INDIGENOUS MENTORING PROGRAM: PILOT PROGRAM

“Round Peg, Round Hole”

Lynn Robson and Jodie Anson
Career Employment Australia
Brisbane

This paper explores the provision of the Specialised Indigenous Mentoring Program on the training, work, life outcomes and recidivism rates of Indigenous offenders and ex-offenders, particularly in the Maryborough and Cairns regions.

Introduction:
The Indigenous Mentoring Program (IMP), funded by Dept. of Employment, Economic Development and Innovation (DEEDI) is specifically designed to improve Indigenous training, employment and retention rates utilising the through-care Advance2Work, Offender Reintegration Support Services, Job Services Australia and community training programs.

The IMP is an adjunct to Advance2Work and not only addresses work issues but whole of life barriers to education and employment. Addressing barriers such as literacy, numeracy, poor health, overcrowded and inadequate housing and building intensive community networks has seen contracted Indigenous outcomes exceeded during the last funding round.

Mentoring is not supervision, it is not only role modelling, but involves direct assistance and the development of social capital through:

- engagement pre release, training
- co-case management with ORSS
- skills audits, needs analysis
- constructive career pathway planning
- training and professional development
- counselling and support for clients and employers
- building trust and respect
- promoting and sponsoring.
The practitioner:
All statistical information indicates that the number of Indigenous offenders is increasing with Indigenous people being 13.3 times more likely than non-Indigenous to be imprisoned. The rate of imprisonment for Indigenous women and men increased by 45.5 per cent and 26.6 per cent respectively between 2000 and 2008.

Violent crime including sexual assault was the cause of the highest conviction rate and a raised rate of recidivism. Eighty-six per cent of Indigenous juvenile offenders entered the adult correction system while 65 per cent serve at least one prison term. Indigenous prisoners were on average 4.7 years younger than non-Indigenous prisoners. These are national figures and vary from state to state. Given these statistics, mentoring, training and effectively placing Indigenous clients is a difficult and important role in the community.

Career Employment Australia:
Career Employment Australia (CEA) is a private not-for-profit, community based organisation for disadvantaged job seekers operational since 1981 commencing in south-east Queensland and moving throughout the state. It is a Registered Training Organisation (RTO) providing programs, funded by both the State and Federal governments, and is also a Registered Construction Company.

CEA has provided offender services in prisons through Queensland since 2000 including life skills, vocational training including IT, Business, aged care, horticulture, engineering, literacy and numeracy. This paper will provide information on the Advance2Work program and outline IMP which CEA has provided at Maryborough and Lotus Glen Correctional Centres.

Advance2Work Background:
IMP is an important adjunct to the Advanced2Work program which was initially the Post Release Employment Assistance Program (PREAP) and has catered to the needs of all offenders, both male and female in correctional centres in SEQ, Maryborough, Rockhampton, Townsville and Cairns. In 2010 IMP funding became available to address

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1 Closing the Gap on Indigenous Disadvantage, Imprisonment & Juvenile Detention Rate – Key messages 4A.12.1).
the high number of Indigenous releases from prison, and six months funding was provided to specifically assist Indigenous people to gain and maintain employment.

Advance2Work is essentially a strengths based resettlement and crime prevention program. This paper have not drawn so much on research but more on Advance2Work’s documented history of service, growth and evolution.

Advance2Work is based on the case management model and Case Managers commence through-care six months pre release before following clients into the community. They assist with general hands-on support services such as:

- accommodation (MOUs with housing)
- attending Probation and Parole
- identification
- health referrals, disability services
- relationship and family issues
- Child Support, Dept. of Child Safety
- Legal Aid, Women’s Legal Services
- drug and alcohol counselling and rehabilitation
- clothing, food, transport,
- debt reduction, addictions
- link to JSA and EPF account.

Eligibility:

Eligible Clients:
- Those incarcerated and register up to six months pre-release

Ineligible Clients:
- Those not registered pre-release including those on:
  - remand
  - parole
  - bail
  - home detention
  - probation
  - court orders
  - Dangerous Persons and Sexual Offenders (DPSO)
Clients with disabilities:
It is estimated that approximately 65 per cent of clients in prison have a disability, either physical, intellectual, impaired cognition or mental illness with many released without being linked to appropriate community supervision and support. Many are already from disadvantaged backgrounds, with few supports ‘outside’. Some are linked to Richmond Fellowship, Mental Health Resource Service (Centacare) and Solace. There are other support services available including Community and Forensic Mental Health Services, but very little in terms of supported accommodation catering for specific disabilities for very vulnerable ex offenders.

There is a huge hole in the provision of this accommodation, which leads to clients becoming victimised and abused. It is impossible to gain and maintain education and employment without somewhere appropriate to live. Clients have been stripped of self-confidence, self-assurance and with low self esteem have absolutely no idea how to get a ‘normal’ job.

Indigenous Mentoring Program (IMP):
Closing the gap on Indigenous over-representation in correctional services is one of the top priorities identified by Queensland Corrective Services. The proportion of Indigenous offenders has increased by up to three per cent since 2005 and IMP is one measure providing diversionary and reintegration opportunities. IMP staff liaise with Probation and Parole offices in the Gulf and cape regions and have community facilitators and case managers to work personally with clients in Thursday Island and Mt. Isa. CEA encourage clients to link with the Murri Chaplaincy Service and with the Indigenous Elders Visitation Scheme. Staff have also invited other program providers including the Indigenous Youth Mobility Program case managers to visit the prison and engage suitable clients in training and employment programs. This is helpful given the high rate of Indigenous youth in juvenile detention that move into adult incarceration.

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2 Delivering Justice – Improving Corrections, Qld. Corrective Services Framework for reform 2010-14, Queensland Government, P.7
Staff ensure that program delivery is culturally appropriate and takes into account the learner’s background, needs, provides practical applications for what is being learned, and engages in a way to overcome shyness and loneliness when clients are away from home.

CEA has met its Indigenous outcomes target numbers to date and addressed not only the 91 day employment outcomes, and ensured underpinning work skills such as literacy and numeracy, money handling, punctuality, reliability and positive communication were addressed. Knowing where to get the relevant community support was necessary as many clients were incarcerated as a result of not using community agencies well.

As an adjunct to the Advance2Work program, IMP:

- recruits Indigenous staff
- builds trust and engages with family members
- refers to numeracy, literacy and voc training
- develops and reinforces community linkages
- travels to communities – Cherbourg, Murgon, Yarrabah, Mossman, Mareeba
- “sell” employers to these communities
- works with specialised JSA providers – (no parking of clients)
- links to Indigenous work projects
- utilise businesses which have quotas for Indigenous employment
- links with Indigenous Liaison Officers (prisons, Centrelink, IETSOs)
- ensures basic client needs are met eg ‘no exits to homelessness’ – MOUs with housing providers and head leasing of houses in Toowoomba, Rockhampton, Townville and Cairns.

CEA was responsible for the development of the mass literacy screen tool and there has been a greater intake in literacy classes since literacy screening commenced. Given the numbers attending literacy classes, the implications for the uptake of vocational education and training particularly by Indigenous prisoners are greatly improved. CEA provide LLNP services and clients are also linked with LLNP in their local community.
IMP Stages (Same as Advance2Work):

- **Stage 1 – Pre-release activities –**
  - identifying clients and building a relationship/engagement
  - completing paperwork (Needs Analysis, Skills Audit, Pathway Plan)
  - providing letters of support to the Parole Board
  - referring pre release to relevant programs literacy, voc training, identification etc.
  - studying to gain a driver’s licence
  - working with clients intensively pre release
  - empowering clients to work on their own behalf and developing social responsibility, break the habit of welfare dependence
  - linking with relevant ‘outside’ programs eg QITE rural project
  - contacting employers with an Indigenous Employment quota eg QBuild, Telstra, Australia Post
  - building an Indigenous friendly employer data base.

Establishing relationships pre release is vital and is a time pre-release to prepare clients to think positively about where they will live, where they will work, how to stay safe and what resources, including family and friends, are available to them. Many clients do not have a driver’s licence and having a licence is a real plus when job searching.

- **Stage 2 - Post release activities** -
  - utilise post release contacts for training, employment, support
  - searching for employment opportunities
  - ‘market’ CEA to Indigenous communities
  - connect with IEP, DES, user friend JSA, JCAs
  - promote short term and work experience programs
  - access Employment Pathway Plan
  - supporting clients to adhere to their orders
  - ensure clients work closely with their ‘mentor’
  - introduce clients to supported employment programs Skilling Queenslanders for Work, Indigenous specific programs: IYMP.
Homelessness is a real issue and CEA is involved in the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness with the Federal Government and committed to clients having a safe roof over their head away from temptation and old habits. This works well in partnership with the Offender Reintegration Support Service (ORSS).

Practical assistance such as food, a bed and/or referral to a more appropriate service is often the first step in relapse prevention. Staff build, where possible, on the skills clients have gained in and out of prison. Community Employment and Infrastructure Programs (formerly SQW) are specifically designed to provide training and a small wage in skill shortage areas and to break the poverty trap for those with multiple barriers to work. While these are not IMP outcomes, CEFP do provide valuable work skills and habits as well as positive socialisation after release which can lead to employment.

- **Stage 3 – Post-placement support -**
  - maintain regular contact with clients and employers
  - stay ‘on track’ and trouble shoot
  - recruit more than one Indigenous worker, a buddy/mentor
  - ongoing support – recognise transport, family/gender issues, involve Indigenous community members
  - other strategies – recruit across kinship groups, try to have more than one Indigenous worker, team a non-Indigenous with an Indigenous worker, provide flexible training, utilise traineeships and advocate.

**Working with and supporting employers and staff:**

- get the message out – Indigenous newspapers, websites, Facebook, Twitter
- get candidates and applications in – info sessions, go to workplace, subscribe to Indigenous magazines
- get to know subsidies and incentives
- get to know candidates – friendly, relaxing interview atmosphere, other Indigenous staff present, can bring a companion
- access Employment Pathway fund
- consider work experience/placement
- provide a clear and unambiguous position description in plain, simple language
- invite Indigenous people to be involved in the interview
• prepare the workplace and the team – provide cross-cultural awareness training, address Indigenous approaches to time, commitment and mainstream work styles
• orientation – be clear about boundaries, expectations, work ethics, punctuality, reliability, leave entitlements, absenteeism and special circumstances.

IMP Case Managers strive for long term placements rather than labour hire positions. Most clients are looking for unskilled or semi-skilled jobs and these entry level positions are excellent traineeship opportunities. Once placed, clients are monitored closely to ensure they are progressing well, are paid appropriately and that they and employers are satisfied.

Training:
IMP staff are involved in the QCS Transition Program delivering work readiness training. This provides clients with training in several competencies of the Certificate I in Employment Skills Training in Resume Writing and Job Interview Techniques. These sessions are an opportunity for participants to ask questions, gain skills, learn about Job Services Australia, the Employment Pathway Fund and their entitlements on release.

Undoubtedly skills, particularly in skill shortage areas, negate a criminal history. Employers will overlook time in prison if clients have the right attitude and abilities for the job they advertise. CEA staff also organise Recognition for Prior Learning through Skilling Solutions Queensland for those with skills but no accredited qualification.

Maryborough Linkages:
• regular visits to Cherbourg, Murgon, Kingaroy linking with JSAs,
• SQW at Scrub Hill, through Fraser Coast Training
• Green Corp – Job Match CTC
• Gas Line Jobs through ESQ, in Dalby
• Silver Lining, Wondai – Iron Bark Ridge Coal Seam Gas production, client placed previously is now a mentor for new staff
• CTC, Murgon and Kingaroy, Line Walking identifying Aboriginal artefacts and involvement in the peanut industry

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- Priority Forestry Service (PFS) – Forestry training
- Manningham Station, Longreach, Agricultural College - 13 wks rural operations
- Titans 4 Tomorrow, links to Gold Coast Titans for mentoring and support of Cherbourg job seekers through completion of Titans Achievement Program and an Individual Agreement and Career pathway Plan.

Cairns Linkages:
- regular visits to Yarrabah, Mossman and Mareeba Community Justice Coordinators
- Indigenous Driver Licensing Unit (also in Lotus Glen)
- TNQ TAFE - Indigenous Student Support Officer
- Indigenous Police Liaison Officer - Esplanade Police Beat
- Indigenous Employment Coordinator - Cairns Regional Council
- Wu Choppen Health Service

Current Contract:
The IMP current contract extends through until June 2012. Contracts vary depending on centre numbers and the client group. For areas with large numbers of Indigenous clients, community placements and community obligation as well as employment can be claimed. These contracted numbers were met and exceeded in the previous contract.

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<th>Stage 1 - Registration</th>
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<td>Cairns</td>
<td>Maryborough</td>
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While these numbers may appear small, the provision of substantial funding is a positive feature in tailoring services for Indigenous offenders. It helps gain sustainable outcomes to give clients a toe on the ladder to the world of work and leading a crime free lifestyle. QCS stats indicate that only eight per cent of offenders who gain meaningful work, return to prison.
While no official statistics have been released in relation to IMP, QCS records indicate that the recidivism rate is normally around 40 per cent but for those involved in Advance2Work, IPM and literacy and vocational training pre release, the rate is reduced by 13.5 per cent.

**Conclusion:**
IMP should not be considered in relation to employment and training outcomes alone. The indirect gains of IMP participation such as staying connected with CEA Case Managers, training, undertaking short training courses, volunteering, reducing drug related activities, reconnecting with family and working more than 25 hours per week are major steps forward. The development of IMP has been, and still is a continual learning process involving research, trial, review, implementation and retrial. Programs such as the IMP also contribute enormously and provide rewards for the social responsibility of ex-offenders when they have work, provide for their family, become role models for their children and contribute meaningfully to the community in which they live.
References:


