

Dear Mr O'Connor,

In response to your letter seeking views on how employment services can be improved. I am happy to provide you with our views but firstly I would like to give you some background on Burrendies Aboriginal Corporation and the programs we have.

Burrendies Aboriginal Corporation began operation in 1999 under the CDEP scheme. As with many other CDEP programs we ran similar project's Art's, garden and home maintenance and other small ventures aimed at eventual self management. Burrendies has always strived to implement and maintain proper management and administration within the organisation. I believe we have been successful in this and Burrendies stands as a testimony to this today.

In 2002 Burrendies began IEC operations. Although we had some teething problems these were overcome with sound management. We reached all of our KPI'S and at the closure of CDEP and IEC we were over and above our targeted outcomes. It was disappointing to see that the IEC's that were successful were not given an opportunity to continue work, why reinvent the wheel. The same could have been said for CDEP. Our CDEP was successful, it was interesting to note that some of the new rules that DEWR had implemented when they took over management had been part of our management policy for some time ie; "no work no pay".

In 2006 Burrendies began the transition from CDEP to STEP ERS. The timing of this process was very tight, from the announcement of closure of CDEP to the call for tenders and then the eventual announcement of successful tender's. During this time a lot of stress was placed on our organisation and the community, the uncertainty of where we were heading, confusion on what the contract was going to look like. The announcement of successful tenders did not happen until late June, which in turn set us back two months in the implementation of the STEP ERS program.

As you would know the STEP ERS program does not have access to EA3000. This is a disadvantage to us. We have the same clients as Centrelink and Job Network so it would only make sense that we have access to the same systems. To this end some of the questions you ask are not part of our systems but do impact on how we work with our Indigenous clients and interact with Centrelink and Job Network.

From an Indigenous perspective.

- Early interventions minimise the number of long-term welfare dependant Australians of working age (including a review of the Job Seeker Classification Instrument)

A review of the independent living policy, taking into account age and circumstances why

- Employment services are relevant to the circumstances and needs of the job seeker

A customised holistic approach taking into account the individuals needs. Bringing together all relevant services without over lapping or cutting business. STEP ERS currently works this way with us managing the co ordination of this.

- Job seekers with higher levels of disadvantage receive intensive assistance. Currently I believe indigenous clients are streamlined into intensive assistance, a lot of these people are not aware of this and miss out on possible support. Job seekers who are not under obligation to look for work ie; single mothers should still be able to receive this intensive assistance.

- Incentives for training which will improve the employability of job seekers (including incentives for long term training and education to address labour market needs)

Training needs to be job specific and negotiated with the client and potential employers to be relevant. This also needs a flexible approach.

- Job seekers receive appropriate training.

As above, but also taking into account how this is delivered in some cases clients are sent through the same training with their Job Network over and over again. This is boring to the client and ineffective. A blanket approach to all clients is outdated and should take into account individual learning needs.

- Performance management principles (including star ratings and business reallocation) that support sustainable outcomes and promote quality service delivery and the minimisation of time and money spent on administration.

As I had mentioned earlier this type of approach has never been taken with CDEP and indigenous employment programs. It seems that we are left on the outer of these mainstream services. Individual organisations are not given credit for their successes and good performances, we are all painted with the same brush when it comes to programs if some are not performing we are all out. This inequality needs to be addressed. We need to be given credibility and support from our funding bodies in the mainstream, instead we are left to forge ahead to achieve this on our own.

To add, proper resources need to be made available to train indigenous job seekers. There is a gap between indigenous school students accessing VET in the mainstream. Intensive assistance is required for the period between exiting the Education system and entering employment. For a variety of reasons young indigenous persons are reluctant to enter into mainstream training programs on offer. They prefer to undertake a more tailored training program in a culturally secure and encouraging environment.

In conclusion I would like to say that on the whole Employment and training services being offered currently through Job Networks and the STEP ERS program are achieving success but there are still some gaps in the system. There is still a strong need amongst the communities for some type of community based program to promote self confidence, motivation and some level of participation, with a strong emphasis on a pathway to employment. Something akin to work for the dole specifically for indigenous Australians. Although there were many critics and problems associated with CDEP it did achieve these objectives within our community. The demise of CDEP has only further marginalised the indigenous communities, even in those areas with a strong labour market. People need a sense of belonging and that was the centrepiece of CDEP in this community. It was the one thing that gave a considerable number a sense of purpose and contribution, raising their self esteem and confidence, giving those younger members a safety net, providing mentors and community leaders with skills and confidence to achieve and promoting local culture and social cohesion. With correct management, proper structure to the programs and planned targets and objectives with the emphasis on achieving job ready participants who then move through to mainstream employment services. This could be a win win

situation, the community capacity is built up, welfare dependant persons are given the opportunity to contribute, community services are enhanced through the involvement of the community in the many social programs.

Tina Summers

Mark Hudson

Carol Watson

Representatives of Burrendies Aboriginal Corporation