

Case Study

Peer to Peer Knowledge Transfer at Darkinjung, Central Coast



Background

Darkinjung Local Aboriginal Land Council (Darkinjung, or DLALC) is located on the Central Coast of New South Wales and covers an area from Catherine Hill Bay to the north, Hawkesbury River to the south, Pacific Ocean to the east and the Watagan Mountains to the west. Darkinjung is the largest private landholder on the Central Coast and is focused on improving the health and wellbeing of the local Indigenous community. The effective management of property assets enables Darkinjung to provide direct and tangible benefits to Indigenous people, particularly housing and education initiatives which they fund using a significant cash reserve derived from the sale of land and from development projects initiated independently and through partnerships.

Darkinjung is keenly aware of the responsibility they have to share their knowledge and experience with LALCs in other areas. Jawun has worked with Darkinjung since 2012, providing secondees from Westpac, Commonwealth Bank, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, the Department of Defence, KPMG, and Telstra. Secondees have provided endorsement for strategic initiatives and have contributed to the 'Economic Development Framework', an operating manual designed to help other LALCs navigate the many challenges and opportunities as they develop their own models of development based on Darkinjung's example.

Darkinjung is actively developing skills and processes for the effective management of a large and diverse property portfolio. Allan Beale, a Gamilaraay man from Walgett, recently joined the organisation. Allan has worked on the Central Coast for many years coordinating Indigenous social support programs. He joined Darkinjung as Health Safety and Environment Project Officer, a broad role covering management of land holdings and workplace health and safety. Allan's day-to-day duties cover:

- Inspecting environmental land holdings and providing regular reports for all properties
- Project managing a major government-funded track rehabilitation project
- Ensuring property management practices meet statutory requirements and properly serve the community at all times
- Ensuring the health and safety of Darkinjung workplaces and employees

Recognising that Allan's role is new, significant for the organisation, and demanding, Darkinjung formulated a brief for a Jawun secondee to provide him with one-to-one assistance and guidance. Specifically, the brief identified that Allan could benefit from early support in formulating systems for inspecting and reporting across all his areas of responsibility.

Approach

In August 2016 Phill Cosmo arrived at Darkinjung. Phill is an experienced Team Manager of a Delivery Relationship team at Telstra Wholesale, a demanding and complex business environment

where his focus must be on both customer service and the long-term wellbeing of the team. As a 'manager of managers', Phill came to Darkinjung wanting to share his skills in management and planning, as well as gain skills and understanding through a completely new experience.

Phill's secondment coincided almost exactly with Allan starting in his new role. They got to know each other at the camping trip during induction week and hit it off immediately.

One of the first things Allan and Phill tackled together was the digital file system used to store reports and other documentation. This oriented them both to the requirements of the role and provided a solid foundation for the rest of the work. Together they improved existing systems to reduce work and gain efficiency, for example migrating from paper-based reporting during site visits to digital reporting:

"We streamlined the inspections by taking the laptop out and putting all the information straight in. That seems to be going pretty good. If that doesn't work on the day - in case there's a bit of an issue with the connection - I have the booklet there just in case. It's something different that we're doing - it's good." – Allan Beale

Phill also supported Allan to strengthen management systems central to his role. In some areas, such as the portfolio of bushland properties, they prioritised key risks and established new systems to address them:

"A good example might be when trees on our land are leaning towards businesses and they want us to come out there to do an inspection. It's good to do it straight away - not leave it for so long - just go out and do it and take it from there." – Allan Beale

Allan and Phill both recognised that the transfer of soft skills would be a significant and lasting impact of the secondment. Phill was able to share techniques he learned through his experience in customer and stakeholder engagement, as well as ways of managing priorities and solving problems that arise when juggling a demanding and wide-ranging portfolio:

"It was a great opportunity for me to learn from someone who has a lot of skills and use them to help me do better in my job. He had all these good work ethics. Even though we had different jobs, the work [practices] are the same. And that's what I'm trying to do now day to day." – Allan Beale

Outcomes

At the end of the secondment Allan and Phill met with Darkinjung management to review the outcomes of their work together. Above all, it was agreed that Allan had used the one-to-one support to become a significantly more confident and organised Health Safety and Environment Project Officer, and had a clear path for his future work. Phill felt satisfied that he had transferred valuable skills, and had an important learning experience himself:

"I wanted to bring skills that I have gained at Telstra into the real world. I often believed these skills were industry-based and could not be transferred to another sector – I now know this is not the case.

I feel that my mentoring of Allan in his new role has increased his confidence, time management skills, and he now understands his role better and will be able to make a positive contribution to his organisation.

I will continue to work with Allan and the Darkinjung team during my own time to follow through on what we have started. I have a far greater appreciation of the work these organisations do and the challenges they face.

My own confidence has also increased and I can see the bigger picture within my own work."
– Phill Cosmo

Darkinjung is closer to meeting statutory requirements and to minimising the risks associated with their landholdings and working environments. Information management has been advanced with a thorough set of property inspection records and new digital monitoring and record-keeping systems. These will play a key role in future management of Darkinjung's property portfolio:

"Phill's support has ensured Darkinjung's records will be detailed and systematic as we move to our future responsibilities to maintain our properties".

– Lynne Hamilton, Planning and Development Manager, Darkinjung LALC

In this way, Darkinjung can continue to provide other LALCs with an example to emulate.

Next Steps

Darkinjung's digital information management is set to strengthen: another Jawun secondee has been deployed to implement a system which builds on what Allan and Phill began together, and will further assist Darkinjung manage property assets in a way that creates direct and tangible benefits for the community.

Allan continues to grow in confidence in the new role, and to consolidate systems and processes he initiated with Phill. Their mentoring sessions are continuing over Skype, cementing the skills transfer and continuing the friendship:

"Phill is truly a great guy - a pleasure to work with and a pleasure to know. He's really helped me in my new role. He guided me through what's got to be done with this job.

I was sad to see him go - he was good. We're from different backgrounds altogether, but for some reason people connect, and we did. We might talk on Skype tomorrow. It'll be good to check in with him and his life. He's got a good attitude. When he goes to his work he's on the go all the time. I hope he takes the time to smell the roses – chill back and think back to the Central Coast and think 'Jeez, I had a good time'. Life's short. That's what I said to him – 'Take the time to smell the roses'. He's a good mate and I do miss him.

That's the only sad thing about Jawun. You get to meet these people, you get on with them and then they go. You probably should cancel it ;)

If anyone else has this opportunity, take it. It helps you – assists you – and makes you a better person in that role."

– Allan Beale

