



# 2011 ICMA Awards

## Indigenous Employment Program

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Latrobe City has developed an exemplary Indigenous Employment Program since focusing on reconciliation and commitment to indigenous people.

It is recognised within Latrobe City and among the numerous businesses and community organisations involved that much of the success is due to the work of Latrobe City Indigenous Employment Development Coordinator, Joanne Brunt.

A Gunai/Kurnai woman, Ms Brunt has established a wide network of contacts within the broader business community and uses her knowledge of the local indigenous community to achieve outstanding employment outcomes for indigenous people.

Latrobe City's Indigenous Employment Program was recently recognised by winning a Local Government Professionals Award for Excellence and a Institute of Public Administration Australia State Award for Excellence.

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An independent review of Latrobe City's Indigenous Employment Program undertaken by specialist training services consultants, SkillsPlus Ltd concluded that a STEP project run by Latrobe City was *“the only regional project that increased or improved the participation of Indigenous people in New Apprenticeships and vocational education and training.”*

The review also observed that *“it was felt that the success of the program was also due to the support of the Latrobe City Council. This local government is renowned for its commitment to Indigenous people.”* The Indigenous Employment Program evolved following a Statement of Commitment and a Statement of Reconciliation by Latrobe City to local indigenous people.

As part of its broad range of acknowledgements, the City noted that actions taken 'must include within the apology a determination to rectify the hurt.' This included a determination to 'facilitate the employment and/or traineeship of Indigenous people.'

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Objectives relating to employment outcomes were developed through the Council's Koorie Liaison Officer and the Braiakaulung Advisory Committee. The Committee was comprised of local Indigenous representatives, the Central Gippsland Aboriginal Health and Housing Cooperative Ltd and other key organisations working with the Indigenous community, as well as the Churchill Aboriginal Reconciliation Study Group and Latrobe City Councillors.

The development and implementation of an Indigenous employment strategy within Latrobe City was one of the key objectives decided upon and led to the appointment of an Indigenous Employment Development Coordinator.

The number of employment placements achieved has exceeded the targets set in place. The direct results of Latrobe City's Indigenous Employment Program are that since 2003 more than 300 people have been employed, averaging around an 85 percent retention rate.

Since October 2009, under a new Indigenous Employment Program contract, nearly 50 people have been employed and the retention rate currently sits at a 90 percent. This includes 26 participants with government agency traineeships, including local

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government, primary health care, and childcare. As well, the program has provided placements for 18 Indigenous participants in private sector apprenticeships including as an apprentice painter, plumber, chef, retail, roof tiler and in civil construction. Latrobe City itself currently has 11 Indigenous staff.

These program elements are delivered utilising various funded initiatives including:

Structured Training and Employment Project (STEP), Structured Training and Employment Related Services Program (STEP ERS), New Workforce Participation Program , New Access Apprenticeship Scheme, Koorie Career Club , Yangan Nalu - an initiative of the East Gippsland Primary Care Partnership's Koorie Health Promotion project, Workplace Participation Project, Transition to Work program (mentoring).

The programs day to day activities typically include sourcing positions both inside council and in the private sector, organising pre employment training when required, negotiating positions with prospective employers, referring participants to Job Network providers, negotiating with Job Network providers for the provision of their Intensive Assistance funding to supplement New Apprenticeship wages, organising “sign-ups” by New Apprenticeship centres, organising the delivery of training by Registered Training Organisations and organising cross cultural training for private sector employers and relevant agencies.

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A big part of the program's success is the ability to develop excellent networks, especially within the education sector in Gippsland, including with GippsTAFE (Central Gippsland Institute of TAFE) and Schools in the region.

An independent review of Latrobe City's Indigenous Employment Program by specialist training services consultants, SkillsPlus Ltd, noted that through these networking and coordinating activities *"Joanne has earned the respect of the community, and interviewees said that her success has actually started to have a cultural effect in the indigenous community."*

The review further highlighted the importance of Joanne's networking and coordinating activities when it noted *"Her role is particularly invaluable in saving employers time when she works out the financial details, does negotiations with Job Networks, and organises contacts, NAC sign-ups and RTO's. If she wasn't there, employers have commented that some New Apprenticeships would not proceed, due to lack of time, and lack of knowledge of the process and the different agencies that need to be involved."*

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Ms Brunt has played a leading role in a number of initiatives aimed at improving outcomes for indigenous employment.

One is development of the Koorie Career Club which is delivered through Nagle College (Bairnsdale), Traralgon Secondary College and Bairnsdale Secondary College.

The Koorie Education Officers at these schools engage young Indigenous people in an innovative, hands-on program. Work placements and relevant role models are used to give them a taste of that career. Career mapping techniques can also be used to assist students to refine their career choices and set achievable and realistic goals.

The program supports the Yangan Nalu Project with traineeship guidance and recruiting. This project is an initiative of the East Gippsland Primary Care Partnership's Koorie Health Promotion project, with Yangan Nalu a Gunai-Kurnai word meaning "go together."

The project focus is on developing resources and networks to support Indigenous people to work as trainees in mainstream health and community service agencies right across the East Gippsland area.