoring, both on site and off site, has been imperative to assist the participants to complete the training program and the work rotations, prior to moving into full-time employment.

The contractors on site have also been vital to the success of the program by their willingness to be involved as prospective employers. As the program continues, new partnerships are likely to be developed with contractors based in Alice Springs who provide goods and services to the mine.

The partners in the program are also building partnerships with other organisations who support the program in different ways. Several organisations based in Alice Springs are involved. The Mining Employment Unit of CLC is building stronger partnerships with organisations such as Footprints Forward and Tangentyere Council, who assist with recruitment of potential participants. As well, the Mall Medical Centre manages appointments for prospective participants.

The Coordinator from Central Desert Training Pty Ltd, who provides literacy, numeracy and educational support, works closely with Northern Territory Open Education Centre (NTOEC) in Darwin to assist participants to complete high school studies; with James Cook University in Townsville to support the Geology student; and with any other RTO where graduates of the program are enrolled, for example, the apprentices. The Institute for Aboriginal Development in Alice Springs also provides some training on site.

Company support

One of the important factors in the success of the program has been the support for the program that has been provided by Newmont Mining at the corporate level. In order to ensure that the program would operate and that the mine did not carry the cost, Newmont Mining undertook to finance the program until the participants are permanently employed. There has been no government funding of the program because it does not meet the guidelines of any program.

There is also strong commitment from the Newmont Tanami site management team. Newmont Tanami employs the Coordinator of the program who is also a literacy educator. He provides ongoing support to the participants, particularly following the completion of the pre-vocational training. He organises the rotational work practice on site and provides tutor support for those who continue with formal study, including literacy support; preparing for tertiary study; and supporting those who are completing secondary schooling.

Celebration of success

On completion of the program, a presentation night is organised and attended by all managers. Certificates are presented and each of the participants receives a letter indicating their new salary. There is immense pride and huge smiles.

Among the 30-40 people present to celebrate with the graduates of the most recent course were the General Manager of Newmont Tanami, the Community Relations Manager, CLC, Industry Training Services, the trainers, as well as representatives from the Northern Territory Department of Education, Employment and Training (DEET).

The future

The program is proving so successful that the mine site is unlikely to be able to absorb all future graduates into employment, so negotiations have commenced with contractors and suppliers who have operations in Alice Springs about taking future graduates into employment in their Alice Springs-based operations which would open a new phase in the program.

Another plan is to select approximately half a dozen of the best Indigenous workers on site to receive formal training as mentors to become the day-to-day support group for the participants in the training program and for anyone else who needs assistance.

Newmont Tanami is negotiating to access government assistance for the program, which it sees as an education function rather than a mining function. Until now, Newmont has funded the program because it does not fit any government model or funding guidelines. However, there are concerns that if government funding is negotiated, control of the program will be lost although the expertise and experience are with Newmont and its partners.

The program has been used as a model for a similar program that was conducted at Wiluna in Western Australia. The same trainer from Industry Services Training delivered the program. The trainees arrived on time and every day. One person was asked to leave the program. Seven people graduated out of 12 who commenced; two left the program and three struggled with the literacy and numeracy requirements. The seven graduates are working at a Newmont mine site on traineeships. Feedback from the community has been very positive.

The feeling is that the program could be replicated in Alice Springs but it would need much more work and organisation for it to be successful because there are too many distractions for participants in Alice Springs. By taking people to the mine site, they are removed from family and community issues and it can be difficult for them to get back home from the site outside scheduled flights.

Conclusions

Summary

This case study has mapped the evolution of an Indigenous training and employment program that has been developed by Newmont Tanami. The aim was to increase the number of Indigenous people, particularly those from local communities to the mine site, employed on the mine, as part of its Indigenous Peoples Statement of Commitment and as a result of its partnership with the Commonwealth Government's National Indigenous Employment and Training Strategy (NIETS). The Statement includes a commitment to employ 100 Indigenous people over two years across its operations in Australia. The program relies on partnerships with a number of organisations for its success. The partners include Newmont Tanami, its contractors on site and in Alice Springs, the Central Land Council, as well as Central Desert Training Pty Ltd, and Industry Training Services as RTO. These stakeholders have also developed partnerships with other organisations to facilitate the conduct of the program.

Main findings

The program has evolved to its current format which begins with two blocks of five eight-hour days before introducing the participants to the usual nine 12-hour days that are normal practice on the mine. The level of support and the range of support mechanisms have also been increased. The training component of the program includes both accredited and non-accredited units that are designed to provide participants with skills that enable them to work safely in a range of areas on the mine site. The work placement component, which provides the opportunity for the participants to work in a minimum of three areas of the mine, allows them to make an informed decision about what type of work they want to do. Every graduate who wants a job is guaranteed a position.

Recruitment and selection processes have been designed to target prospective participants who will be able to complete the program to ensure as far as possible that they are 'not set up to fail'. Ensuring the success of the participants requires that they have literacy levels at approximately Year 8 level so they can manage the safety issues associated with working on a mine site and are likely to have the capacity to complete the program successfully. This requirement provides a significant barrier to many of the people living in the communities near the mine as their literacy levels tend to be below that required for the program.

Other barriers to the success of the program have included negative perceptions of Indigenous people among other workers on the mine site; the necessity for participants to obtain a police clearance, when they may have outstanding warrants for their arrest; drug and alcohol use; previous poor experiences with formal education, particularly classroom-based education and training; conflicting obligations between work and family/community; recruitment processes that include very limited time in communities and, therefore, little time to develop ongoing relationships with influential people such as traditional elders; scheduling of programs at times when there are significant community activities such as football carnivals.

A range of success factors has also been identified. They include familiarity with the mine among local communities; community consultation about the program; the partnerships that have been established among Newmont Tanami, its contractors, CLC Mining Employment Unit, Central Desert Training Pty Ltd and Industry Training Services and Warlpiri elders to deliver the program; the willingness of Newmont Tanami and contractors to employ graduates of the program; support of Newmont at both corporate and Tanami levels; celebration of success of the participants on completion of the program; and immediate and guaranteed employment in mainstream jobs for graduates. Graduates who have moved into employment on the mine have often been retained for over a year.

Implications and the future

The success of the program, as measured by the number of participants completing their training and work placement and moving into employment with the mine and/or its contractors, has been underscored by the decision of other Newmont operations to replicate the program (e.g. in Western Australia). If programs are to be conducted off-site, (e.g. in Alice Springs) they will require additional work and organisation to guarantee success.

The program is continuing to evolve with Newmont Tanami planning to train a group of Indigenous workers to provide mentoring to future participants and other Indigenous workers. The company is also planning to seek funding from government sources, although there are concerns that control of the program may be lost to bureaucratic requirements.

As the number of graduates increases and they continue in employment with the mine and/or its on-site contractors, these employers will be unable to continue to absorb the new graduates. The mine is currently seeking to include other contractors and suppliers who are located off-site, (e.g. in Alice Springs) to employ the graduates of the program.

Newmont Australia describes its Employment and Training Strategy, of which its Tanami program is part, as 'the most important step (the company) has taken to give effect to the Company's Indigenous People Statement of Commitment'. The success of the program has assisted Newmont Tanami to meet its goal of 10 per cent of its workforce being Indigenous. The mine is now moving to a goal of 15 per cent Indigenous employment.

There are key lessons in this initiative for the success of training programs targeting desert Indigenous peoples and particularly those resident in small remote communities. The importance of ancillary support programs that legitimate and support Indigenous structures of authority and responsibility, such as employment of an onsite elder/mentor and the provision of cross-cultural activities for non Indigenous mine staff needs to be underscored. The support from the top, including Newmont Corporate's decision to treat mine site work experience as 'real work' and remunerate it accordingly, has enabled individual effort and the acclimatization to very different lifestyle domains and spheres of expectation to be explicitly rewarded. This approach is significantly different from the more standard one of reducing the deficit in skills, knowledge or the understanding of work ethics prior to commencing employment. The local interest in and the success of the program highlights the efficacy of this approach for all concerned despite the significant extra costs attracted. The combination of awareness education, pre-vocational

experiences, behavioural and emotional support, formal training and real work opportunities, within a framework of mutual respect and aligned goals suggest a suite of activities that seem to really work for remote Indigenous peoples. Harnessing the perspectives of participants in the program since its inception would be a valuable additional exercise that could enable the factors of success to be grounded against individual experiences.

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