

Overview of Cape, Challenges and Agenda for change

Overview and history

Cape York is located on the northern tip of Queensland and encompasses all of the areas north of Cairns. There are 17 Indigenous communities in Cape York; most were formed as missions over the last 100 years. In 1967 the missions began to wind down their influence. Now these communities are administered within Aboriginal Trust areas or, in a few cases, as mainstream local government shires.

Most of these communities are very isolated and are frequently inaccessible by road during the wet season. Approximately 14,000 Aboriginal people live on the Cape with the average community size around 800.

Social issues

As is the case with many Aboriginal Communities, Cape York is afflicted by a number of social problems. Issues such as:

- Extremely high unemployment and lack of employment opportunities
- High rates of preventable disease
- Poor education participation and outcomes, lack of "job ready" people
- Extremely high levels of domestic violence, child abuse and neglect
- Alcohol and substance abuse in epidemic proportions
- High rates of criminal offending and incarceration
- High suicide rate
- Average life expectancy 20 years lower than Australian average

It is widely accepted that one of the major contributing factors is an overwhelming reliance on passive welfare and the epidemic of substance abuse. For a more detailed discussion on these issues, read Noel Pearson's book, 'Our Right to Take Responsibility' (a copy will be made available to all incoming secondees).

In most communities there is almost no enterprise, very few real jobs, appalling educational and health standards. The situation is deteriorating and something needs to change.

Jawun and Corporate Partner approach

Jawun and our Corporate Partners seek to develop innovative ways to arrest and breakthrough the destructive passive welfare economy by:

- Building the capacity of individuals and organisations
- Delivering appropriately skilled resources to priority projects

Jawun Corporate Partners provide the skills of their people to enable our Indigenous partner organisations and their communities to achieve their aspirations. We do not set the agenda; instead we choose to assist with the agreed programs by provision of suitably qualified corporate employees.

We work with a number of Indigenous partner organisations on Cape York. An overview with websites for further reading is provided 'What Cape Organisations Do'

The challenges we face

Over the years, families who have not had the capacity to participate in the real economy has lead to:

- Passive welfare dependency combined with substance abuse
- People who have never known real employment and in many cases, do not have a work ethic.
- People without the education and skills required in the real economy
- In many cases, an inability to recruit top quality people to live and work in the Cape.
- Numerous agendas operating in the Cape making it difficult to united stakeholders on issues and projects
- Ensuring that our involvement is building capacity and achieving outcomes, to ensure that we do not become another dependency
- The ability of the Regional organisations to adequately manage the additional stretch on their capacity that our presence creates.

Message from Noel Pearson*:

Our ultimate goal is to ensure that indigenous people have the capabilities to choose a life they have reason to value.

Economic and social development is about expanding the choices available to people. This range of choices is enriched not only by income, but also other capabilities, such as education, health and community. Development will require access to the opportunities of the real economy. But to make this possible, we must restore social order, attack passive welfare, and tackle substance abuse.

This will only happen if we exercise our right to take responsibility. We (Aboriginal people) have to be as forthright and unequivocal about our responsibilities as we are about our rights - otherwise our society will continue to fall apart while we are still fighting for our rights

This is how we will deliver our future as a recognised first world indigenous people, retaining a culture which requires strong inherited and ongoing connection to ancestral lands, with the freedom to orbit into the wider world and return to home base again.

We believe that the old ways of addressing our issues haven't worked and in many cases, exacerbated the problems. Over recent years, we have embarked on a process of engaging with communities to develop strategies to crunch these issues, but strategies alone aren't enough. What we really need is willing partners who are prepared to bring their expertise to help us deliver these strategies.

Traditionally we have relied on Government to deliver programs, but the problems are too great, so together with Government and a small number of progressive corporations and philanthropic institutions, we have embarked on a true partnership between these sectors and our communities to give real traction to the necessary programs.

*Noel Pearson is Director of the Cape York Institute for Policy and Leadership and works in a voluntary capacity as Team Leader of Cape York Partnerships - a project negotiated between the Queensland Government and Aboriginal leaders of Cape York.

Noel Pearson was born in Cooktown and grew up at Hope Vale, a Lutheran Mission on southeast Cape York Peninsula. Noel Pearson is a history and law graduate from Sydney University. He continues to work as an adviser to the Cape York Land Council and other indigenous organisations in Cape York.

Noel Pearson's current work on Cape York Partnerships draws widely on his thoughts on breaking down 'passive welfare dependency' amongst Cape York Aboriginal people, by reinstating the rights of Aboriginal people to take responsibility for their lives.

The Secondee Experience – Challenge and Reward

A Cape York secondment will almost certainly be one of the most challenging and rewarding activities that people will ever undertake. They will be challenged from the outset.

From the time they arrive in Cairns they will be immediately placed under pressure with activities and learnings. They will be subjected to finding their place in a new group dynamic while learning new skills such as off road driving. The induction will bombard them with information which they will need to understand in order to succeed in their new environment.

For secondees who won't be Cairns based, they will need to negotiate a twelve hour drive over some of the roughest roads in Australia before setting up a rough bush camp. In most cases, they will arrive at their destination after another full days drive over even worse roads and another camp.

And that, some say, is the easy, "fun bit".

They could find themselves in a very remote Aboriginal community where everything is confronting; rubbish, six foot fences, barbed wire, mangy dogs, one very run down shop, and no other signs of commerce, and everywhere, the signs and sounds of dysfunction.

Their accommodation might be very ordinary and more than likely they will have no phone access. When they go to work they might be confronted with a lack of organisation that is hard to imagine in the corporate world. They may be surrounded by apathy. Their tangible support network may be almost non-existent, yet there will be an expectation that they will achieve miracles. If they expect to be universally welcomed with open arms, they may be bitterly disappointed. They may witness all manner of distressing behaviour and incidents.

Despite all this, the **vast majority of secondees rate the experience as clearly exceeding their expectations and almost without exception would do it again given the opportunity**. Most secondees build their ability to learn to take risks, to be more resourceful, to believe in themselves. Secondees have to subordinate their own needs and to work as a team. Most speak about learning to be more compassionate and balanced in the way they go about their business. All speak about finding something in themselves and of personal development.

We are very mindful of OH&S issues and secondees are prepared in such a way that these issues are, as far as possible minimised. While remote communities may be confronting, they are not considered to be dangerous, if the guidelines provided to secondees are adhered to.

In short, the development opportunity offered here to the right people is one which many businesses pay to have their staff attend.

Following is a series of extracts from Westpac secondee evaluations. The question asked was, "Overall did this experience meet your expectations and would you recommend it to your friends and colleagues".

- Yes definitely, I learned a lot about myself....I was challenged in my work and enjoyed overcoming my own limitations... I am better for this experience...
- I hope that I have managed make even a little bit of a difference up in Cape York, as I know that Cape York made a difference to me. I can't believe how much I learned - both personally and professionally - about my strengths and weaknesses and in some cases how different they were in reality to what they were in my perceptions of myself. I was certainly challenged, but in finding ways to get through those challenges, I learnt an awful lot (including the odd hard lesson) on the way. I met some of the most amazing people and heard some really exciting ideas. I had some major frustrations, but these were by far outweighed by the excitement of being able to produce an end product that was useful and helpful and will hopefully allow people to help themselves and their families and their businesses grow and succeed.....I was astounded by how generous people were when I needed help, and I was awed by the physical beauty and attractions of the area. I am so incredibly glad I was able to have this experience.
- I am still high on adrenalin at present therefore I cannot pinpoint any particular area on which the expectation might have fallen down?
- ...Think that I am going home a much better person than when I arrived. Definitely more patient, understanding and compassionate to others. Leaving with the feeling that I have received more than I have given.
- ..This is by far the highlight of both my career & life.
- ...A life changing experience. The secondment certainly provided the desired challenge.
- Never before have I met a better bunch of people, nor laughed as much as I have over the last few weeks. I think it's all about making the most of the opportunities you are given and totally focussing on the good aspects of the secondment - there are plenty of them. Everyone has different reasons for applying and different expectations about what they want to achieve or expose themselves to in Cape York. You can't be selfish and expect everything to work out just as you planned - for everything that is disappointing there are a million things that exceed your expectations. If nothing else, it is an opportunity to put yourself out of your comfort zone and that definitely helps you grow as a person, both a personally and professionally
- ...I achieved a lot in personal growth with new challenges set and being out of my comfort zone
- Well I've had good times & I've had bad times? It has definitely been an interesting experience. It's sure not for everyone, but for the right people it will be an incredibly rewarding experience....Thanks for the opportunity to be a part of this great thing & the opportunity for such extreme personal development. I'm not the same person I was when I left Sydney a few weeks ago?
- ...I would tell them, (incoming secondees), they might freak out at first and think they can't do it (like I did) but as long as they had a keen sense of adventure and compassion they would get used to it quickly. I will never regret this. I will never forget this. And I think there might be some who will remember me, which will always make me smile.