

Young Indigenous Meatworkers' Gazette

News letter 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

At last!! ... We have the final piece to our supported accommodation model



For six months now, Milton has been trying to find suitable accommodation for the Rural & Remote Area Work Scheme (RAWS).

Milton knew what the scheme needed, but it wasn't going to be easy. Readers may recall his effort to get hold of Bungoona. Unfortunately, this did not work out.

It was later in the year when Daniel Longobardi of Narrandera Real Estate Services brought our situation to the attention of Tina Valassis, the new resident owner of the Star Lodge. Tina was pleased to help out and she agreed to lease the eastern wing of the Star Lodge to BFTB Projects.

Pictured below is one of the ten bedrooms, enabling us to accommodate up to 18 young people.



Over the years, Milton has been trying different types of supportive accommodation models, but most of the models were unsustainable. The only model proven to work has been the **Live-in Carer/Family Group Home Model**.

Some of the RAWS' participants have serious behavioural issues, while others have an appalling lack of hygiene and inept social skills.

Other factors that impact negatively on their functioning and well being, is their obsession with and abuse of alcohol. Family and community dysfunction from an intergenerational perspective, is often the common denominator.

The failure of government policy and practice through enforcing and entrenching welfare dependency for these recipients, still remains a major impediment to closing the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.

Some of these youths when they reside at their respective communities, perpetrate violence and intimidation against other community members.

Managing dysfunctional behaviour of RAWS' participants is difficult, given the entrenchment of their negatively reinforced dysfunction which since childhood is the norm.

RAWS' staff do not expect its participants to be well behaved given the mitigating circumstance of entrenched family and community dysfunction.

What is expected and enforced is for these young people to adhere to basic standards of personal and domestic cleanliness and hygiene.

A further expectation is that they will conform to a basic standard of lawful and civil behaviour, which is the norm for other citizens who reside in the same town where they work.

If we are to assist in improving the behavioural and living standards of Aboriginal people who are trapped in welfare dependency and its prevailing dysfunction, then a significant proportion of the broader Australian community needs to shift its consciousness away from some of its negative attitudes and guilt ridden irrationality, in relation to the plight of many Aborigines.

For too long anecdotal social commentary emanating from sections of the broader non-Indigenous Australian community includes the following statements; *"because this is the way things are"*, or *"because this is what they are used to"*, or *"because this is what they deserve"*.

If these racist, inhumane and discriminatory negative beliefs and attitudes are not overcome and cast to oblivion, then the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians will never be closed. It is imperative for all Australians to take ownership of and responsibility for ensuring that we have a

truly equal and inclusive society, encompassing Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations.

The Remote Area Work Scheme (RAWS) will not settle for anything less than what is expected from and offered to all citizens of this country.

Our new worker; George Morton from Ampilatwatja

Pictured below is 15 years old George Morton from Ampilatwatja Aboriginal Community. He turned 16 on 2nd October.



This is what George has to say:
“Hello, my name is George Morton from Ampilatwatja. I came here to this place for work. There is no work for me back home. I have been here for a couple of months. I work in the Feedlot cleaning the cow and yards and then go and help Andrew. I like it down here. My job is good and the people are good. I miss my family back home and my mother. I send them all my love. From George.”

Pictured below is George on the job at Riverina Beef Feedlot. See the Boys from the Bush website www.boysfromthebush.org.au for a film clip of George.



Pictured below is George’s birthday party at the Lodge with the day shift workers. Night shift workers missed out.



Our new worker; Andrew Teece from Ampilatwatja

Pictured below is 18 years old Andrew Teece from Ampilatwatja Aboriginal Community.



This is what Andrew has to say:

“My name is Andrew Teece. I am working at the Riverina Beef Feedlot. My jobs are moulting, ear tagging, cattle cleaning, yard cleaning, and other yard work. I like my work a lot. It’s a hard job, but a good job. I like living at the Star Lodge, because I get a good sleep, and good food. My sister and aunty and my father are very proud of me because I have a real job with good money.”



Picture above is Andrew on the job. He like most of our workers started off slow, but given time and a bit of assertive supervision they come good.

Our new worker; Tristan Morton from Ampilatwatja

Pictured below is 17 years old Tristan Morton from Ampilatwatja Aboriginal Community.



Pictured below is Tristan on the job, working in the Offal Room. Tristan is finding the work a little challenging, having learnt a number of bad habits

from CDEP work, but he is getting there.



This is what Tristan has to say:

“My name is Tristan from Ampilatwatja community. Ampilatwatja is a good place; this is where my family and friends live. I came to Narrandera to get a job. There are no jobs back home, just CDEP. I work in the Offal Room at Riverina Beef separating the guts and cutting the fat off. I like my job, it is good. It’s a bit hard, but I am getting there. That’s it for me.”

Our country’s best kept secret: A successful beginning to the 6th trial of female workers

Pictured below is 21 years old Joyce Briscoe at her home in Yuelamu.



Joyce Briscoe and her family approached Milton, when he visited Yuelamu a few months ago, asking if she could join RAWs. Her placement was approved by DEEWR and she started work for Swift

Australia Riverina Plant on 12 August packing meat. And Joyce is going really well.



This is what Joyce has to say:

“My name is Joyce Briscoe from Yuelamu. Back home it is boring; there is nothing to do. I just watch TV, clean around the house, and sometimes go hunting with my family. I think a lot of girls would like to leave home for work. I don’t like Alice Springs. Other girls like Alice Springs, but I wanted to get right away, and I am happy with my decision. I like living with Bob and Sue; they are friendly and kind to us. Steven is a joker and he makes us laugh.”



Pictured above is 17 years old Sasha Neal at her home in Santa Teresa.



Sasha Neal and her family approached Milton when he visited Santa Teresa a few months ago. Her placement was also approved by DEEWR and she started work for Swift Australia Riverina Plant on 19 August packing meat. Sasha is also going really well.

This is what Sasha has to say:

“My name is Sasha Neal from Santa Teresa. It is boring back home; there is nothing much to do around there. I didn’t want to get involved with other young people because of the trouble. There is a lot of drinking there, and a lot of fights. There are a lot of jealousy fights amongst the girls. The reason I came down here is to get away from them and to have a job. Everyone is friendly to me down here. There is a lot of laughing and joking. I like the job, they are kind people and we get along alright.”

Inspired by the success of both Sasha and Joyce, other family members have now asked if they can also join RAWS. Both girls are on a Participation [Responsibility] Agreement to remain in RAWS for a minimum of 6 months.

Sasha and Joyce do not live with the young male participants; instead they live with the Jones family in Leeton. The Jones family pictured below, are members of the Leeton CRC Church, which was where Milton turned to for help, when he agreed to conduct the trial.



The situation for young females in remote Aboriginal communities

Young women from remote communities have three options open to them after they have completed their formal education. The first option is to remain in their remote home community on income support, and attend one training course after another. Alternatively, as a job seeker they could attend the new 'community clean-up' work for the dole program.

This is not the first time Milton has placed young females from remote communities into processing work.

There are very few employment opportunities for young women as job roles are strictly defined by gender in remote communities. Young women are delegated and relegated to office or childcare roles of which there are few.



In many of the remote communities, there is little chance for young women to ever obtain real employment, particularly in private sector employment. Only remote communities have CDEP, and this is no longer a long term employment option.

The above pictures were taken by Milton of young girls from remote communities on Cape York and the Kimberley in his earlier trial groups.



Milton's trial of young females from remote communities began in 2005 with a number of young girls being placed in the Yandilla Park citrus packing shed, in Renmark, South Australia. This was followed by the trial of placing young girls into the Albany meat processing plant in Western Australia after they had completed the citrus packing season.

The second option for young women is to take up a life of child birth/care and dependency on family, with or without income support. Many young women are actually encouraged to have a child at an early age, as it brings another income to the family, with less compliance requirements than other types of income support.

One of the shortcomings of these trials was that all the girls were accommodated in their own rental accommodation. These problems have now been sorted out by placing Sasha and Joyce with a local family.

This second option is positively reinforced by the fact that there are minimal real jobs in remote communities for young girls,

and not many are excited by the first option of community clean-up.

Many young girls are pregnant at an early age from an abusive or sexually exploitive situation, often moving from one violent partner to another. Each relationship usually produces another child and the cycle of disadvantage is continued.

A number of these teenage girls, like a number of teenage boys, have spent many years indulging in drugs and alcohol and have little or no experience in learning how to have sober relationships, and how to socialise without drugs and alcohol, and how all relationships need not be sexual relationships. In the communities, there are more and more young single mothers and most of these teenage mothers have no idea of how to care for children. In some communities, a number of these children born by teenage girls were fathered by older men after sexual favours in exchange for drugs.

For example, in 2007, thirteen Kalumburu girls had made major disclosure of sexual abuse. These disclosures resulted in nineteen Kalumburu males placed into custody charged with sexual offences against children. They included the Chairman, Deputy Chairman, six Counsellors, Head Warden (Senior Community Police Officer), Warden (Community Police Officer), Stronger Families Project worker, and a number of other community members, including three minors. The victims were lured into providing sexual favours in exchange for drugs, and the perpetrators were teaching the young girls what to do by showing them hard-core pornography.

The third option for these young women is for them to leave home for real mainstream employment away from their community. This option is very difficult for young people particularly females, who lack the necessary

knowledge, skills and confidence to do so. They may be discouraged by family who do not want to lose the extra income of a child. They are also susceptible to cultural pressures (family obligation) to remain in the community.

This option is made all the more difficult by certain social behavioural norms and values which influence attitudes to real work. The roles of women as defined by their gender are a further obstruction to their employability.

The social consequences of choosing the first two options most often results in limited life prospects for young women in remote communities. Increasingly, young people from remote communities are drifting to urban centres including those young people from rural areas who are in search of youth culture, fun and excitement. They have no income to survive in regional or urban centres. For some young women this means engaging in prostitution, taking up a life of petty crime, and often being subjected to violent and abusive relationships. Being subjected to the abuse and exploitation of others is the essence of their social and economic survival.

Many young women who have moved to urban areas leave their children behind in the community, to be cared for by over worked grandmothers, who also have poor health. As a consequence the care of these children is compromised and they are neglected. This pattern of behaviour perpetuates the cycle of intergenerational dysfunction.

Breaking the cycle of poverty, violence and abuse, hopelessness and despair and the neglect of children through employment, is likely to be the most effective change agent to “closing the gap” for Indigenous Australians.

Many young Indigenous people lack positive role models, life skills and sufficient formal education to enable them to make the successful transition to the life to which they aspire.

Boys from the Bush Projects supports these young people to make this very difficult transition to a working life. Consequently, young Indigenous people are then able to make positive life choices for themselves.

A great catastrophe for RAWS: the loss of our recruitment van

Last month Milton was lucky to survive a most terrifying event on the highway between Narrandera and Wagga Wagga. A crazed truck driver left his lane and cut straight across into the oncoming traffic. Unfortunately for Milton, his vehicle was the oncoming traffic. The truck clipped the back of Milton's car and totally destroyed the recruitment van.



To make matters worse, nearly everything inside the van was destroyed, including two laptop computers and the external backup hard drive. Client files,

financial records, promotional videos, posters, photographs, slides, reports, practice notes, dating back years were all destroyed. Draft articles he has been working on for the past 12 months were all destroyed. Valuable and irreplaceable personal items belonging to his father, wife and daughter were all destroyed.

With no recruitment van and supporting equipment the Scheme is now left with a serious resource shortfall.

It could have been worse. In the split seconds prior to the collision, Milton believed he that he was not going to survive this catastrophe. Fortunately for Milton, it was not his time.

At the time of the collision, Milton was travelling at less than 40 kilometres per hour. More out of instinct, he spun his steering wheel and threw himself down across the seat. Further to the crime was the fact that the truck driver didn't even stop, at least not until he was well away from the scene of the crash. As of this day, our insurance company is still unable to locate his whereabouts.

Where we go from here, it's hard to say.

Who does she think she's kidding?

On the 6th October 2011, The *Australian Labour News – Let's move Australia forward*, posted a news release by Minister Jenny Macklin, titled "Getting job seekers ready for work in remote communities". This article describes how the Australian Government is continuing to support Indigenous people in remote communities to get training and find work, by providing \$47 million for Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP) across the country.

Who does Minister Jenny Macklin think she is kidding? It has become widely accepted that CDEP has acted as an

obstacle to employment, rather than being a transitional process for Indigenous people to accessing real work in the mainstream Australian economy.

Participants in Boys from the Bush Projects – Remote Area Work Scheme have clearly stated to us repeatedly, that their experience of CDEP did nothing constructive for them, other than to keep them in the community and to provide them with a bit of money for grog, dope or the occasional feed.

The fact is that their involvement in CDEP has not helped a single RAWS' participant make the transition to real mainstream employment. It is also a fact that the best of the RAWS' workers have never worked on CDEP, or were only receiving CDEP for a few weeks.

Furthermore, BFTB Projects personnel are aware of CDEP organisers discouraging “too many” young people from leaving the community for real employment, particularly the best of their CDEP workers, because they cannot make up the necessary numbers for their CDEP community training courses and work projects. The vested interest of CDEP organisers to maintain

the sham of CDEP and its corresponding artificial non-competitive economy, ensures that the expectations and aspirations of its recipients remain trapped in the inter-generational downward spiral of welfare dependency.

For generations now various governments have taken the soft option of politically appeasing their critics of policy and practice in relation to Indigenous issues. Cheque book appeasement is and has been rife in remote communities for generations. For example, the Northern Territory has a seventy-five per cent welfare based economy, so it is not surprising to see the abject continuous failing of CDEP fitting hand in glove, with both its service providers and its recipients.

The challenge for Minister Jenny Macklin, her political counterparts and senior bureaucrats, is to remove their blinkers and take some risks with innovative and fruitful employment practice. By doing so Indigenous people from remote communities and elsewhere, will be provided with real sustainable employment in the mainstream Australian economy.

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