

# Young Indigenous Meatworkers' Gazette

News letter of the Boys from the Bush Projects, Rural & Remote Area Work Scheme (RAWS)  
Issue No. 19, Monday, 21 November 2011



This space is reserved for the logos of those meat processing companies that have or are engaging BFTB workers

## It has taken six long years, but we now have a practice model that **works**

Boys from the Bush Projects will soon celebrate the beginning of a new phase. This new phase comes after a long hard journey to develop a practice model that works.

Our model has now surpassed all previous efforts to voluntarily engage and maintain disadvantaged Indigenous youths in employment. This model represents a process of not just employment, but also a functional engagement with communities, and a journey to beginning a meaningful life. This journey helps to break the intergenerational cycle of catastrophic dysfunction that the participants would otherwise be subjected to.

This Scheme has successfully demonstrated the claim that; *“young Aboriginal people are unable, or unwilling, or prevented from, leaving their home and community in order to take up employment owing to their strong social, cultural and spiritual links with their land combined with*

*the complex social bonds which link Indigenous families and communities together”*, is completely false.

This Scheme has successfully demonstrated that young Indigenous people from remote communities, can be successfully assisted to assume mainstream private sector employment whilst being located far from their homes and families. They are able to accomplish this outcome despite their disadvantages of having little or no experience of living away from home, being distant from family and community and having little or no work experience. Also they were initially assessed as being high risk of long term unemployment whilst being subjected to environments with life long dependencies on welfare, hopelessness and despair.

This Scheme does not provide the handouts commonly given by welfare programs, nor should it. Enhancing confidence, self-esteem and changing attitudes, is not about giving handouts or

doing things for others. It is about providing an understanding of real world employment opportunities complimented by essential support and supervision. These services help the employee to maintain their employment, to engage with the local community responsibly, and value adding to the local community through their productivity and spending.

This Scheme has trialled various forms of support, facilitation and engagement, including a range of supervised accommodation models. It has established what works given the prevailing variables of a particular environment.

This Scheme has also successfully demonstrated a highly effective method of recruitment. It has established that there are large numbers of young people living in remote communities who want assistance, to be liberated from their chains of oppression, violence and squalor, and to obtain employment opportunities throughout Australia.

This Scheme has also successfully developed tailored methodologies that work for both young men and women.

This Scheme has successfully closed the employment gap, the opportunity gap, and the skills gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in the Riverina Beef meat processing plant and feedlot.

This Scheme has attacked the argument that young Aboriginal women leaving home for work, cannot or should not become attached to non-Aboriginal carers. It has also challenged the racist claim that it is culturally inappropriate for Indigenous youths to live with and be cared by non-Indigenous people, as purported by the separatist movement.

This Scheme is about bridging the divide between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. It seeks to build on common ground; it is not in the

business of trying to create new forms of difference and division, that leads to vilification and conflict. This Scheme is aware of the mistakes of the past and has built on the successes of the past. It has also found new pathways.

Perhaps one of our most controversial outcomes has been the exposure of the non-essential nature of the pre-employment training industry. These work readiness schemes have been in most cases, highly lucrative for all except the participants.

Models developed in policy meetings by government departments based on models used in other settings, are generally an abject failure. The nominal success of these models is measured by manipulated quantitative and meaningless statistics, not by tangible and sustainable outcomes for the participants.

BFTB Projects has been the sole voice in the objection of government endorsing meat processing companies to bring in foreign workers through the 457 visa program to taking up positions that could have gone to young Indigenous Australian.

We know what government has done. They have inserted these 'look good' clauses in the Labour Agreement for Entry of Skilled Meat Workers in Australian about exhausting all efforts to employ Indigenous Australians, but DEEWR has chosen not to provide any resources to check or monitor compliance to these regulations. These are hollow clauses, all about appearances rather than substance.

See our article printed in the Narrandera Argus on page 9.

## **Noel Pearson to visit RAWS on the 28 November 2011**



Lawyer Noel Pearson, and the founding Director of the Cape York Institute for Policy and Leadership has accepted our invitation to inspect the RAWS. He will be arriving in Narrandera on 28 November 2011 where he will hopefully have the opportunity to see how the RAWS operates and participants at work.

### **Our story on ABC radio**

Attached to this Newsletter is a link to a story by Laurissa Smith of the ABC radio played on the rural report last week.

It was also played on the NSW Country Hour and an extended version on NT Country Hour. Laurissa has also offered the story up to Radio National's Country Breakfast program.

### **Is RAWS unique; an innovation that will soon disappear?**

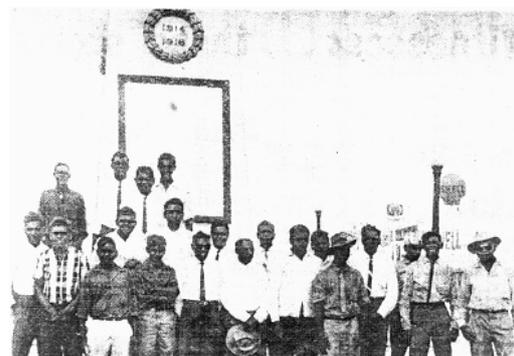
There is a real possibility that when we complete our present IEP contract with DEEWR, RAWS will fade away into history. Government is not good at identifying lessons and learning from them. It is not good at producing real

and tangible outcomes. It is not good at facilitating resilience.

We believe there is a real likelihood of DEEWR continuing the pattern of maintaining entrenched dependency and short term intervention. It would be a shame if this occurs and history repeats itself, because this is what happened the last time something like this Scheme was attempted back in the 60's. It was in the mid to late 60's when Government policies and attitudes began to swing towards placing people on welfare, and against assisting them to move from places where there are no employment opportunities, to places where there are employment opportunities.

For the last 50 years, the policy currents and the attitudes of particular (vocal) segments of the Australian community, have been flowing towards maintaining people in government settlements, missions and outstations, and their exclusion from the competition of the free market economy. The introduction of welfare for all severed the link between effort and reward, locking many Indigenous people into a state of dependency.

This is not an ideological debate. It has tangible and real implications for generations to come. Pictured below is a photograph of a group of 20 young and older Aboriginal men from Santa Teresa in the Northern Territory who came to Griffith, New South Wales, in 1966 to pick tomatoes.



This was one of several successful groups which came to South Australia and New

South Wales around this time, to work in the horticultural industry. Within 12 months of when this photo was taken, the scheme was disbanded. That was the last time most of these people in this picture, ever engaged in private sector employment.

Fifty years later, pictured below, are some of the RAWS' participants living in Leeton and the nearby town of Narrandera, where they work in unsubsidised employment at the JBS Swift meat processing plant and feedlot.

Note the background of these two photographs. They have been taken at the exact same location, fifty years apart. The latter photograph also includes a number of relatives of those people, who appeared in the former photograph.



Perhaps in another 50 years time we may see government being serious about supporting young people to take up employment opportunities wherever it is available. At least Boys from the Bush Projects has denounced the myth that Indigenous people from remote locations are incapable of being competitive and productive workers in the mainstream Australian economy. The RAWS bears testimony that they are more than capable of doing so.

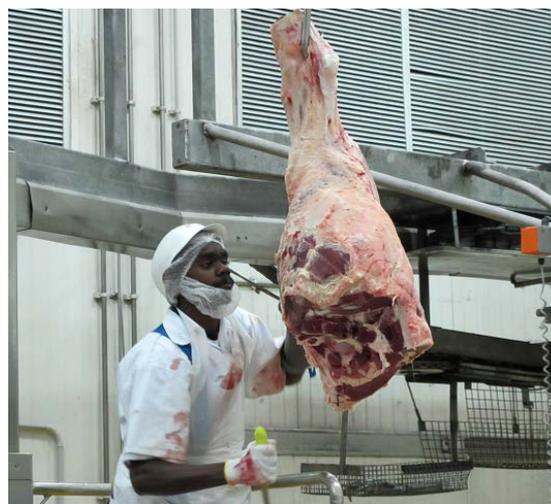
## RAWS is also closing the skills gap

As mentioned, RAWS has closed the employment gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous workers at JBS Riverina Beef meat processing plant and feedlot.

It has also closed the skills gap in that we now have one qualified boner and 3 trainee boners. Pictured below is 18 year old qualified boner, Anton McMillan from Santa Teresa in the Northern Territory.



This is Anton when Milton first met him in Santa Teresa nearly two years ago, and this is Anton today on the boning floor applying his skills.



We also have Mitchell Mahoney from Alpurulam in the Northern Territory following close behind.



Pictured above is Mitchell when Milton first met him in Alpurulum, over two years ago. Pictured below is Mitchell today; a trainee boner working on the boning floor.



We also have Kenneth Philomack pictured below in Alpurulum two years ago.



Kenneth is generalist worker on the boning room carrying out a range of duties.

Picture below is Kenneth doing a bit of slicing work.



On the slaughter floor we have Travis Mahoney, also from Alpurulum. Travis, pictured below, has also been in the scheme for nearly two years.



This year also saw the first of our feedlot workers. Pictured below is Keiran Isaac from Borroloola in the Northern Territory, at his home in Police Lagoon Outstation.



Pictured below is Keiran nearly 8 months later, applying his skills, along with Andrew Teece from Ampilatwatja in the Northern Territory.



## Our new worker; Nicholas Thompson from Ali Curung

Pictured below is 16 year old Nicholas Thompson from Ali Curung Aboriginal Community in the Northern Territory.



Nicholas is a special needs person who turned out to be a good worker. This is what Nicholas has to say:

*“I love it. ... I love to work. ... I will never leave the work.”*



Nicholas’s mother has this to say;

*“I was very worried about him. He just stayed at home sleeping all day. I told him don’t come back to this place, too much drinking and fighting. I am very proud of him, and I have been telling other boys to go away, like Nicholas.”*

## Our new worker; Anthony Tree from Walgett, New South Wales

Pictured below is 19 years old Anthony Tree from Walgett.



Anthony is our first worker placed in Loadout. This is what Anthony has to say;

*“I am from Walgett. It’s not really that good in Walgett. There’s heaps of drinking and drugs and*

*fights all the time. I came here to get a job and to get away from all the drugs and alcohol, and get my life back on track.*

*My work is good. I work in Loadout; packing boxes of meat onto pallets, ready for shipment. This is my first proper job and it's good. It was hard in the beginning but I am getting use to it.*

*The fellows here are good. I have never been with these type of fellows before."*

## **Another brave pioneer; Shannon Palmer from Yuendumu**

Pictured below is 16 year old Shannon Palmer from Yuendumu Aboriginal Community.



For the last 4 weeks Shannon has been working with the other girls packing meat for JBS Swift Riverina Beef. This is what Shannon has to say:

*"My name is Shannon Palmer. I am working at the meatworks as a packer. It's sometimes difficult and sometimes okay. The people at work are really friendly and I get along with them really well.*

*When I was in Yuendumu I was a life guard and shop assistant. There are some jobs in the community but the other girls don't respond to them. I decided to leave to look for more opportunities and gain more life experience."*

## **Our girls are recovering from their loss of dear Sue and Bob Jones**

Our tragic loss of Sue and Bob Jones devastated all of us. The girls have been amazingly strong; having decided to stay and take up the offer of a new family. And we are sure Sue and Bob would have wanted it this way.

We have found a lovely new family for Joyce and Sabrina; Tim and Melissa Stanmore, pictured below.



Milton met Tim and Melissa when he first arrived in Narrandera two years ago. They have always been great supporters of the RAWS, and have most generously offered to take Joyce and Sabrina into their home. They are also members of the same Church as Sue and Bob Jones.

We have also found another lovely new family for Sasha and Shannon; Wayne and Kylie Moore, pictured below with their three children; Michael, Matiece and Kade.



If this occurred today it would have been a big news story. Back then it was not considered that newsworthy. Clearly, a number of stories could be written about what was going on back in those days; a time when our present day policy makers and senior bureaucrats were still at school.

One of these stories could be about the ignorance of today's bureaucrats in the Aboriginal service industry. We suspect most of them would be surprised that this sort of thing was going on 30 years ago. Clearly, things have gone backwards. What these bureaucrats need to think about is **why** have things gone backwards and **how** have they contributed to this.

## Are these girls really pioneers or are they simply following in the footsteps of their aunts

In 1965 Ernabella Mission was the first to trial the idea of assisting Aboriginals living in central Australia to take up seasonal horticultural work in the Riverland region of South Australia. Their scheme known as the 'Ernabella Project' was very successful. But few people know that it continued to operate up until at least 1972. Tucked away at the bottom of page 11 of The Murray Pioneer, March 30, 1972, Milton found this little article.

Another story that could be drawn from this little article, could be about the steadfastness of those managing the Ernabella Project. We know that the Project had a few problems from time to time, but they sorted these problems out. Compare this to the quick abandonment of its replication by the Department of Labour and National Service in 1967 at the first sign of any trouble, never to be revisited, ever again. Clearly, the role of government in these types of endeavours needs to be minimal. Government should be responsible for providing the necessary funding but not to involve itself in practice matters, that it is not competent to undertake.



## WHY SHOULD WE PAY ATTENTION TO GIRLS?

Recently it was publicly exposed that the Australian Government had invested billions of tax-payers dollars in policies and programs to address the gap between Indigenous Australians and non-Indigenous Australians. The outcome has been an abysmal failure. It is disheartening to see that in the 21st Century, many remote Indigenous communities are still marked by dysfunctionality and poverty; social indicators that you would expect to

find in a developing country, not in a Australia.

But what if there was an unexpected solution? Would you know it if you saw it? It's not the Internet. It's not science. It's not the government. It's not money. It's ... A Girl!

The Girl Effect movement was founded in 2008. This organisation believes in the unique and indisputable potential of adolescent girls, to end poverty for themselves and their communities.

Investing in girls has the highest untapped return. It's been shown that a female will reinvest her income and knowledge in her family and her community. As an educated mother, an active citizen, an ambitious entrepreneur or prepared employee, a female will break the cycle of intergenerational poverty.

The Girl Effect Facts:

When a girl in the developing world receives seven or more years of education, she marries four years later and has 2.2 fewer children.

(United Nations Population Fund, *State of World Population 1990.*)

An extra year of primary school boosts girls' eventual wages by 10 to 20 percent. An extra year of secondary school boosts girls' eventual wages by 15 to 25 percent.

(George Psacharopoulos and Harry Anthony Patrinos, "Returns to Investment in Education: A Further Update," Policy Research Working Paper 2881 [Washington, D.C.: World Bank, 2002].)

**Research in developing countries has shown a consistent relationship between better infant and child health and higher levels of schooling among mothers.**

(George T. Bicego and J. Ties Boerma, "Maternal Education and Child Survival: A Comparative Study of Survey Data from 17 Countries," *Social Science and Medicine* 36 (9) [May 1993]: 1207–27.)

But girls need your help. They need information, healthcare and education. She needs money in her pocket, care-givers and a community that sees she is valuable. Her change can't happen without people in power championing her value and potential.

The Australian Government should be paying close attention to what The Girl Effect movement has to say. Girls may very well be the solution to closing the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.

*By Jacqueline James*



# Fair go sought for workers

**Boys From the Bush founder Milton James and secretary Phillip Duncan yesterday lashed out at Government bureaucracy with claims that foreign workers were being recruited for positions that could be filled by remote Australian workers.**

Mr James claimed that this was happening due to a delay in implementing the Remote Area Work Scheme (RAWS) by the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR).

In a joint statement issued yesterday, RAWs spokesperson Mr James and Mr Duncan explained that RAWs was for disadvantaged

Aboriginal youth from remote communities and was operated by Boys from the Bush (BFTB), a not for profit organisation.

They said currently RAWs had 20 young Aboriginal Australians working at the JBS Swift abattoir and feedlot near Narrandera. These participants had been voluntarily recruited from several remote Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory.

"Most of these RAWs participants have made the successful transition to being full time non-subsidised employees in the meat processing industry," Mr James said.

"The initial bureaucratic delay in bringing RAWs to Narrandera was around 18

months. During that time we lost a lot of opportunities to provide employment to young Australian workers.

"For a meat processing company who wants to bring in foreign workers, the turn-around time is three months, compared to 18 months for these Aboriginal workers.

"It seems the bureaucratic process is heavily in favour of foreign workers."

The workers in the RAWs program started off as labourers and many had since moved into skilled positions, Mr James said.

"(JBS) Swift told me they are bringing in 20 foreign workers this month," he said.

Foreign workers are brought in on 457 visas, and

one of the requirements for these visas is that the employer must have exhausted all efforts to employ Indigenous people who are available to fill these vacancies, said Mr Duncan.

"However, the DEEWR does not check whether or not the applicants have rejected an offer by RAWs to provide young Aboriginal workers," he said.

"Further compounding this problem are sections of the meat industry whose management continues to fast track recruiting foreign labour via the 457 Visa approvals, when the supply of domestic labour in the form of Indigenous youth is available.

The RAWs model could

be replicated elsewhere or increased in its scale of operation to provide similar work opportunities to a greater number of marginalised and disadvantaged Indigenous youth.

"However, this potential outcome can only be achieved if the Government in partnership with employers, genuinely commit themselves to affirmative action to provide ongoing employment for Indigenous youth. They remain part of Australia's socio-economic fabric long after foreign labourers have filled their wallets, disappeared from our shores and returned to their country of origin.

"They have exhibited their productivity and

sustainability as competitive employees in the meat processing industry."

JBS Swift were unable to be contacted for comment on the issue before going to print yesterday.

Lawyer Noel Pearson, founder of the Cape York Institute for Policy and Leadership which supports economic and social development in Cape York, has accepted an invitation to inspect the RAWs this month.

"We welcome his interest in RAWs and look forward to introducing him to the RAWs participants," Mr Duncan said.

He described Mr Pearson as a nationally prominent Indigenous spokesman and leader.

## THIS PROJECT IS FUNDED BY



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