

Young Indigenous Meatworkers' Gazette

Newsletter of the Boys from the Bush Projects, Rural & Remote Area Work Scheme (RAWS)
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This space is reserved for the logos of those meat processing companies that have or are engaging BFTB workers

What is our future at the Murrumbidgee Rural Studies Centre?

In Newsletter #22 we talked about our good fortune in being able to reside at the Murrumbidgee Rural Studies Centre.



This is an ideal location for young people from remote communities in northern Australia working at Riverina Beef at Yanco in New South Wales.

Unfortunately we have been told by the Centre Manager that he has received an instruction from his department not to take any residential bookings beyond the 30 December 2012.

What does this mean for our Riverina group?

It means that unless the Department of Primary Industries (DPI) changes its mind, we must leave the Centre at the end of the year.

Where would we go?

We know that our chances of being able to find a suitable rental home in town are very slim.

Is there any chance of the DPI reversing its decision not to accept residential bookings beyond 30 December 2012?

A feasible proposal that may influence the DPI to reverse this decision is if RAWS could progress from a work scheme to an on-campus life skills training program, for the training of rural workers.

One of the toughest problems and social responsibilities facing governments and private enterprise is to get people off the dole and into employment.

Unemployment combined with the national skills shortage, particularly in rural areas, still remains a major unresolved socio-economic problem.

One of the governments' and private enterprises' interim measures to address this problem, is to import foreign workers from overseas, through the 457 visa program. They are gratefully received by those employers who have made reasonable efforts to find local workers. However, there still remains a significant labour shortage across a range of industries.

The 457 visa program is not an ideal solution, as it has undermined efforts to utilise the potential of the domestic labour force. There is a large number of unemployed Aboriginal youth living in remote communities who want a job. BFTB Projects' staff have direct experience in working with these Aboriginal youth, their families and their respective communities.



Take for example the two young people pictured above. Both of them say that they want a job. They are also willing to leave home to become employed. They are also willing to reside hundreds of kilometres from their remote community if this meant getting a job.

However, the likelihood of these young people ever getting a job independently in the mainstream Australian economy is most unlikely. Their grandmother (pictured on the right) would like to see them get a job, but the likelihood of her being able to help them get a job is also most unlikely.



Similarly, the young girl pictured above agreed to take up Milton's offer of a job down south. Her father, who is pictured next to her, agreed for her to go. Without this young female receiving proper assistance her chances of obtaining employment are most unlikely.

The major factors inhibiting their lack of work skills includes geographic isolation, the absence of structure and support to help them obtain employment, their depleted self-esteem and their lack of basic life skills.

There are real and entrenched limitations which inhibit changing these young peoples' attitude to obtaining employment, and to teaching them essential life skills whilst they remain in their community. Resistance to these positive changes is largely due to intergenerational welfare dependence, restricted social and economic mobility, and the blinkered mentality that there is nothing more on the horizon on offer, other than prevailing poverty and sub-standard living conditions.

The Murrumbidgee Rural Studies Centre, if properly utilised, could be of great benefit to these young people. The Centre is an ideal facility for the delivery of

the harvests. Employers complain of them that they are shiftless, incapable of sustained effort, and inefficient for the most part, although there are notable exceptions; other than these exceptions local Aboriginal labour is usually the last to be offered work other than at peak periods or in a very tight labour market.”

This, however, was not the view of visiting Aboriginals from the Northern Territory.

Overall, fruit growers were pleased with their performance and agreed to have them back next season. The Manager of the Leeton CES Office, Mr McCormack, was reported to have said: “*All the [Northern Territory] Aborigines earned sufficient to pay back an original advance of \$10 per head, pay their return fares home, and buy new clothes. They also brought guitars, mouth organs, transistor radios, football boots and a small credit balance when they left Leeton.*”

BFTB’s Savings Scheme

A good example of the flawed thinking within in the ranks of DEEWR, and the radical left, is the story around the BFTB Projects’ savings scheme.

Over the years, BFTB Projects has received much criticism from DEEWR in relation to our voluntary savings scheme. We have also received criticism from those who want to humbug our participants of their hard earned income.

We have also taken criticism from those who want to champion our participants’ right to do as they please with their money, including the unrestricted consumption of drugs and alcohol. This was a major issue as defined by a Narrandera person who complained about us to her friend in DEEWR, and then vowed to “*work full time on destroying our scheme*” and to “*run us all out of town*”.

DEEWR’s latest criticism, which forms part of their alleged “*serious concerns and major shortcomings*” of our project, is that:

- The participants’ Bank Books do not state their salary or living expenses.
- The participants would not be able to work out how much they were paying in living expenses from these books.

How is it possible that these DEEWR bureaucrats do not know the difference between a Bank Book and an Employee Pay Slip? Can they be that stupid?

How is it possible that these DEEWR bureaucrats do not know the difference between a Bank Book and an Income Budget?

DEEWR staff stated that they would provide an interpreter to explain to these young people how their voluntary savings scheme works. DEEWR’s inaccurate and crude assertion is that this action had not occurred. DEEWR staff’s second inaccurate and crude assertion is that none of these young people can understand English. The fact is they all do.

DEEWR’s inept and improper response to issues that it had manufactured in relation to RAWs is a clear indication of its inability to address important practice issues for these Aboriginal youth in a common sense and timely manner. DEEWR’s entrenchment in the machinations of its own bureaucracy, while remaining alienated from the real issues of its clients, has never been more evident than what has been described in this example.

Earlier this year, BFTB Projects asked one of our ex-employees if she was willing to help maintain our participant savings scheme until our trainee Group Manager, Pio Nakvbuwai, was able to take charge of the group.

This ex-employee agreed to our request. However, she ceased to do it without informing BFTB Projects’ staff, and immediately after she had received a visit from some of DEEWR’s staff.

BFTB Projects' staff began to realise that something was fundamentally wrong when we started to receive reports that many of our participants were seen in the local pubs, buying takeaway grog, drunk on the streets, fighting on the streets, gambling, sleeping during the day and out all night, and failing to keep their accommodation clean and tidy. Also, individuals known for their commitment to the Scheme began talking about going home.

Savings ceased at the end of March 2012, immediately after a visit by DEEWR. In the 6 weeks prior to DEEWR's visit, the average weekly savings for each participant was **\$280.81**. Compare this to the actual amount of money that has been saved by all of our participants over the past 6 months, since the scrapping of the savings scheme - **Zero (\$0.00)**.

Consider this:

- There were 11 young people in the BFTB's Savings Scheme.
- 11 people x \$280.81 per week = \$3,0889.91
- \$3,0889.91 per week x 4 weeks = \$12,355.64
- \$12,355.64 per month x 6 months = \$74,133.84

Where did all this money go?

Well, we do know that a lot of this money was spent on grog and gambling. On top of this we had an increase in work absenteeism, the loss of at least one of our participants, plus damage to the good reputation of our participants, and damage to the good reputation of our Scheme. We now have a group of young people who are worse off than they were before DEEWR's interference occurred. The only beneficiaries of this debacle were the local publicans and the TAB.

And who is taking responsible for this debacle?

It appears that DEEWR's interference has again resulted in destroying something that works effectively, while not replacing it with anything constructive.

The destruction of RAWS was assured had it not been for the fact that RAWS is a BFTB Project that has taken us over 10 years to develop this effective practice.

As soon as we realised what had occurred, the savings scheme was quickly reinstated.

What is also tragic in this instance is that the bureaucrats who are responsible for this debacle are earning between \$150,000 and \$220,000 per year at the taxpayers' expense.

If we are serious about closing the Gap for Aboriginal people, then one of the challenges facing our politicians is to get rid of these overpaid useless bureaucrats.

Do DEEWR bureaucrats really care about the plight of disadvantaged Indigenous youth or are they just going through the motions?

On the 5 April 2012, 6 of our 15 participants working at Riverina Beef lost their jobs due to some sort of restructure. These 6 young people were some of the most disadvantaged youths in this country.

Three of them were young women from the remote communities of Santa Teresa, Yuelamu and Yuendumu. They were aged 17, 18 and 21. This was their first ever mainstream job.



One of the males was a 17 year old youth from Ali-Curung. He suffers from epilepsy and cognitive deficits as a result of childhood meningitis. He had been working at the Riverina Beef meat processing plant for 6 months. He loved his job and he never caused us any trouble.

The two other males aged 17 and 18, are both from Ampilatwatja. One had been in the Scheme for about 8 months. This was his first ever job, and the first time he has left his remote community. Everyone in his family is either on Centrelink payments or CDEP. Nobody in his family has ever had a real job.



The other male is very similar - his first ever job and the first time he had been away from home. He is also the first member of his family to have a real job.

We had informed DEEWR of their retrenchment and our proposal to relocate these young people to new jobs with another meat processing plant.

This was our reply from the ACT/NSW State Manager of DEEWR:

“I am formally advising that DEEWR will not endorse or fund the redeployment of workers under the Boys from the Bush contract.”

What does this say about the level of genuine interest in the wellbeing of these young people or appreciation of their achievements by DEEWR bureaucrats?

DEEWR was effectively giving these young people one of two choices. For the girls it was:

Choice 1. Go home to a life of idleness, pregnancy, child care, rampant drug and alcohol abuse, violence, and welfare dependency; or

Choice 2. Remain where you are on unemployment benefits, and trust that one day you will find a job, and live happy ever after.

For the boys it was:

Choice 1. Go home to a life of idleness in a community with high rates of drunken violence, drug abuse and suicide, and a life on the training merry-go-round with no real job at the end.

Choice 2. Remain where you are on unemployment benefits, and trust that one day you will find a job, and live happy ever after.

Displays of this sort of callous indifference or astonishing naivety by inflexible bureaucrats following ridged procedures may well come as a shock to some readers, but BFTB Projects regularly encounters this sort of thing.

Needless to say, BFTB Projects had no intention of entertain this sort of nonsense from DEEWR, and we pushed ahead without its endorsement or funding.

In time, all the young people were re-employed by Riverina Beef and the local rice mill or relocated to a new meat processing job and accommodation organised by BFTB Projects in Lobethal, South Australia.