

Case Study

Supporting better workplace practices for Bama Services



Background

Set up in 2010, Bama Services (originally called Djarragun Enterprises) is a not-for-profit business that provides employment in construction, building maintenance and landscaping services for young Indigenous people from far north Queensland. Over 90 per cent of the organisation's staff are Indigenous, from communities in Cape York and the Torres Strait Islands. As a social enterprise, Bama Services reinvests all its profits to help grow the business and provide support for future skilled workers.

The organisation's business model relies on providing intensive support to its employees, particularly in the first 12 to 18 months. Many of the work crew members have grown up in communities where full-time employment is not a social norm, so a key factor in the successful transition into work is the intensive 'wrap-around' support provided. This involves practical and emotional support, so employees are equipped to successfully enter and stay in the workforce.

At Bama Services, there is a full-time health and wellbeing case manager who ensures the crew members receive appropriate support. Each employee also has a tailored program of continued education and training aimed at developing good work habits, personal organisation skills, financial management skills, and social and communication capabilities.

The organisation received initial seed funding from the Westpac Foundation, Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, Cisco, and the Farrell Family Foundation. Their long-term aim is to become a financially self-sufficient commercial venture. This will allow them to continue to provide Indigenous employment opportunities and to develop staff to their full potential without relying on external support.

With plans to grow their commercial contracts, it was vital that Bama Services had adequate infrastructure in place to handle increased demand. To become a strong commercial entity, Bama Services was keen to improve its efficiency by reviewing their internal processes. They also needed to develop Workplace Health and Safety (WH&S) practices to ensure a safe working environment, and to meet legislation requirements, a pre-requisite for tendering for contracts in a competitive climate. Previously there were no formal procedures for equipment management, or standardised WH&S processes which addressed business needs. As Bama Services did not have the resources nor the expertise required. The corporate skills and focus of Jawun secondees provided an excellent opportunity to execute these initiatives, and suitable secondees were sourced to assist.

Approach

In May 2012, Tom Hughes, a Qantas engineer, was seconded to Bama Services to develop an equipment maintenance program. Tom worked closely with administrative staff and site crew to establish where he could add value, and familiarise himself with the worksite tools. He initially realised that some basic cleaning up needed to be done, and worked closely with the team to see how this could be achieved. Once familiar with the work site tools, Tom also identified that more could be done to ensure the machinery was properly maintained, so he examined the best approach for providing Bama Services with a process for routine maintenance on all equipment.

Following on from Tom, Craig Johnston, another Qantas Engineer, worked with Bama Services to review and update their WH&S processes. When Craig arrived, he spent time on-site to build an understanding of workplace practices whilst on the job, and to get to know the crew their different daily activities. Once Craig developed a strong grasp of how the organisation operated, he used this context to review all WH&S documents, processes and procedures and make recommendations.

Nicola Armstrong, Administration Manager from Bama Services, explained: *“Craig saw gaps that we didn’t see... He brought objectivity and corporate experience and he had a genuine commitment to safety and for the welfare of the employees at Bama Services.”*

Outcomes

At the conclusion of his placement, Tom Hughes had created an asset register, a machine maintenance program and a comprehensive equipment management and stock control process. His work increased efficiency and reliability of tools, and ensured Bama Services would get whole-life usage from their equipment, and ultimately reducing costs to the business.

Nicola Armstrong explained: *“With new processes for managing the equipment, the time spent trying to find equipment was cut in half, and the worksite was cleared of any potential hazards making the workplace a safer environment.”*

For Tom, his time on secondment left a big impression: *“Of all the leadership courses I have completed throughout the course of my career, this had by far the most impact.”*

During his secondment, Craig delivered a suite of WH&S solutions tailored for the busy Bama Services environment. He trained all relevant staff in the use of these new documents, ensuring the new workplace practices became part of the organisation’s everyday operations. Craig shifted the WH&S compliance from a predominantly orange zone into a green zone; meaning the majority of workplace practices had moved from requiring attention, to having been successfully addressed and in-line with Queensland Government compliance rules. All of the WH&S assessment forms which Craig created are now used by team members as a matter of course for new jobs.

Nicola Armstrong explains how quickly Craig was able to progress the project: *“Craig thoroughly researched legislation requirements for Queensland and he very quickly assessed our financial constraints and adapted his ideas to meet our needs. He was a real lateral thinker.”* Rance Stafford, General Manager at DE, also praised Craig’s contribution: *“He was very committed to us and it showed through his efforts to provide us with what was needed; I think he did a great job.”*

Bama Services now has sufficient knowledge and increased capability in WH&S practices to maintain and monitor this practice internally. Jawun secondees supported the organisation in increasing awareness of safety in the workplace and an improved work culture around safety practices. Now, when tendering for new jobs, Bama Services can prove this area is fully compliant and their workers are safe.

Nicola Armstrong explained why the secondees’ time at Bama Services was so successful: *“What works in one business, won’t necessarily work in another business ... Tom and Craig took time getting to know the guys; it meant they were able to get to know the capabilities of the work crews. They very quickly understood the intricacies of our business.”*

Next Steps

As Bama Services continues to grow, so too will their need for support across their internal infrastructure. In the future, Bama Services hopes to work with more Jawun secondees to assess and improve the organisation’s environmental and quality control, and the internal operation functions of the business.

The business has also recently turned their attention to refining their strategic plan, which will involve a three-month Macquarie Capital secondee assisting in the definition of priorities for the next three years. The organisation will continue to improve and refine their internal infrastructure so their capacity grows in line with their strategic agenda; to achieve economic independence and commercial viability.