

Inner Sydney

From youth engagement to business opportunities in La Perouse



Background

The La Perouse Aboriginal community, situated on the northern arm of Botany Bay since 1883, sits within a major urban area but is often described as experiencing 'urban remoteness'. Limited public transport has impeded the development of key services, and constrained employment opportunities and financial return for the community. As a result the La Perouse Local Aboriginal Land Council (LPLALC) was established to support the community with housing, employment, economic development and culturally appropriate services.

Over the last decade, the LPLALC expanded its focus from concentrating mainly on housing to investing in youth engagement. This was a priority for the community given high rates of crime and anti-social behaviour carried out by young people.

In 2005 the La Perouse Youth Haven was established to give young people an alternative to anti-social behaviour, and support them take positive decisions for their future. Based at Yarra Bay House, the Youth Haven focused on educational support through alternative schooling programs, homework programs, family support and IT facilities, while providing activities to young people that deterred anti-social behaviours. It organised cultural excursions with community Elders, facilitated culturally appropriate programs (including Lapa Lads and Lapa Divas), and set up a gym group. There was an unprecedented and exciting level of participation, with a range of initiatives supporting confident, healthy children and young people. Operations Manager Carrine Liddell, who helped set up the Youth Haven, saw immediate positive change:

"We have higher participation rates in services, not just in the LALC but in the community. We have also seen a reduction in the number of young people involved in criminal activity."

From youth engagement, LPLALC set its sights on economic participation and employment, especially for young people. The goal was to bridge the economic divide persisting between La Perouse and the broader Sydney, with enterprises that brought Indigenous people into the 'real economy'.

La Perouse's coastal tourism potential was an obvious choice, with LPLALC keen to identify an opportunity that would allow young people to build their skills and capacity through employment, and would ultimately generate funds to be reinvested in programs for the community. To support them identify, design and implement a viable business idea, LPLALC sought the help of Jawun secondees with experience doing this from a corporate perspective.

Approach

From 2015 to 2016, four Jawun secondees were deployed to LPLALC to support the creation of a new social enterprise.

David Jones from Downer assessed options for enterprise opportunities aligned with the council's economic tourism development plan, building on ideas developed by a previous secondee. From this he designed an initial business plan for a beach equipment rental business, Gamay Beach Hire.

David was followed by Glenn Power, also from Downer, who secured council permit approvals for the business to operate from a kiosk near the beach, and also for an adjoining food and drink operation.

Then an Australian Government secondee, Michael Schanzer, brought experience in planning to a further design of the project focused on delivery and customer service. Michael transferred skills to staff and, where he saw skills gaps, identified training courses for them. With kayaking a personal hobby, he was also the perfect person for product research which led to detailed business costings.

Finally a third Downer secondee, Andrew Bell, supported the launch of Gamay Beach Hire in late 2016. He secured updated permit approvals from the council, and negotiated reduced prices for beach hire equipment from different companies, which was then purchased.

The work ran in sequence, with new secondees starting from wherever previous secondees had got to in terms of the systems and processes needed for running the business. This was supported by the fact that three of the four secondees came from Downer, but was a feature of all secondments and overseen by the management team at LPLALC. Michael Ingrey, Youth and Leadership Manager of the Youth Haven, remembers how the business idea went from being an "open canvas" to a business-oriented investigation of ideas alongside staff and management:

"We did a lot of joint problem solving together. The secondees asked a lot of questions and got down to the details, which took us from having a really strong vision to having something practical and ready to launch".

Accompanying the business plan was an employment strategy for local Indigenous youth to be trained, hired and retained by the business.

Outcomes

In early February 2017, the Gamay Beach Hire business was launched at Yarra Bay, La Perouse. All nine employees were local Indigenous young people, a successful result of the employment. While bad weather hindered a couple of weekends, the business brought in local and tourist customers in numbers that rose steadily over the summer and autumn period it was open. In April, the business wound down for winter, with detailed plans in place for resuming operations later in the year.

Michael Ingrey is clear that the business "wouldn't be operating" without the strategic and business-savvy support of secondees, who got it past feasibility stage and to its first season of operation. Speaking on behalf of others at LPLALC and in the community, he is proud of what was achieved through a collaborative effort, and proud of what it stands for:

"We're in business now in the local economy, with a youth employment avenue and revenue income for the La Perouse Aboriginal Community. We're not selling an Aboriginal product. We're selling a mainstream service. And through this and jobs for young people, we're creating community value".

The work of Michael Ingrey, his brother Chris, Carinne Liddell and others leaders in the La Perouse community, was a source of inspiration for the secondees who helped make their vision a reality. In their first days at LPLALC they had each been immersed in the organisation's history, including the Youth Haven project and the challenges it was set up to address. Michael Schanzer saw Gamay as a direct legacy of LPLALC's youth engagement:

"The Youth Haven is an example of a watershed project, a 'tipping point' for local social issues, and a model nationally. Gamay Beach Hire would not be possible without the social change it achieved."

Next steps

Future secondees will support LPLALC further embrace opportunities for enterprise and employment, while strengthening longstanding community programs including social housing and Youth Haven.