Kilmany is a Uniting Church agency based in Gippsland.

300 staff and an extensive range of child, family, youth, aged care and community development services.

2 long day care centres

20 kindergartens in Cluster Management

One of largest providers of Family Day Care in Australia

East Gippsland Communities for Children Program

Partners in Best Start, Integrated Family Services, Primary Care Partnerships

In July we merge with Remote Family Services UnitingCare

Victoria has about 0.6% of the population who identify as indigenous, whereas Gippsland has 2% of the population. Kilmany’s workforce includes 5% indigenous

Presentation

Part of this presentation was originally presented at a Victorian Council of Social Service Workshop by John Lawrence and Jeff Cooper – the Chairperson of the Gippsland and East Gippsland Aboriginal Co-operative.

It has now been amended to include some more practical tips from practitioners who are working close to the coal face.

Our Learnings

• John – Principles of Partnerships

• Debbie – Tips from an indigenous perspective

• Suzie – Tips from a Gubba’s perspective

GEGAC – Gippsland and East Gippsland Aboriginal Co-operative, Bairnsdale

Ramahyuck – Ramahyuck District Aboriginal Corporation, Sale

Moodji – Moodji District Aboriginal Corporation, Orbost

Partnership with Moodji established Koori Family Day Care

Seconded staff to GEGAC for Aboriginal Best Start, for human resource management

Seconded staff from Ramahyuck for family services

Provided governance training and mentoring

Training Koori foster carers

Partnering to meet accreditation standards

Partnering on projects eg Koori Kinder, Koori Swimming

21 Koori traineeships, plus 20 additional Koori jobs

Share policies and expertise
Principles
1. Build cultural respect into your organisation’s structure
   Must be built into philosophy, values and principles
   Consider public participation principles [www.iap2.org]
   Walk beside and not in front
2. Partnerships are about power – and you need to equalize that
   Funders push partnerships (and implicitly - power imbalances)
   Lead Agency vs Facilitating Partner
   Golden Rule = he who has the gold makes the rules
   Different ways of creating relationships & consulting
   Manipulate policies and funding agreements
   Don’t power dress.
   Use understandable language
3. Pay sitting fees, provide good tucker, assist with transport and
   provide child care
   Importance of access
   You and I are paid
   Consumer participation can be difficult – clarify expectations and use the “promise”
4. Allow your immediate needs to be fluid
   Put aside immediate needs for sustainable outcomes
   Two steps forward, one step back
   Listen
   Be prepared to go off on tangents
5. Understand the local Koori community – have lots of cuppa’s
   We expect a Koori to be able to speak on behalf of all Aboriginal Australia
   The indigenous community is not homogenous
   Family issues and inter family conflict
   Aboriginal Co-operatives
   Seek out locals who can advise you

Leadership
6. Immerse yourself in cultural respect training in the context of poverty.
   Culture is dynamic - it is living, breathing and changing
   Culture tells us what is pretty and what is ugly
   Culture tells us what is right and what is wrong
   Culture influences our decisions and our ways of behaving
   What are myths?
   Go beyond Captain Cook and whether you can look a blackfella in the eye – consider poverty issues

7. Respect that Koories are busy and have more important things to do than talk to you. Allow lots of time for any program.
   Koori time
   Program timelines – add 50% to 100% more

Debbie Leon
Through the partnership with Kilmany and Ramahyuck District Aboriginal Corporation came my position of Indigenous Family Support Co-ordinator. (Ramahyuck did not have the capacity to support my employment.)

I am known by most of the community as I have lived and worked, and raised my children as a proud Birpili woman from N.S.W with strong passionate cultural beliefs.

Sale (Gippsland) are my adoptive family - they know the life I have led. I have (I hope) earned their respect; families yarn with me about their past, about the future dreams they wish to have for themselves and their families.

Family/Kinship
Within Kilmany there are numerous programs to support my people.

When they come seeking help I yarn with them, I allow them the choice to meet a non-aboriginal person, I sit with them to advocate, support, offer transport.

I also offer reminder phone calls, and I let them know they have a choice where to meet - in the office, home or the Ramahyuck office.

I believe a good outcome for engaging indigenous people is having a respected indigenous person.

A wise saying “a formulae face,” someone that understands, is non-judgemental and makes the family to feel no shame in explaining why?

Whitefella’s can never really understand - can’t be taught through books or movies - it’s a way of life.

Remember also that when you’re consulting with a family member within the Indigenous community, there can be a problem sometimes with inter family conflict. Sometimes it can be helpful to have an outsider indigenous person, that has lived within the community but not of their mob.

You may have come across some aggressive behaviour - have you given thought that they may behaving this way due to the feeling of being misunderstood, not heard or feeling stupid or just had a bad day?

Word of mouth (Koori grape vine) is another way to inform my people that your organisation is respectful to indigenous people. Do a deadly job with one family and they will let others know.

If you can’t access an indigenous worker there is no shame to ask your client (example- with paperwork – would you like me to read this out and we can complete this form together?)

A person may look Indigenous and if asked if they are Koori their answer may be “No”

Koori is a term only used for N.S.W and Victorian Indigenous people. A culturally respectful term is Australian Aboriginal or Indigenous person, however ask a Maori or Cook Islander etc - they are too Indigenous in the dictionary.

Indigenous means native to ones lands.

Koori Time definition - when I get there I get there........try not to place a time limit on your consultation and be more flexible.

Visit local Aboriginal organisations - sit down have a cuppa and share a story.

Hints and strategies

• Practice
• Respectful
• Non-judgmental
• Community kinship
• Cultural ways
• Ownership
What is Indigenous Engagement?

Suzie Egan

Relationships that are: a way of practice that is respectful and non-judgemental, built on two way learning, giving people more than one chance.

Relationships

The time spent chatting is two way learning, being honest and respectful around the boundaries to help have better outcomes.

It’s being available when people come to see you, initially a trusting relationships will never be built on making appointments or coming back at a more suitable time.

The learnings

Resilient: building a trusting relationship can put you in the firing line from a list of impacting factors not directly related to the issue at hand.

Persistence – never give up when arrangements such as, meetings, appointments telephone contact, is not kept time after time.

If you have given the time to build relationship you understand the many issues and genuine reason why people are sometimes unable to connected. Reasons that undoubtedly and consistently out way the possibility to reschedule to , tomorrow, the next day or next week.

Services

Aboriginal Elders
Local Aboriginal Corporation
Aboriginal Family Support Workers
Aboriginal Legal Service
Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency
Aboriginal Health Workers
Aboriginal Liaison Workers

Relationships

Its building relationships and interacting as a neutral player, working with a range of community members, offering the same support to a range of kinship groups.

For Kilmany, building a trusting relationship starts with making time to have cuppa’s, sit and chat and hear what people are saying.

Taking the time to get to know the people, listening to their story, not rushing, not jumping in with an answer to the problem.
The learnings

It takes a long time. Things move at a slow pace, and the community need to see for themselves if you’re there for the long haul with a consistent approach and response.

You need a non judgmental response when things do not go to plan. Revisit things and ask what happened, how can we avoid this next time, how can we do this better together?

Real consultation and communication must be inclusive for all. Much of the jargon and way of communication we use is often really exclusive.

The outcomes

After many cuppa’s and many chats, providing transport, lots of re-arranging or rescheduling, being readily available, negotiating respectful interactions, listening to many stories and the impacting issues, has given us a foundation to work with and support children and their families more holistically, not looking at the situation in isolation.

Families and individuals are being linked to a range of programs or services at a pace or a time that works for them.

The capacity of individuals is strengthened because they feel respected and trust that their individual situation is considered.

Outcomes continued

Our Kilmany partnerships with other agencies are looking and investigating working practices and programs that will be developed from real community input.

Outcomes continued

It’s daily interactions, conversations, more and more indigenous community members coming through the door at Kilmany that confirm Indigenous Engagement is a way of working, and it is work practice that is fully supported by all levels throughout the agency.

Kilmany staff witness this as we see:
Individuals are self referring/following up
People wanting to come and volunteer.
Individuals coming to seek support to build their own capacity

More Koori’s accessing events or programs.
On a 40+ degree day a young mum feeling comfortable in seeking a 4km ride home for herself and her four year old, rather than walk.

You don’t have to understand Aboriginal culture, but you need to respect it.