

Mission Australia helps people regain their independence - by standing together with Australians in need, until they can stand for themselves.

MISSION AUSTRALIA | together we stand



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Indigenous Employment and Training

Submission to Government

Mission Australia recognises the unique status of Indigenous peoples as the original owners and custodians of Australia's lands and waters and we are committed to addressing the cultural, social and economic needs of Indigenous communities. Currently 6.63% of Mission Australia's employees are of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander background.

Mission Australia runs a range of successful programs and services in collaboration with Indigenous communities which have revealed the following priorities for improving Indigenous employment outcomes:

- **Integrating support and addressing individual needs:** Recognising that the needs of each individual are different and coordinating support, including through long-term mentoring.
- **Educating industry:** Educating industries, employers and workplaces through cultural awareness training to ensure employers are ready for job-ready Indigenous Australians.
- **Innovation in remote services:** Employing local leadership, new partnership and community development models to support people living in remote areas.

Recognising the needs of each individual by providing integrated support

A key factor for effective employment-focussed service delivery with Indigenous job seekers is a process of engagement and consultation with individuals, family and community. Indigenous cultures and communities cannot be considered homogenous or static and are characterised by a range of local attitudes, values, beliefs and customs that must be incorporated into dialogue between service providers and these communities.

This dialogue can assist in creating tailored and holistic support for the individual. We need to avoid falling back on the 'one size fits all' approach.

Mission Australia has found that **skilled and qualified mentors** play a significant role in this process. By supporting a strong connection to culture and

boosting self-esteem, **long-term mentoring** can bring about lasting positive results.¹ In an education setting, Indigenous students are often uncomfortable approaching mainstream career advisors and prefer to access **Aboriginal Education Advisors, family and friendship networks.**^{2,3} Ongoing support through qualified mentors and Aboriginal Education Advisors is critical. This could also be extended to **mentoring Aboriginal community liaison officers** who ensure cultural security, which is critical to improving outcomes.

Formal education and training programs are also necessary to increase the skill set of Indigenous job-seekers. **Mission Australia's Skills Employment and Education (SEE)** and **Language, Literacy and Numeracy Program (LLNP)** program team at Bankstown is an excellent example of **dedicated teachers and administration staff** working closely with their students to improve English and numeracy competencies for those seeking employment and education opportunities.

Coordinated programs like the **Indigenous Youth Career Program (IYCP)** can be very successful where they encourage the development of workplace and life skills while remaining connected with family support structures. Mission Australia has achieved many positive outcomes through IYCP, such as those achieved by Rose* – a disengaged Indigenous Year 10 student from the Northern Territory. Rose had no goals for the future and had allowed her school attendance to fall below 30%. Through working closely with her IYCP mentor, Rose was placed in a **School Based Traineeship (SBT)** through which she was able to complete a Certificate II in Business. Rose's skills and confidence have grown considerably and through her strong sense of self-worth and work ethic Rose has become a role model for other students and her siblings.

While completion of training is an important step, **national recognition of pre-employment training in the school certificate** is the next step. Pre-employment training is not recognised for completion of the Year 10 school certificate in all states and territories and recognition

would improve Indigenous attainment of the school certificate; a foundation for further study and employment.

Educating industries, employers and workplaces

Seeking 50,000 jobs for Indigenous job-seekers is a highly desirable aspiration that requires not only support for Indigenous Australians but investment and innovation by employers and industry. Employers won't retain job-ready Indigenous employees without educating their own workplaces and developing supportive work environments.

The **Indigenous Employment Program (IEP)** demonstrates what can be achieved when employers are actively engaged in Indigenous employment programs. For example, Mission Australia's **Queensland Reds South Brisbane IEP** placed 100% of the participants into employment, 83% of which remained employed after 6 months.⁴ This success is the result of 'wrap around support', ongoing assistance and the mentorship offered by the Queensland Reds.

Workplaces are often ill-equipped to deal with employees who have additional needs and require specialist support services. Additionally, workplace culture can lead to discrimination and prejudice, which can work against the pre-employment skills developed.⁵ The **Mission Australia Employer Awards** recognise and highlight employers who utilise best practice in securing better employment outcomes. The 2013 Award went to Western Australian Country Health, a hospital which achieves an extremely high retention rate with its Indigenous employees by **offering trial days to job seekers and selective shifts to its employees until they are comfortable taking on more work.** Supporting workplaces to adopt similar approaches will help achieve the 50,000 jobs goal.

Innovative approaches in areas where local jobs are limited

Mission Australia's success in supporting Indigenous employment is attributed to our understanding barriers to work; and working closely with Indigenous people in their communities to address training, employment, housing, youth and family issues in a coordinated way

Mission Australia believes **effective connections between mainstream and Indigenous specific programs can be built** to improve the capacity of

organisations to deliver outcomes for Indigenous job seekers. Utilising leaders, mentors and partners from all cultures is necessary to reflect the workplaces in which clients will work; which are likely to be non-Indigenous. Mission Australia sees great potential for **non-Indigenous organisations to work in partnership to support the capacity of Indigenous run organisations**, including by providing back office support so that local organisations can focus on delivery while benefiting from larger organisational capacity. This approach could also utilise existing Indigenous services with established links within communities to avoid "fly by services" and support **longer-term funding models** rather than short-term programs.

Investment in community development[#], particularly in remote regions, is critical when seeking to improve outcomes in concert with the needs of the community. Mission Australia has invested in intentional social capital creation in the remote communities of Urapunga, NT and Mornington Island, QLD, where our development-trained staff work with job seekers to identify opportunities for change in their community as requested by community. Participants are mentored to take leadership in this area, producing a tangible and valued community project and providing the participants with the initial skills and confidence to engage in a more formalised training pathway. **This model of integrated service delivery provides an entry point for even the most disengaged of job seekers to begin a pathway to employment.**

*Names have been changed to protect the identity of participants

A further submission on Mission Australia's **Community Development Model** has been provided to the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet for consideration as part of this review.

¹ Ware, V-A. (2013) Mentoring programs for Indigenous youth at risk, AIHW. Available at: <http://www.aihw.gov.au/uploadedFiles/ClosingTheGap/Content/Publications/2013/ctgcrs22.pdf>

² Craven, R., Tucker, A., Munns, G., Hinkley, J., Marsh, H. & Simpson, K. (2005) Indigenous students' aspirations: dreams, perceptions and realities, DEST.

³ Circelli, M. & Oliver, D. (2012) Youth transitions: what the research tells us, NCVER.

⁴ Social Ventures Australia, SVA Employment Dialogue: Communique August 2013. Available at: <http://socialventures.com.au/assets/SVA-Employment-Dialogue-Communique-2013.pdf>

⁵ Gray, M., Hunter, B. & Lohar, S. (2012) Increasing Indigenous employment rates, AIHW. Available at: <http://www.aihw.gov.au/uploadedFiles/ClosingTheGap/Content/Publications/2012/ctg-ip03.pdf>

