

Aboriginal Women - Sector Leaders

The NCOSS Indigenous Women's Leadership Program

By Catherine Mahony

In March 2007 NCOSS developed a proposal for a leadership program specifically for Aboriginal women working in the NSW community sector. The search for funding to progress the project began immediately.

At the *Working Together for NSW* Joint HSCEOS/FONGA Implementation meeting in 2008, it was announced that the Department of Premier and Cabinet would fund this project, to be jointly delivered by NCOSS and Tranby Aboriginal College.

Background

A vast and robust evidence base consistently highlights the inequality in service provision and outcomes for Aboriginal Australians. Solutions to the long term social exclusion of Indigenous people must be consistent with the principle and practice of self-determination. The development and promotion of culturally relevant leadership capacity within Aboriginal communities is a critical requirement for self determination and a key capacity building need that this project seeks to address.

Identified Need

A consistent finding in the research is that Aboriginal women carry significant responsibility for the well-being of their communities but are severely underrepresented in formal positions of influence¹. Moreover, their ability to represent the views and 'lived experience' of Aboriginal service recipients to other stakeholders (politicians, funders, peaks, the media etc) is often compromised by the application of Eurocentric models of leadership.

These models often assume a male gendered leadership and other cultural assumptions about what constitutes 'effective' leadership; many of which are alienating and inappropriate for Aboriginal women.

Given the high number of Aboriginal people who are clients of community services, there is a serious lack of Aboriginal women in leadership positions within the community services sector. NCOSS consultations on sector workforce development issues has consistently highlighted the need for strategies that attract more Aboriginal employees into the sector. This requires both Aboriginal leaders as role models and appropriate professional development opportunities to facilitate leadership potential.

There was no leadership program specifically for Aboriginal women in the NSW non-government community sector. Aboriginal women, particularly those serving as voluntary members of Boards of Management, have very limited access to programs that recognise their contribution and develop their leadership capacity. This project seeks to address this need through a pilot program customised to the needs of Aboriginal women as leaders and potential leaders.

Target Group

The project is aimed at Aboriginal women working in the sector as Board Members, Managers or aspiring Managers of community services.

Objectives

¹ Aspects of training that meet Indigenous Australians' aspirations: A systematic review of research, Miller, Cydde; November 2005, NCVER.

1. To develop the leadership capacity of Aboriginal women from the NSW community sector
2. To establish an on-going Aboriginal Women's Leaders network
3. To generate learning's from this pilot to inform and improve future leadership programs for Aboriginal women.

Strategies and Delivery

The key strategy is the delivery of a six month intensive leadership program developed and delivered by NCOSS and Tranby Aboriginal College that combines;

1. Accredited management and governance modules from the Diploma in Business Governance in Aboriginal Communities
2. A series of Aboriginal women guest speakers, with a focus on intergenerational learning, role modelling and mentoring.
3. An action learning approach with a focus on relevant case studies and the organisational experiences of the participants.
4. The provision of resources, advice and support between 'learning blocks' via the NCOSS Management Support Unit.

The design of the program is informed by the Aboriginal Women's Leadership Project Steering Committee, in partnership with NCOSS and Tranby Aboriginal College. Tranby has an extensive history and excellent reputation in delivering Aboriginal education and NCOSS regards this new partnership as a significant step in supporting greater career development for Aboriginal women in our sector.

As this is a pilot program, there is a pronounced focus on developing our understanding of what constitutes 'good practice' for Aboriginal women from their perspectives and experiences.

For further information about the [Indigenous Women's Leadership Program](#)

For [2009 Program Outline](#)

About the [IWLP Closing Ceremony](#)

Next Step: An evaluation of the Pilot Program will be conducted. It will be used to direct decisions on future Indigenous Women's Leadership Programs.

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