

PRESENTERS:

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AND

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PAPER TITLE:

ABORIGINAL PEER MENTORING:
TEACHING A SOCIAL SUPPORT STRATEGY TO
ABORIGINAL MEN IN THE NSW PRISON SYSTEM

ABORIGINAL INMATE COMMITTEE MENTOR TRAINING PROGRAM

Before commencing the verbal presentation we will show the 3 minute section of the video, *Who Killed Malcolm Smith*, this shows the period immediately before his suicide, and the period immediately afterwards. (Malcolm Smith was an Aboriginal man whose death in custody was detailed in The Aboriginal Deaths in Custody Report). This video will impact upon the audience and will set the scene for the presentation.

- **Where did this course come from?**

The Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody identified lack of knowledge of access to resources and available services within the Correctional Centre as one contributing factor to Aboriginal Deaths in Custody. The Commission recommended that a support program be provided within correctional centres for newly received Aboriginal inmates.

As a result of this recommendation, the Department of Corrective Services in consultation with TAFE has established a mentor program, in which Aboriginal inmates have formed Committees to take responsibility for inducting new inmates into the Correctional Centre's systems. These committees advise the new inmates of procedures and norms within that Centre; give them information on legal issues, medical, welfare, education and parole services within that Centre; and act as an information source, support and mentor to the new inmates.

Program:

The course runs for a total of 60 hours, and the participants in each Correctional Centre, are Aboriginal Support Committee members, of varied backgrounds. The participants ages range from early 20's to late 50's, and their literacy levels can range from very low, to high, in some cases.

Not all Aboriginal inmates can be members of a Committee, inmates have to be assessed as suitable to do the course. Their suitability to partake in the course is assessed by the Aboriginal Delegate, Regional Aboriginal Project Officer (R.A.P.O), and the Regional Commander.

Aims:

The program has a primary aim of developing the self esteem and effectiveness, both of individuals and of the group.

Differences from other courses:

- Group run

- Aboriginal based
- Addresses Aboriginal community needs
- Responsibilities of the group
- Contact with different outside agencies

Course Content:

- Role of a mentor
- People skills
- Aboriginal Issues
- Information collection, organisation and dissemination
- Correctional centre rules, regulations and procedures
- Legal Issues
- Welfare Issues
- Health
- Education
- Probation and Parole

Many different teaching materials are used to teach this course:

- guest speakers
- group work
- group roles
- videos
- overheads
- hand outs.

Course Outcomes:

When they have completed the course Aboriginal Committee members will be able to:

- use relevant knowledge, attitudes and skills to clearly inform and act as mentors to newly received inmates;
- work efficiently as a cohesive group to achieve the aims of the support program;
- have confidence in their role as a Committee member and mentor;
- retain and utilise a Mentor Resource Kit in their correctional centre;
- effectively negotiate their needs within the boundaries of their correctional centre system.

In effect, The Aboriginal Mentor Training Program encompasses Inter-Cultural Communication, and Aboriginal Cultural Values in addition to Aboriginal Mentor Training.

There are minor differences in the course related to the goal of incarceration. Louise will discuss MRRC and her delivery of the course there:

On arrival at any correctional centre inmates have to adapt to the system in which they now live, a system which is completely foreign to their life on the outside. MRRC is different to many other correctional centres as gates etc. are not operated manually, but electronically.

Discuss all of the following:

- * arrival
- * induction screening
- * electronic devices
- * the fact that everything is written
- * that the arrival period for Aboriginal people is like living within two worlds.

Play the song - Tell Me Now.

Alison will discuss the program, and her delivery of it at MMTC:

MMTC is totally different to MRRC, it is not electronically controlled, it is a very old gaol with very basic facilities, and all gates etc. are opened manually. Nevertheless, the environment here is also completely foreign to new inmates and has no resemblance whatsoever to their life on the outside.

Play student's poem.

What is the importance of this course?

- self reliance
- self respect
- roles
- responsibilities
- use of knowledge to help other inmates

A positive aspect of this course is that often it is the introduction to education within the correctional centre for many of the students, the course bolsters their self esteem and confidence and this enables them to feel comfortable in a classroom environment. Because of this, students who have completed this course often enrol in other courses offered within the Correctional Centre. Many Aboriginal students, have historically, had a very poor relationship with the educational system while at school, and as a result many leave school with very low literacy levels. To be able to participate in education while incarcerated and to improve their reading and writing skills as well as taking part in other courses such as maths, computers and communications, benefits these students and the community, when they are released back into society.

Restraints of working in a correctional facility:

- Ideally, a hold should be put on inmates who commence this course to enable them to finish it before being moved to another Correctional Centre. If inmates

are moved before finishing the course they may not be able to participate in this course at the Correctional Centre they are sent to, ie. because it is not offered there or there is limited access to education , and therefore their potential expertise will be lost. Even if the Centre they are sent to runs this program it is very hard for inmates to leave one group and join another.

- Because the course is a group activity, if a participant is moved before completing the course it causes anxiety and disjunction for the particular inmate and for the remaining participants of that group.

Discuss the Aboriginal run concept of a Correctional Centre:

- Truth Circle
- Elders
- Commitment
- Culture
- Traditional hunting techniques

Show a clip from the video - Yetta Yetta.

REFERENCE

TAFE NSW Aboriginal Inmate Committee Mentor Training Program.