

**Aboriginal Employment Strategy Submission to the Federal Government Inquiry  
into Indigenous employment with a difference.**

**ABORIGINAL EMPLOYMENT STRATEGY  
FACT SHEET**

Submission No. 40

Date Received 0

**They key facts to why the AES works**

- ✘ Aboriginal community employment is directly related to the self esteem of the community.
- ✘ The AES is know as a good employment agency but building self esteem and impacting positively in a community along with understanding human psychology and how to impact on an entire town and the media is equally important.
- ✘ In Tamworth and Dubbo we were the first Aboriginal businesses in the main street, paid on performance, with the Aboriginal flag flying. It lifts a community.
- ✘ The key role of the AES employment coordinator is to visit businesses and build relationships. It is not about asking for jobs.
- ✘ Using Aboriginal community people to drive the business lifts a community and links the AES to that community in a way that non-Aboriginal people can never connect to.
- ✘ Aboriginal employment coordinators visit businesses wearing business suits. Looking professional impacts positive on a business.
- ✘ The AES's role is to challenge businesses and communities both black and white.
- ✘ It is about black and white working together. There is a majority of Aboriginal people on the board but no community committee structures around any of our offices.
- ✘ Security work builds Aboriginal people's self esteem.
- ✘ People just want to be respected, including Aboriginal people.
- ✘ **It is about being noticed.**

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**OVERVIEW OF THE AES**

History of the Aboriginal Employment Strategy

The Aboriginal Employment Strategy emerged as a result of one of the recommendations made by the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody in the late 1980's. In 1991 an Aboriginal employment promotion group was set up in Moree which was rolled into an Aboriginal employment strategy under the auspice of the Gwydir Valley Cotton Growers Association. After taking five years to establish funding a contract was signed with DEETYA in November 1996.

The Aboriginal Employment Strategy commenced operation on February 10, 1997 with Mr. Warren Barnes of Toomelah as its first manager. This was a defining year for Moree as social problems and crime issues were major concerns. We had a visit from the Police Commissioner as people were demanding more punishment for crimes, the Street Reclaimers Committee was formed and the Parental Responsibility Act came into effect.

During the first twelve months progress was slow but by February 1998 there were 13 Aboriginal people in full time employment. In May 1998 a high profile launch of the AES was held. With politicians and the Sydney media in attendance there was a huge boost in publicity. As a result we rapidly gained more employment opportunities: people were beginning to see that jobs for the Aboriginal community were the answer.

During the next twelve months we worked extensively on programmes that build pride and self esteem in the Aboriginal community. Projects were established including developing a business plan and a code of conduct with the Boomerangs Rugby League Football Club, banners for the main street, electing an Aboriginal Councillor to the Shire and even organising the launch of Rabbit Proof Fence in Moree. Security training was also an important part of our program as it builds self esteem and respect.

Early in 1999 we had a visit from Ray Martin and his Current Affair team. He had a big impact working around the town for three days. This was the first time that a reporter was doing a positive story rather than a negative story on Moree. By the end of 1999 we had well over one hundred Aboriginal people in full time employment.

On the back of this success the decision was made to expand and the doors of the Tamworth office opened on May 6<sup>th</sup> 2003. In its first 12 months of operation the Tamworth Aboriginal Employment Strategy had a massive impact on the local community. 151 Aboriginal people were placed into employment and 630 people registered with the strategy saying they wanted to work. The strategy office even won the CGU Tamworth Chamber of Commerce Best New Business Award.

Following the success of the expansion into Tamworth Dubbo became the next target. The office opened on March 9, 2004. The Aboriginal community was cautious as they had heard and seen all the hype before without the success. In some quarters the AES was seen as competition and some public statements were made about the "need" to have

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another employment program in town. By the end of 2004 with over 100 placements Dubbo was buzzing with excitement with what's been achieved to-date.

The success of the Aboriginal Employment Strategy involves seeking a commitment from the employers to work with the AES; we don't just seek a job. We warn employers of problems ahead, our mentors are there to help manage through them. The staff is all Aboriginal. They visit businesses, challenge people and their role is to build partnerships and mentor the problems. In conjunction with our jobs program we are constantly implementing strategies that raise the self-esteem of the community. It's about building pride in being Aboriginal. These programs include our security work, our DEST funded Indigenous School to Work program and our partnership with banks providing Indigenous School Based trainees.

Security is one of the major initiatives of the AES; we believe it is a key way of lifting an Aboriginal community and getting more Aboriginal people employed. We already have a great security force in Moree. We have the only all Aboriginal security team Australia wide securing a Woolworths store and we have a team of guards on hand to handle commercial work. We work community security in Dubbo. Aboriginal security guards from the AES patrol the troubled Gordon Estate and we also provide security for the main street during business hours. We are working on building similar programs in Tamworth.

We have received funding from DEST to run an Indigenous School to Work program for school students in Years 7 and 8. What is being planned is that students will come to the AES offices in Moree and Tamworth for 2 hours every week after school and take part in a WebQuest. They will enter a learning environment that is totally unlike the classroom and each will be given a computer and a series of Quests that they undertake on the internet each aimed at giving them the skills needed to create their own business. At the end of the Quests they will have to create their own business and sell a product of their own design.

Strategic Approach with banks

In the past two years the AES has deliberately opened the door to banks following a visit from John McFarlane and has several Aboriginal students employed in school based traineeships. The program sees students working at the bank full time during school holidays and one day a week during term time. At the completion of their HSC will receive a Certificate II in Financial Services. The SBT Program aims to build a workplace culture in our young Aboriginal kids whilst they are at school. Students have a clear understanding of the work environment and basic skills in their chosen pathway. School based traineeships increase Aboriginal student participation in education and improve HSC completion rates in Moree, Tamworth and Dubbo. 20 more new positions across NSW will be initiated this year.

The reason we made a strategic decision to approach banks is because corporate governance is a real issue in Aboriginal organisations. We estimated there are 1500 bank

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branches in rural Australia. If we could get an Aboriginal kid into each of these branches it would improve corporate governance issues in Aboriginal organisations. We have an agreement with the ANZ Bank to put an Indigenous school based trainee into every ANZ bank that we can access via our three offices. We have leveraged that into the CBA who now have several Aboriginal kids in their branches across country NSW and we are now in talks with the New England Credit Union.

If you want to fix Aboriginal employment in rural towns, you need to be in customer service in main streets. The key to this is involvement from corporate Australia. That is supermarkets, banks, retailers, franchises like McDonald's, KFC and Hungry Jacks. To get Australian companies involved you need a vehicle they are confidence in. They cannot afford to be dealing with a different Aboriginal organisation in every town they operate in. If the AES could get 16 offices around NSW corporate Australia would say we can use this company and we could make a real difference in Aboriginal employment.