

INTERPRETERS AND SEA DOGS – SUCCESS OF PARTNERSHIPS

Madonna Cochrane

Senior Education Officer
Darwin Correctional Centre
Department of Justice NT
PO Box 1407
Darwin NT 0801
Telephone: 08 89220 166
Facsimile: 08 89 220 121
Email: Madonna.Cochrane@nt.gov.au

Abstract

In July 2004 the Darwin Correctional Centre - Education and Vocational Training Unit embarked on an ambitious project to train the first Aboriginal Language Interpreters for the Northern Territory within a prison. This was to be the first time that a prison had entered into a partnership with another provider and an employer to achieve what seemed to be the impossible, a Diploma of Interpreting – Indigenous Languages.

The project was an important wheel in providing indigenous communities with qualified and well trained, male, Aboriginal Interpreters to serve their communities in the areas of health services, telephone interpreting services, community administration and courts, to name a few.

Less than twelve months later, the first success of this project was witnessed in the form of the Aboriginal Language Interpreter Graduation Ceremony at Darwin Correctional Centre. The participants have guaranteed and rewarding employment as professional Indigenous Interpreters with the Northern Territory Aboriginal Interpreter Service upon their releases.

The Deckhand's Course, another innovative project at Darwin Correctional Centre, was born from an Adult Learner's Week exhibition at the prison in September 2004. The exhibition was designed to give prisoners information about training providers and training options for when they left prison.

The Seafood and Maritime Industries Training (SMIT) display was extremely popular. There was a static display with brilliant

photographs and the speaker quickly engaged his audience. The prisoners were excited about participating in this type of training upon release and its potential for employment.

The SMIT Representative was convinced that he could deliver a deckhand's course within the prison, given some innovation and planning, so that these prisoners could take the opportunity in the first instance. The funding for this project came from DEET NT for 'Australians Working Together 2005', and is based on a partnership between SMIT and Darwin Correctional Centre. Prisoners gain training and qualifications in the Certificate II in Seafood Industry – (Fishing Operations). It has been a very popular course.

Introduction

“ Social exclusion is a shorthand label for what can happen when individuals or areas suffer from a combination of linked problems such as unemployment, poor skills, low incomes, poor housing, high crime environments, bad health and family breakdown”. (Social Exclusion Unit 2001:1)

This widely held definition of social exclusion, most appropriately describes the circumstances of many people who become incarcerated, and who at some stage of their incarceration will participate in education and vocational training programs. The definition can be attributed more specifically to reflect the current conditions experienced by Aboriginal people living on communities in the Northern Territory. Many of whom become incarcerated at some stage during youth or adulthood.

It is the aim of governments through current public sector management policy, to engage partnership arrangements with public sector agencies, private sector, industry, communities and other stakeholders in providing services which build wealth, productivity, skills, ownership and self-determination. Partnerships induce collaborative efforts for the equitable distribution and utilization of finite resources to achieve the most effective outcomes. This is the most practical way to reduce economic and social exclusion.

“Improving opportunities for participation in education, particularly VET, in Australia is seen as a way of addressing inequity in the community. Particularly disadvantaged groups have been identified as women, Indigenous people, people with disabilities, those with English as their second language, people with inadequate literacy

and numeracy skills people from remote areas, as well as prisons. (Noonan2003)

Within a correctional environment this initiative includes the rehabilitation and re-integration of prisoners back into their respective communities and the wider community as a whole. It is with these foci that the Education and Vocational Training area at Darwin Correctional Centre entered into partnerships for delivery of projects such as the Aboriginal Interpreter course and the Deckhand's course.

Aboriginal Interpreters

Developing partnerships with one or more private providers to deliver unique and innovative courses to prisoners within the confines of prison is an exercise in dogged determination, absolute faith, cognitive gymnastics and lateral thinking. There is no one formula and no magic wands to wave.

In July 2004 the Darwin Correctional Centre - Education and Vocational Training Unit embarked on an ambitious project to train the first Aboriginal Language Interpreters for the Northern Territory within a prison. This was to be the first time that a prison had entered into a partnership with another provider and an employer to achieve what seemed to be the impossible, a Diploma of Interpreting – Indigenous Languages.

Past attempts to start this project had failed prior to it leaving the drawing board for reasons such as prisoner transfers, insufficient number of participants who met the pre-requisites and so forth.

The project was an important wheel in providing indigenous communities with qualified and well trained, male, Aboriginal Interpreters to serve their communities in the areas of health, telephone interpreting, community administration and liaison, and courts to name a few.

Less than twelve months later, the first success of this project was witnessed in the form of the Aboriginal Language Interpreter Graduation Ceremony at Darwin Correctional Centre. The participants have guaranteed and rewarding employment as professional Indigenous Interpreters with the Northern Territory Aboriginal Interpreter Service upon their releases.

The course commenced with six participants and one withdrew due to difficulties with literacy, another was released to parole three quarters of the way through the course. His training continued back

on the community and he commenced his interpreting career there. He has not returned to prison. Four of the six participants completed the course in prison and graduated in prison. One was paroled several days later and two of the remaining three are due for release towards the end of this year.

Prerequisites and Target Groups

Prerequisites for participating in the Diploma of Interpreting included:

- participants being speakers of either Murrinh-patha (Port Keats region); Djambarrpuyngu (North-East Arnhem region) or Anindilyagwa (Groote Eylandt)
- participants having at least twelve months or more to serve of their sentences to allow time for completion of the course
- participants having proficiency in English Language at Certificatell in Spoken and Written English Level.
- small groups of up to four in each language group for role-playing purposes
- preferably male participants
- participants not involved in therapeutic programs according to their sentence plans

The pre-requisites were strategic to the success of the course and in meeting the identified needs of the relevant communities and participants.

Identified needs

Groote Eylandt and Port Keats were the most problematic communities in the Northern Territory at the time. These communities were experiencing high incidence of violence, drug and alcohol abuse, chronic, long-term unemployment and endemic health problems. All these factors lead to higher incidences of crime and higher rates of incarceration of males from these communities.

There were shortages of appropriately skilled interpreters from these communities to work in areas such as the courts, health, community administration and for community liaisons in general.

Issues of male indigenous health were becoming more difficult to resolve, especially in the areas of sexual and reproductive health. It is uncommon for traditional Aboriginal men to visit a doctor or health worker when they become ill, and often treatable illnesses linger until they are chronic or life threatening. Some of these

illnesses are highly contagious and potentially have long-term effects on the entire community.

The majority of Aboriginal Interpreters in the Northern Territory are women and it is not culturally appropriate for women to talk to men about men's business and vice versa. Also, the kinship system of Aboriginal culture precludes certain people from talking to each other. This can be even more limiting in small communities.

The majority of prisoners who come from Port Keats and Groote Eylandt have very low levels of functional English language oracy and literacy. Many of the younger generation have limited to no formal schooling and have never been employed.

Inter-generational unemployment can influence an individual's status in relation to the work force. (Dunn&Holtz-Eakin2000;Hout & Rosen1999; Huang 2000; Rubenstein & Tsiddon 1999). This is evident when interviewing prisoners from these communities and they indicate that they have no employment histories. The experience of one generation to the next becomes accepted and sense of purpose diminishes.

Aboriginal people are traditionally nomadic and within their bands they had a sense of belonging and contribution through their roles as hunters or gatherers. This was their equivalent of a workforce. When they were brought into missions, they were given skills and jobs. However, since the abolition of missions, there have been limited jobs and appropriate training. In some communities it created the reverse sentiment and anything that resembled non-Aboriginal culture was rejected, such as learning to read, write and speak English. This has led to a loss of purpose and social decay.

Partners

The needs of these communities could not be addressed by any one stakeholder working in isolation. Therefore, it was decided that the Northern Territory Correctional Services RTO in collaboration with other stakeholders could start to address some the communities' needs through accredited training of male Aboriginal Interpreters.

The partnership included Northern Territory Correctional Services – Darwin Correctional Centre, Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Education and the Northern Territory Aboriginal Interpreter Service.

Objectives of the Project

There were seven main objectives of this project. They included:

- delivery of accredited training to provide qualified Aboriginal Interpreters to represent their communities
- training of Interpreters for the language groups identified
- training of male interpreters to work in areas of health, community administration and liaison and the judicial system
- delivery of training to work with and accommodate diversity
- delivery of training within the scheduled time frame
- to create employment pathways and continued mentoring of course participants upon release from prison
- to contribute to self-determination of Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory

Content and Process

The best of plans crumble when the content and process are not well defined and the human factor can reduce the best of plans to crisis status. Prisons have a structured day and regardless of this routine, events can rapidly change the structure of activities. It requires flexibility and contingency planning, and the ability to make changes and rapid decisions.

Staffs from the agencies met to plan delivery schedules, identify and mobilize human and physical resource requirements and negotiate strategic operations of the plan to work within a secure environment. Each member was responsible for co-ordinating their own area and the over all co-ordination and responsibility for the project was conducted by the Senior Education Officer.

The team included the following members: Deputy Superintendent of Operations, Course Co-ordinator Batchelor Institute, NT Interpreter Service Co-ordinator, internally employed Literacy Lecturers and the Senior Education Officer Darwin Correctional Centre. At all times, there was a clear and direct line of communication between the team members with the Senior Education Officer as the conduit, and information was regularly communicated with sufficient time to respond to unplanned events or obstacles.

The participants were selected according to the pre-requisites and canvassed as to their motivation to complete the course. A meeting was held by the NT Aboriginal Interpreter Service and BIITE with the candidates and they were briefed on the course content and course requirements, as well as the employment pathways created for them by the project. They were given the option to become full-

time students to ensure that they were not financially penalized within the prisoner employment remuneration system.

The content of the course consisted of prescribed units of study within the Diploma of Interpreting - Indigenous Languages and the scheduling of delivery coincided with the course content. The content of the course was designed specifically by Batchelor Institute and was culturally appropriate to include diversity and quality of training.

The participants were enrolled in the diploma through BIITE. All of the participants were enrolled internally in Literacy Support classes which were conducted by two Darwin Correctional Centre Literacy Lecturers. This practice relates to AQTF Standards for Registered Training Organizations and is consistent with the national strategy, *Partners in a Learning Culture*.

“Many Australian Indigenous Languages, including Aboriginal English and Creole languages, are largely oral and are seldom written down. Indigenous Australians are often developing and applying literacy skills in their second and third language, Standard Australian English... therefore the literacy skills of learners must be considered when developing training.” (Robertson, Sclanders, Zed & Donaldson 2004)

It is essential that Literacy and Numeracy skills are taken into account when planning training for Indigenous participants. Literacy Support classes were scheduled for other times during the week. They did not run concurrently with the Interpreting classes or workshops. It was decided in the planning stages that having a Literacy Lecturer working with participants at the same time could change the focus of the activities or even inhibit them. Also, there were activities where it was not culturally appropriate for females to be present. However Literacy Support Lecturers did work in collaboration with students and the training providers.

Initially, classes for the Interpreter course were scheduled for half a day once a week and gradually increased to workshops conducted in fortnightly blocks. This allowed for the participants to gradually build up to the intensity of their studies and practise new skills one step at a time.

There was a multiplicity of planning and the balance was intricate. Behind one scheduled session was a layer of other schedules to accommodate the number of different agencies and sub-agencies and their commitments at that point in time. It facilitated the use of specialist lecturers from interstate or for local lecturers to deliver the other part of their lecturing commitments throughout the NT or

as far away as Northern Western Australia. Specialist Lecturers from the NT Aboriginal Interpreter Service were often called to interpreting appointments at short notice.

In the event that a Lecturer was not able to attend at short notice, the SEO would arrange study sessions for the participants. This ensured that the routine remained consistent and reinforced and supported a study ethic. It kept participants focused and morale high. Participants need to see that they are not forgotten or they give up hope very quickly in a prison environment.

The participants were so motivated that shortly after the course commenced they organized their own weekend study sessions. This was done in their own spare time and under their own direction. They had formed their own support group and if one was sick and could not come to class they made sure that he was supported and brought up to date on tasks.

It was interesting to observe the participants reciprocating the degree of co-operation, dedication and persistence which the project team demonstrated to them throughout the course. It is also worthwhile to note that the support group which the participants started of their own volition is an indicator of self-determination at the individual and group level. If they could do this in a prison, what are they capable of doing back in their own communities as elders and Interpreters who are vital to their communities' communications capacity?

Were objectives met and outcomes fulfilled?

Overall the delivery of the Interpreter course ran well considering it was delivered in a prison environment. There were moments when contingencies had to be activated and situations were avoided because of the clear communication, commitment by all stakeholders including participants, flexibility of process and preparedness of the stakeholders to make adjustments, consistent focus on the objectives and constant monitoring of the plan.

- Accredited training was delivered and assessment successfully completed.
- The content of their courses focused on interpreting dialogues; integrating bi-cultural aspects in behaviour and communication; effective communication with professionals, clients and others, maintaining effective management practices and maintaining professional and personal development. All of which are used in the areas of health, courts and community liaison.

- Delivery of the course was completed ahead of schedule. Participants graduated on the 1 April 2004 from the Diploma of Interpreting – Indigenous Languages from Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Education NT.
- Creation of future learning and employment pathways, mentoring and monitoring post release through NT Aboriginal Interpreter Service.
- Role-modelling for other community members and a mechanism for self-determination for the respective communities was created.

The objectives were met and the outcomes of this project have provided a path for greater inclusion of the relevant Aboriginal communities; creating linkages of agencies and finite resources to deliver a service to address problems in the communities. This project was not designed to solve each of the problems discussed earlier, but could be used as a mechanism for change.

Deckhand's Course

At the time of writing this paper, the Deckhand's Course pilot project is still being delivered. The project is due for completion on 30 September 2005.

The Deckhand's Course, another innovative project at Darwin Correctional Centre, was born from an Adult Learner's Week exhibition at the prison in September 2004. The exhibition was designed to give prisoners information about training providers and training options for when they left prison.

The Seafood and Maritime Industries Training (SMIT) display was extremely popular. There was a static display with brilliant photographs and the speaker quickly engaged his audience. The prisoners were excited about participating in this type of training upon release, and its potential for employment.

The SMIT Representative was convinced that he could deliver a Deckhand's course within the prison, given some innovation and planning, so that these prisoners could take the opportunity in the first instance. The funding for this project came from DEET NT for 'Australians Working Together 2005 Grant, and is based on a partnership between SMIT and Darwin Correctional Centre. Prisoners gain training towards qualifications in the Certificate II in Seafood Industry – (Fishing Operations). This is not delivered as the full qualification, but as a short course consisting of six units from the certificate.

Part of the course focuses on net and rope mending skills. These skills have the potential to be taken back to coastal communities around the Top End and further developed into net and rope mending business enterprises within the communities. Fishing trawlers have only one place between Broome W.A., and Cape York Qld., to mend their nets; that is Darwin. There are many coastal communities in this vast area, which could fill the demand and provide many community members with employment.

Identifying a suitable project

It was identified that there was a need for an innovative course which would introduce new skills to prisoners and provide new employment pathways for the re-integration of prisoners back into the community. It was desirable to have a course which was inclusive of a large range of prisoners and still focus on prisoners from communities which had been identified as having problems with unemployment, and were representative of higher rates of incarceration. These were previously identified in the Interpreter Course project and continued to remain in the forefront of project focus.

At the Adult Learner's Week exhibition in September 2004, many prisoners showed an interest in the Deckhand's training. It was novel and offered skills which could be translated to a variety of employment areas, including self-employment. Also, it focused on skills needed for maritime activities in coastal areas, which could be used for tidal and inland waterways; thus appealing to many prisoners from the Top End.

Community and Industry Consultations

Prior to the inception of this project the Correctional Centre did not have a formal mechanism for community consultation with Aboriginal communities. Earlier this year it was consolidated by a meeting between senior management and Aboriginal Elder representatives from communities throughout the Northern Territory.

In order to overcome this paucity in Aboriginal community consultation, advices were sought through alternate avenues:

- NT Department of Education, Employment and Training – Indigenous Field Officer for Port Keats and the Western Top End
- Community elders who were in prison at the time (two of whom have been released and are now representatives on the Visiting Elder's Committee)

- Indigenous professionals who regularly have contact with the communities and who grew up in these communities.
- Seafood and Maritime Industry representatives who deliver training in Top End communities
- Representatives of ATSIS
- Prison staff who have worked and lived in the communities and who have close contact with prisoners from the communities.
- Surveys of prisoner interest in the course.

Prior to the commencement of the course, a consultant for the Department of Justice, questioned the cultural appropriateness of this course in relation to teaching rope and net mending skills to Indigenous men. He used the example of the Tiwi Islands where it is traditionally women's work to make fishing nets and baskets. This comment was addressed through seeking additional information from an indigenous representative of Port Keats, as to the appropriateness of teaching rope and net mending skills to men from his community (one of the target groups of the project) and other communities nearby. His response was that he had recently read an anthropological account whereby the men of those communities would make rope and nets when hunting slowed down. While the men were sitting in the camp they would twine rope and encourage women and children to do the same. It allowed them to supplement their diet with fish when the supply of land animals decreased. Often the practice would include the whole community.

Target Group

Participants identified for the target group consisted of the following:

- Prisoners from Aboriginal communities where aquaculture and fishing activities are a part of everyday life
- Prisoners who had listed fishing as one of their recreational activities
- Prisoners who wanted to do Sea Ranger and Ranger courses
- Prisoners who wanted to do Aquaculture courses
- Prisoners who wanted to work in the Seafood and Maritime Industry
- Indigenous and non-Indigenous prisoners
- Prisoners who had been disadvantaged by long-term unemployment
- Prisoners with learning and, or physical disabilities
- Male prisoners close to the end of their sentences

There were no prerequisite skills for this course.

Partners

This is a partnership between Seafood and Maritime Industry Training (SMIT)RTO and Darwin Correctional Centre – Education and Vocational Training RTO. Under the terms of the partnership agreement, SMIT delivers the training and assessment of the short course from the Certificate II in Seafood Industry- Fishing Operations and Darwin Correctional Centre delivers Literacy and Numeracy support collaboratively and concurrently with the training. Both of the trainers work as a team to ensure that the course is delivered and support is maintained for the literacy skills required for working in the industry. It is a good medium to deliver literacy with hands-on tasks so that trainers can introduce new terminology and build on both written and oral/aural skills. Aboriginal people traditionally learn through kinaesthetic and visual methods. It is the perfect opportunity to increase Literacy and Numeracy skills through practical application.

Disabilities

Many of the course participants have identified disabilities such as hearing and vision impairment and medical problems which can limit their learning in conventional settings, reduce skills and obstruct learning and employment pathways.

When visual and kinaesthetic methods are used to train disabled people, the disability can be better accommodated and obstacles to learning are more easily overcome. If a participant is hearing impaired they can still learn through seeing and doing. Also, if a participant has auditory processing difficulties, seeing practical demonstrations improves their ability to understand and react to what they are learning in the first instance. It short-circuits initial barriers which consume training time whilst trying to solve the communication problem. It is important that all educators and trainers working with Indigenous adults in the NT, are aware of the high incidence of hearing impairment and auditory processing problems faced by the majority of their students.

If a participant has vision problems, they can use their senses of touch and hearing to complete an action. Of course there are other methods and aids to accommodate these disabilities, as well. With most of our student who experience vision impairment they are referred to an optometrist, but in a prison this can mean months of waiting. In order to overcome this problem the Education/Vocational Training area has a variety of reading spectacles available. These were purchased from a pharmacy and suffice for the short term until the student can obtain prescription spectacles.

Some participants have medical conditions such as diabetes or heart disease which can leave them lethargic, especially by the afternoon session. In most afternoon sessions there is a video component of training, featuring water safety, OH&S and other units of competency. This allows the participants to continue training, but at a slower pace and does not require the level of concentration.

Delivery

Most, who have never worked in a prison, think that prisoners are a captive audience. This is quite the contrary, with most prisoners having quite hectic weeks attending education/vocational training, rehabilitation programs, work, visits, court appearances and so many more daily activities. Their structured day is short in comparison to our daily lives, because their out-of- cell time is very short (up to five hours per day) and there are often many things to do in this limited time frame.

In order to avoid an overload effect on the participants which can contribute to withdrawals from courses, it was decided that the Deckhand's course was to be delivered one day per week for thirty weeks. This way, participants could still meet their commitments and have more opportunity to complete the course. Also, Fridays were chosen for delivery of the course, because on Fridays there were not as many programs/courses being delivered and competition for participants' time was less. The course has been considered more of an interesting and enjoyable activity for winding down the week. However, this does not detract from the fact that it is accredited training and assessed to national standards.

Initially, it was planned that the Deckhand's course would be delivered in the Low Security Area of the prison where there are more appropriate places and resources for delivery and practice of skills. Just prior to the commencement of the course, the previous Superintendent would not approve delivery in this area due to operational constraints and it had to be located in the main compound, which is medium security. Due to this, improvisation and flexibility of delivery had become key foci.

Unlike the Interpreter's course, the trainers for the Deckhand's course have remained constant and there has been no need for specialist lecturer involvement.

Desired Outcomes

The desired outcomes for this course are:

- retention of participants
- completion of the units of competency – short course
- participants learn new and interesting skills
- inclusion and accommodation of participants with disabilities
- create pathways for future employment
- create pathways for further learning/training
- improved Literacy and Numeracy skills
- team skills
- transference of skills back to Top End communities with the prospect of community involvement and the possibility of future, business enterprise opportunities

Conclusion

It has been recognized that the key elements underpinning successful education and vocational training and the transition to further training and employment pathways for students include the following:

- *explicit and well articulated pathways*
- *community partnerships*
- *lifelong learning skills and attributes*
- *enterprise and innovation*
- *career information and guidance, and access to student services*
- *individual assistance for students at risk*
- *supportive institutional and funding arrangements*
- *monitoring and evaluation. (ANTA Blueprint 2000 to 2005)*

The two pilot projects delivered at DCC were completely different, and were delivered in accordance with the values and elements of the referred to above. It is through successful partnerships that a prison RTO with very limited resources can apply the elements and inclusive framework for delivering education and vocational training.

The Interpreter's Course was strategically and logistically difficult due to the number of stakeholders, operations of a secure environment, limited resources and limited number of suitable participants. It had no ascribed budget, and funding for delivery was provided by Batchelor Institute through their recurrent funding. The Literacy/Numeracy Support training, and physical resources were funded through the Darwin Correctional Centre

Education/Vocational Training Unit the budget. Regardless of the limitations faced, this course was highly successful.

The Graduation Ceremony took place within the prison on 1 April 2005 to celebrate the dedication, efforts and achievements of the participants. It was also a tool for restoring dignity and pride which are necessary ingredients to empowerment on the path to self-determination.

The Deckhand's course has been much easier strategically and logistically. It has fewer stakeholders, which keeps it a simple project. It has been amply funded through DEET and the Australians Working Together 2005 Grant. This pilot project has the potential to deliver more training in the future under either the same or different partnership/funding arrangements. This will be investigated after reviewing the outcomes of the pilot project.

It is essential that partnerships for funding and delivery of accredited training of prisoners should not be left solely to correctional centres. One day prisoners are going to be released and they will no longer fall within the jurisdiction of the correctional centres which have trained and promoted pathways for them. It is essential that the community, other government agencies and private sector contribute to the re-integration of prisoners through post-prison training and employment projects. After all, it is the community who bears the cost of recidivism and needs to be investing in the safety, well being and productivity of the community.

References

ANTA, Partners in a Learning Culture- Blueprint for Implementation from 2000 until 2005, p 30

Commission of the European Communities (2001) Draft Joint Report on Social Inclusion, Communications from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, The Economic and Social Committee of the Regions, European Commission, Brussels. 2001:1

Giles, M et al., NCVET 2004, To train or not to train- The role of education in prison to transition. p 23

Noonan, P., 2003, Enquiry in education and training in correctional services, The role of training in prison to work transition, Giles, M et al., NCVET Adelaide 2004, p18,

Robertson, R et al., 2004 Working with Diversity: Quality Training for Indigenous Australians, ANTA, p 25

Robertson, R et al., 2004, Working with Diversity: Quality for Training for People with Disabilities, ANTA

