

Strategies for  
increasing partnerships with local  
Aboriginal organisations

Western Sydney Community Forum  
&  
NSW Department of Community  
Services, Nepean

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## **Acknowledgments**

The Increasing Partnerships with Aboriginal Organisations Workshops were conducted in October and November 2002 and could only have occurred with the considerable time and efforts of a number of people. The contribution and commitment of the following is acknowledged:

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2. The Western Sydney Community Forum for co-ordination and organisation of venues, registrations and follow-up with participants
3. The following organisations for providing a venue for the three workshops
  - Aboriginal Culture and Resource Centre at Katoomba
  - Community Centre at North Richmond
  - Community Connections at Penrith
4. All workshop participants who contributed their ideas for inclusion in this report
5. Local organisations who considered the workshop important to release their workers to attend the workshops

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## **1. Summary**

The main purpose of this report is to provide a clear record of the processes and outcomes of the Increasing Partnerships with Aboriginal Organisations Workshops conducted during October and November 2002.

The workshops were co-ordinated by WSCF and funded by a slippage grant from NSW DoCS, Metro west Region, Nepean Network Office. The aim of the project was to conduct a series of workshops to facilitate discussion and generate ideas to improve Aboriginal people's access to mainstream services in three local areas, ie the Blue Mountains, Nepean and the Hawkesbury.

The gaining of cultural knowledge and wisdom is a lifelong process for many Aboriginal people as it is learnt and consolidated on a daily basis through a myriad of community and individual living, doing and learning. The capacity to facilitate culturally appropriate ways of interacting with Aboriginal people and their communities in a one-day workshop to people from a non-Aboriginal background is both a challenging and intricate process. The concept of a one-day workshop assumes that everything can be summarised into easy, bite size chunks for people to digest, process and integrate into their thinking and doing during a very short period.

Many Aboriginal people live with their culture on a day-to-day, indeed on a minute-to-minute, basis. The ability to explain particular aspects of their culture is not always an easy activity as people are saying what they do rather than doing what they know (as they do outside the training arena).

Non-Aboriginal people are encouraged to develop meaningful relationships with Aboriginal people in their local area to enable them to identify programs and activities that would best meet Aboriginal people's needs in their local area.

## **Recommendations for the future**

1. Establish a ½ day or full day "cultural forum" where participants can provide feedback, results of their action plans or documented case studies of their efforts and or achievements since attending the workshops in their local area
2. Formally identify and prioritise specific cultural training needs of organisations in the Blue Mountains, Nepean and Hawkesbury areas and if possible co-ordinate a "cultural forum"
3. Seek funding from local, state and federal sources to provide cultural awareness training about specific areas as they relate to Aboriginal people, their cultural practices and protocols and lifestyles
4. Provide a copy of this report to the following:
  - Western Sydney Community Forum
  - Department of Community Services - Metro West Region & DoCS Central Office
  - All participating organisations who sent staff to the workshops
5. Consider establishing an Aboriginal Advisory group to guide and advise WSCF in their work with Aboriginal communities



## **2. Overall workshop objectives**

The following workshop objectives were identified by the WSCF at the commencement of the project with the delivery of the workshops to be completed by November 2002:

1. A greater understanding of how partnerships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal services can be achieved
2. Increased awareness on a variety of strategies that increase access and equity for Aboriginal people accessing non-Aboriginal services
3. An increase in organisational problem solving skills

## **3. Workshop Attendances**

<b>Area</b>	<b>Venue</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Attendance</b>
Katoomba	Aboriginal Culture and Resource Centre	October 14, 2002	14 - 18
Penrith	Community Connections	October, 16 2002	12
North Richmond	North Richmond Community Centre	November 20, 2002	25

<p><b>4. Some helpful assumptions to make about working with Aboriginal people and their communities</b></p>
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1. Many Aboriginal people will want to participate in activities that enable them to relate to their own cultural context
2. Not all Aboriginal people are aware of their cultural background or where they come from or how they fit into their Aboriginal world or their local community as a result of the Stolen Generations
3. Many Aboriginal people will probably know about family groups in the area they live in or in other areas across the state. However contrary to popular opinion they do not know every Aboriginal person in their local community, state or at a national level
4. For many Aboriginal people their activities will be focussed around family and culture first and everything else – second
5. Aboriginal people in your local community may originally come from somewhere else, not necessarily the community you are working in (eg they might come from Dubbo which is Wiradjuri country or Newcastle which is Awabakal country)
6. What works in one Aboriginal community will not necessarily work in another just because it is Aboriginal
7. Most Aboriginal people have their own views on matters, which may be different to other Aboriginal people's views
8. Cultural protocols and practices vary from one community to another and need to be acknowledged as such
9. We always need to check our assumptions to make sure they are accurate
10. Not all Aboriginal people are interested in sharing their stories or participating in Aboriginal specific activities
11. Not all Aboriginal people from the same community speak with one voice – they may have different views and opinions
12. Not all Aboriginal people necessarily disclose their Aboriginality for their own reasons
13. Models of service delivery needs to recognise the importance and involvement of family groups eg aunties, grandmother in children's playgroups
14. In children's services, it is important to check with Aboriginal women how they want themselves and their children identified
15. Family needs tend to take precedence over projects, tasks and meetings
16. Meetings need to be arranged to facilitate best access for people who do not have their own transport
17. It is important to keep other people in the local Aboriginal community involved and informed about the project you are working on, despite the fact you may have Aboriginal representation on the group you are working on
18. Process is as important as the final outcome
19. An openness to doing things differently / using different processes to what is usually used

## **5. Guiding principles for working with Aboriginal people and their communities**

1. Identifying, acknowledgment and respect for cultural diversity
2. Acknowledging and respecting cultural protocols and practices
3. Inclusion of family in decision making to encourage ownership of processes and outcomes
4. Developing relationships with individuals before organisations
5. Respect for values, practices and beliefs (even when they are not obvious)
6. Partnerships and involvement
7. Ownership of ideas and projects
8. Culturally appropriate context
9. Respect / trust and relationship building
10. Ownership building through culturally appropriate activities
11. Key people of indigenous background to be involved or employed in activities
12. Do practical hands on stuff with the community to break the ice
13. Reinforcing cultural values and identity in Aboriginal people
14. Developing relationships with the local Aboriginal community
15. Participation and ownership

## **6. Successful strategies used by people when working with Aboriginal people and their families**

1. Have changed approaches when they didn't appear to work eg initially offered counselling to Aboriginal young people in correctional facilities, however involvement and participation was poor. The changed strategy was to involve the Aboriginal young person's family and seek ways that would ensure culturally appropriate ways of communicating
2. "I rang around and talked to "informal" groups that were generally excluded from the larger group meetings because they weren't necessarily known about"
3. Tapped into other links in the local area
4. Ensured people had ownership of the process, product and the outcome
5. Casual engagements with some members of the local Aboriginal community
6. Reviewed processes – from an Aboriginal perspective – with Aboriginal people involved

7. Recognition of different Aboriginal groups in the local area and they have different views, opinions and perspectives on matters
8. Recognising that local groups have access to important information
9. Asking questions
10. Important to learn about local history
11. Important to check if the local history is Aboriginal or European
12. Working with Aboriginal young people on a 1:1 basis, in small groups with those who have indicated an interest with an informal structure
13. Making personal connections and building relationships
14. Identifying and understanding particular issues
15. Use of alternative learning skills
16. Finding out how people are connected in their local community
17. Getting Aboriginal people involved in projects at step 1
18. "Project was only ever going to happen if we had Aboriginal women involved"
19. Established relationships with Aboriginal women at a state wide level
20. Ongoing consultation, discussion and research
21. "Talking, asking, listening, looking"
22. Working on community time rather than project time
23. Building trust
24. The process is just as important as the outcome
25. Long term process
26. Self-determination
27. Having a positive attitude

## **7. Suggested strategies for the future**

Workshop participants worked on action plans to consider implementing in their workplaces. The following sections summarises those areas that people worked on in different groups across the three different workshops.

### **Service Delivery**

#### **Project Area – Stormwater Development**

1. Find out who to talk to about the local area
2. Involvement from the local Aboriginal people
3. Inform land councils of the project
4. Make personal contacts with the local Aboriginal groups
5. Get permission from the local Aboriginal people for the commencement of the project
6. Work out a sample program
7. Attend meetings to make personal contacts
8. Review and provide feedback

#### **Children's Services – Awareness Exercise Building Relationships**

1. Introduce Aboriginal specific workers to local Children's Services Forum
2. Visit Aboriginal specific services to develop relationships and ideas
3. Source additional funding to support improving projects

### **Organisational Development**

#### **Staff Training**

1. Invite guest speakers and trainers
2. Network to gain access to training opportunities
3. Attend the train-the-trainer
4. Aim / outcome soft training – team will have after understanding
5. Delivery programs by networking with other agencies
6. Staff exchange between agencies
7. Identify gaps in existing skills and knowledge
8. Training skill requirements for identified positions
9. Management require skills – training to be able to own the project

## **Employment**

1. Develop policies and procedures on Access & Equity
2. Encouraging Aboriginal people to apply for advertised positions
3. Advertise in Aboriginal friendly publications ie Koori Mail, Indigenous Times
4. Ensure Aboriginal staff are provided with culturally appropriate supervision, identify their training needs

## **Locating Aboriginal organisations in the local area**

1. Ask as many sources as possible for the key Aboriginal contacts in your area - this information should come from Aboriginal people
2. Contact the NSW Aboriginal Land Council (NSWALC) at Parramatta on 9689 4444 and ask them for the details of the nearest Aboriginal Land Council to your area
3. Log onto the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) website [www.atsic.gov.au](http://www.atsic.gov.au) and locate the nearest ATISC office to your location and make contact
4. Log on to the NSW Local Aboriginal Lands Council address on [www.alc.org.au](http://www.alc.org.au) and check for your nearest land council
5. Contact your Local Government office <http://www.lgov.org.au/site/> to see if there is local Aboriginal consultative committee that works with Council on Aboriginal issues
6. Ask around to see if there is an Aboriginal interagency in your area or region
7. Talk to your local schools in your area to see if they have an ASSPA (Aboriginal Student Support Parent Awareness) committee or an Aboriginal Education Assistant (AEA) or an Aboriginal Community Liaison Officer (ACLO) or staff allocated for Aboriginal students who may assist you
8. In some areas there are Aboriginal Directories that detail Aboriginal organisations and people that work in the local area – ask around for one in your area
9. Try and develop a local community map that includes Aboriginal organisations and individuals

### **Local Aboriginal Network in the Blue Mountains**

The participants at the Blue Mountains Workshop identified these networks

- Local Elders
- Aboriginal Catholic Ministry - Maisie Cavanagh
- Children's Support worker at Penrith City Council
- Aboriginal Natural Resource Officers (ANROs) at Department of Land and Water Conservation
- Aboriginal Health – Clarke Scott and Craig Brown, (Jeff Lord at Wentworth Area Health Services)
- Durali Unit at University of Western Sydney
- PATSI Project at South Penrith Youth and Neighbourhood Service
- Family First at Nepean
- DoCS – Aboriginal Community Liaison Officer
- Centrelink
- Blue Mountains Support has an Aboriginal worker – Rose Lord
- Aboriginal Cultural Resources Centre – ACRC – Jacinta Tobin
- Link-Up at Lawson
- Gundungarra Tribal Council – Katoomba
- Cawarra Women's Refuge at Penrith – Theresa Cavanagh
- Dharug Corporation
- Derubbin Local Aboriginal Land Council
- Penrith Women's Refuge – Sue Bell
- Windraydne Aboriginal Land Council – Lithgow / Bathurst
- Greater Lithgow ATSIC
- Yangary – HACC at Mt Druitt
- Local artists and musicians
- Butucarbin Aboriginal Corporation

## **8. Strategies for strengthening organisational structures and management systems**

### **Policies**

- We have policies and procedures that respect local Aboriginal cultural practices and protocols
- We have written policies which are framed within access and equity principles and are reflected in our constitution, service agreements and strategic plans
- Our written policy statements refer to equal employment opportunity, anti-discrimination legislation and consumer rights
- Our policies include mechanisms for responding to complaints and grievances about services
- Our policies, programs and services are regularly reviewed, monitored and evaluated

### **Participation**

- There are procedures in place which ensure that Aboriginal people are provided with opportunities to participate in our organisation
- We encourage volunteers from the local Aboriginal community to participate in our organisation
- We encourage and invite Aboriginal people to be on our management committee and involve them in policy development, while ensuring that their participation is not tokenistic

### **Employment**

- Our service endeavours to employ Aboriginal people either on a full-time or part-time basis in both identified and mainstream positions
- We include skills recognition in selection criteria (language, local cultural knowledge)
- We include Aboriginal people on recruitment and selection and interview panels when selecting staff (both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal)
- We advertise for staff in culturally appropriate publications such as the Koori Mail or the Indigenous Times
- We have grievance mechanisms for industrial disputes in place with which our staff are familiarised and where possible we include culturally appropriate mediators

### **Training**

- We have an induction procedure for all members of our organisation which includes culturally appropriate information
- All of our staff and management committee members are trained in cross-cultural awareness
- We identify the training needs of organisational members, including committee members and funded workers, as well as volunteers

### **Communication**

- We make all organisational policies public and known to all staff and committee members
- We ensure internal communication systems are culturally appropriate and inclusive
- Our service uses professionally qualified interpreters, where considered appropriate, in situations of communication difficulty
- Our service has a user-friendly environment (eg. posters and material in plain English or using appropriate and relevant Aboriginal terms or language)
- We check with local Aboriginal contacts if are using the most appropriate terms before publishing

<b>9. Strategies for strengthening service delivery</b>
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### **Data Collection**

- We have culturally appropriate and sensitive methods of collecting quantitative and qualitative data relevant to the service
- We have developed performance indicators and these are evaluated regularly (eg. monthly/ yearly/other)
- We can describe the current demography of our service area as it relates to Aboriginal people
- We are able to indicate how many Aboriginal people use our services or access our programs
- We know how to get demographic information
- We are aware of the needs of Aboriginal people through quality research (rather than relying on perceptions)
- We are aware of the issues concerning the local Aboriginal community as presented by them (without relying solely on information provided by a few individuals within that community)
- We know how to get information about the issues and needs of Aboriginal people

### **Participation**

- Aboriginal staff have input into our service development on a regular basis

### **Networking**

- Our service is actively involved in local Aboriginal networks
- We have developed partnerships with Aboriginal organisational and key stakeholders.
- We link with key stakeholders including Aboriginal-specific workers and Aboriginal community groups in development of programs
- We know what Aboriginal services, workers and expertise are available and create links with them

### **Programs**

- We have developed and deliver some Aboriginal specific programs
- The generic programs we offer are designed with consideration of the needs of people Aboriginal people
- We are able to identify and deal with barriers, which disproportionately exclude Aboriginal people from participating (eg. need for transport, appropriate child care, hours of activities)

### **Information**

- Our information campaigns and publicity strategies include specific methods for informing consumers from Aboriginal backgrounds about our service, such as:
  - ✓ Respectful use of local Aboriginal terms
  - ✓ Advertising and promotions via Koori Mail or the Indigenous Times

**10. Resources that might be helpful**

1. **"A Question Of Understanding – A Guide supporting Neighbourhood and Community Center in working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples"** produced by the Local Community Services Association phone 02 9211 3644, [info@lcsa.org.au](mailto:info@lcsa.org.au)
2. **The National Directory of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Organisations**, published by IPR Shandwick Pty Ltd, MELBOURNE
3. **NSW Aboriginal Lands Council (NSWALC)**, phone 9689 4444, website <http://www.alc.org.au/about/about/about.htm>
4. **As a Matter for Fact Answering the myths and misconceptions about Indigenous Australians** – produced by ATSIC. 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition
5. **Teaching and Learning Resources – A Guide for delivering CEEW and WOW courses to Aboriginal women**, produced by TAFE NSW Access Division and Aboriginal Program Unit May 2002