

Training, capacity building and employment opportunities for Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islander people who identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual and/or transgender (GLTB)



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BUILDING OUR COMMUNITY'S
HEALTH & WELLBEING

Report on project findings 2009

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Background

ACON is Australia's largest community-based gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender (GLBT) health and HIV/AIDS organisation.

Aboriginal people are a priority population for ACON's work and an Aboriginal Project has operated since 1997. ACON recognises key principles for working with Aboriginal people including:

- Recognition of the legacy of Australian history
- Involvement and self determination of Aboriginal people
- Partnership with Aboriginal community organisations
- Respect for Aboriginal cultural practices and values
- Social justice and human rights
- Confidentiality

Aboriginal Project staff had noted strong interest amongst the target group in performing and related areas, however this group experiences the impacts of intersecting homophobia and racism, resulting in poor health, educational and employment outcomes. In order to research opportunities to further engage this group, in February 2009, ACON's Aboriginal Project applied to Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) for funds under the Structured Training and Employment Project (STEP) for an action learning project on workplace skills development for Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islander people who identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual and/or transgender.

The required outcome of the funding agreement was production of this report on the action learning project findings, which may be used as a model for future work with this target group.

As a health promotion organisation ACON subscribes to the 1986 Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion. Under the Ottawa Charter, community health promotion action means:

- Building Healthy Public Policy
- Creating Supportive Environments
- Strengthening Community Actions
- Developing Personal Skills
- Reorienting Health Services
- Moving Into the Future

In accordance with this, ACON recognises that improved health outcomes are intrinsically linked to social justice and equity including access to education and income.

ACON views building capacity in the target community as a long-term project and so continues to explore and implement models for capacity development and evaluating their effectiveness.

For this project a Participatory Action Research (PAR) framework was adopted, designed to address the health promotion action areas as follows.

Building Healthy Public Policy	Participating in research and producing research findings builds evidence that inform policy
Creating Supportive Environments	Designing and developing projects that are culturally appropriate provides supportive environments for participants to actively manage their health outcomes, including factors that impact on health such as education and employment
Strengthening Community Actions	Building capacity within a community in terms of skills, experience and confidence, and supporting the development of networks, strengthens that community's ability to bring about positive outcomes for its members
Developing Personal Skills	Personal skills of participants were built through the participating in all aspects of the project, from employment-related skills workshops through to the experience of working together to design and successfully deliver performances.
Reorienting Health Services	Participating in research and producing research findings builds evidence that informs the orientation of health services. This is particularly relevant to enhancing cultural sensitivity to improve the accessibility of health services for Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islander people, and in placing an emphasis on wellbeing rather than just fixing illness.
Moving Into the Future	Skills and capacity development enhances the ability of communities to envision and achieve their goals for the future.

The action learning approach focused on needs in the area of entertainment, event management and production skills, performance skills, marketing, promotion and communications.

This report aims to:

- Evaluate the effectiveness of the model used in the Australian context
- Develop a best practice model for working with GLBT Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islander people in developing employment pathways
- Develop understanding of what training and capacity building programs are most effective in developing the skills of individuals to increase their employment outcomes
- Provide evidence of a best practice program for other service providers working with GLBT Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islander people or other groups that may face similar discrimination, disadvantage and barriers to employment.

This document should be read throughout as including Torres Strait Islander people. As ACON is a NSW-based organisation, in recognition of NSW as Aboriginal land, and consistent with NSW Health guidelines informed by consultation with Aboriginal communities, ACON's 'Aboriginal Project' works with both Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islander people in NSW.

Project Objectives

The objective of the project was to evaluate the effectiveness of performance and entertainment industry based workshops to increase the employment opportunities for the target group. Specifically, the project sought to establish the ability for such workshops to increase employability skills amongst the target group, as described by the Business Council of Australia and Australian government:

- Communication
- Teamwork
- Problem solving
- Initiative and enterprise
- Planning and organising
- Self-management
- Learning and Technology¹

Using a workshop model with participation from a range of professionals, the project aimed to establish the effectiveness of the model to holistically develop participants' workplace skills development needs in the areas of:

- Entertainment
- Event management and production skills
- Performance skills
- Marketing
- Promotion and
- Communications

And to engage participants in personal development by working with them on:

- Aspects of physical health
- Improving self esteem and mental health
- Developing skills to increase and maintain participants' health and wellbeing.

¹ http://www.dest.gov.au/sectors/training_skills/policy_issues_reviews/key_issues/es/ accessed 11/08/09

Workshop Model

Workplace and personal skills development was built around participants' involvement in design and delivery of ACON-supported Aboriginal community events scheduled during the 2009 Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras festival. ACON's Aboriginal Project partnered with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community group, House of BlackSTAR to facilitate a series of events, the headline event being the House of BlackSTAR dance party.

The framework for community engagement with the series of events had already been developed and implemented when the DEEWR funding was granted, enabling use of the program as the basis for the action learning research.

Context and Background

Research is traditionally conducted by individuals with specialist, tertiary-level training and experience in research processes, which overwhelmingly has meant that the researchers are from the dominant (Anglo) culture with privileged access to education and resources.

For marginalised groups including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people this has historically resulted in uneven power dynamics during and after the research process, alienation of the people who are the subjects of the study from the research project itself and its findings, as well as failure of researchers to adequately, ethically and sensitively return the knowledge gained through their research to the subject community.

Participatory Action Research (PAR) is an alternative research framework which engages members of the subject community as active research participants. This means that the community being studied is actually involved in the way the research is designed and conducted, the community members' skills are developed and they are positioned to understand the results, communicate them to their peers and the community directly benefits from the research.

In the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander context the use of PAR acknowledges the validity of Indigenous knowledge, cultural approaches, ways of communicating and priorities.

PAR is known to be slower than traditional research, and to utilise some unorthodox approaches, as it acknowledges that the community researchers have very different skill sets than university-educated researchers. It also acknowledges that the subject community may prioritise different values to the dominant community and therefore may require different research methods in order to ensure that the subject community has a shared understanding of the research and are active and equal partners in the research.

PAR was chosen for this project for its ability to deliver information in a way that was supportive, encouraged participation and provided the facilitator and the learners with ways to demonstrate their learnings. PAR's ability to develop community capacity also aligns with ACON's community development principles.

In the case of our workshops, delivery was very informal and classroom style settings were avoided. Rather, groups of participants were able to sit and talk about topics together informally, as if sitting under a tree in the bush. Care was taken with the cultural appropriateness of settings so that participants were able to feel free to speak and contribute on all topics, keeping the learning scenarios as close as possible to workplace situations while maintaining cultural safety.

Consistent with cultural practice for information exchange, sharing of food was part of the gathering, with morning tea and lunch provided.

Discussions focussed on increasing the self-esteem of individuals who are gay, black and living in Sydney. The informal style created cultural safety and encouraged participants to have a say.

The most important thing was to give participants a chance to express themselves and unearth their strengths and ideas. A key element of this research focus is the need to encourage and create a sense that individual skill can be valued and supported to further offer learning opportunities that provide links to the world of employment and vocations, alongside the more traditional subjects learnt at school.

The program offered many opportunities – not only for learning vital workplace techniques and for providing an understanding of how the industry works, but also for discussing the important skills of effective communication, strategic thinking and team-work. Skills such as these will be invaluable in the transition to the workplace or further education and training or event volunteer work which in turn will improve experience and employability.

The research project drew on best practice from the *How Do I Look* Project based in the African American gay, lesbian and transgender communities, which used a strengths or assets-based approach to build skills, empower individuals and the community.

How Do I Look is a project created by artistic activist, Wolfgang Busch to empower the Ballroom community. The Ballroom community was brought to international attention via the Madonna video, *Vogue* and the movie, *Paris is Burning*. Ballroom is an empowering activity and movement created by GLBT African American and other people of colour, using catwalk-style showcases of fashion and expression in New York.

The *How Do I Look* Project is a tool to showcase talents and brings the Ballroom community together to develop hands-on video production / post production training, improve quality of life and communicate HIV/AIDS awareness messages. Organisers believe the project is a great way to reach and teach communities and individuals of all races and ages worldwide.

House of BlackSTAR adopted this approach of education through entertainment, leveraging opportunities to create affiliations and partnerships with educational not-for-profit organisations and with individuals in order to communicate strong health promotion messages while supporting skills development and the building of networks and opportunities for participants.

House of BlackSTAR based the pilot workshop on the *How Do I Look* model, and used **community-based adult learning principles** as well as incorporating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural and creative knowledge in delivery of their workshops.

Elements of the model used were similar to other successfully evaluated education and employment project models (i.e. Partnership and Outreach Education Model) that recognise employment outcomes are related to an individual's self-confidence, health and wellbeing, as well as to education and training. The model incorporated an implicit understanding that for many participants there are other issues that may impact on their ability to develop employment pathways, and personal development can contribute to overcoming some of the underlying issues that may impede participants' current ability to gain employment or pursue further education and/or training in their chosen field.

While the model focused primarily on developing specific entertainment industry related knowledge and skills, health and wellbeing sessions were included with the understanding that in improving these areas, participants would increase their employability skills and have increased confidence. As has been recognised by other evaluated employment and training programs, such skills and personal development are transferable to all employment and future training/education opportunities, including self-employment initiatives.

This underlying principle of the model was aimed to build the capacity of participants to confidently pursue employment pathways that may or may not be within the entertainment industry. Other aspects of the workshop model also provided transferable skills – such as marketing and communications – that can be adapted to other industries.

The model also reflects the research findings of the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) report *A Review Of Indigenous Employment Programs*, that – broadly speaking – showed that indigenous employment programs that incorporated employment related training with on the job experience, mentoring, and other support were more successful than programs specifically targeting only one area².

2 A Michael Dockery and Nicola Milsom (2007), *A Review Of Indigenous Employment Programs*, National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER), Curtin Business School, Curtin University of Technology

Timeframe for Implementation

February 2009

- 7 Performance workshops and rehearsals begin
- 15 Performance at Mardi Gras Fair Day & Festival launch
- 20 Art show opening performances at Boomalli Aboriginal Artists' Cooperative
- 28 Performances at House of BlackSTAR dance party

March 2009

- 2 – 6 Skills development workshops and rehearsals
- 7 Mardi Gras parade performances
- 18 Debrief and wrap-up

Identifying key skills development needs

The National Employability Skills Framework encapsulates a set of generic skills identified as being critical, not only to gaining and maintaining employment, but to operating effectively in personal and community contexts. Developed by the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ACCI) and the Business Council of Australia (BCA), the skills are:

- Communication
- Teamwork
- Problem solving
- Initiative and enterprise
- Planning and organising
- Self-management
- Learning
- Technology

This project focused on the arts and entertainment industry so the employability skills were contextualised accordingly and participants identified the need to develop skills to varying degrees in all these areas.

Additional specific skills development needs were identified in:

- Practical dance and performance techniques
- Strategic thinking
- Event management and production
- Marketing and promotions

Identifying Professional people to be involved

The House of BlackSTAR dance party event was developed on the model of New York's ballroom culture, a movement created by GLBT people of colour as a means of self expression, social support, networking and skills-building through self-organised performance events.

It was important therefore to involve contributing professionals familiar with this model as well as a variety of other potential role models. Professional people approached to participate included Aboriginal people, non-Aboriginal people of colour, other professionals in their fields, both local and overseas-based. All professionals invited to participate had, through previous interactions with Aboriginal Project staff, demonstrated cultural competence in liaising with Aboriginal people.

The professional participants were:

Silver Bee	Aboriginal DJ
Sveta	Non-Aboriginal DJ
Black Sambucca	Stephen Oliver, Aboriginal MC, comedian and dancer
House of BlackSTAR	Aboriginal community event organisers: Shaun Edwards, Craig Greene, Sani Ray Townson
Peppermint	African American drag performer and recording artist
The ONES	New York based dance music trio with background in performing, DJing and styling in club and fashion scenes.
Ken Hutchins	Gusto Productions, event promoter
Pedro Virgil	Photographer
Oxford Art Factory	Live performance venue

It should be noted that Shaun Edwards, founding member and organiser of community group, House of BlackSTAR, was also a part-time staff member of ACON's Aboriginal Project at the time, which facilitated community access and partnerships.

Identifying community participants for workshops

Community members were invited via the Aboriginal Project's regular communication and via word of mouth to participate in the project based on interest in entertainment, performing, event management, production, marketing, promotions or communications as demonstrated by voluntary involvement in previous Aboriginal Project work or involvement in relevant study or skills training.

Workplace and Professional Skills Development Workshop

The workshop design included sessions on industry specific knowledge and skills, as well as session focusing on increasing the self-esteem of participants, exploring the impacts of physical and mental health on working, developing skills to increase participants' health and wellbeing, and engaging with entertainment industry professionals and venues to increase participants' linkages with the sector and to develop future employment opportunities, including self-employment.

Workshop Program

The House of BlackSTAR community-based adult action-learning and development workshop was implemented in Redfern, NSW in March 2009. Redfern was chosen as the location for delivery as it is an inner city Aboriginal community hub, easily accessible and familiar to Aboriginal and GLBT populations. The workshop was attended by between five and 15 adult and youth learners per day over a week. The workshop maintained a laid back feel with opportunity for people to come and go when they could, to fit into their daily routines. The language of instruction combined standard Australian English and local Aboriginal English in order to create cultural safety and allow learners to clarify the concepts being taught.

Basic event management: Soft discussions took place between a qualified promoter and participants, touching on the basic logistics and requirements to run an event: budget, artists, contracts, piggy-backing other events, hosting artists, visas, and taxation requirements, payments, staffing, transport including flights and accommodation, venue and ticket sales, and thoughts about promotion and presentation. Participants were able to ask questions and discuss ideas for their own events and other activities they were currently involved in.

Dance and movement: Professional drag artist, Peppermint and her dancers provided an insight into the performer's New York production. Peppermint provided information and advice on her life and career as a professional drag performer, tricks of the trade and insights into being black and a drag queen in New York. She discussed working with her employees and how she manages her body to support her career by not engaging in alcohol and other drugs. She also touched on the art of make up and costume and her dancers took participants through a series of hip hop dance routines which involved understanding parts of the body and resilience with dance as a professional career path.

Production and performance: Professional artists THE ONES, provided insights into their success as gay artists and how they managed themselves in staying together as a three piece band. They touched on their song writing and how they started out. Each of the three artists spoke about their sexuality and their experiences as everyday black and white individuals living in New York City. They gave insight into their band management and their hit single successes. They gave insight into the development and design of the different creative costumes they incorporate into their act.

Marketing, promotion and communication: The Promoter, Ken Hutchins of Gusto Productions and Professional Photographer, Pedro Vergil shared knowledge, skills and advice in developing marketing and promotional skills. They spoke about their knowledge of design and how to develop a look that identifies. They gave insights into past events they organised and thoughts on some of the logistical elements, such as specialised design concepts, scripts and poses for photography, equipment and print. They also discussed the important rules of communication important when running an event or activity, including: attention to detail, artists management, clear and concise planning, well informed staff and volunteers, understanding budget constraints and payments.

Health and Wellbeing: House of BlackSTAR coordinators opened up discussion on the importance of maintaining health and wellbeing and why it is important when embarking in the entertainment and arts industry. The discussion looked at Aboriginal and GLTB identity and issues, being GLTB within Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander communities and some of the challenges faced. It touched on creating supportive networks, unity within the Sydney GLTB community and how cultural and arts based activities could work towards employment opportunities for community members.

Work Implementation: Approaches and Methodologies

Recruitment of Professional Contributors to Workshops

Professionals invited to contribute were chosen because of their real-world industry experience and qualifications. They were provided with an overview of the Aboriginal GLTB community and over an eight month period liaised with House of BlackSTAR coordinators to develop the activities.

In order to tackle issues of employment and skills development, we chose professionals who had knowledge across a range of multi-disciplinary areas.

Professionals for this project were selected for their ability to understand and effectively communicate around the following:

- Aboriginal culture and Torres Strait Islander culture
- Gay, lesbian and gender issues for people of colour and/or Aboriginal communities
- Holistic health and wellbeing including physical, mental and emotional
- Entertainment, event management, production, performance, marketing, promotion and communications
- Activity-Discussion-Input-Deepening-Synthesis (ADIDS) approach to learning

Recruitment of Community Participants

The workshop was promoted through a variety of methods including Koori Radio announcements, internet presence (Face-book, My Space, ACON website), word of mouth, personal referrals, email distributions through different ACON and social networks and distribution of hardcopy newsletters and posters through ACON mailing lists.

Participation in the workshop meant building on the capacity (confidence, motivation, willingness, knowledge and skills) of participants to work, interact and effectively engage with others.

The criteria for participation consisted of the following:

1. Availability
2. Motivation
3. Demonstrated interest in entertainment, event management, production skills, performance skills, marketing, promotion and communications

Workshop sessions provided learners with self-administered learning which they can continue to use alone or in groups.

Evaluation

Evaluation was conducted by facilitator observation of participant engagement and participation; formative assessment through verbal questioning of participants throughout the workshop sessions; verbal evaluation feedback after sessions; and by telephone and email invitations to provide feedback.

Outcomes and Participant Feedback

The Employability Skills Framework is a set of eight generic skills areas nationally recognised as relevant and necessary for employment. The additional four skills development needs identified were more specific and targeted to the arts and entertainment sector.

Outlined below are the specific ways and contexts the identified skills needs were addressed within the research project.

SKILL	RELEVANCE TO EMPLOYABILITY
Communication	Participants had the opportunity to develop their skills in practical workplace contexts with people already working in the sector including choreographer, dance instructor, hair and makeup artists, journalists, arts festival event organisers, event producer, promoter, journalists, studio owner/manager, venue owner/manager and stage manager.
Teamwork	Participants needed to work together as peers and as part of a larger team led by experienced professionals in order to develop their act from conception to performance at four separate venues and events.
Problem solving	Problem-solving skills were developed and applied to resolving practical issues around transport arrangements, allocating time for study commitments alongside program participation and developing costumes on limited budget,
Initiative and enterprise	Participants gained skills in taking initiative through contributing ideas and volunteering to assist in practical ways to the success of their shows. They were supported to identify the benefits of using initiative and an enterprising approach, not least in relation to participation in the project itself in terms of developing skills and accessing opportunities that will benefit their future careers. Participants were further supported in learning the necessity of weighing costs against benefits in any enterprise through participating in organising, promoting and staging the events that formed the basis of the project.
Planning and organising	Participants were supported to contribute ideas and actively participate in the planning and organising of their act. They developed skills in organising the logistics of getting themselves to rehearsals, getting themselves and their costumes to the four performances they were involved in, collaborating with professionals such as sound engineers and lighting operators and allocating time to make themselves available for interviews and other activities to promote performances.
Self-management	Participants developed skills in self-management including budgeting and prioritising their time to attend study commitments, rehearsals and project workshops on time, and allocating resources to travel between these commitments and their accommodation.

Learning	Practical, workplace learning took place throughout the project and participants applied a number of different learning styles across a number of content areas. These included question and answer sessions with professional guest presenters, learning how to use new technologies to help promote events to audiences and 'hands-on' sessions including dance and makeup application.
Technology	Participants developed skills in using online technologies for team communication and event promotion. Other technology-related skills included how to enhance performances by understanding sound and lighting equipment.
Practical dance and performance techniques	Core dance and performance skills were developed through workshops with experienced professionals as well as through rehearsing and performing live in realistic workplace scenarios.
Strategic thinking	The participatory, multi-task and team-based nature of the project provided opportunities for participants to assess a range of possible choices and collectively decide on the most appropriate and effective steps to achieve goals, taking into consideration a range of factors including available resources, capacity and ongoing relationships.
Event management and production	The project allowed participants to participate all aspects of planning and delivery of a series of performance events, developing skills in planning resource and time allocation
Marketing and promotions	Participants developed understanding of the need to assist in attracting audiences to their performances and developed skills in doing promotional work with print and radio journalists and in using social networks online and in real-time to distribute promotional material and information.

Over the course of the project, including the series of Mardi Gras season event performances, employability skills were developed by participants as follows.

- Communication skills were improved by practicing communication with a range of people - the facilitators, professional contributors and other participants - from different cultural, national, socio-economic, educational and industry backgrounds
- Teamwork skills, necessary to effectively develop performances and all aspects of event production were strengthened by attending rehearsals consistently and on time, observing and collaboratively contributing to the promotion of events and helping to ensure that the logistical aspects of events were coordinated
- Problem solving skills were built by observing experienced professionals responses to barriers and unexpected developments and contributing to solutions
- Initiative was applied in first-hand, practical ways by being part of the project and participants also learned through their interactions and discussions with professionals how enterprise is applied to begin and maintain a career in entertainment and the arts
- Planning and organising skills were developed through contributing to design of various aspects of the events over the period, giving theoretical understanding and practical experience
- Self-management was developed by applying time keeping, maintaining commitments, consistently contributing and communicating with coordinators when issues arose
- Learning and technology skills were expanded, including new ways to use technology to promote entertainment events

In addition, increased confidence levels were observed in the participants, translating to improved likelihood of participants auditioning or applying for employment in the arts and entertainment sector. Furthermore, they had experienced through action learning a model of people working together to develop their own acts and pitching them to relevant community organisations, funders and producers, thus developing awareness and perspectives on self employment opportunities.

The coordinating Project Officer reported that participants who attended the workshops spoke afterwards about opportunities to take the learned skills of event management and working in a team into other areas of their lives. Participants reported positive feelings and intentions about participating or continuing participation in recognised industry training. Verbal feedback was that two participants were contracted as dancers by private companies to choreograph and provide input to new projects.

The rehearsals and performances had a positive impact on participants' dance skills and fitness. Participants also gained perspectives from professional role models on the positive impacts of healthy lifestyle on career prospects.

Linking the workshops to real-world performance and event production outcomes worked well. Participant verbal feedback and active participation during the project revealed clear motivation around wanting to achieve their best public performances possible.

Finally, professionals in the industry gained awareness of the skills and commitment of participants.

Employment outcomes

The coordinating Project Officer reported that six project participants were employed by Leichhardt Local Government's Aboriginal Community Liaison Unit to deliver their performances at two of the events within the project, the Boomalli Mardi Gras Season Show Opening and the House of BlackSTAR dance party.

Some participants continued their professional education through NAISDA, including through to graduation. It was reported that one participant is currently undertaking further professional education and producing his own work.

What worked well

Action learning based around real productions and performances provided opportunities for participants to self-motivate and apply their efforts to real and tangible outcomes.

The participation of a variety of professional contributors from different fields within the arts and entertainment sector including Aboriginal people, Torres Strait Islanders, other people of colour and local and international professionals provided inspiration, a range of role models and a variety of engagement techniques catering to different learning styles. The mix of kinaesthetic (active movement), visual and aural learning opportunities also provided optimal opportunities to engage a variety of learners.

Sector professionals were also able to provide the kind of real-world insider hints and tips that inspire novices with the levels of knowledge and competence that can be achieved. Examples included tips for discussing a performer's needs with staging and technical crew to enhance the product, and understanding the various elements associated with marketing an act.

This project provided opportunities for participants to meet, work with, ask questions of, learn from and develop connections with the following arts and entertainment industry professionals.

Sani Ray Townsend	Dancer / Choreographer / Torres Strait Islander cultural practitioner and consultant
Shaun Edwards	Producer of <i>House of BlackSTAR</i> / professional artist / events organiser / Aboriginal community festival curator
Eddie & Peppermint	New York-based dancers / stage performers / recording artist
Vivienne's personnel	Hair and make-up artists
New Mardi Gras committee members	Organisers of the annual <i>Mardi Gras Festival</i> launch event, <i>Fair Day</i> , which includes on-stage performances and events
Ken Hutchins	Promoter / Owner of <i>Gusto Productions</i>
Mark Gerber	Promoter / Owner of commercial venue, <i>Oxford Art Factory</i>
Sun Studios personnel	Professional photographers / photographic studio managers
Stephen Oliver	Aboriginal performer / dancer / comedian / MC
Silver Bee	Aboriginal DJ
Matt Poll	Director of <i>Boomalli Aboriginal Artists' Gallery</i>
Koori Radio personnel	Producers and journalists from <i>Gadigal Communications</i> (of which Koori Radio is a part). <i>Gadigal Communications</i> produces a range of arts and culture events including the youth performance and broadcast skills development program, <i>Young Black & Deadly</i> and the annual <i>Yabun Festival</i> .

Contact and communication has continued between participants and the above professionals. These relationships, together with the skills developed through the project, mean that there are improved opportunities for participants to be engaged in specific project work within the dance community, Indigenous and non-Indigenous festivals, events and shows.

Outsourcing program design and delivery to an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community group, House of BlackSTAR, provided subject area expertise, cultural safety and appropriateness, and some community access.

The coordinating Project Officer verbally reported that six project participants were employed by Leichhardt Local Government's Aboriginal Community Liaison Unit to deliver their performances at two of the events within the project, the Boomalli Mardi Gras Season Show Opening and the House of BlackSTAR dance party. This means that these participants have enhanced their resumes and further developed their employability.

He also advised that some participants continued their professional education through NAISDA, including through to graduation, and that one participant is currently undertaking further professional education and producing his own work.

He also reported that some of the participants attributed their ongoing engagement with the industry and professional education to the motivation and skills developed through the workshops.

Providing healthy catering throughout the workshops kept participants fuelled for active work and provided another opportunity for discussion of healthy diet and lifestyle to support a successful career.

Promotion via Koori Radio announcements and word of mouth was effective.

Conducting the workshops on a flexible, drop-in basis allowed participants to balance learning with other commitments.

The project was successful in providing training opportunities, developing capacity, in supporting the building of networks that enhance employment opportunities and in providing motivation for participants to engage in further training as a pathway to employment.

What could be improved

While we have received anecdotal feedback that the workshops were well received by those in attendance, recruitment of participants was less successful than anticipated.

A recurring comment from participants was that they wished they had heard of the program earlier. This poses a number of challenges for future programs in particular engagement with a marginalised and sometimes disengaged community. Though recruitment efforts were extensive, promotional budget was limited and therefore did not reach as many people as could have been. While word of mouth and radio announcements were effective promotional tools, budget and time were limiting factors. Commissioned, pre-recorded radio advertisements that could be played on rotation during a longer promotional campaign would have made promotion more effective and saved staff time in conducting live on-air interviews.

While ACON provided part-time staff hours, office infrastructure, catering, venue hire fees, travel and all other material costs to support this project, the community group, House of BlackSTAR, provided the workshops on a volunteer basis. If there were additional funds available for staff costs the coordination could have been tighter, thus providing a better experience for the participants involved.

Additional workshop sessions that could have enhanced the program to meet identified needs of the target group include:

- Sessions on mental health and the GLTB community;
- Specific Indigenous GLTB-focused community training on depression and how to support peers showing signs of depression;
- Insights into some of the platforms that provided success to non-Indigenous GLTB performers within Australia.

Enhanced and earlier secure funding could allow expansion of the program so that industry skills and experience could be developed over a longer time-scale and possibly integrated with units of competency in relevant nationally recognised vocational education training packages.

Engagement of a community group as the project partner, while bringing cultural skills unfortunately resulted in gaps between evaluation data collection needs and result. It was intended that the involvement of a staff member as liaison between the community group and ACON's Aboriginal Project would bridge the gaps but communication and reporting processes broke down.

During the course of the project, working relationships between ACON and venues, performance industry professionals, event managers and other local area employers were established or further developed. Since the project was completed however some relationships have proved stronger and more enduring than others. Those that have proved more enduring are where there is a shared purpose, in serving or catering to the GLBT community.

Workforce development and training is typically the focus of ACON's learning and development. Expanding this work to community events and activities, as well as increasing rigor to the work, provide challenges and opportunities for us.

ACON's Aboriginal Project does however consistently communicate employment opportunities that it becomes aware of to GLBT Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islander people via the project's fortnightly email-out, quarterly hardcopy newsletter and web-page updates as appropriate.

Also, since the project, ACON's Aboriginal Project has adopted a range of more flexible employment practices that suit the local GLBT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community's needs and a number of GLBT Aboriginal people have been employed within the Aboriginal Project itself on a range of health-promotion program activities, though these have not been arts industry roles and have not involved the program participants.

Incorporation of recommendations for a best practice model for use in other programs and organisations

MODEL OUTLINE

- Engage an Aboriginal / Torres Strait Islander Community Development Officer with links to the target community to work with them to identify their strengths / interests and the areas in which they want to develop capacity
- Partner with an Aboriginal / Torres Strait Islander capacity development facilitator / trainer or organisation to develop, in consultation with the community, a culturally appropriate program that meets their identified needs via their preferred methods. Build evaluation into the program using methods acceptable to the participating community
- Engage Indigenous and non-Indigenous subject matter experts who have capacity and willingness to present relevant skills development modules within the program in a culturally appropriate way and consistent with the preferred methods identified by the target community
- The Aboriginal / Torres Strait Islander capacity development facilitator or organisation delivers the program with the active participation of members of the target community as both teachers and learners
- Evaluate and document

Conclusions

This report has provided evaluation of the positive effectiveness in the Australian context of an action learning model based on the *How Do I Look* program for developing employability skills in GLBT Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islander people.

Building on the evaluation of pre-existing successful models including POEM and NCVER, this project allowed identification of the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander GLBT community members and development of a model for working with them in the future to develop employment pathways.

This report contributes to the body of evidence on the effectiveness of community based action learning approaches for Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islander people.

ACON should continue to work with community groups and culturally sensitive capacity development providers to deliver practical workshops and skills development opportunities for community members which would expand delivery of services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and other marginalised groups in the GLBT community.

ACON continues to build links with government, non-government and private sector organisations where shared purpose exists, such as serving the GLBT community and promoting GLBT health and well-being. Through ACON's community development programs we continue to build the capacity of community members and provide employment opportunities at ACON or recommend employment opportunities that exist within partner organisations to members of the communities that we serve.

Recommendations

1. That the model be applied on future employability skills development projects with GLBT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
2. That workplace and personal skills development continue to be conducted in workshop format.
3. That the workshop program continue to run in conjunction with a real event (or events) to give participants work experience and tangible short-term goals.
4. That funding is secured for dedicated project management staff, and suitably qualified staff are recruited to oversee administration and implementation of future workshops.
5. That the time frame for recruitment of future workshops is extended and appropriately resourced (i.e. funding for promotion) to enable increased awareness amongst the target group.
6. That the program retains the feature of the program design and delivery being conducted by, and/or in partnership with an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community group to ensure subject area expertise, cultural safety and appropriateness and community access.
7. That future workshops explore the potential for participants to generate employment/training pathway plans and an outcome.
8. That the opportunity for ongoing engagement and support of participants following the completion of future workshops is explored (i.e. peer support, ongoing regular get-togethers)
9. That industry is further engaged to explore the opportunity for the identification and/or creation of employment/training opportunities for participants upon completion of the project.

Appendices

Appendix 1 Promotional and media material samples ACON Indigenous Program for 2009 Mardi Gras

IN DARKNESS ALL COLOURS AGREE!

Black

INDIGENOUS MARDI GRAS SEASONAL EVENTS 2009

Black - 20th Anniversary
 Location: 20th Anniversary
 Date: 20th Anniversary

Black - 20th Anniversary
 Location: 20th Anniversary
 Date: 20th Anniversary

Black - 20th Anniversary
 Location: 20th Anniversary
 Date: 20th Anniversary

acon
 ABORIGINAL COMMUNITY ORGANISATION
 HEALTH & WELLBEING

LIVING IN A DREAM
 MARDI GRAS 2009

Weekend Features

Black and gay in a straight world

If you think being gay in a predominantly straight society is hard, try being black as well. Gay indigenous Australians talk to Nicky Park ahead of this weekend's Mardi Gras.

IT'S five days away from Mardi Gras and Peppermint — after an American glamazon, dance teacher and drag queen — is taking a group of indigenous Australians through their moves.

The routine will feature in Sydney's Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras this weekend, in the first official float of the gay indigenous organisation House of Black Star.

One of Peppermint's students, Craig Greene, says the existence of indigenous Australians within the

gay community challenges stereotypes about Aboriginal people.

"We're always being viewed as the tribespeople, but we want to show that Aboriginal people are different, we have evolved," he said during a break at Dance Central studio in inner Sydney Surrey Hills.

The dance group, which has no official number ("we're open" says House of Black Star co-founder Shaun Edwards), recruited Peppermint from the US as their secret weapon to choreograph their inaugural performance.

"We just want to show a different type of Aboriginal dance," Greene said of the contemporary routine that



STEPPING OUT: US drag queen Peppermint, front left, teaches a dance to indigenous Australians at Sydney's Dance Central studios to be performed at Mardi Gras.

features no traditional Aboriginal dance moves.

Edwards says House of Black Star was set up last year to support gay indigenous Australians and allow them to harness their spirituality as well as their sexuality.

He said many gay indigenous Australians from around the country come to Sydney, but are often disappointed by the lack of cultural support they find when they arrive.

"There is nothing here for us, other than going to a dance school (or) going to a nightclub which is boring," he says.

"There's nothing there to keep the inner strength and spirituality alive — it's just about drinking and drugs."

Like Greene, Charlie Mallie, 24, moved to Sydney from Queensland to pursue his passion for dancing.

He says some members of the indigenous community are intolerant of homosexuality.

"Traditionally it's not meant to be," he says. "I come from a small country town so it's a lot harder for me, I think I was the only one (gay) in the whole town."

Gay indigenous people often face a double-dose of discrimination, Greene says.

"We're not just dealing with discrimination and inequality for being gay, (but) because we're black before we're gay — there's the racism that comes with it first," he says. "When you're a minority

within a minority it's very difficult to be able to face the challenges and the opportunities you want to engage with."

At its worst, the gay community can be self-centred and hypocritical, he says.

"They're not openly discriminatory, but it's when you start peeling back the layers and you think, 'hey, you know what, you're treating me differently because of the colour of my skin and because of what I look like.'"

"If you're not white and if you're not good-looking and have a six-pack — then you kind of just fall out of anything beautiful."

House Of BlackSTAR Performance and party promotional posters

Appendix 2 Photographs and quote

HOUSE OF BLACKSTAR
 FEATURING DIRECT FROM NEW YORK
THE ONES
 + Peppermint
 28TH FEBRUARY 2009
 OXFORD ART FACTORY DARLINGHURST
 WITH YOUR HOST: MR BLACK SAMBUCCA (BNE)
 DJ SVETA / DJ SILVER B
 MISS ELLANEOUS AND CHARITY CASE
 SPECIAL PERFORMANCE FROM BROWN SUGAR
 & THE GURIZ KANDICE (BYO) PLUS VERY SPECIAL GUEST DJ
 TICKETS ON SALE NOW \$25+BF FROM MOSHITX.COM.AU & QJUMP.COM.AU

HOUSE OF BLACKSTAR
 FEATURING DIRECT FROM NEW YORK
THE ONES
 + PEPPERMINT
 28 FEBRUARY 2009
 MASSIVE DANCE FLOOR
 DJ SVETA / DJ SILVER B
 MISS ELLANEOUS AND CHARITY CASE
 OXFORD ART FACTORY / DARLINGHURST
 TICKETS ON SALE NOW \$25.00+BF
 FROM MOSHITX.COM.AU AND QJUMP.COM.AU

Not only did it allow me to meet international artist it also allowed me to see and interact with my southern brothers and sisters from the Koori community as well as long lost friends from the Murri community. It was great to see our people learning about different performance techniques and industry skills. I'm sure that if you asked anyone there on the night they would say the same as me. The workshop's are an integral step to building strong foundation for indigenous people within the GLBT community, showing we have the self determination and ability to work together and across a range of multi-disciplinary areas.

Community participant

Dance and movement workshop session





BUILDING OUR COMMUNITY'S
HEALTH & WELLBEING

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