Project Report

2006 Victorian Equity Projects – An Office of Training and Tertiary Education initiative

Project title: The Indigenous Community: Bridging the Skills Gap
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Project summary
Aust-Link Pty Ltd is a private RTO that delivers training in the Transport & Civil Construction Industries.

This Active Participation Training Program is a four-week Vocational Education & Training Program aimed at addressing skill shortages in the Transport & Civil Construction Industries. The program is designed to respond to the skill requirements, training needs and employment aspirations of the Indigenous Community in the Murray Valley Region.

The outstanding features of the program included the acceptance and support of the Indigenous Community, the relevant skills and work experience gained by the young Indigenous learners and employment outcomes for over fifty percent of the group.

The learners
The program targeted the Indigenous Community 18 years of age and above that expressed an interest in undertaking training and employment in the Transport & Civil Construction Industry.

Participants were drawn from the Murray Mallee Region. Three programs were conducted, two in Mildura and one in Robinvale with eight participants in each program.

Each program was of a 4-week duration, two being in Civil Construction and one in Transport.

The challenge
Access to training by the Indigenous community in the Transport & Civil Construction Industry has faced a number of barriers including:

- Low literacy and numeracy levels
- Limited or no work experience
- Community and family obligations
- Lack of drivers license
- No VET funding available
However severe skill shortages in the Transport & Civil Construction Industry and the demand for truck drivers provided the opportunity to open the door to new employment and certificate level training to a previously under utilized workforce.

**Your approach**

Our research with the Indigenous Community through the Murray Valley Wurreker Broker revealed the overwhelming interest, particularly from the male population in operating heavy machinery such as Skidsteer Loaders, backhoes, Front End Loaders and trucks and obtaining licenses to operate them and thus providing a pathway to employment.

This interest was supported by a survey of contractors by Employment Works Agency. The agency found that operators were hard to find particularly in the Robinvale – Swan Hill corridor and they would be prepared to give successful participants a go.

Aust-Link engaged a trainer/assessor who is a skilled Plant Operator, having gained his skills and experience in the Australian Armed Forces and with a number of city councils. This person is an Indigenous Australian and was an excellent leader and role model for the group.

Sensing the apprehension of the participants in classroom theory sessions due to barriers mentioned before, theory sessions were related to the practical components of the course. This learning was reinforced by questions and answers during morning and afternoon coffee breaks. Classroom theory sessions were simplified and remedial assistance was given to each participant on an individual needs basis.

Session one was a fun and ‘hands on’ equipment selection day. A range of plant equipment was on display such as trucks, Skidsteer Loader, Forklift, Cars, Motorcycle and scooters. Participants were encouraged to have ‘a go’ and select at least two items they would like to have included in their training program.

As a value added component and due to popular demand, motorcycle training and licensing was added to the program to enable participants to get to work once they were placed into employment – all participants gained at least two licenses.

**The results**

- Communication with the Indigenous Community Forum and the Job Networks supporting the participants
- Appointing an Indigenous Trainer/assessor/mentor
- Having an open day with all training plant & equipment available
- Simplifying theory and classroom sessions

The informal approach to the training facilitated confidence, understanding and mutual respect amongst the participants and trainer/assessors. The communication lines were open to the extent that participants and trainers learnt from each other. It was evident from the high level of attendance and eventual successful competency outcomes the project achieved its purpose – opening up employment opportunities and lifting the confidence of the participants. Within three months of completion of the program, all eight students had gained employment.
Lessons learned

We discovered that the participants were concerned they would not be valued, given the opportunity to have input into the course or be asked their opinion on issues. We then discovered that once they felt comfortable with the training environment they were very eager to show off their practical skills and competency around Plant & equipment. What became very evident and eventually contributed to the successful outcomes of the program was the mutual respect, communication and interaction of trainers and participants who shared their experiences in a way that everyone felt their contributions to the program was recognised and valued. Much of this was achieved over tea and lunch breaks where discussions on progress, their own experiences and idle chitchat led to develop a sense of belonging and well being.

Contact details for queries regarding the project

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