

Economic development in Aboriginal communities

Site visit report

Dubbo and Brewarrina



Site visit to Dubbo/Brewarrina – Tuesday and Wednesday, 5-6 April 2016

On Tuesday 5 April 2016 committee members undertook a site visit to:

- The Clontarf Foundation project operating at Dubbo College South Campus, Dubbo

On Wednesday 6 April 2016 committee members undertook site visits to:

- The Merriman Shearing School project, based at Merriman Station, Brewarrina;
- The Brewarrina Business Co-operative, Brewarrina.

Clontarf Foundation – Dubbo College South Campus

The Clontarf Foundation runs academy programs at various schools across Australia. The Clontarf Academy program supports young indigenous males to build self-esteem, leadership skills and discipline by creating a compassionate and unified group which affords the young men with a sense of belonging. The Clontarf Academy also provides sporting and recreation activities and teaches general life skills such as cooking, cleaning and assistance in attaining a driver licence.

The committee met with Mr Brendan Maher, Partnerships Manager (NSW & QLD) with the Clontarf Foundation. Also in attendance were:

- Mr Chris McDonald, Regional Manager (Clontarf Foundation)
- Mr Charlie Maher, Dubbo South Director (Clontarf Foundation)
- Mr Nick O’Sullivan, NSW Employment Officer (Clontarf Foundation)
- Mr Ged Winterton, Dubbo South Operations Officer (Clontarf Foundation)
- Mr Ian Neubauer, Executive Principal, Dubbo South College
- Mr Ross Gorrie, Principal, Dubbo South College
- Ms Di Baker, Deputy Principal, Dubbo South College.

The Dubbo South Clontarf Academy was established in 2014 catering to high risk indigenous males at the Dubbo College South Campus. Clontarf has engaged with various institutions to supply the students with practical experience and skills within the arena they would like to engage after their studies. This includes contracts with local mining operations, fire-fighters, sporting clubs and electronic companies (for example, Huawei) among many others designed to suit the individual student’s interests.

“So really, we’re just trying to make school more attractive for all the young fellas that they want to come and when they come, we can change their behaviours that we want them to display out in the community. And then hopefully get them through to year 12 and get them a job. It’s really that simple.” Mr Brendan Maher

“It comes down to the marketing of our events and our staff.” Mr Chris McDonald

The Clontarf Foundation will be able to assist 4,500 to 5,000 young Aboriginal males throughout the whole of NSW this year with the existing funds they have available which comes from New South Wales and Commonwealth governments as well as through donations from the private sector.

The program results are demonstrated through attendance statistics. There are 90 Aboriginal males at Dubbo South Clontarf Academy and their collective attendance sits at 89%.

- 91% for year 7 students
- 87.5 for year 8 students
- 91% for year 9 students
- 86% for year 10 students

The committee heard that Clontarf also take responsibility for finding the boys employment post program, facilitated through strong links between Clontarf and local employers and organisations.

The Academy ultimately strives to assist the young men in attending and completing their HSC studies so that they can procure employment or further education,¹ and also on building critical life skills.

Mr Chris McDonald told the committee:

“We are trying to fill up their tool boxes as much as possible”

On skill development on Clontarf camps: “[We do] different things like pulling over on the side of the road, making your own sandwiches, packing it all up, jumping in the bus, off you go. Pretty easy to go through McDonalds, but we pass these sort of skills on to the young fellas – first of all its cheaper, it’s better for you and they can take those skills back to their families and hopefully pass it on to their kids one day.”

The key points and issues raised during the visit to Dubbo South Clontarf Academy were:

- Effective engagement with people at a young age is key to assisting them achieve better results academically, in training and employment and in developing key life skills, all of which contribute toward economic sustainability and security.
- Clontarf’s model works because it uses sport and other incentives to connect with young people, while also offering incentives for good performance:

“We can dangle a few carrots at times... If you want to come on this incentive camp, this is what we need from you – we need you in the classroom, doing the right thing by your teachers as well as us.” Mr Chris McDonald

- Strong leadership, including Aboriginal leadership, is critical to Clontarf’s success.
- There is an identified gap in that similar programs are not available for girls and young women. This is an issue which, if addressed, could significantly improve outcomes not only for young Aboriginal women, but also for their families and communities.

¹ Dubbo South Clontarf Academy website, <http://www.clontarf.org.au/academy/dubbo-south-clontarf-academy/>, retrieved 7/04/2016.

Merriman Shearing School

Merriman Shearing School coordinates a 16-week training programme to prepare and familiarise young Indigenous people for employment in the wool industry. The school is situated at Merriman Station which is an Indigenous Land Corporation (ILC) operated sheep property near Brewarrina in north-western NSW.²

The committee visited Merriman Station and spoke with the following people:

- Ms Tricia Button – Divisional Manager, Indigenous Land Corporation
- Mr Rory Lynch – Project Advisor, Indigenous Land Corporation
- Mr Ian ‘Boof’ Bateman – Head Trainer, Merriman Shearing School
- Mrs Kathleen ‘Tup’ Bateman – Wool Classer / Trainer, Merriman Shearing School
- Mr Michael Nancarrow – Trainer, Merriman Shearing School
- Mr Graham Thurlow – Trainer / Mentor, Merriman Shearing School
- Ms Susan Taylor – Cook, Merriman Shearing School
- Mr Angelo Pippas – Mayor, Brewarrina Shire Council
- Mr Mark Brown – Councillor, Brewarrina Shire Council
- Mr Mike Pora – Australian Wool Innovation (AWI) Training

The following key points or issues were highlighted during the meeting at Merriman:

- Maximising employment post-training relies on ensuring that participants develop life skills and a positive work ethic in addition to job-specific skills:

“As far as the [course] time ... in terms of a residential school it’s longer than anywhere else in the shearing industry, but that’s partly also to build that ‘work as a habit’ as much as anything” Mr Rory Lynch.

“The schools structured with a 3 week pre-vocational course where the kids, if they’re on unemployment benefits they continue to receive the benefits through that period. We usually start with about 20. That usually, through natural attrition whittles down to 15 and then at the end of that 3 week they actually start basically a paid traineeship and they get paid a wage under the Award. Completion rates a bit over 75%.... about a dozen each school ...” Mr Rory Lynch

- It is important that training programs target fields where there are employment opportunities. There is an identified need for workers in the wool industry, meaning that the Merriman program is well placed to respond in a way that maximises employment opportunities for students. A significant proportion of those going through the school go on to obtain employment post course:

“A sheep is \$2.87, so its \$287 a hundred, so double that [is what you can earn in a day]... if you’re any sort of a shearer ... some guys ... they shear 300 quite regular,

² Merriman Shearing School, <http://www.merrimanshearingschool.com.au/Home/About>, retrieved 7/04/2016.

they're earning big money. A wool handler is over \$1000 a week. So it's great money. And it's a great life. And there's forty odd countries in the world you can go to. And it's the only job that you can go without a certificate to get a job. Turn up and go to work." Mr Ian 'Boof' Bateman.

"...Outta that 130 that's graduated, it's probably 85-88% that's actually in work." Mr Ian 'Boof' Bateman.

- Ensuring that there is funding for programs remains a challenge. Sustaining programs that produce solid outcomes is a critical issue in addressing systemic disadvantage and other factors that impact economic development:

"The school is a roughly 50/50, although the ILC puts in more, partnership w/ prime minister and cabinet... the ILC board committed funding.. for a two year commitment. PMC have advised that theyre not going to be a co-contributor anymore ... [they contribute] 350k a year. So, at this stage, this is the last school at the moment. The ILCs running this one off its own bat [by utilising savings from elsewhere]... because we'd already started recruiting kids and we'd contracted Boof..." Ms Tricia Button
 "The total cost of running a school is about \$415 thousand dollars." Ms Tricia Button

"For this to roll over is going to be one of the biggest disasters in the wool industry that we got. As an old contractor said to me ... he looked at me he said "It'll never be sheep. It'll never be wool prices. It'll be labour." And he never said a truer word in his life. To find people now mate, it's near impossible. And that's the reason, these kids have got a ready market out there. If they're interested mate they can go straight to work and we find them jobs." Mr Ian 'Boof' Bateman.

"I've had the parents from all over Australia of the kids who've been through this system [Merriman shearing school] ring me and tell me to make sure I keep this going." Mr Angelo Pippas.

The Brewarrina Business Co-operative

Although originally established to assist small Aboriginal organisations to manage their finances, the Brewarrina Business Cooperative now offer other types of support and services including family day care, mens' groups, womens' groups, young girls and boys programs and the local museum in Brewarrina and in Lightning Ridge.

The committee was briefed by the CEO of the Brewarrina Business Cooperative Ms Catherine Edwards-Bott. Also in attendance were:

- Mr William Barker, Chairperson Brewarrina Business Cooperative Board
- Mr Angelo Pippas, Deputy Chair Brewarrina Business Cooperative Board, Mayor of Brewarrina
- Ms Lily Shearer, Director Brewarrina Business Cooperative Board, Moogahlin Performing Arts Creative Producer
- Mr Gary Peterson, Director Brewarrina Business Cooperative Board, Mission Australia, Men's coordinator
- Mr Robbie Dungay, Moogahlin Performing Arts Inc.
- Ms Frayne Barker, Director Gainmara Birrilee Preschool, Brewarrina
- Ms Annette Pascoe, Children's Services Coordinator, Brewarrina Business Cooperative.

A number of issues were highlighted during the committee's visit:

- It is important to consider the specific needs and challenges of regional and remote towns and communities when applying government processes, upon which funding is reliant:
 "It's very difficult out here, to get qualified people to come out ... we have the equipment, we have the buildings, but we're always being threatened ... Local politics are playing an enormous game with us..." - Ms Catherine Edwards Bott.
- Programs that are funded on short funding cycles makes it difficult for organisations to develop ongoing sustainability:
 "We're hitting out heads up against a brick wall at the moment because our funding for these buildings from Community Services is finished at the end of June, we have no idea what is going to happen then... [to make it work properly] we need to know that we've got funding year to year to keep running what we're running" - Ms Catherine Edwards Bott.