

Case Study

Supporting the formation of East Kimberley Job Pathways



Background

The East Kimberley, roughly the size of Victoria, is one of Australia's most vast and remote regions. It has a population of about 12,000 people, approximately half of whom are Aboriginal. Unemployment in the region is a challenge, with only 32 per cent of the Indigenous workforce age population employed, compared to 88 per cent for the non-Indigenous population¹. Creating employment opportunities and developing work readiness programs for Aboriginal people are priorities for government, service providers and community organisations in the East Kimberley.

In 2013 and 2014, a review of employment services across Australia led to the formation of the Remote Jobs and Communities Program (RJCP). This initiative replaced four existing programs, including Jobs Services Australia, in 60 remote regions across Australia.

Wunan is a not-for-profit Aboriginal development organisation that believes economic participation and less reliance on welfare are essential to developing life choices and better outcomes for families. Wunan sees long-term employment as key to reducing welfare dependency, and as a Jobs Services Australia provider, they delivered employment services to Aboriginal people throughout the East Kimberley. When this program was replaced with the RJCP, Wunan, as an organisation with experience in this area, were keen to tender for the contract to deliver employment services to the region.

Jawun had been providing secondees to assist on various Wunan programs and initiatives since 2012. Wunan was conscious of the magnitude of this challenge, and seized the opportunity to leverage their partnership with Jawun to source secondees to develop an appropriate governance structure for the organisation in applying for the contract.

Approach

At the time, Wunan was tendering in competition with another employment and trainer provider in the region, East Kimberley Community Development Employment Projects (EKCDPEP). Rather than select one organisation, the Department of Employment asked Wunan and EKCDPEP to consider tendering in partnership to deliver the new RJCP. They agreed and formed East Kimberley Job Pathways (EKJP), bringing together two strong local employment services. Jawun secondees were instrumental in ensuring the joint venture was formed swiftly and met the tight timeframe for tendering.

Secondees from KPMG and Boston Consulting Group – Helen Cuthill and Katherine Wilson – worked on developing EKJP's joint approach and supporting its community engagement. Then Tess Matthews from Herbert Smith Freehills and Jason Webster from NAB worked on gathering information and evidence to address the criteria, before Glen Thickett and Rechelle Atkinson, both of NAB, worked on some implementation planning including budget planning, HR requirements and project planning. This extensive ground work put the joint venture in a strong position to win the tender in May 2013.

Despite the delays in the selection process, the timeframe for implementation remained 1 July 2013, meaning once EKJP had been informed of their successful joint tender, they only had seven weeks to develop the organisation and establish arrangements to commence operations.

¹ 2011 ABS Census

During May and June of 2013, EKJP had three secondees assist in the formation of the new entity, so that delivery of the program could commence on 1 July 2013. With the assistance of these secondees, every requirement from IT and communications, office space, insurance, recruitment and HR, training and contractual requirements were addressed in what was an extremely demanding secondment for Fiona Campbell and Chris Williams of NAB and Susannah Carr of Herbert Smith Freehills.

Once delivery of services had begun, EKJP had further input from secondees in August 2013, with work on communication by Sara Prendergast of NAB and Samantha Boswell of Wesfarmers, human resource and policy work by Sara Summerbell of Herbert Smith Freehills and policy and risk work by Celeste Dally of NAB.

Sara Summerbell, Senior Associate at Herbert Smith Freehills, explained: *“As a corporate lawyer specialising in employment law, the type of work was not unfamiliar. However, helping EKJP develop materials for a new entity, while working with people with different backgrounds and cultures across a vast region was a new challenge.”*

During the final secondment round of October 2013, Raman Sethuraman of NAB, developed the Workforce Development Strategy – a contractual requirement under RJCP. In April 2014, another NAB secondee, Robert Babb, completed a significant project conducting risk assessments across all EKJP centres in the region.

Raman Sethuraman, Senior Manager Program Delivery, NAB, said: *“I got along well with staff, ran a couple of workshops to identify skills and training gaps and sat in on interviews with clients. On a personal level, the experience re-energised me to contribute more to make life better for my fellow Australians.”*

Outcomes

East Kimberley Job Pathways (EKJP) is a joint venture between the two local organisations, the Wunan Foundation and the East Kimberley CDEP (EKCDEP), which were successful in tendering for the contract to deliver the Federal Government’s Remote Jobs and Communities Program (RJCP) in May 2013. Jawun secondees’ expertise not only supported the organisations to form a new partnership in what was a rigorous tendering process, but also enabled the full development of a new streamlined employment service provider, EKJP, where it is a fully operational entity, and delivers services to a wide range of users.

The East Kimberley region now has a robust, streamlined employment service that provides long-term solutions in training and employment for Aboriginal people. As an entity, it is less dependent on government and able to provide a collaborative approach to training and employment opportunities aimed at supporting people to transition directly into jobs or training. The new EKJP organisation is delivering services to around 1,700 clients.

EKJP’s staff is 55 per cent Indigenous, and so far have assisted 190 clients to obtain employment, and 200 to start education or training placements.

Sandra Mitchell, CEO EKJP and former Employment Strategies Manager, Wunan, said: *“The support from the Jawun program and the specific secondees who have worked in this area has been and continues to be invaluable. As small organisations in a not-for-profit space, the ability to inject speciality support and capacity, particularly for something like the formation of a new organisation and implementation of a new program, is extraordinary. While there is still capacity to be built within EKJP’s delivery of the RJCP contracts, the organisation is on a sound footing in a comparably short period of time and much of that can be credited to the commitment and work of our family of secondees.”*

By linking clients to appropriate services, programs and opportunities, EKJP is striving to provide employment and training opportunities to community members and bring an end to passive welfare across the East Kimberley region.

Next Steps

EKJP has identified several future projects to continue the valuable support provided through the Jawun program, to advance and consolidate its employment services, prepare policies and procedures, and ensure strategic alignment across its business goals.