

RELATIONSHIPS & CONNECTIONS

(feedback from October 2009 MacUnity meeting)

From an Aboriginal perspective; what is the importance of relationships and connections when engaging the Aboriginal Community?

HOW WOULD YOU PREFER BUSINESS TO BE DONE?

- Not to make assumptions about people – treat as individuals
- Observe/look
- Listening to others
- Learn – mainstream do some learning themselves and not just rely on Aboriginal websites – careful when asking questions.
- Two way street of respect
- Important to be aware of the way mainstream say info/share (use “we” not “I”)
- Enable opportunity/patience to express self
- First impression important and built on – not oppressive, but kind and open (real/genuine) not just to gain something
- Keep it simple
- Timeframes too fast – can destroy – timing is important
- High importance on personal relationships of trust
- Koori time is relevant when building relationships of trust
- Need consistent, ongoing approach to building relationships (e.g. my exp. 5 yrs.) separate from funding & consultations
- Patience & time from others

WHY ARE THESE CONNECTIONS IMPORTANT TO THE ABORIGINAL COMMUNITY

- Body language demonstrates genuine 80% communication
- Get flow/feel of situation
- Historical issues of oppression and domination
- Programmed by experiences
- Fear of authority
- Aboriginal community believe that things come together
- Relationships outside funding important
- Trust in difference
- Respect
- Place, relationship & connection to the land, animals and each other is the corner stone of the Aboriginal culture

FROM A MAINSTREAM PERSPECTIVE: DO YOU HAVE ANY POSITIVE STORIES OF EFFECTIVE ENGAGEMENT WITH THE ABORIGINAL COMMUNITY AND WHAT MADE THE DIFFERENCE?

- Aboriginal community need time to think about answers and clear explanation is important. Need to allow this. If you get a quick answer from clients it is usually only what they think you want to hear.
- Mainstream people need to be open to learn.
- Don't pretend to be an expert but be honest and open. Be consistent. Informal 'cuppa' is a great way to encourage engagement.
- Genuine engagement is vital.

- Important to take the time to talk and build relationships/culture to get genuine engagement back.
- Make safe environment e.g. Koori colours, Koori flags/posters throughout
- Welcome worker helpful – meet and make people comfortable
- Aware of Aboriginal body language and engage appropriately (want to talk or not)
- Support young people to engage in Aboriginal events
- Young people need to feel equal and to have rights. So try and stay on the same level and not an expert.
- Clear explanations important – simple language and ensure they do not look stupid. (respect) and put it cultural terms if possible.
- Be respectful and don't ask for too much too early in the relationship
- Be genuine and yourself – it will be picked up if you aren't
- Build trust through demonstrated action – don't just expect trust through words
- Make the time just to catch up without an agenda to break down barriers

WHAT OPPORTUNITIES EXIST OR COULD BE DEVELOPED TO SUPPORT MAKING THESE CONNECTIONS?

- Build relationships independent of funding
- Macarthur Youth Services Network (MYSN) presentation. Many mainstream services have a percentage of Aboriginal funding and so it is important they consider how to address engagement with this target group.
- Develop partnerships with Aboriginal people – need to develop TRUST.
- Justice Group – feeds into justice system regarding issues. (Crime prevention slant).
- Mentoring (between mainstream/Aboriginal workers) and beyond.
- Lighthouse mentoring (Mount Druitt), SW(SPYNS), St. Uni in Liverpool
- Look at models from other areas (email MacUnity)
- Karri – at risk program (Sarah Redfern) – remote control cars and other skills
- Fitness Program – (Airds) Elders support/partnership
- Look at collaborative approach to risk management
- Joint projects/collaborative approach
- Build what is there
- ALO
- Police Liaison Officers
- AES
- Council Aboriginal reps
- TAC (Boe)
- Would it help if the main Aboriginal organisations provided certain times / opportunities to meet mainstream / other services and build relationships?

WHAT BARRIERS EXIST AND HOW COULD WE OVERCOME THEM?

- Risk management
- Council rules
- Mainstream expect Aboriginal workers to know everything
- Access to community for mainstream – continuing connections and trouble opening doors (unwelcome) in some areas.
- Careful how you ask questions
- Mainstream's work is usually separate to their home life but for Aboriginal workers it is often integrated.

- Mainstream consulting inappropriately regarding funding – genuine connection necessary. (e.g. using networks – SW Koori – needed to re-evaluate membership as a result of previous inappropriate consultations)
- Funders drive timeframe and work practices. Might be good intension – need to be aware when putting in tenders regarding timeframe – flexible delivery.
- Submissions to Aboriginal networks
- Government need to assess tenders around real engagement with Aboriginal community
- System orders and demands young people to engage with services – does not support engagement.
- Mainstream services competing for Aboriginal work.
- Afraid to offend or not follow correct protocol
- Time & resource poor workers – time is needed to build relationships with no immediate outcomes
- Valuing relationships for what they are NOT what you gain
- Limited opportunities to build connections
- Competition
- No clear obvious cultural structure / protocol in local area for mainstream to understand – need to build on this