

## Increasing the number of Indigenous health workers

Founded in 2002, John Pearson Consulting (JPC) plays a leading role in the development and support of Indigenous economies and communities throughout the eastern states of Australia and the Torres Strait. From a small consulting company, JPC has grown to offer business support services, employment programs and training initiatives. Recognising the lack of qualified workers in Indigenous health, JPC partnered with TAFE Queensland to deliver an exciting program called Health Workers for Healthy Communities.

### Addressing a skills shortage

Employing Indigenous health workers not only increases the health outcomes for Indigenous people, it also provides a good role model for the younger generation. In partnership with TAFE Queensland, JPC created a program in which around 150 Indigenous people could be trained in a Certificate IV in Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Primary Health Care, with a further qualification in mental health or alcohol and other drugs work. The program had to address two challenges: a geographically disparate student body, and a need for culturally appropriate resources and delivery.

### Statewide network of campuses removes barrier of distance

With TAFE's statewide network of institutes and campuses, a major barrier to Indigenous participation in training was removed. "We know that family commitment is a major factor for Indigenous people — not wanting to travel large distances. With TAFE, we've been able to offer residential programs in locations as diverse as Cairns, Mackay, Rockhampton, the Sunshine Coast and Woorabinda," explains General Manager Tim Robson.

### Culturally appropriate training

Other barriers to increasing the number of Indigenous health workers include the need for Indigenous trainers and culturally appropriate course materials and delivery, including the use of Indigenous case studies.

"No other training provider was able to meet all these needs," says Tim. "Project staff from both our organisations collaborated early, working on the development of the course and resources. A lot of time was spent 'contextualising' the resources and assessment with respect to Indigenous culture. TAFE showed enormous commitment from the start to get it right; and TAFE staff have always been responsive, flexible and supportive — which has facilitated a strong partnership."

### Extending the program to other Indigenous industries

Because of the flexibility and success of the program, JPC is considering offering something similar to other industries where Indigenous workers are needed.

"Our key ethos is to challenge ourselves to continually deliver our programs in a culturally appropriate way in order to provide the most beneficial outcome for Indigenous communities," Tim explains.

"This is really where TAFE has excelled — in terms of its commitment, its trainers and its flexible approach to training."

Tim Robson  
General Manager

**John Pearson Consulting**

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