

Case Study

Supporting the Path to Autonomy for Bara Barang



Background

Bara Barang means 'make tomorrow' in Darkinjung language. Bara Barang Corporation is an Aboriginal organisation on the Central Coast that provides innovative programs, events, training and services to engage Aboriginal people and youth. Bara Barang also engages in economic development and provides work-for-the-dole opportunities through its social enterprises. For example, Bara Barang's Coolamon Café provides catering as well as work-for-the-dole training, and its Aboriginal Tourism and Aboriginal Cultural Education is a for-profit enterprise that also provides mentoring and training for Aboriginal youth.

When Jawun commenced operations on the Central Coast in February 2012, Bara Barang Corporation was called Koori Connect and was a unit of the large mainstream services provider Youth Connections. Koori Connect (as it was then named) was very clear in its objectives for Jawun's engagement with the organisation: full independence from Youth Connections.

Over a four-year period, Jawun secondees Natalie Bilowol (Commonwealth Bank Australia / CBA), Dominic Prowse (CBA), Richie Hadfield (CBA), Lisa Tubridy (Westpac), Shelley Andreetta (Telstra), Keen Poon (KPMG), Jan Campbell (Australian Taxation Office), Melville Yates (Australian Taxation Office) and Emma Wilde (Suncorp) were sourced to assist Koori Connect transition to Bara Barang Corporation.

Approach

Both the Youth Connections Board and Koori Connect management had felt for some time that Koori Connect had untapped potential. The major barrier to realising this potential was that Koori Connect was not an autonomous organisation. This meant that Koori Connect could not access its own Aboriginal-specific funding, and could not build a strong profile in the local Aboriginal community.

The first step in the journey towards autonomy began in 2012, with CBA business analyst and risk manager Natalie Bilowol developing a business plan for Koori Connect to explore what it was capable of without the safety net of Youth Connections. Natalie's work confirmed that Koori Connect was excellent at cultural affirmation through tourism and cultural education. In February 2013, CBA Commsec equities trader Dominic Prowse was sourced to assist Koori Connect develop a product package for a cultural tourism opportunity with Carnival Australia.

With a business plan and a product to generate revenue, Koori Connect was beginning to put together the case for becoming independent. In October 2013, CBA senior product and business analyst Richie Hadfield conducted the groundwork to support a detailed proposal to the Youth Connections Board of Directors. The proposal recommended incorporated Koori Connect as an Aboriginal subsidiary organisation within the broader Youth Connections Group, with the name Bara Barang. The most significant challenge in building the governance framework for Bara Barang was the need to achieve autonomy without compromising integration and fiduciary duty.

In February 2014, Westpac SME business analyst and Network Manager Lisa Tubridy was sourced to assist Bara Barang with prioritising duties normally associated with Youth Connections, such as staff management, policies and procedures, for which Bara Barang was now responsible.

However, as of April 2014, it became evident that Youth Connections were going to lose funding for their youth services, and thus Bara Barang would be at serious risk of folding, as the organisation had not secured funding specific to its remit. Youth Connections ability to carry Bara Barang financially was unknown.

The next six months saw incredible turmoil in Bara Barang as Youth Connections folded and there was uncertainty around Indigenous Advancement Strategy funding. During this time, Bara Barang focused on its enterprises to attempt to generate revenue. A strategic accounts service management specialist from Telstra, Shelley Andretta, and KPMG management consultant Keen Poon were sourced to assist Bara Barang manage the stressful transition and help staff focus on the priorities that would ensure organisational survival.

Late 2014 saw the IAS funding reinstated, and by mid-2015 Bara Barang had utilised their reprieve to secure a work-for-the-dole contract. With the influx of funding came an influx of staff and clients. Australian Taxation Office (ATO) researcher and business development manager Jan Campbell was deployed in mid-2015 to assist Bara Barang manage the first stages of rapid organisational growth. Her primary tasks included assisting the organisation in prioritising work flows, and developing policies and procedures. The final step towards autonomy was for Bara Barang to become financially independent from Youth connections. ATO tax manager Melville Yates was sourced in August 2015 to assist with the rapid growth and develop financial policies and procedures.

As of late 2015, Suncorp Firstline Manager Emma Wilde was deployed to assist Bara Barang with the compliance processes required for the future vision of becoming ISO certified.

Outcomes

In late 2013, the proposed governance and funding changes were approved by the Youth Connections Board, and on 30 January 2014 Koori Connect moved towards independence by registering as a subsidiary organisation of Youth Connections with the new the name Bara Barang Corporation Ltd.

In June 2015, Bara Barang Corporation Ltd gained complete autonomy from Youth Connections, completing the financial breakaway.

In November 2015, Bob Woods Cruises, a third-party provider to Carnival Australia, listed Bara Barang as the preferred provider of cultural tours on the Central Coast for recently arrived cruise ship tourists in Sydney.

As of November 2015, Bara Barang was supporting approximately 75 of work-for-the-dole participants.

Denise Markham, Manager Bara Barang, appreciates the value Jawun has been to Bara Barang, 'the Jawun secondees not only perform tangible hands on tasks but they also provide valuable corporate knowledge to ensure our organisation excels in the business world.'

Next Steps

Secondees support for early 2016 will focus on financial and program sustainability, as well as policies and procedures to ensure a focused and professional organisation.