

# DONDUNSTAN FOUNDATION

REMEMBER THE FUTURE



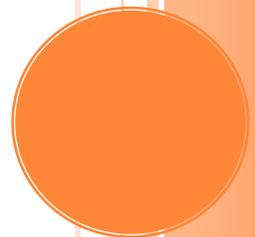
## CREATING EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES IN THE NOT-FOR-PROFIT ABORIGINAL SOCIAL SERVICES SECTOR

*Child Care, Aged Care, Homelessness, Domestic Violence, Family,  
Day Centres, Disability, Mental Health, Legal Services, Offenders'  
Rehabilitation*

### FEASIBILITY STUDY REPORT

Don Dunstan Foundation

January 2012



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Don Dunstan Foundation (DDF) acknowledges with thanks the many individuals and businesses that have contributed to the vision of this project.

In particular, the Foundation wishes to acknowledge the support and guidance of:

- The Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) for funding the feasibility study that generated information about the capacity of the Aboriginal not-for-profit social services sector to provide opportunities for meaningful employment for Aboriginal people; and in particular Ms Sheila Shields of DEEWR who has been generous in her time, support and facilitation of this project.
- Ms Nerida Saunders, Executive Director of the Aboriginal Affairs and Reconciliation Division of the Department of the Premier and Cabinet who identified the emerging problem and gave support and guidance throughout this feasibility stage.
- Dr Peter Acton, Fellow of the Australian Institute of Company Directors who has been unstinting in his support and availability to discuss the potential for private sector involvement.
- Professor John Spoehr and Dr Ann-Louise Hordacre of the Australian Institute of Social Research for their diligence and their availability to the DDF before and after the completion of this study

## FOREWORD

The Don Dunstan Foundation wishes to thank the many people who have given time and energy to this project.

These groups and individuals have questioned why we are not making the improvement we think should be achievable in Aboriginal employment; and have contributed their creative thoughts in searching for ways to attract, retain and promote the careers of Aboriginal people.

The capacity of the Aboriginal Social Services not-for-profit sector was confirmed as a largely-ignored but powerful sector that offers considerable employment opportunity.

On behalf of The Don Dunstan Foundation we commend both the Federal Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations and the State Department of the Premier and Cabinet for their support. We offer the sole recommendation as an innovative and sensible way to promote opportunities for much-needed career paths.

In submitting the potential career opportunity of the social services sector we note how readily the sector aligns with the employment values and aspirations of so many Aboriginal people.

We express our appreciation to those who have indicated their willingness to follow this project through to action.

**Hon Dr Lynn Arnold AO**

**Chair Trustees**

**Bill Cossey AM**

**Chair Board of Management**

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# CREATING EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES IN THE ABORIGINAL SOCIAL SERVICES NOT FOR PROFIT SECTOR

## SUMMARY

This study explored whether the Aboriginal social services sector has the potential to be a significant employer of Aboriginal people in South Australia. The result of the survey established that yes, it can be an employing sector of considerable size, but that efforts to become so will remain disjointed, spasmodic, available only to those who are aware of what is on offer, and not accessed by the myriad small not-for-profit (n-f-p) Aboriginal social service businesses that are overwhelmed by the day to day demand on their entities. Action is required to unify the sector and communicate systematically to and on behalf of the sector.

There is a strong wish that a service will be created to coordinate input and give voice to the Aboriginal not-for-profit sector. This is witnessed in the number of organisations that have signed on to help take the project to the next stage (see final section of the report). The parties wish to improve recruitment, employment, career development, training effectiveness and ultimately to improve the services they provide to their clients, but are aware this is unlikely to be successful until an organisational vehicle is created.

## BUSINESSES ENCOMPASSED WITHIN THIS FRAMEWORK

- Aboriginal services with Aboriginal employees
- Non Aboriginal services with Aboriginal employees
- Businesses with Aboriginal employees and non-Aboriginal clients.
- Businesses wishing to become competent employers of Aboriginal people.

## BACKGROUND

The concept for this proposal originated through discussions with the Executive Director of Aboriginal Affairs and Reconciliation Division (AARD) of the Department of the Premier and Cabinet in South Australia (DPCSA) and the Executive Director of the Don Dunstan Foundation (DDF). The Executive Director of AARD, Ms Nerida Saunders, was concerned that in order to achieve the Government's target for 2% Aboriginal employment in the State public service, it must recruit employees who are currently working in the not for profit services sector and in so doing is denuding that sector of many of its competent Aboriginal personnel. The DPC SA is sensitive to the fact that not-for-profit entities are unable to match Government employment conditions in career pathways or tenure.<sup>1</sup>

Initial consultation on the proposal was undertaken with members of the sector. There was universal support to find a way for Aboriginal people:

- To publicise the sector, what it does, how it might be used to provide meaningful work lives; and
- Identify how Aboriginal people might build careers based on social services to their people.

For this Aboriginal people need knowledge, choice and confidence.

Within the sector there is a need to know Government policies and have the capability to work with them, to use their Aboriginal voice to liaise on policy matters with Government and to confidently support Aboriginal people who are working often, but not exclusively, for Aboriginal people.

Currently within the sector employers wishing to employ Aboriginal people describe the (almost universal) frustrations they experience when wanting to employ Aboriginal people, particularly those with higher levels of skill.

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<sup>1</sup> The Aboriginal not-for-profit sector loosely encompasses disability services, supported accommodation, child care, health and aged care.<sup>1</sup>

## FINDINGS OF THE REPORT

DEEWR granted funds to conduct a feasibility study into the employment possibilities of the Aboriginal not for profit social services sector on the basis of an initial proposal.

The Australian Institute of Social Research, an entity of the University of Adelaide was commissioned to develop the report because it had, the year before, conducted research for the Government of South Australia into factors that would influence the Government's 2% Aboriginal employment strategy to recruit Aboriginal employees into the Government. The actions from that study had the unforeseen consequence of creating a risk to not-for-profit groups that were losing staff to the Government.

In the initial mapping of the sector the AISR identified in 163 organisations with focus on providing services to Aboriginal people. The list of businesses is detailed as Appendix 2<sup>2</sup>. The list is not exhaustive but is a very striking list that will form a foundation for future communications. The list will grow and change as more entities are identified by good publicity and marketing and by further creation of entities (see comment re APY lands below).

The report achieved two goals.

1. The survey identified the businesses in the Aboriginal social service sector that had an employing capability for Aboriginal people in South Australia;
2. It confirmed that there is a significant employment and career potential in the sector IF certain barriers can be overcome.

## DISCUSSION OF REPORT

The AISR report, for a variety of legitimate reasons, was necessarily confined to initial interview followed by a survey. The weakness of a survey method is that a small response is typical and is confined to those who have the confidence and the capacity to reply. This occurred here.

Of the 163 organisations that were identified, approximately 130 were seen as particularly appropriate and were contacted. Thirty one responses were received, but not all respondents answered all questions.

Despite this, the survey gave very strong indications of demand in the sector.

The estimate of potential employment indicates that 118 positions are likely to become available over the next year in **just seven** organisations alone.

If extrapolated to the sector as a whole this number may in reality be many times greater than the number identified. This is commented upon further in the following section.

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<sup>2</sup> Contact details were provided to the Don Dunstan Foundation but have not been published here. A list of the organisations is provided.

## RESULTS OF CONSULTATION WITHIN THE SECTOR

Before, during and after the survey, both the DDF and the AISR consulted with a variety of organisations and individuals in Federal and State Governments, not for profit organisations and the business sector. The list of those consulted at various stages of the project is listed as Appendix 4, and the results of the survey and consultation are consolidated below with a merging of the AISR study report and summary comment from the various sources.

There was wide agreement that survey methods are difficult for small, not for profit organisations that face daily urgencies or lack familiarity with surveys. There was no surprise that only a small number of respondents replied.

AISR SURVEY SECTION	CONSULTATION COMMENT
<p>1.2.1 <b>Workforce profile</b></p>	<p>The high levels of Aboriginal volunteer staff were noted and seen as offering excellent employment potential in a career progression that begins with volunteering and moves to employment as opportunities became available in both that organisation and any other. The potential in this is, of course, subject to the opportunities in other organisations being known or readily available.</p> <p>Interestingly, some comments indicated that the potential is not just in businesses listed within the 163 organisations identified in the mapping, but in <i>potential</i> businesses, and businesses that technically don't fit the strict definition of not-for-profit such as the Australian Red Cross.<sup>3</sup></p>
<p>1.2.1.2 <b>Employment contracts</b></p>	<p>The higher levels of permanent employment for Aboriginal staff were a pleasant surprise for most people consulted.</p>
<p>1.2.1.3 <b>Demographic Characteristics of Aboriginal Staff</b></p>	<p>Services in the sector are provided by a predominantly (76%) female workforce. This survey figure was not directly commented upon in the consultation but is probably in line with general comments.</p>
<p>1.2.2 <b>Job related training or study</b></p>	<p>69% of survey respondents are currently supporting staff to undertake further training or study. This was seen as an excellent statistic but several respondents queried whether this was more strongly an indication of what</p>

<sup>3</sup> Mr Peter McCusker of the Palya Fund estimates that through the Matuka project up to 200 jobs may be available in transport services within the Social Services framework providing that licensing matters can be addressed; and Ms Kerry Symons, Executive Director of Australian Red Cross (South Australia) plans by 2015 to have increased Aboriginal employment from the current 30 to around 250 Aboriginal people. These numbers were not included in the survey.

<b>offered</b>	the larger organisations could achieve, rather than an across-the-board result.
<b>1.3.1 Unfilled vacancies and new positions</b>	<p>That there is significant employing potential in the Aboriginal not-for-profit sector was strongly supported in the consultation.</p> <p>Apart from the 35 vacant positions in six organisations that were identified, it was noted that the employing potential of the 118 entities over the next 6 – 12 months was very conservative. Various consultations estimated the potential as being many times that if the right people can know about and be attracted to the sector; if a long term skill planning process is developed; and if culturally safe employment practices are used.</p>
<b>1.3.2 Difficulty in filling particular roles</b>	<p>The difficulty in filling roles was the most commented upon of all.</p> <p>The survey identified the difficulties in filling higher level professional roles and noted this is a common experience reflected in the statistics provided in a DFEEST report “Aboriginal Employment and Training Strategy for the Community Services Sector in South Australia”. The DFEEST report showed how few high level professionals are currently in training compared to the potential employment opportunities.<sup>4</sup> The DFEEST report resonated very strongly, particularly in the large consultation group.</p> <p>As an example, one employer described advertising a position for a professional Aboriginal person three times and still failing to attract a person with the necessary skills. The employer wanted badly to employ an Aboriginal person but did not want to set that person up for failure. That employer described this example as simply what happens over and over in the sector, and expressed frustration that there is no reliable assistance that could be called in to help.</p> <p>Consultation suggested also that para-professional staff, and Aboriginal employees in general are difficult to find, and that much work needs to be done in employment to make it easier for businesses to obtain and retain Aboriginal employees. The final section of the report addresses this matter.</p>
<b>1.4.2 Perceived barriers</b>	<p>The survey identified lack of competitive salaries, lack of security of employment and lack of a career path as barriers to employment.</p> <p>The consultation process concurred that the competitive salaries issue is</p>

<sup>4</sup> The DFEEST report, for example identified that while there are 1039 Aboriginal students in TAFE, Taundi and the Universities, there is a lower completion rate in Aboriginal students and a poor success rate in transitioning to employment.

The consultation group also noted that in areas where there is a g major employment opportunity (social work, for example) only 37 new social workers are studying in the sector at present.

<p><b>to employment</b></p>	<p>likely to be addressed with the recent Federal Government initiative to fund the difference in sector salaries, but that employment security is a major issue in the sector where many of the projects are precariously funded - less so in the higher professional levels and more so at some of the lower levels of employment. These factors combine with the inadequate numbers of skilled Aboriginal people to place serious limits on employment.</p> <p>Consultation reinforced the finding that lack of a career path is definitely a barrier, especially when combined with short-term funding and the project nature of much of the work in the sector.</p> <p>Also highlighted in the discussion about barriers was the absence of information. Employment expos and leaflets are not seen as a useful tool for Aboriginal people who need to know the sector in advance and have confidence in their ability to work within it.</p>
<p>1.4.3 <b>Strategies for increasing employment</b></p>	<p>The strategies suggested for increasing recruitment received little comment in the consultation apart from general support and the sense that 'this all should happen – but it's not sufficient on its own'. It was also noted that these suggested strategies have been similar to those suggested many times before without significant change in employment figures.</p>
<p>1.5.1 <b>Retention rates</b></p>	<p>The consultation noted the positive survey information regarding retention but suspects that this is a skewed result with possible bias towards the larger employing bodies familiar with Aboriginal people. The consultation noted that many organisations are not yet culturally competent and able to offer a 'culturally safe' work environment for Aboriginal people.</p>
<p>1.5.2 <b>Perceived barriers to retention</b></p>	<p>The barriers to the retention listed in the survey response, again, whilst supported in consultation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Were seen in the many organisations that lack cultural capability; and</li> <li>• Consultation indicated significant improvement was unlikely to happen unless a major new initiative to unify the industry was implemented</li> </ul>
<p>1.5.3 <b>Strategies suggested for maximising recruitment and retention</b></p>	<p>The recommended strategies for maximising employment were noted as being self-evident. The main issue for those consulted was that despite the fact that many Aboriginal people want jobs where they can serve the needs of other Aboriginal people there is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• no comprehensive information about the benefits and opportunities of the sector written for Aboriginal people (including case studies and success stories)</li> </ul>

- no active promotion of the employment and career benefits of the sector as a whole
- no mechanism for Aboriginal people to present a unified Aboriginal voice to promote the sector
- no linking across the sector so that employment in one section might lead to further career progression in another sector;
- no mechanism for people to be facilitated in and through the sector
- no systematic or accredited Aboriginal mentoring for Aboriginal people
- no Aboriginal-accredited cultural competence training
- no voice for Aboriginal people regarding the training and development that is on offer.
- no Aboriginal voice to advise on policy impacts or the disharmonies evident in some cross-department policies.

In short, both those who conducted the survey and those who commented on the needs of the sector have a view that a unified approach to provision for employment, mentoring, career progression, education, training, promotion of the sector and provision of information is critical if the employment opportunities that were established by the survey and confirmed in consultation are to be realised.

In commenting thus, concern was expressed that despite the many attempts by competent and committed people to effect change, these efforts have achieved very limited success and the potential of the sector to employ Aboriginal people to conduct services for Aboriginal people is not yet realised. Aboriginal people need to know the sector, what it offers, how to move into it and within it; whilst the sector needs the capability to attract, develop retain, and preserve the value of skills within the sector.

#### **CONSULTATION EXTERNAL TO THE SECTOR**

Key business leaders have been asked to comment on this strategy. They include Ms Melinda Cilento, formerly Business Council of Australia and now Co-Chair Reconciliation Australia, and Mr Peter Acton; formerly Vice President of Boston Consulting Group (now a private consultant) has made considerable pro-bono assistance available to assist in this project. Both people have offered to assist with networking into business should it be needed.

Both people have confidence that many businesses in the private sector would support the development of a group to communicate with and unify the sector. In the current climate, that support is seen to more likely be with in-kind skills mentoring than the provision of cash.

## BACKGROUND TO RECOMMENDATION

All of the issues canvassed are addressed in the recommendation below.

The recommendation reflects the positively assessed potential of the Aboriginal Social Services not-for-profit sector to provide employment and careers, but carries a distinct message that this potential will not be achieved unless Aboriginal people are given a mechanism to advocate for the sector.

The preferred mechanism is a coordinating body to provide expert advice and service support.

A list of functions of such a body are listed below. They would operate in conjunction with and amplify Federal and State Government initiatives.

## RECOMMENDATION

*Create a unified Social Services Not-for-Profit Sector that will build the capacity to generate sustainable employment and career pathways in the Aboriginal not-for-profit Social Services Sector by;*

- *undertaking or advising on long term planning for employment and career path development that is tightly linked to skills formation*
- *advising on training, mentoring, career development opportunities that are more immediately available;*
- *communicating, linking and networking and promoting the sector.*
- *giving a voice to, and support for Aboriginal employees who are working to, for or with Aboriginal people.*
- *improving liaison within the social service sector and between the social service and government sectors*
- *assisting with policy harmonisation, evaluation and accountability processes*

*In short, the recommendations contemplate that employment will be enhanced and the services improved by empowering Aboriginal people to promote the sector as a whole to those in the Aboriginal population whose values and skill potential align to the sector.*

## **CONCLUSION SUMMARY**

The Feasibility Study that was funded by DEEWR has established through the AISR's survey that with natural turnover in the sector and the continuation of the funding base there should be the opportunity for long term employment and career potential in the order of some hundreds of people per annum, subject to the availability of necessary skills.

The supply of skills is a serious limiting factor to employment. The supply is seen as a product of the lack of unity in the sector and the inability of any one body to promote the sector as a whole. This in turn can only be done with long term planning, coordinated training in line with that planning, policy support and active promotion of the sector potential employees. But all of the above will not achieve new gains without an Aboriginal voice speaking for and to the sector.

## **FINAL WORD**

The difficulties in recruiting potential employees with necessary skills are made clearer by this DEEWR-funded study. As a consequence of the study and the consultation over time, the final consultation group determined that steps must be taken to create a unified approach so that Aboriginal people gain confidence in the sector as a desirable industry within which to build their careers.

Accordingly, a new group has been formed that will submit for funds to further the task in the near future.