



BoysTown

BoysTown is a national not-for-profit organisation that delivers services and programs for marginalised young people and their families in order to improve their quality of life and level of social inclusivity. BoysTown operates in all States and Territories of Australia.

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BoysTown Inala Indigenous Mentoring Program Year 3 Evaluation Report

"When I was (back) in Brisbane, my mum was going through domestic violence and I didn't want to come back to my job out here. My mentor really encouraged me to come back. She has always been there for me when my family members have died. She has always encouraged me. I felt a connection there and opened up to her and told her everything that was going on for me"

**19 year old female - achieved 26 weeks employment in full-time remote area
hospitality traineeship**

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BoysTown Inala Indigenous Mentoring Program Year 3 Evaluation Report

Summary

The BoysTown Inala Employment Service Indigenous Mentoring Program (IMP) funded by the Australian Government Department of Employment has now completed its third and final year of operations (July 2012 to June 2015). The program has struggled to achieve the program benchmarks set at the end of Year 1 by the Department of Employment, particularly in relation to 26 week employment retention, and each of BoysTown's previous annual evaluation reportsⁱ & ⁱⁱ have attempted to deconstruct the issues impacting on these results.

Two key questions were asked at the commencement of this evaluative series in 2013:

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?*

This longitudinal evaluation of the Inala IMP finds there is no simple Yes or No answer to the first question, but offers some insights into the second.

Key to understanding the inability to make global statements of mentoring success in the Inala Employment Service is an acknowledgement that participants are unique, including mentors, and individual circumstances and histories will affect the degree of positive impact a mentoring relationship operating out of an employment service can have on sustainable employmentⁱⁱⁱ.

Key also is an acceptance that there are structural determinants of long-term unemployment for youth and Indigenous young people in particular, that cannot be resolved through a mentoring strategy. However without a mentoring strategy for young Inala Indigenous people struggling with intergenerational unemployment and few effective role models, the "wicked problem" of Indigenous youth unemployment is even less likely to be resolved. The Inala study has demonstrated that with staged processes young people of a highly disadvantaged community can be brought to engage with the labour market, to endure the anxiety of long periods of job seeking, to demonstrate their strengths at interview, to be selected for jobs and eventually, to keep them for up to six months. The study has also demonstrated that efforts to achieve the last outcome at high levels will take more than three years.

What have we learned about what works?

The Inala IMP study has highlighted a number of successful strategies that Indigenous Mentors attached to employment services in highly disadvantaged regions can employ.

1. Resource intensive community engagement activities by the Inala employment services Mentor have successfully attracted more Indigenous young people to participate in job seeking processes than before the IMP began.

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2. Intensive case management and counselling style support and relationship building with co-case managing agencies and families have contributed to improved psychosocial outcomes which the research informs us will position Inala clients to achieve sustainable employment^{iv} & ^v.
3. The Inala IMP program has successfully assisted Inala clients to be placed into employment during their time with the program – some of whom may never have attempted job seeking without culturally safe coaching and motivational support.

However these crucial initial steps have not guaranteed high levels of sustainable placements in Inala within the three year period. Some clients have achieved 26 week job outcomes and report that having a mentor made that possible. These clients were more likely:

- to have built relationships of trust with the mentor and disclosed issues potentially affecting the success of placements, and
- to have been placed into Indigenous specific traineeships.

Where clients have not achieved 26 weeks:

- Some report having dropped out of placements for personal reasons including not enjoying the work, relocation, becoming homeless, or imprisonment. These clients may have confided their personal concerns and circumstances to the mentor, yet still the placement could not be saved.
- Some report simply not having confided in the mentor about issues that may have been salvageable, and the placement has broken down.
- Others report job placements have only been short-term, casual or with low/non-existent paid hours of work that were not accurately described by the employer at point of lodgement with the employment service. Mentoring support would not have had any impact on those cases where employment service expectations of length of employment were not met by the employer.
- Clients themselves report no adverse impact of multiple short-term placements on themselves, most seeing these as “all good experience”.

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Introduction

The first two BoysTown IMP evaluation reports published in 2013 and 2014 have offered evidence of significant case work and community liaison activity undertaken by the Inala IMP Mentor and described the results of that activity within a framework of both hard and soft outcomes.

The studies have focused on exploring the policy and service model used to deliver employment support programs to young Indigenous people in the economically and socially challenging area of Inala and on understanding the tasks undertaken by the Indigenous Mentor to assist this client group to achieve sustainable employment while concurrently adjusting practice to adapt to evolving program and outcome expectations.

Specifically the **Year 1 report** identified the long term nature of building bridges between the Inala Indigenous community and the labour market. The study explored how wide ranging models of case management, including working intensively alongside other service providers with those clients who would not be considered "job-ready", are required by the Indigenous community in order to build trust in the employment provider's long-term commitment to the well-being of their young people. The report identified the pervasive sense of isolation and dislocation felt by the community's young job seekers and the barriers of cultural misunderstanding between employers and the Indigenous community.

Note was made of:

- The client group's extreme youth and lack of positive local male role models
- Clients' expressed relief at having an Indigenous person to support their job seeking
- Clients' significant levels of motivation to seek work
- Indications of a slowly emerging trust-based relationship between the Indigenous community and the employment service in response to the continuity of culturally appropriate care increasingly offered across the Inala community and across a range of service sectors.
- The need for strategies such as the IMP to be seen as long-term and stepped processes.
- The introduction of new funding requirements at the end of Year 1 in the form of benchmarked Key Performance Indicators. These indicators required a target percentage of clients to achieve job placement and retention and were to be calculated from the commencement of the IMP. This meant that for the life of the funding agreement denominator counts would include "non-job ready" Year 1 clients accepted into the IMP under redundant program objectives.

The Year 2 report was an opportunity to review the psycho-social progress made by clients of the Inala IMP as they slowly moved towards employment in larger numbers. This report noted a new stage of young people "churning" through multiple jobs but failing to achieve 26 week outcomes in corresponding numbers and raised the question of the longer term consequences of this "job placement cycling" phenomenon.

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A number of issues relating to sustainable employment barriers were noted to be present including:

- transport limitations
- competing pressures of family and work obligations
- poor communication and negotiation skills on the part of clients complicating conflict resolution in the workplace.
- a sense of shame over these issues frequently holding clients back from asking for help from employers, although some felt able to discuss these feelings with an Indigenous Mentor

"There's the shame factor- (my Mentor) doesn't make me feel embarrassed. I was ashamed that I was unemployed for so long- I always used to work. But Simon understands the impact of family loss on me and so I wasn't ashamed around him"

For clients who responded to a between-subject design pre and post program study in Year 2, improvements were noted in a range of motivation and well-being related indicators known to influence the likelihood of increased job placement and retention.

The Year 2 report also noted the increasing focus of the employment service mentor on job ready clients as it became clear that program timelines would prevent a continuation of the previous year's investment in supporting community-referred non-job ready clients.

The findings of this **final Year 3 report** follow on in many ways from the previous two years of research. The unfortunate results of the Inala IMP's major program Key Performance Indicator – an overall three year achievement of only 30% of job placement retention beyond 26 weeks, suggested a need for this study to revisit the complexity of the challenging issues referred to in the earlier reports. The findings intimate a need for this report to reinforce the understanding that there are no quick fixes or simple solutions to the "wicked problem"^{vi} of Indigenous youth unemployment in Inala. Three years is a short time to address an issue with many structural and social causes requiring so much interdependent change.

An effort was made in this report to not repeat detailed information already explored in the previous two reports. As such, it will be useful to read all three reports to extract the full story of the Inala IMP.

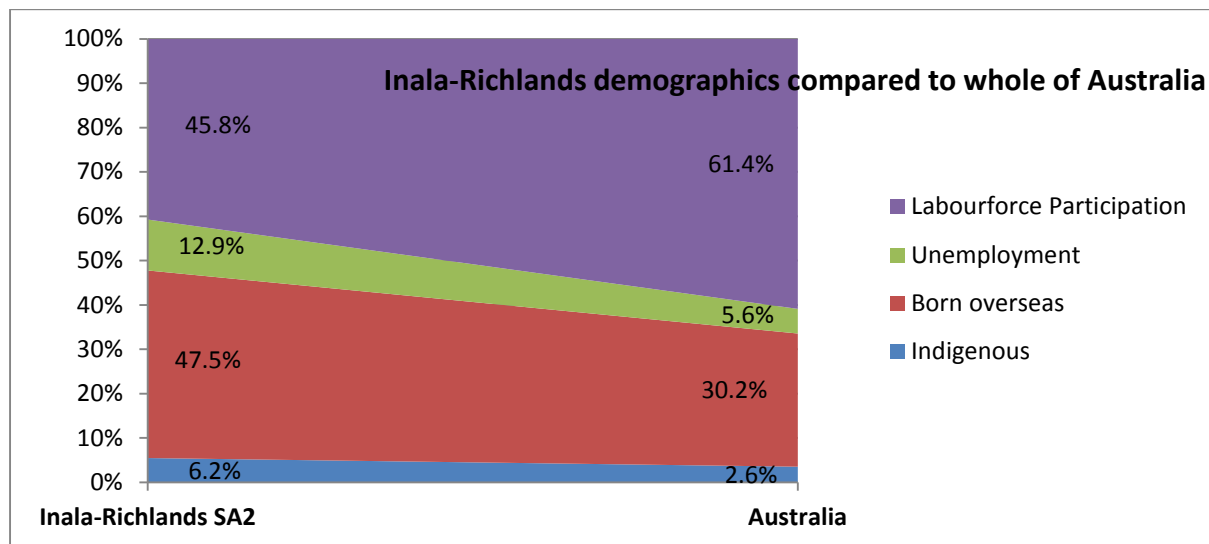
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Program Description Year 3

Inala Demographics

The Inala-Richlands SA2 community is ranked 30th most disadvantaged area within Australia, 9th most disadvantaged within Queensland and second within the Greater Brisbane region with a SEIFA score of only 783^{vii}. A quick reference to other ABS data indicates that 6.2% of the Inala-Richlands SA2 population identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander in 2011 compared to 2.6% for the whole of Australia with an additional 48% of the population identifying as born overseas compared to 30% for the rest of Australia. Overall unemployment rates were 12.9% in 2011 compared to 5.6% (whole of Australia) and labour force participation rates were only 45.8% compared to 61.4% (whole of Australia).

Graph 1

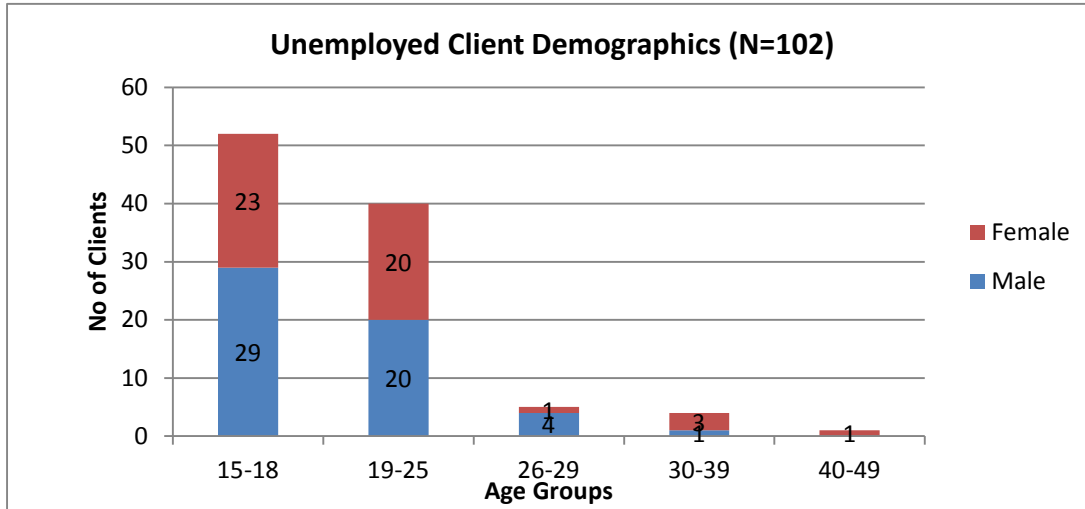


Client Profile

Previous BoysTown IMP evaluation reports have highlighted the impact of the key variable of age on low rates of employment placement and retention. Over the past 3 years 90% of the 102 clients that Mentors have worked with in pre-employment programs have been between 15 and 25 years of age. Fifty three percent have been male and 47% female.

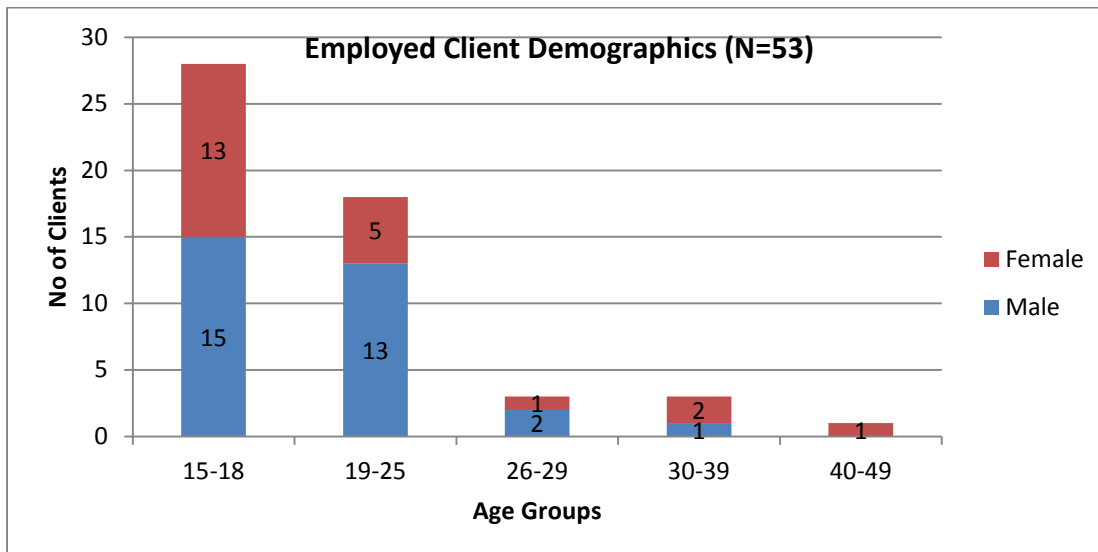
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Graph 2



Eighty seven percent of clients either placed into employment by the Mentor (47) or enrolled in the IMP following other forms of employment placement (6) have been between 15 and 25 years of age. Fifty eight percent have been male and 42% female.

Graph 3



As Year 1 and 2 evaluation reports noted, young clients face a range of barriers to employment above and beyond those experienced by older Indigenous people. They are more likely to be homeless or couch surfing and extremely young clients' behaviours such as submission to peer or family pressures, or responding inappropriately to employers' non-Aboriginal communication styles, severely reduce their ability to maintain employment following placementⁱⁱ.

Ten percent of the Inala IMP clients have spent periods in either juvenile or adult detention, also reducing their ability to maintain work^{viii}

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Shift in Mentoring Activity Focus

Earlier reports described the extensive efforts invested by the first IMP Mentor in raising awareness of the IMP program within the Inala Indigenous community and the resulting high levels of non-job ready clients referred and accepted into the Pre-Employment program in Year 1. In May 2014 a new female mentor commenced at the Inala Employment Services office following the transfer of the previous mentor to another BoysTown program. The new mentor also identified as an Indigenous person and came from a professional background of employment consultancy.

The focus of activity for the Inala IMP mentoring role as described in the Year 1 report started to change during Year 2 following the introduction of funding related target outcomes. The focus shifted even more significantly during 2014/2015 under the new Mentor.

The emphasis on building bridges with the Indigenous community as a whole ceased as energy became focused on finding and servicing clients with as few non-vocational barriers as possible. Inter-agency liaison only occurred with external agencies that were specifically servicing joint clients. The size of this shift can be garnered from Mentor reports in Year 1 indicating that 30% of their time was spent with other agencies compared to reports of 10% in Year 3. Feedback in 2015 from Indigenous staff in other agencies was that this was a loss for the Inala community as the Indigenous Mentor was no longer seen as a drawcard for young people into the employment service office.

"There was a relationship between the community and the JSA. Now the community will have to start all over again if there is ever more funding"

The Mentor intimated to the evaluator that this withdrawal from deep collaboration with other support services for Indigenous clients was driven by funding priorities and that in her view time spent in regular meetings with other agencies and educating them on the services a JSA based Indigenous mentor can provide would bring *"a higher level of buy-in from.... clients who then view BoysTown as having the approval of their leaders"*.

The struggle that commenced in the second year to find job-ready clients has seen case-loads rise and fall dramatically and periodically in each program over the remaining period of the IMP. Numbers of Pre-employment program clients which had reduced from a high of 35 in February 2013 to 20 in March 2014 were increased again to 32 in September 2014 under the new Mentor in an attempt to add more job-ready clients to the overall mix. Six new clients who were already in jobs were also added to the Post-Placement caseload by March 2015, bringing the count to 12 young people - the highest number seen at any point in the program.

Strikingly, while the Pre-placement case load was steadily reduced to 15 by March 2015 as a result of the strategy to move the Mentor's major focus to supporting employed clients, mentoring/casework activity with the unemployed group continued to dominate all case work (62% vs 38%).

The graph 4 below shows an example of the number of clients in each program during the month of March in Years 1, 2 and 3. It demonstrates the Mentor's clearly increased

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focus on clients placed into employment by Year 3, but also the residual case load effects of high levels of pre-employment client numbers from Year 1.

Graph 4

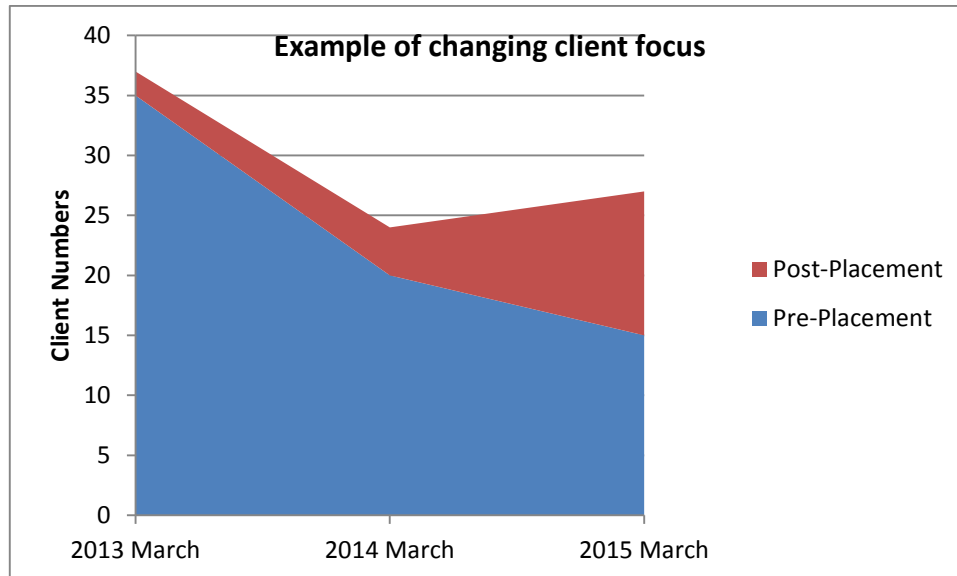


Table 1 and Graph 5 (below) highlight the significant increase in post-placement activity in Year 3 as efforts were intensified to achieve higher rates of 26 week outcomes.

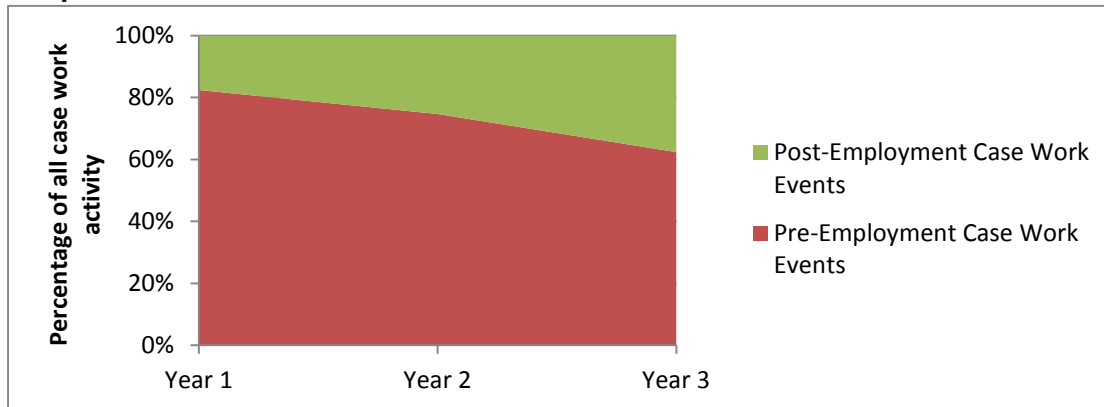
Table 1

Activity	Count in Year 1	Count in Year 2	Count in Year 3	Change since Year 2	Change since Year 1
Pre-Employment Case Work Events	258	407	461	13% increase	79% increase
Post-Employment Case Work Events	55	138	278	44% increase	405% increase

NB: Contacts with family members and employers by the Indigenous Mentor are included in "Case work events".

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Graph 5



It should be remembered when interpreting the continuing high level of pre-placement support work that many of those receiving support under each program were the same clients cycling through employment and unemployment phases.

A strong belief was held by the final Mentor that it was essential the same person offer support across both pre and post stages. It was felt that critical relationship building frequently occurs in the pre-employment phase leading to trust and a willingness on the part of clients to disclose issues potentially leading to job placement breakdown. These issues may not be identified in a timely way if clients are faced with starting a new mentoring relationship once in employment.

Early Program Closure

In March 2015 with the end of the IMP in sight and the Inala BoysTown Employment Service office set to close following 'jobactive' retendering processes, the Mentor chose to move to another Indigenous support position within BoysTown. At this point there were five clients within reach of achieving 26 week outcomes by the end of May 2015. An agreement was reached with the relevant service managers that the Mentor would maintain some limited telephone based engagement with these clients, however within weeks two placements failed while another client became ill, delaying his outcome date beyond the end of the contract. Neither of the clients whose employment ceased had been receiving intensive or long-term support from the Mentor. In addition both had given feedback whilst still employed that suggested they did not recognise mentoring as a key factor in their employment placement or retention.

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Evaluation

Key Performance Indicator Results

From the commencement of the program in July 2012 until May 13 2015, 102 unique clients were enrolled in the IMP Pre-Employment program. Of these, 46% (47 unique clients) were placed into employment at least once. Twelve of these clients were placed between two and four times. Six additional clients were referred to the Mentor by their Employment Consultant following their placement into employment, bringing the total number of unique IMP clients to 108. With a total of 53 unique clients in Post-Placement, **the Inala IMP achieved a Department of Employment KPI 3 percentage result of 49% of enrolled clients placed into employment over the length of the contract compared to the KPI 3 target benchmark of 60%.** An additional 12 placements would have been required to reach this benchmark.

Of the 55 unique clients who were not able to be placed into employment over the three year period, 27 (49%) had been enrolled in the first year when the service had a more "open door" policy in relation to enrolling clients with significant non-vocational barriers such as ongoing court appearances and mental health issues (including suicidal ideation). The departmental methodology for calculating performance indicators introduced at the end of Year 1 included these clients as part of the denominator for measuring performance years after these clients had exited the program with no employment outcomes. This inclusion resulted in an ongoing struggle for the BoysTown IMP program to ever achieve the Departmental KPI 3 goal.

In relation to KPI 4, at the time of writing a total of 16 clients had achieved 26 week outcomes during the three year period (one in Year 1, seven in Year 2 and eight in Year 3). **This result leads to an average 30% sustainable employment achievement rate - short of both the target 50% benchmark for KPI 4** and the national average IMP achievement level of 49% as of March 2015 (communicated to BoysTown by the Department of Employment on May 11 2015). A further five clients are currently in the Inala IMP Post-employment program with due dates for 26 week outcomes in June (1 client) and post June (4 clients) 2015.

BoysTown has as its mission the intention to improve the quality of life of those who are marginalised and without voice. The organisation has invested significant funds in monitoring and evaluating the progress of the IMP and is committed to learning from the findings of its studies. The remainder of this study is aimed at shining some light on the qualitative context for the quantitative shortfalls reported to the Department of Employment and considering whether these results should be viewed as evidence of the need for longer-range strategies beyond three years rather than as a failure of mentoring processes at the Inala IMP.

Methodology

This final Year 3 study uses a mixed methods approach to examine the opinions of a number of stakeholders in the Inala community on the range of issues impacting on IMP client job retention, including mentoring relationships.

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Five separate stakeholder groups were interviewed using a combination of semi-structured interviews and structured questionnaires.

Evaluation Participant	Evaluation Method
14 Clients who had experienced at least one employment placement	Semi-structured interviews plus scaling questions conducted by phone
5 staff from companies offering either open employment or traineeships	Semi-structured interviews plus scaling questions conducted by phone
6 members/ staff in local community group/agency support services (incl. Indigenous specific community supports and Health, Justice and Welfare Benefits services)	Semi-structured interviews plus scaling questions conducted by phone
2 Client family members	Semi-structured interviews conducted by phone
BoysTown JSA Indigenous Mentor	Self-completed structured questionnaire plus open interview conducted face to face

The target client group for interview were clients – current or past - of the Inala IMP who had experienced at least one employment placement and may or may not have reached 26 week outcomes. Given the difficulty of reaching young people who no longer had contact with the Inala office, the majority of respondents were those clients still receiving a service either from the Indigenous Mentor or their Inala Employment Service Employment Consultant.

Five employers were also surveyed to see whether their perspectives on job placement break down aligned with those of the client group. Local Elders, Indigenous community development representatives, members of client’s families and other human services staff working with local Indigenous young people were interviewed to add context and further insights into why the Inala IMP was not able to achieve higher levels of job retention during 2013-2015.

The Inala Mentor was also interviewed and client case notes created by her and other relevant staff were reviewed. This methodological triangulation was particularly illuminating given the divergence of messages that young people gave about themselves compared to the perspectives of those working with them. These discrepancies will be explored in further detail later in the report.

Two case studies offer examples of the challenges young Inala Indigenous clients face and which mentors have helped to overcome.

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

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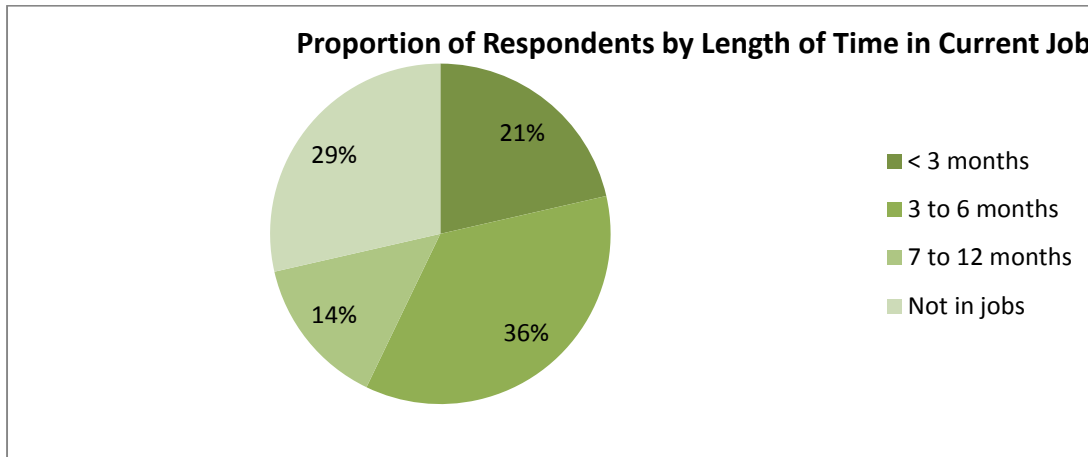
Client demographics and program documentation were reviewed and analysed. Together this data provided a detailed picture of the journey of those involved in the Indigenous mentoring program at BoysTown JSA Inala over the past three years.

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Client Respondent Profile

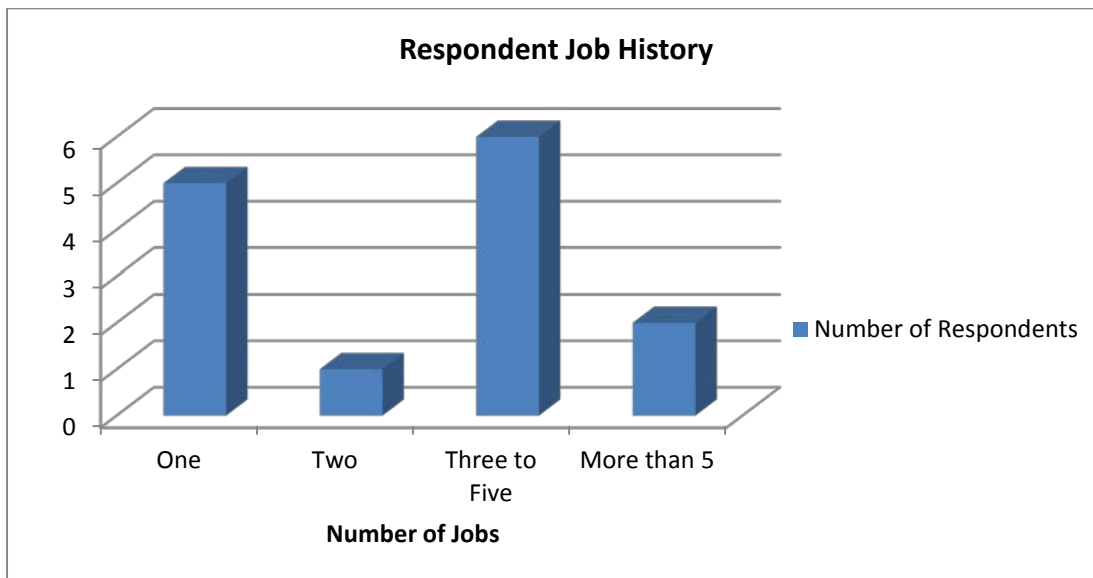
- Of the 14 clients interviewed 10 were working at the time of interview, four were not.
- The majority (36%) had been working in their current position for between 3 and 6 months.

Graph 6



- The evaluation sample was reflective of the total client population with equal numbers of male and female and an overall average age of 20 years (range of 18-24).
- 64% had at least one vocational qualification, almost half of these at Cert 3 level.
- A majority (57%) had held more than 3 jobs.

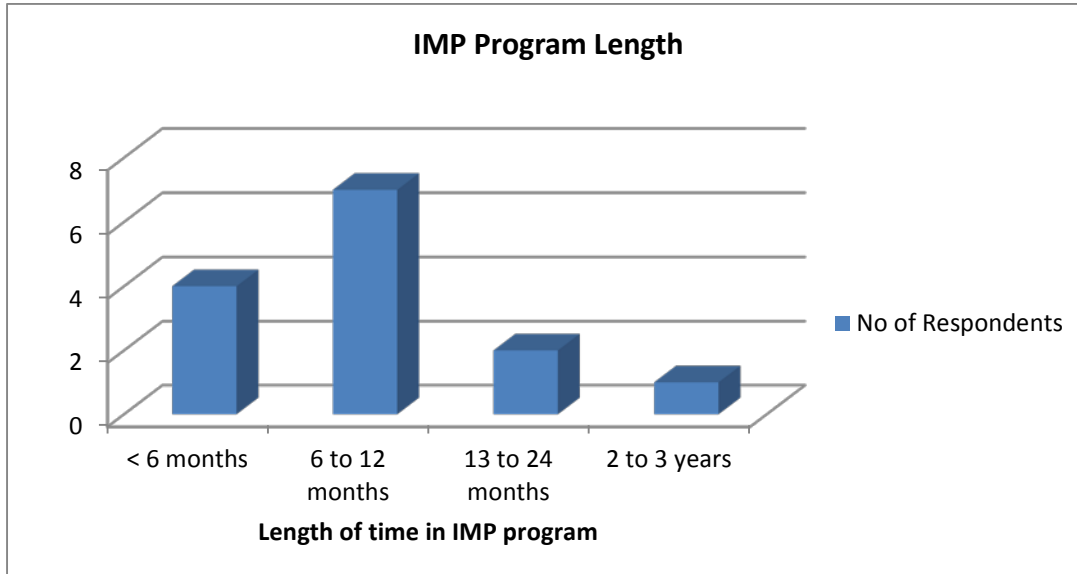
Graph 7



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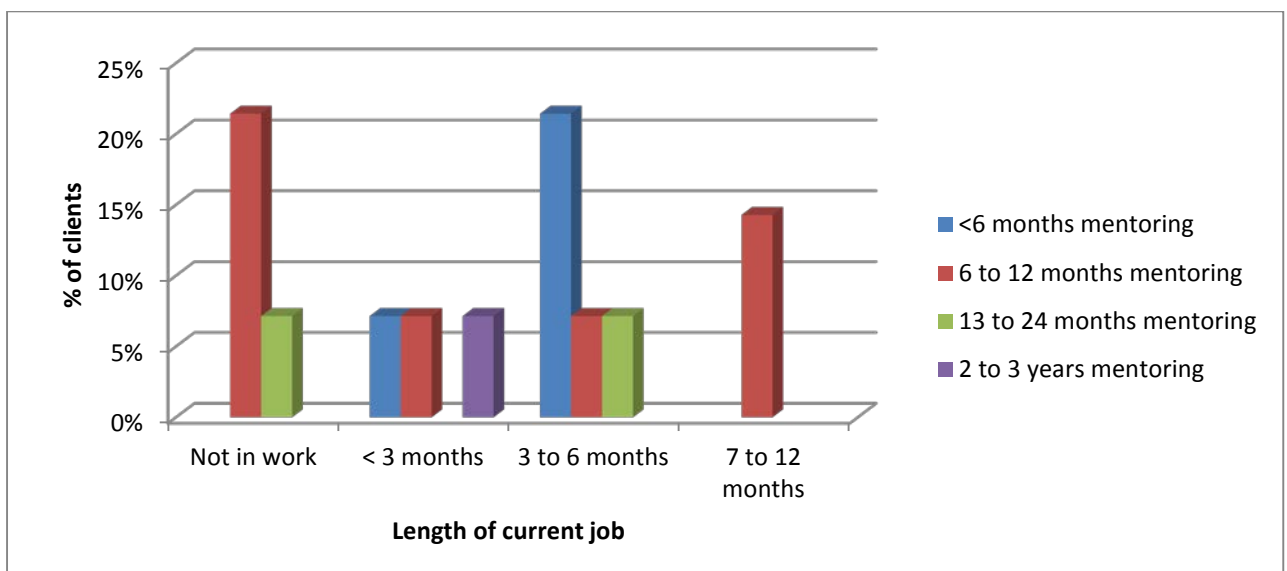
- Almost three quarters (71%) had been working with an Indigenous Mentor for less than 12 months.

Graph 8



- The largest cohorts of respondents fell into 2 categories:
 1. 21% had received between 6-12 months mentoring but were not in work at the time of interview
 2. 21% had received <6 months mentoring and had been working for between 3-6 months at time of interview
- 14% had received mentoring for between 6-12 months and had been in work for between 7-12 months at time of interview
- Respondents who had received more than 13 months of mentoring were either not currently in work (7%), or had been working for up to 6 months at the time of interview (14%)

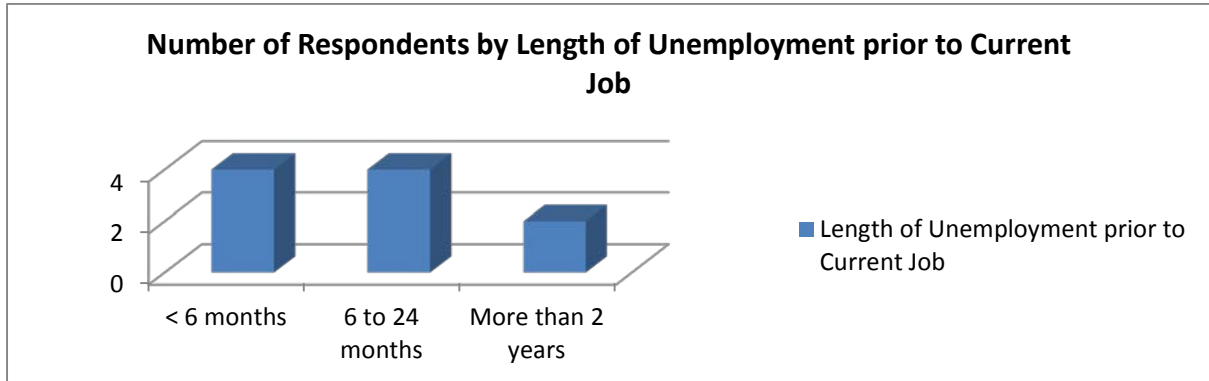
Graph 9 Length of Current Job by Length of Mentoring (n=14)



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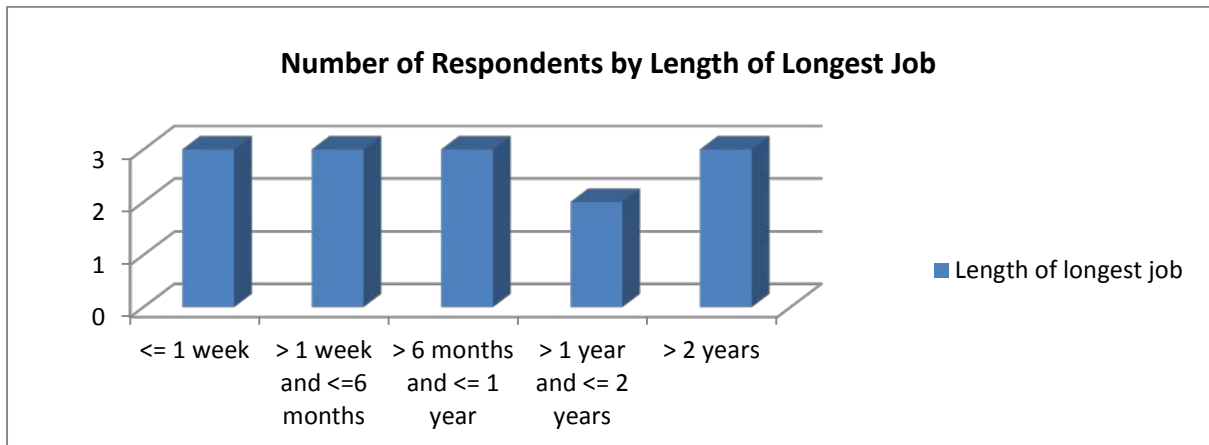
- Of the 10 young people working at the time of the survey, two had been unemployed for at least 3 years prior to their current position.

Graph 10



- Fifty eight percent of the sample had at some point experienced employment placements lasting longer than 6 months, including their current job. The majority of these positions were casual or part-time positions, and included traineeships where there was no guarantee of continuing employment beyond the end of the traineeship. The range of time periods was from one day to 5 years (casual).

Graph 11



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Findings

Surveyed clients were asked to nominate from a supplied list of options all the relevant issues that had made it hard for them to keep a job. This list was developed from issues raised in BoysTown IMP Years 1 and 2 studies and consultations with the Indigenous Mentor.

The table below sets out the results of responses to this survey question. Additional non-supplied issues were also nominated by four clients.

Each issue is then examined in order of client perceptions of relevance with perspectives offered from other stakeholders and data sources where gathered.

Table 2

Ranking	Issue	*% of Responses (N=14)
1	Employment placements only short-term or not enough hours	71%
2	Transport- No driver's license or inadequate public transport	64%
3	Family and cultural obligations	57%
4	Bored by the work	50%
5	Unable to communicate my needs effectively with the boss	36%
6	Don't feel I have the right skills for work	29%
7	Drug and/or alcohol issues	*21%
7	Not enjoying the work	21%
7	Depression	21%
8	Feeling angry and/or misunderstood at work	14%

**It should be noted that these proportions are related to specific answers to a survey item. There are discrepancies in data sources however as many clients denied issues that a review of their case notes suggested were indeed factors in jobs ending (eg: transport, drugs/ alcohol and inability to communicate effectively with their employer).*

1. Short term and casual placements

The number one reason IMP clients surveyed in 2015 reported difficulty staying in work was that their jobs were either short-term (less than six months) or casual, with not enough hours to come off their social security benefits (71%). The Year 2 IMP report noted this issue and included a recommendation for a stronger focus on quality and length of job placements to limit the impact of "churning". It is not clear to what degree the Year 3 mentor had access to positions offering greater permanency for clients,

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however the Mentor stated that close to half of her placements had been with employers who were actively seeking to engage Indigenous job seekers into employment. These “employers” included social enterprises and Indigenous specific traineeships where positions did not necessarily translate into open market permanent jobs.

The mentor’s response to questions relating to the degree of difficulty in sourcing appropriate employment for her Indigenous clients was that it was no more difficult than for any other long-term unemployed young client. With her years of experience as a JSA Employment Consultant, this answer can be partly interpreted to be alluding to the structural determinants of high levels of Australian youth unemployment referred to earlier in this report, including poor literacy and numeracy, low Year 12 completion rates, generally high unemployment levels nationally^{ix}, the changing nature of industry and employment conditions and an increasing shift towards casual positions.

It should be noted that the following client comments as to why employment was not sustainable for them do not only refer to jobs held during IMP participation.

“The job was only one day a week” (23year old female)

“The jobs are often casual” (19yo female)

“I completed the traineeship- there was no more work” (23year old female)

“The second job I got was only a temporary position” (18yo male)

“One company got shut down - the contract ended” (18yo male)

“The company changed owners and they wanted to bring in their own staff” (23 yo male)

“I was told by my Employment Consultant that the job was ongoing but (when I got there) Woolies said it was just a trial” (20yo male)

“My only other job has been (an Indigenous specific music event) - one event per year for 4 years helping with event management” (19 yo female)

One comment suggests that a casual position ended prematurely due to family obligations:

“I only did a week at the (Indigenous heritage consultancy) job because we rotate the role through the family, so we make space for other family members” (20yo female)

The Year 2 Inala evaluation recommended a stronger focus be placed on longer-term placements to avoid the potentially enduring risks of the cycling phenomena described in that study. Interestingly, although respondents reported short-term placements as the most frequent reason for them not staying in jobs, they did not have a perception that this was necessarily a negative issue.

This year’s evaluation specifically asked respondents what they thought the impact of short term and casual work was on them and the results were somewhat surprising.

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Sixty percent of those that responded to this question (n=10) felt that all work was positive as it was "all good experience". The remaining 40% were neutral, claiming a number of short-term positions had no effect on them. No respondents perceived multiple short-term jobs as contributing to a loss of confidence or motivation.

Numerous studies refer to the potentially detrimental aspects of casual employment including increased vulnerability to summary dismissal, variation in hours and schedules, arbitrary treatment and underpayment^x. In addition, it has been claimed that casual employees are vulnerable to missing out on training and promotion and researchers have noted in particular that "*Such deficits may not have much effect in the short-term, but the consequences are likely to be worse when employees are stuck in casual jobs for long periods of time*"^x.

However it is crucial in this analysis to understand the fast changing nature of the current commercial environment and the high adaptability of young people to fast-paced change^{xi}. It may be that repeated exposure to a range of roles will contribute to the resilience required to survive the current employment landscape. It is also worth noting that because clients do not perceive short-term or casual jobs as detrimental there is a higher likelihood that they will take these positions if offered. This may even occur despite a mentor's advice that they should wait for a longer-term position. It may also mean that they are more ready to leave an ongoing position if the situation is not optimal for them. Both of these scenarios can impact on the ability of the IMP to achieve Key Performance Indicators developed under the paradigm that only 26 week outcomes equal employment success.

2. Transport

The issue of transport has repeatedly arisen over the past 3 years of this study as a defining feature for clients of the success or otherwise of both job hunting and job retention. It is not a barrier unique to Indigenous people, however it is an issue that the young Indigenous clients of the Inala IMP consistently rated as one of the hardest things for them to manage with 64% of 2015 survey respondents reporting difficulties staying in employment as a result of transport disruptions.

While public transport is available and appropriate for some clients with office-based positions, many others are placed into jobs long distances from their homes or that require quick and flexible mobility.

"The job took two hours on three buses to get there"

"There aren't enough buses at the hours when I needed them (between midnight and 6am)"

"Timetables can get confusing"

"Couldn't get to the jobs"

Case notes reveal clients struggle to:

- Afford driving lessons,
- Gain access to vehicles for compulsory driving hours,
- Develop the confidence to take the licensing test, and
- Afford the purchase, insurance and maintenance of a vehicle.

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"I have a license but no car"

"I have a car but can't afford insurance"

The risk of losing their driver's license was ever-present, with clients reporting that once this happened the job generally ended too.

"There was a course in automotive detailing that I was doing, but I lost my license so I couldn't drive the cars anymore"

The practice of the Qld State Penalty Enforcement Registry (SPER) of suspending drivers' licenses for non-payment of fines was also raised by several clients as a further obstacle to maintaining employment.

"My license was suspended due to SPERS (State Penalty Enforcement Registry) fines"

Other clients placed into remote community roles including mining and hospitality faced the issue of expensive airfares:

"I had to keep flying back from (workplace) for funerals and I can't afford the fares"

Surveyed agency staff also reiterated the important relationship between transport and job retention, mentioning loss of drivers' licenses and distance from the workplace as key factors in placement breakdowns.

The Inala mentors have been able to intervene over the past 3 years in relation to financial support for transport related items including Go-cards, driving lessons and vehicle insurance and repairs, but this is only available while the client remains with the IMP.

"BoysTown paid for my airfare, but only because (my mentor) talked them into it"

Direct advocacy for difficult issues such as SPERS fine repayment negotiations has also been carried out for many clients. However the evidence was clear that even when mentors actively offered assistance to clients disclosing such issues, this help was frequently turned down by clients. It was not clear why clients refused assistance from the mentor but there may be some evidence to suggest the situations were experienced by the client as shame inducing, leading to avoidance style behaviours, despite the notion of "cultural safety" offered by the helper's shared indigeneity.

3. Family and Cultural Obligations

Fifty seven percent of surveyed clients in this study nominated pressure from competing family/ cultural and work obligations as one of the reasons why jobs had ended. More research is starting to be carried out about the impacts of family and cultural obligations on Indigenous employment and in particular the difficulty employees experience trying to communicate these pressures to their employers^{xii}.

"Meeting the complex obligations and demands of an extended family and fulfilling employer expectations can be a difficult balancing act for some, particularly those working in FIFO operations who may be absent from home for extended periods. Anecdotal evidence suggests that a compounding factor is that

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Indigenous employees are often reluctant to discuss personal problems with their supervisors”^{xii}

Feedback from Indigenous staff at other Inala community and public sector agencies describe the pressures felt by local urban clients:

“Those from regional areas with full cultural values move to the town. The extended kinship system still has significant ceremonial expectations here - even (for those) with semi-cultural values - and family obligations mean time off work. People are not supposed to work for weeks for some ceremonies” (Indigenous agency worker)

“Kinship means your cousin's kids are your kids. You can't send your mother to a nursing home so you have to stay home to care for her” (Indigenous agency worker)

“Circumstances often change in families after people get work so the client may now need to support other family members” (Indigenous agency worker)

Without a high degree of self- confidence and significant communication skills, the Inala IMP study showed some clients were either sacked or dropped out of employment once the level of discord and competing pressures became too high.

“I volunteered at the RSPCA for 6 months but had to stop cause of family issues” (20yo male)

Beyond the need to communicate with employers, family related “emotional overload” appears to have been a factor for several clients:

“It was hard to be at work cause I have a young child”

“I can get emotional trying not to think about family when I'm away (remote job)

Other clients reported feeling quite able to explain the need for absences for family related issues:

“This would only be for things such as attending funerals and I would feel confident talking to my boss (about that)”

The reported upside of extended kinship obligations for clients was that if work ended for any reason some clients were themselves then able to draw upon family resources to survive. The IMP mentor framed this “safety net” as another reason why some clients were less motivated to remain in jobs that were not experienced as stimulating or fulfilling.

The Years 1 and 2 Inala IMP reports highlighted supporting clients to negotiate extended kinship responsibilities with employers as a key area for mentoring activity and there is a vast array of evidence from client case notes that the mentor devoted many hours to responding to this issue at an individual client level in 2015.

Although the Year 2 report also suggested the mentor work with the local Indigenous Elders to develop culturally appropriate mechanisms for minimising the pressure of competing family and employer obligations, it appears that recommendation was not

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implemented in Year 3. The mentor did however refer to the need for a whole of community response to this issue in her end of program interview:

"(We need to) change the culture of families to be more supportive of clients going into employment. Getting the entire family and community more involved in the processes around job searching, job readiness and maintaining employment. Higher levels of indigenous employment is going to require a change in mindset at a community level"

4. Bored by the work

Clients of the Inala IMP have given feedback over the past 3 years that they want their jobs to be interesting and to stimulate their minds. Fully half of 2015 survey respondents nominated "feeling bored by the work" as a trigger for a job ending. Although this is not an issue unique to Indigenous young people, there may be a correlation between the entry level jobs many Indigenous youth find themselves in and a lack of motivation to stay in these jobs if they are not seen to be going anywhere.

Research by the Centre for Social Responsibility in Mining also noted in 2007 that *"Indigenous employees are aware of the limitations of working in semi-skilled operational roles and that some study participants commented that the work was 'boring' and they wanted further challenges. Others felt they were overlooked for promotion. These observations are supported by the work of Barker and Brereton (2005), who found that eight per cent of survey respondents cited 'boredom with the job' as the reason for leaving employment"* ^{xii}

BoysTown IMP clients were surprisingly open with feedback relating to the demotivating nature of unskilled work and staff from other Inala agencies were also very specific about this factor.

"It was warehousing- it didn't interest me so I left" (20 yo female)

"Being stuck in the same job with no progression can make people bored so they want to leave. Entry level jobs are great for starting but they need to see a path to something else" (Indigenous staff member in mainstream social services agency)

The mentor gave feedback that she found unmotivated clients with few non-vocational barriers were often more likely to leave a job than clients who may have had many non-vocational problems, but had the ability to keep working when the nature of the work was not motivating:

"It all comes down to motivation and attitude. I have placed clients into work who would be termed non-job ready due to numerous non-vocational barriers but who were desperate to work and (I've) found that they have stayed in work as well as dealing with their non-vocational stuff"

5. Unable to communicate my needs effectively with the boss

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The Year 2 evaluation report noted the need for a stronger focus on building understanding between clients and employers in relation to each party communicating their needs effectively and resolving miscommunications. Clients with strong cultural obligations frequently have difficulty explaining to an employer why they need to take time off work without reasonable warning.

“Even when there's something wrong they can find it hard to ask for help- It's seen as a failure by them as either of themselves or of their leaders. They fear their employers will see it as failure to ask for help too often so they say nothing and things just escalate” (Public sector agency Indigenous staff)

“There is a lack of understanding about sorry business by employers” (Indigenous community agency staff)

“There is a great lack of awareness and sensitivity in employers. The lack of a treaty between our people leads to a lack of importance placed by employers on these issues” (Indigenous health services agency staff)

Reinforcing this report's earlier call to not assume the homogeneity of this client group however, one local public sector agency Indigenous staff member noted that:

“I think the younger generation in the cities don't have the same respect for their elders and don't have the same traditional needs for time off for traditional ceremonies. Unexplained absences is often just laziness”

One family member reinforced this perception, commenting that *“I don't really know why he left his job - maybe my son doesn't like getting up in the morning”*. However she also added that her son lacked confidence and *“doesn't communicate well”*, reflecting the perennial dilemma of determining cause and effect for this issue.

Although clients did not nominate this issue as highly as some other options (36%), a review of case notes would suggest that communicating with employers remained a hugely significant issue for many of them. This study found that clients framed their difficulties in terms of managers not being *“likeable”*, being *“difficult to deal with”* or *“not being paid properly”* (the latter in relation to an agreement on paid hours following absences). Many told their mentor that they had informed their employer of intentions to be absent but employers had fired them anyway. One Indigenous Public Service officer commented on that claim by noting:

“I think there is a mismatch between clients saying they always call and the truth”

Regardless of the reason behind these failures to communicate, there was universal agreement that this was an area of strong opportunity for a mentoring role.

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Employers who were surveyed about the main benefits of their Indigenous employees having a mentor frequently framed their responses in terms of it being the mentor's role to intervene in frequent and/or unexplained absences.

"She chased up stuff like (my) employee not turning up. (T)hat was helpful"

"They found me staff and chased the staff for me if they took days off without negotiating that first"

"It has worked. We have had some issues. It's been good when we had issues like not turning up or not communicating properly. Cause these issues were always resolved by the client after we let the (IMP office) know"

"(She) got the client to work on time"

"The client worked really well when she was here, but she was away a lot. Other workers questioned why she got so much lee-way. It really needs a lot of understanding on the employer's part about indigenous workers and their issues"

Employers particularly noted the proactive nature of the mentor's behaviour as being key to placement success with 100% reporting the mentoring program as either Effective or Very Effective at meeting their needs as an employer:

"The mentor was around quite a lot to see the employee- not me. Prompting my employee- getting her into gear/get motivated. I didn't need to call to discuss absences- the mentor rang me"

"We have an employee with serious issues and the mentor speaks with her on a weekly basis. The client still has the issues, but they are being managed"

"A mentor lessens the impact of (employees') issues (on the employer). When something happens for an employee, it might just be small, but the potential is there for the client to go off the rails to the point of losing their job. If the mentor intervenes it can short circuit the problem. Minimises the impact of the problem on the employee's ability to do their job"

"(When there were) issues with attendance or communication (close liaison with employer) made it easier for the mentor to call the client and reiterate a message about expected behaviour, rather than just coming from us. That helps to get the message through"

Although there was some evidence of responsibility felt by small business employers to increase their own awareness of Indigenous people's cultural concerns, the mentor and

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other Indigenous agency staff clearly nominated this as an area for increasing focus in the future. It was stated that a major challenge of the role is the belief held by employers that only the client benefits from the work of a mentor.

"I would advocate close contact with the Employer during the recruitment process so that they understand the role of an indigenous mentor is to support them as well as the client. I would also suggest that the employer needs to be open to listening to the mentor on common hiccups that happen when long term unemployed job seekers are placed into employment.....If the contract was extended I would spend more time with employers" (IMP mentor)

Specifically it was stated by one agency staff member that:

"Mentors can do more to educate (employers) about the responsibilities involved in being Aboriginal- Everyone in large family networks is classed as close- most employers don't allow for that in their employment conditions".

while another agency staff member gave feedback that:

"Mentors need more cultural knowledge and professional development to understand their role to do their jobs effectively. The right person in the job could have done it better"

The remaining five issues each attracted less than 30% of client nominations as areas contributing to job loss and/or decisions to quit. A brief note is made under each heading with direct comments offered to provide more detail where available.

6. Don't feel I have the rights skills for work

As noted earlier, there is a danger that young people placed into casual and temporary roles will miss out on training.

"If Indigenous people are not offered training in their jobs they get left behind. Casual workers have this problem even more" (Indigenous Public Service officer)

One client reported that although it was not an issue for her personally, Indigenous colleagues employed with her in a remote hospitality placement struggled with their frustration at poor literacy:

"They don't know how to read or write so they can't do the paperwork to get jobs or stay in jobs - that makes them frustrated"

One Inala agency staff member also referred to poor reading and writing skills making work difficult for this client group.

The Year 2 study investigated this issue and noted that even when clients commence work with confidence in having the appropriate skills, experience in the workplace may challenge this self-belief. This is an area that mentors can assist with if clients are willing to disclose their frustrations and fears of "not being good enough".

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7. Drug and Alcohol

Few clients disclosed issues with drugs and alcohol as a factor in job retention during the survey (21%), however case-files revealed many clients struggled with these issues and had been referred by their mentor and/or Employment Consultant for specialist counselling during the course of the mentoring relationship.

"I have gone through some bad times - I get into trouble"

Employers noted that those employees whom they knew to have substance abuse issues had been receiving active mentoring support and referrals to limit the impact on their jobs and that this had been successful.

8. Not enjoying the work

Twenty one percent of respondents nominated this as a concern leading to them leaving a job. This issue can be a result of a number of other issues mentioned here including boredom, feeling a lack of skills, frustration and feeling like they are not getting on with other staff.

"I didn't like the work so I just stopped going" (23 yo male)

9. Depression

The demography and low SEIFA index rating of Inala have already been briefly described in this report. Together with the impact of intergenerational trauma experienced by Indigenous people, depression is a common experience for Inala IMP job seekers and the mentors described significant investments of time and resources in assisting clients to survive and manage their depression. Twenty one percent of client respondents nominated feeling so depressed that they felt like they could not get out of bed as a reason for not attending work.

10. Feeling Angry and/or misunderstood by other staff at work

This issue was nominated by 14% of respondents. One case of a client who precipitously left employment in a social enterprise placement demonstrated how easy it is for clients to become confused in relation to their tenure in short-term contract based work and how lack of clarity around length of employment can generate high levels of anger and mistrust for the client.

Additional issues raised by both young job seekers and other agency service providers for not staying in a job were homelessness, couch surfing and the need to continuously relocate, imprisonment, physical injuries and chronic health conditions, and boredom during the hours after work when placed in employment in remote locations.

"I moved away from the last job. I've been unemployed now for 1 year and been homeless during that time which makes it hard to look for work"

"Being out in the desert for work there is not enough to do after hours"

"I'm diabetic and sometimes I feel so sick I can't get out of bed"

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"I hurt my back"

Mentors are well placed to assist with practical welfare related issues such as accommodation, legal and medical appointments as well as emotional support during these experiences. The past three years have demonstrated that although these issues may make job retention extremely difficult in the short-term, there is long-term value to be gained in offering this support as a means of building trust between the local Indigenous community and the employment sector.

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Case Studies showing examples of how the mentor contributed to 26 week employment outcomes

Client F: 19 year old female living with mother and 7 year old nephew referred to IMP for pre-placement support

F was first enrolled in a BoysTown delivered Certificate 2 in Hospitality in March 2014 following referral from the BoysTown Inala Job Services office. Her assessment at point of intake by the BoysTown youth worker revealed F needed:

- *skills and knowledge to improve her opportunities of securing full-time employment*
- *interview clothes to provide her with the best chance of competing in the labour market*
- *assistance to seek out independent living through indigenous services*
- *information on support services for Domestic Violence and anger management*

F disclosed at point of intake experiencing domestic violence and requested help with managing a family relationship described as “not supportive” including arguments with her mother often over money. F was expected to buy food for the household and give her mother money, even when she had none.

Barriers to F being able to move into independent living included no references or past rental history, no money for bond and no household goods.

F disclosed that three months prior to intake at BoysTown, F’s grandfather passed away. Three weeks later she discovered she was pregnant and then subsequently miscarried at eight weeks. F reported feeling traumatised by these losses.

F also disclosed having recently been arrested for driving without a license. She reported to the youth worker that this had both positive and negative consequences:

1. *F was no longer expected to transport her family and friends around*
2. *A two year ban on driving would affect her ability to improve her own situation, particularly in gaining work*

F had completed Year 12 and scored reasonably well on Literacy testing but less well for Numeracy.

F reported having hated her school life as she attended many different schools. Her case file noted a lack of work experience, poor life skills and no future aspirations or goals as further barriers to F’s developmental progress. She was in receipt of Newstart allowance of less than \$200 per week and had existing Centrelink and SPERS debts repayments of \$121 per fortnight. The impact of these financial difficulties contributed to continuous arguments with her mother.

F reported using occasional alcohol and marijuana and had a currently incarcerated partner who used “heavy drugs” and violence against her. She had a DVO currently in place, but was intending to have it removed.

No mental health or suicidality issues were recorded.

F reported having an aunt who was supportive, but no other external agency support. She nominated her own confidence and friendly nature as her strengths and reported enjoying venturing into new and unknown places, stating she loved scenery and landscapes.

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In May 2014 F was referred to the Inala Indigenous mentor by the BoysTown Youth Worker. During their first meeting to discuss her employment plans following completion of her Certificate 2 in Hospitality, F was keen to apply for a suggested Indigenous traineeship role at a remote tourism destination. By this time, F was couch surfing with family and friends as contact with her mother remained difficult. F was very keen to leave the area and thought this job would be a perfect solution to her family issues. If F was to take up this position arrangements would first have to be made with the Parole Board to leave the area and to stop mandatory AOD counselling.

The mentor emailed F's resume through to the potential employer and then remained in phone and FTF contact to support F through these ancillary arrangements. In the meantime, and although F's preferred placement was the remote location, they continued to work together on alternative job applications and skills training including:

- coaching in how to read job specifications,*
- thinking through the skills and abilities she had that would meet employers' needs,*
- developing well-crafted applications evidencing her matching skills*
- coaching and role plays in how to manage any subsequent telephone job screenings and interviews and demonstrate high levels of motivation and willingness to work hard.*

The mentor also stayed in contact with F's EC, keeping her up to date with F's progress.

Transport assistance was given for several subsequent job interviews as well as credit top-ups to public transport Go-Cards. Bus timetables linking F to job interview locations were looked up online and printed copies given to F to take with her.

Assistance was also given in gathering required documentation for the Parole Board and the Mentor wrote a support letter to the Board relating to F's active job searching activities.

The mentor continued to meet on a fortnightly basis with F offering practical and emotional support throughout F's court case and job hunting activities. The mentor sometimes called companies on F's behalf for feedback following interview and at other times encouraged F to contact herself.

F successfully interviewed for a city based large corporate indigenous training program in June 2014 and her mentor stayed in close contact with her throughout the work experience. During that time F missed a court appearance and an arrest warrant was issued. The mentor was able to successfully advocate to the court that F was engaged in a work experience placement and was receiving favourable reports from her supervisor.

Additional efforts made by the mentor to place F in the remote hospitality training position included installing Skype on Job Services office laptop to enable a Skype interview and providing written information on the position to the Parole Board. Several appointments were made prior to F's interview to discuss possible questions and plan for asking details about the position.

In August 2014 F was notified she had been successful. After flying out to the remote location F and her mentor stayed in fortnightly phone contact. The mentor assisted F to access appropriate Centrelink payments for undertaking a Certificate 3 and purchased and mailed work clothes out to her. F gave regular feedback about how much she was enjoying the job. F said she had plans to complete the traineeship, stay another two years and then request a transfer to one of the company's Brisbane hotels.

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Over the next six months the mentor also stayed in regular contact with the employer's Indigenous traineeship co-ordinator, checking whether issues were arising that the mentor was able to assist with. The traineeship co-ordinator noted that F was struggling with some issues including bullying outside of work, but that F was seeing work-based Indigenous mentors onsite about these issues.

In October another of F's grandfathers passed away and she returned to Queensland for the funeral without the financial support of paid annual leave. The mentor spoke with F and was assured that F intended to return to her job; however when F failed to answer several calls in the following weeks the mentor contacted the employer and learnt that F had failed to return. Intense support was provided to F over the next week to assist her to return including approaching charities and advocating for the BoysTown Inala employment office to pay her airfare. F disclosed that she had learnt upon her return that her mother was undergoing domestic violence and she had found it very difficult to leave her mother on her own. The mentor counselled her in relation to this issue and gave her referral details to pass on to her mother. The mentor also negotiated permissible break time with the employer due to the bereavement.

In early November F was back at work and agreed to weekly phone contact from the mentor for the remainder of the 26 week post placement period.

In late November F experienced another family member's death and disclosed in a phone call to her Inala employment services mentor that she was reluctant to confide this death to the worksite Indigenous mentors. Despite F presenting in an extremely distressed manner the mentor was able to get her to agree to manage this funeral's arrangements in a more proactive way than in the month prior. F agreed to arrange return air fares and fill out leave requests and all paperwork prior to leaving the worksite. The mentor helped F to focus on her long-term goal of building a career in tourism and not to make short-sighted decisions that would impact on her future, despite the urgency of her need to be with her family.

Four months into the placement F informed the mentor during a fortnightly catch-up call in January 2015 that due to breaching probation requirements another arrest warrant had been issued. Once again the mentor provided both practical and emotional support throughout the legal processes and court hearing and F was eventually able to return to her remote work placement. This traineeship based employment was then able to continue for the remaining period without further major incidents and in April 2015 the mentor closed the case with one month remaining of F's traineeship.

This case study illustrates the holistic nature of support required for one young Inala IMP client to achieve 6 months of employment. At multiple time-points this placement could have failed without the continuous nature of oversight provided by the mentor and her willingness to advocate for her client's employment opportunity to be seen as the major goal in all circumstances. Close liaison with the employer and a willingness on the employer's part to be flexible and accommodate cultural obligations was also critical to the success of this placement.

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Client E: 20 year old male living alone referred to IMP for post placement support only

E was first referred in June 2012 when he was 17 years old to a series of Employability Skills workshops run by a BoysTown trainer. He was described at the time as having 2 days of work experience (with a veterinarian), limited work skills, but possessing an excellent attitude, presentation and motivation.

E was then referred to a BoysTown Youth Worker whose assessment revealed E had lost his mother at the age of 9. E's father was in and out of prison and E lived with his grandmother who passed away in 2011. A further history of trauma was disclosed and E was referred by the youth worker for specialist counselling.

E expressed an interest in working with animals and hospitality and was soon placed into a Certificate 2 Hospitality traineeship at the RSPCA café.

Over the following two years practical welfare support was offered on a series of "one-off" bases by a BoysTown Youth Worker including assistance with public housing and driver's license log-book exemption applications. E continued to receive counselling support for his psychological issues and continued to engage with the BoysTown JSA EC.

In May 2014 E was referred by his EC to the Inala Indigenous Mentor following commencement of full-time work in a timber yard. E reported feeling happy with the plan for continuing follow-up by the mentor during the first 6 months of his first job. Arrangements were made for E to have monthly contact with the mentor, predominantly by telephone.

In this case-study the mentor was not in direct contact with E's employer. E continued to suffer from depression and required medical care at times including medication management and adjustment. On occasions E would contact the mentor and disclose issues relating to his mental health and related job absences, and at other time the employer contacted E's EC who informed the mentor that unexplained absences and inadequate communication issues had arisen and required intervention. At these times the mentor worked with E to understand the need to always contact his employer and explain his actions. Feedback from the employer in this case was that this dynamic worked well and E had increased both his attendance and his communication levels over time.

The mentor built her relationship with E through demonstrating support in practical aspects such as assisting E to avoid expensive dental treatment by informing E of the ATSIHCHS dental clinic, booking his appointments and attending them with him. During these welfare focused meetings the mentor also "checked in" with E about how his depression treatment was progressing and specifically asked about his family. E disclosed significant emotional distress at both past and current family dynamics and revealed that these were not issues he had felt comfortable divulging to his non-Indigenous psychologist. E's mentor explored other supports that E could access when he was feeling overwhelmed and E. was able to nominate people he viewed as safe and supportive.

Towards the end of E's 6 month engagement in the IMP he was visited by his mentor at his worksite. This discussion entailed a review of the constructive work habits E had developed and positive reinforcement of E's new understanding and willingness to communicate openly with his employer.

This case study demonstrates a number of key learnings:

- 1. the value of using practical welfare based activities to build trust with a client who has not been engaged in a mentoring relationship prior to placement*
- 2. the presence of debilitating mental health issues do not necessarily lead to an inability to achieve sustainable employment when the employee's motivation and confidence levels are high*
- 3. referral to mainstream psychological services may not achieve trauma resolution if there is not a culturally informed assessment process and the client does not feel a sense of "cultural safety" in disclosure.*

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Discussion

What insights has this report offered into the original key evaluative questions?

As noted throughout this report an employment service provider based mentor is able to address some of the psychological and interpersonal issues including self-confidence building, employer/employee negotiation and communication skills building that can impede young Indigenous people from achieving long-term employment. An Indigenous Mentor in particular is well-placed to understand and respond to Indigenous young people's difficulties navigating the web of culturally determined competing obligations to extended kin and employer.

Despite these benefits there is little a mentor can do to overcome the structural determinants of high youth unemployment in the current labour market.

Factors such as:

- Weaker labour market conditions with the number of recorded job placements in 2013-2014 25% below the Department of Employment's annual target^{xiii}
- Expensive educational qualifications above Certificate levels
- Low levels of literacy and numeracy
- Jobs that end at the same time as promotional wage subsidies
- Traineeships with no guarantees of ongoing employment
- Casualization of employment with fluctuating numbers of work hours per week
- Low rates of pay and uninteresting entry level work
- Long distances between places of residence and worksites and the limitations of public transport availability and costs
- Lack of access to private transport, including a lack of a driver's license, cars and money for car registration, insurance and repairs
- A preference by many young Indigenous people for employment in Indigenous specific agencies or small businesses
- No guarantee of further work offered beyond completion of Indigenous specific traineeships and;
- Large corporate employers recruiting paid Indigenous staff through employment services and then reconstructing their offers into "unpaid work trials" upon placement

all contribute to the reduced likelihood of Indigenous young people increasing their share of long-term employment through stand-alone mentoring strategies.

What the mentors did well

"Having to deal with not only community and extended family, as well as the employer and communicate at all levels, as well as be coach and counsellor to the client - this is important but rare, and the mentor could do this" (Indigenous Traineeship Co-ordinator)

The BoysTown evaluation studies over the past three years have continuously sought to extend the focus of this pilot's achievements beyond the Department of Employment's

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Key Performance Indicators. Highly successful initiatives have operated out of the Inala IMP, receiving acclaim from many stakeholders.

The nature of these activities and the degree of their resulting benefits has frequently depended on the stage of program rollout.

Evidence of the following positive impacts was gathered at progressive points in time:

- Bridges were successfully built between the Indigenous community and the Inala JSA office. Strong feedback was given in relation to increased referrals from external agencies and improved attendance by Indigenous job seekers
- Perceptions of the employment service office as a “culturally safe” place increased during the period of close liaison with local elders and Indigenous community groups
- The engaging personalities of the mentors and their ability to communicate appropriately with multiple stakeholders was perceived to have led to effective network building
- Levels of “employment influencing” psycho-social aspects of client functioning improved for a sample of Year 2 clients (these were only measured in Year 2) following intensive case management practices
- A strong focus on driving licenses, go card credit, physically transporting job seekers’ to appointments and interviews and placement in jobs close to their homes increased the chances of clients achieving sustained employment
- A willingness to stay in regular contact and adjust contact frequency in relation to client needs led to timely issue identification and intervention
- Negotiations with employers following unexplained absences and encouraging and educating clients about the importance of constantly informing their employers of upcoming appointments, funerals, family illnesses etc, saved some jobs from “falling over”

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Key Learnings

As noted earlier research momentum is gathering on the issues that influence Indigenous employment and the interventional impact of mentoring. Many of the conclusions of this longitudinal study carried out within the Inala Indigenous community reiterate and reinforce the findings of other studies, including those conducted under the auspices of the Closing the Gap Clearinghouse^{xiv} and the University of Queensland's Centre for Social Responsibility in Mining.

Key learnings arising from the BoysTown Inala IMP study are outlined below:

Community Engagement

- Strategies must be tailored to the local community and their needs. If the community has not previously had a strong engagement with employment services then that is where the strategy must start
- Resources must be spent engaging with the Elders and the existing Indigenous support agencies to build trust that the employment office is a culturally safe place to refer their young people
- Time should be spent with family members yarning about how they can respond to cultural issues impacting on their young people while job seeking and subsequently working
- Deep collaboration between an employment service based Indigenous mentor and the local Indigenous community will lead to high levels of referrals of non-job ready people
- The struggle to balance the needs of the community for utilising a mentor's skills to help their most disadvantaged young people and the need of the employment service provider to focus on clients who can achieve sustainable employment will remain an ongoing dilemma

Client Characteristics

- Traditional notions of "non-job ready" do not automatically lead to an inability to retain work if an employee's motivation levels are high and post-placement supports are implemented
- Attitudes towards work are shaped by an individual's "preferred states" of being as well as perceived "rewards and punishments" of work, including:
 - ❖ location (ie: distance needed to be travelled from place of residence to worksite, as well as separation from other family members when the worksite is remote),
 - ❖ price (balance of income after sharing with extended family members)
 - ❖ sense of belonging (clients more likely to stay where they experience acceptance and enjoy collegial atmosphere)

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- ❖ stimulating work engaging each individual's preferences and talents
- High levels of motivation to work and a confident attitude can overcome the risks inherent in the presence of mental health issues

Mentoring Characteristics

- There is value in using practical welfare based activities to build trust with a client who has not been engaged in a mentoring relationship prior to job placement
- Mentors need to be given time to build trust relationships through non-vocational support rather than immediately engaging in attempts to change behaviours
- Mentors may be more effective at identifying and resolving trauma related issues than mainstream psychological services
- Mentoring contact needs to be regular to enable continuous monitoring for early detection of issues with the potential to cause placement failure
- Mentoring availability needs to be flexible, increasing the pace of contact when clients are demonstrating signs of being overwhelmed by non-vocational pressures such as family obligations
- Mentors need to be outspoken advocates for employment as the "end game"; eg: using evidence of employment efforts and successes (no matter how small) if clients are involved in legal proceedings that threaten the placement
- Mentors need to not only directly advocate for their clients but also encourage clients to speak up for themselves by using role-plays to practice.

Workplace Cultural Awareness

- Young Indigenous people may need flexible working conditions to support their cultural obligations while they learn the expectations of work such as high levels of attendance and the critical need for communicating urgent absences for family and cultural obligations
- Recruiting Indigenous young people into traineeships where employers are actively seeking Indigenous workers means employees are more likely to find the requisite flexible working conditions
- Mentors can improve cultural awareness amongst employers and other JSA staff. A mentor can improve the willingness of an employer to be flexible by educating them about the existence of extended kinships and the responsibilities they entail.

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Policy

- While the employment sector focuses on the achievement of long term (more than six months) placements as a definition for a “successful” employment program, there are indications that young people need to adapt to a labour market offering predominantly short-term positions
- Young Indigenous Inala people did not view short-term positions as having a negative impact on their motivation or confidence levels
- SPERS debts punished by suspending drivers licenses leads to prevention or loss of employment. It is a short-sighted and illogical way for society to deal with unpaid fines

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