



## **THE REPLAY GROUP**

### **Submission to DEEWR**

### **How Employment Services can be improved**

**March 2008**

#### **The Replay Group's EQS (Employment Qualifications and Support) Program**

The Replay Group's (Replay) Program delivers a new model of education to the Indigenous Community. The two previous models namely, employment and then training or training and then employment, have serious flaws. Replay's EQS Program has been designed to overcome such flaws. Employment and training walk hand in hand over a period of 26 weeks after which the Employee graduates with the relevant professional Vocational Qualification and has had valuable "real" work which usually leads to on-going employment. A survey conducted by Replay showed that after two years from graduation, 86% of the EQS Program Graduates were still in the relevant profession.

The EQS Program also leads to generational change with many successful graduates of the Program encouraging their siblings, parents or children to take part. For example, in Victoria, one successful Graduate from the 2004 EQS Aged Care Program, who is presently graduating from university as a registered nurse, encouraged her sons to take part in Replay's EQS Welding Program. Both sons are about to graduate with a Certificate III in Fabrication and will, within the year, complete their welding apprenticeships. They are both highly regarded in the workplace and will probably continue in the workplace that Replay secured for them.

It must be noted that a variation on the EQS Program is operating in the Northern Territory but in essence the philosophy is the same.

## **Phase 1**

### **Recruitment of Mainstream Employers**

Replay recruits employers into the Program in the two skill shortage areas of Aged Care and Child Care and in Victoria and the Northern Territory (NT) Welding is also included.

These areas provide Indigenous Participants with the opportunity to engage in sustainable career pathways. Experience in Aged Care opens the door to the whole of the Health Industry. Experience in Child Care is a precursor to the Educational Sector and Welding leads into the Engineering and Construction Industry.

Recruiting employers is difficult as the image portrayed in the media has to be overcome and employers have to be able to see the benefit to their own organization in employing an Indigenous person, particularly as a trainee.

### **Recruitment of Indigenous Employees**

Using its Job Search capacity Replay recruits Indigenous people to fill the acquired mainstream jobs.

It is Replay's experience that there is an overwhelming demand from the Indigenous Community for the Program. For example, in the present NSW Program Replay has had more than one thousand applications for a total of 80 positions. Most of the applications are directly from the applicants which indicates a strong interest and initiative. Only a few applications come through Job Network Members (JNMs) Consultants.

### **Matching the Prospective Indigenous Employee to the Employer**

After two initial Replay interviews, which are also mentoring mechanisms, Replay organizes interviews for the prospective employees with the relevant employer. Usually more than one prospective employee is interviewed. The employers are usually impressed with the standard of candidates and often make an additional place available.

## **Phase 2**

### **Accredited Training**

Replay conducts accredited training at the level of entry into the relevant profession. This is extremely important element of the Program as it allows the Participants to gain on-going sustainable work, and a career path to a 'real future'. It also is starting to bridge the huge gap within the Indigenous Community between the small number who have University Professional training and the majority of the Indigenous population who have nothing.

The delivery of the Accredited Training has been designed to meet the cultural needs of the Participants as well as building their self-esteem and developing their literacy/numeracy skills.

It is conducted in a central location such as Sydney as the Program spans the State in which it is operating.

It is essential that the training is conducted with at least 10 people but usually not more than 16. It often takes considerable time to gather-up such a group as the employers are usually slow in committing themselves. Once they do however, commit they often want the program to start immediately. Therefore, Replay has to achieve a balancing act, maintaining the equilibrium between all interested parties.

Replay also asks the employer to provide someone in their workplace to act as the Indigenous Participant's Workplace Learning Mentor. Replay trains these Mentors for three days before the Participant commences work and then a two day follow-up training later in the Program. The Workplace Learning Mentors if successful can receive the skill set of the Assessment Competencies of the Certificate IV Training and Assessment Package. Cultural respect training is an important component of the training.

### **Support**

Replay provides an extraordinary level of support throughout the Program. Staff have to walk a tight rope between successfully integrating the Indigenous Participants in the workplace and meeting the commercial realities of the workplace. This is often difficult for example in the last program, on one weekend four female participants were severely physically abused by their partners which included hospitalization. The Participants felt 'shame', Replay had to recognize the need for confidentiality and at the same time appease employers who had to meet their workplace demands. Replay successfully

managed to negotiate all these hurdles, the four participants graduated and all are employed.

## **The Importance of this Model**

### **Educationally**

- The importance of this model cannot be over-emphasised as it is extremely sound educationally, directly linking theory to practice and vice-versa.

### **Integrating into Mainstream Employment**

- Integration into mainstream employment is much more successful, Replay's lowest retention rate is 86% which includes training and on-going employment for 26 weeks.
- Replay has found that on-going support is necessary to bridge the Indigenous Community to mainstream employment and the results are evidence of its effectiveness.

## **Other Support Mechanisms**

### **Centrelink**

Replay over the last five years has had a Centrelink contact which was initially arranged by DEWR on Replay's request. This proved invaluable. In 2007/08 this link has not been very strong which has been very problematic. We would strongly recommend that it be reinstated to its previous level as the Participants have on-going problems with their benefits. There is an Indigenous Call Centre but not one of our Participants will use it. If their benefits are under pressure the likely result is that they will drop-out even with all the assistance that Replay provides. Without a key person it is difficult to navigate the system particularly in a limited time span and under pressure that a Participant is in an 'at risk' position to be breached.

## **Traineeships**

Traineeships are essential to encourage employers into the program. Employers have to meet commercial realities and even with a social conscience find difficulty in taking part in the program without some form of commercial incentive.

Presently, the traineeship funding is the same for all trainees with the added bonus of Wage Allowance for our Indigenous Participants. If there could be an added traineeship incentive for Indigenous Trainees plus pro-rata payments it would be easier to secure mainstream employment. For example, one local Council chose not to take part in the program because the Traineeship and Wage Allowance did not cover all the trainee's wages. There was in fact a shortfall of \$300 over six months.

Also, Traineeship rules vary greatly according to the State or Territory in which an EQS Program is operating. One approach would make it much more effective.

## **JNMs**

As part of Replay's Contract with DEEWR it has to ask JNMs to access the relevant EQS Participants' JobSeeker Account particularly to cover the cost of travel, accommodation and dinners during their formal training in Sydney and Melbourne. Many JNMs refuse to use the JobSeeker Account for this purpose. In NSW, in 2007, the refusal was so widespread that funding was accessed through AES and both AES and the relevant JNMs received outcomes. In the 2008 program currently Replay to date has lost 7 jobs which it has found because of JNMs refusal to allow the JobSeeker who had been selected by the employer and offered employment to take part in the program. One job secured by Replay and linked to a JobSeeker, who had directly applied to Replay was taken over by the JNM as they refused the JobSeeker to take part in the program because they deemed it not suitable for her and then chose to give her a traineeship for that particular employer and linked her to another Registered Training Company for her training.

It is Replay's understanding that up until that time this particular JNM had not offered the JobSeeker any such training or a traineeship.

### **It must be noted that:**

- in 2007, out of 36 students in the NSW Program, all had serious problems with their JNM which resulted in Replay having to provide an enormous amount of support to the Participants;

- when Replay contacts a JNM about a JobSeeker who has applied to be in the Program, very often the JNM is unaware that the JobSeeker is on their case load;
- Replay is still owed a considerable amount of outstanding money from the JNMs as Replay pays directly for all the Participants travel, accommodation etc and invoices the relevant JNMs. If Replay did not organize all the travel etc and pay for it upfront the Program would not survive as the JNMs at first clearly demonstrated that they were incapable of doing this;
- some JNMs are extremely supportive and Replay has recognized this support with its JNM Partnership Awards presented at Graduation (usually by a Federal Minister).

## **DEEWR**

A Central Contract approach by DEEWR would assist with the delivery of the EQS Program. Currently Replay operates over two States and a Territory and has three different Account Managers and three different Contract Managers and three different Contracts. A centralized approach would simplify the process and make it more efficient.

**Administration costs could be cut substantially if Replay had direct access to funding on a cost recovery basis similar to the JobSeeker Account, to cover the cost of travel, accommodation and meals for the residential workshops which are an essential part of the transformation to sustainable employment.**

**Presently, there is a double handling with invoices needing to be sent to Job Networks and payments needing to be tracked.**

**The Replay Group  
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