

1.11 INDIGENOUS INMATES EMPLOYMENT POLICY

Introduction

This policy manual section sets out the underlying philosophy for the provision of employment opportunities for Indigenous - *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander* inmates. This policy is to be also considered in the context of [section 1.1](#), - Correctional Industry Philosophy.

The development of the Indigenous Inmate Employment Policy has drawn heavily upon the Aboriginal Employment Development Policy known as the Miller report, which was prepared and published by the Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Commission in 1987. The policy also recognises recommendations 184 and 185 of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody covering education, training and employment opportunities for Indigenous inmates.

Background

Inmates, who enter the NSW Correctional system, are typically young with limited education, vocational and employment skills. These characteristics are, unfortunately, also typical for the broader Indigenous community.

A recent survey indicated an unemployment rate, within the Indigenous community, of 38% of whom half were classified as long term unemployed. Of those employed 26% were in special Government funded employment positions who would otherwise receive an unemployment allowance. In rural areas, the survey suggested 53% of jobs held by Indigenous people were through Government funded employment strategies.

It was within the context of this information that the Aboriginal Employment Development Program emerged - to address, within the Indigenous community, unacceptably high levels of unemployment and to redress the economic consequences of the resultant lack of access to economic resources and opportunities. The Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody cited the high level of Indigenous unemployment as a contributing factor to the high incarceration rate of Indigenous people.

Strategies

Correctional Industry programs have a profound role and capability to provide vocational and employment opportunities for Indigenous inmates which will assist their positive skill development within Corrections and facilitate employment and economic independence upon release. Indigenous inmates are therefore to be provided opportunities in accord with this policy within CSI work programs.

The development and maintenance of individual case management plans for Indigenous inmates and the stability of inmate placement through the classification process are critical functions in the provision of Correctional opportunities. The plan development must, in particular, focus upon an

inmates' post-release geographic and vocational intention. It is this intention that will critically influence the scope, nature and structure of vocational and employment opportunities provided. Aboriginal Pre and Post Release Program Officers are to be encouraged to provide support in the linking of correctional-based programs with community employment along with providing ongoing consultation and assistance in the development of case management plans.

In preparing vocational and employment skills development programs the potential post-release employment opportunities of Indigenous inmates might be regarded as through traditional employment, including community based employment, and within the general marketplace. In the case of traditional employment case management plans must recognise the need for skill development to provide portability to future general marketplace employment.

Work programs in which Indigenous inmates are engaged are to be supported with vocational education and training opportunities and wage payments in accord with [sections 1.3](#) – Vocational Education and Training and [8.2](#) – Inmate Wages System respectively. These opportunities must place a heavy emphasis upon work preparation/employability skill development, recognise cultural issues and preferably be provided within a culturally sensitive learning environment. The provision of technical based vocational training must embrace skilling which enables future flexibility in application i.e. generalist as distinct from specific.

The provision of a broad skill base to Indigenous inmates incorporating education, vocational and employment elements is intended to also support those inmates who will be returning to remote communities where a key focus is improving community self-sufficiency. In line with the Aboriginal Employment Development Policy, vocational education and training is also to focus upon providing Indigenous inmates with skills in small business management. This expectation recognises the high level of Indigenous business failure brought about by skill deficiencies in this area.

Indigenous people face enormous hurdles in joining the general employment marketplace. This is reflected by the relatively low level of Indigenous employment within the non-Government workforce. A critical responsibility of the Employment Development Program is therefore to target and identify potential employers who will provide real employment options and facilitate employment equity for Indigenous people.

The continuity of skill development beyond release from Corrections is an important element to enhance the positive return of Indigenous inmates to their communities. In this regard CSI is committed to encouraging external Agencies to sustain the principles and spirit of this Employment Policy.

The implementation of this policy at Correctional Centre level requires close and continuing interaction with Indigenous inmates and, where established, the local Indigenous Inmates Development Committee. This expectation is also to involve continuing consultation with Indigenous support staff including Aboriginal Pre and Post Release Program Officers and local Elders who are to be involved, wherever possible, in a mentoring capacity to support the positive development of Indigenous inmates.

Summary

The commitment of Governments at all levels to address Indigenous disadvantage and aspirations, including employment, represents an important part of the reconciliation process.

The Girrawaa creative work program for Indigenous inmates was introduced at Bathurst Correctional Centre during 1997/98. The function of this program will be to embrace, by practical implementation, the principles of this policy to determine the potential structure of special programs at other Centres.

The development and operation of CSI work programs, in accord with this policy, will facilitate Indigenous inmates returning to their communities with dignity, pride and the skills to facilitate their employment and economic independence.

Note 1: Employment has traditionally been an important part of Indigenous culture. It has brought individual identity, standing, forged family bonds and contributed to the maintenance of communities.

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