

## Case Study

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### Supporting the development of Indigenous staff across The Kimberley



#### Background

Many Aboriginal organisations across The Kimberley are keen to foster and expand opportunities for Aboriginal people in their community. Although Jawun secondees more commonly focus on assisting organisations to build their capacity, sometimes this work supports growth on an individual level.

Ian Trust and Wayne Bergmann are respected Indigenous leaders from the Kimberley region of Western Australia. Ian is Chairman of The Wunan Foundation, an Aboriginal development organisation based in the East Kimberley, and Wayne is CEO of Kimberley Regional Economic Development Enterprises (KRED Enterprises) in the West Kimberley. Both have many demands on their time and play an important role in Indigenous affairs, not only in their respective communities, but also nationally, through the Empowered Communities program, for example. Their ability to manage their busy schedules, arrange complex interstate travel and most importantly, support their organisations in their absence is absolutely critical to their ability to fulfil their roles.

In 2012, Ian Trust requested assistance from Jawun to help build the capacity of his incoming Executive Assistant. Ian had always managed without an EA but his busy schedule and numerous commitments increasingly meant he needed additional support. A young Indigenous woman, Celeste Hunter, who had previously worked as a receptionist at Wunan was chosen to take on this role. Celeste explains her concerns about gaining the necessary skills to be effective in the role:

Living and working in small remote town like Kununurra can be a challenge for a number of reasons. One I found particularly frustrating was the lack of high level administrative 'guidance' available. It might sound silly but for me it wasn't, because I had just been promoted from a modest admin position to the Executive Assistant to our organisation's Executive Chair. I was eager, anxious and apprehensive. I wanted a challenge but I needed help! I didn't know how to be an Executive Assistant.

Over in the West Kimberley a similar individual development opportunity existed with Divina D'Anna, who is the Executive and Corporate Services Manager for KRED Enterprises. She had a high level of responsibility, taking charge of KRED Enterprises on a day-to-day basis when the CEO, Wayne Bergmann, was away. Divina was looking for a higher level of professional development and support and there were two other members of the KRED administrative team who needed support with the implementation of rigorous new systems and work practices. Both Divina and Wayne, felt there was much to be gained by seeking the support a Jawun secondee.

#### Approach

In 2012, Jawun supported Celeste at Wunan by seconding Nicole Purdi, an Executive Assistant to three of Woodside's top executives. Celeste explains: "when I heard I had been assigned a secondee in the upcoming Jawun secondment round, I was happy; but still a little scared as to who I was going to be spending the next five weeks with. I shouldn't have been scared though because Nicole was awesome."

One of the keys to the success of this secondment was the early formation of a strong, honest and respectful relationship where Nicole and Celeste felt comfortable having frank conversations. While

Nicole brought with her a wealth of experience from her time at Woodside, she also shared many insights on how to achieve a manageable work and home balance. Together, Nicole and Celeste worked through handling new work tasks, home and family responsibilities, office politics, managing conflict and, most importantly, the critical role of an effective executive assistant. Celeste said: “Nicole and I fit very well together, we learned about each other and moved at a pace that was comfortable for both of us... something that was important with the one-on-one secondment we had.”

The impact that Nicole had in developing Celeste at Wunan, influenced the approach when support was sought for Divina D’Anna, Executive and Corporate Services Manager and the administration team at KRED Enterprises. Jawun sourced Larissa Nowland from the NAB who had a background in financial planning as well as learning and development. Larissa was tasked with developing Divina’s skills, improving administration systems and procedures and mentoring two other administrative staff.

Larissa engaged Divina in a development discussion which covered her strengths and weaknesses, her short and long terms goals, areas she would like to develop, training courses she was interested in and potential mentors. Larisa then worked with Divina to develop goals and a plan which included tangible actions. According to Divina, the outcome of these discussions contributed to her increased confidence and capacity to fulfil her role. Larissa also undertook similar discussions with the other two staff she was mentoring. Larissa explains: “I found that adopting a facilitative approach to this project worked really well, as it enabled Divina, Merrilee and Amanda to drive their own solutions and outcomes and take ownership of any actions required.”

Larissa also reviewed the position descriptions of Divina and the other two employees, to ensure their key responsibilities were clear and aligned with the organisation’s broader strategic plan.

## Outcomes

The personal and professional development of two key staff in both Wunan and KRED Enterprises has been significant for each individual, the organisations they work for and the leaders they support.

For Celeste at Wunan, the journey has been significant: “Nicole helped me in my role by giving me the tools I needed and guiding me around common EA duties. This helped me immensely and gave me a running start in my new role. Nicole and I are still in touch and when recently I moved into a new role within a newly formed organisation, I asked Nicole for advice before I started. Thanks Nicole and thank you Jawun for giving me and my workplace the opportunity for growth”

Since her secondment with Nicole, she has further developed her skills and has recently taken up a new role in a developing, non-government organisation in Kununurra. She also recently won the *Employee of the Year Award* at the 2013 East Kimberley Aboriginal Achievement Awards.

Divina at KRED also gained a lot from her time working with a Jawun secondee as she explains: “Larissa had a very positive influence on me professionally, highlighting the importance of structure and planning to achieve desired outcomes not only through theory but also through practice. Her patience and ability to adapt also assisted me personally in thinking and setting out my personal goals and professional path”

Not only did Divina gain much from Larissa’s input but the organisation also benefitted. Now KRED Enterprises not only has a number of clear duty statements for their Executive and Corporate Services Manager, Operations and Logistics Manager and the Personal Assistant to the CEO, but also a template for weekly activity reports and meeting agendas, development plans for all their staff and identification of prospective mentors to continue to assist in their further growth. Having the administrative processes properly in place has led to a more professional and productive environment, which has broader benefits for the organisation and its staff as well as those individuals, families, businesses and communities the organisation supports. Ian Trust, Chairman of Wunan, explains:

As a young Aboriginal person, it was essential that Celeste not only be provided with support and guidance to do the Executive Assistant job but also get a clear understanding about what is required to do the job and develop it further, particularly when their role is so crucial to supporting the role I play. Empowerment is not just about empowering the executives; the sharing and development of skills has to happen at all levels for organisations and communities to grow.

## **Next steps**

Due to the effectiveness of the Jawun secondee's work with Celeste at Wunan, the organisation has requested more assistance with individual capability building in 2014. At KRED, the success of this process driven-approach has led to a desire within the organisation to tackle other aspects of operations in the future such as accounting and payroll.