

Case Study

Supporting Tranby Aboriginal College



Background

Tranby Aboriginal College, based in the inner Sydney suburb of Glebe, is a not-for-profit organisation established in 1958. Its main purpose is to deliver Vocational Educational Training (VET) accredited courses to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students from across Australia, in a setting that supports Indigenous ways of learning. Tranby has been a pioneer in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adult education, training and social action for over 50 years, and remains committed to its mission to deliver lasting change to students' lives, their families and communities.

Tranby also provides fee-for-service courses for a range of organisations such as Aboriginal Land Councils and the Aboriginal Legal Service, and offers venue hire for seminars and planning days.

Currently, approximately 170 Indigenous students from across metropolitan, regional and remote Australia and the Torres Strait Islands attend the college. Some students have limited formal secondary education, while some are looking to progress to university and others are undertaking post-secondary studies for the first time and/or re-entering the education system after a long absence.

The courses are developed in consultation with stakeholders and Indigenous elders, and respond to community needs and aspirations. The focus of the courses is to consolidate skills, knowledge and expertise which enhance the ability of individuals and community organisations to work towards their desired futures.

Tranby went through a challenging period in 2012, with a reduction in federal funding and a decrease in the number of staff employed and students enrolled. Funding bodies questioned Tranby's ability to deliver on their programs, and the college was at risk of closing forever.

In 2013, Belinda Russon, one of Tranby's educators, was appointed CEO. Her main aims were to restore Tranby's reputation and rebuild its programs; aware of Jawun's access to skilled secondees, she approached Regional Director Brad Cooke for support.

Belinda worked with Brad and identified three areas of focus: review the financial position of Tranby; review the organisational structure and human resources (HR) strategy; and devise a new business strategy to build a more resilient funding base. Over six months, three secondees assisted Tranby with their goals:

1. Jaimes Adlington, a Westpac employee with an accountancy background, was seconded to review Tranby's financial position, and assist with establishing risk management principles.
2. Liz Barker, a Woolworths Liquor Group employee with an HR background, was seconded to work on the organisational structure review and HR strategy.
3. Heyshan Mendis, a Department of Defence employee with a project management background, was seconded to work on the business strategy and organisational development.

Approach

With each placement, the secondees familiarised themselves with the history and purpose of Tranby. They then met with Belinda to discuss the needs of college, review the proposed Jawun brief and explore where they felt their skills could provide lasting benefits.

Jaimes Adlington from Westpac worked closely with Belinda and other staff to review Tranby's financial infrastructure, and identify areas which required improvement. He undertook a wide range of activities to allow him to build a full understanding of the college's current situation, including: reviewing archived files, financial reports and statements; developing a detailed timeline of the donations, trusts and scholarships Tranby had received in the last 25 years; and reviewing payroll, bank reconciliation processes and budget documents. Using this picture of the college's financial position, Jaimes made recommendations and put in place robust processes which would benefit Tranby in the long term.

Liz Barker, from Woolworths Liquor Group, liaised closely with staff and Belinda to review existing HR documentation to understand where improvements could be made. She also workshopped ideas for staff engagement and spent time with Belinda discussing ways to use the staff performance review process to build the organisation's professional culture.

Heyshan Mendis from the Department of Defence worked with Belinda and staff to review current funding streams. He used the information gained from these discussions to explore a range of business strategies which could increase profits and financial outcomes. His dialogue with the staff and Belinda also revealed a need to improve the relationship between the college and its funding bodies, so he investigated ways this could be achieved. Finally, when Tranby was faced with some urgent and unexpected funding challenges, Heyshan's expertise in dealing with government agencies, complex computer software and problem resolution also proved valuable.

Outcomes

Many tangible outcomes have been achieved as a direct result of Jawun secondees' work with Tranby. Belinda outlined the benefits of working with Jawun: *"Our relationship with Jawun has developed over the past year ... We worked closely with Brad and placed our trust in him, and the secondments and Tranby as an organisation, have gone from strength to strength. It is a process not without challenges but it has been incredibly beneficial and productive for our organisation."*

Westpac secondee Jaimes put processes in place to ensure good management of donations, trusts and scholarships in the future. He also drafted a risk management plan, which has provided the basis for overhauling Tranby's financial practices and framework. On his recommendation, Tranby is also working with an external partner, and migration is currently underway to a new, more secure data management system. As a result of Jaimes' secondment he was asked to join the board of Tranby College, and he also continues to provide the college with guidance on financial matters.

The Woolworths Liquor Group secondee Liz delivered a comprehensive HR policy and performance review which has resulted in significant changes to the organisation's HR processes and procedures. She also updated staff employment files, and completed a review of staff and student inductions. All these activities have contributed to building Tranby's professional culture.

The final secondee, Heyshan from the Department of Defence, produced a phased implementation business plan. The ultimate result of the implementation of this plan will be an increase in student numbers. To enable staff to work towards these goals, Heyshan developed a master task list detailing responsibilities. As a result of an urgent funding-related challenge, he provided a short-term overview of the college's entire funding structure and contracts operation, which built understanding around the funding expectations of Tranby, as well as forecasting future funding opportunities. He also produced a reporting timetable to ensure all funding requirements were met.

Tranby would not be in such a strong position without the knowledge and skills of Jawun secondees. Belinda explained: *"For Tranby, the results have been outstanding ... Jawun has supported us to build and deliver our own strategies to become a stronger, better organisation that directly benefits our community. Tranby has learnt from the professional expertise and knowledge that all the secondees bring, but I hope that our secondees have learnt from the cultural and community knowledge that we have shared with them."*

Next Steps

The Jawun program has the endorsement of the Tranby Board of Directors, and Tranby Chairperson Kristy Masella is keen to work with more secondees. On the back of the success of the three secondees in 2013, another secondee has been sourced to develop a board manual which will define policies and procedures, and strengthen the governance processes of the college. A new financial system is also being implemented and current secondees are contributing to reports that will form the basis of Tranby's strategic plan and annual report.