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# BoysTown Job Services Australia Inala Indigenous Mentor Pilot Program Evaluation Report

Prepared by BoysTown  
Strategy and Research

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**BoysTown**

Fresh start.  
New hope.

May 2013

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## DEEWR - BoysTown South Brisbane ESA

May 2013

### Project IMP 020- Access to Mentoring Support for Indigenous Job Seekers Pilot

#### End of Year 1 Contract Report

This report details the findings of an evaluation of a pilot project under the auspice of the Australian Government Indigenous Mentor program (IMPP). This pilot operated at BoysTown's Job Services Australia (JSA) Inala office. The pilot trialed the provision of culturally appropriate mentoring support for Indigenous and Torres Strait Islander job seekers during pre-placement and post-placement support phases over a period of one year.

In line with the reporting template provided by the Department of Education, Employment, and Workplace Relations, this report commences with a summary of findings as outlined in **A5: Discussion**. Detailed information relating to specific feedback gathered during the evaluation process is offered in the pages following. The evaluation was conducted between May 7 and May 21 2013 and included interviewing 38 people from 6 different stakeholder groups including pre and post employment clients, family members, employers, staff from BoysTown Inala JSA, Indigenous community networks and local community specialist services.

#### **A5: Discussion**

The BoysTown JSA Inala Indigenous Mentor Pilot 5 month performance report submitted to DEEWR in December 2012 offered a broad and comprehensive description of the nature of activities undertaken by the Indigenous Mentor at that time, describing efforts to build relationships with community agencies with the aim of identifying potential JSA Indigenous Mentor clients and building relationships and structures to support specialist service referrals or joint case management where deemed necessary. Two case studies were offered as examples of good practice in:

- 1) supporting a job-ready client in a fly in/fly out position in Roma and
- 2) engaging a non-job ready client in the process of becoming job-ready.

That report also described the placement of 8 Indigenous people into the post-placement program. Since then, although 5 more clients have commenced in the post-placement program, 5 have exited for a range of reasons described in the report below. One client has achieved a 26 week employment outcome. The focus of mentoring has tended to be mixed between supporting clients who are ready

or almost ready to take advantage of mentoring assistance in the workplace and supporting clients who have both significant vocational and non-vocational barriers preventing them from imminent work placements.

As will be discussed in further detail in the body of the report, BoysTown has carried out this work over the past 10 and a half months with “non-job-ready” clients in good faith and in the belief that a long term commitment by the service’s Indigenous Mentor to Indigenous clients will eventually result in job placement outcomes as clients start to respond to the continuity of culturally appropriate care increasingly offered across the Inala community and across a range of service sectors.

The teleconference held with DEEWR on May 22 2013 to discuss the extension of the current IMPP Funding Agreement has now made it clear that the focus of the BoysTown JSA Indigenous Mentor’s activity needs to shift to working with only “job-ready” clients in order to realistically achieve the required proportions of 26 week job outcomes within the prescribed time periods.

BoysTown intends to comply with this stronger focus on job-ready clients, however this report will demonstrate that the opportunity to also mentor non-job ready clients can lead to improvements in those clients’ attitudes to work, with the longer term expectation that this can and will lead to future sustainable job outcomes for larger numbers of Indigenous young people.

It is with this context in mind that the following Discussion and Evaluation Report has been developed.

### **What worked well?**

Significant learnings about effective mentoring processes have been made as a result of interviewing 38 JSA Indigenous Mentor Pilot Program participants and stakeholders in relation to successful strategies for engaging Indigenous young people in job seeking activities and sustaining them in work placements.

Summarised, these strategic processes include:

- Case work that is collaborative, family oriented and addresses practical obstacles to employment such as drivers licenses,
- A program model that acknowledges the imperative to work with the Indigenous community to strengthen relationships of trust, and

- A practice framework that embeds the notion that the most effective mentoring of vulnerable and high risk Indigenous young people occurs when carried out by highly skilled, gender appropriate Indigenous adults.

Further details of Strengths and Issues identified from this study are available in the Evaluation Report below.

### **What issues were encountered that impacted on the program performance?**

The Inala community is reported by the ABS as the second most disadvantaged area in Greater Brisbane and one of the most disadvantaged in Australia<sup>i</sup>. As such, there are many Indigenous young people in this area with multiple problems who are not engaging in school, are registered with Centrelink, classified to Streams 1,2,3 or 4, but cannot realistically be classed as “job ready”. Since the commencement of the pilot, some of these young people have either been referred by other agencies or have self-referred to the BoysTown JSA Indigenous Mentor because of his reputation amongst the Indigenous community as a culturally safe “interpreter”, role model and compassionate supporter for young Indigenous people at risk of imprisonment or suicide. This referral pathway of Indigenous young people in the Inala area who are not ready to be sustainably placed in work has contributed to a weighting in the Indigenous Mentor’s case load away from clients who are job ready. This caseload imbalance has been impacting on the proportion of sustainable 26 week work outcomes achieved so far in this pilot.

This imbalance cannot be seen as mismanagement on the part of the Inala JSA IMMMP; indeed the experience of struggling to find work ready Indigenous clients is validated by a number of industry bodies, including ACOSS, the Business Council of Australia and the Australian Council of Trade Unions<sup>ii</sup>. The findings of the Generation One report also speak of the supply/demand problem in Indigenous employment - that although there is commitment from business to employ indigenous people since the Australian Employment Covenant, there is a dire lack of job ready Indigenous employees across many regions of Australia<sup>iii</sup>.

Some of the experiences that hinder Indigenous young people of Inala from being job-ready are explored further in the report below, together with evidence of positive changes from the impact of culturally appropriate mentoring from BoysTown JSA.

**Did the characteristics of the job seekers (eg age/gender) make a difference to the delivery of mentoring services?**

BoysTown is identified as a youth specialist in the Australian Education and Employment sector. In addition to the impact of growing up in a geographical area identified as disadvantaged by the ABS, one of the major barriers to achieving sustained employment outcomes for clients of the BoysTown Inala Indigenous Mentor program is likely to be related to their youth.

Youth brings with it behaviours that can be related to an undeveloped sense of responsibility, a lack of wisdom and a strong susceptibility to peer pressure to participate in offending behaviours such as substance abuse and break and enters<sup>iv</sup>. The entrenched cycle of crime and imprisonment for young people in Inala leaves few spaces to intervene and recidivism rates are high. As one legal advisor interviewed for this study from a local private practice noted:

*“Young offenders released from prison who have no functioning family need someone to assist them with things like accommodation and transport, which are all inter-related with compliance with court orders. If there is no-one to help, things spiral out of control and then we (lawyers) can't help them with their legal issues”*

*Private practice lawyer*

Homelessness and couch surfing are also common for young Indigenous clients of the Inala BoysTown JSA office. At the time of writing more than 40% of clients in the pre-employment program were reported to be living in unstable housing and often the Indigenous Mentor is required to spend time addressing this most basic need before other vocational and non-vocational issues can be addressed.

A further point in relation to gender is that of the current unmet need for a female mentor. It is more consistent with Aboriginal culture for young women to be mentored by older women. Furthermore, several stakeholders interviewed during this study referred to an unknown number of young Indigenous clients of the Inala JSA office, both male and female, having experienced abuse and sexual assault necessitating a cautious approach by either gender towards developing the mentoring relationship.

**Did anyone choose to disengage with their mentor, and if so, why?**

There were no clients who disengaged with the Indigenous Mentor due to dissatisfaction during the reporting period. Exit reasons for clients no longer with the program are discussed in the report below.

**Feedback from employers and issues identified?**

Two employers were interviewed and gave positive feedback relating to satisfaction with key issues for them including the high level of communication by the Indigenous Mentor. In particular one employer noted his support of the IMPP saying:

*“It is crucial to have mentors for these workers.....They need help to stay employed and break the cycle of disadvantage in their communities”*

Further feedback relating to continuous communication requirements are discussed in later sections of the Evaluation Report.

**Cessation of mentor employment?**

The current mentor has been employed consistently in this role since 27 August 2012.

## **Evaluating the BoysTown Inala JSA Indigenous Mentor Pilot Program (IMPP)**

### **Summary**

In order to better identify key learnings from the Indigenous Mentor Pilot Program (IMPP) underway at BoysTown Inala JSA, the BoysTown Strategy and Research team was asked to conduct a formative evaluation focusing on program processes, outputs and outcomes as of May 2013. The pilot has now been running for 10 and a half months and with the Final Report due it was considered a timely opportunity to reflect on program activities and outcomes and consider opportunities for adjustment during a further program extension.

Specifically, the evaluation aimed to address the following questions arising both directly and indirectly from the program objectives:

1. Does the provision of dedicated intensive and culturally appropriate mentoring support achieve sustained employment outcomes for Indigenous and Torres Strait Islander job seekers?

and

2. What have we learned about the key drivers for achieving sustainable employment for young Indigenous and Torres Strait Islander job seekers?

Essentially the findings of the evaluation are that it is too early to tell whether provision of Indigenous mentoring support will achieve sustained employment outcomes for young Indigenous people in the Inala area.

However this study does offer considerable evidence to demonstrate a real need to not only concentrate on mentoring job ready clients who are in employment, but to continue a strong mentoring focus on those who will be left behind without culturally safe support as defined by the Inala Indigenous community.

Although the program has been running in Inala over the past 10 and a half months, full commencement of the program was delayed by the precipitous resignation of the initial Indigenous Mentor and therefore the current Mentor has only been in the position since the end of August 2012 (9 months). There have been several relevant evaluations of similar programs finding it common for a longer than expected period of time to be required to establish mentoring type programs, develop effective partnerships as well as to engage with Indigenous



young people who are often uncertain about engaging and face multiple and complex issues<sup>v</sup>.

The mentor's role in this pilot has been a difficult one, as the need to focus on job ready clients has had to be juggled with responsibilities to the local Indigenous community, frequently leading to time being spent with non- job ready clients.

*"The role asks me to focus on job ready clients. This is an issue because it's the clients with the barriers that take up all my time, and you don't want to ignore their needs - well you can't – there has been a number of suicides over the past few months affecting my clients...one who killed himself, and others who have talked about wanting to as a result of the suicides of family members and friends. I have to support them through these times and it means less time for those who don't have so many barriers".*

*BoysTown JSA IM*

However this pilot's evaluation has nevertheless found that critical foundational shifts are being made not only in the attitudes of Indigenous young Inala job seekers to the challenges of seeking work, but also in the core trust relationships between their community/ family and the "whitefella" world of Job Services Australia. It is this patiently built bridge between cultures that BoysTown believes will see sustainable work placement outcomes achieved in the longer term, and must be seen and respected for what it is: a direct outcome of the genuine commitment of the BoysTown JSA Indigenous Mentor to this community and its young people.

### **Challenges to a “job-ready” client focus**

In 2006, 48% of Indigenous Australians aged 15-64 were employed. By 2011, this had declined to 46.2%. The drop in Indigenous employment between 2006 and 2011 was driven mainly by deterioration in Indigenous male employment with this worsening occurring mainly at the younger end of the age ranges<sup>vi</sup>. The South Brisbane suburb of Inala serviced by BoysTown Job Service Australia has a lengthy history of mixed ethnicities, high crime rates and poor socio-economic status. The ABS Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA) rates the Inala –Richlands SA2 as the second most disadvantaged area in Greater Brisbane and one of the most disadvantaged in Australia<sup>i</sup>. In addition, BoysTown has a mission led commitment to working with young people. This pilot is therefore being conducted with clients who fall into those categories of people most likely to be long-term unemployed with the greatest number of vocational and non-vocational barriers.

There are many young Indigenous people in the Inala area who cannot be considered “job ready” and have significant obstacles to overcome before they will be able to be placed in employment situations. However the Inala community continues to identify these young Indigenous people as being in real danger of sinking further into social exclusion and continues to refer them to the BoysTown JSA IMPP. Moreover, non-job ready clients surveyed in this study reported having self-identified a need for culturally appropriate support to achieve employment and of having requested transfers to the Inala BoysTown JSA in order to gain it.

Gray, Hunter and Lohoar in 2012<sup>vii</sup> acknowledged the role of multiple disadvantage and social exclusion in contributing to the manifold causal pathways underlying employment disadvantage for Indigenous people. Mentoring by skilled individuals who are considered “culturally safe” and who understand and can effectively respond to these causal pathways is essential to commencing and maintaining indigenous young peoples’ engagement with the labour market. BoysTown would argue that without this “pre-job-ready” mentoring work, Australia will continue to see a lack of supply to meet employers’ demands for Indigenous workers.

### **What is mentoring in the Inala BoysTown Job Services model?**

When considering the role of the Indigenous Mentor (IM) in the Inala BoysTown Job Services model it's important to remember the average age and developmental stage of most of the office's Indigenous clients (see Tables below). Information gathered from the community and family members during this evaluation tells us there is a dearth of responsible and effective male role models in this community. Research tells us that when young people have supportive relationships with adults (parents, family, teachers, neighbours, etc), their ability to develop resilience, meaning in life and deal with life's challenges is enhanced<sup>viii</sup>. These relationships act as a protective factor when young people grow up in high-stress family or community environments and can be understood as a form of "social capital".

The BoysTown Indigenous Mentor has been clearly identified by stakeholders in this pilot as playing a significant role in compensating for the lack of stable adult relationships in these young people's lives.

*"It makes a big difference that the mentor is Aboriginal- not many Aboriginal men around here talk to the kids, but Simon does so he's a good role model- He even talks to the street kids and they talk well of him because of that"*

*Family member- pre-employment program*

*"He helps me with my shyness. Also I have lost several people in the past two months and he has been the one I have talked to about how I feel. Better talking to him than to a counsellor"*

*Male client- 25years- Pre-employment program*

*"I think mentoring- taken under someone's wing- is really important for our young people, especially when the young person takes it seriously"*

*Inala Elder*

*"It has given indigenous people opportunities to find their way out of unemployment. I can think of half a dozen kids who can now see light at the end of the tunnel because of being linked into employment services with support from us and Simon. I've been here (Inala) for 12 years and there has been a tremendous improvement in the well-being of the most at risk kids in Brisbane this past year. We had a suicide here the other week that affected the Indigenous kids big time and having Simon and the other BoysTown staff help organise the funeral and offer ongoing support*

*with the fall-out for the other kids was crucial- the risk of copy cat suicides is high and Simon is actively monitoring and intervening to get those not managing into Mental Health services which they otherwise would not have accessed. Simon is paving the way cause they trust him"*

*Inala Youth Mental Health*

*"He knows I have a drinking problem and he's trying to help me find things to do to keep me occupied- He does fitness stuff and he's offered to do fitness stuff with me. And he talks to me about how when I have work I don't drink so much because I've got other things I have to do"*

*Male client 25 years- pre-employment program*

Secondly, the Indigenous Mentor acts as a bridge between the young person and the BoysTown JSA office and as a welcome interpreter during the many times Indigenous clients feel overwhelmed by the language and prescriptive nature of formal government communications and documentation.

*"I have a lot of problems and he helps me with everything. Some of us can't understand how white fellas talk and Simon explains to me what everything means"*

*Male client 25 years pre-employment*

*"Its very hard for all Aboriginal people to go to the JSA offices and an Aboriginal mentor there helps to build respect in these offices for our people.*

*Family member pre-employment*

*"He rings me up to yarn about jobs that I might be interested in. He helps to keep me interested.*

*Female client 23 years-pre-employment*

*"Our shared client was very shy and Simon was able to increase our communication with him. This was achieved because Simon shared the client's cultural background and understood the client's needs, and so was able to make the client relaxed enough to listen to our requirements"*

*Probation and Parole*

Thirdly, the IM acts as a link between the JSA and the Indigenous community, building relationships that create a willingness to encourage their young people to trust the formal employment system and a confidence that their children will continue to be supported during their entry into the employment landscape.

*“He is very understanding of our needs. He knows Inala - it’s good to have someone who knows the community as well as he does, helping our kids to get jobs”*

*Family member*

*“Having an indigenous mentor program demonstrates to the local indigenous community there is a commitment to indigenous welfare at the organisational level”*

*BoysTown JSA staff member*

And fourthly, the IM also performs the role of creating a 3 way bridge between the client, the JSA and employers. Creating a balance in these relationships is not easy as a JSA juggles responsibilities to both clients and employers. Interestingly, those employers surveyed for this report clearly see the mentor as someone whose role it is to support the client in understanding the needs of the employer, with a smaller corresponding emphasis on supporting the employer to understand the needs of indigenous employees.

*“(The role is) anything to assist a job seeker keep a job.... (This) could be financial/emotional/relationship/interview practice/resumes, etc”*

*Employer*

*“(We need a Mentor to conduct) proper screening before recommending clients/Be transparent about skill levels (and) if there are snags we expect the mentor to communicate with our staff and keep communicating”*

*Employer*

And as other stakeholders describe:

*“Simon made sure they know they need to be on time for appointments. He has taught them not to be ashamed if they can't get to work, but to contact people and let them know. They make the effort to ring now”*

*Client family member*

*“Our IM is always positive about the client’s potential which is very encouraging to the client and in his representation of the clients to other agencies and potential employers (which is good for our community).”*

*BoysTown JSA Inala staff member*

### Characteristics of the Inala JSA Indigenous Mentor pilot program clients

As of writing, there were 23 Indigenous clients actively involved in the Inala JSA IMPP Pre-employment program and 5 in the Post-employment program. Their gender and ages are shown in the tables below:

**Table 1**

#### Pre-Employment Program-current clients:

Age in years	Male	Female	Total
15-18	2	4	6
19-25	9	5	14
26-29	1	0	1
30-39	0	1	1
40-49	0	1	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>23</b>

Proportions of Gender and Ages for all 60 clients enrolled in the Pre-employment program over the past 10 and a half months has been consistent with the above figures:

**Table 2**

#### Pre-employment Program- all clients

Age in years	Male	Female	Total
15-18	17%	13%	30%
19-25	27%	27%	53%
26-29	10%	2%	12%
30-39	0%	3%	3%
40-49	0%	2%	2%
<b>Total</b>	<b>53%</b>	<b>47%</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Table 3**

#### Post-Employment Program-current clients

Age	Male	Female	Total
15-18 years	0	1	1
19-25	1	3	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>

**Table 4**

**Post-Employment Program- all clients**

<b>Age in years</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Total</b>
15-18	13%	13%	26%
19-25	25%	19%	44%
26-29	19%	6%	25%
30-39	0%	6%	6%
<b>Total</b>	<b>56%</b>	<b>44%</b>	<b>* 100%</b>

\*Proportions may not add up due to rounding

Reasons for exits from each of these programs are outlined in the Findings section.

**Client-identified barriers to work**

Clients participating in the survey reported a range of issues that made it hard for them to look for work. These included:

- Personal barriers
  - Lack of qualifications including Year 12
  - Lack of work experience
  - Poor communication skills
  - Literacy and understanding “whitefella” language and ideas
  - Lack of work skills in desired work situation
  - Problems with alcohol
  
- Practical barriers
  - Unstable accommodation/ couch-surfing
  - Interview clothes
  - Money
  - Driver’s License
  - Public transport near jobs
  - Car
  - Lack of money for getting to interviews, phone credit and petrol costs
  - Finding a job with appropriate hours for child care
  
- State of Mind
  - Anxiety caused by the interview process
  - Fluctuating motivation following lengthy unemployment and mental health issues

- Demoralisation, frustration and anger at not having employers phone back after interviews
- Lack of self-belief
- Finding the right place where the client feels they will fit in and look forward to going to work
- Living in domestic violence situations

One family member interviewed for this evaluation added that sending their children to training that they had already done as part of compliance regulations also negatively impacted on motivation levels.

*“They like to learn and get bored if you send them to the same courses all the time”*



## Evaluation Methodology

Both data and method triangulation approaches were used in this evaluation to strengthen the quality, rigor and dependability of the findings. The variety of data sources and the application of quantitative and qualitative data collection methods are outlined in the Table below.

**Table 3**

Evaluation Participant	Evaluation Method
12 Client participants in the pre-employment program	Semi-structured interviews conducted face to face
2 Client participants in the post-employment program	Semi-structured interviews conducted by phone
2 Client family members	Semi-structured interviews conducted by phone
9 BoysTown Job Services staff, including 4 Employment Consultants, 1 Youth Worker, 1 Counsellor, 1 Team Leader, 1 Work Preparation Trainer and the JSA Manager	Semi-structured group administered questionnaires
BoysTown JSA Manager and the BoysTown JSA Indigenous Mentor	Open interviews and semi-structured questionnaire
2 Indigenous community support networks including representatives from the Inala Elders and Wangarra – a “one- stop shop” for indigenous people in the Inala area offering sports, recreation, after school care and employment services,	Semi-structured questionnaires conducted by phone
8 other agencies servicing the Inala community including private legal services, health (both mental and	Semi-structured interviews conducted either by phone or face to face

<p>physical), Centrelink, Youth Justice, Probation and Parole and the Brisbane Youth Education and Training Centre/ Brisbane Youth Detention Centre.</p>	
<p>2 Employers</p>	<p>Semi-structured interviews conducted by phone</p>

Activity data relating to the Indigenous Mentor Pre and Post Employment programs was also collected from the BoysTown Client Information Management (BCIMS) database.

Client demographics and program documentation were also reviewed and analysed. Together this data provided a detailed picture of the journey of those involved in the Indigenous mentoring program at BoysTown JSA Inala and the progress made thus far towards achieving the pilot's aims.

## **Findings from the BoysTown JSA Inala IMPP Evaluation Study**

As noted earlier, this study was intended to be a formative appraisal examining perceptions of effectiveness of program activities rather than outcome results. Given this is a pilot program still in its infancy, few long-term outcomes can be expected at this stage, although it has already been noted that there are currently 5 clients in the post-employment program and one who has achieved a 26 week employment outcome.

This evaluation explores the incremental positive changes in individual clients' lives achieved through the Indigenous Mentor's culturally appropriate case work and educative activity. It also examines the enhanced relationships commenced between the local Indigenous community and BoysTown and the increased capacity of the JSA and other local services to engage Indigenous clients. Evidence of these shifts have been drawn from information gathered from a range of stakeholders including pre and post program clients, client families, employers, JSA staff and external agencies.

In particular, stakeholders shared perceptions of effectiveness in relation to a number of strategic processes including:

1. Case Work
2. Community Capacity Building and
3. Increasing Cultural Understanding

Each of these 3 processes are examined separately, with a further section of this report describing client and staff perceptions of IM assisted change over the mentoring period with "the things that make it hard to get or keep a job".

BoysTown considers these changes in vocational and non-vocational barriers as important outcome measures in preparation for job placement.

## **1. Case Work Activity**

The Indigenous Mentor described a formal process of case identification and collaborative case planning carried out with both the client and the Employment Consultant. Although the Indigenous Mentor is always formally linked to Indigenous clients of the Inala JSA office through referrals from Employment Consultants, some referrals to the BoysTown JSA office have been requested transfers from Indigenous clients who have heard from other community agencies about an IM being available at the Inala JSA office.

Once a client has been introduced by their Employment Consultant, the Mentor initiates ongoing client contact. Case loads are actively managed by both the IM and the BoysTown JSA Inala Manager. Length of contact with the Indigenous Mentor for surveyed clients ranged from a few days to 9 months. Frequency of client contact with the Indigenous Mentor ranged from daily during a crisis, to twice a week for cold canvassing and interview practice to fortnightly contact before or after an Employment Consultant appointment.

In addition to DEEWR mandated Employment Pathway Plans created in the ESS database, formally documented BoysTown instigated case plan templates called "Plans for Success" have been collaboratively developed by the Indigenous Mentor, the client and the Employment Consultant. These plans are aimed at addressing both vocational and non-vocational barriers (see Appendices 1A and 1B). Case review meetings are regularly held to review plans with alternative strategies developed where goals are not being achieved.

As previously noted the current mentor has been working for the BoysTown JSA Inala office for the past 9 months and finding an appropriate case mix of job ready clients appears to have been difficult. As can be seen in the quantitative data, although there have been 60 unique pre-employment enrolments since July 2012, 13 have moved to post-employment at various times with one achieving a 26 week outcome. Seven have moved back to the pre-employment program. The following table outlines the total count of unique program enrolments, case work events and program exits over the 10 and one half months up to late May 2013.

### **Mentoring Activity between July 1 2012 and May 24 2013**

<b>Activity</b>	<b>Count</b>
Pre-Employment Program Enrolments	60
Post-Employment Program Enrolments	13
Pre-Employment Program Case Work Events	256
Post-Employment Program Case Work Events	55
Pre-Employment Program Exits	33
Post-Employment Program Exits	10

#### **Reasons for exits**

Pre-employment clients not moving into the post-employment program have exited for a range of reasons including imprisonment, death, pregnancy, ill physical health, transfer to Disability Support systems and relocating from the serviced area.

Post-employment clients have exited back into Pre-employment programs either because the client felt the job they were placed in was not appropriate for them, the placement was a time limited one or the client was let go for not attending as required by the employer.

Two clients were exited from both pre and post programs as they had been classified as Stream 1. This was despite the IM's assessment that both would have benefited from receiving further mentoring support. This experience reinforces BoysTown's ongoing concerns relating to the assessment tool used by DEEWR to stream clients. The removal of the JSAT review mechanism in recent years has meant that Streams 1 and 2 clients who are experiencing non-vocational barriers such as mental health, homelessness and legal issues are unable to have their stream reviewed and therefore are unable to be allocated the assistance they need, including mentoring assistance.

No clients are known to have exited the IMPP programs because of dissatisfaction with the IM and as already noted, one client has been exited under the terms of this pilot for achieving a 26 week outcome.

## **Stakeholder perceptions of effectiveness of Case work activity**

Measures of process effectiveness showed high levels of satisfaction from stakeholders with the IM's case identification practice, levels of consultation on case planning and case work activity.

The following section is divided into detailed feedback on case work activity from BoysTown JSA staff, staff from external agencies (including Indigenous community networks) and clients.

### **BoysTown JSA Staff Perceptions of Effectiveness**

BoysTown JSA staff across all roles reported strong satisfaction with the IM's levels of consultation with 100% being either Very Satisfied (78%) or Satisfied (22%)

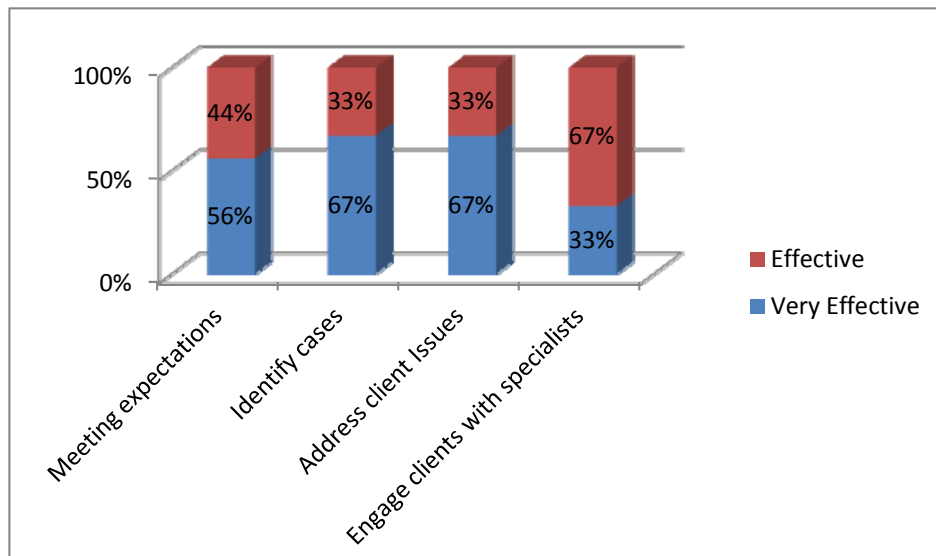
The following points outline their perceptions of the effectiveness of the IM's case work activity:

- One hundred percent found it either Very Effective (56%) or Effective (44%) at meeting their expectations
- One hundred percent of BoysTown JSA Inala staff said the Indigenous Mentor was either Very Effective (67%) or Effective (33%) at working with the Indigenous community and other agencies to identify Indigenous clients looking for work.
- One hundred percent of JSA staff said the IM was either Very Effective (67%) or Effective (33%) at identifying and helping to address emerging client issues, eg: legal, health, family problems, attending appointments, document acquisition, etc,
- One hundred percent said the IM was either Very Effective (33%) or Effective (67%) at engaging young people with specialist agencies for assistance in resolving non-vocational barriers and achieving client goals.

### Graph 1

#### BoysTown JSA staff perceptions of case work activity effectiveness

N= 9



There were strong themes from JSA staff about increased levels of engagement between Indigenous clients and the JSA office as a result of the IM's case work activity:

*"I have found by having this service available there has been an increase in engagement with our indigenous caseload. I have also noticed that clients linked with other providers are requesting to come here to specifically access this additional assistance"*

*"Simon is just gold! (There has been) increased participation of young indigenous clients and excellent, flexible post placement support to young indigenous clients who have commenced work"*

*"We have been able to engage/ re-engage Indigenous clients at higher rates and are able to case conference about indigenous clients"*

*"Some clients who were regular No-Shows are now regularly attending"*

*"The program has helped engage indigenous clients into our office and into employment. (It has) also assisted indigenous clients in staying in employment"*

*"The program has motivated our indigenous clients a lot. Simon is very hands on and works very hard with our case load to get very good results. He is very good at building rapport with our indigenous clients"*

Other feedback described the IM's effectiveness in expanding information for both clients and JSA staff relating to Indigenous specific work and training opportunities:

*"The Indigenous Mentor's assistance with sourcing indigenous specific vacancies and referral of work ready clients has been useful"*

*"The program has.....increased job search and educational opportunities"*

*"The Mentor ..... is knowledgeable in current and local indigenous affairs"*

*"Good resource as central point of contact for indigenous employment opportunities"*

One staff member however particularly noted the need for the IM's resources to be expended on the pre-employment phase:

*"This cohort is predominantly NOT work ready and requires significant non-vocational support work"*

### **Indigenous Community and Other Specialist (External) Agency Staff Perceptions of Case Work Effectiveness**

Similar questions relating to casework effectiveness were asked of staff from other agencies and support systems for Indigenous young people in the community. Seven out of the 10 respondents described their agencies' work relationship with the Indigenous Mentor as one where referrals were either/both given or taken, and where shared case management frequently occurred. The other 3 described the relationship at this stage as consisting mainly of networking, awareness raising and information sharing.

One hundred percent of External Agency staff responding to this questions reported being Very Satisfied with the level of consultation they had received from the IM (N=8).

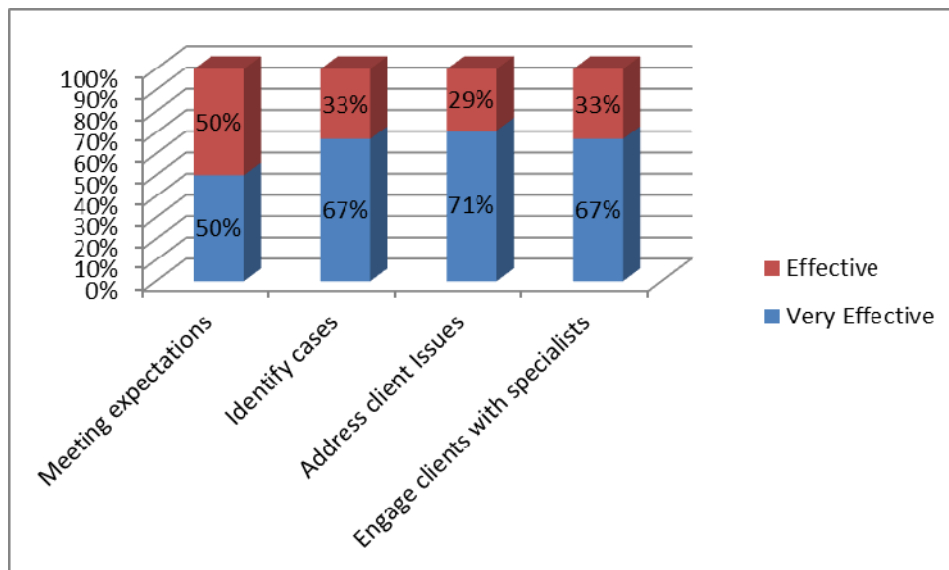
The following points describe their perceptions of the program's case work effectiveness. Percentages refer to proportions of staff responding to the question (N given):



- One hundred percent said the program was either Very Effective (50%) or Effective (50%) at meeting their expectations (N=8)
- 100% said the program was either Very Effective (67%) or Effective (33%) at working with the Indigenous community and other agencies to identify Indigenous clients looking for work (N=3)
- 100% said the program was either Very Effective (71%) or Effective (29%) at identifying and helping to address emerging client issues, eg: legal, health, family problems, attending appointments, document acquisition, etc (N=7)
- 100% said the program was either Very Effective (67%) or Effective (33%) at engaging young people with specialist agencies for assistance in resolving non-vocational barriers and achieving client goals (N=6)

**Graph 2**

**Indigenous community and other External agency perceptions of case work effectiveness**



Indigenous community and other specialist service staff from External agencies reported the IM's capacity to build bridges between the JSA, clients, the Indigenous community and specialist service agencies as a critical factor in supporting clients with complex needs to stay in the job placement system:

*“Simon has good rapport with the Indigenous clients, so when we have vacancies in our training programs, Simon is able to engage their interest. Three clients started the course and one has now commenced an*

*apprenticeship. Simon always follows up and gets feedback on his clients about how they are doing. His level of communication is high"*

*Not for profit employment service*

*"(The IMPP) has made a big difference in levels of access to mental health and employment services by local Indigenous young people"*

*Community Mental Health Youth Service*

*"We have clients with complex needs. When we need non-vocational barriers addressed Simon is able to work with these clients for example by effectively linking them to Indigenous Health services, etc".*

*Youth Justice*

*"Simon is effective at assisting clients to remain compliant with court orders"*

*Lawyer, private legal practice*

The element of the Mentor's indigenusness was consistently raised as the key to effective case work with clients of the IMPP. Successive stakeholders referred to the IM's crucial ability to relate to the clients' needs and communication styles. This "cultural connection" was no more apparent than in discussions with the clients themselves and is further discussed in the following section.

### **Client Perceptions of Case Work Effectiveness**

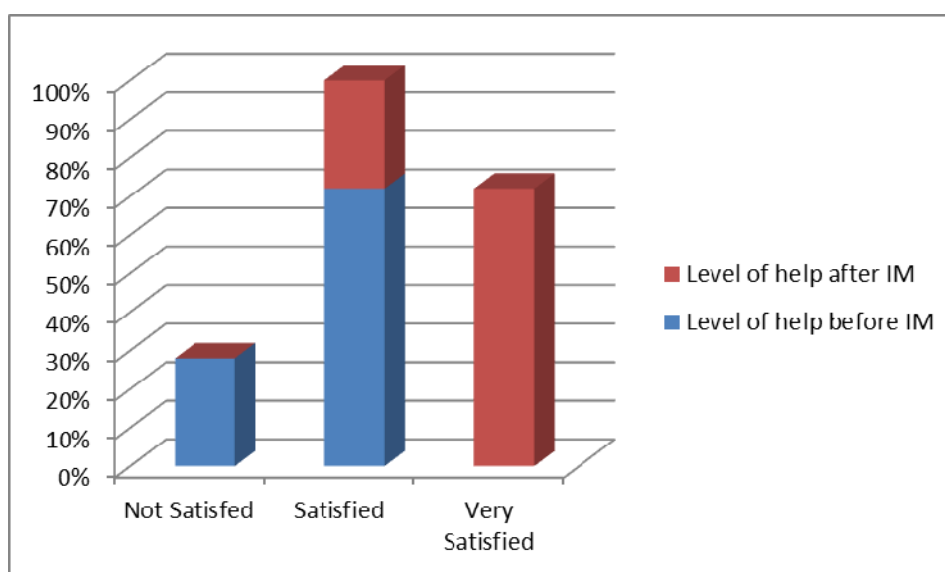
Clients from both and pre and post employment programs were overwhelmingly satisfied with the level and type of support they were receiving from the IM. As reported in earlier sections of this report, clients were asked to describe the things that made it hard to get and keep a job. When asked about satisfaction with levels of help received from the JSA system with these things **before** they had an Indigenous Mentor:

- 72% of pre-employment program clients reported feeling Satisfied with level of help received
- 28% reported feeling Not Satisfied
- No clients said they felt Very Satisfied

When asked about levels of satisfaction with help received from the JSA **after** they started getting support from their Indigenous Mentor:

- 100% of pre-employment clients were either Very Satisfied (72%) or Satisfied (28%) with the level of help from their Indigenous Mentor with the things that made it hard to get a job

**Graph 3 Pre-employment client satisfaction levels with help with “Things that make it hard to get a job” before and after indigenous mentoring**



When asked about what kinds of things the Indigenous Mentor had been able to do to help them with the things that made it hard to get a job, a frequent response related to receiving assistance with getting a Driver’s License. In particular, assistance with completing the application forms for exemptions from completing and logbook recording 100 hours of supervised on-road driving experience due to not having a car or a suitable person to supervise their driving, was reported as being of substantial value to job seekers.

Other descriptions of help included a mix of practical and emotional/cultural supports including:

- Information about Indigenous specific and generalist traineeships
- Indigenous specific support groups at Indigenous Community networks such as a Quit Smoking group
- Active referrals for mid-to long term accommodation
- Resume writing and computer assistance
- Appointment reminders
- Accompanying clients on door to door “cold calling” trips to potential employers
- Assisting with accessing financial support for phone credit to call employers

- Supportive conversations relating to maintaining positive mental health and self-esteem

Despite the generic and rudimentary nature of many of the above activities, it was clear from talking to clients that the element of “cultural safety” experienced in their dealings with the Indigenous mentor was crucial to many of them following through with the most basic aspects of job seeking. A recurring theme heard in talking with indigenous clients was the concept of “shame” and how effectively it can prevent Indigenous young people from navigating the most fundamental steps of job hunting.

*“If I don't want to ring an employment place- too shame- he (the Mentor)'ll do it for me. If I don't want to walk into a place (when cold-calling) he'll walk in with me to make it more comfortable for me”*

*“He teaches me tips like how to walk in the door- walk in straight with your head high so you look like you're willing to work”*

*“He tells me to say I'm ready for work... This gives me more confidence to walk in”*

*“He helps me with computers cause I don't know how to work them”*

*“He helps me practice questions for interviews and discuss things like the right clothes to wear”*

*“We wrote out questions that might be asked in interviews and I practiced the answers”*

*“When we talk it lifts a lot off my shoulders and gives me more confidence”*

*“(He) took me cold calling- opens up new opportunities that I wouldn't get otherwise if I was just looking for myself sitting here (in BoysTown JSA) at the computers”*

*“Simon is giving me information about how to get the Indigenous traineeships. He goes through it all one step at a time- how to apply- this builds my confidence”*

*"Gives me ideas about jobs that I'm really wanting to do rather than only what I'm able to do or on paper able to do. I don't want to do the sort of jobs I've been doing in the past. Simon "gets" that I won't stay in a job where I'm not comfortable"*

The two post-employment clients were both Very Satisfied with the level of help received from their IM with the things that make it hard to stay in a job. One had nominated finding a workplace with the right atmosphere as crucial to staying in her job and the other reported transport as key to her being able to keep her job.

Interestingly, both clients reported finding it "easy" to keep their job with the support of the Indigenous Mentor.

*"I find it easy" /"I find the fly in/fly out routine keeps me on track so I don't get caught up in what's going on back home"*

When asked about what kinds of things their Indigenous Mentor was able to do to help with the stuff that makes it hard to keep a job, the following comments were made:

- *Simon sends me things to support me if I'm stressed- like he sent me a sheet on homesickness (see Appendix 2 )/ He talked to me about things to expect like homesickness when working away/He helps me with transport to and from airport until I can get my driver's license. He is also helping me with that (Drivers License) - organised for me to have driving lessons on Fridays when I'm back in Brisbane/ He's always available for a talk"*

The other client who was concerned about transport issues in keeping a job said:

- *My Indigenous Mentor helped me with working out a budget for bills including public transport costs/(He helped me with) applying for an exemption for a driver's license (and he's) helping me with driving lessons"*

Further measures of satisfaction with the Indigenous Mentor program are revealed through responses to questions about whether clients had told their friends about having an Indigenous Mentor and whether they would recommend that their friends get an Indigenous Mentor if they were looking for work:

- 63% of pre-employment program clients said they had told their friends they had an Indigenous Mentor, and
- 100% said they would recommend their friends got an Indigenous Mentor.

Both Post employment clients said they would recommend to their friends seeking out an Indigenous Mentor if they were looking for work.

### **Family Perceptions of Case Work Effectiveness**

Although Simon has worked with 7 distinct family members so far, only two were able to be interviewed for this study. Both were mothers of a number of IMPP clients also surveyed and each reported having met Simon on several occasions. Both reported that they felt they could talk to him about anything. Although one family member reported being Satisfied with the level of support offered by the JSA office **prior** to the Indigenous Mentor program commencing, one said she was Not Satisfied. **Following** their children receiving mentoring from the Indigenous Mentor, both mothers reported feeling Very Satisfied.

When asked what specifically the Indigenous Mentor had been able to do to support their family members' job seeking, the mothers reported a blend of practical assistance, psychological support and motivation building as key activities:

*"He's got them Driver's Licenses and helps them get certificates and paperwork they need"*

*"He motivates them- builds up their excitement about earning money from work"*

*"Gets him (son) to see the specialist Mental Health Indigenous worker"*

Both mothers also said they would recommend other Indigenous people sought out a mentor if job seeking.

*"I think its good. (It) gives the young people something to look forward to seeing Simon at BoysTown"*

### **Employers' Perceptions of Case Work Effectiveness**

Two employers were surveyed and provided valuable feedback on how effective the Indigenous Mentor program had been in meeting their needs. One had an Indigenous Mentor client actively employed at the time of the interview and the other had had one on a temporary placement for several weeks. Both had had previous experience with indigenous mentoring programs and had clear expectations of what should be provided:

- Anything to assist a job seeker keep a job-financial/ emotional/ relationship/ interview practice/ resumes, etc
- Effective screening before recommending clients
- Being transparent about skill levels
- Effective and continuous communication with employment managers if there were “snags”

Both employers reported receiving the support they had expected, particularly around direct Indigenous Mentor communications with workplace supervisors and with encouraging clients to communicate if they were going to be absent from work.

When asked what benefits their organisations gained from the Indigenous Mentor program, they reported both performance management and cultural awareness raising benefits:

*“It saves us hassle if the employee comes to work, so whatever the mentor has to do to keep that happening is important to us”.*

*“It’s good to get different insights into the cultural needs of potential staff”.*

## 2. Community Capacity Building

All professional stakeholders were unanimous in their assessment that the IMPP had been effective in building community capacity that would filter through to longer term benefits for Indigenous job seekers in Inala.

*“Having an indigenous mentor program demonstrates to the local indigenous community there is a commitment to indigenous welfare at the (JSA) organisational level”*

Specifically:

- 100% of BoysTown JSA staff believed the role of the Indigenous Mentor to be Very Important to the community
- 100% of External agency staff (including Indigenous community support people) said the Indigenous Mentor program was either Very Important (80%) or Important (20%) to the Inala community
- 100% of BoysTown JSA staff said the Indigenous Mentor was either Very Effective (78%) or Effective (22%) at working collaboratively with local service agencies to build service capacity and share best practice knowledge, and
- 100% of External agency staff said the program was either Very Effective (71%) or Effective (29%) at working collaboratively with local service agencies to build service capacity and share best practice knowledge

The following activities are examples of how external agencies saw the Indigenous Mentor program as building community capacity:

1. By building trust between the Indigenous community and the mainstream sector by having an Indigenous person in an official role doing joint case management with other agencies:

*“The Inala community has not had identified Indigenous positions in its community services for some time. It is critical that this role is filled by an Indigenous person and that it continues to be funded”*

*Not for profit employment agency*

*“The liaison between the Indigenous community and a job service is important for our people to get jobs”*

*Inala Elders*

*“Simon is identified as a key person we can go to for connections in the Indigenous community. He has a great reputation and is very well-known*



*and well-connected. For eg: When we needed to link a client with professional football aspirations to a key Indigenous footballer for his career, Simon had the connections"*

*Youth Justice*

2. By supporting the Inala service network to offer continuity of care to Indigenous young people across agencies and sectors.

*"Indigenous people need support to get access to the services they deserve. The only way to get them into the workforce is through culturally safe pathways. (When they are) in interviews with non-indigenous people they go silent- fade away and won't say the things they need. With a mentor as a third person they get the support that is essential to get them along that pathway from A to Z, by finding ways to get clients to meet their job seeker obligations and do the activities it takes to get a job"*

*Centrelink*

*"This program literally prevents breaches of parole. Our shared client had literacy deficits causing him to be defensive. Simon calms him so he is accepting of Parole rules and regulations. Simon encourages clients to listen to what we have to say"*

*Probation and Parole*

*"An interpreter – (He) helps to bridge the gap that always exists between clients and legal services. Simon is used like an interpreter to translate our requirements into a form clients can understand and accept"*

*"Indigenous young people in detention now have a higher level of awareness of job service pathways which leads to increased engagement in job services"*

*Youth Detention Centre*

3. By increasing self-sustainability of the Indigenous community by facilitating a greater awareness of and increased access to specialist services like legal, mental health and suicide prevention services.

*"This program is very very important. Simon has great capacity to educate members of his community about what resources are available"*

*Old Health Suicide Response*

*“Indigenous people, like all people, need to have stable mental health before they can work. Simon’s role facilitates those foundational steps being taken by his clients with mental health issues”*

*Youth Community Mental Health Service*

*“Someone is available to the community who can ensure that the client is compliant with court orders and therefore reduces recidivism”*

*Private practice lawyer*

### 3. Increasing Cultural Understanding

Issues of varying levels of trust between Indigenous clients and mainstream agencies have been documented elsewhere in this report. Indeed the Indigenous Mentor pointed out:

*"Some of my clients tell me they don't trust whitefellas- so me being here helps them to see this office as culturally safe".*

Multiple stakeholders referred to the positive impact on clients and the community of employing an Indigenous person in a position that engenders respect. Notably, 75% of clients in the Pre-employment program said it made a difference that their Mentor was Indigenous rather than a "whitefella" and gave the following reasons:

*"Young fellas look up to him. When they see him he's not doing all the wrong things like crime stuff. They look at him as a role model (and) can see he's got a good job, so they think hey- I want to be like that"*

*"He knows what young Indigenous people go through these days. When you talk to him about things he just clicks on"*

*"I connect better with Aborigines. We've got the same style of talking and know what each other is going on about- it's a connection thing"*

*"He knows where you're coming from and your background and you don't have to explain yourself"*

*"I'm more relaxed talking to him than whitefellas"*

*"Being indigenous he knows our ways and our issues. He understands the stuff we have to go through that makes it hard for us to work"*

One of the two Post Employment program clients reported feeling that it made a significant difference that the Mentor was Indigenous rather than a "whitefella":

*"He understands me more than non-Indigenous staff and he can explain things the way we would. He makes me more relaxed"*

The length of contact with the Indigenous Mentor was positively correlated with whether clients perceived it made a difference that their mentor was Indigenous

(the longer they worked with him, the more important was the mentor's Indigenousness).

The Indigenous Mentor himself described the issue of the IM being an identified Indigenous position as key to achieving employment outcomes.

*"It is crucial that those who work with Aboriginal people are also Aboriginal. The barriers to achieving employment for young disadvantaged people are already well-known. But the barriers for Aboriginal young people can only be understood at an emotional level (where change happens) by another Aboriginal person. Rapport must be built before a client will listen to a mentor or service provider who tells them to get up early, to be on time, to phone the boss when sick. But a non-Aboriginal person cannot build this rapport so the next stage of employability skills learning does not happen"*

The IM gave several examples of how referrals for assistance for his clients were expedited because of being Indigenous himself. One of these related to a young woman who had been couch surfing for months and had not been able to commit to a job because of this non-vocational barrier.

*"A youth worker could have done this (referral) but when (the accommodation service) knew there was an Indigenous worker following up the progress of this referral it sped the process up.... it kept them (accommodation service staff) motivated. It's the follow-up from an Indigenous person that I know secured the outcome for the client"*

The issue of concerns about 'cultural safety' was again raised by JSA staff as a barrier to young people's engagement with job seeking that the mentor had been able to help them overcome.

*"The indigenous mentor can help to make the experience of appointments and job discussions culturally safe so that customers will engage in the process".*

### **Staff increases in cultural awareness**

Up to the time of writing, staff cultural awareness raising at the BoysTown Inala JSA has been undertaken on a one on one basis with Employment Consultants rather than in formal group presentations. The Indigenous Mentor described this activity in terms of being client-centred, specific and tailored to shared client needs. The content appears to have been frequently related to the historical

background of the Indigenous community's experience of inter-generational trauma and how this can manifest in behaviours which affect compliance with social, legal and economic expectations and demands. This lack of compliance then negatively impacts on a clients' job readiness and job retention.

The IM reported an intention to deliver more formal presentations to staff in the next year covering colonization and its effects on indigenous people, the presence of racism today and its effects, and actions both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people can undertake to move forward.

When BoysTown JSA staff were surveyed about how effective the current methods of increasing staff awareness of culturally appropriate ways of working with Indigenous clients had been, 100% said it was either Very Effective (56%) or Effective (44%).

Staff in External Agencies also reported benefiting from the knowledge brought to them by the BoysTown Indigenous Mentor of how Australian history and cultural issues have impacted on Indigenous clients' social inclusion.

*"We try to use Simon as much as possible as we don't have an Indigenous worker and Simon was able to step in and build cultural capability in our service to extend what we can offer our shared indigenous clients"*

*Youth Justice*

## **How have BoysTown JSA Indigenous Clients Lives Changed as a result of the IMPP so far?**

BoysTown acknowledges a focus of this DEEWR strategy is to develop a better understanding of the impact of mentoring assistance on sustained employment outcomes for Indigenous people. In order to be able to validly study this strategy, a sufficient cohort of young Indigenous people need to first achieve employment. Although BoysTown Inala JSA has achieved one 26 week outcome and has 5 clients in the Post-employment program at the time of writing, only 2 post-employment clients were able to be interviewed during this evaluation. This sample size limits our ability to deeply reflect on the learnings from this post-employment part of the program.

This report has already discussed the difficulties of finding young Indigenous people in Inala ready to be placed in employment. We have reviewed the range of serious non-vocational barriers to clients becoming job ready and it is a concern that until these barriers are acknowledged and appropriately responded to along with their vocational barriers, the cohort of post placement clients will remain small.

As an alternative to examining clients achieving 26 week outcomes, this formative study has explored changes that have occurred thus far in the lives of 12 pre-employment clients since receiving mentoring support as well as the 2 post-employment program clients noted above.

As recorded in the commencement of this report, it is not uncommon for life changes to be slow to be effected for groups of people with entrenched deep disadvantage and the shortness of average engagement period may reflect the low level of employment outcomes at this point in time. As the Indigenous Mentor noted:

*‘Even when an Aboriginal person is working with an Aboriginal client, the change takes time. We may not see outcomes in periods of months, or even 1 to 2 years. There may need to be periods of 2 to 3 years given to a single client who is experiencing the community impact of dispossession and trauma’*

Length of engagement with the Mentor for surveyed pre-employment clients ranged from a few days to 9 months, with 50% being active for 3 months or less. The 2 employed clients surveyed reported being mentored for 3 months and 1

month in the pre-employment program and then 1 month and 5 months respectively in the post-employment program.

Two pre-employment clients who had been seeing the Indigenous Mentor for less than one month and two who had been seeing him for more than one month had difficulty describing what had changed for them as a result of his support. However 80% of those that had been mentored for more than one month described very positive changes (N=10). These shifts occurred in many of the state of mind barriers to work reported earlier in this study and included:

- Improved self-confidence
- Increased engagement with the JSA system
- Increased motivation to look for work
- Decreased levels of suicidal thinking
- Decreased susceptibility to peer pressure not to work
- Improved overall well-being

*"I'm more motivated to keep looking for work and have more self-confidence because he (mentor) accepts me as I am"*

*"I've really improved. Rate the change for me as 9 out of 10. I'm starting to look for work and coming to appointments is good. I look forward to coming in to BoysTown now"*

*"Having a mentor has made a big difference- I feel more lifted up"*

*"Before I was really slack and thought like-' ohh do I have to do this?', but now, everything's coming into place and I feel good and more motivated."*

*"I feel more positive thinking way- When other people say to me – 'nah you can't do it', he'll say 'well, if you want to do it- don't let other people bring you down'"*

*"I'm getting more positive. I'm talking a bit more about everything. I know more about what job options there are now. (I feel) more confident"*

Additionally, those reporting changes described practical and personal outcomes including:

- Increased knowledge about how to access indigenous specific training and employment opportunities
- Increased comfort with approaching potential employers
- Increased support networks
- Increased enrolments in training courses
- Increased levels of stable accommodation
- Increased engagement with driver learning programs

*"I've been to a few information sessions about Indigenous traineeships and know more now"*

*"(I'm) more keen to go back to work now/He's made life a bit easier"*

Feedback from the 2 clients surveyed from the post employment program related to changes in their practical, personal and state of mind barriers.

*"I'm more motivated to keep going because of him"*

*"I'm having driving lessons now. Getting a license will make a huge difference. I love having a job, but without a license I can't get to my job"*

Family members also described noticing practical, personal and state of mind changes in their children since receiving mentoring.

*"Simon made sure they know they need to be on time for appointments. He has taught them not to be ashamed if they can't get to work, but to contact people and let them know. They make the effort to ring now"*

*"Now they both have their Learners Licenses and one is going for her Ps"*

*"(My) son is changing a bit- he goes out more and talks about his problems more. He's getting help for his thoughts about suicide"*

### **Benefits to Clients of having an Indigenous Mentor as described by BoysTown JSA staff**

JSA staff also confirmed seeing the personal, practical and state of mind changes described above, plus some additional outcomes for clients:

- Increased understanding of how having a job positively impacts on not just themselves, but their families and their community
- Increased understanding of employers' expectations (including attendance at worksites and need for communication when this is not possible)



- Decreased levels of probationary breaches
- Increased cultural ties and sense of belonging to the Indigenous community
- Increased understanding of historical events and connections to current events
- Decreased levels of anxiety and increased willingness to be assisted by formal services

*“Some (clients) have a far deeper understanding and appreciation for culturally significant events past and present than ever before”*

*“(Their) increased engagement (with JSA) and increased work activities means we get the chance to address barriers to employment, leading to increased placements and then to making real changes to their lives”*

## Key Strengths and Issues

Stakeholders interviewed for this study reported a number of key strengths of the Inala IMPP.

Summarised, these included:

- Collaborative case planning with clients and Employment Consultants
- Improving service responses to the client by engaging and empowering families to participate in the development and delivery of the case plan
- Linking clients to the BoysTown JSA Drivers License club in response to employers' needs for staff to be able to drive
- A practice framework that embeds the notion that the most effective mentoring of vulnerable and high risk Indigenous young people occurs when carried out by highly skilled, gender appropriate Indigenous adults with strong connections to the local Indigenous community
- A program model that acknowledges the imperative to work with the Indigenous community to strengthen relationships of trust, shared information and resources

Frequent references were made by stakeholders to the communication and engagement skills of the BoysTown JSA Indigenous Mentor. He was variously described as an "interpreter", a "translator" and someone who had become a role model for young indigenous people who had lost connections with strong indigenous male models. One family member reported that *"seeing Simon gives the young people something to look forward to"* - a telling remark given the difficulty many JSA offices experience in trying to engage young Indigenous people in job seeking.

Several clients also reported their increased engagement with the Inala JSA office as being due to the Indigenous Mentor's presence:

- *"I only came to BoysTown because I heard you had an Indigenous Mentor here"*
- *"I look forward to coming into BoysTown now"*
- *"BoysTown's doing a good job now"*

Previous studies indicate this increased pattern of engagement with the JSA office holds the key to increased Indigenous employment placements. Gray, Matthew & Hunter (2005)<sup>ix</sup> found that compared with non-Indigenous people, Indigenous people rely disproportionately on friends and relatives as a source of information

about jobs. However, this is less effective because their networks tend to have fewer employed members. Therefore increased engagement capacity on the part of JSA structures is critical.

Professional staff also referred to the IM's connections with community as a key strength, with clients accessing services, including employment through the IM's interventions.

*"It is critical that a mentor has the capacity to engage with the community and understand how it works. When a mentor can do this it leads to the community being more willing to facilitate their family member engaging with JSA"*

A number of recent Issues papers for the Closing the Gap Clearing House have raised the dearth of evidence relating to critical factors for achieving long term job retention for Indigenous people<sup>vii</sup>. However Hunter and Gray (2006) nominate increased human capital along with macro-economic policies as having a positive impact on Indigenous job retention<sup>x</sup>.

It is important to note that although Gray, Hunter and Lohoar refer to the government as being responsible for increasing the level of human capital among indigenous people through training and education<sup>vii</sup>, this should not translate to requiring indigenous job seekers to comply with training requirements that do not achieve real work skills or increase actual job readiness. This study has already quoted one BoysTown JSA IMPP client's mother reporting that one of the hardest things for her children was being sent to training that they had already done. This confirmed a strongly worded point in the Generation One report that employment training focusing on broad generic skills does not enhance sustainable employment and that "go-round-in-circles" training rather than industry specific training is a strong demotivator for Indigenous job-seekers<sup>iii</sup>.

BoysTown's position is that mentoring which facilitates the honest reflections of clients in relation to their preferred career pathways is more likely to lead to sustainable employment. When, as reported by one BoysTown client, the IM supported her "*think(ing) about ideas for jobs that I'm really **wanting** to do rather than only what I'm **able** to do or my certificates say on paper I can do*", answers to sustainable employment start to become apparent. Like all of us, Indigenous people will not stay in jobs that are not satisfying.

Other evidence gathered during this evaluation reinforce tentative explanations for poor Indigenous job retention levels recently proposed by Gray, Hunter and Lohar<sup>vii</sup>. The sensitive issue of supporting clients from families with intergenerational unemployment to break from established “norms” was raised by stakeholders in this study, with the IM’s skills in this area reported as another key strength of the program.

*“It is a difficult task to identify the members of a family who are ready for work and sensitively support them to ‘go for it’ when the rest of the family is trying to talk them out of it. Simon is able to work with the whole family so they trust BoysTown and support their family member to work”*

*Brisbane Youth Detention*

In addition the IM’s strong focus on working with families illuminates the challenges experienced by some employed family members in indigenous cultures. The mentor described several stories of clients who were considered job ready, had had several work placements, but were continuously vulnerable to dropping out because of culturally dominant family commitments. For example ill health is common in Indigenous families and given the existing cultural intradependence dynamic<sup>xi</sup>, the ill health of one family member affects all family members. This means that for those with a job, a regular income or a car, frequent requests may be made for money, transport and logistical arrangements to get everyone to hospital or medical appointments.

Culturally imposed responsibility on the working family member for providing support each time something changes in the family- whether a hospitalization, an imprisonment, a death, or a birth, can be burdensome and can severely affect the perceived benefits of working. The IM’s regular engagement and yarning with the larger family group can help members to understand the impact this may have on the working member’s desire to stay employed.

Also required is an acknowledgement by all stakeholders that turning to the mining industry to create a labour force demand for indigenous people will entail leaving community for many living in urban and regional areas. This will lead to additional challenges for job retention requiring further individualised planning and support from mentors. BoysTown has however demonstrated success in this area already with one Inala client about to reach 26 weeks employment in a regional mining community. An example of tailored support for this client is the

Homesickness support sheet tool developed by the BoysTown Indigenous Mentor and JSA staff (see Attachment 2).

An extremely positive story arising from the BoysTown study and reinforced by recent annual Mission Australia Youth Surveys is that young Indigenous people are retaining their motivation to work.

Seven out of 9 IMPP pre-employment client responding to the BoysTown evaluation question relating to Motivation levels said they were Very Motivated to look for work while the other two reported they were Somewhat Motivated (reasons for fluctuations in motivation levels were associated with mental health issues and requirements to attend multiple funerals in another state for family members who had suicided). Both post-employment clients reported high levels of motivation to remain employed.

The past two annual Mission Australia Youth Studies surveying Indigenous youth found high levels of motivation to work. In 2011 36.2% of Indigenous respondents reported highly valuing getting a job compared with 21.7% of non-Indigenous respondents<sup>xii</sup> and in 2012, 46.9% of Indigenous respondents ranked getting a job as Extremely or Very Important compared to 35.4% of non-Indigenous respondents<sup>xiii</sup>.

A more concerning finding of the Mission Australia report however, was that Indigenous respondents were considerably less likely than non-Indigenous respondents to feel that getting a job was an option available to them (41.8% compared with 50.3%) and that they therefore face a higher likelihood of becoming 'discouraged workers'<sup>xiii</sup>.

Such concerns - that while Indigenous young people want a job and are available for work they are more likely to give up looking because they believe they will not be able to find a job, reinforce the need for Indigenous mentors to remain embedded in the JSA system. Clients have been quoted elsewhere in this study as saying that it is the continuous positive messages from their IM to "*Keep going- You'll get there if you want it*" that are critical to their persistence in job seeking and retention. Combined with the clients' respect and admiration for the IM evidenced throughout the evaluation process, it is such factors that may eventually break through the inter-generational cycle of depression and self-defeating behaviours of these vulnerable young people.

## **Conclusion**

Gray et al only one year ago noted that “Although there is a substantial body of high-quality research that provides strong evidence on the factors associated with the relatively low employment rates of Indigenous Australians, much less is known about what will be most effective in increasing employment rates and this needs to be the focus of the next stage for research. Although it is clear that continuing efforts to increase the demand by employers for Indigenous employees will be important, it is also clear that addressing labour supply factors such as education, work readiness and whether people want paid employment will become increasingly important elements of efforts to increase Indigenous employment rates”<sup>vii</sup>.

It is hoped that this evaluation of the first year of the BoysTown Indigenous Mentoring Pilot Program has begun to add some material towards answering questions relating to challenges of supply. A series of recommendations for improvements of the IMPP at BoysTown Inala JSA follows.

## Recommendations for Improvement of the Inala IMPP

As the preceding report evidences, there is a consistently high level of satisfaction with the IMPP among all stakeholders. Consequently, when stakeholders were asked for ideas from improving the program, few suggestions were offered, other than a widespread request for more mentors.

One client suggested a group for Indigenous only young people at the Inala JSA office focused on successful job-seeking strategies, in addition to the current Job Club which is open to people from all cultural backgrounds.

All other clients, both pre and post-employment, thought the program was operating as effectively as possible.

*“BoysTown’s giving me all the help I need”*

One family member suggested more training in literacy and numeracy and asked BoysTown JSA staff to work with her community on starting a program to run horticultural, car mechanics and arts and crafts projects for young local Indigenous clients.

One employer responded by encouraging the IM to continue reinforcing the message to clients of the need for them to be accountable for their behaviour.

*“Clients need to understand there will be a stigma attached to not turning up when you say, or having a work history of going in and out of jobs. If we invest in training we don’t want to be worrying that it will be wasted by staff leaving quickly. We want as much screening as possible as we want these to be long term jobs”*

This statement however raises concerns noted in the Generation One report – that “induction and career development by employers is (also) critical to achieve sustained employment due to the fact that failing to retain indigenous employees creates large amounts of staff turnover, which reinforce stereotypes and lead to further prejudices within the workforce”<sup>iii</sup>. Clearly there is a need for responsibility for this induction and career planning to be negotiated early on in the work placement process to ensure clients do not fall through gaps of mutual misunderstanding.

The Indigenous Mentor had practical ideas about increasing his knowledge of employment opportunities by increasing the number of in depth meetings with relevant agencies beyond standard “interagency networking” processes. He also

raised the idea of BoysTown providing a van to increase the efficiency of large group employment cold canvassing.

Other JSA staff noted the need to increase work placements for Indigenous clients in the months ahead, while acknowledging the time constraints imposed on the current Mentor to also address the barriers of non-job-ready Indigenous clients.

A practical suggestion was made for future group staff cultural awareness training to be held with Indigenous clients present and sharing the experience, with the intention of transparently demonstrating the JSA agency's commitment to learning about their needs.

Other JSA staff suggestions included:

- Structured IM diary appointments and job search activities with clients
- Targeting evaluations of Stream 1/2 clients as well as Streams 3/4 for more evidence about what works in post-employment mentoring
- Strategically developed program-based support for non-job ready clients
- Professional development for mentor including conference attendance targeting indigenous specific employment strategies

External agency staff consistently responded to this question with the message that the program was so valuable the only thing that could improve it would be an increase in the number of mentors available. In particular, comments reflected staff members' deep concerns for the futures of young Inala Indigenous people without culturally safe and appropriate interventions such as the Indigenous Mentor strategy:

*"Six more Simons to give deeper coverage to issues like those (kids) being released from prison. The recidivism rates are extreme here in Inala - kids being returned to abusive homes where they immediately act out again- they need mentoring because they will never get out of the cycle otherwise"*

*Community Youth Mental Health*

*"More mentors- positive role models are crucial for these young people"*

*Youth Detention*



Three external agency staff members also raised issues of need for gender matching of clients with Indigenous mentors, and Indigenous community networks encouraged closer networking to expand awareness and trust.

Finally, BoysTown would recommend to DEEWR they assist the Inala JSA with an alternative program strategy to continue the engagement of the Indigenous Mentor with young Indigenous clients who are not job ready yet and therefore not the focus of the Pilot program extension. Their extreme vulnerability to disengagement from not only job seeking activities, but also support systems targeting their mental health and well-being, makes them key candidates for either suicide or imprisonment. BoysTown has previously advised DEEWR of the need for an additional stream 5 in the JSA system to be created to ensure these most at risk young people are not left unsupported (see Appendix 3).

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## **Appendices**

- 1A: Pre-employment Plan for Success case planning template
- 1B: Post-employment Plan for Success case planning template
- 2. BoysTown JSA Homesickness support sheet for clients
- 3. BoysTown Submission to DEEWR Issues Paper: *Employment Services-Building on Success*, March 2013

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