

Case Study

Inner Sydney – QBE and Tribal Warrior forging a strong partnership



Background

Tribal Warrior Association is an Indigenous tourism and training organisation in Sydney. It offers a cultural harbour cruise and charter service, commercial maritime training for disadvantaged Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, and a range of youth mentoring initiatives. Grounded in cultural pride, Tribal Warrior uses its programs and presence to forge vital links of appreciation, respect and understanding between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people.

Tribal Warrior has been receiving Jawun secondees since 2010. While secondees have come from a wide range of companies and government departments, a particularly strong relationship has developed with Australia's largest global insurer, QBE.

Around 50 QBE employees have been seconded through Jawun since 2011, to Indigenous-led organisations in Inner Sydney, Cape York, Goulburn Murray and East Kimberley. Fifteen QBE executives have been on Executive Visits, connecting on country with Indigenous leaders and reforms. At Tribal Warrior, five QBE employees have been on secondment since 2013, supporting a range of Indigenous-led development and enterprise initiatives through strategic planning, risk management, fundraising, human resources (HR) support and event management.

Approach

In 2015, Senior HR Business Partner Melinda Bell followed the footsteps of other QBE employees by choosing to go on a Jawun secondment in Inner Sydney. Melinda was drawn to Jawun because she wanted to better understand and support Indigenous Australia. Unlike many who want a remote, outback experience, she was keen to do so in her home suburb of Redfern.

In six weeks at Tribal Warrior, Melinda oversaw an HR restructure and new performance management framework. Her work focused on a program called *Clean Slate Without Prejudice*, a stand-out initiative for urban Indigenous youth. Set up in 2009 by Redfern Police Superintendent Luke Freudenstein alongside Shane Phillips and other Indigenous leaders, Clean Slate is a boxing and mentoring program between the police and young people including prisoners from Long Bay Correctional Centre. At the break of day three times a week, around 80 youth and officers spar together before having breakfast together. Since it began there has been a 73% drop in juvenile robberies and a 57% drop in assaults on police¹. A simple explanation of the power of the program, offered by Shane and Luke, is that it provides vital routine and discipline for young people who have known little of either.

Melinda joined the dawn boxing classes with her colleagues, Tribal Warrior's youth mentors and boxing instructors. This helped her build trust with the team, see the benefits of the program first hand, and understand the strength of each mentor's approach to working with young people in the community. It led to a more productive secondment, and aided Melinda in completing her brief.

¹ Figures from NSW Bureau of Crime between 2008 (the year before the program started) and 2014 (the last year of available statistics)

Among a set of recommendations made, Melinda identified an organisational need for marketing of Tribal Warrior's new cultural education product, Bangabaoui. Targeted at primary school students, Bangabaoui comprises a cruise with the crew from Tribal Warrior, exploring the environment and history of Sydney Harbour from an Indigenous perspective. Students learn about the history and traditional land use of the area, and about first encounters and relationships between colonists and Indigenous people. They stop for a tour of Clark Island and learn a traditional dance as well as traditional fishing methods. From an HR perspective, Melinda recognised the need for marketing skills to drive the promotion and uptake of a very well-conceived idea that was struggling to reach clients.

As a result of Melinda's recommendations Patrick Myles, a QBE Claims Officer with a background in training and coaching as well marketing and sales, was seconded to Tribal Warrior in the middle of 2016. Patrick coached an existing Tribal employee in marketing and customer service strategies applicable to Bangabaoui, and created a database of potential school clients and relevant contacts to market the initiative to. He described his secondment as "*enlightening*" him in Indigenous values, and valued the opportunity to share his marketing and customer service experience with "*an incredible organisation with significant further potential*".

Outcomes

CEO Shane Phillips remembers Melinda's secondment as having been a great fit. She delivered a productive training workshop, efficiently streamlined roles and responsibilities, developed new HR policies, and left a more professional and equipped team. Melinda also stayed in touch with Tribal Warrior to provide ongoing HR advice where needed. Tribal Warrior's Mentor Manager, Jeremy Wright, values this ongoing support greatly: "*Mel is a lovely, mature resource to access when we need to. She provides ongoing advice as a sounding board to Tribal on HR issues when required.*"

In addition, Melinda lived up to her original intention of building relationships within her local Indigenous community. She has a strong friendship with the Clean Slate team – when the cry of 'Partner up!' launches the early morning boxing sessions, Melinda is likely to be there with gloves on.

After Patrick's secondment, Tribal Warrior had an informed marketing strategy and a database to use in promoting Bangabaoui. As a result there was an immediate increase in the number of schools purchasing this educational tour for their students. Patrick's customer service coaching is still being used to ensure the product is an end-to-end success from the customer point of view.

Other QBE secondments at Tribal Warrior have added to the partnership's professional legacy, and ex-secondees have been active in a range of ways. Melinda and earlier secondee Leigh raised \$3,000 for new boxing gloves for Clean Slate for example, and QBE dedicated two 'staff volunteering days' to painting the vessel Mari Nawi as part of its renovation after fire damage.

Next Steps

In the final round of 2016, QBE Performance Analyst Khalil Saroufim was deployed to Tribal Warrior to strengthen financial planning and accounting systems, do a feasibility analysis of a move to new premises, and oversee final-stage renovations of Mari Nawi before a December launch. Through this, the partnership between QBE and Tribal Warrior continues to grow.

More broadly, Inner Sydney continues to attract secondees, from QBE and elsewhere, who are keen to support Indigenous development in their home area. Many of these stay engaged after secondment through mentoring, fundraising, continued professional advice and simply friendship. This proves the finding of end-of secondment surveys from Inner Sydney secondees, where 94% said they felt more motivated to actively follow and learn more about Indigenous affairs². It also reflects a trend among corporate and government secondees to support Indigenous Australia locally, and in doing so shows that reconciliation begins at home. With Melinda Bell becoming the new Sydney Jawun Alumni ambassador, and QBE's sustained commitment to the region, this trend looks set to strengthen.

² 2016 surveys