



VITAL TRAINING FOR ABORIGINAL COMMUNITY SERVICES WORKERS

Project lead: Swinburne University of Technology

Project partners: Department of Health and Human Services, Department of Education and Training, Victorian Aboriginal Education Association, 23 Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) across Victoria, various RTOs

KEY SKILLS TO TACKLE FAMILY VIOLENCE – THE CONTEXT

The Victorian Government has made a commitment to improve the health, wellbeing and safety of Aboriginal people.

Part of this plan involves improving the workforce capability of Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) so they can provide culturally appropriate family violence support, child protection and related health and community services to Aboriginal communities.

This will enable ACCOs to implement recommendations of the Royal Commission into Family Violence, and to meet Section 18 State Government directions for Aboriginal children requiring care. The intent of Section 18 is for Aboriginal people – not the state – to look after their own.

This has significant implications for the ACCO workforce in terms of upskilling and acquiring required qualifications to carry out this work.

Regional and Specialist Training Fund (RSTF) grant money has allowed much needed flexibility to customise courses to reflect Aboriginal people's strengths, skills and life experience, and to integrate Aboriginal culture and self-determination.



Swinburne University of Technology has worked closely with ACCOs and the Skills First provider network to customise the courses, such as the Diploma in Community Services, that teach the knowledge and skills workers need to manage, co-ordinate and deliver family violence services to Aboriginal people and communities.

EXCEEDING EXPECTATIONS – THE OUTCOMES SO FAR

- Swinburne has established a network of *Skills First* registered training organisations to meet the training and skills development needs of ACCOs.
- The ACCOs identify the training organisation they want to work with. Swinburne facilitates negotiations – including discussions about delivery models that will best support participants' retention and wellbeing – and administers the RSTF grant funding to the training organisation. The training is delivered at participants' workplace, or an agreed other venue.
- As of October 2019, 157 workers were enrolled, passing the project's target of 150.

CUSTOMISING A COURSE IN A CRUCIAL CONTEXT

Organisation case study: Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency

The Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA) is the leading organisation in child protection case-management of Aboriginal children in care, and in working with Aboriginal families.

Al Dawood drove and managed the first VACCA-specific iteration of the Diploma of Community Services, in close partnership with Swinburne. This preceded the initiative but informed the later approach for VACCA and other ACCOs once the project began in July 2018.

"The course content was developed with input from Aboriginal staff, and senior Aboriginal managers were guest speakers," he says. "Participants were able to share their lived experiences and how 'mainstream' approaches could be adapted to work in an Aboriginal context."

The first cohort of VACCA staff began the Diploma of Community Services in April 2018 and this May, 26 of them graduated. A new intake of 40 staff across two groups have begun the course under the AWDI Accredited Training project's guidance and support.

"For many participants, this is their first time (back in) formal education and, for some, their previous educational experiences were negative, culturally insensitive and unfulfilling," Mr Dawood says.

"This program has created the opportunity for VACCA staff to undertake a formal qualification that's positive and culturally relevant."

The Regional and Specialist Training Fund is a targeted *Skills First* funding stream that supports training for specific skills in regional and specialist areas that are not being met by the current training market. Training providers who hold a current *Skills First* VET funding contract are eligible to apply for higher subsidies and one-off grant payments for selected courses in specific regions to meet local industry demand or specialised occupations. Funding will be considered where there is a strong connection between industry, training and job outcomes.

To find out more visit:

www.education.vic.gov.au/training/providers/funding/Pages/rstf.aspx

or email the RSTF team at:

rstf@edumail.vic.gov.au

"I COULD HAVE CRIED. IT'S LIKE I COULD READ A BOOK FOR THE FIRST TIME"

Student case study: Katrina Harrison

For most of her life, the vast world of learning and literature lay obscured from Katrina Harrison.

She is a dyslexic indigenous woman and so, when she was a child in the 1970s, school brought only exclusion. She emerged from it unable to read or write – "they just assumed we were dumb".

Now, in her 50s, the door to that world has opened, as if someone waved a wand and ushered her through. In a sense they did – the reader pen scanner was invented.

"I could have cried," she says. "It's like I could read for the first time. When you're dyslexic, you're avoiding situations all the time ... like before, people are talking about books they've read, whether it's Treasure Island or 50 Shades of Grey, and you can't participate."

Ms Harrison, from Bairnsdale, has worked at a women's shelter for the Gippsland and East Gippsland Aboriginal Co-Operative for two years. She has a fierce desire to help the women who use the shelter, because she was a victim of domestic violence for 20 years, while raising 10 children.

"I felt in certain places there were cracks in the system and I wanted to have a better understanding of the system and help fix those cracks," she says.

That desire – and her scanner – helped her overcome any doubts and nerves and she enrolled in the Diploma in Community Services, which has been customised thanks to the RSTF funding.

Twelve weeks in, Ms Harrison says the course is a joy, thanks to the content and the trainers – and it's already making a practical difference to her work. She has been learning about policy and procedures and that has allowed her to suggest improvements.

For example, she had the confidence and knowledge to recommend a change to the positioning of the Aboriginal advisory group at a recent meeting about The Orange Door service in Morwell.

"That's me having a better understanding – I'm ready to push back," she says. "And if I'm wrong, I'm ready to listen."

She credits the course and its "wonderful" teachers for the surge in her confidence, and is looking forward to applying it to her job, to help people suffering the effects of family violence.

"It's a powerful thing," she says.