



SUBMISSION PAPER: EMPLOYMENT AN OPEN INVITATION

I hope you can provide some feedback to the *Community Discussion Paper: Improving employment outcomes for Aboriginal people* for the Ministerial Taskforce on Aboriginal Affairs (the Taskforce) to consider. Your submissions will help inform the work of the Taskforce in the development of a new Aboriginal affairs strategy for NSW. To help us understand who is providing views and ideas please mark the appropriate area/s:

- Aboriginal community organisation¹
- Non-Government organisation²
- School
- Non-Aboriginal Community organisation³
- Government agency
- Local Government
- Local Aboriginal Land Council
- Industry
- Aboriginal community group, including Community Working Parties and community engagement groups
- Individual – Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander
- Individual – Non-Aboriginal
- Postcode

Age Bracket

15-24 25-34 35-44 45-54 55-64 65+

¹ These include peak bodies, service providers and consultative groups

² Ibid

³ These include advocate groups and charities



Improving employment outcomes

Q1. What are some of the reasons for the low levels of employment amongst some Aboriginal people in your community, especially for young people?

Q2. Is there a need for better data and understanding of reasons for low levels of employment amongst some Aboriginal people? If yes, how can it be developed?

In considering the reasons for low levels of employment amongst Aboriginal people, it is essential to acknowledge the complex, interlocking nature of issues faced by Aboriginal communities and the impacts of inter-generational trauma. The [Bringing Them Home Report](#) found that the impacts of past policies of forced removal continue to resound through the generations of Aboriginal families. These impacts include: destruction of connection to community and culture; unresolved grief and trauma; high rates of depression, mental illness and self harm; domestic and family violence; and loss of parenting skills.

Aboriginal children and young people continue to be removed from their families at an unacceptable rate. As at June 30, 2011, Aboriginal children represented 33.9 percent of children and young people in care in NSW (see Department of Family and Community Services, Annual Report 2010-11, p99). Young people growing up in care are over-represented in the NSW statistics on early school leaving, poor physical and mental health, homelessness and juvenile justice. Employment outcomes for care leavers tend to be particularly poor (see [Family Matters, no.83, 2009](#)).

Aboriginal children and young people are also heavily over-represented in the juvenile justice system. Although only making up 4.3% of the population, in 2009/10, Aboriginal children and young people represent 49% of juveniles on detention and 38% of juveniles on remand (see Juvenile Justice, 2010 Annual Report Summary, p9). There is a strong association between juvenile offending, early school leaving and poor employment outcomes.

The high rate of hearing loss amongst Aboriginal children and young people is also a key factor impacting on employment outcomes. Hearing loss can lead to poor educational and literacy outcomes and consequent poor job prospects. The House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs [report on Indigenous youth in the criminal justice system](#) recognises the strong link between high rates of hearing loss, low levels of educational attainment, involvement of Aboriginal people in the criminal justice system and consequent poor employment outcomes. The report recommends that COAG implement a range of measures to address this issue including comprehensive hearing tests for all Aboriginal children starting preschool, with appropriate follow-up support.



Employment trends

Q3. How can government, private sector and the not-for-profit sector foster more job opportunities for Aboriginal people in growth industries over the next 10 years?

Q4. What can employers and training organisations (including those that are government based) do to assist Aboriginal people to get the skills and experience needed to be job and career-ready?

Employment projections by the Federal [Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations \(DEEWR\)](#) indicate that employment growth in the community welfare sector is expected to be very strong. Therefore, it is important that the NSW Government strategy include a focus on fostering job opportunities for Aboriginal people within this sector. This should include, for example, providing funding to support non-profit organisations working in the community services sector to help Aboriginal staff gain professional qualifications.

In 2007, UnitingCare Children Young People and Families (UnitingCare CYPF) introduced an Aboriginal Employment Strategy to create employment opportunities, traineeships and cadetships for Aboriginal people and to provide our staff with training, career development and mentoring (funded by DEEWR, see our submission to the Ministerial Taskforce on improving service delivery and accountability p. 2). Aboriginal staff numbers in UnitingCare CYPF have grown from 10 in 2007 when our Aboriginal Employment Strategy was introduced to 71 (9.49% of total UCCYPF staff) in 2010-11. From a strategic point of view, our experience demonstrates that there are a range of recruitment, mentoring and professional development opportunities which can support the creation of employment opportunities for Aboriginal people.

Our recruitment process has been guided by our Good Practice Guidelines for Recruitment and Retention of Aboriginal Employees. The Guidelines encourage program managers to use a range of proactive strategies to assist recruitment of Aboriginal staff such as developing relationships with Aboriginal employment agencies and Aboriginal workers within mainstream employment agencies. We also participate in Aboriginal focused employment expos as a way of encouraging Aboriginal people to apply for positions with our organisation.

UnitingCare Unifam and the UnitingCare Institute of Family Practice are using funds provided by the Australian Government's Attorney General's department to recruit six cadetships to Aboriginal people interested in working in the family relationship.



Q5. How can the skill and labour needs of NSW growth sectors, including in specific parts of NSW, be better matched to Aboriginal employment opportunities? What data is needed to support this?

(Question 4 continued from previous page)

sector. There will be two cadets placed in each of Unifam's three Family Relationship Centres (Fairfield, Campbelltown and Wollongong) to avoid isolation. The cadets will choose whether they work part or full-time and will be appointed on award wages.

On the Central Coast, the UnitingCare Burnside Brighter Futures program has worked in partnership with TAFE to provide an opportunity for Aboriginal staff working in the health and community services sector to gain a formal qualification in the Certificate IV in Community Services. Burnside is providing the venue and TAFE is providing the trainer. Three of the participants are from Burnside and nine are from other services such as an Aboriginal intensive family support service, an Aboriginal community housing provider and an Aboriginal medical service.

Our experience is that in areas like Dubbo, South West Sydney and the Central Coast, where we have recruited significant numbers of Aboriginal staff, these Aboriginal staff members are seen as leaders and role models in the general community, and other Aboriginal people are attracted to work in the organisation. For example, in the UnitingCare Burnside Child and Family team in Dubbo, 14 out of 20 positions are now filled by Aboriginal people. Whilst some of these positions are Aboriginal identified, Aboriginal staff have also been successful in being recruited to mainstream positions in the team.

Question 5

Organisations working in the health, education and community welfare sectors face significant challenges in recruiting Aboriginal staff in rural and remote areas. However, as the Productivity Commission has identified in its report on the [Early Childhood Development Workforce](#), workers who are recruited from, receive training in, or otherwise have experience with rural or remote areas are generally more willing to work in those areas. Increasing the number of training opportunities for Aboriginal people in rural and remote areas would improve staff recruitment and retention rates.



Challenges for employment growth

Q6. In your community, are there programs that have effectively helped Aboriginal people with complex needs to become job ready? If possible, please provide details of where it operates, how it works, its costs and evidence of success.

As an organisation, UnitingCare CYPF provides opportunities for Aboriginal people to move into traineeships and entry level positions with high levels of mentoring and support (rather than waiting until Aboriginal people are completely 'job ready').

Staff taking up these positions may not have formal qualifications and may lack confidence to undertake training. UnitingCare CYPF addresses this issue by providing on-site training which has been specifically designed to meet the needs of Aboriginal employees and their learning style. This training covers areas such as literacy, computer skill development and support, and support for staff to gain a Certificate IV in Community Services.

For example, a training program was run in collaboration with TAFE at the Burnside Out-of-Home Care Program in Dubbo, which supported staff, particularly older Aboriginal workers, to improve their literacy and computer literacy skills. The program identified that a number of staff had not received formal literacy and computer skills training, but were cautious to raise concerns based on a fear of being singled out or 'shamed'.

A TAFE teacher supported staff over a six-month period in weekly sessions. The training was conducted one-on-one with staff and focused on working with forms and templates that staff use in their daily work. The feedback from staff indicated that they valued receiving the training in an environment where they felt comfortable (rather than, for example, going to the TAFE campus) and the opportunity to work privately with the trainer.

We have also found that it is important to provide flexibility for Aboriginal people moving into employment. This includes, for example, enabling people to work two days a week initially, and gradually move into full-time employment.



Promoting responsibility and building individual and community capacity

Q7. What are some of the biggest barriers to Aboriginal people moving off welfare and into work?

Q8. How could Government make paid work more attractive than income support payments?

As the discussion paper acknowledges, Aboriginal people often face complex and multidimensional issues which impact on their ability to move into employment. The UnitingCare Australia network has identified that in these circumstances, single interventions will be ineffective and punitive approaches such as quarantining welfare payments, which do not address causal factors, are the wrong place to start. Rather, it is important to work respectfully with people to build their strengths and capacity to overcome significant hardship and build a better life for their children.

The attached case study shows how the UnitingCare Burnside Brighter Futures Program on the Central Coast has worked with one Aboriginal family to address domestic violence, child behaviour issues at school stemming from an undiagnosed disability, and social isolation. The case study highlights the importance of increasing the availability of family support services that can provide intensive and holistic support for Aboriginal families over a sustained period of time (see our submission to the Ministerial Taskforce on improving service delivery and accountability in Aboriginal Affairs, p34-37)

The [Allen Review of NSW Government Aboriginal Employment and Economic Development Programs](#) recognises that the disadvantage associated with poor early childhood development tends to have a compounding effect throughout the entire lifecycle. As the report identifies, the consequences of poor early childhood development include difficulties in making a successful transition to school, poor educational outcomes, early school leaving, and higher risk of unemployment and welfare dependency. Therefore, improving employment outcomes for Aboriginal people and reducing welfare dependency, will require greater investment in services for Aboriginal children in the early years. We strongly support this approach and we will expand on our comments on this issue in our submission to the Taskforce on improving education outcomes.

Our staff have also identified that homelessness is a major barrier to Aboriginal people moving into employment. Our experience is that families often relocate in search of employment, but are then unable to find affordable housing. Until a family has obtained stable housing it is very difficult to address other issues such as employment. This highlights the importance of addressing housing issues within the overall Government strategy for Aboriginal Affairs in NSW.



Government-private-community sector partnerships

Q9. How could more Aboriginal people, including young people, be encouraged to apply for public sector jobs in NSW? What could be done to better support Aboriginal people to remain in this sector?

Q10. What can government do to support people living in locations with limited employment to take up opportunities elsewhere, while maintaining connections with family and Country?

Question 10

UnitingCare CYPF does not support the idea that young Aboriginal people living in locations with limited employment should be encouraged to take up opportunities elsewhere. Many Aboriginal communities are losing their young people, and this is creating further fragmentation of communities and families. In our view, the focus of the Government response should be on providing training and employment opportunities in rural areas.



Government-private-community sector partnerships (continued)

Q11. How can government, non-government organisations and industry business partners improve any of the following with regard to improving employment opportunities for Aboriginal people across NSW?

- a) Increase the rate of retention;
- b) Improve cultural awareness of employers;
- c) Improve employment providers focus on long term, meaningful employment;
- d) Tailor skills development and/or training programs to reflect the projected growth and skills shortages; and/or
- e) Create employment opportunities in locations where they are currently limited.

UnitingCare CYPF has implemented a range of strategies which have contributed to improved retention of Aboriginal staff. Staff feedback indicates that the features which make us an attractive employer to Aboriginal people and which help retention include: high levels of mentoring and support (including both peer support and supervision); training opportunities; and scope for advancement within the organisation. Examples of specific strategies we use to improve retention include:

* The role of Jaanimili, our Aboriginal Services and Development Unit (see our submission on Improving Service Delivery and Accountability, p2) includes supporting the recruitment and retention of Aboriginal staff. This includes: linking all new members to the Aboriginal staff network; offering career guidance, support and coaching to members; aiding human resources processes; and organising regular gatherings of Aboriginal staff which provide an opportunity for peer support.

* All new staff are required to complete Introduction to Aboriginal Awareness training (see our submission on improving accountability and service delivery, p32)

* An internal review of recruitment and retention practices, identified that lone Aboriginal staff positions can result in staff feeling isolated and should be avoided where possible to improve staff retention.

* Providing support to staff in relation to 'sorry business' - managers are trained to understand and accommodate issues relating to grief and loss ; staff from Jaanimili, provide support for the emotional wellbeing of staff in relation to sorry business (in addition to the support available through our Employee Assistance Program).

* We are currently developing a training package for Aboriginal supervisors, which will take account of the specific needs and challenges faced by Aboriginal supervisors. We are also developing a training package for supervisors who work with Aboriginal staff, which will support the capacity of non-Indigenous supervisors to recruit and retain Aboriginal staff.



Additional Comments

This submission builds on, and should be read in conjunction with our submission to the Ministerial Taskforce on improving service delivery and accountability in Aboriginal Affairs. That submission includes background information on UnitingCare CYPF, our programs, and the role played by Jaanamili, our Aboriginal Services and Development Unit.

The [Allen Report](#) recommends that "Programs need to focus more on the complete 'pipeline' from early childhood through school and post-secondary education to sustained employment and career opportunities. Rather than just creating an identified position or undertaking a one-off or short-term business intervention, programs need to provide sustained levels of support." UCCYPF supports this approach. For example, there needs to be much greater emphasis on ensuring that traineeships lead to sustained employment.

We also note that the emphasis in the discussion paper is on assisting Aboriginal people to be 'job ready' and move into employment. This is important, but equally, the strategy should include a focus on supporting Aboriginal staff to advance in their careers and to take up management positions. Our submission on improving service delivery and accountability provides examples of how UnitingCare CYPF supports Aboriginal staff to move into leadership positions within the organisation (see p 12).

Submissions in relation to *Improving employment outcomes for Aboriginal people* should be lodged no later than **5pm Wednesday 29 February 2012**.

Written submissions can be forwarded via email to taskforce@dhs.nsw.gov.au.

or to:

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If you need more information or help to lodge your submission, please contact the Ministerial Taskforce on Aboriginal Affairs Secretariat on (02) 9219 0702.

Thank you again for your time and contribution, it is greatly valued.