

INQUIRY INTO ISSUES RELATING TO REDFERN/WATERLOO

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Theme:

Summary



ES

ABORIGINAL EMPLOYMENT STRATEGY

April 21st 2004

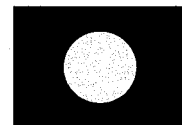
The Director
Standing Committee on Social Issues
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
SYDNEY 2000

To The Director,

Following an invitation from Rachel Callinan the Aboriginal Employment Strategy would like to submit the following information about our work which has been changing Aboriginal communities for the better in Tamworth, Dubbo and Moree and which we believe could be make a difference to the Aboriginal people in Redfern.

Taking the initiative to try to do something about the town's growing problems, including concerns about a possible exodus of skilled labour, the Gwydir Valley Cotton Growers Association applied to the Federal Department of Employment for funds to help establish a strategy to increase Aboriginal employment in the local cotton industry, and thus began the Moree Aboriginal Employment Strategy (MAES) in early 1997.

The AES places approximately 120 – 130 Aboriginal people into seasonal, part-time, casual and permanent positions in Moree. Generally 66 per cent of these jobs have the potential to lead to full time employment and out of this we find that 50 – 60 people stay in jobs for 13 weeks and 50 stay in jobs for more than 26 weeks. Considering the seasonal nature of the labour market in Moree and the issue of trans-generational welfare



dependency these are good figures. The key to the success of Moree is the ability to keep kids through to Year 12. We are never going to be able to do this unless their parents, uncles and aunts are cycling through jobs. This will have an impact on their kids and provide hope for the future. These kids will strive for a career and we are starting to see this in Moree already. In 2003 16 Aboriginal students completed Year 12 compared to the one or two who got their HSC in the early 90's. The trend has been set.

The existence and activities of the MAES, which revolves around building self esteem and pride within the community, are also a continuing reminder to Aboriginal people of the importance of employment and of the fact that there is within their midst an Aboriginal business dedicated to helping Aboriginal people get and retain jobs, and staffed entirely by young Aboriginal people. Thus, MAES helps keep employment on the agenda for Aboriginal people as well as employers.

The Aboriginal Employment Strategy expanded into Tamworth on May 6th 2003 and has continued the success it built in Moree. In its first year of operation the TAES has seen 648 Aboriginal people register as interested in working and placed over 130 Aboriginal people into jobs. It took out the Tamworth Chamber of Commerce Business Award for Best New Business 2003.

Following the success of the expansion into Tamworth the AES made the move to Dubbo. With the support of DEWR, the Dubbo City Council and Insurance Australian Group (NRMA Insurance) we have opened up a prominent main street office on March 8 of this year and have impacted on the community already. In the first month of operation 22 Aboriginal people were placed into jobs with 20 more positions waiting to be filled, resumes are already in.

The key to the success of the AES is the business approach we take. There is no town committee around our offices. The staff is young Aboriginal people who mix and socialize within the Aboriginal community and are people who are capable of building long term partnerships and relationships with businesses. Our mentoring service helps us keep Aboriginal people in jobs where other services and strategies have failed. We know the people we place in employment, we know their families. We understand where they come from and what issues they are facing. Also we are experienced in dealing with

employers so that we act as a go between and can nip problems in the bud before they become big issues; because we are upfront and we know where to find our clients when they are missing. Our job doesn't end when a person starts their job. We will continue to mentor our clients for as long as they need us. The AES tends to be the centre of social change, in a sense we are like a big family and provide a work culture to our community which is what is missing in Sydney. The AES is about building pride, self esteem and long term commitment in Aboriginal communities.

The AES also has a security arm which is another way we have a positive effect on the Moree Community. In 2003 the AES gained a Masters Security License. The idea being to get more community people involved in securing the town. Most of our problems arise around a small group of kids which give the Aboriginal community a bad name. Last year we ran a trial "Safe Shopping" program in the main street for the Christmas holidays with a grant from NSW Police Minister John Watkins another \$2000 each came from Moree Plains Shire Council and the Chamber of Commerce to extend is to the end of January. Following this project and our work at other town events like CROC Eisteddfod, Golden Grain Ball, NAIDOC Week Ball and private functions we have won the contract for securing the Moree Woolworth's store. This security works because it pushes back into and builds peer pressure in the Aboriginal community. We are constantly lifting the Aboriginal communities we work in, challenging them to strive for a better future.

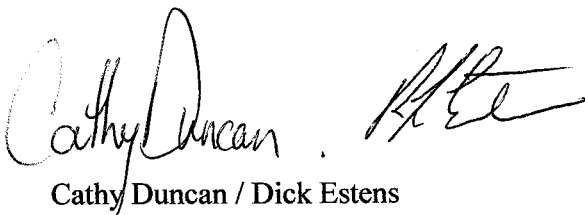
We at the AES know that the key to solving Aboriginal crime is Aboriginal employment and the key to employment is big business. Big business needs an Aboriginal organization that links them to the community that they have confidence in. With this in mind it is really important we try and get another four units going in the next two years, to make us more attractive to big business and to make it financially viable for them to use us. To do this I think we need Sydney offices. We had already spoken to DEWR about this before the Redfern incident. We are looking at somewhere just off Redfern in the eastern suburbs of Sydney, say Surry Hills / Waterloo area and an office in western Sydney at Blacktown and also south west at say Liverpool, both areas have significant Aboriginal populations. These people have lost hope, they have been let down by the system. There are no units in western Sydney that help Aboriginal people in employment. We probably need an additional office in southern NSW, like Wagga Wagga, to give us a reasonable geographic spread

Longer term we are looking at restructuring the board of the AES, the future I think, will involve four Aboriginal managers being voted on the board by their fellow AES managers, this gives ownership, we are looking at having 10 foundation companies on board who will vote on four non-Aboriginal business directors, hopefully this group will include IAG, one of the banks, one of the big retailers like Coles or Woolworths, a car company, fuel company, ideally companies that are represented in every regional town and city in Australia, we would like to think that these ten can come on board at around \$100,000 per year. The ninth board member will be an Aboriginal person that is not employed by the AES. We have a person in mind for this position.

The other reason for bringing business on board is because the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations is reducing our funding next year, as we are responsible for our funding and are not a recognised government program, partnerships with big business are an important part of our financial future.

As you consider the future of the Aboriginal community in Sydney we want you to consider what the Aboriginal Employment Strategy is delivering. We will need your help to keep pressure on the system to get us there.

Yours Sincerely

The block contains two handwritten signatures. The first signature, on the left, is 'Cathy Duncan' written in a cursive script. The second signature, on the right, is 'Dick Estens' also in a cursive script. The signatures are written in black ink.

Cathy Duncan / Dick Estens

Aboriginal Employment Strategy