

Boys from the Bush Projects  
Rural and Remote Area Work Scheme



Progress Report #4



31 January 2011

# RURAL & REMOTE AREA WORK SCHEME PROGRESS REPORT #4 31 January 2011

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APPENDIX 1 - Extract from WPS Developmental Note #64 titled 'The fifth trial of providing work in a citrus packing shed to young Indigenous females from remote communities', by Milton James, September 2007



# RURAL & REMOTE AREA WORK SCHEME PROGRESS REPORT #4 31 January 2011

## 1. Preamble

BFTB Projects is a not for profit organisation comprised of volunteers, who are committed to addressing systemic disadvantage through helping to close the gap for Indigenous Australians. BFTB Projects is an apolitical and non religious organisation that seeks to collaborate with other like minded individuals and organisations, for the betterment of its target group.

Boys from the Bush (BFTB) Projects - Rural & Remote Area Work Scheme (RAWS) seeks to address systemic disadvantage through targeted assistance to disadvantaged Aboriginal youth, who reside in rural and remote communities.

The cornerstones for RAWS' operation, and evidence based success are; A) its participant recruitment methodology, B) the provision of immediate, unsubsidised employment for its participants in the mainstream Australian economy, where they compete on an equal footing with their fellow employees, and C) the provision of off site support and supervision through the Live-in Carer/Family Group Home accommodation support model, aimed towards functional independence. These three key components have been refined by previous work trials, which have occurred over the past ten years. This model extends the exclusive therapeutic community model into an inclusive environmental model.

## 2. Executive Summary

Census data<sup>1</sup> reveals that between 2001 and 2006 Indigenous unemployment decreased from 20.0 per cent to 15.6 per cent. This compares to non-Indigenous unemployed decreasing from 7.3 per cent to 5.1 per cent. This was a period of substantial national and inter national economic growth. This period also saw a slight closure in the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous unemployed from 12.7 per cent to 10.5 per cent.

The most recent Indigenous labour force data indicates that the situation may have deteriorated since the 2006 census. ABS figures released in June 2010 state that the unemployment rate increased from 13.8 in 2008 to 18.1 per cent in 2009. At the same time, the employment rate fell from 50 to 48 per cent.

In 2008 the Rudd Government set the target of halving the employment gap within a decade, but these results show that the unemployment gap had in fact widened from 9.6 to 12.6 percentage points. This suggests that the prejected decrease in Indigenous unemployment is going to fall well short of meeting the Governments 2008 pledge by 2018.

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<sup>1</sup> Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision (SCRGSP) 2009. *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage: Key Indicators 2009*, Productivity Commission, Canberra.



The Australia Government is blaming the economic downturn for this outcome. Employment Participation Minister Mark Arbib says he is disappointed by the ABS figures - but not surprised. Arbib told the Senate estimates hearing;

*“When you look at the groups that fared worst out of the global recession it’s those most disadvantaged groups, particularly long-term unemployed, people with low skills, low education levels and also young people. So I don’t think it’s a surprise that the Indigenous community would fare poorly employment wise in the global recession.”*

The Rural & Remote Area Work Scheme (RAWS) aims to match job aspirations of disadvantaged Indigenous youth with employer needs in the meat processing industry. This Scheme represents a totally new approach to achieving superior job retention and job performance outcomes, through tailored off site support and supervision methodologies, which have the potential for scaling and replicating nationally.

This report summarises additional learnings gained, and provides the evidence base that demonstrates the scheme’s success. For example, the outcomes for RAWS show that 78.5 per cent reached the 13 weeks milestone, 57.1 per cent reached the 26 weeks milestone, 50 per cent reached the 39 week milestone, and 35.7 per cent are about to reach the 52 weeks milestone. An additional 7.1 per cent likely to join their ranks. Compare this to the employer’s previous experience of 5 per cent retention of Indigenous workers after 6 months.

BFTB has demonstrated a ten fold increase in retention over 39 weeks and over seven times the retention rate over a year, in addition to reducing turnover. The general worker turnover rate at Rockdale Beef was in the vicinity of 80 per cent, or an approximately 20 per cent retention rate over 12 months. RAWS retention rate will fall somewhere between 40 per cent and 50 per cent over the year.

Our industry partner JBS Swift is the largest meat processor in Australia. It has recently recognised the demonstrated value that this DEEWR funded RAWS project has brought to the industry, by signing a new and more extensive Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with BFTB Projects. This new MOU allows for an additional 25 new positions. With a retention rate of 50 per cent over the subsequent 12 months, this would enable RAWS to place up to 37 participants in full time employment.

### **3. Original contractual requirements**

BFTB Projects’ present Indigenous Employment Program (IEP) contract with DEEWR, provides for fifteen participants from the Northern Territory and ten participants from the local area to be placed with Rockdale Beef for the duration of 12 months. All recruitment was to be completed within 3 months.

Rockdale Beef agreed to offer fifteen positions to disadvantaged young Aboriginals from remote northern communities. They were willing to look at providing additional positions once these fifteen positions had been filled.

Rockdale Beef made a decision to reject DEEWR’s call to employ ten locals through RAWS, stating that local Aboriginals are welcome to apply for a position at Rockdale Beef at any time, as they have always done. However, Rockdale will not employ local Aborigines under the same arrangements that have been negotiated for disadvantaged Aboriginal youth from remote northern communities.



After repeated applications by BFTB Projects, Rockdale Beef agreed for BFTB Projects to bring in ten young people from the western regions of NSW, beginning in late 2010. See Section 5.4 for further discussion on this matter.

## 4. Outcomes to date

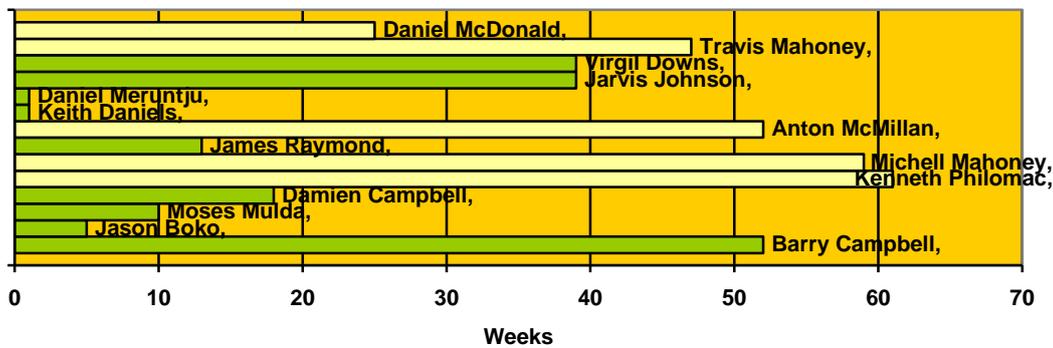
Boys from the Bush Projects (BFTB Projects) – Rural & Remote Area Work Scheme (RAWS) commenced operation in late September, 2009, with the first Northern Territory recruitment drive. Work placements began on 11 November, 2009, with Rockdale Beef which is located between the towns of Narrandera and Leeton in southern New South Wales.

### 4.1 Job placement outcomes – Northern Territory participants

The primary job placement outcomes achieved and the key events that occurred in relation to job placement and job retention for Northern Territory participants, are discussed in the following sections.

The following graph (Graph 1.0) illustrates the outcomes achieved by RAWS for the twelve months period from 2009-2010, followed by an analysis of these outcomes.

**Graph 1.0 Names and length of time Northern Territory participant have remained with Rockdale Beef/Riverina Beef 2009-2010**



Note: Participants who remain working for Riverina Beef are shown in pale yellow

- Fourteen young people from the Northern Territory were placed in full time employment at Rockdale Beef/Riverina Beef.
- Participant #13 from the Northern Territory was placed with Rockdale Beef on 12 March, 2010. Participant #14 was placed on 23 August, 2010. This delay in the recruitment of participant #14, and the return of participant #3 after he had recovered from a motor vehicle accident, was due to a number of factors. The primary reason was the lack of accommodation, as the flats and all the beds in the family group home were full.
- Eleven (78.5%) of the fourteen participants reached the three months (13 weeks) milestone.
- Eight (57.1%) of the fourteen participants reached the six months (26 weeks) milestone.



- Seven (50.0%) of the fourteen participants reached the nine months (39 weeks) milestone.
- Five (35.7%) of the fourteen participants remain in the Scheme.
- Five (35.7%) of the fourteen participants **have** completed their twelve months Participation [Responsibility] Agreement.
- Four (28.5%) of the five participants who have completed their twelve months Agreement remain working for Riverina Beef.
- Three (21.4%) of the fourteen participants who left the scheme prematurely have requested to return to the scheme.
- The financial benefit of eight Northern Territory participants working for six months has been calculated.
  - \* Savings on CDEP payments:  
Eight people x \$217 per week x 26 weeks = \$45,136
  - \* Savings on Activity Fee and CDEP Mgt:  
Eight people x \$135 per week x 26 weeks = \$28,080
  - \* Tax paid by participants (say avge salary \$40k pa):  
Eight people x \$115 per week x 26 weeks = \$23,920

**Total = \$97,136 or \$12,142 per person**

- \* Savings achieved by seven people completing nine months calculates at \$127,491 in total, or \$18,213 per person. This calculation does not include the additional three young people who have completed the three months (13 weeks) milestone.
- \* Savings achieved by five young people completing twelve months calculates at \$121,420 or \$24,284 per person. This calculation does not include the three young people who have completed the three months (13 weeks) milestone, and the three young people who have completed the six months (26 weeks) milestone, and the two young people who have completed the nine months (39 weeks) milestone.
- \* This compares to participant outcome payments by DEEWR of \$14,227 per person, excluding GST (and excluding the progress report payments).
- Participant #15 was a skilled participant from Queensland. He was placed with Rockdale Beef on 15 April, 2010, at the request of Rockdale Beef for a skilled person<sup>2</sup>, following the dismissal of participants #9 and #10 on 22 February, 2010, and the departure of participant #5 on 25 March, 2010. No claim for outcome payments was submitted to DEEWR for this 15<sup>th</sup> participant, nor has he been included in these statistics.

#### 4.1.1 Recruitment drive 2010

The RAWS manager departed for a New South Wales and Northern Territory recruitment drive on the 20 November, 2010. The following lists the activities and applicants assessed until his return to Narrandera on 14 January 2011.

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<sup>2</sup> Michael Tabuai was in the BFTB trial group in Wonthaggi, Victoria, from 2006 to 2008 whereby he gained Certificate II in Meat Processing (General), and Certificate III in Meat Processing (Boning). Shortly after BFTB left Wonthaggi in mid 2008, Michael was dismissed from Tabro Meats due to a deterioration in his work performance and absenteeism. He returned back home to Cairns where he remained unemployed for the next 1.5 years.



**Narrabri (New South Wales)**

On the 21 November, 2010, the manager briefed Summit Employment and Training staff about RAWS.

**Moree (New South Wales)**

On the 21 November, 2010, the manager repeated this briefing to Summit Employment and Training staff. He also conducted community based suitability assessments for Russell Christian aged 19, Shane Fernando aged 20, Troy Weribone age 16, Brogan Nixon aged 17, Brogan Nixon aged 17, Brandon Johnson aged 17, Kevin Prince aged 18, and Chris Smith aged 20.<sup>3</sup>

**Toomelah (New South Wales)**

On the 25 November, 2010, he conducted community based suitability assessments of Wesley McCrady aged 18, Shane Duncan aged 16, Ryan McCrady aged 16, Ewan McCrady aged 17, and Dylan Duncan aged 16.

**Dimbulah (Far North Queensland)**

On the 29 November, 2010, he conducted a site inspection of Northern Support Services residential rehabilitation Outstation program, and reviewed the progress of Kenneth Prince aged 20 from Moree, and Darrin Duncan aged 20 from Moree.

**Mossman (Far North Queensland)**

On the 30 November, 2010, he conducted a community based suitability assessment of Michael Kulka aged 17.

**Cairns (Far North Queensland)**

On the 1 December, 2010, he received the referral of Derek Koowootha aged 17 from Yarrabah.

**Camooweal (Western Queensland)/Alpurrurulam (Northern Territory)**

On the 7 December, 2010, he conducted community based assessments of Warren McDonald aged 22, Justyna Sampi aged 21, Jeremy King aged 16, Cameron King aged 27, Roderick Mahoney aged 19, and Troy Mahoney aged 18.

**Borroloola (Northern Territory)**

On the 10 December, 2010, he conducted community based assessment of Chris Rory aged 16, Clinton Shadford aged 18, Liam Hookey aged 16, Ronald Lee aged 19, Shane Charlie aged 18, Tremaine Riley aged 17, Jason Pyro aged 16, Wesley McDinny aged 21, Quinton Wory aged 18, and Kieran Isaac aged 16.

**Elliot (Northern Territory)**

On the 13 December, 2010, he conducted community based assessments of Alvin Ulamari aged 22, and Francis Kingston aged 18.

**Tennant Creek (Northern Territory)**

On the 14 December, 2010, he conducted community based assessments of Joseph Allum aged 18, Absalom Murphy aged 19, Brayden Club aged 22, Clievlan Stokes aged 16, Glen Waistcoat aged 19, Ronnie Nemo aged 18, Chad Western aged 16, Laurance Graham aged 16, Garnet George aged 17, and Clinton Western aged 23.

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<sup>3</sup> Names are included in this confidential report for specific verification purposes.



**Ali Curung (Northern Territory)**

On the 17 December, 2010, he conducted community based assessments of Kieran Rex aged 19, Thomas Presley aged 17, and Stamos Lane aged 18.

**Santa Teresa (Northern Territory)**

On the 18 December, 2010, he conducted community based assessments of Mike Wallace aged 21, Glen Smith aged 16, and Jason McMillan aged 16.

**Table 1.0 Recruitment drive summary**

<b>Recruitment Dive #3 Summary</b>	
Length of recruitment drive	29 days
Communities/towns visited	12
Promotion presentations	10
Community based suitability assessments	48

**4.1.2 Consideration given to job substitution**

An important factor in assessing the effectiveness of RAWS is to ascertain the success of these job placements, and if job retentions came at the expense of other individuals.

Substitution effects are usually an issue when seeking to understand the macroeconomic effects of labour market programs.<sup>4</sup> The following questions need to be asked;

- 1) had Rockdale Beef/Riverina Beef already committed to Indigenous employment targets, and therefore the positions offered to RAWS would have been filled by Indigenous job-seekers anyway; and
- 2) for that matter, would these job vacancies have been filled by non-Indigenous job seekers?

The short answer to both these questions is “no”. The issue here is not the outcomes achieved to date (increased Indigenous employment), but rather isolating the contribution of RAWS in order to accurately assess what additional contribution it is making to the labour market.

Rockdale Beef had no Indigenous employment target. Indeed it had no Indigenous employment strategy. Furthermore, none of these positions were Australian Employment Covenant (AEC) positions or Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) positions.

According to Australian Contracting Solutions (ACS), the general worker turnover rate at Rockdale Beef was in the vicinity of 80 per cent, or an approximately 20 per cent retention rate over twelve months. RAWS retention rate will fall somewhere between 40 per cent and 50 per cent over the twelve months period. This suggests that RAWS participants had taken up some Rockdale Beef positions that have been relinquished by non-Indigenous job seekers. Given that Rockdale Beef was recruiting job seekers throughout 2010, except for a few weeks in May, it is likely that RAWS participants were also taking up positions that could not be filled by non-Indigenous job seekers.

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<sup>4</sup> Hunter, B.H., Gray, M. and Chapman, B. (2000), ‘An analysis of data from the longitudinal survey of ATSI job seekers, Topic 3: Labour market programs and Indigenous Australians’. A Report to Department of Employment, Workplace Relations and Small Business, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra.



On the 20 September, 2010, JBS Swift took control of Rockdale Beef. Unlike Rockdale Beef, JBS Swift does have an Indigenous employment strategy. JBS Swift management stated that they employ a few Indigenous people, but kept no records on the actual number. We also see a situation where JBS Swift is increasing production, which will create a number of new positions, some of which BFTB Projects hopes to secure for RAWs' participants.

Director John Berry told the ABC News that "*Swift buys businesses to run them successfully. We're going to have to spend in excess of \$80 million in working capital to get this business (Rockdale Beef) back to where it needs to be*", he said. "... \$80 million will be spent on getting the feedlot numbers to back around 50,000 and buying grain and other issues." The plant is presently operating at fewer than 13,000 head of cattle. In other words, JBS Swift plans to create a number of new positions. They may even double their present staff numbers.

On the 20 October, 2010, JBS Swift signed off on a new Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that provides for 25 new positions offered to RAWs participants.

### 4.1.3 Consideration given to selection bias

Another important factor to assess is commonly referred to as selection bias. This factor acknowledges the probability that the achievements of RAWs is due, at least in part, to selection of the least disadvantaged job seeker, rather than improved outcomes for the most in need. This may be particularly relevant for RAWs because such selection is likely to be amplified if registered and voluntary job seekers, are asked to sign up to a one year work commitment in a meat processing plant far away from family and community.

Presumably, the least confident and least experienced job-seekers may find this requirement quite daunting. Selection biases are important in understanding the net effect of employment programs, because they increase the likelihood that outcomes will be skewed upward by those who may have found and maintained employment without intensive assistance.

For example, the Aboriginal Employment Strategy (AES) achieved a 24.8 per cent six months retention rate in 2006/07, a 32.1 per cent six months retention rate in 2007/08, and a 42.3 per cent six months retention rate in 2008/09.<sup>5</sup> This compares to the 57.1 per cent six months retention rate in 2009/10 achieved by BFTB Projects, but more importantly, BFTB Projects targets those youths experiencing far greater disadvantage.

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<sup>5</sup> Aboriginal Employment Strategy Ltd, 'Transforming Australian Workplaces', Annual Report 2009.



The following chart (Chart 1.0) reveals participants' circumstances at the time of RAWS recruitment.

**Chart 1.0      Income source, work experience, and education prior to joining RAWS 2009-2010**

	Receiving welfare benefit	Receiving CDEP payment	Receiving a training allowance	Experience in private sector employment	Experience on CDEP	Education
1.Jarvis	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	Year 11
2.Virgil	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	Year 11
3.Anton	No	No	No	No	No	Year 11
4.Kenneth	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Year 11
5.Travis	No	No	No	No	Yes	Year 9
6.Mitchell	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Year 10
7.Daniel Mc	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	Year 7
8.Barry	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	Year 8
9.Moses	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	Year 9
10.Jason	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	Year 8
11.Daniel M	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	Year 8
12.Keith	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	Year 8
13.James	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Year 8
14.Damien	No	No	No	No	Yes	Year 10
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>5</b>		<b>3</b>	<b>13</b>	

This chart reveals that at the time the fourteen participants from remote communities in the Northern Territory joined RAWS, five were receiving Newstart or Job Search Allowance, five were receiving CDEP payments, and four were receiving no income support. Of the fourteen participants, only three had previous experience in private sector employment.

These results confirm that BFTB Projects **is** targeting highly disadvantaged registered and voluntary job seekers.

#### 4.1.4 Consideration given to cultural accord

There are very few employment options for those young Indigenous people living in remote communities who would like to work outside the Community Development Employment Projects scheme (CDEP scheme). For young people to be assisted in taking up private sector employment, they must be willing and able to leave home and community for long periods of time.

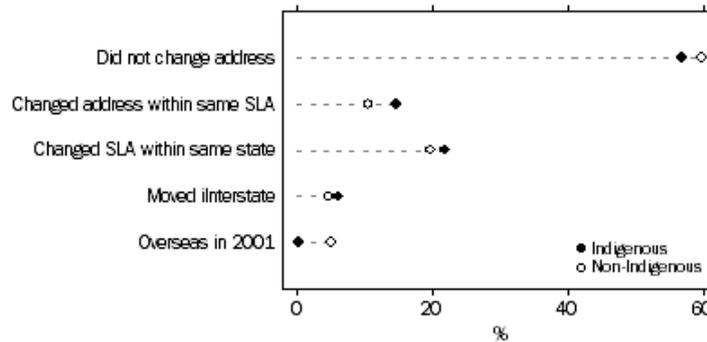
Hunter and Grey (2004) have argued that young Indigenous people are unable or unwilling to leave their home and community to enable them to gain mainstream employment, because of their strong social, cultural and spiritual links with their land and the complex social bonds which link Indigenous families and communities together.<sup>6</sup> But is this true?

<sup>6</sup> Hunter, B.H. & Gray, M.C. (2004). *Patterns of Indigenous Job Search Activity*. CAEPR Discussion Paper No. 263, CAEPR, ANU, Canberra.



Census data reveals that Indigenous mobility patterns are quite similar to non-Indigenous mobility patterns. In 2006, approximately 43 per cent of Indigenous people reported living at a different address as in 2001, compared with 40 per cent of non-Indigenous people. Of those who were living at a different address in 2006, about half of both Indigenous (51 per cent) and non-Indigenous (56 per cent) people had moved between Local Government Areas within the same state or territory. Non-Indigenous people were slightly less likely than Indigenous people to have moved within the same Local Government Area (66 per cent compared with 70 per cent), and almost equally as likely to have moved interstate (14 per cent for Indigenous people, 13 per cent for non-Indigenous people). See Figure 1.0 below.

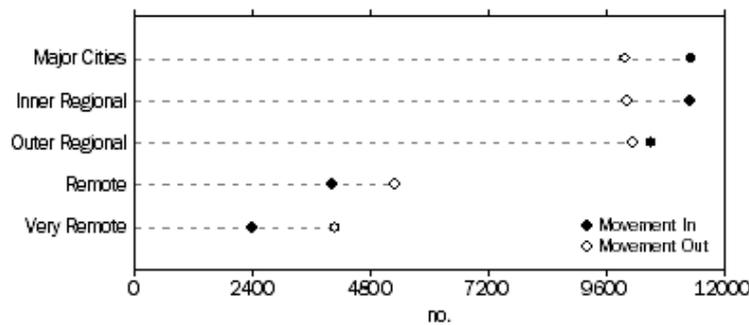
**Figure 1.0 Indigenous and non-Indigenous Mobility between 2001 and 2006 (a)**



(a) Persons aged five years and over in 2006 with a place of usual residence in both 2001 and 2006.

What about Indigenous people living in remote communities? Between 2001 and 2006, 12 per cent of Indigenous people aged over five years living in remote communities had moved between remoteness communities. During the same period, 3 per cent of Indigenous people moved from remote communities to less remote communities. See Figure 2.0 below.

**Figure 2.0 Indigenous movement in and out of remote areas (a)(b) 2001 and 2006**



(a) Based on 2006 SLAs and Place of usual residence 5 years ago concorded to 2006 Remoteness Areas.  
 (b) Persons aged five years and over in 2006 with a place of usual residence in both 2001 and 2006.

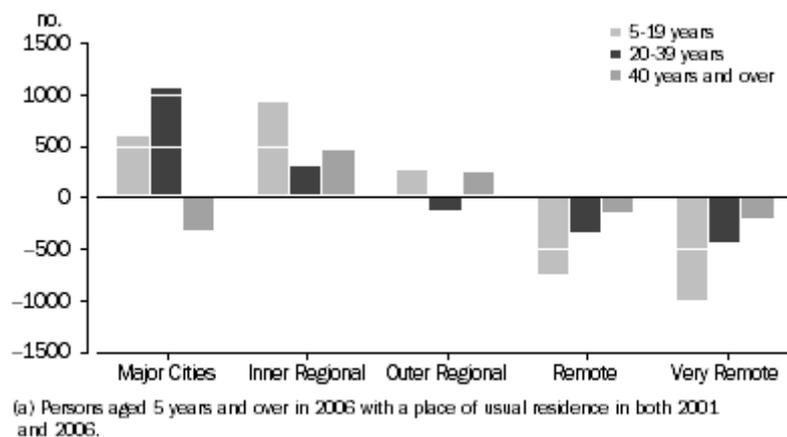
In relation to the rate and pattern of mobility for different age groups, Census data reveals that Indigenous people aged between five and nineteen years accounted for 43 per cent of net movement between remote communities, and were most likely to leave remote and very remote communities, accounting for 45 per cent and 57 per cent of the movement out of these communities. Mobility reduced with age, with 30 per cent of people aged forty years and over living at the same address as 2001.



One of the reasons for younger people moving away from remote and very remote communities is to attend school. Of Indigenous people aged between five and nineteen years who moved away from remote and very remote communities to inner regional areas, 8 per cent were counted at a boarding school or residential college/halls of residence. Indigenous people aged between twenty and thirty nine years were most likely to move to major cities.

Unlike the younger age groups, Indigenous people aged forty years and over had a net migration away from major cities, as well as remote and very remote communities, into inner regional and outer regional areas. See Figure 3.0 below.

**Figure 3.0 Net effect of Indigenous mobility 2001 and 2006(a) areas by age**



In conclusion, we can say that Indigenous people, particularly young people from remote and very communities are most definitely willing and able to leave home, similar to that of non-Indigenous people, and they are already doing so. The numbers of young people wanting to join RAWs is further testimony of their willingness to engage in economic mobility.

A second common myth is 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, Pearson asserts 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.”<sup>7</sup>*

Similarly, Johns (2006) says:

*“... the young who are simultaneously attracted to the trappings of modernity but ill-equipped in terms of their education or their values to move fully into the wider world ... are fast becoming a lost generation. They have rejected the world in which their elders find value, but they are not equipped to embrace the alternative. They are caught in a destructive—often self-destructive—limbo.”<sup>8</sup>*

<sup>7</sup> Pearson, N. (2000a). *Our Right to Take Responsibility*. Noel Pearson and Associates, Cairns Queensland. p.30.

<sup>8</sup> Johns, G. (2006). *Aboriginal Education: Remote Schools and the Real Economy*, The Menzies Research Centre. p16.



The results of RAWs speak for themselves. BFTB Projects have located a large number of young people who are willing to leave home for work in the meat processing industry, evidenced again by our recent recruitment drive (See Section 4.1.1).

In addition, our results confirm that young Indigenous people can successfully work in the private sector and live independently far from home and community, **provided they are removed from the distractions and negative influences of family and community and receive appropriate support and supervision in their new environment.** RAWs has proven that not all of these young people have “*Values, expectations and aspirations limited in this artificial [welfare] context*”, and not all of these young people are “*caught in a destructive—often self-destructive—limbo*”.

Our results also show that the younger inexperienced participants proved more resilient than one would have expected, and they are better able to accept the structural and task demands of private sector employment than many of the older participants who have had more exposure to various work and life skills programs.

### Cultural context and relatedness

Meat processing work was selected by BFTB Projects for its ability to engage young disadvantaged Indigenous job seekers, that best matches their preferences and aspirations.

Many young Aborigines, particularly those from remote northern communities, enjoy this type of work and they can be very good at it. They can be good at it for a number of reasons.

A) Young people in good health are usually strong and usually have good eyesight, good reflexes, good fine motor skills and good hand-eye coordination – all necessary attributes for good knife work.

B) Most young males from remote communities are accustomed to the slaughtering of wild animals for food, along with the accompanying sensations (texture, sights, sounds and smells) involved in this sort of work. You can see this taking place in the following pictures the RAWs manager took a number of years ago in the Torres Strait.



Photo of Boys from the Bush program participants butchering turtles in the Torres Strait in 2002

Today, like in traditional times, male prestige is associated with bringing home meat. This can be seen in the Torres Strait and throughout Aboriginal Australia.

C) The families of most Northern Territory participants have a historical connection to the pastoral (cattle) industry. It is on this point that the RAWs manager draws upon his earlier work in narrative therapy. Narrative therapists believe that people live their lives by stories, and no one’s life story is free from ambiguity or contradiction. The role of the therapist is to help search out more preferred stories from the client’s mass of experiences, and to elevate these alternative narratives to a more central position. The RAWs manager’s recruitment of young



people to work in the abattoirs involves him telling the story of how this type of work is part and parcel of what their great grandfathers, grandfathers, fathers and uncles were doing over the past 125 years, before the time of welfare and CDEP. Young applicants and their families are shown the above and below sets of pictures as part of the community based suitability assessment interview.



Photo of Boys from the Bush program participants working at Tabro Meats, Victoria, in 2007

It's a return to the 'golden age' when their families were the mainstay of the northern cattle industry. It's this historical connection that gives **context** and **relatedness**.

### Provision of peer group employment and production line work

Peer or mutual support is the sixth structural component of RAWs (see WPS Developmental Note #20 [www.boysfromthebush.org.au](http://www.boysfromthebush.org.au) / articles). This was recognised as an important factor at the time the Scheme was being first conceptualised in 1999. The RAWs manager's 2005 report on the first fruit picking trial in South Australia, stated;

*“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.”<sup>9</sup>*

Perhaps another way to describe these aspects of work dynamics, is to mention the distinction between **task behaviour** and **maintenance behaviour** used in group work theory. This theory purports that most group activities could be classified as either task behaviours, which are those behaviours directed towards the accomplishment of tasks, or maintenance behaviours which are those behaviours that are directed towards facilitating and providing emotional/psychological support to each other. Maintenance behaviours include **mutual aid** behaviours. In social psychology, there is a body of knowledge about what makes for an effective group and their potential to serve as a mutual aid system, which is separate to those interactions with the various surrounding social systems; described as task type behaviours. This has been recognised as a crucial factor for participants and is one of the primary structural components of the Scheme. These mutual aid systems include; sharing information, the dialectical process, discussing taboo areas, the all in the same boat phenomenon, developing a universal perspective, mutual support, mutual demand, individual problem solving, and rehearsal.

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<sup>9</sup> *A report on the trial of placing young Indigenous people from Cape York Peninsula region into private sector employment picking fruit in southern states*, by Milton James, April 2005.



A third common myth exposed by BFTB Projects is the belief that rural and remote Aboriginal youths are by nature simple people, yearning for the communal, contented to live in the haven of their own people, and therefore not wanting or unable to cope with a modern production line work. This is also false.

In assembly line work or production line work, the worker is required to follow a set routine at a constant pace; the line controls both the quality and quantity of the product with physical movement restricted to a few feet from one's 'station' on the line. This work does not require the workers to conceive, plan and initiate their work task. It is the line's speed, and the workers' separation from one another, that inhibits conversation and loafing. For young people with limited education, work skills, self discipline and work ethic, this type of work has proven to be ideal.



**Photo of BFTB Projects participants at their stations on the assembly line at Rockdale Beef 2010**

In his 2005 report titled; '*Report on the trial of placing young Indigenous people from Cape York Peninsula region into private sector employment picking fruit in southern states*', the RAWS manager touched upon the issue of participants working collectively versus working individually. He had noted back in 2005 that whenever participants were allowed to co-work or were placed on a collective contract, this would invariably result in a drop in the productivity of the better workers and only a marginal increase in the productivity of poorer workers. Employers were therefore advised by BFTB manager to work them separately.

This finding was confirmed with our Robinvale lettuce picking group (shown below) which ran for approximately seven months in 2006, without a single participant losing his job. How is that possible? One of the reasons, we believe, was due to the requirement to keep up with a moving machine which objectified the work, similar to production line work. If any one person started slowing down it would affect the work of others and they would have something uncomplimentary to say about it; including the owner-manager, driver, and other cutters and corers.





Photo of BFTB participants picking lettuce at Robinvale 2006

They all worked in close proximity to each other, but they all had to perform to a standard, and free loaders are not tolerated.

#### 4.1.5 Creating Social capital

RAWS can also be evaluated in terms of its ability to create social capital. **Social capital** is a sociological concept, which refers to connections within and between social networks. Though there are a variety of related definitions, they tend to share the core idea that social relations and values such as trust have worth. Just as a car (physical capital) or a university education (cultural capital) can increase productivity (both individual and collective), similarly social contacts affect the productivity of individuals and groups. This may include anything that facilitates individual or collective action, through networks of relationships, characterised by reciprocity, trust, and social norms. Strong social capital is necessary for a strong democracy and strong economic growth.

Evaluating the outcomes of RAWS in terms of the production of social capital will offer a broader appreciation of the Scheme's worth, and the government's purchase of the delivery of these connections.

This section of the report will now examine the strong connections that have taken place within and between four primary systems: 1) individual participants; 2) the family, friends and home community; 3) the work place; and 4) the local community of Narrandera and Leeton, which includes the Indigenous and non-Indigenous residents.

##### 1) Creating social capital at the individual level

There are those who mistakenly believe that we are all primarily motivated by economic reward and therefore placed emphasis on piece-work (linking an individual's remuneration directly to his output) so that workers had incentives to produce as much as possible within a given period. This belief oversimplifies the complex nature of human motivation, ignores cultural and social context, and has been superseded by those of the *human-relations school* which place importance on the influence of group norms and values. The human-relations school is closely associated with the name of Elton Mayo who published the results of the famous Hawthorne Experiments which concluded that the attitude of the workers and their feelings about their work were of strategic importance. Good relations and a positive atmosphere are responsible for high morale and good productivity. This has certainly been achieved with our abattoir group, as testified by Rockdale Beef and Riverina Beef management and workers.

Most participants are in their mid to late teenage years. These are impressionable years, which mean that some of the experience these young people have today will be remembered for the rest of their lives. Moreover, some of these experiences have, or are in the process of, shaping or



reshaping their thoughts, attitudes and behaviour. They have established new friendships with, or exposure to, people from all walks of life; people that they would not normally come into contact with, and through which they become exposed to new ideas, new ways of viewing or handling existing situations and challenges, i.e. we are creating new, more productive patterns of behaviour. This could only be to the benefit of these young people and to broader civic society. Viewing outcomes in these terms, placements that only lasted for three months may still be viewed as having some positive benefit. This is discussed again in Section 4.1.6 and 5.3 of this report.

## 2) **Creating social capital amongst family, friends and community**

When individuals from remote communities leave home to live and work in the mainstream, everyone in that community, and some people in neighbouring communities, get to hear about it. Should they hear that things are going well for that young person then this becomes a matter of pride for the family of the young person, and an inspiration to his friends and young relatives – someone they view as having ‘made it’.

Dick Estens, Chairman of the Aboriginal Employment Strategy (AES), recently said to the RAWs Manager “*Our one [Aboriginal] bank manager is worth fifty of your [meatworkers]*”. Estens was speaking about an AES client who had recently secured a position as a bank manager, and the positive impact that this would have on members of her extended family. Whereas, young people working in abattoirs would have a much less impact on members of their extended family. BFTB Projects strongly disagrees with Estens’ assertion.

The Estens status focus assumes that social reference groups have a trickle down effect on families, where it is evident that this is often not the case. Many of the professional and managerial class who may have arrived to their positions from working class backgrounds, tend to move class and develop identities within the groups with whom they work, at the expense rather than the benefit of their working class origins.

Many young Indigenous people living in remote communities are poorly educated and will continue to fall behind in the skills needed for successful participation in the mainstream work force and the non-welfare economy. There are now more Aboriginal young men in prison than there are at TAFE and at university. At best, most young people are destined for unskilled labouring positions.

This however, should not be viewed in any disparaging manner, or to see this as a reason for not engaging in any sort of work. The truth is not everyone is cut out to be a bank manager, professional or member of the intellectual elite, and besides, how many vacant bank manager positions are there? In the same manner, it's also silly to say to young people aged in their early to mid teens who can barely read and write and have a series of behavioural problems, to be told that if they go to school and study hard they could one day become a doctor, lawyer or engineer. This (in all but rare cases) is nonsense and just adds to the confusion, false hopes, disillusionment, and ultimately the sense of despondency or anger expressed by these young people. It is wrong to encourage young people to build their aspirations on fantasies.

Similarly, it is disingenuous to say to these young people that if you do well at sports you could be a Cathy Freeman or a Wendell Sailor one day. Very few young Indigenous people have made a successful career in sports. Nor is the use of privileged people like the young Australian of the Year, Tanya Major, originally from Kowanyama, likely to inspire the ordinary people living in remote communities. The RAWs manager knows Tanya personally and has worked in Kowanyama for many years, and he is unaware of a single person in Kowanyama who has followed Tanya’s lead. Privileged or exceptionally talented people do not make effective role models for those who are not privileged or talented. More effective role models are ordinary



people who are doing well; people that the average young person can identify with. BFTB Projects can name any number of young people who have been inspired by their older brother, cousin or uncle now working at Riverina Beef, and now asking for the opportunity to join them. The results of our recent recruitment drive provide evidence of this.

The BFTB Projects target group is young people disconnected from mainstream social structures and social networks, and who are trapped in small remote homogeneous systems, where social networks are characterized by weak social norms, low levels of trust, and high levels of demand reciprocity. BFTB Projects helps these young people by offering them an employment opportunity, physical and social mobility, and engagement in mainstream social structures and social networks. A number of these young people, in time, take on a form of 'bridging social capital' whereby it is they who hold the connections between other like minded family members and friends, and it they who can leverage the BFTB Projects and JBS Swift to allow these others to join them. BFTB Projects in turn encourages this sort of mutual leveraging to take place. This form of bridging social capital has the potential to grow exponentially.

### 3) **Creating social capital in the workplace**

John Ray, in a study to explain racism, noted that people with negative views of Aborigines tend to vote conservative and endorse statements of a generally conservative ideology. Older people, particularly males, do tend to have a more conservative orientation, and males too are probably more likely to see the world in a rather more Darwinian way. As they are more generally involved in economic struggle and competition, and therefore their attitudes may become more hardened.<sup>10</sup>

The meat processing industry is a labour intensive industry employing three unskilled labourers to every one skilled labourer. The RAWS' manager has noticed that meat process workers do tend to endorse statements of general conservative ideology, and they hold hardened attitudes towards Aborigines.

It can also be true that conservatives look down on Australian Aborigines because that is the traditional thing to do. Ray goes on to say;

*“Up until very recently, Aborigines have always been looked down on, so the conservative will continue to do so. Being cynical about man, conservatives are also less likely to make allowances for the characteristic behaviour differences between Aboriginal and white Australians. Where a radical might put higher Aboriginal unemployment and infant mortality down to difficulties of cultural transition, the conservative is more likely to conclude that Aborigines are simply lazy or stupid. In addition, given that Aborigines are in fact backward by the prevailing standards of white Australian culture, the conservative could simply claim that he is recognizing backwardness when he sees it. Radicals who regard this backwardness as being basically temporary or even praiseworthy he could with some justice call 'idealistic'. The conservative sticks to the reality whereas the radical concentrates on what might be or what might have been.”*

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<sup>10</sup> Ray, J.J. (1981) 'Explaining Australian attitudes towards Aborigines', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Volume 4, Number 3 July 1981, 348-352.



It would be fair to say that Rockdale Beef management and staff were, at the start, reticent if not cynical, about taking on young Aboriginals from the Northern Territory with no prior work experience and who can barely read and write. From this beginning, we now have a situation where both Rockdale Beef and Riverina Beef are very supportive of the Scheme and these young people. Paul Troja, General Manager/Director of Rockdale Beef stated in a letter to Barbara Livesey, Group Manager, Indigenous Strategic Group, DEEWR, that:

*“ ... the workers under the BFTB, are treated in the same way as any other workers, ... The BFTB workers all interact with the rest of the workforce, either at their workstation, during their breaks, or, as I understand, away from the workplace. We have found that, in general, the BFTB workers are willing workers, .... The BFTB program has delivered essential workers to Rockdale Beef, at the same time as providing opportunities for some of the most disadvantaged Australians. Rockdale Beef considers the outcome to be a win-win situation.”*

Riverina Beef has now agreed to provide an additional 25 RAWS positions to disadvantaged Aboriginal youths through RAWS, sight unseen.

In regards to the production of social capital, we have here two ethnically diverse groups of Australians, where one group at least (non-Indigenous management and staff of a meat processing plant) were generally holding poor opinions of, or lacking trust in, the other (young Aboriginals), but who are now, after a relatively short time, engaging in social relationships of mutual respect, trust and reciprocity. These qualities are a central dynamic of a healthy work environment and with high levels of productivity. This is the stuff of a good civic society. They are qualities by which unequal individuals can now unite around the shared objective of productivity and economic progress. Rather than the hitherto unequal relationship of producer-consumer versus despised dependency.

#### **4) Creating social capital within the community of Narrandera and Leeton**

In RAWS' Progress Report #1 the author mentioned that the two most challenging issues in establishing a work group in Narrandera would be:

- Members of the non-Indigenous community expressing concern about young Indigenous people coming into their community.
- Members of the local Indigenous community expressing concern about other young Indigenous people coming into their community.

Soon after our arrival in Narrandera, it became clear that we were dealing with not two, but five discrete groups that had relevance to our presence in the community:

- There was the group of non-Indigenous people that spoke of their town as a good town. They would say that they have a few problems with the local Aboriginal people, but no more or less than any other town. A number of them did, however, express reservation about these young Aboriginals people from the Northern Territory being brought into their good town.
- Then there was a small group of non-Indigenous people describing local Aboriginals as “a pack of useless mongrels”, describing the BFTB Projects manager as some sort of “bloody bureaucrat”, and expressing concern about BFTB Projects “bringing in more of the mongrels”. These people are the diehard cynics, intolerant, fearful of trespass, and with hardened attitude towards Aboriginals.
- Then there was a small group of local Aboriginals that were more or less agreeing with the above description of some members of the local Aboriginal community, but welcoming the young people from the Northern Territory.



- Then there was a group of local Aboriginals saying that Rockdale Beef is a racist company and this town is a racist town, describing the BFTB Projects manager to be like the old time Missionary Superintendent, and reserving their welcome of the young people from the Northern Territory. These people had established themselves around the maintenance of victimhood and continuance of racial division.
- Then there was a group of about fifteen very vocal, very provocative young people aged between ten and sixteen identifying as Aboriginals, and causing a great deal of trouble in the town. The parents of these children were members of the above group or closely associated with the above group.

BFTB Projects' primary concern was with the latter two groups. It was important that BFTB Projects be seen as a totally benign, independent, apolitical organisation, whose only concern was for the wellbeing of disadvantaged youths who needed a fair go. We did pay our respects to the representative of the local Indigenous community, but we did not engage ourselves in any community event without invitation, nor willing to go along with any of the divisive rhetoric from any one group. BFTB Projects has avoided being caught up in any conundrum by stating that our focus is on those young people that are clearly disadvantaged. One's identification as Aboriginal does not in itself provide eligibility to RAWs. We were therefore perceived as holding no threat or benefit to any one group or organisations' interests.

It was also helpful to us that there is no racial segregation of Aboriginal residential areas in Narrandera, unlike that of many towns throughout the country.

RAWs' participants were very effective in managing and helping to subduing the group of troublesome local youths. The Mayor of Narrandera agreed that RAWs' participants did play an important part in subduing this group, combined with interventions developed by the Narrandera Aboriginal Advisory Committee, plus the fact that many of their families were transient.

We now have a situation in Narrandera where we believe all members of the community hold good opinions of the young people from the Northern Territory. Similar to our relationship with the management and staff of Riverina Beef, all RAWs' participants are engaging in social relationships of mutual respect, trust and reciprocity, with a number of sectors of the local community, to everyone's mutual benefit. In essence, we have achieved a situation near to the ideal view of good civic life in a small country town, and the notion is central to high levels of social capital.

#### 4.1.6 Social inclusion/exclusion

RAWs can also be evaluated in terms of its ability to achieve social inclusion. One key aspect of social exclusion is unemployment and the lack of participation in the workforce. Jahoda and associates (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 Marienthal, 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 are like a pandemic sweeping across Aboriginal communities. According to Pearson, this stems largely from people's detachment from work and the real economy.



So how does participation in the workforce benefit RAWs participants? Jahoda and associates provide a comprehensive answer to this question. Work according to Jahoda, has both manifest and latent functions. The manifest function is **income**. The latent functions are **time structure, enlarged social experience, engagement in collective purposes, identity, and creativity**.

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. These studies have shown that unemployment does have a negative impact on people's mental health, not as an association but as a cause. This research also reveals that there are a number of demographic variables, which influences the nature and severity of the impact. For example, studies have 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, other studies found that emotional instability increased with the length of unemployment.

Another important demographic variable is culture. There appears to be little published evidence about commitment to the labour market among Indigenous Australians in comparison to non-Indigenous. 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. A look at places like Mitiujulu in the Northern Territory illustrates this point.

There was one interesting study by Warr and associates, 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. By comparison, young white males had a more positive attitude towards jobs and job seeking.

This finding concurs with our own experience with participants in RAWs. Warr and associates concluded that these differences reflect a more realistic adaptation to poor job prospects among the black sub sample. They observe that to "*Continually 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.*"

Another important demographic variable is age. Eisenberg and Lazarsfeld<sup>11</sup> 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. On the other hand unemployment, particularly long-term unemployment, had a discernible effect on their personality. These detriments included the tendency to become drifters, increased irritability, loss of ambition, an increase in female prostitution, criminality and homelessness. These behavioural traits concur with the findings of RAWs where better outcomes are achieved with young people under twenty years old compared to those over twenty years old. A good case in point was Keith Daniels aged 24 and Daniel Meruntju aged 22 from Titikala being sacked from Rockdale Beef within 48 hours of their arrival. To be fair, however, we should point out that both Kenneth Philomac and Barry Campbell were both aged 22 and they did complete their twelve months work placement.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Eisenberg, P. & Lazarsfeld, P.F. (1938). The psychological effects of unemployment. *Psychological Bulletin*, 35, 358-390. Sighted in Mitchell, D.P. & Betts, A. (2002). Youth employment, mental health and substance misuse: a challenge to mental health services. *Journal of Psychiatric and Mental Health Nursing*, 9, 191-198.

<sup>12</sup> Names are included in this confidential report for specific verification purposes.



More recent studies have shown that unemployed young people experience a decrease in self-esteem and increases in depression, from general poor health to serious chronic illness, impaired social competence, impaired learning, alienation, social exclusion, and psychological morbidity.

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. Secondly, it can lead to increasing the risk of suicide. Thirdly, 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 family or unemployment benefits rather than paid employment.

In summary, a thorough evaluation of the outcomes achieved by RAWs needs to take into consideration the high levels of social inclusion, achieved by placing participants into fulltime private sector employment, and the government's purchase of the delivery of these inclusions. Although not discussed above, this evaluation should also take into consideration the degrees of social inclusion achieved by placing participants in a functional mainstream community and the positive effect this would have, and continues to have, on participants. Again we argue that placements that only lasted for three months or so would still have a positive benefit to these young people.

#### 4.1.7 Outcome summary for Northern Territory participants

The evidence to date, on outcomes from the Northern Territory participants, show that this scheme has already achieved superior outcomes in line with Department program goals.

- Fourteen disadvantaged youths from the Northern Territory have been placed with Rockdale Beef/Riverina Beef. 50 per cent of these participants have passed the nine months continuous employment milestone with the majority of these (35.7 per cent) having completed their agreed twelve months continuous employment with Rockdale Beef/Riverina Beef.
- Four (28.5 per cent) of these young people remain working with Riverina Beef having completed their twelve months Participation Agreement. This is by any measure a good outcome.
- JBS Swift report having achieved only a 5 per cent retention rate for six months with their previous trial at another location.
- The departure of two young people from the scheme after nine months for a funeral was disappointing, but it has raised a number of important issues and has provided additional insight into the problem. Regular attendance at funerals and failure to return to work after funerals has been a long stand problem with Aboriginal people, this practice has harmed their employment reputation, and frustrated efforts to close 'The Gap' on employment. This is discussed in detail in Section 5.7 - The matter of funerals.
- In addition to the number of job placements, and the range in the rates of job retention, RAWs has achieved significant outcomes in the production of social capital within individuals, within the workplace, within the home community, and within the host community. It has also achieved superior outcomes in improving social inclusion and lessening degrees of social exclusion.

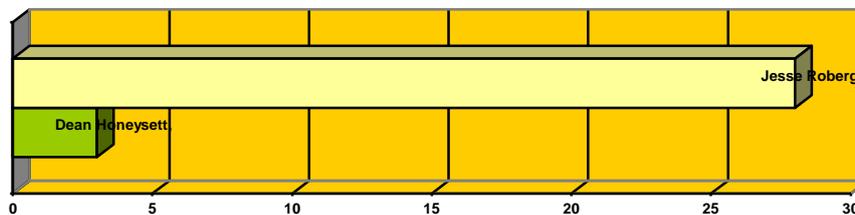


## 4.2 Job placement outcomes – New South Wales participants

The primary job placement outcomes achieved, and events that occurred in relation to job placement and job retention for New South Wales participants, are discussed in the following section.

The graph below (Graph 2.0) shows that only two young people from New South Wales were placed with Rockdale Beef. There were, however, a number of other activities taking place which have been noted below.

**Graph 2.0 Length of time New South Wales participant have remained with Rockdale Beef/Riverina Beef 2009-2010**



Note: Participants who remain working for Riverina Beef are shown in yellow

- Four applications were received from Wagga Wagga and one application was received from Wentworth. All received a suitability assessment and provided with pre-employment preparation training. (Four of these applicants had received pre-employment preparation training before Rockdale Beef ruled that it will not employ locals through RAWs.<sup>13</sup> See Section 5.6 of this report for a detailed discussion.
- One of the Wagga Wagga applicants was placed into employment with Rockdale Beef, along with the applicant from Wentworth.
- Graph 2.0 depicts outcomes of the New South Wales participants thus far:
  - \* One (50.00%) of the two participants remain in the Scheme.
  - \* One (50.00%) of the two participants passed the twenty six weeks (6 months) milestone.
- Dean Honeysett from Wagga Wagga was placed with Rockdale Beef on 13 July, 2010. He left his employment on 4 August, 2010, after only eleven days work.
- Jesse Roberg from Wentworth was placed with Rockdale Beef on 3 August, 2010. He remains working for JBS Swift and lives independently.
- A recruitment drive took place in Walgett in early 2010. The first referral for a suitability assessment was received from Walgett in January, 2011.
- Two referrals were received from Summit Employment and Training in Moree in September, 2010. Both applicants were interviewed in Canberra. Both applicants tested positive for cannabis on a urine drug test. At the request of the applicants they were sent to Far North Queensland to a user pays twelve weeks residential drug rehabilitation program where they could also obtain fruit picking work. The outcome of this intervention proved to be disappointing. Both participants remained for only five of the twelve weeks. In that time they resisted paying for their own board and keep, and refused the offer of local fruit picking work.

<sup>13</sup> Note: Rockdale Beef make their own business decisions based upon their own criterion.



- A second recruitment drive took in Narrabri, Moree and Toomelah in November, 2010 and again in January, 2011. A number of referrals for suitability assessments were received from Moree and Toomelah. Nearly all were regular cannabis users. In total, ten applicants were subjected to a suitability assessment. Two applicants were offered the opportunity to do fruit picking work in Griffith as part of their suitability assessment. Both accepted the opportunity and were provided with accommodation at the Griffith International Backpackers Hostel. The outcome of this intervention was successful in that it helped to more effectively assess young people's suitability for meat processing work. One young person left after the first day saying that cherry picking was too hard. The second young person worked for two weeks after which he was returned home for Christmas. He remains in Woree waiting to join RAWs. See Section 5.4 for discussion around the further development of this intervention.
- Arrangements are presently being arranged for the Walgett applicant to be sent to Griffith for fruit picking work in order to provide him with work while the cannabis residue passes from his body.

### Important lessons in regards to Dean Honeysett of Wagga Wagga

Dean Honeysett was 19 years old and lived with his mother in Wagga Wagga. He left school in early 2004; never completing year 8. Since leaving school he has never held a job, and spent much of his time in and out of the Children's Court, including a number of months in the local Juvenile Justice Detention Centre.

Dean is now a young man that habitually seeks to turn supportive relations with adults into an adversary relationship; i.e. regularly engaging in provocative, rude and disrespectful behaviour, seemingly for no apparent reason.

Dean is overweight, a heavy smoker, drinks copious amounts of soft drink and deep fried chips. He plays no sport nor engages in any exercise. He was unable to wake up in the morning for work without assistance; alarms don't work for him.

At work, Dean behaved as the RAWs' manager expected. His Rockdale Beef supervisor had no issue with his work performance. That is, his work performance for the two weeks he worked in the Rockdale Beef Tripe Room on Green Offal appeared to be on par with other RAWs' participants when they first arrived. This is consistent with the author's assertion that young Indigenous people from welfare dependent families with little or no work experience, can still be successfully assisted to take up mainstream private sector employment. Although a number of Northern Territory participants anticipated that he would not last long, saying to the RAWs' manager that he was too lazy, and complaining about the job being too hard and having to stand all day.

In Progress Report #3, the RAWs manager warned that; *"If local Indigenous young people were not required to function within the RAWs peer support mechanism then divisions would arise."* This statement was made in the context of local participants being placed into alternative non-abattoir employment, away from the Northern Territory participants. The RAWs' manager stated that the likely consequence of individuals operating outside of the RAWs peer support mechanisms *"would be the creation of a two class system, or an 'us and them' division. This division would be based not only on place of birth, but possibly on other sub culture characteristics."* As it turned out, Dean was placed at Rockdale Beef with the Northern Territory participants, but, due to him being a local resident he was able to very quickly partition himself away from the other participants. This was a foreseen problem.



- On weekends Dean would return to his mother's home in Wagga Wagga. This was greatly resented by the other participants. In addition, it was perceived by the other participants that while he was in Wagga Wagga he was engaging in behaviours that were prohibited to the other participants.
- Using his local status, Dean immediately established alternative transport arrangement to and from work, rather than travel with the Northern Territory participants in the work bus.
- After work, Dean would leave the other participants and spend time with friends and their family in Narrandera, which added to Dean's separation from the Northern Territory participants.
- In his final days he even sought to eat separately from the other participants. He would not come for dinner when called, saying he is not hungry, but as soon as the group finished their meal, he will come out from his room demanding his dinner. When there was none available, he insisted that he eat some of the food set aside for the nightshift workers.
- In his final days he refused to help clean up the house or his own mess, and began accusing the other participants of the mess that he created.
- On his second week he talked to other participants about anticipating "chucking a sickie".

It is important to point out that much of this behaviour did not occur, nor could it occur, with Jesse Roberg who came from Wentworth in New South Wales. This is due to a combination of lack of family proximity, and reduced contrast between dysfunctionality of the community and provided opportunity.

#### 4.2.1 Outcome summary for New South Wales participants

- Due to events beyond the control of BFTB Projects, we have managed to only place two young people from New South Wales into the fulltime employment of Rockdale Beef/Riverina Beef. One of these young people has passed the six months milestone of continuous employment and lives independently in Narrandera.
- The development of a trusting and fully cooperative relationship with our industry partner, Rockdale Beef, has taken longer than desired, especially relating to employment of local New South Wales clients. See Section 5.2 - The problem of cannabis users, and Section 5.6 - Rockdale Beef's refusal to employ local Aboriginal people through RAWS.
- The New South Wales clients appear to have similar employment barriers as Northern Territory participants, but they have proved to more frustrating in relation to individual issues of resistance and self destructive behaviours, as a result they have consumed more of our resources than the Northern Territory participants. Families and Indigenous Community Organisations also tend to be less supportive of the program, with a higher component of self destructive local politics. In addition, it appears there is less support for youth mobility and less interest in meat processing work at the local level.
- It would appear that the widespread use of cannabis by our target group is going to be a major impediment to their admission into the meat processing industry; greater than the Northern Territory participants. This is likely due to their proximity to the supply. A number of strategies are being developed to deal with this issue. See Section 5.4 – The development of a fruit picking group for those who test positive for drugs, and Section 5.5 – The development of a drug rehabilitation program for those who test positive for drugs.



## 5. Discussion on other issues

### 5.1 The potential threat imposed by 457 visa workers

JBS Swift has advised BFTB Projects that the company intend to bring in foreign workers under the 457 visa program into Riverina Beef meat processing plant, presumably to take up newly created positions of boners, slicers and slaughterman.

New regulations now see boners and slicers identified as skilled workers under the 457 visa process. The majority of young people placed into Riverina Beef by BFTB Projects were moved up to the job of boning, slicing, or on the slaughter floor, within nine months. These are tasks that can be mastered by RAWs participants relatively quickly. This is exactly what the Australian Meat Industry Employees Union was on about when they 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 of time.

Section 8.63 of the *Labour Agreement for Entry of Skilled Meat Workers in Australia* states that;  
 "...under this Agreement, the Meat Processing Company must have demonstrated the following to the satisfaction of the Commonwealth in regards to each Meat Processing Establishment:  
 (iv) they have an effective plan which will, over the Term of Operation of this Agreement, aim to reduce their reliance on temporary overseas workers, and increase training and employment of Australians, **including indigenous Australians, the long-term unemployed** (bold added) and ..."

Section 8.63 of the *Labour Agreement for Entry of Skilled Meat Workers in Australia* states that;  
 "The Meat Processing Company must over the life of the Agreement:  
 (iii) participate in initiatives facilitated by DEEWR's Industry Strategy Branch to promote employment and training opportunities to Humanitarian entrants, **Indigenous and long-term unemployed job seekers** (bold added)."

These clauses are highly relevant to the operation of RAWs. BFTB Projects recognizes that meat processing plants have high staff turnover. This employee impediment restricts the industry from reaching its full potential. BFTB Projects can appreciate the fact that if meat processing plants cannot find workers from near by, they will look for workers living in other parts of the country. If they cannot find workers in other parts of the country, they will bring them in from overseas.

However, we encourage JBS Swift and the Federal Government to note that two of our participants are holding positions as trainee boner and slicer. In addition, two of our participants are holding positions as trainee slaughterman, or as labourers on the slaughter floor. This provides RAWs with 28.5 per cent of total participants taking up skilled positions within twelve months. This confirms what BFTB Projects has consistently maintained, while also giving support to the claim made by the Australian Meat Industry Employees Union.

The Institute of Public Affairs stated in 2008 that the cost of foreign labour via a 457 Visa is in the range of \$17,000 to \$30,000 per applicant. The costing for each RAWs participant will come in at approximately \$17,000 per participant, per annum, which makes RAWs not only competitive with the cost of acquiring foreign labour, but with the comparative economies of scale significantly cheaper in many cases.



## 5.2 The problem of cannabis users

The 1994 National Drug Strategy Household Survey found the lifetime prevalence of illicit drugs for urban Aboriginals was 50 per cent. The proportion of urban Aboriginals who have used illicit drugs in the past twelve months was 24 per cent compared with 15 per cent in the general population (MCDS 2001). The 1998 National Drug Strategy Household Survey reported that 28 per cent of Aboriginal people used cannabis in the year before the survey (AIHW 1999). This suggests that cannabis use by Aboriginals is alarmingly high and is on the increase. There is very little research about the illicit drug use by rural and remote Aboriginals even though it is a known problem. Anecdotal reports suggest that in many communities, the majority of juveniles are regularly using cannabis. The Maningrida police in the Northern Territory estimated in 2004 that one-quarter of Centrelink payments were spent on cannabis (Andrews, 2005).

Meat processing plants are strictly enforced drug and alcohol free zones, and most employers are now conducting pre-employment drug tests and random tests thereafter on all employees. This is due to the detrimental effects drugs have on work performance. Those with positive readings usually have their application for employment rejected, or their present employment terminated or suspended. This makes it difficult for RAWs, as it means that a majority of our target group will be rejected or deferred, due to their recent or regular use of drugs.

BFTB Projects earlier fruit picking trial groups did not require applicants to pass a drug test before they were accepted into the scheme, as this was not a requirement of employing fruit growers. Instead, our focus was on helping participants to abstain from further use once they entered the Scheme. This was achieved through a combination of proximity to the supply, loss of privileges, chores, loss or delay of work promotions, separation from the main group (time-out), counselling and fines for those who have breached the prohibition rule.

In 2007, BFTB Projects began closing down the horticultural groups in favour of meat processing groups. A problem occurred when a number of participants in the horticultural groups tested positive for cannabis, which prevented them from being transferred to an abattoir group. To overcome this problem, Tabro Meats in Victoria agreed to host what became known as the 'Drug Trial'. To enter the Drug Trial, participants had to consent to regular blood drug testing that measure the level of cannabinoids (and other drug substances) over time. Should the level of cannabinoids decline to zero over the following three months they would retain their employment with Tabro Meats, subject to periodic urine tests thereafter. A stationary or an increase in the level of cannabinoids is evidence of continuous drug use, and they would be immediately dismissed from the abattoir or returned back to our fruit picking group in Robinvale or Renmark. The Drug Trial proved to be very effective way of dealing with an awkward problem. It was later extended to new applicants placed directly into meat processing plants.

The present problem we have is that the Drug Trial can not be used at Riverina Beef, and nearly all New South Wales applicants to RAWs have tested positive for cannabis, or admitted to regular or recent usage. To say to these young people that they can reapply after staying off the drug for up to three months, while leaving them in the same pro-drug use environment, is setting most of them up to fail, particularly if their drug usage is driven by certain social dependency or peer pressure.

For low to moderate users, peer pressure appears to be a major driving force. Once the peer pressure stops the behaviour will stop. A number of young people from different communities have told the RAWs manager how they were "forced" to sniff (or smoke dope) under the threat of being "bashed", "put-down" or simply excluded from the group. When these boys were released from that pressure, or on those occasions where they were able to release themselves, their sniffing or dope smoking immediately stopped. This is illustrated in the following statement



made to the RAWs manager by a young person from Mossman Gorge, in Far North Queensland, 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.”*

Faced with this problem in relation to New South Wales applicants, BFTB Projects joined forces with Summit Employment and Training to run two separate trials. One trial consisted of sending two applicants from Moree who were heavy users of cannabis to a drug rehabilitation Outstation Station in Far North Queensland for three months. The other trial consisted of sending two applicants from Moree who were low users of cannabis to fruit picking work in Griffith, New South Wales.

The results were promising. The two that were sent to Far North Queensland stayed off drugs for five weeks, before walking out and demanding that Summit Employment and Training send them to live with relatives in Canberra, where they will look around for work. The second two that were sent to Griffith had a mixed success. One said that cherry picking was too hard and returned home to Moree after one day’s work. The second remained working for two weeks before being sent home by Summit Employment and Training for Christmas and for the lack of work. See Section 5.4 for discussion of the development of fruit picking groups as a drug dry out group.

### **5.3 Some communities are particularly difficult**

There are communities, like Mutitjulu, in the Northern Territory, which are particularly difficult to deal with. That is to say, there are hardly any young people willing to engage in education or work, nor are they willing to leave their region for any length of time. In addition, many of them already have a partner (promised wife) and a child.

BFTB Projects has argued that passive welfare does not just involve unconditional income transfers from governments to recipients. Passive welfare also involves a mode of government and non-government service delivery, which is largely founded upon patronising and infantilising Aboriginal people. Mutitjulu is one of several communities that have been unwittingly wracked by welfare and this mode of service provision.

As the RAWs’ manager has said on other occasions, most, if not all, young Aboriginal people in communities like Mutitjulu and their families, have in the course of their lives come into regular contact with a number of government operated and government funded welfare programs. This has on many occasions produced something of a paradox: even though these 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. This rarely happens with RAWs, as the mothers of Virgil Downs and Jarvis Johnson discovered to their great annoyance. See Section 5.7 of this report.

We believe that in places like Mutitjulu modified intervention, at arms length from government and non-government modes of service delivery that patronises and infantilises Aboriginal people, should be considered. Interventions whose goals are not easily corrupted by its recipients, but modified so that they are within the young person’s capabilities. For example, reducing the work



placement period to three months, and allowing their partner and child to accompany them for this period, and perhaps placing the young person in horticultural work first and then transfer him to meat processing work if things work out.

#### 5.4 The development of a fruit picking group for those who test positive for drug

Boys from the Bush program had successfully operated a series of fruit picking groups in South Australia and Victoria commencing in May, 2005. Over the following three years, it placed over one hundred and fifth participants from rural and remote northern communities into unsubsidised horticultural work.



Photos of BFTB participants engaged in horticultural work 2005-2007

In 2005 and 2006 participants were on six months Participation [Responsibility] Agreements, and the retention rate in 2006 was 74 per cent.

The horticultural industry was chosen for its abundance of unskilled work believed to be ideal for unskilled Indigenous youths lacking in formal education and work experience.

There were a number of factors that seriously hampered the development of these groups, they included; lack of skilled on-site supervisors, a number of young people with very difficult behaviour, huge seasonal fluctuations and gaps in employment, low wages, weather conditions, shortage of accommodation, severe reduction in the allocation of irrigation water due to the deepening drought which had a significant impact on employment; and loss of national and international fruit and vegetable markets (i.e. reduction in the USA fresh citrus market and national citrus juice market due to cheap imports) which had a significant impact on employment. To overcome these problems our employer base was expanded with participants working in the timber industry in Albany, Western Australia, and the meat processing industry with work groups in Bordertown, South Australia, Wonthaggi and Cobram, Victoria.

Based on our experience with the horticultural industry, Summit Employment and Training has sought to develop a collaborative relationship with BFTB Projects in order to help them develop a horticultural group in Griffith, New South Wales, of young Indigenous people that can work alongside their harvest trail services for overseas backpackers.

BFTB Projects has agreed to assist for the benefit of our target group as an adjunct to our meat processing group **for those testing positive for drugs.**



The BFTB Project manager's Developmental Note #7 dated July 2005, and Developmental Note #30 dated December 2005, discussed the development of a two tier suitability assessment. Tier 1 assessment was the community based assessment that consisted of criteria and professional judgement. Tier 2 assessment was based on observation of actual performance. This second tier assessment was carried out over a three week period on the job.

This tier 2 assessment was abandoned after a few months as there was **no** significant difference between the number of participants assessed as **suitable** at the completion of this second tier assessments and no longer in the scheme, and the number of participants assessed as **unsuitable** at the completion of this second tier assessments and no longer in the scheme. In other words, these second tier assessments were not very effective at identifying suitable and unsuitable participants. Furthermore, and perhaps the greater flaw in the concept, was that second tier assessment were in effect a probationary period, and it made little sense to send someone home at great expense to taxpayers if they had failed their probationary period, and the effect this would have on other participants.

The development of this horticultural group in Griffith, as an adjunct to our meat processing group is not for the purpose of assessment for entry into the meat processing group. Its purpose is to provide applicants who test positive for drugs with alternative temporary employment while they are waiting for all traces of drugs pass from their bodies, which may take up to three months.

## **5.5 The development of a drug rehabilitation program for those who test positive for drugs**

Experience has shown that there are a number of young people in rural and remote communities whose drug and alcohol use has reached a stage of social dependency, if not a physiological addiction. To place these young people directly into unsubsidised fruit picking work living independently in a backpacker hostel, would be setting these young people up to fail. For these young people, they will be provided with the alternative of being sent to Far North Queensland to a residential rehabilitation program on an Outstation owned by an elderly Aboriginal couple, and supported by Northern Support Services. Their three months program provides participants with the following components:

- Nutrition/diet
- Development of a daily routine
- Psychosocial counselling
- Regular exercise
- Correct posture (Alexander technique)
- EG biofeedback
- Work activities

Northern Support Services is willing to work with BFTB Projects in receiving selected individuals, but they require BFTB Projects to take charge of the development of their work activity component. BFTB Projects has in mind the re-activation of our bush oils enterprise as the work activity.



## 5.6 Rockdale Beef's refusal to employ local Aboriginal people through RAWS

RAWS Progress Report #3 discussed the matter of Rockdale Beef refusing to employ local Aboriginal youths through RAWS. Even though RAWS has limited experience with NSW participants; we are able to offer some useful comments about this matter.

Progress Report #3 discussed Rockdale Beef's refusal to employ local Aboriginal youths through RAWS in some detail. To summarise, Rockdale Beef management consider local Aboriginal youth unemployment as largely **voluntary unemployment** and therefore not eligible to take part in the RAWS program. The view is that local Indigenous youths are unemployed as a result of their own behaviour. The Plant Manager candidly told BFTB Projects "*they have had their chance*". Meaning that the company has taken on local Aboriginals in the past, and it didn't work out. The company is now very wary about employing local Indigenous youths and has completely ruled out their participation in the RAWS program.

Australian Contracting Solutions (Rockdale Beef's contracted employment agency) have reported to RAWS in relation to serious conflicts with some local Aboriginal employees and of their steadfast and earnest desire to never revisit those dreadful times.

Rockdale Beef perceives that many Aboriginal youths living in remote communities are unemployed as a result of **structural unemployment**. That is to say; there are not enough jobs in the local labour market for everyone who wants one. For this reason the company has agreed to employ these young people through RAWS sight unseen.

The disparity between the local and remote northern labour market is undeniable. But this is not the issue here. The issue is that Rockdale Beef is unwilling to offer any special concession to local Aboriginal people and their family members, due to the past behaviour of some members of the local Aboriginal community. Nor are they willing to employ local Aboriginal youths on the basis of merit, who then become participants of RAWS, if this has been prearranged.

A proposal to bring in some Aboriginal youths from remote areas of New South Wales was presented to Rockdale Beef, but this was also rejected on the grounds that these remote areas of New South Wales, are not as remote as communities in the Northern Territory.

For the most part, this situation remained unchanged until the 10 May, 2010, when Mr Paul Troja, General Manager & Director of Rockdale Beef wrote a letter to Ms Barbara Livesey, Group Manager, Indigenous Strategies Group, of DEEWR giving praise to the Scheme and declaring the company's interest in holding on to the Scheme. It was this open pronouncement that the Scheme had a worth to the company that provided BFTB Projects with an opportunity to present the fact that BFTB Projects was looking seriously at relocating the entire group to another abattoir if a compromise could not be reached on the inclusion of NSW participants. Soon after, Rockdale Beef agreed to allow BFTB Projects to bring in young people from western NSW. Why western NSW? Because, Rockdale Beef believed that young people in the western regions of NSW had fewer opportunities.

It is interesting to note that DEEWR's response to Rockdale Beef's refusal to employ locals through RAWS was to seek a contractual change in the RAWS contract to try and place locals into alternative local employment. This was a strangely naïve response to a complex situation.

It is hoped that this story will serve as lesson for a number of people and organisations, including DEEWR.



Members of the local Aboriginal community who heard about this situation were wrongly asserting that Rockdale Beef was a racist company. But BFTB Projects does not support this view. It was true that Rockdale Beef management disliked the idea of giving favour to Aboriginal people per se. But it is precisely because Rockdale Beef management were not racists that they rejected the demands of those people, who choose to identify as Aboriginal to receive preferential treatment on the basis of their Aboriginal identity.

The RAWS' manager did in fact speak to a number of local people identifying themselves as Aboriginal, and questioned them on their assertion that Rockdale Beef was a racist company. The RAWS manager can recall one conversation vividly. The writer said to this person; *"How can you say that Rockdale Beef is racist when they employ all these young people from the Northern Territory sight unseen?"* The man replied; *"But they won't employ local Aboriginals."* I replied; *"But they do, I have met a number of local Aboriginals working out there."* The man scoffed and said; *"They're all coconuts working out there ... you know, white on the inside but black on the outside."* Without realising it, this man had just exposed the nature of the real problem - an attempt to try and pass off the deviancy of individuals as **the** nature of Aboriginal people rather than the nature of those individuals. (To help the reader better understand this sort of problem we have included in Appendix I an extract from a note written by the RAWS manager a few years ago.) To add further complication, this man had no identifiable physical features that would identify him of Aboriginal descent – he was not black on the outside. An additional twist to this tale was that Rockdale Beef management were incapable of identifying all the local persons who were identifying themselves as Aboriginal, unless they were told that certain people were identifying themselves as Aboriginal. We do indeed live in complicated times.

It is interesting how JBS Swift also knocked back the attempt by BFTB Projects to introduce the following two clauses into our Memorandum of Understanding.

\* *"In the event that a young person leaves their employment without notice, and there are no other significant concerns, then that person may return to work after nine months."*

\* *"That participants not be penalised for a late return (overstay) from approved bereavement leave, if it has been established that the late return was not of the young person's choice and beyond his or her control."*

Both of these clauses were rejected by JBS Swift in favour of reviewing situations on a case by case basis. Our reason for trying to introduce these clauses were to secure additional concessions for our target group on the basis of their special circumstances, but our attempt to formalise any concession was rejected.

We cannot deny the fact that special services, and concessions, created on the basis of racial identity are being seriously questioned, particularly as the construction of Aboriginal identity is becoming less and less founded on cultural differences or differences of appearance, and increasingly founded on the assertion of an ethnicity based on past ancestry.

The integration of Indigenous with non-Indigenous people is taking place at a rapid rate as never before, with an inevitable homogenising effect on how people look and live. Peter Sutton, for example, talked about 2006 Census data that reveal the percentage of Indigenous women in Sydney whose partners were non-Indigenous had reached 83.9 per cent, and those of men 82.3 per cent. Sutton said;

*"But just because people look and live more and more like those who claim no Indigenous ancestry, and are increasingly integrated culturally, socially and economically into wider Australia community, this is not resulting in a diminishing of Indigenous identification. For example, in the 1996 Census, 87 per cent of children of interracial unions were identified as Aboriginal."*

As we know, life is full of trials and tribulations, and not everyone is going to get what they want. We are then left to contemplate on how well we fared in our transactions and give explanation



for our success or otherwise. To admit to ourselves that our failure was due to an innate weakness or deficiency can at times be very difficult. There are however, ways of handling information to make it appear more agreeable; to allow ourselves to view a disturbing event in a less disturbing manner. Such defences are usually normal and healthy. They help us survive stress. Without them we would be exposed to the full intensity of every disturbance or trauma.

The term defence mechanism was coined by Sigmund Freud. He argued that it was necessary for us to distort reality in some way in order to protect ourselves from unacceptable thought and unwanted realities. Twisting the truth may be wrong, but some misrepresentation seems to be necessary for our psychological well being. In general, social workers and psychologists do not consider the use of defence mechanisms to be inappropriate or unhealthy, unless it causes harm to the self or others.

This is the situation with a number of people living in Narrandera. Rather than admit to themselves that their inability to obtain or maintain employment at Rockdale Beef is of their own making, they have chosen to distort the truth by saying that it was due to their racial identification, even though there is no apparent physical or cultural difference between those not of Aboriginal descent that have also been unable to obtain or maintain their employment at Rockdale Beef, of which there are many. Rockdale Beef had a turnover rate of around 80 per cent.

JBS Swift took control of Rockdale Beef on the 20 September, 2010, and they have imposed no restrictions on recruitment location. However, JBS Swift does remain strongly focused on work performance.

## 5.7 The matter of funerals

On the 13 November, 2010, Virgil Downs and Jarvis Johnson of Ali Curung were contacted by their adoptive mothers, who told them that their natural father had passed away and that they had to return home immediately. The moment they received the call, they were off, or at least they tried to take off. They didn't bother to give notice to their employer. In fact they didn't even mention anything to their work mates. They simply packed their bags and went straight down the street to catch the first available flight or bus back home. Virgil and Jarvis had been in the Scheme for exactly nine months.

This sort of behaviour was in breach of the RAWS Participation [Responsibility] Agreement protocol, as agreed to by this family. The reason it got to this point was because the RAWS' manager was away on a recruitment drive. However, the manager did catch wind of what was going on, and he immediately rang their senior uncle in Ali Curung to point out that his family was in breach of the protocol in regards to funerals. The uncle acknowledged their breach of the agreed process and instructed the boys to remain in Narrandera, and return back to work until they receive further instruction.

When the RAWS' manager questioned the mothers of these two youths on their role in the breach of protocol, they denied any understanding of the protocol, or that leaving their employment without notice for up to three months to attend a funeral was unacceptable. They said; *"But nobody told us we couldn't do this."* This of course was not true, and it was clear to the RAWS' manager that these women were not accustomed to being brought to account, and they didn't like it.

To assist in elucidating what was occurring, a broader historical and social context of the issue at hand will be discussed. The issue at hand is Indigenous people's long and regular absence from



work (and school) to attend funerals. This is one of the areas in which Indigenous cultural practices is antagonistic to the national task, of trying to close the employment gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples.

What we are arguing here is the necessity for some fundamental cultural redevelopment, if Indigenous people are to improve their employability in the private sector. This however, is much easier said than done, as Sutton explains (p.66);

*“The trouble with culture in this context is that it is neither fully conscious and subject to voluntary control, nor wholly unconscious and beyond being brought to mind. Culture consists of the interplay between what social scientists sometimes call ‘unreflexive daily practice’ and our awareness of what we are doing and thinking. Much of this awareness is selective. This complexity alone makes cultural and social engineering an unpredictable and daunting venture, if not in fact, as Charles Rowley once said, a phony idea.”<sup>14</sup>*

Evidence was presented at the 1966 cattle industry award case [Commonwealth Conciliation and Arbitration Commission: The Cattle Station Industry (Northern Territory) Award, 1951] on a number of failed experiments to engage Northern Territory Aborigines into mainstream employment. This included failed attempts to use Aboriginal labour in abattoirs in Katherine and Darwin. The reason for these failures were *“because of their poor working record and frequent absenteeism.”*<sup>15</sup> Attending funerals had been cited as one of the causes of this high rate of absenteeism.

A similar situation was being experienced in other parts of the country by other industries at that same time. It was reported by J.E. Tonkin, Chief Personnel Officer, Comalco Aluminium, in 1966 that;

*“The rate of absenteeism amongst the aborigines is distressingly high. In general it is no less now than it was 7-8 years ago and averages about 15% of the total ordinary hours of work. This rate would not be tolerated from southern workers. ... All of the aborigines have been on and off the payroll many times because of absenteeism, and if the normal commercial disciplines that applies to imported workers was applied, then none of the aborigines would now be employed.”*

We will now come forward fifty six years and cite an extract from a 2010 publication by the Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC) titled; ‘Working and Walking Together’;

*“Because Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families are extensive, and observe significant obligations around Sorry Business and other bereavement protocols, assumptions should not be made about the perceived ‘closeness’ of an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person to the deceased in their need to attend a funeral or conduct Sorry Business. It can also be a cause of great distress if an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person is unable to fulfil their bereavement obligations. **Adequate arrangements for bereavement leave should be available for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff to attend funerals and observe Sorry Business** (Bold added).”*

SNAICC states that the purpose of this publication; ‘Working and Walking Together’, *“is to provide ideas, information, tools, practical tips and encouragement to assist non-Indigenous organisations, and their non-Indigenous staff, to strengthen their relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and organisations”*. The publication, however, makes no mention of the ongoing concern of employers about Indigenous peoples’ long and regular absence from work (and school) to attend funerals. Does this mean that SNAICC has no interest in the concerns of employers, or of the concerns

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<sup>14</sup> Sutton, P. (2010). *‘The Politics of Suffering: Indigenous Australia and the end of liberal consensus’*, Melbourne University Press.

<sup>15</sup> Seminar paper titled: The problem of Aboriginal Employment, Wages and Training, May 1966, by F.H. Gruen, Professor of Agricultural Economics, Monash University, Victoria.



expressed by teachers and the State and Federal Departments of Education? Does SNAICC understand that this ‘working and walking together’ needs to be a two way street?<sup>16</sup>

There are in fact countless numbers of articles and other publications written in recent times that express concern about this ongoing problem. In fact there are indications that the situation may have worsened over the past fifty six years. According to Hudson;

*“CDEP payments help fund attendance at funerals and ‘sorry camps.’ Lasting several weeks, ‘sorry camps’ have become a major feature of remote existence, providing a respite from the boredom and frustration of life in remote communities as well as an excuse for indulging in feasts of packaged goods, alcohol, and marijuana. Many remote community leaders have become disturbed by the disruption to work and schooling that these prolonged funerals cause, arguing instead to a return to traditional burial ceremonies that only required one to three days attendance spread over several months.”<sup>17</sup>*

In one study of remote communities it was found that 28 per cent of the CDEP participants attended funerals, ceremonies or festivals in the previous three months, whereas only 6 per cent of the mainstream employed reported attending these kinds of events.<sup>18</sup>

Taylor, Bern & Senior (2000: 80) have also described the situation in most remote communities.

*“People’s awareness of death as a frequent event is heightened by the fact that a death in the community involves everyone. Death interrupts the life of all residents in the community. Upon notification that someone has died a sorry day is declared, work ceases, school children are sent home and the shop is shut. Later when the body is returned to the community family members are required to hide indoors. Finally the entire community stops work and schooling to attend the funeral. Lost days due to deaths and funerals impact most adversely on the education of children, whose outcomes are already affected by irregular attendance. At the end of term in October 2001 only one week out of ten that had not been affected by such an event.”*

Geoff Guest, an old stockman and horse handler of Aboriginal decent in a private interview with the author at his Outstation on Cape York Peninsular had this to say about Aboriginal funerals.

*“These days we see funerals being held up, sometimes for months, while they wait to contact certain people and sorting out squabbles. They will squabble over where the body is to be buried, who’s going to be in charge, and how’s it going to be organized. This didn’t happen in the old days; it was not the tradition. The longest I ever saw a funeral go on for was about 3 weeks. It was 1939; I was 13 years old at the time, when we were mustering up in the Kimberly country. The funeral was delayed while things were being organized and while some of the new ones learn the ceremonial dances. It was important for them to get it right. Also in those days, only local people could be reached. People outside the area didn’t feel guilt if they couldn’t be contacted or couldn’t attend. That was understandable.*

*There were always squabbles, but in those days it would be sorted out very quickly, you had to sort it out quickly. But these days with refrigeration it can be put off. And with the advent of telephones and charter flight everything changed, people far away could more easily be contacted, and this has caused a lot of problems since. The funeral can be put off until they are able to contact certain people, or for someone to get a lift, or for someone to get the money to travel.*

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<sup>16</sup> The SNAICC was founded by the late Mollie Dyer from the Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service. Mollie and I were good friends back in the 1980s before she passed away, and I know that she was very concerned about those elements of Aboriginal culture that were holding her people back, nor did she hold back in speaking out about these things.

<sup>17</sup> CDEP: Help or Hindrance? The Community Development Employment Program and its Impact on Indigenous Australians, Centre for Independent Studies, Policy Monograph 86, 2008.

<sup>18</sup> J C Altman MC Gray and R Levitus, ‘Policy Issues For The Community Development Employment Projects Scheme In Rural And Remote Australia’ Discussion Paper 271/2005 Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, ANU (2005) IX.



*Funerals have now become like a social event; a bit like a party, people coming from far away and staying for longer. Many might hardly know the deceased person, but they are still expected to go to the funeral or think they should go. For some it's like a power thing, where families try and put it over one another. If someone doesn't turn up they will get wild with them. It looks like they are showing respect, but it's not for the benefit of the deceased person. Others just come along for the food. And these days it's much easier to go away. With a key card you can draw out your Centrelink payments at any time any where. They can stay away for weeks. This couldn't happen before. I know some people who are professional funeral goers, you know, attending funeral all the time and all over the country. I can understand it when the deceased person is close to you, but not if they are distant, and you hardly know them. A lot of these people will leave the kids at home to look after themselves with no money, sometimes for weeks. This is when the kids get into trouble, breaking into places to get food.*

*These people don't understand that culture is for people, not people for culture. If the culture becomes a problem or no longer has benefit for the people it should be dropped. If we get locked into a culture that's no longer a benefit, it holds us back. People need to be educated about these things."*

Geoff Guest picks up on the point about the SNAICC publication 'Working and Walking Together'. Has SNAICC become blind to the problem? SNAICC is one of many organisations calling on employers to be considerate and to make available adequate arrangements. Unfortunately, it appears that SNAICC, like so many others, has succumbed to the business of blame, which is constantly directed outward to others, not inwards to the self.

A number of employers in the meat processing industry have expressed to the writer that they are reluctant to employ Aboriginal people, for exactly the same reasons as stated in 1966; "because of their poor working record and frequent absenteeism". The Australian Centre for International Business conducted a survey of 227 CEO's on their views of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The CEO's identified three main factors constraining the greater employment of Indigenous workers: 1) shortage of job applicants, 2) difficulty in retaining, 3) high absenteeism.

A certain level of workplace absence is to be expected and can be beneficial for an organisation. Attending work when genuinely unwell is a health and safety issue, for both the sick employee and others in the workforce. On the other hand, high rates of absence are costly and impact on individuals, business units and the organisation as a whole. Excessive absences often coincide with poor performance, high turnover rates and low organisational commitment. The costs of absence can be divided into two categories: direct costs and indirect costs. Direct costs include salaries, recruitment costs, overtime, and replacement staff costs. Indirect costs include training costs, service disruption, negative public perception, poor moral and lost productivity, business continuity and interruption.

The experience of BFTB Projects is that one of the most important pre-condition, for a successful work placement, is where the young person's family understands the nature of real work and is committed to supporting the young person to fulfill his obligations. Where there is little understanding or support from the family, high rates of absenteeism is assured, followed by an early departure. Such lack of understand and support is more likely in families with little or no history of engaging in real work. In this regard, huge numbers of young people living in remote Aboriginal communities have got a serious problem and will continue to have a serious problem for many years to come.

BFTB Projects is, however, assisting to balance these issues. In mid 2010, Barry Campbell from Titjikala was called home to attend the funeral of his young niece. Rockdale Beef provided him with two weeks bereavement leave, which included the three days bus trip home and the three day bus trip back. Barry returned back to Narrandera and work at Rockdale Beef within the two week period. This was all facilitated by BFTB Projects.



In September, 2010, the sister of Daniel McDonald from Alpururulam had passed away. After talking to the RAWS manager, Daniel decided not to go home.

Whereas, in the case of Virgil Downs and Jarvis Johnson, their adoptive mothers simply swept our agreed protocol aside. But this was typical of these women. From the day Virgil and Jarvis arrived, their mothers were constantly pressuring them into coming back home. Their excuses included: they must come home to attend a royalties meeting, they must come home to be by the side of a family member who has fallen ill, they must come home to protect the family from a tribal fights, and they must come home to attend an initiation.

What frustrated their mothers was that each time they called with a new story as to why the boys must come home, the RAWS' manager caught wind of what was going on. The RAWS' manager then promptly contacted the head of the family requesting him to intervene in order to minimise these inappropriate requests. This is what also occurred when the RAWS' manager caught wind of the mothers' disregard of the agreed process in regards to the funeral of their father. The uncle again intervened and instructed the boys to remain working for JBS Swift until they receive further instruction. On this occasion, however, the RAWS manager was still on the road and unable to monitor everyone's compliance with the uncle's instruction. The next thing the RAWS' manager knew, was that both boys had returned back to Ali Curung.

It is a fact that funerals are often used by young people, and their families, as an excuse for getting out of school or work or detention. The writer has witnessed a number of incidences where a young person returned home for a funeral only to find that the young person did not attend any service. Instead they spent the day sleeping, playing video games, or indulging in drugs or alcohol with friends.

What made the case of Virgil and Jarvis particularly troubling was the fact that their father's funeral service never actually took place at the time the family was stating. The deceased man died on the 13 November, 2010. It was on this day that the family called Virgil and Jarvis to return home immediately. The disturbing fact was that the deceased man was not buried until 28 January, 2011 – **seventy six days later**. Furthermore, it was the family's expectation that Virgil and Jarvis were to remain at home until their father was buried. This family would often go on about their strict adherence to traditional culture. But this business of putting off a funeral for seventy six days could never have take place in traditional times. As a result, two young people have lost their job and with little to show for their past nine month's effort.

By way of contrast, Jewish and Muslim tradition requires that the deceased must be buried as soon as possible after death. This traditional practice originated from the fact that the Middle East was, and is, a region with a hot climate. In Biblical times, there were few ways of keeping the dead body from decomposing. Not only would this be generally undesirable, but allowing the dead body of a deceased person to decompose in this way would be showing that person great disrespect. Decomposition would have occurred very quickly due to the constant heat. Hence, the custom of burying the body as soon as possible. **This practice has not changed, even with the advent of refrigeration.**

Another worrying fact about this tale was the comment made by the Ali Curung non-Indigenous CDEP Manager. When I questioned him over the disturbing nature of this business, he replied, *"This is not unusual, they don't understand why we want to bury our dead so quickly."* I was surprised to hear this sort of nonsense come from a man in this position. This raises the question about what training these CDEP managers are receiving before they take up their post.



## 5.8 An additional aspect of the case of Virgil Downs and Jarvis Johnson

Virgil Downs and Jarvis Johnson are 19 years old. Jarvis left school in 2006 after completing year 11 at a school at Adelaide. He returned home to Ali Curung where he remained for the next three years on CDEP. Virgil Downs left school in 2007 after completing year 11 at Tennant Creek High School. He returned home to Ali Curung where he remained for the next two years on CDEP.

Virgil and Jarvis remained in RAWS for nine months. During which time they were required to live in the Family Group Home at 26 Douglas Street, Narrandera. The manager of RAWS was their Live-in Residential Supervisor.

The manager of RAWS has worked with Indigenous youths and their families for many years, during which time he lived with a number of Indigenous people for several weeks at a time. He also worked as a statutory child protection worker, in a number of rural and remote communities throughout Australia, for many years. During this time he was required to enter and inspect countless number of homes belonging to Indigenous families.

This experience of living with Virgil and Jarvis for nine months, and a number of the other RAWS participants for over twelve months, has provided an experience beyond anything that he has previously encountered; an experience that proved to be far more challenging than first anticipated. It has, however, provided the manager with a far greater and richer insight to the challenges ahead.

Much has been documented about the overcrowded houses in remote communities, but less is said about the filthy, unhygienic condition of most houses and their surrounds. It was clear that Virgil and Jarvis had received, at some time in the past, training on keeping themselves and their surrounds clean and tidy - most likely while they were at boarding school. But the problem was that there was virtually no application of their knowledge, unless they were **directed** to do so. Simply **asking** them to clean up their mess had little effect. Their home cleanliness, inside and out, and their personal hygiene practices, were appalling, and without **strict** supervision, they would have reduced the RAWS residence at 26 Douglas Street, Narrandera to the same deplorable condition as their home in Ali Curung.

RAWS Progress Report #3, Section 2.2, gave a number of examples of the behaviour that the Live-in Carer had to contend with. In regards to Virgil, for awhile this behaviour extended into the workplace, until one day Virgil's supervisor told him that he and other staff members can no longer put up with his stench, and that if he doesn't wash himself every day he will no longer be allowed on site.

Their problem was not their lack of education or training. Their problem derived from their upbringing that normalised apathy and the lack of self-discipline - an inability to control a tendency towards laziness and lethargy - except when it comes to the pursuit of stimulants. For example, left unsupervised on weekends they would begin watching videos and playing video games non stop day and night. It appeared that they were incapable of deferring activities like watching videos and playing video games, in favor of basic personal hygiene activities and cleaning up their mess from the night before, after watching videos all night. Both would drink copious amounts of soft drink, sweet energy drinks, and confectionary.

All their rubbish, including chewing gum and ear cleaners will be thrown on the carpeted floor rather than place them in a nearby rubbish bin, even when that rubbish bin is within arms reach. On one occasion, the manager witnessed both of them lying down watching television and allowing a nearby whistling kettle to boil dry rather than get up and turn it off.



Whenever there was a breach of the drinking rule, more often than not, Jarvis would be involved. And when Jarvis drinks he would drink to get drunk, and then collapse into a state of unconsciousness.

Mason (2009) speaks of the “addictive personality disorder”. This disorder may be defined as a psychological setback that makes a person more susceptible to addictions. This can include anything from drug and alcohol to pornography, gambling and videogames.<sup>19</sup> According to Nelson;

*“Experts describe the spectrum of behaviors designated as addictive in terms of five interrelated concepts which include patterns, habits, compulsions, impulse control disorders, and physical addiction (Addiction/ Addictive Personality). An individual is considered to be at the risk of developing such addictions when he/ she displays signs of impulsive behavior, combined with a weak commitment to the goals for achievement valued by the society, a sense of social alienation, and a sense of heightened stress.”<sup>20</sup>*

According to Nelson, such a person may switch from one addiction to another other or even sustain multiple addictions at different times. People with addictive personalities are very sensitive to stress. They have trouble handling situations that they deem frustrating, even if the event is for a very short duration. This is a characteristic of the RAWs target group. They are easily frustrated with sustained mental effort, and prone to quickly giving up. They often lack self-esteem and will show impulsive behavior such as excessive caffeine consumption, Internet usage, eating of chocolates or other sugar laden foods, television watching.

In the midst of this, the manager saw other social phenomenon at work, including **feast and famine** type of behaviour, and **social loafing**.

### **Feast and famine type of behaviour**

Short term gratification at the expense of medium and long term reward is common to people with low self esteem. A number of participants would repeatedly over indulge themselves with all that they had today, knowing that they will go without tomorrow. For example, they would spend all their surplus income (which would range from \$400 to \$800 per week) over the weekend, leaving nothing for themselves through the week, to the point where they are walking around picking up “bumpers” (cigarette butts) off the ground, and unable to afford a \$2 drink, or unable to make a 50¢ telephone call to be picked up from work – poverty in the admits of abundance.

One can speculate on how and where this sort of behaviour has its origins, certainly there is little socialisation in the communities of origin that runs counter to this behaviour, low self esteem derived from violent and conflicted upbringing, poor role models, limited goals and consequences, lack of clear self narrative and self identity all play a part.

### **Social loafing**

It is common knowledge that when people join a group they feel less responsible for their actions than they do when they are alone. This knowledge has been backed up by a considerable amount of research. Darley and Latane (1968) were among the first to describe how in groups, the pressure to perform does not focus on any particular participants, instead, the responsibility to perform is shared among all the participants and their sense of responsibility decreases in proportion to the size of the group.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Mason, S. (2010). The Addictive Personality. Psychology Today. N.p., 14 March 2009. Web. 31 March 2010.

<sup>20</sup> Nelson, Bryce. "The Addictive Personality: Common Traits Are Found." The New York Times. N.p., 18 January 1983.

<sup>21</sup> Darley, J., & Latane, B. (1968). Bystander intervention in emergence: Diffusion of responsibility. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vol.8, 377-383.



The Karau and Williams (1993) Collective Effort Model of social loafing, asserts that individual performance is influenced by how the person perceives the connection between their effort and expected outcomes.<sup>22</sup> Thus, individuals will engage in social loafing because they do not perceive a strong relationship between their effort and valued outcomes. Applying this model to RAWs participants living in the Family Group Home can help explain why Virgil and Jarvis in particular were recognised as the primary social loafers, because they, more than the other residents, did not value a clean and tidy home and surrounds. It appeared that they were more comfortable surrounded by mess.

The lack of social context around material value leads to a tendency towards wastage, which must be seen to be believed. Participants would pay for home cooked meals only to throw them in the bin in favour of a pile of hot chips and coke. I have seen participants throw carrots in the bin because they were crooked and potatoes and apples because they were marked. On one occasion, one young person could not be bothered taking his wet clothes from the washing machine to hang them on the clothes line to dry. Instead, he threw them all in the rubbish bin, and then went out and bought all new clothes.

We will often hear a number of people trying to encourage these young people into joining the Scheme, by talking about all the goods and services that can be purchased with their greater income. But then we will often hear it being said that the earning capacity of these young people far exceeds their level of desire for goods and services. This is not what is going on here. Instead, what we have here is an insatiable appetite for a narrow range of good and services. For example, there are a number of participants who spend up to \$200 on a single video call to girlfriends on a weekly basis. Virgil alone would spend up to \$150 every week at the corner video store. Moreover, this behaviour didn't let up. In the case of Virgil and Jarvis, it went on largely unchanged for nine months; despite the training and counselling they were receiving.

What is interesting is that Virgil and Jarvis's behaviour at Riverina Beef was very different to their behaviour at home in Narrandera. They were in fact doing well at work. The reason for this, we believe, has to do with the fragmentation, specialisation and the confinement of workers to narrowly defined aspects of production, as discussed in Section 4.1.4; Provision of peer group employment and production line work.

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<sup>22</sup> Karau, S. J., & Williams, K.D. (1993). Social Loafing: A meta-analytic review and theoretical integration. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vol.45, No.4, 681-706.



## 5.9 Formal induction training delivered by FGM Consultants

FGM Consultants have been engaged to deliver the MINTRAC Certificate in Meat Processing i.e. Certificate II as determined by their training program.



The above pictures show Michael Grogan and RAWS participants engaged in a two day induction course

Michael Grogan has begun to deliver this training free of charge. He has been a long time supporter of the BFTB Projects. It was Michael who assisted the manager of BFTB Projects with the original negotiation with Tabro Meats in 2006, for BFTB to conduct its first large scale trial group in this industry. He continues to promote RAWS to other meat processing companies throughout Australia.

This induction course module gave RAWS participants an overview of the industry, and where they are presently situated. Participants were taken through the various streams of MINTRAC courses that will provide them with a career in the meat processing industry.

They were provided with an understanding of, and an appreciation for Work Instruction (WI), Standard Operating Procedures (SOP), Critical Control Points (CCP), Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points (HACCP), Quality Assurance (QA), good health and hygiene standards, the function of AQIS, and much more.

Michael said; *“Their eagerness and enthusiasm to move up quickly in the industry has definitely been ignited.”* He went on to say, *“Their excitement and enthusiasm was significantly above the general industry participants.”*

Michael added that; *“Swift is a company that could offer these young people the opportunities they need to progress their careers. I can also see how the off-site coaching and mentoring will ensure their success”,* he said.



## 5.10 Problems and solutions with accommodation

The number of places available at the RAWs Family Group Home is a contributory factor to the overall number of clients that can be supported by RAWs.

Progress Report #3 submitted to DEEWR reported on the limited effectiveness of the On-call/Visiting Supervisor Model, compared to the highly effective Live-in Carer/Family Group Home Model.

Shortly after this report was submitted the two flats leased by BFTB Projects at 69 Melbourne Street, Narrandera, and provided to two RAWs participants, were severely damaged by intoxicated local youths – see pictures below.



**Photos of the damage done to the flats at 69 Melbourne Street, and bottles of grog strewn around.**

An investigation into the matter revealed that the local youths were invited to take up residence in the flats by the Northern Territory participants living in the flats at that time. A large amount of alcohol was brought onto the premises, followed by the inevitable drunken brawl, and the vandalism of the flats.

The fact that the local youths were identifying as Aboriginal would have been irrelevant, if it was not for the fact that they were well known for their claim to victimhood and promoting racial separation.

This event brought an immediate halt to the On-call/Visiting Supervisor Model as a failed model. This decision meant:

- A) Terminating the lease agreements of the two flats at 69 Melbourne Street, Narrandera.
- B) The immediate need to acquire a much larger premises, as the Family Group Home at 26 Douglas Street, Narrandera, was full.
- C) Collaboration with Summit Employment and Training who agreed to purchase the building named Bungoona positioned in the main street of Narrandera, and lease it to BFTB Projects on favourable terms. This agreement is subject to Summit obtaining the necessary financial assistance to refurbish the building.

This event triggered further thoughts about the ongoing problem of participants not looking after their homes. A thought began to emerge that the problem of filthy, unhygienic condition houses and their surrounds has been exacerbated by the sharing arrangements. This thought led to



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The report contains client privileged information

BFTB Projects taking up the offer by Summit Employment and Training, to place some participants in their single bed-sitter units in Leeton, shown below.



**Photos of bed-sitter units in Leeton**

In mid November 2010, three young people from RAWs were provided with their own single person bed-sitter, under their own name, and without a residential supervision. Three months later, Summit Employment and Training, reported that the three young people are going well; they are keeping their units and the surrounding area clean and tidy, and they have caused no problems. Similarly, the three young people report enjoying the experience of having their own private flat.

BFTB Projects has, by all measure, successfully help these young people achieve functional independence.



### **5.11 The completion of a three part film**

BFTB Projects successfully fund raised \$1,500 for the production of a promotion/induction film, produced in three parts.

The film was shot and edited by the manager of BFTB Projects, who believed he could make a film that works better for young Indigenous people than those films produced by the meat processing industry, which have been made for a non-Indigenous audience. The “actors” were RAWS participants.

Part 1; is titled, “Employment preparation and assessment” (lasting approximately 11 minutes). Part 2; is titled, “The daily routine” (lasting approximately 15 minutes). Part 3; is titled “Meat processing work” (lasting approximately 30 minutes). Each segment has been designed so that it can be viewed separately from the other two segments, and in any order.

All three parts have been field tested on the recent recruitment drive throughout New South Wales and the Northern Territory, and they proved to work extremely well.

Part 3; Meat processing work, proved to work extremely well as promotional video, as it was designed to be. After young people and their families viewed this segment, the young viewers were keen to join RAWS, and their families were also keen to see them join.

Copies of all three films will accompany this report.



## APPENDIX 1

**Extract from WPS Developmental Note #64 titled ‘The fifth trial of providing work in a citrus packing shed to young Indigenous females from remote communities’,  
by Milton James, September 2007**

Attitudes can be a real block or filter to facts and logical arguments. Attitudes develop over time and are usually the result of repeated exposure to particular points of view. Students or workers who see their teachers or superiors recoil in disgust or reach out in empathy to members of some racial group, social class, gender group or social circumstance are likely to go along with displays of the same emotion and thus, over time, develop the same attitude. To give an example, years ago, I and many other social workers were given an article as part of an induction course by the Department of Families and Communities Services, Victoria, on how to work with Aboriginal children and their parents. This article was titled, ‘Raising Children in the Nunga Aboriginal Way’ and published in the prestigious Australian Child and Family Welfare Journal. It begins with the following abstract:

**“This article provides a snapshot of some aspects of Aboriginal child rearing. It argues that Aboriginal child rearing practices that may be seen in a negative light by non-Aboriginal people are, in fact, effective means for preparing Aboriginal children to deal with the conditions they will encounter as adults.”**

This abstract is followed by an introductory quote by an Aboriginal woman that the authors say “sums up some of the concerns of many Nunga Aboriginal mothers”.

*“You know a government worker will come through the door and see that we haven’t got very much and that I haven’t got a sparkling clean toilet or a shiny kitchen. There’s only four cups in the house and two or three knives. There’s only five towels between 11 or 12 people. There’s junk on the floor and chocolate and scribble on the walls. Sometimes a panel in the wall will get broken when one of our relations gets drunk and goes silly. There might be bits and pieces of car in the yard and the grass will probably be long and dry. They might even hear me yelling at Wayne, “Get off the fucking table or I’ll knock your head off”. These are the kinds of things that government workers will see and turn around and say that maybe I’m not a fit mother. **Because they are only seeing things through their white culture** (bold added). I often wonder why me and my family have to be punished because we are poor because the school never taught my kids to read and write properly and nobody will give them a job. **Why should I be punished because I do things differently to the way white people expect things to be done** (bold added)? **Why do I have to worry that my son will get depressed in prison and take his own life? Why do teachers, police, welfare workers and doctors look down on me because of my Nunga culture** (bold added)?”*

The authors named this woman Dorothy and they go on to describe more of her lifestyle and her way of raising children. The authors contrasted Dorothy’s behaviour with that of a non-Indigenous woman. Differences between the two women and their child care practices are identified and described as cultural differences, rather than general behavioural difference, and hence “prone to misinterpretation”.

What we have here is a misguided effort to create cultural understanding which perpetuates the very problem that we are all trying to eliminate. The article reinforces negative cultural stereotypes, and then urges practitioners to be empathic towards people like Dorothy and her abusive and neglectful child care practices. It can be argued that the national Aboriginal child abuse crisis was fuelled by this sort of distorted understanding of what constitutes Aboriginal culture. This distortion has shaped a culturally justified view of child abuse within many Aboriginal communities, by defining it as culturally acceptable.



Many professionals will not publicly address this issue of cultural distortion, and what is or is not acceptable child rearing practices for fear of being branded a racist, or promoter of those policies or practices that led to the 'stolen generation'. This has led to a serious deterioration in effective child protection service delivery to Aboriginal people throughout the country.

Dorothy's story is a story shared by many uneducated, disempowered single mothers dependent on welfare living in outer suburbs or inner city ghettos. What she has here is a drunken relative coming into the family home smashing holes in the wall. She has a dirty, unkempt house lacking in the basic necessities that can be picked up from the Salvos or St Vinnies for free. Her house sits on an overgrown junk yard. She yells and swears at her kids. Dorothy then goes on to say how her kids cannot read and write and portrays this as the fault of the school. There is no mention of her (or her partner(s)) having any role to play in the education of her children; no mother encouraging, no father pushing - this is seen as the school's responsibility. She then says that she can't understand why her illiterate children can't get a job. She suggests that they cannot get a job because they are poor. We are then told that her son is in prison and feeling depressed and Dorothy is asking why she must worry about this; as if she is an innocent victim in the behaviour of her own children.

None of this is the way of Aboriginal people or has anything to do with culture - this is only about Dorothy - a person with some serious problems and it should not be construed as anything other than this. Shame on those professionals who have acquiesced to even the grossest misrepresentation of Aboriginal culture. Readers can simply ask the question - How on earth can this sort of environment and parenting be effective means for preparing Aboriginal children to deal with the conditions they will encounter as adults, unless Dorothy desires her children to grow up as illiterate, unemployed criminal alcoholics dependent on welfare?

I will leave it to an Aboriginal social worker working in the area of child protection in North Queensland to make the final point.

*“Cultural apology, also leads to planners and child abuse workers developing a two-tiered response between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. Standards for what constitutes child abuse are allowed to drop for Aboriginal people because for some reason there exists a cultural rationale for the problem. Circumstances which would generate a child abuse intervention response in a non-Aboriginal family may similarly in an Aboriginal family not result in intervention (Paper titled: The Way Forward – cultural relevant practice responses to child abuse in Aboriginal communities in North Queensland, 1995, p.8).”*

