

Case Study

Supporting the Establishment of the Beagle Bay Futures Indigenous Corporation



Background

Beagle Bay is a small, remote community on the west coast of the Dampier Peninsula in Western Australia. The majority of the town's 300 inhabitants are Aboriginal, and under the National Partnerships Agreement a range of services are delivered to the community. A Local Operations Centre in Beagle Bay supports a variety of organisations to deliver services in the areas of: early childhood, education and training, healthy lives, safe and supportive communities, economic participation, home environment, and governance and leadership.

Since the winding up of Beagle Bay Community Corporation in 2007, the Beagle Bay community hadn't had an overarching body to coordinate the delivery of these services. There had been various interim solutions after that, but no permanent overarching entity. The lack of a suitable governance structure resulted in disjointed service delivery, and there was a sense of disenfranchisement from the wider community, who felt they did not have a voice in how services could be delivered to meet their needs.

In 2013, Beagle Bay resident Mary O'Reeri took part in Jawun's Emerging Leaders program. Mary worked at the Local Operations Centre in Beagle Bay, and was aware her community lacked representation and strong governance around how services should be delivered. During the Emerging Leaders tour, Mary visited organisations and Indigenous communities around Australia with highly effective governance structures. She also discussed her community's challenges with her fellow participants, exploring possible solutions to the situation in Beagle Bay.

This experience led Mary to approach Jawun for assistance in establishing an effective community governance model for Beagle Bay, to improve the coherent delivery of services, and provide the community with a clear voice in articulating their needs. To avoid repeating the mistakes of the past, residents wanted a governance structure that was inclusive, developed by the whole community and reflective of Beagle Bay cultural practices. The community wanted to create an entity which could work effectively with other local corporations and groups to achieve a joint vision: *'A thriving community focused on a safe and healthy future for our children, people and our country to build and maintain a strong future'*.

To assist Mary's ambitions, Jawun sourced two secondees to work on the Beagle Bay governance project. The first, Teigan O'Grady, was an employee of the Australian Tax Office and began work in November 2013. The second, Paul Habal, a zone manager from K-Mart (Wesfarmers), continued Teigan's work in March 2014. Teigan and Paul had strong engagement skills, combined with the expertise and experience to connect well with community members and progress the project.

Approach

Community participation was central to the success of the project, which historically had not been strong. An added challenge was the need to establish a governance model quickly. The cessation of funding under the Remote Service Delivery program scheduled for 30 June 2014 meant there was the threat that support from the Local Operations Centre could end. The community fast-tracked their efforts to complete the project by the impending deadline, and Jawun secondees channelled this energy to secure a governance model supported by the whole community.

Teigan held numerous workshops with an interim working group to establish what they hoped to achieve with a new governance structure. It was clear the new entity needed to represent a cross section of the community, and be fair and transparent. The working group looked at several models and eventually selected a burrow/cluster model, where directors represent a broad cross section of the community. A draft rule book and an alliance agreement for the new governance structure were also set up with the assistance of the Office of the Register of Aboriginal Corporations (ORAC).

The second secondee, Paul, then worked with Mary O'Reeri and Liz Kelly-Hunter, another employee of the Local Operations Centre, to ensure community corporations and service providers understood the vision and how the governance process would operate, with the ultimate aim of encouraging them to sign up to the community alliance agreement. They held a series of workshops and meetings with community organisations, such as the school, women's centre and ranger group, where they outlined their plans and answered questions. As the new corporation would represent the community, it was important everyone understood what governance meant, had an opportunity to critique the vision and were actively involved.

Paul, Mary and Liz were particularly keen to engage with the school, as this directly related to the community's vision with a focus on youth and safe communities. To understand students' aspirations for the community, Paul, Mary and Liz undertook a number of activities with students. The students designed the new logo for the council, with the favourite version selected by community members.

Mary O'Reeri explained, secondees actively engaging with the community, building trust and helping residents to understand what the new entity would achieve were all critical to the success of the project: *"Keeping the message and vision simple and not getting bogged down in legal speak helped galvanise the process. At the end of the day everyone wanted a safe and healthy future for our children, people and country to maintain and build a strong culture."*

Outcomes

As a result of Jawun's involvement, the support of the Local Operations Centre and participation by the interim governance working group and community members, Beagle Bay Futures Indigenous Corporation (BBFIC) was incorporated on the 17 April 2014 under the Corporations Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (CATSI) Act 2006. Beagle Bay now has a governing body with equal representation and the capacity to ensure future planning evolves, learning from past lessons. The Jawun secondees played a significant role in working with the interim leadership group, the Local Operations Centre and other parties to progress the thinking and support to achieve this outcome.

To date the outcomes achieved for this project have been:

- The development of a community vision: *'A thriving community focused on a safe and healthy future for our children, people and our country to build and maintain a strong future'*
- The development of a rule book for BBFIC
- The development of an alliance agreement between BBFIC and other community stakeholders
- Strong engagement from the community and other Aboriginal organisations, including the women's centre, school, local festival organisers and ranger group all signing up to the alliance agreement
- BBFIC incorporated under the Corporations (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander) Act 2006

- The seven director positions and seven proxy positions filled, reflecting strong community engagement.

Liz Kelly-Hunter, Beagle Bay RSD Local Area Coordinator said: *“The Beagle Bay Governance Project is about strengthening and building governance and leadership within the community, it is also about engaging the people in a governance and leadership revolution.”*

Next Steps

Whilst the establishment of the BBFIC and the subsequent election of the executive committee is a major step forward for the community, significant work remains around building strong processes. Future secondees will support the committee on a number of projects including: establishing members’ roles and responsibilities; outlining accountabilities under the CATSI Act; creating a reporting framework which holds partners accountable to the alliance agreement; establishing a review process for the new community governance framework; and indicators to measure the success of the new organisation and its community impact.