

Young Indigenous Meatworkers' Gazette

Newsletter of the Boys from the Bush Projects, Rural & Remote Area Work Scheme (RAWS)
Issue No. 22, Monday, 13 August 2012



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

Riverina group relocated to Yanco

In our last newsletter (Newsletter #20) we talked about our forced departure from Narrandera. Then good fortune came our way and we were given the opportunity to reside at the Murrumbidgee Rural Studies Centre. We are indeed very fortunate as we could not have asked for a better location.



Pictured above is the entrance to the Murrumbidgee Rural Studies Centre. The Centre has an interesting history. It began as an Experimental Farm in 1908. Between 1928 and 1942 it operated as a

Welfare Farm for delinquent boys, aged up to 18 years old. During the War it was taken over by the Federal Government and turned into a prisoner of war camp. After the War it resumed as a Research Station. In 1963 it operated as a Research Station and Agricultural College. It ceased to operate as an Agricultural College in 2003.

Milton is an old graduate from the Roseworthy Agricultural College in South Australian, so for him this is a familiar environment.



Pictured above are the male members of Riverina group residing at the Centre, with their accommodation block in background.

Today the Murrumbidgee Rural Studies Centre is held by the Department of Primary Industry. It has wonderful facilities; each person has their own room with a very good toilet and shower facilities, kitchen, dining room, games room, swimming pool, and football oval. It is within walking distance of Yanko and a 40 minute walk to work.



Pictured on the side is Andrew Pula from Ampilatwatja in the corridor of our dormitory block. Andrew joined RAWS in September 2011, and he is still going strong.

There are 3 other dormitory blocks, each holding 20 rooms that have been mothballed.

Also pictured on the side is Travis Mahoney from Alpururulam in his dormitory bedroom. Travis joined RAWS in February 2010, and he is still going strong.

A big thank you to the manager of the Murrumbidgee Rural Studies Centre, Mr John Collins, for his wonderful support.

New manager for our Riverina group

In February this year Mr Pio Nakubuwei joined our team as the Manager in training of our Riverina work group. He is now in full charge of the Riverina group.



Pio is a religious man with sound values. He is also a family man with two teenage boys. He was a meat inspector at the Riverina Beef meat processing plant, and is now a meat inspector for Cargill-Teys meat processing plant in Wagga Wagga.

Pio is originally from Fiji, but has been living in Leeton for the past 18 years. Pio has this to say about his position with BFTB Projects:

“I can understand these young people. I can understand their behaviour and where they are coming from. I see my task and responsibility is to help these young people to obtain their goals and to reach their potential; to be a good citizen and a good community person especially with his own people.”

New residential supervisor for our Riverina group

In February this year, Mr Simone Naivalu (pictured below right) also joined our team as our residential supervisor of our Riverina work group.



Simone is also from Fiji and an experienced youth worker, and missionary worker with experience in the residential care of troubled youths with have drug and alcohol problems.



Pictured above are Pio and Simone holding a group meeting in our dining room.

What is DEEWR up to?

On the 20 April 2012, the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) wrote to BFTB Projects. It stated that JBS Swift had identified “*a number of serious concerns and major shortcomings*” in relation to “*supporting JBS Swift’s needs and the needs of our participants*”.

And what are these “*serious concerns and major shortcomings*”, and how is it that these alleged “*serious concerns and major shortcomings*”, have only emerged now after three years of an unchanged practice?

DEEWR has stated:

1) That JBS Swift has identified a serious concern and major shortcoming in regards to BFTB Projects not providing support to our clients during the initial employment induction. DEEWR presumably means that BFTB Projects is not sitting with our clients in the JBS Swift training room, during their initial 5 hour on-site induction.

Our response: BFTB Projects **does** meet with their trainers before their initial induction, and again after their initial induction to see how they went. We do not sit with our clients during their induction, nor is it appropriate for us to do so.

Over the last 3 year, neither Rockdale Beef nor Riverina Beef, nor any other meat processing plant have ever requested BFTB Projects to sit in on their initial induction.

So what is DEEWR up to?

2) That JBS Swift has identified a serious concern and major shortcoming in that BFTB Projects does not provide our clients with sufficient on the job mentoring.

Our response: BFTB Projects does not provide on-site mentoring. Indeed it is not possible for us to do so, as we are not employees of JBS Swift. Instead, our focus is on the provision of intensive **off-site** support and supervision.

The business of providing on-site mentoring is what is used by the Australian Employment Covenant (AEC). The BFTB Projects model, however, is different.

Our model is based on what happens outside of work, as the main determinant of whether or not the young person is going to hold on to their job.

Common sense tells us all that it is what time these young people go to sleep at night, and what they eat and drink, their transport to work, and what their family says and does, and the level of their general life skills, are the key factors which determine whether or not these young people will retain employment. Our results are testimony to this fact.

We find it difficult to comprehend how for the past two years, JBS Swift staff have stated that they understand the BFTB Projects model. It appears that DEEWR's interference has created confusion with JBS Swift staff in relation to their understanding of the BFTB Projects' model.

One thing for certain is that Mr Paul Gilligan, who was the Riverina Beef Plant Manager, had no problem understanding and publically supporting the BFTB Projects model. He said so in an interview with the ABC late last year. His interview has been posted on the BFTB website: www.boysfromthebush.org.au See the newsletters page.

So what is DEEWR up to?

DEEWR's claim that JBS Swift had identified serious concerns and major shortcomings with RAWS was pursued

by the ABC rural reporter, Laurissa Smith, with JBS Swift Australia. Mr. John Berry who is one of the firms' directors was interviewed by her on the 1 May, 2012. Mr Berry said he was not aware of any complaint.

So we have a situation where DEEWR is alleging that JBS Swift had identified "*a number of serious concerns and major shortcomings*" and JBS Swift is saying to the ABC that they are unaware of any such complaint or concerns, then something really weird is going on.

We have experienced this situation before where DEEWR has said that they received complaints, but upon investigation it was revealed that no such complaints were made. We will keep readers posted on this one.

Big job losses at Riverina Beef

In April 2012 we saw significant job losses at Riverina Beef, which included six of our workers; three females and three males.

What also made it difficult for us was that most of the managerial staff who knew about RAWS, and who had supported our clients, had also lost their jobs.



It took its new managers more than a week before they advised BFTB Projects' staff of these job redundancies, and their rationale for doing so.

The Riverina Beef HR staff have said to our group manager, Pio Nakubuwai, that DEEWR has told them that our project has been taken over by Sureway Employment & Training, and that they were instructed not to talk to BFTB Projects.

We contacted Sureway Employment & Training. Its staff refused to meet with us or to discuss this matter via telephone. They stated that we must direct all of our enquiries to DEEWR.

We have contacted DEEWR to clarify what is going on. We hope to receive a response from them soon.

JBS Swift has since re-employed all our young people, except for Joyce Briscoe who has been employed by T & R Pastoral in South Australia.

Our new recruitment camper

Readers may recall the story about the loss of our recruitment caravan (Newsletter #18). It has taken us a while, but we are back on the road with a new slide-on camper, pictured below.



We have already tested our camper in a recent recruitment drive throughout the Northern Territory. It serves this purpose well.



Readers will hear more about this recruitment drive and our next recruitment drive in future newsletters.

Outstanding success of our young female' group

In 2011, four young females were recruited from the Northern Territory. We had Joyce Briscoe from Yuelamu, Sabrina

Briscoe from Yuelamu, Sasha Neal from Santa Teresa, and Shannon Palmer from Yuendumu. All four girls signed up to a Participation Agreement for 6 months. A year later, 3 of these young females are still engaged in our work groups. This is a 75% retention rate over a year.

Sabrina Briscoe returned home at the request of her mother, to help out with the care of her sister's new born baby. Sabrina did not want to go. She is still asking if she can re-join the scheme within the near future. We would welcome Sabrina's return.

Whichever way you look at this result, it is a fantastic outcome, particularly when you consider that these girls were born and raised in remote NT communities, and this was their first mainstream job.

Unlike the males, the females are billeted out to local families. The only factor inhibiting us from increasing the number of female participants is the difficulty in finding more families who are willing to take them in.

Pictured above is Shannon Palmer on the right and Sasha Neal on the left, outside their home in Leeton.

Government and non-government service providers should be paying more attention to the achievements of these young people. It appears that they have the prevailing attitude that young Indigenous Australians from remote communities are too problematic to manage - the too hard basket syndrome.

