

Case Study

A new way of working with government to design an Aboriginal-led aged care Hub



Background

The La Perouse community in Botany Bay, NSW, sits within a major urban area yet maintains many aspects of a traditional Aboriginal context. Like many contemporary communities it has an ageing population, but there are no local aged care services that are residential. As a result, elderly people needing live-in care are forced to move to other areas, leaving them feeling socially and culturally isolated. In 2012, The Sydney Indigenous Aged Care Scoping Study identified the need for an Aboriginal-operated residential aged care Hub in the Sydney region. Plans for this were further supported in December 2015 when, as part of the Empowered Communities (EC) reform agenda, the La Perouse Aboriginal Alliance identified aged care as one of the First Priority Agreements (FPAs) within a newly developed twenty year Community Plan.

The proposed Hub would be managed by The Guriwal Aboriginal Corporation, an accredited aged care service provider in La Perouse which delivers day programmes, flexible respite care, and community transport. The La Perouse Local Aboriginal Land Council identified a piece of land for this Hub, and the Inner Sydney Aboriginal Alliance expressed strong support for its planning, development and operation. Partnership was offered from the Wyanga Aboriginal Aged Care in Redfern and Kurranualla Aboriginal Corporation in Sutherland. The Hub would offer community-based and culturally appropriate residential aged care services for the Aboriginal community, and also training for Aboriginal care workers qualified in aged care.

A series of Jawun secondees supported development of the idea. The first of these was Rosemary Hollows, who in August 2015 was seconded from the Department of the Environment. Rosemary initiated plans for a feasibility study for the Hub and met with council, local government, aged care providers and architects to inform this. In October 2015, Jason Scott and Madeleine Dowling, Jawun secondees from the Department of Social Services and City of Melbourne, were deployed to Guriwal to continue Rosemary's work. They held a series of community consultations around 'healthy ageing', and reviewing the current Guriwal services against the needs.

In February 2016 Casey Greentree, secondee from the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (PM&C) was deployed to Guriwal to plan a comprehensive feasibility study that would guide design, construction and management of the new aged care Hub facility, and would form the basis for a capital works funding bid. Casey had worked for over six years in Indigenous affairs, experience that forged her commitment as a keen advocate but also made her familiar with the frustrations of government policy not always matching needs on the ground. It was with this motivation that she approached her secondment at Guriwal, hoping it would be a chance to put into practice EC principles of reforming how Indigenous policies and programs are designed and delivered.

Approach

Casey established what a detailed feasibility study for the Hub would need to look like, and estimated that it would take 6-12 months. Along with Karen Cooley, Guriwal's CEO, Casey then met with key stakeholders to discuss funding, focusing on PM&C and the Australian Government's Indigenous Enterprise Development (IED) opportunity. Karen understood quickly that with Casey's network and inside understanding, it was going to be a very different process to what she was used to!

In the past, Guriwal, like many other community development organisations, had approached government agencies to see what existing funding opportunities might be suitable, and then fulfilled application requirements accordingly. It was essentially a 'supply-driven' and transactional process, rather than one led by the needs of the community/organisation and then negotiated by both sides. If a funding opportunity was not apparent or criteria could not be met, little more was done. Casey approached it from the other end however, laying out the compelling aged care needs and the vision of Guriwal and the La Perouse Alliance to meet them, then asking PM&C how they could support that. Karen remembers a novel and empowering meeting that felt more like a conversation or negotiation than an interview.

Karen and Chris Ingrey, leader of the La Perouse Alliance, then invited PM&C Deputy Secretary and EC focal point Richard Eccles to visit the proposed site for the aged care facility. Richard in turn brought Margaret McCarthy, Deputy Secretary of the Department of Health. The visit included a tour and a presentation on how the Hub matched community priorities set by EC. Guriwal were asked to submit an 'unsolicited proposal' for funding a feasibility study, one that corresponded to a 'thematic funding stream' within the Department of Health. As Karen said afterwards, '*We'd never even heard of that option!*' A new negotiating table had been created, exactly as the EC model envisaged. The experience also showed the value of Jawun secondees, particularly government staff, in navigating and recreating relationships with government. This is something Jawun founder Noel Pearson has described as '*opening doors which only have handles on the inside*'.

Casey worked with Guriwal, La Perouse Alliance and EC teams to draft the proposal. It set out how the needs had been defined through community consultations, pro bono advice from an architecture firm, and meetings with aged care service providers as well as the Aged Care Services NSW peak body. It gave the key elements of the proposed feasibility study, and a detailed budget totalling \$250,000. It was submitted as an unsolicited proposal to the Department of Health on 28 April 2016.

Outcomes

By 4 May, the requested funding was granted for the feasibility study. This included a project manager to oversee planning and design, impact assessments and approvals, and the costs for a council re-zoning application. It covered development of a business model ensuring the Hub's sustainability in terms of income generation (and therefore funding independence), and integration with other local organisations to ensure engagement of elderly people with children, youth and the whole community.

Next Steps

A project manager is being hired to carry out the feasibility study, in consultation with a working group of local, partner and government representatives established to support this. The study should develop into a capital works funding bid for the construction of the Hub by late 2016. Depending on its size and facilities, the cost of set-up is likely to be at least \$10 million, and the Hub should open its doors by 2018. The intention is to fulfil the EC vision for Inner Sydney: '*By 2020, culturally appropriate aged care including residential accommodation is available to 80% of the Sydney Aboriginal aged community*'. The Hub's story is also living proof of the broader EC model, where Indigenous communities negotiate on their terms to drive their own priorities for development.