

# **A report on the trial of placing young Indigenous people from Cape York Peninsula region into private sector employment picking fruit in southern states**

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## **Introduction**

There are very few employment options for those young Indigenous people living on Cape York Peninsula who would like to work outside the Community Development Employment Projects scheme (CDEP scheme). If young people are to be assisted in taking up mainstream private sector employment they must be willing and able to pursue opportunities off Cape York. For this to occur, it would appear that two major hurdles need to be overcome. The first concerns the claim that young Indigenous people are unable or unwilling to leave their home and community in order to take up employment owing to their strong social, cultural and spiritual links with their land and the complex social bonds which link Indigenous families and communities together (Hunter and Grey, 2004). The second concerns the claim that young Indigenous people could not cope with the structural and task demands of mainstream private sector employment after many years on welfare within families who have spent most if not all their lives on welfare. Speaking on welfare dependency, Noel Pearson reports that:

*“Passive welfare is now well embedded in Aboriginal society. It is almost seen as the Aboriginal way, part of the culture. Recipients of passive welfare are far removed from the real economy and have been for a long time now. Children who have grown up in this passive welfare economy have little understanding of and have never experienced life in the real economy. Values, expectations and aspirations are limited in this artificial context (2000a, p.30).”*

This paper reports on the trial of placing sixteen (16) young Indigenous people from Cape York Peninsula region into unsubsidised fruit harvesting work in the Murray Valley region of Victoria and the Riverland region of South Australia for three months.

The results of this trial confirm that young Indigenous people can successfully work in the private sector and live independently far from home, provided they are removed from the distractions and negative influences of family and community and receive appropriate support and supervision in their new environment. What was unexpected was that the younger inexperienced participants proved more resilient than expected and better able to accept the structural and task demands of private sector employment than the older participants who have had more exposure to various work and life skills programs. At the end of the three months period, eleven (11) of the sixteen (16) participants had managed to remain in full-time casual employment and continued to live independently. Ten (10) of the participants have chosen to remain in their jobs and take up post-picking seasonal work and the South Australian Autumn-Winter orange harvest.

## Methodology

### Trial participants

The participants in this trial were chosen on the basis of certain qualities that are characteristic to most young people on Cape York Peninsula.

There were sixteen (16) participants in the trial aged between sixteen (16) and twenty-five (25) years old. The average age was eighteen (18) years. Fifteen (15) were of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent, one (1) was of Maori descent. Two (2) participants had past mainstream work experience, one in the building industry (the details of which are a bit obscure) and the other had one or two weeks experience picking watermelons. Eleven (11) were receiving Newstart or Job Search Allowance, six (6) had prior CDEP work experience, and eight (8) had no prior work experience. Two (2) have never received an income.

Other relevant factors were: one (1) was known to be an active petrol sniffer; eight (8) regular cannabis smokers; and two (2) heavy drinkers. Four (4) were young offenders, and one (1) was an adult offender.

### Hypotheses and Practices

Three hypotheses were investigated using a series of practices. These practices were developed from the author's years of social work throughout Cape York Peninsula and the Torres Strait, in particular the development of social enterprises for young Indigenous people as a means of dealing with anti-social and self-destructive behaviour. Obviously, when practices are derived from, and intended for, certain behaviours in a certain context and are then applied to another situation, questions of applicability and adaptability must arise. Therefore, at this stage and in the context of this trial work placement scheme, these practices must be seen as descriptions rather than prescriptions wanting evaluation.

**HYPOTHESIS 1) Young Indigenous people from Cape York Peninsula with little or no experience of living away from home, family and community, with little or no work experience and thus assessed at high risk for long-term unemployment or dependent on CDEP, can still be successfully assisted to take up mainstream private sector employment far from their homes and families.**

*PRACTICE DESCRIPTION A) Participants were sent from Cairns and various Cape York Peninsula communities to the Riverland region of South Australia and the Murray Valley region of Victoria (a distance of over 3500 kilometres, well away from distractions and interference of families and the state welfare department and its funded community based organisations). They remained free to leave the trial at any time.*

**Rationale for this practice:** Young people refusing to attend school and work are commonplace on Cape York Peninsula. In most cases, this appears to result from the lack of an educational and work ethic, combined with the unrestricted, unconditional licence endowed upon young people by their families and community at large. One

strategy used to deal with the problem of school rejection has been to send young people to school well away from the distracting and sometimes negative influences of peers, family and community. Experience has shown that these school or work placements must be located far enough to deter the young person from running back to family and community as soon as conformity is required and restrictions apply. This strategy has proven to be the most effective in providing formal education for children and young people on Cape York. It is also a key strategy used in this trial.

Distance will not only deter young people from leaving, it will also prevent others from interfering.

Few would disagree with Mark Latham, former Member of Werriwa and leader of the opposition, when he says “.. *welfare dependency reflects the greatest failing of welfare policy* (Latham, 2001).” Latham used the word “welfare” in the broad sense given to it in the term “welfare state”. The author is also a strong critic of “welfare” but my use of the word includes the more specialised meaning of the services provided by welfare departments. According to Pearson (2000a), widespread social problems didn’t come before passive welfare dependence – rather Aboriginal social problems arose out of the economic conditions of passive welfare dependence. And of course high levels of welfare dependency legitimised and increased government involvement in, and control of, Aboriginal peoples lives (Arthur, 2002).

Over the years the author has witnessed welfare departments and their funded agencies engage in some shockingly inappropriate practices. The author has also witnessed them muster incredible forces against other service providers considered as a nuisance or troublemaker because they are unwilling to follow the bureaucratic mould and do things by convention. A number of effective practices and programs have been lost in this way, and in part, explains why widespread family and community dysfunction continues to exist on Cape York (James, 1998, 2003). The reason for this behaviour is more often than not self-serving. Take, for example, the belief held by a number of service providers that young people are unable or unwilling to leave their home and community in search of education or employment because of their strong social, cultural, and spiritual links with their land, family and community (Hunter and Grey, 2004). It is true that many young people are unwilling to leave home and community, but to say this is owing to their strong social, cultural, and spiritual links with their land, family and community is simplistic. At best such statements are prompted by ignorance but occasionally they are raised to cause mischief, and to this end, serves the interests of community-based service providers. They contain potential behavioural problems well away from those communities with lesser problems, especially the major residential, commercial or administrative centres (James, 2004). This is another reason why this trial took place well outside the jurisdiction of community-based and regional welfare organisations.

*PRACTICE DESCRIPTION B)            Positions were for a minimum of three months.*

**Rationale for this practice:** A number of young people sent away to boarding schools or work programs do in fact miss their homes, families and friends. Some young people cannot cope being away from home and family for any great length of time. Young people involved in this scheme will also experience varying degrees of

home sickness. In addition, there are a number of young people who value not just their personal freedom but desire to live a totally uninhibited life – free from all responsibilities towards self and others. It is this that drives many young people to try to return back home where they live a near totally uninhibited lifestyle.

More often than not, it will take time to replace highly dependent, anti-social behaviour with a sense of autonomy and improved pro-social behaviour. This work placement scheme will strike a balance between: 1) the need for a prolonged exposure to new patterns of behaviour; and 2) the genuine plea of homesickness. Three months was considered a compromise between these two factors.

A successful work placement will be the completion of the main picking season (January to March), followed by the participants' willingness to remain in, or return to, the scheme and take up post-picking seasonal work and the Autumn-Winter orange harvest in South Australia.

*PRACTICE DESCRIPTION C) Participants travelled, lived and worked in groups*

**Rationale for this practice** To help balance this need for a prolonged exposure to new patterns of behaviour and genuine pleas of homesickness, participants will be given the opportunity to be placed along with a family member or friend. These small peer groups will share a common identity, language, lifestyle and needs and provide each other with mutual support. This mutual support during difficult times is an important ingredient to a successful work placement. Harvesting of fruit and vegetables crops can involve working singularly, in pairs or in teams.

*PRACTICE DESCRIPTION D) A work placement scheme rather than a welfare program.*

**Rationale for this practice:** Most, if not all, young Aboriginal people on Cape York Peninsula and their families have in the course of their lives come into regular contact with a number of government operated and government funded programs. This has on many occasions produced something of a paradox: even though Cape York people are in great need of assistance, much of that assistance has resulted in a state of mind that makes the necessity of further assistance a disconcerting situation for the service provider. Many young people and their families have become quite skilled in systematically manipulating programs to meet their own ends rather than the stated end of the program - which often ends up compounding the original problem. It becomes a constant battle to keep community based programs on track and normative values, rules and regulations intact. Pearson appears to have hit the nail squarely on its head when he says, in relation to the impact of passive welfare dependency:

*“People are deliberately taking and not giving, expecting rights and not being responsible. In other words, taking advantage of other, usually weaker members of our society (2000a, p.31)”.*

Perhaps from the standpoint of one who has spent his/her entire life on the receiving end of handouts, one becomes quite skilled at identifying potential providers and

manipulating the system towards these ends. This may explain why so many service providers complain that their so-called social relationships with community people have often been manipulated to economic ends. For this reason, this scheme has been developed to prevent any corruption or manipulation by its participants or their families.

This scheme has clearly defined minimal roles and relationships with participants and their families.

- The coordinator has no relationship with the families of participants.
- Participants are provided with employment (picking fruit) and free travel to their place of employment. No other financial assistance will be provided. Participants must finance their own return.
- Accommodation and daily transport to and from work operate with strict departure time and will be provided only on condition that the young person is willing to work up to 6 days per week, achieve a minimum standard of productivity and does not engage in disruptive behaviour including the use of drugs and alcohol. Accommodation and transport will be withdrawn if the participant does not comply with these conditions.
- If a participant is sacked owing to bad conduct or poor work performance he must find alternative employment and transport or return back home using his own resources. The scheme will not assist with his return home or care while waiting for his return.
- The scheme accepts no other responsibility towards participants.

*PRACTICE DESCRIPTION E) All participants were assessed healthy and agreed to the living and work conditions.*

**Rationale for this practice:** It is appreciated that young people require special consideration because they are less mature. (This means that they possess less self control, a lesser sense of responsibility; they are more easily influenced, and more reactive to pressure. This makes them generally more vulnerable than adults. They are also not in a position of total choice regarding their environment and life circumstance). On the other hand, young people are more malleable, and more amenable to change than adults, although they are more dependent on adults to assist them in this change. The support and guidance they receive from the scheme coordinator will be based on the principle of normalisation in recognition of the fact that young people have greater potential to change through involvement in normal life activities. They will be required to shop, cook and clean for themselves and pay for their own board and keep etc. There will be no restrictions on their social activities apart from those contained in Practice description D. See Appendix I for a copy of the Medical & Legal Assessment Form and Appendix II for a copy of the Rules and Conditions of Involvement.

*PRACTICE DESCRIPTION F) All jobs were within the capabilities of participants.*

**Rationale for this practice:** Many young Indigenous people on Cape York Peninsula are inadequately educated and unskilled and will continue to fall behind in

the skills necessary for successful participation in the mainstream work force and the non-welfare economy. Therefore, at best, most young people are destined for unskilled labouring positions. This, however, should not be viewed as a reason for not engaging in work. What is unfortunate is that young people aged in their early to mid teens who can barely read and write and have a series of behavioural problems are told that if they go to school and study hard they could one day become a doctor or lawyer. This (in all but rare cases) is nonsense and just adds to the confusion and false hopes of these young people. It is wrong to encourage young people to build their aspirations on fantasies. Likewise, it is wrong to say to these young people that if they do well at sports they could be a Cathy Freeman or a Wendell Sailor one day. Very few young indigenous people have made a successful career in sports. Privileged or exceptionally talented people do not make for good effective role models for those who are not privileged nor talented. More effective role models are ordinary people who are doing well - people with whom the average young person can identify.

The 'Boys from the Bush' program promotes ordinary young people who take pride in work, especially hard physical work. Good labourers are well respected, well rewarded, highly prized people. The best are promoted as role models. They are taught to take pride in being a fruit and vegetable picker, a ganger on the railways or a deck hand on a trawler. There is no pride, however, in being dependent on welfare or a participant in a welfare program.

The type of jobs considered suitable for this trial will be seasonal fruit and vegetable picking in southern States. The job involves climbing ladders, standing, bending, or kneeling while moving through the crop. Crops are collected in different ways. They can be picked into buckets, cartons or into bags strapped to the shoulders and when full are poured into large bins. The work is repetitious and can be tiring. Starting time is from early morning (before sunrise) and to late in the day. Pay is usually by piecework (per bucket or bin) or occasionally wages (per hour). No young person over the age of fifteen (15) will face a presumption that they are incapable of doing this type of work.

*PRACTICE DESCRIPTION G) Four experienced 'Boys from the Bush' program participants and supervisors were included in the trial to ensure the effective management of anticipated behavioural problem by the younger less experienced, less mature participants.*

**Rationale for this practice:** Where this strategy of peer group placements is used, it may be necessary to include a peer supervisor. These peer supervisors will be chosen from the pool of effective participants of the 'Boys from the Bush' program. Without peer supervisors, groups may run the risk of letting negative peer group influences overwhelm the group objectives. The 'Boys from the Bush' program coordinator knows all too well how rational thought processes can easily be abandoned by groups of young people with low impulse control and underdeveloped social consciences. Critical self-analysis of the inherent consequences of their behaviour can, at times, become near impossible. The 'Boys from the Bush' program coordinator is also very experienced in the practice of placing selected young Indigenous supervisors into groups of young people to provide necessary leadership, discipline and support.

*PRACTICE DESCRIPTION H) The trial coordinator was present to provide support and supervision.*

**Rationale for this practice:** The trial coordinator is fully aware of the risks and complexities involved in this trial. The coordinator is a social worker highly experienced in working with young Indigenous people from Cape York Peninsula and the Torres Strait. His mode of practice is group work. He has also considerable knowledge of, and experience in, the horticultural industry in the Sunraysia region of Victoria and the Riverland region of South Australia.

**HYPOTHESIS 2) It is expected that past and present members of the ‘Boys from the Bush’ program are more capable of work and independent living owing to their involvement in the program.**

*PRACTICE DESCRIPTION I) Prerequisite training would be advantageous.*

**Rationale for this practice:** The ‘Boys from the Bush’ program was a holistic program using a social enterprise as the means of providing psychosocial support and counselling, education, work and life skills training to young people at risk. The program’s effectiveness in dealing with offending behaviour, substance abuse, youth suicide, lack of confidence and self-esteem was widely recognised.

**HYPOTHESIS 3) This scheme is suitable for petrol sniffers.**

*PRACTICE DESCRIPTION J) Involvement in the work placement scheme is sufficient for most petrol sniffers to stop this behaviour.*

**Rationale for this practice:** The author argues that for young people whose reason for petrol sniffing has more to do with the influence of other sniffers with no great interest or commitment to the behaviour, their involvement in this work placement scheme is sufficient to stop the behaviour.

To illustrate the point, the author will again quote a young person from Mossman in relation to alcohol. “*You can’t stop the drinking here; it’s too strong. If you want to stop, others will force you into it. You can’t say no, they will make you. If you don’t drink with them they think bad of you. The only way to stop is to get out of this place* (James, 2004).”

Of course this scheme goes beyond the mere removal of sniffers from these influences; this scheme is making a strong investment in the overall development of these individuals.

## Results

This section describes the results of the trial of placing sixteen (16) young Indigenous people from the Cape York Peninsula region into full-time fruit picking work in the Murray Valley of Victoria and the Riverland region of South Australia for three months.

Three hypotheses were investigated using a series of practices articulated in the Methodology section of this report, all of which were evaluated in terms of their applicability and appropriateness.

**HYPOTHESIS 1) Young Indigenous people from Cape York Peninsula with little or no experience of living away from home, family and community, with little or no work experience and thus assessed at high risk for long-term unemployment or dependent on CDEP, can still be successfully assisted to take up mainstream private sector employment far from their homes and families.**

This hypothesis was confirmed. All sixteen (16) participants were flown from Cairns to Adelaide where they were transported to the Riverland region of South Australia and later the Murray Valley region of Victoria. Pre-arranged accommodation and full-time employment had been organised in each location. Eleven (11) of the sixteen (16) participants remained living and working for the duration of the trial (3 months). Ten (10) of the sixteen (16) participants have chosen to remain living and working full-time in the two regions until the end of the summer harvest and the South Australian Autumn-Winter navel orange harvest.

By the end of the trial, five (5) out of the seven (7) participants of the South Australian group were excelling in their work, picking between five (5) and seven (7) bins of oranges per day (the average backpacker or amateur picker would pick between three (3) and four (4) bins per day at \$26.00 per bin gross), six (6) days per week. One (1) participant was averaging around three (3) bins per day, and the other was placed separately working as general farm hand on wages. He will be discussed later in this report.

The Victorian group never achieved this level of productivity. When in Shepparton, one (1) of the four (4) participants was picking on average three (3) bins of pears per day (the average backpacker or amateur picker would pick three (3) bins per day at \$30.00 per bin gross), five (5) days per week. The remainder were averaging two (2) bins of pears per day. When they were moved to Robinvale their performance remained poor. They were picking and packing table grapes and earning between \$280 and \$300 per week. With the departure of one of the participants at the end of the trial their performance dramatically improved. The remaining three participants are now earning between \$500 and \$700 per week.

Throughout the course of the trial a number of issues, of varying degrees of importance, surfaced in regard to their experience of living away from home, family and community for any significant length of time for the first time in their lives. They included:

### *Initial financing*

All but two (2) participants arrived with no money and therefore no capacity to pay for their board and keep until they received their first pay cheque, despite being told that no other assistance will be provided. This behaviour is consistent with the nature of passive welfare dependency. They and their families were all counting on the long established norm that someone will take responsibility for their welfare, regardless.

### *Nutrition and cooking skills*

One of the difficulties they experienced in independent living was cooking. A number of participants had no experience of cooking and knowledge of nutrition. Assistance was provided by other participants. It was clear that their quality of life and dietary habits could be greatly improved by further education in this area.

### *Money management*

Another area requiring improvement was their ability to more effectively budget their money. A number of them had little understanding of how to save and spend wisely. Some had little to no experience with the banking system. This too could be greatly improved by further education in this area.

### *Transport*

Their lack of transport also resulted in a reduced quality of life as they were not able to participate in recreational and social activities, goods and services that were not within walking distance. The Victorian group was particularly disadvantaged as they were living on two consecutive farms in the district of Shepparton and Robinvale, both approximately 15 kilometres from town. Few people were willing or able to transport the entire group into town and because this group had no effective leadership to look at something like a roster or a shuttle system they ended up using a taxi at around \$50 per trip.

### *Alcohol*

Alcohol proved to be an issue for the Victorian group. When at Robinvale, according to their employer and a younger participant, the group spent nearly all their first pay cheque on a weekend drinking binge. They did not think to save any money for food and as a result they went hungry for the latter part of that week. I think this sort of behaviour is a combination of youthful exuberance and the results of passive welfare dependency. It also raises issues of effective supervision and leadership which will be discussed later.

### *Accommodation*

Accommodation was also an issue. Initially, all the participants were living in tents and sleeping in swags at local caravan parks. This was suitable in the short-term but proved to be highly unsuitable in the long-term, particularly after a series of wind and rainstorms passed through. Also the participants were not the cleanest of people and anticipation and prevention was also not their strong point. For aesthetic, health and comfort reasons I decided to buy the South Australian group two caravans. These proved to be ideal.

*PRACTICE DESCRIPTION A) Participants were sent from Cairns and various Cape York Peninsula communities to the Riverland region of South Australia and the Murray Valley region of Victoria (a distance of over 3500 kilometres, well away from distractions and interference of families and the state welfare department and its funded community based organisations). They remained free to leave the trial at any time.*

The applicability and appropriateness of this practice was confirmed. This practice proved to be highly effective and was undoubtedly the most powerful aspect of this trial.

As expected, when conformity was required and restrictions applied most participants objected. The author believes that most participants would have returned home within the first 2 or 3 weeks if they could. As it was, five (5) of the participants did return home, all with the assistance of their families. The sheer distance and the cost of return prevented most participants from running back home and an effective constraint on families, primarily parents, wanting to “rescue” their children.

There were occasions when young participants telephoned back home complaining about how they were being treated unfairly by their employers, supervisor or trial coordinator. These complaints did not, or could not, go higher than the coordinator of Cape York Partnerships nor could they result in threats of reprisals from family, which often occurs when children and young people have their unrestricted, unconditional freedoms curtailed. The nature of the scheme meant that interference from families was kept to a minimum.

*PRACTICE DESCRIPTION B) Positions were for a minimum of three months.*

This issue proved to be of little significance. Apart from participant # 2 and # 3, all other participants expressed no sign of homesickness. Even the youngest were happy to remain in the scheme at the end of the trial. This shows that most of the participants were far more resilient than first believed.

*PRACTICE DESCRIPTION C) Participants travelled, lived and worked in groups*

This practice was confirmed in most cases. It was clear that participants enjoyed the companionship of other group members. This companionship was based on their common identity, language, lifestyle and needs and they therefore did provide each other with mutual support which was very important to their overall wellbeing. It was clear that they also enjoyed their own privacy, as a number of participants preferred to have their own tent or section of the caravan. There were however some individuals more prone to causing arguments and fights. Participant # 11 had recently decided to leave the group and live with his employer because, “others were picking on him”.

*PRACTICE DESCRIPTION D) A work placement scheme rather than a welfare program.*

The value of this practice was confirmed. One of the main differences between this work scheme and social welfare programs is the degree by which the restrictions can be personalized and construed as a test of their ingenuity to overcome the restrictions. Like many challenges, the reward is built-in. The defying of a stricture, the defeating of an external foe, the beating of a system, can all produce great self-satisfaction, superiority and cause for celebration.

Whereas, in this scheme, the demands and restrictions were impersonalised and expressed in terms of universal requirements of work. This, combined with the fact that participants can leave the scheme at any time, means there is no test of their ability to defy the structures, unlike what was occurring with the placement of young people in the Torres Strait by the 'Boys from the Bush' program from 1999 to 2002. Stories like the film "Rabbit Proof Fence" are no longer applicable with this scheme.

A case in point was participant # 5 aged twenty (20) years and recently released from Lotus Glen Correctional Centre. Upon arriving in Adelaide, he and the other members of his group were reminded that this is a scheme where Cape York Partnerships had no responsibility for them apart from providing employment, rental accommodation and transport to and from their place of employment. This was subject to their agreement to work up to 6 days per week, achieve a minimum standard of productivity, and do not engage in disruptive behaviour. See Appendix II for a copy of this agreement. Participant # 5 objected to this saying that he thought we were going to look after him and that if he knew this was a scheme rather than a program he would not have agreed to come. This is a good example of how some young people are so conditioned into dependency on their terms. Throughout the trial, attempts at manipulation were common-place by most participants.

*PRACTICE DESCRIPTION E) All participants were assessed healthy and agreed to the living and work conditions.*

The applicability and appropriateness of this practice was confirmed. All but one participant presented with good physical and mental health enabling them to cope with the structural and task demands of private sector employment in fruit picking.

Participant # 7 aged sixteen (16) was a puzzle. All his movements were languid and expressionless. He was withdrawn; he rarely interacted with the group nor got involved in any decision-making. On most occasions, he appeared confused and was very slow at organising his thoughts. When asked to choose, he was often unable to make a decision. On the other hand, there were occasions when he showed reasonable insight and comprehension. As will be mentioned later, he spent nearly all his leisure time sleeping. As one would expect, his work performance was very poor. This individual clearly had a mental health condition, as opposed to an attitudinal or intellectual problem, which affected not only his work performance but also his ability to socialise. There was very little that could be done for him under the circumstances and he agreed to leave the trial midway.

The present medical assessment of all participants is insufficient to assess for mental health issues that could significantly affect an individual's capacity to work.

With regard to the living conditions set out in their initial formal agreement, there were no significant non-work related behavioural problems in the South Australian group, apart from a general lack of cleanliness and a seventeen (17) year old participant entering the local hotel to play pool and participant # 4 bringing alcohol back to the camp. Both behaviours were immediately stopped but the lack of cleanliness and general untidiness remained an ongoing issue.

In the Victorian group there was a non-work related incident when participants brought alcohol back to their quarters and went on a weekend drinking binge. When this resulted in their failure to show up for work, they were all given an official warning from their employer.

The author believes the current participation agreement is sufficient. It was effective in holding participants accountable for their misbehaviour. The agreement does not define disruptive behaviour for to do so will remove a degree of flexibility, which is important to this scheme.

There were, however, some serious work-related breaches of their agreement, which will be discussed in Practice descriptions F and H, and Hypothesis 2.

*PRACTICE DESCRIPTION F) All jobs were within the capabilities of participants.*

The major work-related difficulties experienced by participants were early morning starts and their forgetfulness of essentials.

#### *Late starts*

All participants experienced varying degrees of difficulty in getting up at 6:00 am to go to work. Most would go to work without breakfast because they woke up late. Over time, the South Australian group improved, but not after a great deal of time was spent counselling and reprimanding the most persistent offenders. With the establishment of the Victorian group with no formal leadership, and therefore nobody taking responsibility for waking everyone else up in the morning, they were regularly late for work which resulted in their employers giving them all formal warning of their dismissal if the behaviour continued - even then there was only marginal improvement. The author believes much of this behaviour was due to habit. For years these young people were free to wake and sleep at their own pleasure, and most of the time they were walking the streets at night and sleeping during the day - and old habits die hard. Participant # 7 was an extreme case. He would rarely wake by himself on work days and on days off he would sleep all day and night. Towards the end of the trial the author introduced a fine system whereby participants were fined \$1.00 for every minute they left the driver waiting and \$10.00 if they failed to show up. The author believes this system was much better than growling, as they appeared to become desensitised to this after a time. This fine system needed to run longer to assess its effectiveness. There also appeared to be a relationship between this behaviour and forgetfulness.

### *Forgetfulness*

Many participants were regularly forgetting to take their essentials to work in the morning, things like their picking bag, gloves, hat, water and lunch. Some individuals were more forgetful than others. There were one or two individuals who were consistently forgetting these things and would suffer repeatedly as a result - demonstrating that there was no learning taking place. The author believes much of their problem was their inability to organise and plan ahead. They continued to live like they did at home - in the then and there – reacting rather than anticipating. This behaviour improved with increased supervision.

### *Literacy and numeracy*

Nearly all participants had extremely poor reading and writing skills. As expected, only one or two of the participants had the ability to complete the various forms given to them by their employer. Some participants had communication problems and some appeared to have comprehension problems. Comprehension problems were all overcome by patient repetition of simplified forms. Participant # 2 would regularly claim that his employer had failed to provide information, but the author noted he would not ask his employer any questions. This behaviour dissipated over time.

### *Other behaviours*

Participant # 6 is an interesting case. He is twenty (20) years old and remains in the trial. He was the first participant to receive an official warning from his employer within the first week of his arrival. For this job he was paid wages. His work was unacceptably slow and he was caught lying down on the job. When the author questioned him over this he denied working slow saying the boss was “*talking shit*” and claimed that he laid on the ground so that he could pick the oranges on the bottom of the tree. Shortly after this, he threatened to kill himself if I did not agree to immediately send him home. For the following 3 months he remained the least productive member of the group, regularly late and highly forgetful. He was a major distraction for the other participants, as their productivity would drop when they were working beside him. The author assessed participant # 6 as not unintelligent but lacking maturity, passive, very cunning and highly manipulative, and accepting of his most meagre existence due to his unwillingness to work and earn. A younger participant described him as “*just chilling out*”. By this, he meant that participant # 6 did not come on the trial to do any serious work; he came primarily for the excitement and adventure and to pass the time away in a new location. The author considers this to be classical behaviour of passive welfare dependency; a weak character, lacking ambition, lacking initiative and drive, thriftless and dependent. The reality is that he was not the only participant exhibiting some of these traits and there are many more like him on Cape York. What is good is that he has agreed not to go back home, giving hope that over time his behaviour will change. The latest report is that he is improving; he is now picking up to four (4) bins of oranges per day.

Participant # 7 was also interesting. He was seventeen (17) years old and the author felt he had potential for on occasions he was a good worker. His shortcoming was his attitude and poor relationship with other group members. He was very stubborn but resourceful. He said he wanted to go back and get a job with Comalco as the work was easier and the pay much higher. The unfortunate reality was that he was living a

life of dependency and at high risk of crime and substance abuse. He chose to leave the trial midway, but the author believed he could have done well if we had more job opportunities.

Still on the topic of suitability of work, another interesting issue that arose was working as a collective versus working alone. In the beginning of the trial all the participants were working as a collective when placed on contract. This proved to be disastrous. The discrepancy in the productivity of each participant was enormous. The most productive were doubling the effort of the least productive whilst all were being paid equally. This resulted in widespread discontent and the most productive choosing to dramatically reduce their productivity. The author then advised the most productive to go it alone, which they did. Their productivity and therefore income dramatically increased. This in turn motivated the moderate workers to also work independently and before long their productivity increased. It was interesting to see that the least productive workers continued to prefer working as a collective and their productivity remained extremely low. The author later introduced the rule that nobody was to work as a collective. It then became clear who was dragging the chain and it was they that became the focus of my attention.

Later in the trial when the Victorian group was moved from Shepparton to Robinvale their employer rang the author saying how he was very disappointed in their productivity and was unsure of what to do. When it came out that they were working on a collective contract, the author suggested he separate them and place them on individual contracts. Within days their productivity dramatically increased. This provides clear evidence that motivation and personal responsibility quickly dissipates when working as collective, which in turn resulted in increased disputations and irresponsibility. Participant # 2, # 3, # 4 and # 6 were particularly keen on trying to work as a collective.

A brief mention will also be made of participant # 10 aged seventeen (17). He left the trial shortly after his arrival saying that he prefers his CDEP work over fruit picking. He said that the promise of full-time CDEP pays more money for less work. He is of course only half correct. You work less for your money on CDEP but on contract picking you can earn much more. This will be discussed later.

*PRACTICE DESCRIPTION G) Four experienced 'Boys from the Bush' program participants and supervisors were included in the trial to ensure the effective management of anticipated behavioural problem by the younger less experienced, less mature participants.*

This practice proved to be ineffective. Only one of the four participants of the 'Boys from the Bush' program proved to be effective in helping to manage the anticipated behavioural problems of the younger less experienced, less mature participants. In fact the most serious behavioural problems came from three of these participants. Refer to Hypothesis 2.

*PRACTICE DESCRIPTION H) The trial coordinator was present to provide support and supervision.*

This practice proved absolutely crucial to the success of the trial. Few of the participants fully appreciated the realities of life and the risks involved. Support in the form of information, advice and reassurance was in the early stages of the trial essential. Supervision in the form of power and authority to intervene and direct participants was also crucial.

For example, in the third week of the trial the group's performance deteriorated to a point where they were all at risk of being sacked owing to the highly disruptive behaviour of three of the oldest participants (participant # 2, # 3 and # 4). These individuals refused to work on weekends and would work no more than three consecutive days before taking one or two days off. They would regularly sleep in and finish shortly after midday. What was worse is that they influenced nearly the entire group to behave in the same manner. On average, participants were picking only 1 bin of oranges per day.

At this point, the author had no choice but to intervene. The author decided to separate participants # 2, # 3 and # 4 from the group and advised them to seek alternative employment. The author then directed participant # 2 to leave the trial. Within three days participants # 3 and # 4 submitted and agreed to comply with their original agreement. They were directed to form a second group with two other participants in Shepparton Victoria. This manoeuvre effectively quarantined participant # 3 and # 4 and enabled the leadership of the South Australian group to be handed back to participant # 1. The South Australian group then settled down and remained settled for the duration of the trial. The performance of the Victorian group remained marginal until participant # 3 left the group at the end of the trial, after which its members made a dramatic improvement.

The conclusion drawn from this experience was that groups can effectively be self governing but there must be an overseeing authority remaining vigilant to destructive individuals and capable of moving quickly to neutralise their influence by placing them in a different group where they can do little harm.

Another example of this need to remain vigilant occurred later in the trial when newly arrived participant # 15 began to cause trouble. He was immediately transported to the Victorian group where he was unable to cause any harm to other participants.

**HYPOTHESIS 2) It is expected that past and present members of the 'Boys from the Bush' program are more capable of work and independent living owing to their involvement in the program.**

*PRACTICE DESCRIPTION I) Prerequisite training would be advantageous.*

As mentioned, only one of the four participants of the 'Boys from the Bush' program proved to be effective in helping to manage the anticipated behavioural problems of

the younger less experienced, less mature participants. In fact the most serious behavioural problems came from these three participants.

Accordingly, this practice presumption proved incorrect. All past and present members of the 'Boys from the Bush' program received substantial psychosocial support and counselling, education, work and life skills training. Despite this, most behaved in a highly irresponsible manner; displaying a general immaturity and inability to apply their knowledge, skills and morals in this new environment (a condition known as functional fixedness). In addition, this result appears to give weight to the argument that an individual's personality and cognitive abilities are essentially set by early adulthood (Berger, 1983).

Participant # 2 was twenty five (25) years old and the only one with any significant work experience and was therefore given leadership responsibilities. He had no experience of private sector employment. His work performance was always marginal due to lack of stamina and attitude, but he presented as an authority on OH&S rules. He was always aloof, remained silent in group discussions and showed no great interest in the group's effectiveness. He like others would find excuses to take days off and resented being told what to do. In the first week of arriving he appeared to break down, became very emotional and telephoned his father demanding that he send him money to return back home. There appears to be no reason for this tantrum apart from bringing attention to himself. He was the first to leave the group three weeks into the trial at my direction. His father paid for his flight back home. Immediately after his departure, a number of other participants expressed their relief and said how he was instrumental in preventing the group from progressing. This was also the author's assessment, but there were others I held equally responsible.

Participant # 3 was twenty one (21) years old, one of the first and a long term participant in the 'Boys from the Bush' program, and was given supervisory responsibilities. His only experience with mainstream work was a few weeks picking watermelons outside Cairns. This individual proved to be one of the most difficult. He like participant # 2 never at any stage seriously applied himself to work but presented himself as an authority on the subject. He was easily distracted and lacked stamina. He was sacked on 2 occasions and officially warned by his employers on 3 occasions, for misconduct, lateness and absence. He was the only individual to be sacked. His employers believed that he was the most immature and highly influential in holding back other individuals from reaching their full potential and the group as a whole. Other participants also expressed to the author their concern about how he was causing friction amongst team members. This coincided with the author's observations. This participant chose to return home at the end of the trial.

Participant # 4 was eighteen (18) years of age, one of first participants in the 'Boys from the Bush' program, and was also given supervisory responsibilities. He had a close relationship with participant # 3. He claimed to have some experience in the private sector building industry, but the details of this are a bit obscure. He, like participant # 3, never really applied himself to work, but presented with great authority on his working rights. He greatly resented being told what he can and cannot do, including bringing alcohol into the camp. He was also officially warned by his employer on 2 occasions for lateness and being absent. Interestingly he decided to

stay on after the trial and his employer reports that he has made remarkable improvement since participant # 3 left the group.

These three participants were clearly unwilling or unable to take any constructive leadership role. As a result, their groups experienced a number of problems. There were inconsistent goals, little structure, little coordination, inability to make decisions and act on information, defused responsibility, and selfishness. The way in which the author understood what was happening here, was that these participants were the oldest and therefore most rigid in their attitudes and behaviour. More important was the fact that all three refused to recognise the leadership of others.

### **HYPOTHESIS 3)                    This scheme is suitable for petrol sniffers.**

*PRACTICE DESCRIPTION J)                    Involvement in the work placement scheme is sufficient for most petrol sniffers to stop this behaviour.*

One of the participants in this scheme was an active petrol sniffer. From the information I received from his peers, this participant is best described as a **complier** to petrol sniffing behaviour. As expected, I did not observe this individual engaging in the behaviour at any time during the trial, nor did any other participant report to have seen him do so, or hear of him expressing any desire to do so. This is discussed in greater detail later in this report.

## **Discussion**

This section considers additional issues arising from the trial, but first some insights from research.

### **Importance of work**

Work is a fundamental aspect of our society. It is the means by which most people play a full and active part in community life. Karl Marx viewed humans as potentially creative creatures that express their basic humanity, and differentiated themselves from other animals, in and through work (Bilton *et al.*, 1988). Sigmund Freud and his followers also saw work as crucial to the psychosocial development of the individual, especially ego development and learning about reality (O'Brien, 1990).

Jahoda, *et al.* (1933) were among the first to identify and research a link between lack of work and psychosocial developmental problems. Their case study series on the effects of high unemployment in the Austrian village of Mariantal, during the Great Depression, revealed that those who were unemployed sharply curtailed their social activities, read less, lost their sense of time and punctuality, and experienced increased familial breakdown. This must surely resonate with Noel Pearson's thesis in that these and other behaviours (including phenomenal levels of violence, outrageous levels of grog addiction and a large and growing drug problem amongst the youth) are like a pandemic sweeping across Aboriginal communities which, according to Pearson, stem largely from the people's detachment from work and the real economy (Pearson, 2000b).

Since this pioneering study by Jahoda and associates, there has been a great deal of research into the effects of unemployment throughout the western world, all of which has shown quite convincingly that it does have a negative impact on people's mental health, not as an association but as a cause (Jackson *et al.*, 1983; Liem, 1987; Warr, 1987; Morrell *et al.*, 1994; Schaufeli, 1997). This research also reveals that there are a number of demographic variables, which influences the nature and severity of the impact.

For example, studies by Marsden & Duff (1975), Hill (1977), and Hepworth (1980) have all revealed how there is a gradual increase in anxiety and depression and loss of morale in the unemployed as the period of unemployment lengthens. Similarly, Shanthamani (1973) found that emotional instability increased with length of unemployment. The level of activity is another variable where studies have shown that the level of activity decreases with decreasing occupational status and length of unemployment, so that the longer a man was unemployed, the less likely he was able to fill his time meaningfully (Hepworth, 1980). According to Jahoda *et al.* (1971), the inability to fill one's time meaningfully leads to apathy and depression and once this state was reached, a vicious circle was entered from which it was nearly impossible to escape.

Another important demographic variable to this trial is culture. There appears to be little published evidence about commitment to the labour market among Indigenous Australians in comparison to non-Indigenous, although one might expect from the disadvantaged position of Indigenous people in general that young unemployed Indigenous people would exhibit less positive attitude to paid employment than do non-Indigenous. Although, a study by Arthur and David-Petero (1999) found that, in some respect, young Indigenous Australian may approach work in a similar way to other young people. That is, they often express their future in terms of work.

There was one interesting study by Warr *et al.* (1985) where the commitment to participation in the labour market among young British born unemployed black people of Afro-Caribbean descent was compared with young British born unemployed white people. This study found that young unemployed white people exhibited higher general distress and depression than young unemployed black people. In comparison, young white males had a more positive attitude towards jobs and job seeking. They exhibited significantly higher employment commitment, lower unemployment orientation, and higher job search attitude scores. They were significantly more likely to describe themselves as actively seeking jobs, had made significantly more job applications in the past four weeks, and were significantly more likely to say they would accept any job that was offered. This concurs with my own experience with the participants of this trial. Warr, *et al.*, concluded that these differences reflect a more realistic adaptation to poor job prospects among the black subsample. They say: "*Continually to seek jobs is particularly stressful in a labour market where rejection is almost certain, and temporary withdrawal from job search provides some defence against that threat* (1985, p.85)."

Another important demographic variable is age. Eisenberg & Lazarsfeld (1938) were amongst the first to examine how unemployment affects young people, particularly during the crucial transitional period between childhood and adolescence. They

concluded that young people who gain employment are more likely to make a full and successful transition from childhood to adulthood, whereas unemployment, particularly long-term unemployment, had a discernible effect on their personality. These include the tendency to become drifters, increased irritability, loss of ambition, an increase in female prostitution, criminality and homelessness.

More recent studies have shown that unemployed young people experience a decrease in self-esteem and increases in depression (Winefield and Tiggemann, 1985); from general poor health to serious chronic illness (Cullen *et al.*, 1987; Hammarstrom, 1994; Mathers, 1996); impaired social competence, impaired learning, alienation and social exclusion (Warr 1987; Hannan *et al.*, 1997); and psychological morbidity (Feather and O'Brien, 1986; Winefield and Tiggemann, 1990; Winefield *et al.*, 1993; Morrell *et al.*, 1994; Prause and Dooley, 1997). In addition to these psychosocial effects, there are other reasons why youth unemployment is a major concern. Firstly, widespread youth unemployment leads to an increase in criminal activity and other forms of antisocial behaviour (Thornberry and Christenson, 1984). Secondly, it can lead to increase risk of suicide (Platt, 1984; Morrell *et al.*, 1993; Krupinski *et al.*, 1994). Finally, there is the fear that it may have a detrimental effect on work values so that unemployed youths come to reject the work ethic and prefer a life of idleness supported by unemployment benefits rather than paid employment (Dowling, 1978; Carle, 1987).

At this point, it is worth reminding the reader about the incredible levels of unemployment that continue to exist in Aboriginal communities. The 2001 Census revealed that the national Indigenous unemployment rate was 22.5 %. This figure has barely altered since 1996, but what is more worrying is that the future looks set to make a turn for the worst. Estimates of future job growth point to an increase in unemployment and a decrease in employment over the remainder of this decade. By 2011, an extra 84,000 Indigenous people are expected to be of working age – almost as many again as are now employed. If CDEP scheme participants are counted as unemployed (on account of the notional link between CDEP wages and the Newstart and Job Search Allowances), then labour market outcomes for Indigenous people become far worse, with an unemployment rate of 43.4 % in 2001 and projected to rise to 50.4 % in 2011. If all people who claimed they want to work and are not included in CDEP, Newstart and Job Search Allowance (categorised as discouraged workers) are included in the labour force the unemployment rate in 2001 was 55.9 % and projected to rise to 61.3 % in 2011 (Hunter, Kinfu and Taylor, 2003). To make matters worse, detailed calculations by Daly and Hunter (2000) show that over 50% of both males and females had been unemployed for more than 18 months, compared to 37% of unemployed non-Indigenous Australians. These figures are national statistics and, of course, the situation would be much worse in individual communities on Cape York Peninsula.

The effect of this level of unemployment on a community can be devastating, as revealed by Jahoda using the plight of the Austrian village of Marienthal. Many would argue that Marienthal pales in significance to the incredible suffering and waste of humanity that presently takes place in a number of communities on Cape York. Take, for example, the open letter to the Courier Mail on August 7, 2003 by Lara Wieland.

*“Indigenous people in [Cape York Peninsula] communities suffer from much higher levels of psychosocial distress. I found in my time as a doctor that despite the high rates of physical disease I would spend the majority of my day dealing with social/stress problems. Almost every day I would see someone who had been contemplating suicide. The majority of mental problems are related to substance abuse, unemployment, relationship problems, domestic violence, witnessing violence, trauma and grief, lack of sleep, and overcrowded housing also play a part.”*

So what is it about work that provides salvation from these devastating social evils? For an answer, we can again refer back to Jahoda (1979, 1981, 1982). Work, according to Jahoda, has both manifest and latent functions. The manifest function is income and the latent functions are time structure, enlarged social experience, engagement in collective purposes, identity, and creativity.

These latent functions can be explained by referring to the young people in this trial, who will now be the focus of my discussions.

### **Relevant latent functions of work**

The first of Jahoda’s latent functions is **time structure**. It is work, more than any other life activity, that provides us with the opportunity for order and structure. Most work involves starting at a set time and finish at a set time, with lunch and tea breaks at set intervals. For daytime workers, it means getting up early in the morning in time to prepare oneself for the working day, including travelling time. This preparation involves showering, dressing, preparing and eating breakfast and cleaning up. Whereas, it is clear that the young people in this trial are not used to this sort of order and time structure. The task of getting up early in the morning requires going to sleep earlier and this is something that comes hard to these young people. They are more used to staying up to the early hours of the morning watching videos or roaming the streets at night and sleeping during the day. This partly explains why many of them slept in their work clothes and get up minutes before their morning transport arrives. Thus they had no time to shower or eat breakfast. This lack of order and structure helps explain why so many are so forgetful of their necessities every morning. This behaviour did improve over the course of the trial.

Another latent function is **enlarged social experience**. Again, it is work, perhaps more than any other activity, which enlarges our social experience. This is clearly evident with the young people in this trial. If it was not for the purpose of going down south to pick fruit these young participants would have no reason for visiting this region and meeting the people they have. Work brings all of us into contact with a wide range of people doing all sorts of things. And of course it is our genetics, knowledge, experience, beliefs and values that make us all different. The more people we meet, and the more we experience, the richer our lives become. Work environments can sometimes be like a laboratory – by bringing together people from all over the world from all different backgrounds. Who knows what will happen? Often I saw and heard participants talking to itinerant pickers from nearly every corner of the world: Africans, Iraqis, Pakistanis, Afghans, Vietnamese, Cambodians and Europeans - everyone from everywhere – how they made sense of each other, I do not know.

What I do know is that the traditional divisions of black versus white which exist on Cape York and in the Torres Strait, no longer applied in these fruit and vegetable growing areas of Victoria and South Australia. Their employers were Australian-Greek, Australian-Cambodian, Australian-Filipino and Anglo-Australian. It is good that these young participants see this as it helps remove race and culture from the world of work and the ownership of wealth and property - something that they have little experience of and will hopefully pass on to others back home.

At the very least, they are now beginning to learn how the real economy works and the importance of getting a job and finding a cheap deal.

Another very important latent function is **identity**. Identity is all about establishing and knowing who you are (Berger, 1983). Erikson has written extensively about the search for identity as the primary task, and crisis, of adolescence - a search, if successful, will move the individual into adulthood and maturity. As he puts it, "*Especially in times of change in the structure of society identity, becomes as important as food and security* (Erikson 1975)." I know of too many young Aboriginals who believe that to be an Aboriginal you must drink alcohol and behave in an unruly manner (Erikson would call this **identity foreclosure**, where the young person has accepted parental/family values and behaviours wholesale, never exploring alternatives nor truly forging a unique personal identity). I also know of too many young Aboriginals who do not understand the question, "*What do you want to be when you grow up?*" They believe that work is a whiteman's thing. (Erikson would call this **identity confusion**, where they have few commitments to goals or values and are apathetic about establishing an identity). Some of the participants in this trial could fit into one of these categories, particularly the older participants. Three of the older participants made it clear, in no uncertain terms, that they were adults and as such were free to do what they want. The problem was that their version of adulthood was to do minimal work and consume unrestricted quantities of alcohol at the expense of the entire group. I likened them to tumbleweeds that think they have mastered the art of flight. As I mentioned in the results, this behaviour began to wane with the change in group dynamics – which confirms the powerful role of peers and group dynamics in the business of identity formation (Berger, 1983). Another important point to note in relation to identity formation is that if you **now** ask the remaining 10 young participants, "*What do you do?*" They will answer, "*Orange picking*", or "*Orange Picker*", "*Grape picking*" or "*Grape Picker*". The fact is, they also do a lot of other things, (or I should say, they **did** do a lot of other things, like drink, fight, smoke dope, watch videos, and generally hang out) but their **primary** role or task in life by which they describe themselves is **now** a work task or work role – this is what work socialisation is all about.

### **The issue of alcohol**

With regard to alcohol, a number of studies have reported that the unemployed have the highest rate of drug and alcohol use and abuse (Kandel, 1980). A study by Janlert and Hammarström (1992) revealed that total alcohol intake was twice as high among men who were long-term unemployed compared to those with short or no unemployment. A number of factors have been suggested which are responsible for this, including stress, increased leisure time and economic deprivation (Winton *et al.*, 1986; Forcier, 1988). Stress will increase with unemployment and this may also explain the increase in alcohol use. Or it could be due to unemployment increasing

idle time which in turn provides increased opportunities to drink. Economic deprivation may increase the level of stress, but it may also reduce the affordability of alcohol (Janlert and Hammarström, 1992).

For the participants of this trial however, alcohol use or abuse was only an issue with a few of the older participants and it appears to me to be a carry-over from their previous lifestyle, where their home communities are known to have the highest per capita consumption of alcohol in the world (Pearson, 2000a). It will take time for old habits to be replaced by new ones. I believe the way in which this behaviour was managed remains appropriate, that is, by way of an agreement. Any serious breach of this agreement risks the young person being asked to leave the supportive umbrella of the scheme. To be 3,500 kilometres from home is a very powerful reason for remaining within the scheme, at least until they have established their own autonomy, by which time, alcohol should cease to have become an issue. By then they would be well socialised into work. I believe the primary problem with participant # 3 was that he did not come on the trial to do any serious work; he was more interested in the excitement, adventure and freedom that the trial provided; plus he always knew that his mother would pay for his return home, regardless of how irresponsibly he behaved. As an old local Aboriginal co-worker said; *“He’s a mummy’s boy”*. It was his influence that led the group astray on most occasions.

### **Anti-social influence**

This issue concerning “the power of one” was discussed in great detail in my paper titled: ‘Petrol Sniffing on Cape York Peninsula – An Intervention Strategy’. In essence this strategy involved the removal of the most influential in introducing and maintaining petrol sniffing behaviour to a new location. This strategy proved to be most effective in dealing with petrol sniffing and equally effective in dealing with other antisocial behaviours that were occurring in the South Australian group. It not only protected the South Australian group from the destructive influence of certain individuals, but the way in which the Victorian group was established also made it very difficult for them to continue their misbehaviour in that group. The Victorian group was given complete autonomy but were told when they were placed into their jobs at both Shepparton and later Robinvale - *“If you get the sack, don’t bother to tell me because I won’t be coming back - you will be on your own.”* As I said earlier, being 3,500 kilometres from home, and knowing that I was serious, is a very powerful reason for choosing to remain within the scheme, at least until they have established their own autonomy. This was indeed a highly effective way of dealing with deviance, qualified by the fact that 5 out of 16 individuals chose to return home – with the assistance of their families.

The beginning of this discussion was devoted to both the theory and reality that many young people (and adults) living on Cape York Peninsula are significantly delayed in their psychosocial development. I knew at the outset of this trial that it was vitally important to explain the nature of this scheme in very clear and simple terms – before entering into any agreement. Communication had to be open and honest and all roles and expectations clearly stated and agreed upon. This proved correct, as it gave me a solid platform from which to measure performance and provide feedback. It also provided the moral authorization to place sanctions upon an individual or to exclude any from the scheme for a breach of agreement. For example, participant # 15 was 20 years old, and showed the signs of a very confused, very disturbed young person, and

potentially very dangerous. When demands were made and restrictions imposed upon him, he made it clear to me, and all the other members of the South Australian group, that he will use violence against anyone who tries to force him to do anything he did not want to do. This resulted in my making it very clear to him that his behaviour was in breach of **his** agreement and that this provided me with the option to place him into the Victorian group where he remained for the duration of the trial. His appeal to the coordinator of Cape York Partnerships failed on the same grounds and he was subsequently moved to Victoria without resistance. If he was of the opinion he had not breached his agreement, he would not have submitted to being removed from the South Australian group. As it turned out, he is now settling down and his work performance is improving, although he did get into a fight recently with some young local residents for which he came off worse for wear (he was the only participant to run foul of local young residents).

### **Power, control and group development**

The results of this trial did not support the hypothesis that the older and more experienced participants were more mature and therefore would behave in a more responsible manner than the younger, less mature and less experienced participants. It was a surprise to see the younger participants more able to cope with the structural and task demands of private enterprise employment. This conclusion needs to be qualified by other factors at work which has a lot to do with the practice of group development.

Groups change over time and numerous models or frameworks have been developed to describe the changes that occur. The author finds the model or framework developed by Tuckman (1965) particularly useful in describing the changes that the author had observed occurring in both the South Australian group and, to a lesser extent, the Victorian group. It was necessary to make some minor modification to this framework as the author is using it in a different context from the original.

#### Stage 1          Forming

When the new group is forming most group members are likely to be cautious in their approach to each other. There is often over-tolerance and artificial politeness, a reluctance to rock the boat, a fear of making a fool of oneself and fear of offending others in the group. People are on their best behaviour, tiptoeing around, with the tendency of keeping their thoughts to themselves suspicious about how they might be perceived. Many of the participants were initially behaving in this manner.

With a new group, the facilitator needs to reassure and affirm all group members, allowing them the freedom to get to know each other. It is important for the facilitator to help focus the group on its purpose and the expectations of individual members.

#### Stage 2          Storming

As individuals get to know one another and begin to establish themselves within the group, they often become more assertive and begin to reject other members' points of view and asserting their own views. It is a time when some members will seek power and control and will test the limits and established norms against the authority of both the group and the group leader. Rebellion is not uncommon and the dropout rate is at its highest. This very much describes what happened in the second and third week of

this trial, particularly with the older participants. As it turned out five of the participants did return home - three of them within the first 3 weeks of their arrival.

The facilitator needs to view this behaviour as part of the process of group development. It is important for the facilitator to objectify the behaviour and help to keep the group on track and manage the conflict. One effective, more extreme strategy that was used to manage the behaviour was the removal of the most disruptive by placing him in a new group in a different location. It was important to depersonalise the rules by expressing them in terms of universal requirements of work.

### Stage 3 Norming

As the group moves on from Stage 2 it begins to accept the purpose and cohesion develops amongst group members. Group members know each other better, well enough to negotiate, debate and discuss issues and concerns in a purposeful, non-threatening manner. People see less need to be confrontational. People trust each other enough to take risks and be more honest and open about their opinions and values.

The task for the facilitator is to monitor the group progress - to be available for advice, and assist with the sustainability of the group. This was the stage when I provided caravans for the group and left them by themselves for a few days at a time.

### Stage 4 Performing

Many long-established groups get no further than Stage 3 and many group facilitators would feel satisfied with having a group that gets the job done, and whose members, on the whole, get on well with one another. However, such a group may not have reached its full potential. It problem-solves on a practical, pragmatic level depending on things seen or previously tried.

With appropriate facilitation the group can become more proactive or enterprising, where group members strive towards higher peaks in their personal and professional development. This was affected by the facilitator handing over and delegating greater responsibilities to group members, by sharing leadership role and by trusting in the abilities of the group to manage its own affairs.

Such a group will have members who really enjoy each others' company and who feel stimulated by working together. Members feel secure enough to propose their own ideas and approaches. Such a group still has room for differences of opinion since criticism is tolerated within the group without loss of face. The facilitator's role is to be a support, when required.

This model describes what occurred within the South Australian group. The Victorian group went through stage 1 and 2 and was then left to its own devices. It never really developed much beyond that. Even today it operates more on the basis of 'every man for himself', although the situation is still being played out. Whereas, the South Australian group is a very cohesive group and now has complete autonomy.

### **CDEP as a means versus an ends**

Mention will now be made of participant # 10 who preferred CDEP work over mainstream employment picking oranges, and for that reason returned back home within a fortnight of arrival. I must also point out that he was the only participant that

expressed preference for CDEP work. On the other hand, it is reasonable to assume that there would be many more young people like him living on Cape York.

Although participants perform work for what is basically their unemployment entitlement, the CDEP scheme does have a welfare base, and as such, fails to address the issue of passive welfare dependency. The unfortunate reality is that the CDEP scheme has failed to move people into mainstream employment, and this dependency on the scheme is growing (Taylor and Hunter, 1998). According to Shergold (2001),

*“The object is to encourage CDEPs to support participants in progressing to mainstream employment. How successful has it been? It has been an abysmal failure (2001, p.70).”*

It is therefore argued that the CDEP scheme is reducing participant’s willingness and effort to seek employment in the mainstream (Arthur, 2002), and participant # 10 provides evidence of this. What’s more is that he is only seventeen (17) years old. The wider social implications of this are alarming.

Participant # 11 also raises some interesting issues. This young person is from Palm Island. He is twenty (20) years old and has never had a job or income, and from all accounts, had a pretty rough upbringing. He has lived his entire life completely dependent on others. As expected, he had great difficulty in coping with the structural and task demands of private enterprise employment, yet he wants very much to stay in his present job as general farm hand. The problem for his employer is that he can no longer afford to keep him on, plus the fact that his productivity is too low to warrant an award wage.

His situation is somewhat reminiscent of those times when 93% of the indigenous population still lived and worked in agriculture and pastoral areas (Smith, 2003). The Europeans owned the land while the original owners were permitted to reside in some areas and to exercise traditional rights to the extent that this was not intrusive to the pastoral industry (Dean, 1996). With the introduction of award wages however, and a collapse in beef commodity prices, this all changed virtually overnight. The result proved disastrous for Aboriginal people. The decision to implement Award wages meant that station owners could justifiably evict their Aboriginal tenants on the grounds that it was too expensive to pay wages to all inhabitants of their property. Evidence by the pastoralists to the 1965 Conciliation and Arbitration Commission hearing the application for the Award by the North Australian Workers’ Union was that,

*“at least a significant proportion of the Aborigines employed on the cattle stations in the Northern Territory is retarded by tribal and cultural reasons for appreciating in full the concept of work (Stevens, 1974).”*

The Commission’s reply was:

*“If, therefore, as a result of our decision, substantial numbers of Aborigines move to settlements or missions it is our view that the policy of assimilation and integration will be assisted rather than hindered. These Aborigines who move will be those who are now having the greatest difficulty in understanding the concept of work and in fitting into our economic community.”*

There are important lessons to be learnt here. We must do everything we can to help young people get away from their debilitating environments, and if they so wish, help

them to get back in to the agricultural and pastoral industry. The merit of using CDEP in this situation is strong and stands in stark contrast to participant # 10.

### **Petrol sniffing**

Finally, a word about petrol sniffing. There is no reason, as far as I can see, why this scheme cannot to be used as an effective strategy for dealing with petrol sniffers of legal working age (15 years old) who are simply *complying* with the behaviour. It may be effective for young people who are *identifying* with the behaviour, but I doubt that it would be effective for those who have *internalised* the behaviour (James, 2004).

The effectiveness of this scheme is due, in large part, to the provision of work followed by the consequences of failing to comply with the established norms. These consequences do place the young person at risk. The nature and degree of risk is largely subjective and will depend, in large part, on the ingenuity or resourcefulness of the young person.

It is this issue of risk, perceived or actual, that would make this scheme difficult for government welfare agencies to embrace. This is because today's government welfare agencies for children and young people are primarily designed to "protect" or "rescue" them from perceived or actual harm, in addition to protecting the organisation from perceived or actual harm. A scheme which has no procedure for rescuing its participants from experiencing the consequences of their irresponsible behaviour is in conflict with the very nature of these government welfare agencies.

A familiar example of this dilemma is when a government welfare agency places a young person in a residential program in which the young person soon decides he or she wants to go back home. If his request is refused, the young person may then threaten suicide or engage in some other form of disruptive behaviour. If there are no court orders preventing it, the customary tendency for the welfare agency would be to return the child home as soon as possible. Young people conditioned to welfare services know this and become highly effective at manipulating services to this ends. I have seen this sort of thing occur time and time again. What is more, the welfare agencies also know they are being manipulated, but they feel powerless in doing anything about it while they remain in the business of risk avoidance or risk minimisation.

The significance of this dilemma in terms of the acceptance of this scheme as a petrol sniffing strategy for Cape York Peninsula is unclear.

### **Conclusion**

This trial work placement scheme has confirmed that young unemployed and inexperienced Indigenous people of working age from the Cape York Peninsula region, including petrol sniffers, were willing and able to be assisted to live and work in southern states picking fruit and vegetable for an extended period.

Prior training or work experience was no advantage and formal training in picking is unnecessary.

The younger, less troubled, participants proved to be more resilient and able to adjust more quickly and effectively to the structural and task demands of private sector employment.

The scheme confirmed that certain practices were important in achieving a successful outcome and these include:

### **Nature of the scheme**

It was critical that the scheme was not seen as a welfare program but a voluntary work scheme with defined minimal roles, relationships and responsibilities. Rules about minimum levels of work performance, productivity, behaviour, alcohol and drugs were necessary to stay in the scheme.

### **Nature and duration of work and its location**

The work available needs to be within the capabilities of the participants and for an extended period of time. The work needs to be located sufficiently far enough away, to discourage participants from running away when demands are made and restrictions imposed.

### **Selection**

Participants need to be healthy, physically and mentally capable of performing the required work tasks.

### **Support and supervision**

It is crucial that the young participants receive a high level of support and supervision in the first month, after which they can be given increasing levels of autonomy. Their emotional and social support was effectively provided by other members of their group. Effective supervision was provided by their employer and coordinator of the trial, supplemented by internal supervision through delegating certain responsibilities to responsible group members. Additional support at the work location with accommodation (rental caravans), transport to and from work, advice on nutrition, hygiene and money management must be provided.

### **Group dynamics**

The use of groups was important for support and socialisation within an ideal group size of five, but group dynamics can make or break the group. The most effective way of dealing with highly disruptive members was to place them in a group where they hold less influence. Care must be taken when introducing new members to an established functional group as disruptive members can destroy a functional group very quickly.

### **Work type and inducement system**

Fruit picking work was appropriate as it is unskilled work with engagement by short term contract and quick payment by results. Experience showed that participants work best when working as sole contractors rather than as collectives. When participants work as a collective, productivity will drop to the lowest level. It is best that participants remain in full-time employment for no less than nine months to enable the full psychosocial benefits of work to take effect. As an inducement to young people entering or re-entering the scheme, they could be offered a free flight

down, plus a free return flight after nine months, if they achieve a certain level of productivity.

## APPENDIX I

# MEDICAL & LEGAL ASSESSMENT FORM

BOYS FROM THE BUSH WORK PLACEMENT SCHEME

NAME OF YOUNG PERSON: ..... DOB: .....

**TO BE COMPLETED BY YOUNG PERSON, GUARDIAN AND  
MEDICAL PRACTITIONER**

Please circle **O** 'yes' or 'no' if the young person suffers from any of the following conditions.

<b>1.</b>	<b>PHYSICAL CONDITIONS</b>	<b>ANSWER</b>
1.1	Asthma / breathing problems	Yes / No
1.2	Sinus / hay fever	Yes / No
1.3	Headaches / migraines	Yes / No
1.4	Bronchitis / pneumonia	Yes / No
1.5	Kidney disease	Yes / No
1.6	Heart problems	Yes / No
1.7	High / low blood pressure	Yes / No
1.8	Diabetes	Yes / No
1.9	Epilepsy / fits / convulsions	Yes / No
1.10	Eyesight problems	Yes / No
1.11	Hearing problems	Yes / No
1.12	Allergies to particular food, chemicals, stings or bites	Yes / No
1.13	Scabies, lice	Yes / No
1.14	Other	Yes / No

<b>2.</b>	<b>MENTAL CONDITIONS</b>	<b>ANSWER</b>
2.1	Anxiety / panic attacks	Yes / No
2.2	Fear / paranoia	Yes / No
2.3	Headaches / migraines	Yes / No
2.4	Dramatic mood swings	Yes / No
2.5	Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder	Yes / No
2.6	Depression	Yes / No
2.7	Withdrawals	Yes / No
2.8	Suicidal attempts / threats / thoughts	Yes / No
2.9	Anger / aggression	Yes / No
2.10	Thought disorders	Yes / No
2.11	Schizophrenia	Yes / No
2.12	Other	Yes / No





## **APPENDIX II**

### **RULES AND CONDITIONS OF INVOLVEMENT**

If you become involved in this scheme you must be prepared to change your behaviour. You are going to live and work in the mainstream. Irresponsible behaviour will not be tolerated. You must learn to be independent and behave in responsible manner.

We are a long way from home. It will take you 6 hours to fly here, but it took me 6 days to drive. This is not a time or place for nonsense.

The work is contract orange picking. This means you get paid by how many oranges you pick. You get paid \$26.00 (Gross) or \$22.50 (Net) per bins of oranges. Lazy workers were picking 1 bin per day. Good workers are picking 5 bins per day.

You must be prepared to work up to 6 days per week.

You must get up no later than 5:30am and be ready to be transported to your job at 6:00am. You must work until 4:00pm.

The work is hard and hot.

You will be living in a tent at a camping ground. A camp kitchen, toilet, showers and laundry are provided.

You must pay the camping fee of \$7.50 per day.

You are responsible for the purchase and cooking of your own food.

You are responsible for your own flight home.

If you get the sack you are on your own.

Drugs and alcohol are prohibited.

Tobacco is prohibited for the under aged.

You must follow the instruction of the Supervisor (Abia Ingui).

You must follow the direction of the Director (Milton James).

If you don't follow the above rules you are on your own. This means that you must leave the camp and go and find your own job or find your own way back home.

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