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Enquiries Secretary

Mr Barry Wakelin MP

Ms Danna Vale MP

Parliamentary Inquiry into indigenous Employment

Can the following please be included in comments gathered concerning Parliamentary Inquiry into indigenous Employment?

Peter Dickson
Works Managers Assistant
Bega Valley Shire Council

I apologise for not speaking at Friday's inquiry, but I was unsure of the political correctness in some instances and did not want to upset anyone.

I have worked for Bega Valley Shire Council for over 15 years. For the last 2 years a portion of my job has involved, working closely with Mission, CDEP, indigenous personnel and council staff. I have also been involved in the selection and recruitment of two full time Koori positions with in our Council.

When Kathleen Boyne and Neville Voysey from Mission Australia first mentioned this program to me, I could see this was a win/ win opportunity for Council and indigenous people. Council currently had a need for casual personnel and this was an opportunity to fill this vacancy.

Council initially started with six Koori positions on a 26-week program. These were located in Council's Town Teams, construction and major Construction teams. Council had tried something similar in the past and some teams were cautious. This was not for discrimination reasons.

Things worked well for several weeks. I believe Council staff especially the supervisors went out of their way to ensure this program worked. (Evidence from Ian Goward's comments on Friday) In some instances picked trainees up on the way to the job, due to no licence. (Only two out of the original six had a licence). Teams were happy for this to occur as it was giving them some flexibility. Trainees were provided with phones, contact details, and instructed to ensure they rang to let supervisor know if something was wrong and that they could not make it to work.

Unfortunately, in some instances unexplained absenteeism and no communication began to creep in. No time sheets, not signing time sheets, and constant problems with the family and extended family (I understand the cultural difference and its importance) made it very difficult to plan jobs. Construction jobs delayed at the last minute, if trainee responsible for traffic control did not show. Concrete pours cancelled and the days schedule needing to be reorganised, due to lack of communication and just not fronting. It has to be understood some of these work crews cost about \$5000 a day and the down time waiting for or reorganising staff could only be tolerated so many times. In short some of the teams refused to help the program beyond the initial 26 weeks.

There has been some success stories however and we were happy to re employ Kevin Dixon, Edward Forest, James Pitman (all with out licenses) James Mundy and John Williams who have been both offered a one year traineeship with future full time employment, if successfully completing a TAFE course (certificate 3).

Problems identified with indigenous employment and not mentioned Friday

Yes there is cultural differences and some allowances can be made, but you cannot have your cake and eat it. If the koori population want increased employment, they will also need to make allowances for cultural differences. Family is very important as are recreational times, sporting and party times. These all need to be prioritised in order to fit into the wider community. Family is important, but to an employer, so is fronting regularly for work.

Koori's discriminating amongst themselves.

I was present on several occasions when our trainees were referred to as coconuts. When I asked what this meant I was told, Brown on the outside white on the inside. By working, your conforming to the white mans way of thinking. (should not be tolerated by the elders)

Budgeting

On numerous occasions I was told, could not get to work no fuel, no money to buy fuel. Car broken down, no money to ring up, phones been cut off. However, this is a small community and I would run it this gentleman regularly at the pub or TAB. We did in this case organise a fuel card and deduct money from his pay.

If I could change one thing, that would help indigenous employment in Australia, it would be:

- to fund education programs for the Koori population including the Elders. It would appear in some cases there have been no role models or poor role models for kids and then teenagers growing up. I understand that the Elders are highly respected and so they need to be leading by example. This is in regards to the coconut comments and White mans ways. Some education in prioritising life's tasks (Similar to Danna Vale MP comments on Friday) then walking the talk so to speak.

- Funding could continue to supporting programs where Elders or high profile indigenous people could talk at schools. They could explain the need for a good education, giving examples of successful indigenous people and the importance of studying hard and receiving a good education. They could do a scenario of both ends of the scale and instil in the indigenous kids that the only thing stopping them from being successful and achieving there goals are themselves.

□ There is obviously more education and awareness needed on our side as well. However it is the easiest thing in the world to blame someone else for our predicament, there is no risk it will be hard to choose the other path, but at the end of the day, we all need to take responsibility for our own actions, failings and successes.



Peter Dickson