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Title of Research:
‘Working for CDEP’: A case study of the Community Development Employment Projects scheme in Port Lincoln, South Australia

Research Publication:

Name of Researcher(s):
D. E. Smith

Time period:
1994

Geographic location:
Port Lincoln (SA)

Methodology:
The research was conducted through interviews and discussions with staff, participants and management of the Kuju CDEP scheme, as well as with government agencies and other local organizations impacted by the scheme. Census data was analysed to examine the statistical impacts of the scheme on the Aboriginal labour force of Port Lincoln.

Aims:
The aim of this research is to describe the organisational structure and practices of the Kuju CDEP scheme, to examine the specific social, economic and cultural contexts in which it operates, and assess its success in improving employment outcomes for Aboriginal people in the area.

Selected findings and insights:
This research found that whilst the Aboriginal work force had historically been well integrated with the Port Lincoln economy, particularly in the primary industry sector, the impact of the recession and rural crisis in the early 1990s had a significant impact on Indigenous employment in particular.

- As CDEP participants accounted for 85% of the total employed Aboriginal population in Port Lincoln, the emergence of the Kuju CDEP scheme was critical to maintaining employment in a struggling regional economy where the Indigenous employment niches were significantly diminished.

The success of the Kuju scheme was attributed to several factors:

- The development of a flexible ‘service contract’ system, which allowed people to work for thirteen weeks at a time;
- The institution of a ‘spouse allowance’, whereby the spouse of a CDEP participant also received their pay through CDEP, as opposed to through unemployment benefits, thereby generating a broader social framework in which CDEP was implicated; and
- Training and career development focus: including a partnership with the local TAFE which tailored courses to the needs of CDEP participants.
The regular employment facilitated by the CDEP scheme was widely considered to have generated subsidiary community benefits: encouraging stability within families, improved attendance and retention rates for their school-aged children, and decreased alcohol-related problems.

- The Kuju scheme was thus more than an economic, employment-oriented endeavour, but had significant impact in broader social contexts.

Despite the significant success of the Kuju scheme, the study found that community discrimination, low-educational levels, and a reluctance to move out of the 'comfort zone' of CDEP employment were factors that continued to limit employment opportunities for Indigenous people in Port Lincoln.

Educational implications:

Relationships between Kuju CDEP and educational institutions have been clearly important in Kuju’s success in facilitating transitions to non-CDEP employment. [partnerships]

The Kuju CDEP scheme demonstrates the variety of articulations between employment opportunities and the attitudes to education. In Port Lincoln, employment opportunities remain highly dependent upon literacy and numeracy, levels of which remain relatively low in the Indigenous community. However, the increased opportunity for regular employment through Kuju is associated with increased attendance and retention of school children. Three factors in particular emerge as relevant in this case study:

- Increased training and employment opportunities have led to increased numbers of Aboriginal Education Workers, whose presence is important in fostering an appropriate educational environment for local Indigenous students.
- It is also implied that employed parents may tend to encourage greater engagement in schooling of their children; reinforcing, through their own example, the value of that schooling as an avenue to employment.
- Schools and training providers have a critical role in developing the capacity of Indigenous staff and parent volunteers to work within a non-Indigenous work environment.

The removal of CDEP funding eligibility for the Port Lincoln region in the coming funding round will place additional challenges for training providers, in collaboration with local education authorities, in ‘skilling’ Aboriginal education workers to be competitive with non-Indigenous teacher aides. Furthermore, educational authorities may need to increase their funding for the specific employment of Aboriginal teacher aides as CDEP funding of such positions is removed. [training] [pathways]

The removal of this established pathway to employment via CDEP will place additional pressures on training providers and other government agencies, as well as local Indigenous organisations, to ensure that not only training and employment outcomes continue but that the social and community benefits that have accrued in the past continue to do so. [capacity development]
Relevance:

Domain 5: Pathways to training, employment and higher education

Student aspirations and key transition points

Participation, retention and achievement in post-compulsory schooling, training and higher education

Related papers:


