

Understanding Anangu employment on APY Lands

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Background

Regional Anangu Services Aboriginal Corporation (RASAC) is a not-for-profit Aboriginal Corporation wholly owned and governed by the Anangu (Aboriginal people) of the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (APY) Lands. RASAC has over 30 years' experience delivering services in the APY region, which covers over 103,000 square kilometres in the northwest of South Australia. RASAC is the largest employer of Anangu in this region and its mission is to build better communities by providing local services, sustainable employment and training for Anangu people in the APY Lands.

Jawun commenced operations in Central Australia in August 2014. The Jawun Central Australia region includes all the APY Lands, as well as areas of WA and NT in what is known as the tri-state border region. This region is known as the Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (NPY Lands), which covers the traditional cultural lands of the Anangu people of the region.

While Commonwealth and state governments are committed to Closing the Gap on Indigenous employment, there is very little empirical data about the local Indigenous employment and labour force in Central Australia. RASAC began collecting data on Anangu work patterns in 2013 to inform internal workforce management, with a focus on 2 programs with the majority of workers from local Anangu communities: municipal services and community patrols. Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Empowered Communities (NPYEC) identified this data as a potentially useful source to inform thinking about employment programs and support evidence-based policy-making. Jawun secondees have helped bring this project to life while building RASAC's data management capabilities.

Typically, in the very remote communities on the APY Lands, the labour market is thin and operates on a limited tradition of paid employment and a narrow range of work opportunities. RASAC has built an employment model focused on developing the local Anangu workforce through culturally appropriate, flexible employment arrangements and meaningful, work-based training. This enables Anangu workers to maintain strong connections to community and culture and to balance employment with personal, family and cultural obligations. These can often include unplanned absences from work, sometimes for several days or weeks. The RASAC data presents a 'snap-shot' of Anangu workforce and employment patterns that has never been available before.

Approach

In 2017, Emily Dann from the APS Department of Social Services was seconded to the region. With a background in workforce data management, Emily helped RASAC take the first steps towards converting basic payroll data from fortnightly summary timesheets to a meaningful, verified dataset. This work provided a basis for 2018 APS Department of Jobs and Small Business secondee Steve Lloyd to take the

data set to the next level. Steve drew on his extensive knowledge of government employment policy and skills in technical data analysis to identify and resolve underlying issues with the data and explore ideas for how the data might be analysed.

In Round 3 of 2018, Bluescope secondee Megan Ferguson continued this work with RASAC. Megan's background in process optimisation and transformation equipped her to identify process improvements, working with the team at RASAC to automate manual processes by designing tailored Excel tools to capture and preserve employment data. She also trained RASAC staff to use the tools, ensuring they were fit-for-purpose.

RASAC wanted to use this accessible data to get a better picture of its workforce. Georgie McWatters from Defence Housing Australia was deployed in April 2019 with a background in data analysis and financial management. Georgie began looking at trends the data revealed, helped along the way by another Jawun secondee from the Commonwealth Bank working on a different project at RASAC. Georgie worked closely with the RASAC HR team to document the work they were doing, setting it up for RASAC to take the analysis forward after her secondment.

Following Georgie's secondment, Poursu Bharucha from the APS Department of Industry was deployed to RASAC in July 2019, bringing in-depth experience in data, research and analysis. Julia Curtis, National Data Director of Empowered Communities, linked RASAC with the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) to assist with analysis of the data. Poursu helped RASAC transform basic employment data into a robust dataset fit for purpose for AIHW's analysis.

Outcomes

The work of all 5 secondees paved the way for the next stage in the project. Under a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), RASAC is working with data analysts from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) and is supported by a project working group, including representatives from RASAC, NPYEC, EC Data Management, TAFE SA and AIHW, with additional input from the Australian Bureau of Statistics. Adapting to the restrictions of COVID-19, in October 2021 virtual secondee Abby Rossiter from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade worked with RASAC to commence drafting of the project report.

This report will be the culmination of a long-term project by an Anangu-owned organisation working on Anangu lands to provide real information on its work. It addresses a critical gap in information about employment in very remote communities. It is the sort of information that is needed to support place-based, co-designed programs that respect and support Anangu culture, authority and agency. There is more work to be done, but this is an important step towards enabling evidence-based approaches to effective and culturally appropriate employment policies.

'As we work through all the secondments we never really realise the impact of the data we have been collecting. This data can frame a picture over time and tell us all a story. Our secondees can then piece this story together, which can help shape the pathway of Indigenous employment in remote areas into the future.'

Mark Jackman, General Manager, RASAC.

The input of Jawun secondees helped RASAC deliver this project while also transferring critical skills to the organisation, lifting their ability to track and improve workforce development on the APY Lands. Three

years on, the data capture tools Megan developed and trained the team to use are the basis of their payroll reporting and RASAC now has direct access to real-time data on its workforce.

'The Jawun secondments have enabled RASAC to transform basic payroll information into a unique dataset which will assist employers and governments to better support Anangu workforce participation and development.'

Madonna Tomes, Workforce and Programs – Development Manager, RASAC.

The hands-on work with the team also equipped secondees with deep understanding of the complexity of employment issues in remote Indigenous communities and the importance of enabling strong cultural connections – knowledge which informs their approaches to their work in their home organisations and their understanding of Indigenous Australia.

Next Steps

The next step for this project will be for RASAC to complete the report and share its findings with key stakeholders. This report will be used to inform both RASAC's and NPYEC's work with relevant state and federal government agencies moving forward with programs to improve employment outcomes for Indigenous Australians in very remote communities. This will support further growth of RASAC as an Anangu-owned organisation, committed to developing the Anangu workforce and providing real opportunities for employment and economic empowerment.

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