

GENERATIONOne

# Summary of Yarns



Skills and Training for a Career



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# Introduction

**“This is evolving, how we provide wraparound services and support people for the initial period at work. This is about substantive equality – treating people differently to get the same outcome. It’s doing stuff to make the playing field level because the playing field hasn’t been level.”**

**Mick Gooda, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner**

**GenerationOne and the Australian Employment Covenant engaged with many different stakeholders around Australia in a series of Big Yarns and Little Yarns held between May and September 2011 as part of our consultations in developing the Indigenous Vocational Training and Employment for Careers (IVTEC) policy.**

**We were seeking feedback on the Indigenous Skills and Training for a Career discussion paper so we could better understand the issues facing employers and to inform the final IVTEC policy paper, which proposes a new way of connecting Indigenous job seekers and employers with vacancies.**

**The video footage for the Big Yarns is available on the GenerationOne website and summaries of the Little Yarns are outlined in the following pages. Written submissions were made using the GenerationOne webpage at [www.generationone.org.au/training](http://www.generationone.org.au/training)**

## **GENERATIONONE BIG YARNS**

**“We need to charge the employers of Australia with their responsibility. After several decades of so-called equal opportunity, we need a new attitude – we need employment among Indigenous and non-Indigenous people at rates that are barely perceptible in their difference.”**

**Andrew Forrest, GenerationOne founder, Garma Festival**

*“The problem in schools and workplaces is low expectations. GenerationOne is looking at entry into work but after that we need to support people to stay at work.”*

Mick Gooda, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner, Garma Festival

The GenerationOne supporter network and the Australian Employment Covenant network were used to host Big Yarns across Australia. More than 1000 people attended events and 7000 people watched over the internet.

### **Broome North West Expo, Western Australia, May 7**

Moderated by Sandy Dann. Panel members: Madonna Beattie, Director, Nyaarla; Andy Grieg, Broilga Developments; Christine Ross, Aboriginal employment consultant; Tania Major, spokesperson, GenerationOne.

### **Bringing It All Together forum, Queensland, May 27**

Panel members: Scott Wilson, ISS; Tania Major, spokesperson, GenerationOne; Tim Gartrell, CEO, GenerationOne.

**The University of Melbourne, July 5**

Moderated by Professor Marcia Langton. Panel members: Adrian Appo, Chief Executive Officer, Ganbina; Madonna Beattie, Director, Nyaarla Projects; James Packer, Executive Chairman, Consolidated Press Holdings; Christine Ross, Aboriginal employment consultant; Andrew Forrest, founder of GenerationOne and the Australian Employment Covenant.

**Garma Festival, Arnhem Land, Northern Territory, August 7**

Moderated by Professor Marcia Langton. Panel members: Mick Gooda, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner; Andrew Forrest, founder of GenerationOne and the Australian Employment Covenant; Tim Gartrell, CEO, GenerationOne.

**The University of Western Sydney, August 19**

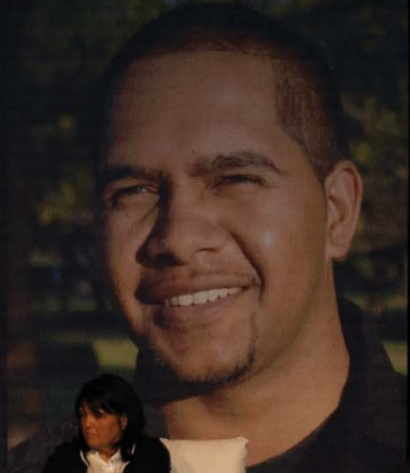
Moderated by Ali Moore. Panel members: Danny Lester, Chief Executive, Aboriginal Employment Strategy; Deb Nelson, CEO, Yarn'n; Professor Peter Shergold, Chancellor, University of Western Sydney; Andrew Forrest, founder of GenerationOne and the Australian Employment Covenant.

## **GENERATIONONE LITTLE YARNS**

Little Yarns were hosted with organisations and employers in Perth, Brisbane, Darwin and Adelaide. Details are outlined in this document.

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250 REAL businesses  
4,000 REAL stories  
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# Little Yarn, Perth

## August 22, 2011

### Participants

- Offshore Marine Alliance
- Woolworths
- Fairbridge
- NRW
- Ngarda Civil and Mining
- Department of Training and Workforce Development

### Key points

- Employers viewed work-readiness as the most important barrier to be addressed
- Western Australia has severe labour shortages, so capable employees are moved into work quickly
- The State Government has created Aboriginal Workforce Development Centres through the Department of Training and Workforce Development. The centres help job seekers connect with employers and service providers
- Employers expressed interest in working together to create pools of job-ready Indigenous candidates, which would benefit many industries

### Candidate attraction and recruitment

- Work preparation must be linked to a job, to ensure that training and support is relevant to workplace requirements and to build commitment from job candidates

- o “Identifying that position first is the thing. We won’t go out and actually start talking to the JSAs until we’ve gone through the process with our mine sites locally or whatever we’re doing ... so there isn’t this ‘we’ll get people work-ready in a general sense’ - there’s a specific role.”
- Word spreads among Indigenous communities and trust grows quickly once employers establish a reputation for supporting Indigenous candidates and working with them to develop work readiness linked to a job
  - o “It’s vital. You need the job for the person to go to. It’s no use providing all the training in the world if they haven’t got a job outcome at the end of it.”
  - o “What we’re looking at is nutting out with the JSAs ... to have the candidates’ program ready, preparing them to be interview-ready from the JSA. Putting it back on the candidate and the JSAs to ensure that when they come to us for the initial interview, they have all the relevant documentation and the JSAs and the candidate are taking ownership themselves so they are program-ready.”
- Employers believe that the JSA funding model needs to change to better support candidates
  - o “The whole performance model [for JSAs] is about placement, it’s not about quality [it’s about getting people out the door], and if they ponder about for too long they don’t get their star ratings.”
  - o “I think there’s a lot of expectation in this space about what we expect of a JSA but if you break it down to the actual payment they get, for moving someone into a job, it doesn’t actually fund a great capacity to prepare someone for the workforce, to mentor them. They don’t have the resources or funding [to

do this] and, given the high turnover in this industry, they often don't have the skills or experience to deliver that appropriately. So it's about making sure either the JSA funding model is looked at or we don't put unrealistic expectations on [them]."

- o "If you actually look at the contracting around the JSAs, they won't give us [trainee candidates] because they can't get their payment, so there's actually a gap in the funding structure for JSAs, which then directs the work that they do. If you can get some of this work-readiness [preparation] tied-in to a 12-month paid traineeship, where [they are] doing this literacy, numeracy, OHS, emailing [competency], I.D. and all this stuff as part of a broader course, then that's when it starts to stick."
- o "Looking at that [GenerationOne] work-readiness model, in the metro area that's important but the JSAs need to be able to work together. The way the JSAs are structured doesn't allow for that sort of communication [because of] the competitive tender model."
- o "The JSAs that are working view their funding as open, so what they are able to do is have flexible delivery of needs for each individual client [candidate] to make them employable. Some candidates require more and some candidates require less. The JSAs that are working are financially sustainable but not revenue-driven."

## Breaking down the barriers to employment

- Employers say that preparing Indigenous candidates for work is an important issue and should cover:
  - o Lack of basic literacy and numeracy
  - o Tax file number
  - o OHS preparation
  - o Access to and competency to use email and a bank account

- o Identification documents
- o CV and work history
- o A driver's licence - "a suspended driver's licence, how do you overcome it?"
- o Interview training

- Preparation must be flexible to suit the candidate. Some need more support and pre-work training than others
- Employers believe one of the key challenges in getting candidates work ready is the lack of engagement and support from many JSAs. Employers attribute this to:
  - o Contract funding disincentive, focused on training not sustainable job placement
  - o Some JSA staff lack career or support/mentoring expertise
  - o The lack of Indigenous JSA employees results in little understanding or empathy for local customs and context
  - o Lower-paid positions at JSAs do not attract high-quality, engaged staff, particularly in areas where housing is expensive
- The shortage of stable, secure and safe housing in Indigenous communities is a barrier to employment because:
  - o It is difficult to hold a job down without stable accommodation
  - o Asking people to move for work is almost impossible, because new accommodation is unavailable or prohibitively expensive
  - o The threat of losing housing subsidies if earning above a certain level means many Indigenous people shun work
- Some employers believe that stable accommodation should be tied to employment, not left to market forces
  - o "Accommodation is probably our highest critical issue of getting Indigenous people [employable], appropriate accommodation

pre and post-employment. In the north, we've got the big issue that people chuck their job because they really need state housing, and if they earn over a certain level they lose their house."

- o "How can you improve the lives of Aboriginal people if you're taking away their accommodation? It defeats the purpose [of getting a job]."
- It is important to understand how health and family dysfunction can impact on a candidate's ability to find work and stay there
- The two main barriers for Indigenous candidates:
  - o Being able to pass medicals, particularly in the mining industry where occupational health and safety requirements are strict
  - o Addressing issues in the home which leave candidates "shut-off" from work. Employers said that some non-Indigenous staff did not understand the complex social problems faced by many Indigenous people, and reiterated the importance of having Indigenous staff to give advice and support
- Employers are trying to address these issues by working with local GPs. For example, one employer ran a three-month boot camp to improve the health of candidates. However, there is a need for more professional mentoring, workforce support and mentoring training for existing staff, to provide support on and off the job
- Workforce racism must be eliminated. Cultural awareness training is a key factor in preventing covert and overt racism
- Employer support programs work best when the program includes a business champion, who takes ownership and helps stakeholders understand individual cases
- Many employers help Indigenous people with transport (pre and post-employment).

Transport support should be part of the JSA remit, to remove the burden from candidates and employers

## Employment and training

- As much as possible, employers should work with candidates to identify roles that the candidate wants
- Pre-employment training must be linked to job requirements and is best run with short turnaround times (10 weeks maximum) to engage and motivate Indigenous employees
- Some employers rely on external suppliers to undertake licensing and skills training, creating problems with quality
- Employers would like to link up more throughout the employment cycle, to create pools of trainees and candidates and share development costs. This would be based across different industries to avoid competitive issues:
  - o "We're talking to other employers. We need people and I could fill 200 spots today but in [another] industry, there might be Aboriginal people that might not meet your requirements, but they could come over to us, where we don't have as stringent requirements."
  - o "It's about providing the support network and structures around to say, if [some candidates] are not right here, I can pass those five or however many to another organisation. We need to make sure that those guys that have got up to this level don't fall through."

## Post-placement support and mentoring

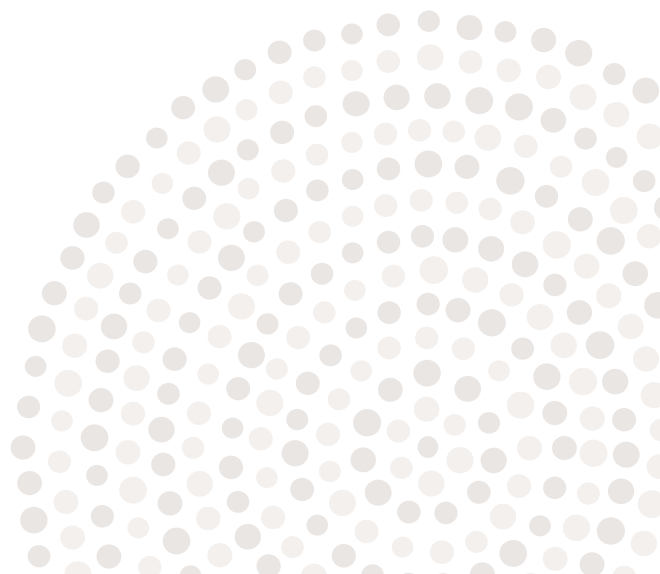
- Employers identified the following important factors:
  - o Cultural awareness training for non-Indigenous staff; also useful if tailored for Indigenous candidates, e.g. understanding mainstream

attitudes and workplace expectations. Good communication to ensure participants do not feel threatened

- o Mentoring is required on many levels, with well-defined roles. Must include specialised expertise and a buddy for peer support
  - o Supervisors need to be trained on mentoring and cultural awareness programs so they understand the role of mentors
  - o Inducting and employing Indigenous candidates in pairs or cohorts is more successful than engaging single candidates. Mixing new Indigenous candidates and experienced Indigenous employees also helps
  - o Each mentoring approach must work within the company's structure and consider the industry. For example, in the mining industry, where there are many layers of contractors, there is no guarantee that people at all tiers can support the candidate, making mentors even more important
  - o Numeracy and literacy training only works when it is relevant to a specific job - so that candidates understand why they need to learn, which for many is reportedly difficult and often embarrassing
- Mentoring should encompass work and home support. While the former can be best supplied internally by the organisation, the latter is best provided by external partnerships to ensure the right expertise (e.g. psychologists, social workers). External mentoring providers must understand the needs of the business and operate as a true partnership, in the interests of the candidate
  - Apply mentoring across the workforce, with different levels of support. When applied to all employees, mentoring stops being 'special treatment' for Indigenous people

## PERTH AND WESTERN AUSTRALIA ISSUES

- The needs and pressures of the mining industry are a significant influence on Indigenous employment. For example, housing is a critical issue – Indigenous communities cannot afford the inflated rents being charged around mining areas; having a driver's licence is crucial to travelling in vast, remote areas





# Little Yarn, Adelaide

August 25, 2011

## Participants

- Anglicare South Australia
- Mining Engineering Energy Academy
- Skill Group
- Reconciliation Australia (South Australia)
- Health Workforce Development
- Port Adelaide Football Club

## Key points

- There is no single gateway into employment for Indigenous people
- Indigenous people remain shut out of the workforce because Career Development services are too general. There is a low level of awareness among Indigenous people of options and career opportunities
- Employers recognise that unemployed Indigenous people need support but also want Indigenous high school students to be taught about career options to build their aspirations
- Rushing to place a candidate in a job has set people up for failure and led to high turnover of Indigenous staff
- Asking Indigenous people to participate in more training without a job prospect is asking them to “jump through hoops of hope”
- There is a need to understand that change takes time and marginalised Indigenous people need time to learn, undertake pre-employment programs and be matched with the right job

## Establishing an Indigenous employment program

- There can be issues over what is seen as ‘special treatment’ for Indigenous people, particularly with new programs
  - o “When you try and introduce an Indigenous Aboriginal component to your selection process, you’ve firstly got to deal with pushback that says, ‘Why treat them as favourites?’ And Aboriginal people themselves don’t want to be treated any differently, and we found most people in the workforce are prepared to go along with that sort of program as long as it’s seen as not being too unfair or too unbalanced in treating Aboriginal employment versus the rest.”
- Buy-in across the organisation (CEO, senior executive, employees) is critical
- Lack of coordination between program stakeholders can threaten sustainable employment. There is a strong need to keep all links in the organisation strong, because typically “enthusiasm fades along the shoelace” [of the organisation’s structure].
- Organisations should network more to share their experiences with Indigenous employment
- Continuity in the role of Indigenous Employment program manager will allow the manager to build strong relationships that go beyond the job. Employers must recognise and value the Indigenous Employment program manager
  - o “It’s about continuing to wire it up and coordinate it in a way that makes it work, in a way that case-manages effectively, not just through a traineeship phase but into the job.”

## Breaking down the barriers to employment

- Employers who shared their experiences in Indigenous employment programs emphasised the importance of pre-employment training:
  - o Candidate assessment tools are Eurocentric and inappropriate for Indigenous people, especially if English is not the first language
  - o Indigenous candidates need to meet an employer's requirements. In order to achieve this, workplace readiness, job skills and training may be required. This typically needs to be an iterative process
  - o Effective job-matching is a driver to successful employment, to ensure candidates are taking roles they want and are capable of doing. This is typically not being done well
  - o Helping Indigenous candidates attain driver's licences is important. Sometimes the first contact that young Indigenous people have with the criminal justice system is for driving unlicensed or driving an unregistered vehicle. Some No Income Loan Schemes (NILS) can provide loans to pay for insurance and registration
  - o Training needs to take into account Indigenous learning styles. On-the-job training is preferable to class lessons and practical lessons are preferable to theoretical. Participants identified value-added learning as a successful teaching method (the student learns and then applies the lesson immediately)
  - o Training must take into account the skill levels of each candidate
  - o There is a lack of clarity for Indigenous people and employers about the appropriate entry point - this may be a location or it may be the type of work, e.g. low-skilled with intensive support or flexible hours required. There is little understanding of where Indigenous candidates can go, particularly those who are not work-ready, and which organisations will best suit their needs

- o Indigenous employment programs require a longer timeframe and a longer view of the investment in candidates. Programs must give candidates time to overcome personal barriers. Participants felt that many short-lived attempts had failed
- o There is little awareness of work opportunities for Indigenous candidates. Participants reported that many Aboriginal people have had a bad experience of employment and some "don't even think about getting another job"
- o Cultural competency training for employers and the colleagues of Indigenous candidates is a vital component for success
- o Abandonment is a big issue for Indigenous candidates – going the "extra mile" is vital to successful placements. For example, helping job candidates get to work "before they are in the routine of being able to do it themselves"
- o Support structures need to be tailored for men and women, to address gender issues, particularly within families
- o Holistic care requires investment in pre-employment stages to build strong relationships with the candidate and support providers

## Accredited training

- There is a need for recognised qualifications and a better link to vocational education and training with tertiary qualifications
- Training must recognise the way different people learn, and education providers need to be more flexible with their teaching styles

## Employment

- South Australia has an Industry Clusters Network program, supported by the State Government. The directive is to step-up the pace of achieving Aboriginal training and

employment outcomes in the state. Industry leaders identified a good fit between industry needs to address growth and Indigenous community employment needs and capabilities:

- o Each cluster (seven currently) has an industry-driven approach to promote and develop Aboriginal training and employment, and is coordinated by an industry champion
- o The initiative recognises that governments are a partner but that industry-based champions are the drivers
- o Clusters work with other organisations based on the need. For example, working with universities to identify Indigenous candidates for the professional services sector
- o Training is determined by each cluster and provided by Indigenous Employment Program panel providers
- o Each cluster must operate collaboratively, not competitively. A “commonality of workforce interest” on skill requirements will result in trained candidates who can work across an industry
- o Clusters can centralise elements of training to suit all members
- o The program is producing opportunities to share knowledge across the industry sectors
- o The program was building demand for Indigenous candidates and is now developing training packages to build supply

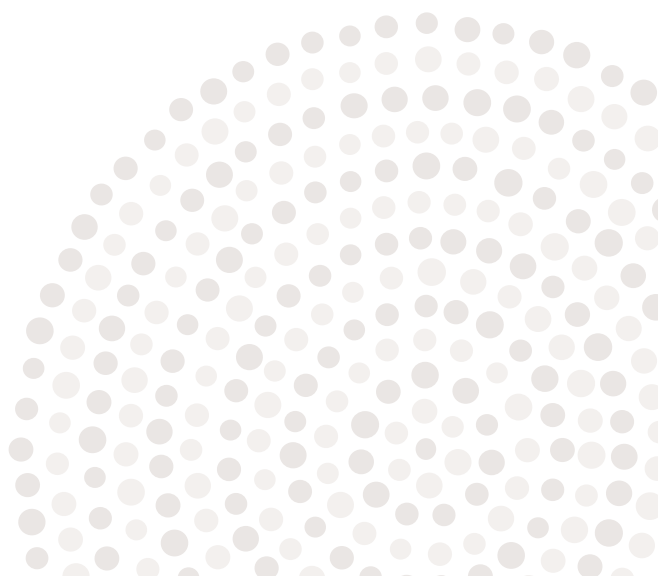
- o Indigenous people reported that they often became de facto mentors to other Indigenous colleagues. Employers should recognise the additional responsibility
- o Internal mentors must be trained. Indigenous people should also be encouraged to use an external mentor
- o Mentors do not necessarily have to be Indigenous but they must be trusted by the candidate. However, one benefit of an Indigenous mentor is that: “You can speak with someone you know as one of your own. Because what goes on with mentoring is that it can alleviate some of the racist views, because often when people talk about policy being put in place, [Indigenous people] think it’s being used against them in a racial manner, rather than what is truly just a policy within the organisation. So having someone that you can trust and confer with can alleviate some of that.”
- o Mentoring must be tailored to the candidate. There are large differences in the needs of candidates from remote, regional and metropolitan areas. There are large variations in the types of mentoring needed between candidates; mentoring must therefore be tiered, providing Indigenous people with choices about how much support they receive
- o Mentoring ratios ensure there is enough support time available. One employer reported that one mentor to every 25 candidates is the maximum effective ratio

## Mentoring and post-placement support

- Employers agreed on the importance of mentoring, particularly in the first 12 months. Lessons:
  - o Workplace buddies need to be acknowledged and supported by the organisation for undertaking an extra role

## ADELAIDE AND SOUTH AUSTRALIA ISSUES

- Locational disadvantage is a significant factor between communities. For example, some communities face greater problems with racism, lack of financial literacy and low levels of employment
- Relocating people away from communities is difficult to manage, therefore expecting people to relocate is not necessarily the answer
- There is concern that Indigenous employment policy is deficit focused, i.e. emphasises what Indigenous people are incapable of doing, rather than focusing on strengths and capabilities
- Access to appropriate housing needs to be considered when discussing employment. Particularly, remote housing and issues about relocation can create disincentive as people fear losing their house if they move, or losing their housing benefits once they are employed. This is less of a concern compared to other states because the Department of Housing allows tenants to remain in the dwelling, but at market rent rates





# Little Yarn, Darwin

## August 29, 2011

### Participants

- Northern Land Council
- MacMahon Holdings
- Mantra Hotel
- InterContinental Hotels
- Nitmiluk Tours
- Karen Sheldon Training and Development
- Prospect Pty Ltd - Tennant Creek
- Leighton Contractors
- Thamarrur Development Corporation - Wadeye
- Department of Business and Employment, Northern Territory Government
- Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations
- Cross Cultural Consultants
- Skycity Darwin
- KLI Services

*“Everyone has their models but they are all flawed because nobody is working together and nobody is seeing everybody else’s side of the picture.”*

Employer, Darwin

### Key points

- There is a huge gap between available jobs and work-ready candidates, and no supportive environments for candidates who need a foot in the door
- Providers and employers agree that “something in the middle” needs to be available, such as an “incubator” which would give candidates time to gain life and work skills in preparation for mainstream work
- Communication breakdowns between staff and management can cause conflict; mentors need to build bridges to establish rapport and trust
- Employers and employees need someone who can connect people and focus on “practical day-to-day stuff”, recognising that “if you don’t work on the communication issues, it won’t work. If you don’t address that, you won’t have employment outcomes”
- Staff should be treated equitably and have the opportunity for mentoring and training. This can improve the engagement of employees because it feels like “a family rather than a cold business”
- Services and employers need to “look at the individual and what they require” as we are “dealing with people with multiple barriers, multiple problems ... [which is] nothing to do with Aboriginal people, these are people who are disadvantaged and disconnected from the labour market, and whose whole families are disconnected”
- Employers recognise that change is occurring through state and federal governments, and this final policy should leverage the framework put in place under the Closing the Gap agenda

## Breaking down the barriers to employment

- Employers recognise that providing extra support is crucial:
  - o “Even though this is a considerable cost, it is crucial in retaining staff – we have become more like a family than an employer. They know we have invested in them and they respond well.”
- Indigenous-owned businesses and organisations see it as integral to their operations, saying “we are 100 per cent Indigenous-owned, so we are willing to do it”
- Due to government funding requirements, providers argue they cannot access funding if the candidate is not taking a recognised course. It takes time to complete the work-readiness stage (12 months or more) and funding is difficult because there may not be an end-point
  - o “One of the biggest barriers to the holistic side is getting that self-confidence up.”
  - o “The ability of either organisations or corporate or government to fund that bit where it takes a long time to get someone ready to go to work – that first step.”
  - o “It’s the first stage – getting their confidence up and helping them with paper work and to actually get people attending.”
  - o “To get someone to get a job, work with you to get their self-confidence up, so they can walk into a job with their head held high, and be told what to do and if you get it wrong not get so embarrassed that you go home.”
- Communication skills, mentoring, language literacy and numeracy are seen as integral to retaining staff. The Indigenous Employment Program (IEP) is heading in the right direction but more support is needed. People spoke of trying to “stretch” the program
  - o We have burnt a few employers in Darwin with recurring themes of why people aren’t in work: “We need an incubator for them, where we can actually get them work-ready to join the mainstream, and that can take a week, two weeks, six months or a year.”
  - o “You’re asking a lot of companies and of employers, and there is no place in the middle where you can get people work-ready.”
  - o “It’s one thing getting through the IEP program, it’s another thing to survive once they have been placed.”
  - o “... whether it comes from government or if there is a pool of money that employers can put into, we need to get a body of knowledge and a body of skills that can actually feed those candidates into jobs.”
- An employer spoke of turning a canteen into an incubator café in Alice Springs, working with the Institute for Aboriginal Development: “We can put people through for x amount of time, some people will be one month, some people six months and beyond, then move them into mainstream employment.”
- Employers spoke of the reality of hiring the best candidate for the job (competitive merit-based selection) that will most benefit their business: “Why would I hire this person over that person, or an apprentice which I am going to get all these incentives for?”

## Extra support needed

- Employers and service providers recognise the difficulty for JSAs. Participants recognised that up to 90 per cent of candidates from JSAs are classed as Stream 4, yet their participation requirement is for full-time work. This is impossible for a JSA. Those who had worked in the JSA network shared the frustrations, saying: “I left because I didn’t feel like I was helping anyone.”

- For a JSA to generate income, it must consider other methods, so “they are just whacking them into accredited training because they are going to get an educational outcome as opposed to no hope of getting a Stream 4 to 26 weeks ... that has been compounded by Productivity Places”
  - o “Where does that leave that person? With a lot of certificates but no job at the end of it? And then from that [training course], to another one.”
  - o “Senator Arbib is quoted as saying he’s going to make sure there is no training for training’s sake but he’s actually manipulated it so that’s the only way the JSA can get an outcome.”
  - o “We have had others sent through to us because they were Aboriginal, not even if they were interested.”
  - o When asking the JSA if it vetted people using the requirements stipulated by the employer, the response was: “No-one fitted it so we just sent anyone on our books.”

## Training and employment

- There is wide recognition that training can no longer be delivered in isolation to the employment market, and without consulting employers. Participants agreed that accredited training is better when it takes place on the job, rather than in the pre-employment phase
  - o “Every Aboriginal person can paper their walls with training certificates.”
  - o “If you put people into jobs, you can then see what they want to do and they will take ownership of the training because they want to do it and can see a reason for it, rather than training for training’s sake.”
  - o “We have a wide area of positions going, so up-skilling depends on what job the candidates wanted.”

- o “Where we found they wanted to work, we up-skilled them, and we retained them.”
- o “Encouraging people to follow their passion.”
- o “The career comes with support and ownership of that role.”
- Employers spoke of using part-time work, school-based traineeships and paid work experience as a way to build relationships with job candidates. This approach has given candidates real experience that can be cited on resumes, and allowed them to try jobs before committing to formal training. However, one employer told of a school that only allows students to participate in work if they are undertaking formal training, which forces candidates to do certified training they may not want to do
  - o “They have had time over a year to get to know us, to see us, to be buddied up with other Indigenous employees, knowing we have cultural awareness workshops for all our non-Indigenous staff, two mentors on staff, they feel comfortable.”
  - o “The advantage there is they can then put that job on their resume and say, ‘I’ve had real experience’, and in our industry that is the most valuable thing.”
  - o “The first thing a manager is going to do is pick up their resume and look to see if they have done the job before and if they have, that is a big tick.”

## Mentoring

- Mentoring is seen as crucial to retaining staff. The foundation is effective, timely communication
  - o “Our mentors do their best work when they are location-specific rather than industry-specific, as there are the same recurring themes.”
  - o The “barriers to people settling into work are not job specific. Most employers do a great

- job of skill training but it's the life skills and moving work up the ladder of priorities in their lives" that are the key barriers
  - o Mentors typically deal with issues that relate to a region, not a job
  - o "If you are dealing with intergenerational unemployment, you need to have [Indigenous] role models in the workplace otherwise it becomes quite toxic."
- The mentor can help a candidate understand basic workplace communication, such as "if you have a problem, it's OK to tell someone". Employers recognised that if you fail to communicate clearly, your Indigenous employment strategy will not work
- Communication between providers and the employer is important, which reflects what GenerationOne has heard across Australia: that candidates are sick of telling their story over and over again. Some service providers are now briefing the next organisation in the employment pathway about the candidate
- Employers pointed to apprentice inductions – the apprentice who wants a long-term commitment works with the governing organisation (usually the group training organisation) to map a pathway through the apprenticeship. This process should apply to job candidates: talking about their drivers and barriers, completing paperwork and mapping out a plan with their case worker or mentor
- Employers who know the full picture can make an informed decision on how to support a candidate. However, in most cases, an organisation will not know the candidate's barriers, completed programs or any reporting requirements. Ideally, the person or organisation referring the candidate should disclose this information. Employee disclosure was also preferred
  - o "Employers are willing to take that on if they know what they are dealing with."
  - o Employers must understand the candidate's needs, "things that other employees won't come with", so they can provide support
- Communication breakdowns between staff and management require an intermediate person who can build rapport and trust. This person could "reduce the element of surprise" for the employer – an unexpected situation that is difficult to manage
- Educating employees to understand and value the commitment to employing Indigenous Australians is critical. At one business in Alice Springs, providers discussed the buy-in from staff who know that Indigenous employment is a priority:
  - o Other staff talk about it as "their Reconciliation Action Plan". All staff understand the importance of the Indigenous employment strategy and "everyone in the hotel seems to know what is going on"
  - o This 'top-floor to shopfloor' approach ensures everyone is "on the journey"
- Cultural awareness training should focus on cross-cultural training
- The shop floor is where most conflict occurs between Indigenous and non-Indigenous staff, as people witness the real-life experiences of their Indigenous colleagues, i.e. the "everyday trauma". Educating the workforce about the issues facing Indigenous people can achieve greater buy-in from all staff. When issues arise at work, colleagues are "a lot more tolerant and compassionate"
- Staff must be trained to deal with real situations and think about the way supervisors would handle a situation. Rather than stereotyping people, give supervisors and managers information on how to act.

To build on cultural awareness training, managers could benefit from role-playing real-life situations

### **Regional differences**

- A Local Implementation Plan (LIP) for 20 Northern Territory towns helps economic participation services work through problems. LIPs are implemented by a Remote Training and Economic Development Group. In a first for the Territory, workforce development planning, employment counts and job counts are now being done, in contrast to traditional complex silos and reporting systems





# Little Yarn, Brisbane

August 30, 2011

## Participants

- Abbey Group
- Smashcare
- Department of Education
- InterContinental Hotel Group (Brisbane)
- PSC Project
- Martyr Hospital
- Fulton Hogan
- C&K
- First People Recruitment
- AEC P-Plate program
- QR National
- Lighthouse IT
- Hornibrook Bus Lines
- Centacare
- ISS
- Bridge Consultants
- Engineering & Employment

## Key points

- There was a mix of experience, including employers with Indigenous staff and employers who had no Indigenous staff
- Many employers emphasised the importance of commitment, dedication, passion and the need to go beyond standard human resources practices
- For jobs that are not entry-level, employers find it hard to access qualified Indigenous or non-Indigenous candidates
- Employers who are succeeding with Indigenous employment programs say it is vital to be open and honest with Indigenous candidates about the realities of work and the employer's expectations
- Employers know that the Indigenous population is relatively young but do not know what this generation wants to do for work
- Employers prefer to employ Indigenous people in cohorts, so they can share their experiences

## Creating partnerships

- Many employers believe that the partnership model in GenerationOne's policy proposal is critical; some have already formed partnerships to deliver wraparound support and/or training, sometimes with specialist organisations or local Indigenous community groups
- Many employers do not know how to build partnerships
  - o "The partnership side is vitally important ... so that the requirements are clearly spelt out. You've got to have the passion and the drive. People will accept [what needs to be done] if you tell them what the parameters are."
- Employers have learned the value of having an Indigenous stakeholder working in the program, particularly for understanding local cultural or community issues. However, this is based on trust rather than being Indigenous; many programs are successful where non-Indigenous stakeholders have

won the trust of the community and the job candidate by building strong relationships

- One small employer who cannot employ an Indigenous person full-time said a strong community partnership had been vital
- Those who are using the Indigenous Employment Program reported difficulty receiving an outcome payment if the candidate was signed on to another IEP panel provider

### Candidate attraction and recruitment

- Some employers are unsure about the laws on discrimination and the advertising of roles when identifying positions for Indigenous Australians
- Employers do not see value in using employment service providers; many rely more on word-of-mouth when recruiting
- Employers believe that JSA providers are referring Indigenous job seekers to training courses as part of a JSA's financial sustainability. Yet employers believe there are often no jobs at the end of training courses and little support for candidates to find jobs
- There is a mismatch between the resources needed to support Indigenous job seekers and the support being offered by JSAs. Employers said:
  - o "I had 24 job offers for apprentices and on the day we had the open day the turnout [of Indigenous candidates] was a poor reception and I believe that's due to some of the [job] networks involved. It's not a nine-to-five job, it's a job of passion. It's more through the relatives' network that we find employees than through the established agencies."
  - o "There's no passion to make something happen [in job networks]."
- o "Motivation, energy and sheer doggedness are critical aspects of [Indigenous] recruitment and retention. I've had too many bad experiences [with JSAs]. Because you only get one shot at it, after that management will say it's all too hard."
- o "[The JSA] started to come up with this recruitment strategy and I said, 'I don't want any of that'. Everything I am asking of these candidates we can train - what I'm looking for is attitude."
- One employment service only had a small number of job seekers listed, and fewer job-ready Indigenous candidates
- Recruiting Indigenous candidates for jobs that are not traditionally held by Indigenous people – for example, the IT industry – can be difficult. Indigenous people may be deterred by the lack of role models
- Indigenous people are not applying for some positions because they lack self-belief and think the jobs are out of reach. Employers wanted candidates to have better support so they can build self-confidence, and for a third party to help build relationships between employers and job seekers
- Employers who do not offer entry-level roles report difficulty finding skilled, qualified candidates, particularly if tertiary qualifications are required. Employers need to take a longer-term approach and "grow our own" skilled Indigenous employees
- Participants rely on engaging Indigenous people through the arts and sport, in which many Indigenous communities are involved

## Breaking down the barriers to employment

- Senior management buy-in and support is “absolutely critical”
- Having strong pre-employment preparation helps managers who are more comfortable when there is little or no difference in work-readiness between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people
- Pre-employment programs can be short, for some roles, and are often more productive and engaging for Indigenous candidates than long courses:
  - o “Normally we run these 10-week programs but there’s no need for that when we’re going to run them through traineeships. [In our four-day course] we need them to understand the environment, to understand safety to themselves and their colleagues. We want them to start at 6.30am so they understand what getting up early means, and we want them to bring all their food and drink. We didn’t have one drop-out, it really worked. The trouble is, people have been through these long courses [before] and unless there’s a job at the end of it, why would you do it?”
- Many employers want pre-employment programs to recognise and accommodate the needs of each candidate and to work with the conditions and resources in different locations:
  - o “Not everyone is ready to be thrown in” to do an interview or a 38-hour week, especially long-term unemployed people
  - o “The recruitment and the training and the retention – it’s all very personalised [to address the needs of the candidate].”
  - o “When we started, there was more of a one-size-fits-all approach and clearly that wasn’t really working. But the way we’ve transformed things is to focus on those [GenerationOne pre-employment] steps 1 to 3. If you have them crossed off in your strategy, you’ll probably be a lot better off.”
- o One national employer said tailoring pre-employment training was important for success: “Each division has a specific program for work and life skills, and look at the specific industry and then look at the geographical location. We have very unique challenges in the Northern Territory and we need to address them in a unique way. The challenges in Perth or Brisbane will be a bit different ... [and in each location] we do outsource the training components to local people that have the influences and the connections to address those unique challenges.”
- A strong, culturally well-informed human resources division is important because there can be barriers in an organisation to Indigenous programs, including misconception, resentment or racism
- One employer who has been driving local service providers to deliver, told of pushing the JSAs to find people with the right attitude to be up-skilled once they were employed. Building relationships and intensively supporting candidates helped achieve program success:
  - o “It was just amazing the effort that those [JSA] people put in. They were driving out to see candidates and making certain they got to interviews, and to get their medicals they were driving them [long distances]. And I think the candidates acknowledged that and realised there were people working with them on their behalf. It was the energy we needed from the JSA, as well as [our] energy from the employer side, because we couldn’t have done it alone.”
  - o “We’ve got this group of [Indigenous] kids here and their life pattern is, the boys are destined for jail and the girls are destined to get pregnant. [But when I started trying to do something about this], it took me a year of asking and looking and talking to government departments and people who are more knowledgeable than myself and learning this stuff that maybe would have put a lot of other employers off.”
- There was a case made for small to medium enterprises that need significant support

for pre-employment preparation for highly disadvantaged candidates. This includes overcoming major lifestyle barriers:

- o “It comes down to what we feel we are equipped to do. As much as I’m supportive of these sorts of initiatives and keen to see them be successful, I also have a responsibility to my [business owner] and the rest of my staff not to be in a situation where, as a small organisation, we’re spending so much money to support an individual or set of individuals to the detriment of others.”
- o “In our organisation, the HR function is one day a week for a person that has a number of other responsibilities. So for an organisation of our size, I think having some way to call on external support is critical.”
- Contract arrangements with the Department of Employment, Education and Workplace Relations are important: “Previously we were on a three-month recruitment window, which means you spend more time negotiating with the next IEP than you do actually filling the jobs. So we’ve moved that to 12 months.”
- Criminal records are a barrier to employing Indigenous job seekers in specific roles. However, one employer told of working around this by offering roles that could be filled regardless of whether the applicant had a criminal record
- One organisation recruits people from half-way houses. The new employees are finishing their jail sentences and gain support from the employer to make the transition to work
- Candidates are less confident because of their history. One employer reported that in a cohort of 12 young Indigenous men, 10 had criminal records. The employer worked with local businesses to find jobs for all 12 candidates

## Employment and post-placement support

- Most employers recognise that mentoring is vital for Indigenous employee retention and advancement. However, employers feel this is difficult to get right
- Important participant experiences:
  - o Life skills, such as financial literacy, are often lacking and should be addressed by post-placement support
  - o While the employer must be responsible for workplace mentoring, deciding whether to deliver all or part of that support internally or externally has to be considered and tailored to the candidate
  - o One benefit of external mentoring is the privacy this affords the candidates, away from the organisation and bosses
  - o One benefit of internal mentoring is that mentors know and understand the organisation’s structure and business, and can more easily negotiate what needs to be done
  - o Employers are receiving DEEWR funding, which is reportedly available for Indigenous mentoring for at least six months
- Employers recognise that there are different types of mentoring, and ‘mentoring’ is used too much as a generic word in relation to Indigenous employment. One employer said:
  - o “Training is ‘do as I do’ and demonstrating cause and effect. Candidates might be able to repeat the functions you are demonstrating, but they are not growing in their learning”
  - o A mentor can encourage and support
  - o A coach helps people grow by asking the candidate, “What do you think?” and working on the issue together
- Employers believe a mentor can help negotiate with family and teach a candidate how to bring their two worlds together (work and culture)

- Another aspect vital for workplace harmony is cultural awareness training, particularly for managers and departments where Indigenous people will be working:
  - o Good cultural awareness training happens at all levels, including the board, line managers and staff; especially for support staff (e.g. human resources, mentors). Cultural awareness training must be ongoing. Just as employment is a journey for the candidates, cultural awareness and appreciation is a journey for non-Indigenous employees
  - o Without understanding and respecting each other's culture, Indigenous employment programs can stall and fail quickly. Non-Indigenous staff must understand Indigenous cultural imperatives and social styles
  - o It is likely that at least a minority of staff will be concerned or resent 'special treatment' for Indigenous employees. Some employers address this by making parts of their programs company-wide – e.g. scholarships with Indigenous and non-Indigenous places: "We do get [pushback from non-Indigenous staff] from time to time. That's why we often need to make sure that when we do put programs together, that at the same time we are possibly putting something together for the entire workforce. That's something we always have to be mindful of."
  - o Some employers use an online cultural awareness tool, which makes training available to all staff. Cultural awareness training is part of the induction process

## BRISBANE AND QUEENSLAND ISSUES

- This workshop had the greatest number of organisations which have only just launched their programs. Consequently, many have little or no experience of Indigenous employment

