



What Works. The Work Program

Improving outcomes for Indigenous students

Tharawal Lands Council

Training for employment opportunities through a TAFE/Lands Council partnership

The context | The Tharawal CDEP program | The outcomes | Key factors in success

The context

The Community Development Employment Program (CDEP) is a significant avenue of employment and income for Indigenous people.

Many CDEP schemes provide for the maintenance and improvement of community infrastructure. Sometimes they provide accredited training and sometimes they lead participants on to other forms of employment which are not reliant on government underwriting. Tharawal Local Area Land Council's CDEP program, based near Picton about 120 kilometres south-west of Sydney, does both.



The Tharawal CDEP program

Following an evolutionary process of community discussion, the Council decided six years ago to develop a Training policy. This policy focused on ensuring that all participants had the opportunity to get tangible outcomes from their experience, with the goal of 'real jobs for all'. To do this, 'proper' nationally-recognised training and certification was required and it was recognised that TAFE courses were the medium for this.

It was agreed that all CDEP programs would include a mandatory component of TAFE-accredited training for participants, who range from recent school leavers to middle-aged people. As a rule, 15 hours of CDEP work is included each week with an additional day (sometimes in the form of weekend workshops) devoted to formal training.

While South Western Sydney Institute of TAFE is the registered provider and its sites and facilities are used for some purposes, two local sites owned by the Land Council are central to the training offered and some of the training is provided by staff employed directly by the Land Council. The CDEP program maintains an enrolment of about 80 participants with a consistent turnover as students complete their training and gain employment. Nine to 12 months is the standard period for training.

All trainees are Indigenous but not all are Tharawal people and some come from considerable distances to be involved. (A train station is handily placed nearby.) The Land Council has a view that its work should help participants to become skilled and thus empowered and independent, so that when they return to their own communities some of this might translate into wider action.

The Land Council also owns two conference centres, one at the Council site and another, *Gibbah Gunyah* ('house of stone' or lodge) closer to Picton. The conference centres provide excellent opportunities for training — in hospitality, building refurbishment and maintenance, and home care.

The trainees are at present divided into three 'Crews' with subsections of 8 to 12 trainees.

- The Outdoor Crew trains in four areas — painting and decorating, carpentry and joinery, and plumbing.
- The Catering Crew works on gaining Level II Hospitality Certificates related to cooking, serving and home care. Trainees service a large number of contracts for home care in south-west Sydney. They provide food and services to the conference centres and operate mobile catering vans.
- The Art Crew does Certificate courses in Showcard and Ticket Writing and Ceramics and Pottery. Their products, with a strong emphasis on Aboriginal art and cultural practice, sell through the Council's Art and Craft Centre and wherever else there is an opportunity.



Trainees serving a visitor at a local tourist centre

The outcomes

For some time now, more than 90% of all trainees have gained jobs in the wider community after their training. However in some areas, such as plumbing, 100% have consistently gained jobs.

Key factors in success

One of the key factors in success is clearly the connection with TAFE. Robyn Williams is the current Chair of the Land Council. She is also the Aboriginal Development Manager of South Western Sydney Institute of TAFE. But the community-generated idea of attaching training to CDEP through policy is also crucial. As Robyn says, 'it's the interaction and partnership with the Land Council that makes the difference'.

Robyn also suggests the following as factors in success:

- *Flexibility in the running of courses.* Changing the times at which classes were held significantly increased the volume and regularity of attendance. 'They're nocturnal. When we began our classes at two in the afternoon and went on into the early parts of the evening, attendance shot up.'
- *Flexibility in the courses offered.* 'We are looking all the time for niches in the employment market.' A small local abattoir provided work for meat handlers for a while. On another occasion there were opportunities for forklift drivers. The land the Council currently owns adjoins the Dharawal National Park (another spelling of Tharawal) and members of the community have been involved in the development of environmental impact statements and Aboriginal site survey workshops. 'Windows of opportunity are there all the time if you look for them.'
- *The value of mixed age groups working together.* In particular, older participants can have a very positive impact on younger people.
- *Hands on learning.* 'Real work, leaving something you can see and touch, makes you proud of what you've done.' Both the conference centres have been refurbished by Painting and Decorating trainees. The plumbing and renovation of railway carriages forming part of the art/craft centre has all been done by trainees. The Catering Crew operates two mobile catering vans which provide services, including 'great feeds of bush



Robyn Williams

tucker', in various parts of the state. When bushfires swept through parts of New South Wales in 1997, fire fighters were fed by trainees working from these vans. 'You should have seen the faces when they lined up for omelettes and muffins and bacon and eggs.'