Australian Workplace Innovation and Social Research Centre

THE STRETTON CENTRE

MARNI WAIENDI – ART EMPLOYMENT TRAINING TO EMPLOYMENT MODEL: CASE STUDIES

Strategic Framework for Regional Aboriginal Workforce Development: Northern Adelaide Focus

Accompanying Report 3

Cecilia Moretti & John Spoehr

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AUSTRALIAN WORKPLACE INNOVATION AND SOCIAL RESEARCH CENTRE

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Australian Workplace Innovation and Social Research Centre
The University of Adelaide
230 North Terrace
Adelaide
South Australia 5005

www.adelaide.edu.au/wiser

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1 Background

The development of a regional Strategic Framework for Aboriginal Workforce Development in South Australia was jointly commissioned by the Local Government Association of South Australia and Stretton Centre Services to increase and enhance opportunities for Aboriginal employment in local government council regions. The project brief was to document the Aboriginal training to employment model developed by Marni Waiendi and ART Employment in the Northern Adelaide region and use it to inform an Aboriginal Workforce Development Strategy with specific application to local government. It is intended for South Australian local government councils and other organisations to be able to draw on the experience and learnings associated with the implementation of the model, in order to inform and progress their own localised training to employment strategies.

The development of the Strategic Framework has involved the following stages:

- Completing a literature review to identify relevant Indigenous workforce strategies being implemented in other jurisdictions;
- Completing an environmental scan of regional Aboriginal workforce initiatives and programs funded by Local, State and National Government, and local employment conditions and outlook in the North;
- Developing a profile of the Aboriginal population in the Playford LGA with particular emphasis on education, employment and training participation and opportunities;
- Consulting with key stakeholders and organisations to draw on their experience and develop a number of case studies of successful Aboriginal training to employment initiatives in Northern Adelaide; and
- Preparing a sector-wide Strategic Framework for Aboriginal Workforce Development in the Northern Adelaide region, and a second Strategic Framework for Aboriginal Workforce Development specifically referenced to the role of South Australia local governments.

The Strategic Framework for South Australian Local Government is published as a separate Main Report. The present report documents the training to employment focus of Marni Waiendi and ART Employment and includes illustrative case studies for the Holden Aboriginal Apprenticeship Program and Garden Blitz project (*Accompanying Report 3*). These examples are referred to briefly in the main Strategic Framework report, with the present report designed to provide greater detail and insight into the workings and learnings of these initiatives. A literature review and environmental scan of initiatives and programs is also published as a separate report (*Accompanying Report 1*) as is the City of Playford Aboriginal Population Profile (*Accompanying Report 2*).

2 Aboriginal training to employment initiatives in the Northern Adelaide region

Consultation was undertaken with stakeholders in the Northern Adelaide region who have had direct experience with local Aboriginal training to employment programs, to scope what has been done and to what effect. This included representatives from the City of Playford, ART Employment, and associated projects included here as case studies.

2.1 Marni Waiendi

The Playford Indigenous Transition Pathways Centre (*Marni Waiendi)* was established in 2004 in partnership with the local Aboriginal community and local agencies including

Aboriginal Education, training bodies, industry and governments as a 'whole of government model'. The Centre was established by the City of Playford in conjunction with the Aboriginal community to provide Aboriginal young people with opportunities to engage in learning pathways leading to successful employment outcomes and positive social and economic participation. The primary goal was to achieve 'sustained well-being, learning and employment outcomes for Aboriginal young people, thereby halting intergenerational poverty'. Fundamentally, the model is about life-long learning from early childhood to sustained employment. The model was developed in association with the Kaurna elders and leaders and managed by Aboriginal project staff with the support of the City of Playford.

The Aboriginal Community gave the Centre the name Marni Waiendi 'Towards a Future' in recognition of their support at the time for the Centre. A critical feature of Marni Waiendi was the support and involvement of the local Aboriginal leadership and community. An Aboriginal-based governing council was established to manage the work of the Centre and to advocate to all levels of government. The Centre employed a Project Manager, Project Officers and Administration Staff.

The focus of Marni Waiendi was expanded to incorporate an Aboriginal Lifelong Learning Strategy which brings in early childhood, health and well-being. The strategy was centred on a holistic approach, integrating culture, health, housing, learning, employment and governance by and for the local Aboriginal community. As such, Marni Waiendi constituted a 'learning node' connecting a network of stakeholders to provide a comprehensive range of education, training and other support services to engage Indigenous young people in seamless, aspirational, action-based learning pathways leading to employment, social inclusion and cultural participation. Case management and mentoring approaches were integral to Marni Waendi support services.

Aboriginal young people often come from a background of intergenerational unemployment, which can lead to lower aspiration for employment. Marni Waiendi used a staged approach to account for different levels of job readiness among young Aboriginal people, for example by focusing initially on engagement through activities such as the literacy and numeracy program, followed by linking participants to specific vocational courses in combination with supporting activities (e.g. Driver Education, Structured Work Placement to give participants a better understanding of the workplace).

A particular strength of the Marni Waiendi model involved the strategic partnership formed between the City of Playford and the local Aboriginal community. The Council had the resources and expertise to assume legal entity status, provide corporate support, manage bureaucratic and governance arrangements, and to liaise with various government departments to link into and administer available state and commonwealth funding including addressing quite intensive funding reporting requirements. This paid for necessary infrastructure and enabled Marni Waiendi to procure Aboriginal staff to deliver training to employment programs. The synthesis within Marni Waiendi of Aboriginal community involvement and ownership, and local government capabilities was seen to produce a powerful complement in furthering the social and economic interests of local Aboriginal people. Key successes of the Marni Waiendi training to employment model included the development of a strong cohort of Aboriginal staff channelled into State government, and recognition in Canberra as a project of national significance.

Once the training to employment model was established, the City of Playford formed the view that it could feasibly be delivered independently of Council. At this point the Council stepped away from direct service delivery and this function was taken up ART Employment. ART expanded the model to include the engagement of the Kaurna Lands Trust, Aboriginal Health providers, Sport & Recreation, Housing, and schools, making the model highly integrated, robust and representative of the Kaurna people. It is seen as a positive development that the training to employment model seeded within Council by

way of Marni Waiendi had reached a stage where it could meet the needs of community independently of Council, and that ART Employment was able to take it to this next level.

2.2 ART EMPLOYMENT

ART Employment Pty Ltd (Aboriginal Recruitment Training and Employment) is an Aboriginal owned and managed company established to develop and support innovative Aboriginal training and employment models and unique community based Aboriginal training and employment models of national significance. The service engages with local industry to understand where employment opportunities exist and links Aboriginal job seekers to these opportunities through targeted training, development and support.

Partnerships have been formed with a range of stakeholders to support and develop employment opportunities for Aboriginal people. The partnerships have evolved through ART's personnel, experience, networks and connections to industry, training, community organisations, community and state and federal agencies, and are based on a shared commitment to improve training-to-employment outcomes for Aboriginal job seekers underpinned by healthy lifestyle activities and choices. For example, Muna Paiendi (provides primary health care services to Aboriginal people living in the northern metropolitan area) has formally partnered with ART Employment to perform routine health checks on commencing members. This assists ART Employment to position its clients in the best possible way to gain employment, while Muna Paiendi benefits from increased contact with the Aboriginal community.

ART Employment specialises in brokering with training and employment services (Indigenous and non-Indigenous) and assisting in the development of programs designed to equip Aboriginal participants with requisite skills and capabilities to work in recruiting industries. Rather than 'training for training's sake', the organisational principle is to 'work backwards' by identifying industry opportunities and what specific employers are looking for in their employees, examining what RTO's have to offer, and working with RTOs so they can better respond to these local demands – within an Aboriginal employment context. ART Employment works on the premise that employers are looking for more than job-specific skills, with 'employability' (also characterised as 'job readiness' capabilities) rating as a key requirement. Hence there is a focus on wrap around services to develop capabilities across both specific skill sets and employability attributes for Aboriginal job-seekers.

ART Employment has partnered with employers such as Primo Smallgoods, Woolworths, GMH Holden and Coates Hire to tailor accredited training according to specific industry needs, for Aboriginal participants. The partnerships extend to industry supervisors attending classrooms to monitor the efficacy of the training and to observe the progress of Aboriginal trainees. ART Employment also delivers **cultural awareness training** for corporate and public organisations to assist them in engaging with Aboriginal clients, community, colleagues and suppliers. The training equips participating organisations with the knowledge and practical tools and techniques to offer Aboriginal inclusive and understanding work environments.

A key aspect of the service is the provision of **mentoring support** which combines a case management approach and coaching methodologies to simultaneously provide job seekers with practical tools and intensive one-to-one support. Mentors work closely with participants to develop meaningful connections and relationships, and canvas the immediate and peripheral life issues impacting on their employment prospects. They perform crucial wrap around support roles, by helping participants to link to necessary

services, attending court with them if required, helping them to organise their various commitments and appointments, and following them up if they do not turn up to training on schedule.

The ART Employment experience has highlighted a range of key factors contributing to successful training to work transitions for Aboriginal people. These include:

- Offering integrated services to Aboriginal people, preferably in a centralised location, that bring together supported health, training and employment services coupled with welfare, family and justice support networks.
- Using a case manager and/or mentorship approach to support Aboriginal job-seekers. Case managers and mentors must be highly committed and able to connect meaningfully with participants. This often means being available outside regular working hours (ART Employment case managers field calls both day and night from participants with multiple complex needs).
- Conducting routine health and dental checks (including drug and alcohol testing) as a requirement of enlisting with the service, as this sets up a solid foundation for participants' involvement and ultimate success in securing an ongoing job. Some people will walk away from the service at this point; however it is considered a necessary part of the compact and a commitment on the part of participants to recognising and doing what is necessary to gain a job.
- Catching people (especially young people) at transition points in their lives rather than at the 'back end' when their situation has become entrenched. ART Employment has received the message that young Aboriginal people want jobs but do not know how to get started; hence, it is vital to intervene at school level to introduce principles of self-empowerment, motivation and aspiration, and to develop a career plan before young people leave school.

ART Employment has hosted a number of successful training to work transition projects in the Northern Adelaide region. Two of these – the *Garden Blitz Project* and *Holden Aboriginal Apprenticeship Program* – have been included here to showcase successful examples of practice in the region and the principles on which they were based. More detailed information about these case studies can be found in the accompanying Case Study Report.

2.2.1 The Garden Blitz Project

The aim of the Garden Blitz project was to up-skill Aboriginal jobseekers while delivering benefits for Aboriginal Housing SA tenants in the Elizabeth region. The program was led by a partnership between Housing SA; ART Employment; and the Department of Further Education, Employment, Science and Technology (DFEEST). The City of Playford played an instrumental role in project administration, reporting and acquittal of funds. This included signing the funding agreement with DFESST – thereby assuming full accountability for the project - managing the funding, and dispersing payments to ART Employment as milestones were met. The training provider Heta was engaged to provide training for the first round of the project, and Taoundi College was engaged for the second round. A third round is planned with TAFE as the training provider. Important partnerships were also established with a number of JSAs – in particular Workskil, Boystown, and Job Prospects.

The idea for the Garden Blitz project grew out of previous work undertaken by ART Employment, which was contracted by the SA Aboriginal Elders and Community Care Services Inc. to provide garden maintenance for 60 properties inhabited by Aboriginal residents. Noting a widespread problem of poorly maintained yards in Aboriginal communities, ART Employment approached Housing SA and DFEEST about developing a landscaping program that involved recruiting, training and supporting Aboriginal job seekers. Funding was sourced from Skills For All for training in Cert II Horticulture, with payment contingent on participants achieving the certificate.

The project was based on the provision of a 'whole of person' suite of services, which is understood as essential for successful entry into and retention in the workforce of Aboriginal people. The project consisted of the following steps:

- **Recruitment of participants**: ART Employment advertised and promoted the project through job service providers, the Turkindi Network[1], schools, Aboriginal organisations, correction services, and CentreCare among others with the aim of recruiting 15 to 20 participants. Applicants were selected by means of a face to face interview process.
- **Induction day**: participants were briefed by the different agencies involved about the project and associated expectations, and OH&S stipulations were explained.
- **Accredited training program in Cert II Horticulture** was held over 13 weeks. Training was designed and provided by the participating RTO in partnership with ART Employment; a live tenanted site for the practical component of the training was sourced and coordinated by Housing SA. Additional one on one literacy and numeracy learning support was provided by ART Employment as part of the broader training support.
- **Health checks** were provided for participants by Muna Paiendi, including dental, eye testing, diabetes testing, podiatry; coordination of agencies as to address health and social issues as required (in collaboration with ART Employment).

The first Garden Blitz activity commenced in October 2012, and proved so successful that a second round was organised. Of the 17 participants registered in the pilot round, 12 achieved Statements of Attainment and/or Statements of Attendance, one gained employment on a major project (e.g. Adelaide Oval redevelopment), three were on referral to jobs and awaiting interview outcomes; one was being supported to transition to a TAFE Mining Certificate course, and one had started their own business. The second round produced 17 registrations, resulting in nine achieving Statements of Attainment and/or Statements of Attendance, five gaining employment, one enrolling in a further Cert II course at Taoundi College, and one being referred to a Primo Meats Employment Program. All participants across both rounds were provided with medical checks by Muna Paiendi Community Health Service.

At the conclusion of the project participants were reported to be more engaged, willing and confident about finding employment, and had taken responsibility for establishing daily routines. They also took pride in their achievements and the positive feedback received from project stakeholders and the community. The health checks resulted in the diagnosis and subsequent treatment of diabetes, dental, optical and referrals to a GP for ongoing medical assessment and support.

There was positive acclaim for project results from Housing SA, the property tenant, and neighbours of the property. Local feedback indicated increased neighbourhood harmony and acceptance of Aboriginal residents, stemming from the environmental improvements brought about by the project. It was reported that curious neighbours witnessing the Aboriginal team working to improve the yard helped to shift negative racial perceptions. Partnering JSA's were also reported to have benefited from their involvement in the project; referring their clients to the project ensured their target numbers and PPE requirements were met, as per their funding stream for these participants. Muna Paiendi benefitted by gaining access to Aboriginal workers on site as part of the training program, for the purpose of conducting health checks and providing clinical services.

[1] The Turkindi network is an informal group of Indigenous and non-Indigenous people who, through their work, are directly involved in assisting Indigenous people in finding meaningful employment, training or information relating to Indigenous service providers and events statewide and nationally http://www.aitec.edu.au/sbcpb/index.php/turkindi-online

The project presented a range of valuable learnings about delivering training to work programs for Aboriginal people:

- **Maintaining strong relationships and clear lines of communication** between partnering organisations is critical. The success of the project hinged on the support received from Housing SA, DFEEST, the JSAs, the RTOs, Muna Paiendi and the community in valuing the project and wanting to be part of the consortium approach. The partnership with Housing SA was reported to have worked extremely well, due to the clear commitment, tolerance and flexibility of the Housing SA Manager involved in the project. The manager maintained close contact with the project, by attending weekly meetings and personally visiting the property with the trainer. This built a shared understanding of the issues attending the project, and mutual cooperation in problem solving and forward planning.
- **Managing different stakeholder expectations** is important, particularly those of the live site property tenant. The role of the project mentor, who also acted as key liaison between the various stakeholders connected with the live site process, was seen to be critical in managing different expectations. The mentor was seen to 'hold the process together' by maintaining a neutral, courteous stance and balancing the demands of the tenant, Housing SA, the training providers and trainees.
- Engage an **RTO that is committed to high quality training standards** and securing completions for students (e.g. Heta was seen as a highly motivated and organised RTO, partly because it was in their pecuniary interests to secure completions for trainees).
- Maintaining an **integrated focus on practical and theoretical learning** proved to be a key factor in engaging and sustaining Aboriginal participation. There was consistently good turnout at the landscaping site, but less so for theoretical lessons at the training venue; what appeared to work well was incorporating as much theory as possible into the practical, hands on sessions. It is important therefore to use a trainer who is an experienced builder/supervisor with a solid focus on industry standards; who has experience in 'live work-training' (i.e. not limited to classroom-based instruction); and who is flexible enough to incorporate theoretical training into the practical setting.
- The **live site practical training element** of the project was considered to be one of the project's key strengths, however it also presented key challenges. The main issue involved coordinating the demands and schedules of different parties on site (i.e. the tenant, trainers, trainees and suppliers of material goods).
- Having in place a **case manager/mentor to liaise with participants**, who is experienced in working with Aboriginal people and aware of training and employment issues in this context, was considered critical to the success of the project. Garden Blitz mentors working in this capacity built strong relationships with clients and were able to troubleshoot and follow them up where necessary. They also advised JSAs on attendance rates on a daily basis, which was appreciated by the agencies.

2.2.2 The Holden Aboriginal Apprenticeship Program

The Holden Aboriginal Apprenticeship Program (Holden Program) was developed to create opportunity for local Indigenous people to qualify and apply for apprenticeships within General Motors Holden, with potential to lead to subsequent employment with the company. Recognising that not all program participants would secure ongoing employment with Holden, a secondary aim was to increase participants' technical skills and wider employability through the program training.

The Holden Program was developed and implemented by General Holden Motors at the South Australian Elizabeth plant, in partnership with ART Employment. A key driver has

been Holden's commitment to the local community and to building a culture of diversity and inclusion in its workforce. Recognising that the Elizabeth region has a disproportionate level of disadvantage and one of the largest urban Indigenous populations in South Australia, Holden has accepted corporate responsibility for developing opportunities in the region for those most in need. Holden is also a signatory to the National Indigenous Covenant Action Plan, and part of this involves providing job opportunities for Aboriginal Australian job seekers.

The Holden Program is based on a strategic partnership between Holden, ART Employment, DFEEST and the City of Playford. As a member of the IEP Employment Panel, the City of Playford played a key role in accessing Indigenous Enterprise Program funding for the project. This extended to signing the funding agreement with the funding body (i.e. the City of Playford was the accountable entity), administering project finances, releasing milestone payments to ART Employment, and collating documentation to show employment outcomes upon which release payments were contingent. Taoundi College was engaged to provide non-accredited training (pre-employment personal development) and TAFESA to provide accredited training (Cert I Engineering), while the City of Playford Council played an administrative role. The training component of the program was held over 13 weeks, with mentoring support and wrap around services continuing for approximately twelve months to support apprentices to stay engaged with work and to balance work demands with competing family need and personal circumstances.

Elements of the Program include the following:

Recruitment of participants: A community information session run by ART Employment at the Holden site, publicised through ART's networks (e.g. JSA's, Centrelink, non-government agencies, schools and the Aboriginal community). Around 100 people attended the session. Holden presented the company story from set up to present day, and gave a detailed explanation of the roles they had planned for the apprentices. This included the very clear and direct message that candidates would have to meet strict health and lifestyle requirements (including passing medical, drug and alcohol testing) in order to be successfully engaged by Holden. The session was attended by supervisors from each of the shopfloor areas relevant to the apprentices, who took questions from participants at the end of the session (for close to two hours, due to the high level of interest of session participants).

Pre-employment training: an initial non-accredited, four week training program was designed, developed in conjunction with Holden, and delivered with the support of Tauondi College. The training focused on literacy and numeracy, and employment-related personal development. Participants were supported throughout the pre-employment training by an ART Employment Mentor. Holden also maintained an active role throughout the pre-employment training, with supervisors attending training sessions, interacting with, and getting to know participants. Holden also hosted weekly BBQ's for participants.

In a concurrent program, Holden employees including supervisors and any workers expected to come into contact with program participants took part in a tailored cultural awareness training provided by ART Employment. Training took place every day over a 2-3 week cycle involving groups of ten to fifteen people; this involved a major investment of time by Holden and its employees to support the Aboriginal Apprenticeship Program.

A further component of the pre-employment training phase involved assessing and addressing participants' health and lifestyle issues. These were described in many cases as 'multiple' and 'complex', involving drug and alcohol, housing and violence issues, among others. Muna Paiendi conducted health screening for all participants, who were referred on an as needs basis to Nunkuwarrin Yunti, an Adelaide based community controlled centre providing health care and community support services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Intensive one-to-one literacy and numeracy support also was

provided by ART Employment case managers to all participants from the commencement through to completion of the program.

Selection for Cert I Engineering: 20 pre-employment training participants were selected to participate in nationally accredited training in Cert I Engineering, the entry level qualification for an apprenticeship in mechanical engineering, tool making and electrical with Holden. This training was provided by TAFESA Elizabeth, and was located directly across the road from ART Employment office. This proved very useful in keeping the training and support integrated, as participants tended to go to the ART office during their lunch break which gave them the opportunity to debrief with the ART mentor. The trainer also occasionally joined in, further strengthening the training and support collaboration. The training involved a one week work experience placement and was designed to create a practical, hands-on delivery methodology to enable work ready graduate outcomes.

Program participants were very aware that to be successful in ultimately gaining an apprenticeship at Holden, they would have to pass key medical, drug and alcohol, and aptitude tests. They also knew they had the 13 week duration of the training program to identify and address any inhibiting issues in time for Holden's official selection of apprentices. A number of screenings were conducted over the course of the training, to diagnose and monitor progress on different indicators. A good number who tested positive for illicit substances at the beginning of the program were clear by its conclusion, which was testimony to participants' strong motivation to realize the employment opportunity at hand.

Holden supported participants by providing them with their own pre-interview medical and aptitude tests (e.g. a dexterity test wearing gloves, BMI and strength testing) so participants knew what to expect from the formal selection process. It became evident from this testing that some participants were likely to fail from a BMI perspective so ART Employment arranged to put them through a one month YMCA program, which they committed to undertaking before and after work.

GM Holden recruitment and selection: At the conclusion of the training program, participants underwent a final, formal selection process to ensure they met GM Holden recruitment standards. The process resulted in 12 participants successfully gaining an Apprenticeship with Holden, commencing in July 2012. The six non-successful applicants were provided with alternative training and employment opportunities.

Key insights derived from the project included:

- The importance of approaching employment programs for Aboriginal people from a '**whole of person perspective'**, albeit difficult on occasion to reconcile with formal program funding models. For example, DEEWR funding could not be extended to supporting the exercise program to assist Aboriginal participants to lose weight so they could qualify for the apprenticeship position. Funding was subsequently sourced from DFEEST to provide gym memberships and a personal trainer at the local YMCA Aquatic Centre, with the result that seven out of eight participants with an identified weight problem passed the BMI test. Similarly, no additional funding was available to conduct the compulsory drug and alcohol checks, which were an integral part of the Program; these costs had to be absorbed by ART Employment. It was noted that there is little point putting people through training if they are physically, socially or psychologically unfit to do the work – this highlights the critical nature of providing holistic services in tandem with training.
- Holden's high-level **organizational commitment to and engagement with the project** ('making it their business to make the program work') was critical to the success of the Program. For example, supervisors attended pre-employment training and Cert I training sessions, interacting with participants and forming early connections and relationships with participants. Holden understood that

people were coming with challenging issues, and were prepared to do whatever they could to help them resolve these – although guided by strict (not negotiable) medical, drug and alcohol guidelines.

- A further success factor was the **high level of participant motivation to work at Holden,** which was seen as a locally significant industry, and an organisation they could relate to and wanted to be part of. The level of enthusiasm was noted at the information session, and underpinned the preparedness of participants to commit to the lifestyle and education challenges posed by the project.
- **Mentor support** was crucial to project success, in providing support, encouragement and motivation for participants. Moreover, it was noted that mentoring on a strict nine-to-five schedule will not work as it is important to be available when issues arise, especially considering shift work arrangements. It is a major advantage if the mentor is someone participants' can look up to and respect (e.g. a role model in the community) – who they know will be honest with them and will maintain confidentiality. The project mentor was also useful in maintaining a productive relationship with Holden, visiting once a week to keep communication channels open and to address any issues that arose.

3 CONCLUSION

The training to employment model developed by Marni Waeindi and ART Employment, and put to effective use in the Northern Adelaide region through projects such as the Holden Aboriginal Employment Program and Garden Blitz, has promising applications as part of wider regional strategies to support Aboriginal workforce development. The model and case studies outlined in this report showcase the potential of workforce development programs that are driven by Aboriginal leaders and communities in partnership with local government and other key stakeholders with an investment in Aboriginal workforce development. The training to employment model advocates a locally defined central point of contact connecting Aboriginal community and job seekers, education and training providers, support services, employment services and industry and local employers. It seeks to understand and address local barriers to employment, and to maximise local opportunities for employment through targeted and culturally responsive training and development and the provision of holistic support services to Aboriginal job seekers who require them.

The implementation of the Marni Waiendi-ART Employment training to employment model example signals the great potential for Aboriginal leaders and communities to work with local government and other partners to bring together particular forms of knowledge, skill sets, resources and infrastructure relevant to designing and implementing Aboriginal Workforce Development programs.