

# **Lessons from an evaluation of ‘TrainingPlus’: an attempt to bridge a cultural divide through a training and employment initiative**

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## **Abstract**

This paper draws on the lessons learned from an evaluation of a program designed to support Indigenous people into employment. The program (TrainingPlus), managed by the Desert Peoples Centre (DPC) in Alice Springs, uses vocational training offered by the Centre for Appropriate Technology (CAT) and the Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education (BIITE) as a vehicle for achieving employment outcomes. What makes this program different from a plethora of others trying to do the same is the intentional use of a case management approach where Indigenous cultural brokers support learners through a transition in their identity from being ‘unemployable’ through to becoming ‘employable’.

While the evaluation highlighted a number successes associated with the TrainingPlus approach, it also highlighted a number of tensions that arise for DPC as it attempts to straddle the space between mainstream and Indigenous cultural contexts. The paper problematises the issue of training for employment outcomes in Indigenous contexts. The evaluation found that VET as a tool designed for employment outcomes (at least in this context) is not as effective as might be expected. That said, the findings suggest that the training space is a useful place for creating meaning and for engaging at the interface between the mainstream and Indigenous culture. Another finding from the evaluation reinforces the need for cross-cultural skills for trainers that go beyond basic cultural awareness programs. Ultimately, the evaluation concludes that the integrated case management process is effective compared to more conventional approaches to training in the employment services industry. However it is an approach that requires considerable resources to be sustainable. The policy and practice implications of these issues are discussed in the paper.

## **Introduction**

The TrainingPlus program is an initiative of the Desert Peoples Centre (DPC), a joint venture between the Centre for Appropriate Technology (CAT) and Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education (BIITE). The program aims to provide unemployed Indigenous people with support, training, work experience and employment in the building, construction and renewable energy industries. The program was funded as a trial by the Northern Territory Department of Education and Training (DET) for an initial 18 month period. It was expected (as described in Key Performance Indicators or KPIs) that 25 clients would complete the program and that 25 would transition into employment or further training.

The first clients were enrolled in the program in March 2009. All participants in the TrainingPlus program have a case manager to provide individual support, counselling and

assistance with health, housing, family issues or other problems. Each participant has a tailored training and employment pathway plan developed for them and participates in a range of training courses suited to their needs and personal development goals. TrainingPlus is designed to bring in services from a range of organisations, such training providers, Job Services Australia (JSA) providers or support agencies.

This paper draws on the findings of a largely formative evaluation carried out during the life of the trial. While the evaluation was focused specifically on TrainingPlus we will discuss the implications of the findings with a broader consideration of the issues that surround training provision in remote Indigenous contexts. We will also discuss the implications for training providers, training practitioners and funders.

Since the trial ended TrainingPlus approach has been developed in a remote context with the Central Desert Shire (CDS). CDS commenced operations in July 2008 as part of the Northern Territory Local Government Reform. The challenge for Central Desert Shire Community Development and Employment Projects (CDEP) is to provide an effective strategy to re-engage individuals and communities in work and livelihood opportunities, through work readiness. The proposal is to work in six of the major population centres in the Shire to:

- Undertake training needs analysis with all CDEP participants;
- Develop comprehensive individual plans for accredited and non-accredited training;
- Link training to work experience participation in defined community work projects;
- Articulate individual training and development plans with broader community needs;
- Deliver flexible training packages in community, harnessing local resources; and
- Identify and broker transitions into appropriate employment with CDS CDEP.

As in the trial, the process is attempting to maximise engagement of clients in ways that might enthuse individuals and groups to work from where people are at rather than seeing them as either a training target or an employment target.

### **A word or two of caution**

Before reading on, the authors first wish to make it clear that as non-Indigenous VET practitioners and researchers, we cannot assume to represent an Indigenous position. We present a non-Indigenous perspective based on our work in an Indigenous context. Second, we do not pretend to have a lot of answers to the issues we raise. They are complex issues that require a multifaceted approach. We recognise that VET is just one element among many that intervenes in the lives of Indigenous people. Thirdly, we write about a context that is unique in Australia. Though there are lessons to be learned for all VET stakeholders working in a cross-cultural environment we caution the generalisation of findings to other seemingly comparable contexts, such as those where there are high levels of socio-economic disadvantage. Finally, we recognise that our arguments can and will be contested. We leave ourselves wide open to critique, yet we invite others to debate these issues with us.

### **Literature**

#### *Policy directions in vocational training*

Policy development in the Northern Territory over the last few years has been unremitting, complex and stressful for Indigenous people. The Northern Territory Emergency Response has been operating in Northern Territory Indigenous community contexts since 2007 including policing, access to alcohol and other alterations with the commencement of a

number of new community roles like Government Business Managers (NTER Review Board 2008). Significant reform has occurred in the job services system with the creation of Job services Australia (JSA), altering client eligibility criteria and changes to many or most of the organisations delivering JSA services in central Australia (DEEWR 2008). These Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) reforms sit alongside the Department of Families Housing Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA) CDEP reforms (Australian Government 2008) which have also set out to provide stronger accountability, employment outcomes and reconciliation with JSA initiatives.

The Northern Territory Government has introduced significant Local Government reforms that have turned over 80 Community councils into 14 Shire Councils involving a complete redesign of the third tier of government in the Northern Territory. The Northern Territory Government is also pursuing its Territory Growth Towns policy that seeks to prioritise 20 key communities in an attempt to develop local economies where currently their existence is thin at best (Northern Territory Government 2009). The Northern Territory Government is also overseeing the Strategic Indigenous Housing and Infrastructure Program (SIHIP) program which has involved a rewriting of the way land is dealt with in communities or town camps (Department of Families and Northern Territory Government 2009).

All of these reforms have significantly affected Indigenous people in the Northern Territory. Most have involved an increase in resource allocations but this amount of change in a well-educated non-Indigenous community would be arguably untenable let alone in a remote Indigenous community.

#### *Indigenous education and training*

The education system, at primary, secondary and tertiary levels, is not delivering the outcomes needed for Indigenous people to enter and remain in the labour force even at the level of unskilled or semi-skilled work. Despite some improvements, the progress of Indigenous Territorians through primary and secondary schooling is poor. The Coordinator General for Remote Services describes poor school attendance in the Northern Territory as a ‘crisis’ (Beadman 2010: 7). Even with (or maybe because of) increasing enrolments among Indigenous students in secondary education, apparent retention rates from years 10 to 12 have declined from 64.6 per cent in 2006 to just 44.6 per cent in 2009. In 2009, just 154 Indigenous students completed the Northern Territory Certificate of Education (Northern Territory Department of Education and Training 2010).

While Indigenous participation in Vocational Education and Training is high, (although still below 2002 levels) most participation is at pre-vocational Certificate levels or in subject only or mixed field courses—that is, those not leading to a qualification. There is some evidence that the high participation rates reflect the churning of the same student cohort through successive programs. Training delivery for residents of remote communities usually requires movement away from a community to participate in one or two week blocks of training a semester. This again is a further barrier to Certificate completions.

Some argue that a different approach to training is required—one that promotes learning for livelihoods rather than training for employment (Davies et al. 2008; Young and Guenther 2008). The reality is that mainstream jobs in many remote communities are limited, and those that do exist require skills that local people often do not have (Guenther 2006). A livelihoods approach recognises this and acknowledges that ‘work’ may be conceptualised more broadly than a nine to five job. The approach also recognises that learning (as opposed to training) has a range of benefits beyond employment, that include improvements in health, reductions

in crime, improved family function, and better civic participation (Schuller et al. 2004). A common theme that runs through the literature on outcomes of learning is its impact on identity (Côté 2005). There is a progressive development in personal development that occurs as the individual navigates through the learning environment: increased awareness, improved capacity to act and a greater ability to adapt to change (Guenther 2010).

### *Indigenous employment strategies*

The demand for employment, especially in the construction and renewable energy industries is high and there has been recent and concerted attention on establishing targets for the employment of Indigenous people in infrastructure projects. This is highlighted in the Northern Territory Government's emphasis on 20 'growth towns' as hubs for service delivery (Beadman 2009). There are success stories highlighted in the literature where training has supported employment outcomes in a range of industries including mining, land management, tourism, media and art (see Young et al. 2007; Boyle and Wallace 2008).

The TrainingPlus program trialled a case management model to broker a range of accredited and non-accredited training and personal support interventions that respond to both individual need and industry requirements and support successful transitions to employment. It also recognised that formal, informal and on the job training are parts of a package of additional supports that are required to help individuals into work and enhance both employer and employee satisfaction.

Fundamental to a productive employee is a sense of worth, vision and intrinsic motivation to turn up to work regularly. At the outset of the program it was expected that TrainingPlus would also contribute to personal growth in addition to vocational and workplace skills. Though this growth was expected to occur as a consequence of the TrainingPlus approach, it was never-the-less an important outcome for the project that needed to be measured.

### *Indigenous culture and western worldviews*

There is no dispute that Indigenous culture is distinct from other expressions of culture in Australia. There is a broad recognition that Indigenous identity is tied up in a deep and longstanding connection to the land, family and kinship, law and the spirit world. Indigenous culture is expressed variously through the use of language, ceremony, arts, traditional healing, rites of passage and story-telling. The distinction between Indigenous culture and mainstream culture is most recognisable in remote contexts of Australia, particularly where an Indigenous language is spoken as a first language. Briskman (2007), commenting on the interface between social work and Indigenous spirituality comments that:

What constitutes a good life may be different from the views of mainstream society. Indigenous perspectives are frequently marginalised, with Indigenous culture, particularly in terms of its nonmaterial focus, depicted as inferior and primitive. (p. 69)

While the unique characteristics of Indigenous culture are easily recognisable to a non-Indigenous person, the *values* of Aboriginal culture are often not so easy to appreciate for many non-Indigenous people. The values of mainstream culture, which are represented in terms of 'work ethic', institutionalised education and training, the importance of material wealth, democratic authority structures and individualism are taken as a 'normal'. Conversely, Indigenous values are frequently described in terms of *abnormality*. Hence, programs developed for Indigenous contexts often tend to make assumptions about what 'whitefellas' think is important for 'blackfellas'—for example in terms of education, health,

employment and justice—rather than the other way round. But as Sutton (2011: 81) rightly points out ‘Cultural differences... matter’.

Very rarely are Indigenous views about what is important—particularly from an Indigenous knowledge perspective—taken into account in education programs (Trudgen 2000). While the definitions of traditional or Indigenous knowledge are seldom disputed in the literature, the application of that knowledge is varied and has many perspective. For example the idea of ‘both ways’ or ‘two ways’ learning in education embraces the importance of respect for culture and language in education (Northern Territory Department of Education 1999). Nakata (2002), referring to the use of Indigenous knowledge in education comments that:

...the field of Indigenous education refers... to cultural appropriateness, cultural content, cultural learning styles, culturally responsive pedagogy, [and] Indigenous perspectives...(p. 285)

He argues that these are not the same as Indigenous knowledge because the perspective from which they are viewed is a Western, non-Indigenous construct: ‘a cultural framework largely interpreted by Western people in the education system and filtered back to Indigenous students...’. The integration of Indigenous knowledge into learning is done from within a non-Indigenous worldview, not from an Indigenous worldview. What may be required then is integration from an Indigenous perspective (Macfarlane et al. 2008). What is clear though, is that both ways learning approaches, while drawing on and respecting traditional knowledge, are not grounded in traditional knowledge.

#### *Vocational learning in the context of central Australia*

The context in which TrainingPlus operates is markedly different than what might be expected in urban or regional areas of Australia. Table 1 summarises a number of key characteristics of the Alice Springs local government area (LGA) which are pertinent to TrainingPlus. The data are compared with comparable figures for Australia as a whole. What stands out is the contrast between the Indigenous characteristics compared to the non-Indigenous characteristics for Alice Springs itself, and the contrast between the Indigenous characteristics of Alice Springs compared with those for Australia as a whole.

**Table 1. Key characteristics of Alice Springs at 2006 Census (LGA geographic area)**

Indicator	Persons <sup>a</sup> Years <sup>b</sup>	Per cent of total	Selected Australian characteristics
Total population <sup>a</sup>	23892		
Total Indigenous persons <sup>a</sup>	4494	18.8%	2.3%
Median age <sup>b</sup> Indigenous	23		20
Median age <sup>b</sup> non-Indigenous	35		37
Persons (aged 15+) with bachelor degree qualifications <sup>a</sup> Indigenous	56	1.9%	2.9%
Persons (aged 15+) with bachelor degree qualifications <sup>a</sup> non-Indigenous	1923	13.9%	12.4%
Persons (aged 15+) with certificate level qualifications <sup>a</sup> Indigenous	334	11.2%	13.2%
Persons (aged 15+) with certificate level qualifications <sup>a</sup> non-Indigenous	3072	22.1%	17.7%
Persons attaining year 12 or equivalent <sup>a</sup> Indigenous	357	7.9%	19.4%
Persons attaining year 12 or equivalent <sup>a</sup> non-Indigenous	6527	33.6%	44.9%
Labour force participation Indigenous	1232	41.2%	51.2%
Labour force participation non-Indigenous	11410	82.2%	63.7%

Source: (ABS 2007)

While these data do show that something is different about the Alice Springs context, they do not show the extent to which cultural factors play a significant role.

### Methodology

The purpose of the evaluation of TrainingPlus was partly to identify and demonstrate how and why the program works. This aim was driven both by a need for accountability to the funder and to ensure that as the service matured, outcomes for clients could be enhanced. For these reasons the evaluation included formative and summative elements—on the one hand reflecting back on what was achieved and on the other looking forward to how service delivery and practice could be improved. The anticipated outcomes were identified using ‘theory of change’ and ‘logic modelling’ techniques, frequently used in program evaluations (Frechtling 2007; Funnell and Rogers 2011). A set of four evaluation questions shaped the design of the evaluation in terms of quantitatively assessing effectiveness and outcomes and qualitatively assessing factors that contribute to these outcomes. A ‘mixed methods’ approach drew the data together to provide a combination of deductive logic and inductive reasoning in order to firstly test the assumptions of the theory of change and secondly provide for an assessment of implications and recommendations for the future development of the program. These complementary approaches are often used in the field of educational evaluation and research (see for example Johnson and Christensen 2004).

The evaluation drew on four sources of data. These were: a) 57 training, intake and exit records together with accompanying case management notes collected by TrainingPlus workers, for each client; b) Semi-structured interviews with stakeholders (14 trainees, three TrainingPlus staff, and 11 other stakeholders); c) Relevant literature as it relates to aspects of the TrainingPlus approach; and d) Background and contextual data related to issues of housing, employment, education and training.

Once interviews were completed, they were transcribed ready for analysis purposes. Analysis followed standard practices employed in social research methods (Creswell and Plano Clark 2007). An NVIVO (qualitative data analysis software) project was used to store and analyse text obtained from interview transcripts. Analysis included identification of key themes and patterns according to accepted qualitative analysis techniques (Silverman 2001). Where needed, quantitative narrative analysis techniques were employed in order to quantize findings and thereby make sense of the priority and intensity of issues given by respondents (Franzosi 2010). The quantitative data was collated using spreadsheets and analysed using statistical analysis function within Microsoft Excel. The findings presented in the following section unpack the key learnings from the evaluation.

### **Learnings from the evaluation of TrainingPlus**

It is not the intention of this paper to present detailed findings of the evaluation. However, in order to understand the discussion that follows, a brief summary of the findings is provided for the reader.

#### *Summary of evaluation findings*

The evaluation found a number of training and employment outcomes that have emerged from clients' participation in the program. Of 57 clients who had commenced with the program, more than 60 per cent achieved a positive training or employment outcome. A total of 205 accredited units were completed by clients and assessed as competent. By February 2010, 19 clients had achieved an employment outcome—12 of these were for at least three months. The achievement of 35 training and employment outcomes exceeds by 10, what was originally anticipated in KPIs set for the program.

Table 2 summarises an analysis of outcome data in terms of employment, work experience and ongoing training at the beginning of February 2010. Of 57 clients, 39 per cent had left the program with an uncertain destination. About one in four of the 57 were continuing with training. About one-quarter of the clients had achieved employment outcomes.

Perhaps just as significantly as these outcomes the evaluation also identified outcomes that point to a shift in clients' work readiness. Clients' increased work readiness was observed in terms of a progressive shift from an identity that was expressed in terms of 'unemployable' to one that was increasingly 'employable'. While some of these identity shifts were subtle they were nevertheless very significant. These changes were attributed to a number of factors: use of a supportive case management approach; the development of strong relationships with external stakeholders and with clients; the ability of the program to advocate for clients; and a hands-on, supportive learning environment. The evidence from both the literature and the data gathered during this evaluation suggests that the approach used by TrainingPlus (in terms of customised and personalised case management support) provides Indigenous long term unemployed people in Alice Springs with a more direct and sustainable pathway into employment than other approaches would.

**Table 2. Employment and other outcomes for clients at February 2010**

Employment and other outcomes	Status (at Feb 2010)	Per cent of total
Ongoing employment	9	15.79%
Employed greater than 13 weeks	3	5.26%
Employed less than 13 weeks	7	12.28%
Work experience	2	3.51%
Continuing with training	14	24.56%
Left program (unsure of destination)	22	38.60%
Total	57	100.0%

### *What works*

The key ingredients of the TrainingPlus program that produce employment/training/livelihood outcomes relate to the four aspects of the program identified in the findings of this evaluation: 1) the case management approach; 2) the relationships formed with clients and other stakeholders; 3) the ability of staff to advocate for and support clients; and 4) the learning environment. Case management in the TrainingPlus context encompasses a range of individualised or personalised planning, support, advocacy and relational components. It requires a significant amount of ‘behind the scenes’ work that the client will not necessarily see.

The extent to which a client is ready to adopt the values of workplace culture also influences these outcomes (for example In terms of literacy and numeracy, regular attendance, punctuality and work ethic). A client that is not prepared to adopt these values (or at least accept the behaviours that go with these values) will be less likely to achieve the employment and skill development outcomes that they may otherwise be capable of.

At an organisational level the extent to which TrainingPlus was able to forge new and constructive working relationships with other organisations, had a direct impact on outcomes. Relationships with Job Services Australia providers, employers and other RTOs have all facilitated effective service delivery. The evaluation suggested that relationships must be strategic. It was evident that trying to build relationships where there was a sense of competition would be a problem. On the other hand, collaborative partnerships where there was mutual benefit proved productive.

### **Discussion and implications**

The findings of the evaluation of TrainingPlus are to some extent secondary to the purposes of this paper. While they are important for the ongoing development of the program there are perhaps more significant issues that arise from the findings that have implications for VET delivery and its function in an Indigenous and cross-cultural context. There are also implications that arise for teaching that we will raise here. The arguments presented here are provided with an understanding that they apply directly to the remote Indigenous service delivery. While there may be lessons that can be applied to urban or mainstream contexts, we suspect that the bulk of the learnings offered here are most useful to locations where Indigenous people make up a significant proportion of the population and where there are strong traditional cultural values present within the Indigenous population. We would expect that these issues would arise in the more remote centres where there are strong Indigenous communities in each Australian state and the Northern Territory as a whole.

With these provisos in mind, *we would first assert that VET as a tool that leads directly to employment, is not particularly effective* in this context. The paradigm in which this kind of VET delivery operates assumes that the skills deficits that are required for employment (or employability) can be fairly directly filled through vocational training. As discussed earlier in the literature (see Indigenous employment strategies, page 4) it would seem that many of the employment service reforms adopted by the Australian Government accept this as axiomatic. The reality of the TrainingPlus context is such that preparing individuals for work is just not as simple as filling skills and knowledge gaps. There are several reasons for this. They are partly alluded to by the statistics (see Table 1, page 6) which show the stark contrast between Indigenous and non-Indigenous elements of the Alice Springs population. However, the statistics say nothing about culture. They say nothing about the worldview of Indigenous people, and as discussed earlier (see Indigenous culture and western worldviews, page 4) an understanding of that worldview is seldom sought. They say nothing directly about the cultural values of the mainstream of society, where policy directions and strategies are determined for the apparent good of all Australians.

Creating opportunities for employment requires more than successful completion of a Certificate III. It requires a shift in identity so that the trainee's values become more closely aligned to those of the workplace. We may at first cringe at the thought of training as a vehicle for identity change, but that is what we are indeed doing in training (see page 3). For those of us who have been brought up in the mainstream of Australian culture, those values were instilled in us from an early age. They are, as Sutton (2011: 66) suggests, 'sedimented'. We learned as a child that by doing our chores and saving our pocket money we would be rewarded. For most of us, this process was enculturated in us over 15 or 16 years until we attained our first part time job. It is at that point that we became work ready. We are kidding ourselves if we think we can instil the same kind of work-ready values in an individual who has only been exposed to a six month Certificate course.

The reader may well ask: Why is it then, that an organisation such as the Desert Peoples Centre encourages the use of vocational training? We believe VET is a valuable tool. While we contend that training delivery may not always lead directly to employment, it can be seen as part of a bigger process of engagement in learning. We believe that human beings are by nature curious. All of us want to learn. As adults we want to learn about things that are relevant and meaningful to us. For participants coming to TrainingPlus enrolled in a training program, the context of building a tucker box or servicing a car provides an immediate space for engagement. By learning simple carpentry skills or construction skills, the immediate value of this skill is not necessarily seen in terms of a career in the building and construction industry or the automotive service industry. Rather it provides a meaningful space to learn about how trainees can fix their own cars or how they can repair the doors in their houses. *VET training then, is a place for creating meaning and for engaging at the interface between the mainstream and Indigenous culture.* We contend then, in this context, that VET is as much about engagement as it is about skills. The outcomes, as the literature suggests (for example, Schuller et al. 2004) are more than just about employment.

There are implications in all of this for VET practitioners from the mainstream wanting to deliver training in Indigenous contexts. The first point we would make in relation to this, is that in order to be effective, non-Indigenous VET practitioners need to be aware of their own culture before they try to become aware of Indigenous cultures. We (as non-Indigenous commentators) confess that we will never fully understand Indigenous culture. But do we really understand the unique features of our own culture? As the earlier discussion of the

literature suggests (see Indigenous culture and western worldviews, page 4) it seems that many non-Indigenous people assume they have no culture. They find it difficult to express the norms and values of their culture in tangible terms. They find it difficult to identify the artefacts of their culture. Yet non-Indigenous cultures are full of artefacts and full of often unstated norms, mores and values that define who we are. Cross-cultural awareness then, needs to start with awareness of one's own culture. *As VET practitioners an awareness of our own cultural biases will help us inordinately as we are confronted with values and norms of behaviour in another culture.*

*Trainers who enter this learning environment may need to be qualified, not only in their field of expertise and in adult learning techniques, but they also need to be equipped with a range of skills and characteristics that promote engagement.* We believe this is fundamental to successful teaching and learning in the kind of environment where learners (such as those who join TrainingPlus) thrive. The trainer must be concerned not only with skills transfer, he or she must also be able to support identity change, behaviour change, attitude change and introduce the learner to new and supportive networks while at the same time being flexible and engaging. The trainer must explicitly model the kind of behaviours that are expected in the workforce as well as being aware of his or her own cultural biases. This kind of trainer is a rare breed.

Finally, we see implications for strategic policy direction emerging from this discussion. Against the background of disadvantage painted in the literature, there is a need to reflect carefully on the challenges associated with 'closing the gap' as it were, being respectful of culture and at the same time providing every opportunity for Indigenous people to access all that they aspire to in the mainstream world. We do not suggest that Indigenous people we work with do not aspire to employment. Many do, and many achieve their aspirations. Yet, for all the reasons outlined above, it is often a long, hard and often frustrating journey. The place of VET in this journey can be a particularly challenging one that may take considerable time. This time is generally not taken into account in funding models, which make assumptions consistent with a view that sees VET as an individualised linear process where skills are imparted to meet employer requirements and therefore fill industry skills gaps. We acknowledge that the TrainingPlus model is imperfect and is relatively costly—at least from a training delivery perspective. Customised support and case management take considerable resources. The evaluation of TrainingPlus shows that this approach does work in many cases. Nevertheless, *we would see a broadening of the scope of funding for VET in Indigenous contexts.* Performance indicators that are narrowly focussed on job or qualifications outcomes (or unit completion outcomes) miss the mark. To be effective training providers in this kind of context must be able to demonstrate that learners are progressing in their identity to the extent that their horizons are widened, their understanding of workplace expectations and values is aligned for the intended purpose and they are more capable of making informed choices about their future. We would also see changes that are demonstrated in improved health and well-being outcomes, improved social relationships, and better family functioning. All these things are the hallmarks of an effective training program. A broadened scope implies broadened responsibilities, more accountability, and importantly, and appropriate level of funding to match the increased scope.

## **Conclusions**

This paper has to some extent problematised the issue of training for employment outcomes in Indigenous contexts. While it is based on the findings of an evaluation of the TrainingPlus program, delivered by the Desert Peoples Centre in Alice Springs, the implications have a

broader application for training providers, practitioners and funders as they seek to maximise the outcomes for Indigenous clients. The program itself was designed to produce employment and training outcomes and to some extent it achieved those outcomes. However, in the process of reflecting on the outcomes we see a number of implications for delivery of training in remote Indigenous contexts.

First, we contend that in these contexts, VET as a tool designed for employment outcomes is not particularly effective. The process of achieving work outcomes is often long and difficult. It requires a shift in identity so that the trainee's values become more closely aligned to those of the workplace. While VET itself is not the silver bullet, the training environment is a place for creating meaning and for engaging at the interface between the mainstream and Indigenous culture.

Second, for trainers the significance of cultural awareness should not be underestimated. For those of us who are VET practitioners, an awareness of our own cultural biases will help us inordinately as we are confronted with values and norms of behaviour in another culture. Trainers who enter the cross-cultural learning environment may need to be qualified, not only in their field of expertise and in adult learning techniques, but they also need to be equipped with a range of skills and characteristics that promote engagement. Trainers need to be able to successfully straddle the cultural divide.

Finally, we see implications for strategic policy direction emerging from this discussion. The kind of customised support and case management offered in a program like TrainingPlus takes considerable resources. These resources are not factored into funding models. While funding for VET delivery may be based on notional hours of attendance and in the domain of job services, success is deemed to be related to sustained employment outcomes, a more nuanced approach that recognises the incremental steps along the way to employment, should be considered.

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