

2019 Fons Trompenaars Cross Cultural Management Award

WINNER: Jesuit Social Services

Corporate Diversity Partnerships

Origins and principles

Jesuit Social Services is a social change organisation with more than 40 years of experience working towards building a just society. The organisation runs programs across settlement and community building, mental health and wellbeing, justice and crime prevention, as well as education, training and employment. Research, advocacy and policy are coordinated across all program and major interest areas of Jesuit Social Services. Our advocacy is grounded in the knowledge, expertise and experiences of program staff and participants, as well as academic research and evidence. We seek to influence policies, practices, legislation and budget investment to positively influence people's lives and improve approaches to address long-term social challenges.

The beginnings of the African Australian Inclusion Program (AAIP) originated in 2009, when the then-Federal Minister for Finance and Member for Melbourne, Lindsay Tanner, was seeing large numbers of under-employed and unemployed African Australians. Many of these people were degree-qualified and, if working, were driving taxis, working in hospitality, aged care facilities and petrol stations. The issue of under-employment and unemployment was also being seen by Jesuit Social Services in its interactions with African-Australians through its homework club in Flemington and its broader Settlement Services.

A lack of work experience in the Australian workforce and limited knowledge of Australian workplace cultural norms and job-seeking processes were consistently identified as the most common barriers faced by the African communities in their search for work. These barriers were often intensified by recruitment system bias, where overseas qualifications and work experience were disregarded. The long term result was a generational and systemic problem of under-employment or unemployment, affecting not only individuals but also their families and communities.

In response, the Minister reached out to his corporate network and challenged the sector to address this social issue. At the same time, National Australia Bank (NAB) staff were volunteering with Jesuit Social Services' Settlement team in order to learn more about the complexities for African Australians in their search for work. A NAB staff member who also volunteered with Jesuit Social Services was so impressed by the skillsets of the African-Australians he met that he took 30 of their resumes back to NAB. He called on NAB leaders to respond to the challenge of under-employment and unemployment amongst this cohort.

All of these threads came together simultaneously and the dots were joined. Jesuit Social Services began working closely with leaders at NAB to develop a pilot workplace inclusion program. In March

2009, NAB opened up three paid roles for three months, part-time and so began the African Australian Inclusion Program (AAIP).

Embedded within Jesuit Social Services was an understanding that their work cannot be done alone, but requires the sort of collaborative approach seen in the development of the African Australian Inclusion Program. What started as a pilot grew into a highly successful program that is well-known across the country for achieving excellent employment outcomes leading to greater economic and social inclusion. Nevertheless, 10 years since the start of the African Australian Inclusion Program, the challenge of under-employment and unemployment persisted for African-Australians, and for others from culturally diverse backgrounds.

This led Jesuit Social Services to partner with other organisations to offer cross-cultural workplace initiatives, known as Corporate Diversity Partnerships. With 450 applicants applying for one of these partnerships in a two-week period in 2018, the need remained great. But, driven by the desire to build a kind, caring and inclusive society, Jesuit Social Services remained committed to creating social impact through workplace diversity and addressing the larger social issue of unemployment and under-employment for those marginalised from their field of qualification throughout Australia.

Implementation

Corporate Diversity Partnerships were born out of the success of the African Australian Inclusion Program with the support of the Victorian Government through the Department of Economic Development, Jobs, Transport and Resources. Partnerships were developed between Jesuit Social Services and the following organisations:

- John Holland
- Australian Taxation Office (ATO)
- Yarra Valley Water
- Melbourne Water

Tailored programs were designed with these partners providing supported employment experience for people from diverse cultural backgrounds seeking employment in their field of expertise in Australia. The programs included the following core elements:

- Partnership – collaborating to arrive at the right approach for each business
- Proven model – time-limited, paid work experience with built-in mentoring and support
- Flexibility – extensive program or individual internships
- Support and development – for both interns and company employees
- Workforce supply – the option for companies to offer post-program employment

Jesuit Social Services believes that initiatives which address both business and social impact goals present the opportunity for thought leadership and innovation across many areas important to business, Government, and the community.

Corporate Diversity Partnerships represented a creative approach to Corporate Social Responsibility and promoting diversity as a strength for employers in an increasingly complex and changing

marketplace. Recent studies showed that only 23% of decision-makers in Australia believe that social responsibility is a top priority, and over half (53%) say it's not even a focus.¹

Yet, the African Australian Inclusion Program and, more recently, Corporate Diversity Partnerships powerfully highlighted how diversity and inclusion can enhance not only the lives of individuals but also business performance. A NAB Manager commented:

"The skills, qualifications, life experience and intelligence that candidates bring to the table is outstanding. This talent pool of potential employees is one we have only just touched the surface of through the AAIP. The passion and drive of the participants is legendary!"

The strength of the Corporate Diversity Partnerships model stems from the interplay between the benefits delivered across multiple areas of these organisations - workforce supply, corporate social responsibility, workforce diversity and employee engagement - and the benefits to individual program Participants, their families, community and wider society.

The Corporate Diversity Partnerships model aims to set participants up for success by providing a structured schedule of training. This support and training is provided by both Jesuit Social Services and the partner organisations.

Jesuit Social Services provides:

- Participant Preparation Training prior to starting in the role
- Participant care and to ensure a positive program experience for both the partnering organisation and the participant, Jesuit Social Services provides regular check-ins and tailored support for each participant. The model draws on Jesuit Social Services' extensive practice knowledge, resources and referral processes and works with participants to navigate complex challenges which have previously created barriers to inclusion in the workplace and limited their professional success in Australia.
- Job-readiness coaching and the opportunity to build professional networks

The partner organisations provide:

- Professional experience which can be leveraged to obtain employment in chosen field post program
- Training and development
- A Team Leader, Program Manager and an additional support person ('mentor/buddy') within their team. In the AAIP, participants are also assigned a Coach. Each of these support people play a specific role in assisting the participant manage their day-to-day jobs, integrate into the culture of the organisation and deal with any unexpected challenges or issues.

Jesuit Social Services provides a briefing for partner organisation employees at the beginning of each program. A key aspect of this briefing focuses on cultural awareness, specifically the lived experiences of people from refugee and humanitarian backgrounds. The briefing also covers how

¹ 2018 Deloitte Human Capital Trends

working styles in a professional setting in Australia compare to countries around the world, including the concept of cultural agility.

Corporate Diversity Partnerships embed the principles of diversity into the partner organisations' DNA in one powerful way – through the program participants. Participants are instrumental in shaping culture when they go into Jesuit Social Services' partner organisations. They change perceptions and capture the hearts and minds of their colleagues.

- In one case, this involved a partner organisation setting up a prayer room for a Participant, where one had not previously existed. The participant had not seemed himself and, when prompted by his manager, had admitted that he was finding it difficult to find a place to pray. The manager then realised that other employees (not on the program) were also needing a space to pray. This prompted the manager to organise a comfortable place for all these employees to undertake their daily prayers.
- For another partner organisation, the sense of community injected into the workplace by African participants on the program changed the culture within the participants' teams. Where the culture had been supportive but introverted, leaders at the organisation began to notice a new sense of team spirit and community as a result of the community values brought to the workplace by African program participants.

Jesuit Social Services frequently hears from staff at partner organisations who say how much they appreciate the diversity brought by the participants and have gained a greater understanding and appreciation of the power of inclusion.

Benefits and Outcomes

A total of 542 people from culturally diverse backgrounds have participated in a Corporate Diversity Partnerships program. Beyond the metrics, the impact of the program can be seen at an individual, organisational and community level. In the words of a program participant:

"[It] is not really about giving me a job – it's about transforming my life, transforming my household, transforming my extended family and transforming the community I represent".

Benefits to partner organisations include:

- Generates a workforce which reflects the organisation's customers.
- Demonstrates commitment to diversity, inclusion and positive social impact.
- Facilitates an uplift in the capability of managers, mentors and the wider organisation to manage a diverse workforce.
- Professional development opportunity for employees supporting Participants.
- The opportunity to participate in building a diverse and inclusive culture inspires employees and increases employee engagement.
- Broadens the talent pipeline generally and in key strategic areas.

Benefits to participants include:

- Opportunity to gain meaningful work experience in a corporate context.

- Opportunity to grow professionally within a Program that provides professional development and support.
- Opportunity to build confidence and capability within a structured Program.
- Opportunity to build professional networks in Australia.
- Knowledge, understanding and experience of Australian business workplace culture and the associated behavioural expectations.

Benefits to the community include:

- Participants become role models within their community.
- Both local and global positive impact in the instance of candidates using income generated to support extended family and communities in developing and/or war affected nations overseas
- Increased proportion of community members with professional qualifications secure employment in their field of expertise.
- A sense of connection between the organisation and people from new and emerging communities and people from disadvantaged backgrounds.

According to one participant:

"[This opportunity] has changed my life. I can confidently say that within my community, I am one of the very few to have attained tertiary qualifications and to have gained work in a professional role. I see myself as a role model for young kids in my community who I see giving up on finishing their studies or even Year 12, as they no longer have dreams of working in professional roles and don't believe in themselves." Kan Tingpaw, John Holland Pathway Program, 2018

Over time, the benefits of the Corporate Diversity Partnerships have been noticed by senior leaders within all participating organisations. These leaders champion the programs in many ways. In the early days of the African Australian Inclusion Program, Michael Ullmer, then NAB Group Deputy CEO, was actively involved with the program, meeting the participants personally, and advocating across the executive team to encourage and support increased business engagement.

Summary

Jesuit Social Services is a social change organisation working towards building a just society. Corporate Diversity Partnerships seek to break down barriers to employment for professionally-qualified migrants and people from a humanitarian background by partnering with the corporate sector to create shared-value initiatives which are good for business, individuals and communities.