

Case Study - empowering Indigenous leadership



Chris Ingrey; Qantas Sydney offices; Empowered Communities leaders with PM Turnbull & Minister Scullion, Jan 2017

Jawun's inaugural 'reverse secondment' in action

Background

Jawun seeks innovative ways to strengthen Indigenous leadership; from facilitating secondments that provide direct support to leaders, to upskilling up and coming leaders, and making connections between corporate and Indigenous Australia through Executive Visits and Stories of Female Leadership. To further this, Jawun launched the Indigenous Corporate Leadership (ICL) program in collaboration with CBA, Qantas, and Westpac in 2017.

ICL is a 'reverse' of the traditional Jawun secondment model which to date has facilitated over 2,500 secondments from government and corporate to Indigenous organisations: Indigenous leaders from Jawun partner organisations are instead seconded to corporate contexts for paid 6-12 month placements. To empower Indigenous leadership, the program is designed for highly capable participants who are figures of influence in their communities. ICL intends to ensure such leaders gain exposure to the corporate world, strengthen skills and capacity, and expand their networks. As such, roles and responsibilities while on secondments are developed based on the exposure, skills, and goals the participants are seeking to develop through the secondment. The team and projects then are designed to meet these higher learning objectives. This learning-by-doing leads to practical impacts that are mutually beneficial to participant (Indigenous secondee) and sponsor (corporate host organisation).

2013 Jawun Emerging Leader Chris Ingrey, Co-Chair of the Inner Sydney Empowered Communities and CEO of the La Perouse Aboriginal Land Council, was one of three participants this inaugural year. With a clear objective outlined - to learn how to access and influence government - Chris was placed in the Government Industry and International Affairs team at Qantas. As Industry Relations Manager, Chris would review the financial performance of major Australian airports, prepare policy documents and liaise with MPs, and write correspondence and papers for the Group Executive and CEO. Through this work, Chris would be contributing to Qantas while simultaneously achieving his learning goal – how to effectively “influence at a local, state and federal government level.”

Approach

In the design phase Jawun connected participants and sponsors so that individual learning goals could be at the core of secondment roles and responsibilities. This high-touch approach continued with Jawun-hosted progress sessions where participants and sponsors shared experiences and best practices, as well as inputs on how best to capture impact. A dedicated manager was also identified in each sponsor organisation to provide ongoing support and guidance throughout the placement.

At Qantas, Chris' manager Damian Callachor (Head of Industry, Qantas) identified projects and opportunities for Chris to achieve his goal of learning how best to engage government to achieve intended outcomes.

“Chris had already understood he needed to build his expertise and experience in engagement with government because his experiences at La Perouse have shown him that unless you engage with government you get no outcome.”

At the first opportunity Damian suggested Chris accompany colleagues to Canberra. Over six

months Chris visited Canberra a number of times to champion the objectives of Qantas, including in high-level meetings and negotiations.

Outcomes

Chris embarked on his journey at Qantas with a clear goal in mind: To learn how to access and influence government. Chris is already paying it forward by sharing what he has learned with his colleagues and community. Empowering Indigenous leaders like Chris means empowering Indigenous communities. Chris shares some key learnings:

“They say the number one rule when you are lobbying to government is brevity. Keep your message precise and succinct and limit it to three issues.”

Chris also saw the importance of effective time and people management by leaders, and cultivating relationships to achieve an organisation’s intended outcomes:

“Working in community organisations you can get so caught up in non-productive work. You also get caught up in work that other people in the community or your staff can do. One of the biggest challenges was having time for stakeholder relations. I realised at Qantas that it’s important to keep those relationships up. Government relations are about who you know and can access.”

The secondment not only expanded Chris’ network but he also adds, “enhanced my reputation within my own networks.” Reflecting on what the program has meant for him, Chris recalls:

“I strongly believe that the ICL program allowed me to develop my personal skills around effective communication, negotiation, managing people and leadership through on-the-job training and working and learning from my manager and others in the Qantas team.”

These are skills Damian is thrilled to have witnessed Chris develop:

“It was magic to watch the difference from the start to the finish.”

While the long-term impact of the program on Chris will unfold over time, some early outcomes are already surfacing. Chris himself feels this is the case: in his role as co-chair of the Inner Sydney Empowered Communities (ISEC), the regional governance structure tasked with delivering the priorities of the community empowerment agenda:

“My time at Qantas allowed me to reflect on my past leadership styles and decision-making, and learning that rather than just lobbying government on what we wanted we can be more efficient.”

Reflecting on how Chris’ role at ISEC has transformed since joining the ICL program, ISEC Regional Director Eula Rohan observes,

“He is a lot clearer now in what he wants to see from government, in how they work with community and how they interact in negotiations. Time working with Qantas, going up and down to Canberra, has given him another perspective on the workings of government. His ideas and strategies to lead government towards the community’s goals have more precision and are cutting through old barriers. He has a renewed confidence and determination to keep raising the bar for himself and those around him.”

Next Steps

Building on the success of the pilot, and integrating learnings from it, the ICL will continue in 2018 with the existing corporate partners, Qantas, CBA, and Westpac. The second cohort will again be comprised of three ICL participants.