

Young Indigenous Meatworkers Gazette

News letter of the Boys from the Bush Projects, Remote Area Work Scheme (RAWS)
Issue No. 2, Sunday, 13 September 2009



This space is reserved for the logos of those meat processing companies that employ our young workers

FINALLY !!!

It has taken 17 months of unbelievable hardship to get this project back on track, and we have finally made it.

The story behind the development of this scheme is an incredible story, dating back many years. It's a story about an ideal, passion, devotion, enormous sacrifice, hard won success, betrayal, shocking waste, destruction and resurrection. Above all this, it's a story about a small group of people trying to do something about the appalling human tragedy occurring right now in our own back yard.

The impetus of our struggle is to give disadvantaged young Australians a fair

go, particularly those young people born on the wrong side of the Great Divide.

With no rest, we move immediately on to our next great challenge of implementing a large scale commercial trial, beginning with a group of up to 25 young Indigenous people from the Northern Territory placed into the fulltime employment of Cargill Beef at Wagga Wagga in southern New South Wales.

This battle is more to my liking, as I am in familiar territory with old battle hardened friends.

Cargill Beef is ranked the 5th largest red meat processor in Australia. Cargill operates two processing plants in Wagga Wagga and Tamworth, and a feedlot at Stockinbingal in NSW. The Wagga plant processes high quality beef for the

domestic and export markets. It has the capacity to process over 300,000 head per annum.

The Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) has presented BFTB Projects an interesting challenge. The Department has requested that 10 of the young participants in this group come from the Wagga Wagga region. To make matters more difficult, the challenge comes with a reduced funding.

Clearly, the exact same methodology we use for disadvantaged young people from remote northern communities will not work for young people in Wagga. We will need to modify some structural components and certain practices. It will be challenging but not impossible. I have considerable experience working with young Indigenous people, from small rural towns and large regional centres.

To give an example of the challenge we face, the other day I was passing through the NSW town of Walgett. I pulled in to say 'good day' to members of the Elders Group. I later walked across the road to introduce myself to one of the local job agencies.

As I was walking across the road, my attention was drawn to a small group of young people who were behaving in a menacing manner, on the opposite side of the road.

I observed the dominant member of the group; a well built lad who is approximately 18 years old. Our eyes met for only a fraction of a second but that was enough for him to angrily yell out "*What the fuck are you looking at, you*".

Twenty minutes later, when I came out of the job agencies and walked back to my car, I passed a young 19-20 year old mother with her 3 year old child who was walking behind her and crying. The mother turned and furiously yelled out to the child, "*Shut the fuck up, or I give you a fucking flogging, you little shit*".

I began thinking, what are the chances of this little child growing up like the angry young man I encountered earlier? This is the nature of life for many disadvantaged young people today.

The details and progress of this Wagga Wagga trial will be made available to the public via our website:

www.boysfromthebush.org.au

Return of our Assistant Recruitment Officer

Those readers familiar with the *Boys from the Bush* Projects' social enterprise program, will know of Abia Ingui, aka Casper. Well, Casper has returned to us to resume his position of Assistant Recruitment Officer & Youth Advisor.



Casper is coming down to Wagga Wagga with his partner and young child, to experience working with Cargill Beef, and to help Milton to assess young applicants from the

Wagga Wagga region. He is also available to help Milton recruit young people in the Northern Territory.

Inequitable processing by different branches of government, results in disadvantaged Indigenous Australians being left behind in favour of foreign workers

Growing up in a remote community is tough. Your chances of getting a good education, a good job, and a good income, are much slimmer than those of people growing up in the mainstream.

When we elect a Government, we expect that it will do the right thing and give every young Australian a fair go, particularly those who are disadvantaged. Unfortunately this does not always occur.

The employment of choice for many young Indigenous people living in remote communities is working in a meat processing plant. They have proven to be very good workers.

The Remote Area Work Scheme (RAWS) was developed specifically to help disadvantaged Indigenous youth living in remote communities, to gain employment in the meat processing industry.

However, the Australian Government is favouring the importation of foreign workers for these positions ahead of young Aboriginal workers.

It achieves this outcome by fast tracking the employment applications of foreign

workers to 1 month, while delaying the employment applications of young Indigenous people through RAWS for 17 months. In the meantime their job opportunities were lost.

In addition to the fast tracking of foreign worker applications, one of the approval requirements for a foreign worker is that the applicant (employer) must have exhausted all efforts to employ available Indigenous people. Yet, the Government makes no check on whether or not the (more dodgy) applicants have rejected an offer by RAWS to provide young Indigenous workers. What the Government has in fact done, is to insert these 'look good' clauses in the *Labour Agreement for Entry of Skilled Meat Workers in Australia*, but it did not allocate any resources for checking or monitoring employers' compliance with these regulations.

It is true that only skilled foreign workers are eligible for a 457 visa, and our young people are unskilled but new regulations now see boners and slicers identified as skilled workers under the 457 visa program. Nearly all the young people placed into abattoirs by RAWS were given the job of boning and slicing. These are tasks that can be mastered by these young people within a short time. This is exactly what the Australian Meat Industry Employees Union referred to when it called on the Federal Government to stop the importation of foreign workers, to positions that Australian workers could be trained to fill in a short period.

In addition to these policy implementation issues, the Government needs to explain why the Pacific Islands Guest Worker Scheme (a scheme importing unskilled workers) was also fast tracked over RAWS by over 6 months, with the result that many jobs

for young Indigenous people were lost. Clearly, the Government has a serious problem with policy implementation that is neither rational nor fair.

Now that the Australian Government has opened its door to unskilled foreign workers for the Australian horticultural industry, what is preventing other labour strapped industries from demanding similar favourable treatment of selecting its employees.

Immigration Minister Chris Evans has just announced the Australian Government's intention to introduce a two-tiered system. An "accredited business" will receive even faster processing (as if 1 month was not fast enough) and undergo even less monitoring (which sounds like no effective monitoring).

Boys from the Bush Projects will be writing to the various political parties to ask how they intend to correct this unfair policy implementation. Also where they stand in relation to the importation of unskilled foreign workers. Their responses will be shared with our readers.

Special thanks go to Darren Coyne of the Koori Mail and Phillip Adams of Late Night Live in helping us to get this story out there. We greatly appreciate your help guys.

Our new sponsor/donor



Officeworks is one of our new valued supporters. It has generously donated a Data Projector to the RAWS Outreach Recruitment Service.

Pictured below is Jon Niehaus, Office Manager, Officeworks Cairns, handing over the Data Projector.



This Projector is a crucial piece of equipment for the projection of Power Point presentations to groups of young applicants, as part of the community based assessment/preparation process.



Another new and valued supporter is Bunnings Warehouse.

Pictured below is Fiona Tunstall, Community Involvement Manager, Cairns Warehouse.



Fiona, on behalf of Bunnings, has generously donated some excellent bench chairs to the Recruitment Team.

These bench chairs will be used to seat the young applicants when attending our information/preparation sessions.

Are these donations important?

Yes, these donations are very important. Apart from using these donated items, I is also about forging new connections; helping to bridge the divide between the corporate world and social work.

It is also about involving the business community in an important social project where their (big or small) contribution makes them a stakeholder and a recipient of our progress reports containing information on what is working and what is not working.

Surely it is better to hear from these battle scarred front line workers, covered in dust and sweat, achieving real results, rather than having to listen to the same old theoretic critiques and the 'big bang' pie-in-the-sky grandiose statements marketed by the nation's elite.

We look forward to sharing with you the progress of RAWS' participants at Cargill Beef at Wagga Wagga. Our combined endeavours will improve the lives of these young Indigenous Australians.

We appreciate the expanding support that RAWS is receiving from various sections of the Australian community.

Always looking for more support

If you wish to donate cash or items to the Boys from the Bush Projects, your donations can be sent to:

**Boys from the Bush Projects
PO Box 1684
Queanbeyan, NSW, 2620**

What we need most of all is a second-hand 12 seater van for transporting young people to and from work.

The RAWS express

The global economic crisis and the experience of going through the process of getting this scheme back on track is confirmation that the good economic times over the past 10 years had largely been squandered, with those who can least afford it bearing the burden.

The global economy is now picking up, and RAWS is back on track. Now is the time to pull out all stops and open the throttle, so to speak. We cannot afford to allow this opportunity to be squandered ever again.

Our goal is to have disadvantaged young Indigenous people acquire the characteristics of modern wage earners, and a major force in the national meat processing industry.

The main advantages our young workers are:

- * They are a mobile workforce who can be delivered on the spot when and where needed.
- * They are young, malleable, and full of potential having been introduced to hunting and processing meat from an early age.
- * Aboriginal people have a spiritual and emotional attachment to the land, its animals and the pastoral industry.