Safe Places Training Framework: Building Indigenous capacity through work based VET in remote communities

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Abstract
The Safe Places Training Framework project, funded by the Northern Territory Department of Health and Community Services (NTDHCS,) is part of the implementation of the Federal intervention into remote NT Indigenous communities. This project seeks to address many of the issues relating to formal training and capacity development in partnership with government-initiated social and workforce development programmes. This paper highlights some of the project's emerging outcomes and discusses insights into its effectiveness and potential as a model for training and professional development in remote Northern Territory Indigenous workplaces. The innovative approach to professional development and training focuses on Safe Places staff within remote organisations has three key areas; designing appropriate courses, establishing 'communities of practice' to support participation and developing relationships with government staff that develop positive and self sustaining learning experiences, networks and environments. This paper discusses issues related to the development and implementation of this approach and the role of VET delivery within the project.

Introduction
The Safe Places programme is developed to be integrated into community life and support the development of sustainable employment of Indigenous people within their communities. This project seeks to address many of the issues relating to training and capacity development in partnership with government-initiated social and workforce development programmes. An important aspect of the programme's implementation is the professional development and qualification of Indigenous community members to work in and manage the Safe Places programme. The Northern Territory Department of Health and Community Service is collaborating with a team from Charles Darwin University to develop a training framework. The framework needed to meet the needs of Indigenous people, prepare and build people's capacity to work in and manage the Safe Places programme.

This government-initiated social and workforce development programme needs to develop a strong investment by all stakeholders. The training framework development intends to empower stakeholders to understand its underlying logic and rationale. By owning not only the framework but the approach, NTDHCS staff and Indigenous community members can participate in its continuous evaluation and improvement. In this way, the stakeholders can negotiate its implementation in the long term and participate in a learning and workforce development partnership. The training framework is developed alongside the Safe Places programme including Safe Places staff working on the ground, field officers and management. The innovative approach to professional development and training works to develop a professional community of practice of Indigenous and non-Indigenous Safe Places staff, field officers and management who are developing, implementing and documenting a community

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partnerships to addressing domestic violence. The framework is mapped to nationally accredited qualifications, employability skills, position descriptions and a sustainable employment path. This framework development and design also recognises the value of positive relationships in developing positive and self sustaining learning experiences, networks and environments. The challenge of this project was to develop a responsive and inclusive training framework that manages Indigenous Australians expectations of training and employment and Territory and federal expectations of the Safe Places programme.

Significance
This project is aligned with the Council of Australian Government's (2004) goals by *striving for best practice in the delivery of services to indigenous people, families and communities* and *committing to cooperative approaches on policy and service delivery between agencies, at all levels of government and maintaining and strengthening government effort to address indigenous disadvantage*.

Indigenous people have identified the essential role of sustainable economic development in community independence, cultural maintenance, self-esteem and economic independence and the importance of engaging Indigenous people in productive economic activity. The *Northern Territory Indigenous Economic Development Strategy (2002:1)* recognises the *strength, diversity, resilience, and cultural integrity* of Indigenous people who also experience the high levels of disadvantage which impact the capacity of people, families and communities to engage in economic and social development activities. The challenge then for VET policy makers is to make sure stakeholders' preferences are accommodated; VET remains relevant to stakeholders and ensure stakeholders voices are not rationalised into a single system (Campbell 2000).

Young, Guenther and Boyle (2007:7) have found there is a *significant misalignment between the content and delivery models of VET and the prior skills, educational demands and aspirations of desert Indigenous people. VET programmes struggle to adapt to and address the types of learning needs that arise as a result of language and cultural differences and the different ways work is constructed.*

As part of the Federal Intervention into Aboriginal Communities to halt child abuse in Indigenous communities of the Northern Territory, the NTDHCS is building a series of Safe Places in remote communities. The location, design and placement of the buildings and the associated Safe Places programme are being negotiated with remote communities (Department of Health and Community Services Family and Children's Services: 2007). The Safe Places programme is developed to be integrated into community life and support the development of sustainable employment of Indigenous people within their communities. An important aspect of the programme's implementation is the professional development and qualification of Indigenous community members to work in and manage the Safe Places programme at every level that incorporates a career pathway.

Literature review
 Developing an effective training framework for Indigenous contexts needs to recognise the expectations and realities of Indigenous people and utilise best practice in developing vocational training and qualifications. Conducting a review of research Miller (2005) found the key factors in implementing training that meets the

aspirations of Indigenous Australians which include self development skills, completion of educational subjects and courses at all levels, employment, self determination and community development. These aspirations are the key starting point for developing and implementing a training plan with Indigenous people, training organisations and industry partners. Miller found seven key factors are associated with positive and improved outcomes from vocational education and training for Indigenous people. These outcomes must be considered regardless of the location, time or context;

- *'community ownership and involvement*
- *the incorporation of Indigenous identities, cultures, knowledge and values*
- *the establishment of 'true' partnerships*
- *flexibility in course design, content and delivery*
- *quality staff and committed advocacy*
- *extensive student support services*
- *appropriate funding that allows for sustainability'* (Miller 2005:5)

An integrated approach to professional development, then recognises the educational experiences of participants, provides a scaffolded (based on Vygotsky's (1978) zone of proximal development) approach to learning and work in the community services sector, recognises and incorporates Indigenous knowledge and experience, is integrated into the working lives of Indigenous people and offers a career pathway in the Safe Places programme or, if appropriate, other workplaces in the community. Vygotsky's (1978, Bockarie 2002) defined the 'zone of proximal development' in terms of the distance between a students' actual developmental level demonstrated by problem solving independently and the students' potential development level through guidance or support from a teacher or more capable peers. Scaffolding, then, provides a framework to support students' movement from their current level to the next level of potential development (Bruner 1975). Bockarie (2002) concludes the notion of the 'zone of proximal development', when designing and implementing programmes, can be used to maintain an effective tension between facilitating learning at students' current level and introducing concepts with the appropriate intervening support and development. He notes this process needs to recognise the socio-cultural context, students' individual differences and utilise a range of learning and communication strategies.

The National Centre of Vocational Education Research's forum on Indigenous vocational education and training noted the importance of working with employment opportunities and developing positive relationships with organisations that have the capacity and capability to support community and family goals (O'Callaghan 2005). Young, Schaber and Guenther (cited in Miller 2005) identified the importance of training being 'demand responsive' rather then 'supply driven'. Of value then is the identification of training approaches that reflect the stakeholders' priorities and are developed with Indigenous stakeholders (Campbell 2000) and are part of lifewide and lifelong learning. Field (2006) describes lifelong learning in terms of the *many different areas of life in which people continue to acquire and create new skills and knowledge throughout their lifespan.* Flamsteed and Golding (2005) emphasis the importance of learning through business and incorporating learning opportunities that are linked to earning, context specific, developed in parallel to actual work and applied through practice in commercial business activities. They also note the importance of incorporating resources that are responsive to Indigenous businesses'

and potential students' and communities' needs. Workplace learning (Billett 2001, Castleton 2006, Mitchell, Chappell, Bateman and Roy 2005) recognises the complexity of the interactions in workplaces, participants, the resources they use and ways they learn from them. It emphasises the value of communication and the symbolic interactions that a part of the workplace culture.

Young, Guenther and Boyle (2007) found effective training linked to improving livelihood opportunities for Indigenous people was reliant on a commitment to sustaining and nurturing partnerships between stakeholders in training and employment and the facilitation of communication between non-government organisations, government and other agencies and local Indigenous communities. They found formal training needed to include non-formal elements, flexible and innovative delivery methods, support arrangements and mentoring by Indigenous elders. Partnerships need to be both innovative and flexible when responding in training and employment needs. Work-based learning approaches are being utilised as they are integrated and relevant to community based training and workforce development. This approach also meets stakeholders' aspirations for programme participation. Keevers and Outwaite (2003:80-1) note workbased learning challenges the classroom by starting from specific competence and works back to the generalisable case. Learning is less explicit and taught as an integrated event. Workbased learning supports people to recognise and value the skills inherent in their work and study, enables people to reflect on their experiences, the reasons practice occurs in a specific way and how it might be different.

The development of community generated programmes is preferable to initiate effective partnerships, government-initiated programmes, on the other hand, risk being imposed with minimal engagement by Indigenous community members. The development of an effective approach to training and regional economic development must include strong partnerships that create individual and community confidence, sustainable career pathways and effective regional strategic development (Allison, Gorringe and Lacey 2006). Communities of practice, a form of network can be used widely in VET to address urgent issues. Communities of practice are defined by Wenger (1998) as groups of people who are bound together informally through shared expertise and interest in a joint venture. Through a range of structures participants share knowledge in creative ways to develop new approaches to issues of mutual concern,

Mitchell, Chappell, Bateman and Roy (2006:32) noted networks are complex, constituting *multiple parties with diverse and challenging goals*. Networks are also used to assist practitioners and varied stakeholder groups to build relationships and be responsive to students community needs. One approach to development that can be used to underpin this partnership or network is a community of practice. Wenger (2004) describes communities of practice as social structures which have been brought together by a commitment to interact regularly and develop their understandings, skills and knowledge through shared practice. 'Communities of practice are social structures that focus on knowledge and explicitly enable the management of knowledge to be placed in the hands of practitioners' (Wenger 2004:2). It is *the role of 'top down' people to interact with 'bottom up' people to understand each other and create a new borderland ...to maximise local learning outputs in the greater district, regional and national interests* (Falk and Surata:

forthcoming:26). The community of practice approach can be used to facilitate the process to ensure all stakeholders are invested in and feel ownership of the programme; its ongoing potential and connection to employment and economic development.

Approach
As this was a new Federal Government initiated programme the initial discussions were undertaken with NTDHCS staff including key Indigenous staff, with extensive experience in family safety programmes in remote communities. The second phase is piloting the programme with the Indigenous community members who will be involved in the training and programme implementation. This is expected to commence in the first half of 2008. As part of the implementation of the Safe Places programme, the NTDHCS has contracted a research team to develop a training framework; this framework will be based on courses ranging from Certificate I to Certificate IV levels as part of the Safe Places Training Framework. The Safe Places programme is designed to be much more than Safe Places but to provide communities with both the infrastructure and resources to support Indigenous men, women, children and families in remote communities. Safe Places ideally will be made up of a work force from the local community, and staff will carry out a variety of job roles and it is envisaged that training for staff will occur on site.

Through collaboration, the project and government teams are designing a training framework to be used as a guide to align job roles and responsibilities and skill sets to Nationally Recognised units of competency and courses. As the workforce for the Safe Places is identified from the local community, local staff may carry out a variety of job roles and move within the organisation.

The principles of the training framework are;
1. Locations of the Safe Places are remote and contextually unique; training and professional development would take place on-site and integrated into the community and workplace.
2. The framework identifies and matches Safe Place job roles and responsibilities with units of competency from the relevant nationally endorsed Training Packages.
3. The training pedagogy and content is based on the Safe Places position's skills sets, context and their relationship to endorsed competencies' description
4. Training builds to support a sustainable economic, culturally inclusive, community-based programme.
5. The need to build a large workforce in a community in a short period. This means the programme will include appropriate people with minimal English literacy, community services' workplace communication skills and experience. The definition of appropriate' was defined with NTDHCS staff and Indigenous community representatives and includes passing a police check and support from the local community.
6. Resources need to be developed that respect and incorporate Indigenous literacies, knowledge of and understandings about family, relationships and community services. As such content must be developed with community approval and include the collection of NTDHCS required data. NTDHCS has developed digital visually based data collection methods with Indigenous people working in the area.

7. All resources are inclusive, include visual and digital resources for teaching and the programme does not rely on having the English written skills assessed at the National Reporting System Band 3 or above, to enter the programme.
8. Students' progression is supported through a scaffolded approach to a framework from Certificate I to Certificate IV.
9. The programme includes a set of generic skills to enable people to move into other training and community employment. The programme also need to be customisable to other programmes
10. The programme is easily matched and integrated with existing and future editions of relevant qualifications such as the Aboriginal Health Worker Programme and the Community Services Training Package

After initial consultation a draft of the framework was presented to the NTDHCS to both ask questions and clarify that the project is proceeding on the right track. Input from experts on the ground throughout the process has been essential to ensure the most appropriate units of competency are selected and the inclusion of case studies that reflect the reality of working in a Safe House (the infrastructure in which the Safe Places programme operates) in a remote Indigenous community. Indigenous stakeholders' input through piloting is essential in the refinement and success of the framework. The resources have been developed with a 1:1 model of a Safe Place, NTDHCS video production team and DHCS staff. In this way the resources are designed for the Safe Houses' context and feature Indigenous people in the key roles of responsibility.

The framework is a tool for all stakeholders and underpins the training. The tool will consist of several sections determined by the needs of all stakeholders, initially these could include;

Section 1	Introduction: An outline of the resources with sections specifically designed for each stakeholder
Section 2	How do Safe Places work?: A background document for trainers that outlines the Safe Places programme as it operates in different sites and develops a sense of community
Section 3	Qualifications and courses: An outline of the qualifications and requisite competencies matched to each role
Section 4	Glossary; A list of relevant terms for the Safe Places programme for trainers and students. This will be supplemented by staff as the programme develops.
Section 5	Resource list
Section 6	Training approaches: A description of the workplace based training approaches to be employed
Section 7	Training packages/rules and Implementation guide

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The approach recognises the significant knowledge all the participants have about working in complex remote environments and socially based programmes. It builds from this to the skills sets required to undertake the roles in the Safe Places programme and works to deepen participants' understanding and management of the programme over time. The reflective learning cycles are integral in developing professional approaches to family harmony based on Indigenous perspectives of life, family and health. This approach does not expect one trainer will know everything rather particular expertise can be drawn on to address specific areas of importance

when participants are ready. In this way the students' interest directs much of the learning experiences and high level expertise informs learning. The cycles are conducted through a series of negotiated professional learning projects and learning sessions that are mapped to the appropriate modules predominately from the Community Services Training Package. The learning materials have a strong focus on visual and accurate representations of the relevant concepts as they operate in Indigenous communities. For example digital stories and videos developed in the Safe Houses. The potential of presenting information in a range of languages is yet to be explored.

Each of these sections are reviewed annually and revised as required. The tool is a model of training that is innovative in its approach and developed to meet the needs of the students who will be working in the communities. The framework challenges traditional class room based models and focuses on training on the job in relevant situations.

Findings and Discussion
The development of this framework has tested the rhetoric about participative training development in a mandated programme environment and found the following approaches as important and viable. The stakeholders established a learning partnership to develop the framework. A negotiated training model needs to be based on understanding and meeting the individual needs of the students and the demands of the role to be undertaken as well as the employer. The training framework was negotiated with NTDHCS team as they would be implementing the training model with accredited trainers The NTDHCS staff has a vested interest in and understanding of the programme, by discussing the various limitations and opportunities of the VET system and how they would match to the needs of the Safe Places programme, as it develops. In this way the staff have an understanding of the underpinning rationale for this approach to training Staff also became interested in the Certificate IV Training and Assessment studies using similar principles, through involvement in training and the ongoing discussions about the best ways to develop the framework, a shared ownership of the framework was established. In this way the framework will grow beyond the life of the partnership with the developers.

The partnership team started by mapping the skill sets inherent in each position to the position description, competency elements and performance criteria. In reviewing both the range statement and context of assessment of a number of units, the discussion about Training Package rules and components opened up the possibilities of the way in which the programme could be taught and assessed. For example
- Identifying units that can be assessed in a language other than English,
- Using work based projects as assessments
- Having the materials tailored for training specific to the Safe Places Programme

This opened by discussing the possibilities for the framework and established a new way of thinking about what this programme could be; an important point in the initial discussions. By focussing on what could be, the team could concentrate on working from the students' strengths and needs, rather than the training systems'. The next step was mapping of the levels of the job roles to the National Quality Framework levels which assisted in the determining the choice of units of competency, transition points and the overall structure of the training framework.

The workbased learning model was based on a strong mentoring element, staff would be working with an experienced supervisor who would assist with a large degree of their on the job training. As people develop their skills and complete the relevant qualifications they inturn become mentors to new staff. The preceptor model was borrowed from the health education sector and was valuable in this emerging community programme. It was also a good way of ensuring the incorporation of Indigenous knowledge into the training framework; which could prove difficult for trainers who are not from or extensively involved in the relevant communities and the Safe Places programme. The preceptor model assists to develop communities of practice within the workplace. This is a key aim in the approach used as it will extend the learning beyond formal training sessions. Ultimately this can lead to Safe places staff becoming the trainers in the programme in the long term.

A portfolio of evidence samples that guide students/staff in developing their own evidence for assessment and Recognised Prior Learning was developed as well as exemplars of work based projects. By analysing the work tasks and resources with NTDHCS team we designed a range of projects using existing and easily accessible information and communication technologies, tasks required in the job role as well as the requirements of the funding body. The evidence is collected through normal workbased practice and includes the Safe Places management software which relies on visual representations of work undertaken and statistics. The NTDHCS team designed the case studies that will be used for training to ensure there was high congruence with the environment within which the Safe Places programme would operate within. It is anticipated that these will be developed with cohorts of students as they and the programme develops. There is clearly a need to move away from traditional text based learning using work books to using the literacies that are required in the job roles and the emerging digital age, i.e. visual and digital literacies. This includes a web based system to collect daily activity statistics for standard reporting e.g. number of incidents, who was involved, time of day and intervention by Safe Places staff.

The development of the framework and relevant resources has started from the programme that will operate in Indigenous contexts. This approach values Indigenous knowledge and contexts as a valid point of reference and study, it does not assume that a Western model of domestic violence response is the starting point and any other model is the anomaly. Similarly the training framework starts by recognising the participants' knowledge and context and works to build capacity and competence in the workplace and relevant industry. This meets the intention of the Community Services Training package and the COAG agenda. The next stage is to pilot the project in remote Indigenous communities and collaborate with participants to develop the framework and related resources.

As the Safe Places programme develops over time, the ownership and investment DHCS and Indigenous community participants will be tested. This will test the efficacy of the learning partnership and the sustainability of the Training Framework.

Conclusion

The development of the Safe Places Training framework was conducted by establishing a learning partnership between teams from different systems, experience, knowledge and power bases. This government initiated programme team, rather than a community generated programme, has challenged itself to work with the knowledge and experience of Indigenous communities members and the National Training System to develop an effective and sustainable programme. The team's learning partnership was key in this process' development and we anticipate this will continue to be the case in the future. It was important to work with government through out the whole process rather than be contracted to do the job in isolation and we believe this improved the tools ready for piloting for four reasons;

- Through discussion and analysis of what is envisaged and what was possible we had a better shared understanding of what was being asked for and ways this could be achieved. Ultimately this went beyond our initial ideas of how training can be constructed.
- The framework assumes Indigenous partners, participants and contexts are core in defining the knowledge and skills sets, the evidence to be collected and pedagogy for training delivery
- Relationships of trust take time but are fruitful in achieving positive outcomes for all stakeholders, by working from across three different knowledge systems (indigenous, government and education) and taking time to develop that trust the team could see new opportunities and be flexible. The team developed a better understanding of each group's priorities and understanding of the work and were more open to the discussion about what could be.
- The programme is a co-production with shared ownership and investment by a range of key people. This will support its development as the programme matures, training packages change and potential links arise. As a pilot, the framework will evolve as the Safe places evolves, the continued input and ownership from stake holders is essential in this process.

The Safe Places programme and framework will now be tested through the pilot with remote Indigenous communities in the Northern Territory. This will test the efficacy of the learning partnership and whether the training framework provides sufficient flexibility and depth of understanding of the Safe Places programme and remote Indigenous partners' knowledge and learning.

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