"Working with Indigenous Students with disabilities in Tertiary Education"

Meeting Place (2009)
Sharon Reid

Joint Strategic Project NDCO Regions 15 & 17 (Julie Fry & Cressida Metcalf)

Final Report May 2010
Working with Indigenous Students with Disabilities in Tertiary Education

Funded by the Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations under the National Disability Coordination Officer Program

Coordinated by the NDCO programs of Wodonga TAFE and The University of Melbourne

Supported by the Aboriginal Disability Network
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Background to the Project

The prevalence of disability in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) communities (metropolitan, regional and remote) is at least double that of the overall Australian population. Aboriginal people with disability have the poorest outcomes of all socio-economic groups in Australian society, including educational outcomes and transition to employment.

Education providers within the TAFE and higher education sectors employ Aboriginal Liaison Officers (ALOs) to provide targeted support to ATSI students. They also employ Disability Liaison Officers (DLOs) to provide specialist support to students with a broad range of disabilities. Anecdotal evidence provided both by disability and Aboriginal practitioners within tertiary education indicates that although Aboriginal people represent the community most severely affected by poor health, chronic medical conditions and permanent disability, there is little collaboration between the two specialist services. Disability practitioners report that Aboriginal people rarely access disability services at TAFE or university. In turn, ATSI services report that Aboriginal students requiring support or assistance are almost always referred to the Aboriginal Liaison Officer, regardless of the support needed.

Aboriginal practitioners explain that, while disabilities and chronic medical conditions do have a negative impact on Aboriginal students’ participation and outcomes in tertiary education, there are two core reasons why Aboriginal people do not access disability-specific services. First, the process of having to identify and prove need to receive disability support in tertiary education conflicts with the Aboriginal understanding and acceptance of disability ‘it is a part of who we are’; and second, ‘why would we put our hand up for another label that has negative stigma attached’.

The aim of this project was to bring together staff working in Aboriginal and disability support services at Victorian TAFE and higher education institutions. The goal of the meeting was to facilitate discussion between ALOs and DLOs around the issues faced by Aboriginal students with disabilities and to begin the exploration of collaborative work strategies and practices that will enhance service provision for Aboriginal Students with disabilities and develop professional relationships between Aboriginal and disability services.
Project Process

The project was divided into the following activities.

• Organisation of a state-wide, one-day forum for disability and Indigenous practitioners and community members to:
  » share practice experiences, concerns and successes
  » hear from leading advocates for Aboriginal people with disabilities
  » hear from Aboriginal people with disabilities
  » explore possible practice strategies
  » discuss ways to work collaboratively to improve the education experience for Aboriginal people with disabilities.

• Establishment of regional working parties within NDCO Regions 15 and 17, comprising NDCOs, Aboriginal Liaison Officers, Disability Liaison Officers and other significant local stakeholders and practitioners, with the purpose of developing procedures and protocols between disability and Indigenous units to foster collaborative provision of culturally appropriate disability supports for Aboriginal students with disability.

• Development and production of an electronic and hardcopy poster promoting key messages for collaborative practices between Aboriginal and disability services for distribution across the tertiary education sector.

The artwork ‘Meeting Place’ by Sharon Reid will be reproduced and adapted in electronic format for Aboriginal design of the poster promoting collaboration between Aboriginal and disability practitioners in Tertiary Education.

Meeting Place (2009)
Contemporary Aboriginal Art
Artist  Sharon Reid
Medium  Acrylic on canvas
Minds @ Work

Minds at Work help people think

Minds at Work were chosen as forum facilitators for the event because of their proven history working with and across the education, welfare, government and corporate sectors. Minds at Work are respected for their ability to facilitate group thinking and were a key component of the forum, moving the group forward through an innovative, creative and motivational approach to problem solving.

The forum opening facilitated an agreement from all present that the day would focus on improving the education experience for Indigenous people with disability by:

- working together better
- not casting blame
- not defending the status quo
- not coming up with reasons why it can’t be done
- not just having a ‘talk fest’
- not being cynical
- all being active participants in the process.

The challenge for the day was to think outside the box and to be aware and respectful that all forum participants were there to improve outcomes in education and employment for Aboriginal people with disability. The primary focus for the forum was to facilitate collaborative approaches for supporting ATSI students with disability.
A snapshot of data that highlights the disadvantage and social exclusion experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people was presented. Key points were that the Victorian ATSI population (30,141 people) are more likely than the rest of the population to:

• exit school prior to completing Year 10
• experience unemployment (15.7%)
• suffer from high financial, emotional and mental stress
• not complete tertiary courses, or attain lower qualifications (Certificate 1 & II) in TAFE
• present with disability or health conditions to employment services.

The speakers briefly outlined the Australian Government’s Social Inclusion Policy and presented the six priorities of the Closing the Gap initiative. The priorities are a commitment to:

1. providing all Indigenous four-year-old children in remote communities with access to early childhood education within the next five years
2. halving the gap in infant mortality
3. halving the gap in reading, writing and numeracy difficulties for Indigenous children within the next decade
4. halving the gap of Indigenous students attaining Year 12 equivalent education by 2020
5. closing the gap in life expectancy within a generation
6. halving the gap in employment outcomes for Indigenous people within a decade.

The National Disability Coordination Officer (NDCO) project was presented as a key component of the Social Inclusion Policy. The core objectives of the NDCO are to:

• improve transition
• improve participation
• improve linkages between schools, higher education, VET, disability programs and employment.

The DEEWR representatives encouraged forum participants to explore ways to:

• support Aboriginal Liaison Officers and Disability Liaison Officers to work together to improve opportunities for Aboriginal students
• work against the ‘silo’ approach and encourage inclusion in mainstream programs for all students
• get to know ATSI communities
• develop understanding about how ATSI people acknowledge and respond to disability
• develop approaches that facilitate holistic support for ATSI people with a disability
• allow user choice of services by ensuring promotion of all services to all students
• work with the Aboriginal Liaison Officers by meeting ATSI students on common ground such as Aboriginal units or ALO offices
• be partners and advocates for ATSI people with a disability and play an educative role to drive change in their organisations.
Aboriginal Disability Network

Damian Griffis is a leading advocate for the human rights of Aboriginal people with disability. Damian is the Chief Executive Officer of the National Aboriginal Disability Network. In 2004–2005 Damian undertook a major consultative project visiting Aboriginal communities across New South Wales to discuss the unmet needs of Aboriginal people with disabilities. Meeting directly with Aboriginal people with disabilities and their carers culminated in the report ‘Telling it Like It Is’. Damian represents the views of Aboriginal people with disabilities in a range of forums. Internationally he was the lead advocate in establishing the Pacific Disability Forum, which is a network of disability organisations from 13 Pacific Island nations.

Damian’s presentation was titled ‘A Way Forward: Building Capacity of Aboriginal Disability Rights Movement’. Damian opened his presentation with a request that we use the term Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander when referring to Aboriginal/Indigenous people, explaining that the term Indigenous had been used so broadly that it was now non-specific and did not clearly identify the ATSI population.

Key messages drawn from Damian’s presentation are as follows.

• At least 37% of Aboriginal people have a disability (this figure does not include mental health which is also believed to be at least double that of non-ATSI populations).

• Mental health for ATSI people is not taken seriously, because to do so would mean acknowledging its cause through the trauma of colonisation. Damian explained that post-traumatic stress disorder is recognised for grandchildren of concentration camp victims but not for grandchildren of the Aboriginal stolen generation.

• There is very little reference material available about the prevalence of disability in ATSI populations, for a number of reasons including:
  » many Aboriginal people do not recognise disability, with some Aboriginal languages having no word for disability
  » lack of education within the community
  » some disabilities are related to health issues such as diabetes
  » disability does not stand out as a source of different when everyone is struggling.

• Aboriginal students with disabilities are not having their basic human rights met. For example:
  » many Aboriginal students are not diagnosed and they often do not want two labels, it is hard enough coping with the stigma associated with Aboriginality
  » the approach within tertiary education focuses on impairment and labelling of disability, instead of exploring strengths and areas where support might benefit the individual
  » Aboriginal students usually feel safe in the ALO area, but if the ALO is not connected to other services then the students do not receive the benefits of these services
  » Aboriginal students must first feel safe now, this is more important than the future
many Aboriginal students do not know about disability support pensions and education supplements, and in turn ALOs often do not know about these because they are disability-specific resources.

- Social exclusion impacts on health and disability for Aboriginal people. For example:
  - Aboriginal students with disabilities also experience discrimination from community based transport, because there are areas where these services will not provide for the Aboriginal community
  - Aboriginal Land Councils and Aboriginal Health Services are not supporting Aboriginal people with disabilities with accessible housing, but basic needs must be met before vocational and career options can be realised
  - there is a lack of appropriate housing and health care
  - there is limited advocacy for and by Aboriginal disabled persons
  - education and employment opportunities cannot be realised when basic life needs are not being met.

Damian strongly encouraged a move toward collaborative practices between Disability and Aboriginal Liaison Officers in tertiary education. Conversation, ‘yarns with people’, will assist in raising awareness, changing practices and beginning a social movement that will eliminate people and services working in isolation within tertiary education.
Steve Widders

‘I lost my sight – not my vision’

Steve Widders is an Aboriginal advocate with a vision impairment. Steve was diagnosed in 1990 by Fred Hollows. Steve’s experiences as a person with a disability have led him to take on a strong advocacy role to raise awareness and improve processes and practice to increase opportunities for Aboriginal people with disability. Steve provided a personal perspective about being Aboriginal and having a disability. This was a moving and enlightening story highlighting the gaps in service provision, assumptions that can be made by disability practitioners and the importance of working within a culturally appropriate framework when supporting Aboriginal people with disability.

Steve emphasised the fact that Aboriginal people with disability present with compounded issues and stated it is imperative for tertiary education support staff to have an understanding of the cultural issues for Aboriginal people as a foundation to their practice. For example, understanding that:

- all Aboriginal people, regardless of presenting ability, are impacted by trauma inflicted on older generations, and that transgenerational trauma must be recognised within all practices for Aboriginal people
- disability compounds issues and results in further isolation for Aboriginal people
- depression, suicidal thoughts, social isolation and confusion are common issues for Aboriginal people with disability.

Steve also highlighted ignorance in the community around disability which has an impact on all people with a disability. For example, when disclosing he was blind to an airline he was provided with a wheelchair; when disclosing vision impairment to his tertiary provider he was provided with reading material in Braille. Steve does not read Braille. But was never asked!

His message was clear: people with disabilities often need to be able to assert their needs, self-advocate and challenge systems to receive adequate supports and services. This is often very difficult for Aboriginal people with disability who are already affected by issues that result in low self-esteem and negative self-worth.

Steve encouraged all practitioners, both disability and ATSI, to go back to their organisations and look at the statistics there, which will tell the story of who is included and who is not. Disability practitioners should find out how many Aboriginal students are supported and whether there was a process of consultation with the ALO to gain an understanding of cultural issues which will affect these students. Aboriginal practitioners should ask themselves how often they consult with or refer to disability practitioners.

Steve’s final message:

‘We need to be much more adaptable and flexible and we need to work collaboratively. The first step is to set up a consultative committee where both Aboriginal and disability practitioners can work together and learn from each other’.
Participants

The forum was promoted to Disability and Aboriginal Liaison Officers within TAFE and higher education across Victoria, as well as to all Local Aboriginal Education Consultative Groups, Wurreker Brokers and Aboriginal Corporations across all regions in Victoria.

The following tertiary education providers were represented at the Forum.

- Sunraysia TAFE
- Kangan Batman TAFE
- Wodonga TAFE
- The University of Melbourne
- University of Ballarat
- RMIT
- East Gippsland TAFE
- Monash University
- Gippsland TAFE
- Skills Plus
- Latrobe University
- Swinburne University
- NMIT
- South West TAFE
- Goulburn Ovens TAFE
- Bendigo TAFE
- Victoria University
- BoxHill TAFE
- Chisholm Institute of TAE
- Deakin University
- University of New England

Of the participants who attended the forum, 29 were disability practitioners in tertiary education, 15 were Aboriginal Liaison Officers or Coordinators of Indigenous Units within tertiary education and 14 participants represented equity units in higher education, the NDCO program and students.
Forum Workshop

Discussions around the key barriers to success in education for Aboriginal students with disabilities took place in a large group workshop and small groups. Participants identified the following concerns as key issues affecting Aboriginal students and disability and Aboriginal practitioners within tertiary education.

Many Aboriginal students with disabilities experience:

• anxiety around education, especially when compulsory school years were fragmented and the individual left school at a young age
• disempowerment and unwillingness to speak out about individual learning needs
• a lack of trust of mainstream services, especially where there is evidence that the practitioners have no cultural understanding and there is no Aboriginal influence within the service
• confusion about medical definitions of disability and requirements for assessment.

Service provision:

• is often changing, with new names and new initiatives. This creates confusion and a lack of continuity for service users, especially as there is often poor communication to individuals about the changes
• often reflects a superficial approach to policy making, with policies appearing as though Aboriginal people are understood and included but in reality with no real understanding within the organisation
• is inconsistent between regions and States
• often reflects high staff turnover, especially where organisations want an Aboriginal person in a role but do not provide a culturally appropriate work environment or reflect an understanding of the community outreach required to engage with Aboriginal people
• is often not accessible to the community, for example located too far from the community they serve
• reflects culturally dominant thinking, i.e. bureaucratic language and culture clash
• does not reflect equitable assessment, with processes and practices that have not changed over time in response to policy and legislation
• is difficult in tertiary education because ALOs and DLOs are working with the most disadvantaged students in a system that caters to the academically competent. This places heavy expectations on ALOs and DLOs
• reflects a lack of coordination for a group who are heavily governed.

The Way Forward

Participants (ALOs and DLOs) agreed that there are serious barriers to full participation and success in tertiary education for Aboriginal students with disabilities. However, discussions highlighted that there is a prevailing sense of social justice and opportunity for improvement through dedicated people who value their role, who are valued for their role and who are committed to creating change.
The group explored ideas about what they believed needed to change in current practice to improve opportunities for Aboriginal students with disabilities. The suggestions included the following.

- Moving away from practice that reflects the ‘medical’ model of disability and for tertiary education disability services to reflect strongly an understanding of the ‘social’ or ‘impact’ model of disability. This approach focuses primarily on removing barriers in the environment, policies and processes in contrast to ‘fitting’ people with disabilities into current structures and systems.
- Challenging negative attitudes toward disability. Aboriginal people accept disability as a part of life and living while the medical approach and negative attitudes categorise people with disability as ‘sick’ and ‘requiring special treatment’. This results in people having very low expectations of a person with a disability.
- A move to qualitative measures of good practice rather than using only quantitative data. There are examples of excellent good practice that need to be showcased to encourage adoption of similar practices across the sectors.
- Strengthening linkages between Aboriginal and disability practitioners within organisations to facilitate information sharing, provide access to resources to accommodate participation and learning difference and to ensure Aboriginal students have in place ‘reasonable adjustments’ that will facilitate improved participation.
- Being flexible in approaches to accommodate the Aboriginal understanding and acceptance of disability i.e. exploring impacts on learning and participation. These may include past experiences, examples of positive learning experiences, examples of where difficulties exist and working to resolve these wherever possible, and not requiring individuals to provide medical evidence and assessments as a first step before intervention, especially if assessments have not occurred in the past.
- Raising the profile of Aboriginal and disability practitioners within organisations. These positions are complex, provide specialist roles and are responsible for facilitating successful engagement for the most disadvantaged groups.
- Practices need to reflect Aboriginal pedagogy. Raising awareness within organisations must go beyond basic cultural awareness and provide opportunities for staff to understand teaching and learning practices which will engage Aboriginal students.
- The Aboriginal Liaison Officer and the Disability Liaison Officer must embed consultancy between their services into their everyday practice.

**Post Forum**

Participants at the forum were unanimous in their support of the idea of developing local working parties that would facilitate collaboration between Aboriginal and Disability Liaison Officers in TAFE and higher education. Participants were invited to express an interest in developing pilot models for the working party concept. Since the forum, the NDCO programs supporting the Loddon Mallee and North East Victoria regions have assisted in the establishment of two regional working parties. It is anticipated that these will continue to be developed across Victoria in 2010 with support from the Victorian branch of the National Aboriginal Disability Network.

The purpose of the regional working parties is to build further on information received at the one-day forum and to develop and enhance existing ALO and DLO professional relations. The goal is to develop and enhance practices that will foster collaboration within organisations, to build collegial consultancy and the provision of shared support for Aboriginal students with disabilities.

The minutes of the first meeting of each working party are included in the appendices. The minutes highlight representation on the working groups, which includes organisational and community participation from disability and Aboriginal sectors. The actions proposed by the working groups reflect the promotion of change at service provision level as well as through policy and procedures. The Disability and Wurreker plans have been highlighted as needing to reflect both disability and Aboriginality in their action planning.
Forum evaluation

Feedback from participants in the forum was positive and supportive of the concept of enhancing collaborative practices between Aboriginal and disability practitioners’ service provision to Aboriginal students with disabilities (96% of respondents). However, there were also a few responses that highlighted embedded practice and resource issues that may continue to create barriers for Aboriginal students with disabilities. For example, participants said ‘it isn’t currently possible to spend time building relationships in communities as we don’t get the time to visit the people with a disability who have already disclosed and enrolled at TAFE, let alone those who haven’t’ and ‘it will be a challenge to engage students if they choose not to access the services of the DLOs’.

In brief, 92% of respondents stated that attendance at the forum would directly impact on their future practice; 23% identified the need to begin working at a more strategic level, i.e. embed Aboriginal issues in Disability Action Plans and disability issues in Wurreker plans; 47% identified that they would immediately begin to work more collaboratively across Aboriginal and disability services to ensure the provision of culturally appropriate support to Aboriginal students with disability; and 30% of participants stated that they would seek further information to become more aware of barriers for Aboriginal students with disabilities and practice strategies to remove these barriers.

Disability and Aboriginal Liaison officers from five regions in Victoria indicated that they would establish working groups, with representation from both services within their organisations and local communities, to begin the process of developing action plans and new approaches to providing specific assistance to Aboriginal students with disabilities. The National Disability Coordination Officer program was identified as one source of support in establishing such working groups.

One participant felt the presentation from DEEWR was condescending toward Aboriginal participants, while others expressed appreciation of an increased awareness about specific issues faced by Aboriginal people with disabilities. The presentations were designed to educate and raise awareness for those less familiar with the issues of social exclusion experienced by Aboriginal people with disability. There was no intention to offend any person or group.

When asked if the forum was worthwhile, responses were as follows.

• Yes it was. It confirmed some of my awareness/experience of the issues of Indigenous learners with a disability that we have had ourselves at KBT i.e. issues of disclosure, identifying with culture versus being a person who has a disability. The guest speakers were inspiring and informative, Steve Widders and Damian in particular.
• I found the forum to be worthwhile as I was fortunate to meet Aboriginal people who work as ALOs.
• Yes, it was good to hear what other people were thinking.
• I felt it was worthwhile, I particularly enjoyed the speakers.
• I found the forum to be NOT worthwhile. I found a large focus on the issues but no focus at all on the solutions.
• I have a degree in Indigenous studies and all of my post grad studies are in Disability, however, there were gaps in my knowledge regarding the links between the two areas. I thought Damien Griffis’s talk was extremely informative and provided me with great information that will assist in beginning to work more closely with Koori Services at our Institute.
• Absolutely - great opportunity to build better understanding on both parts about needs of Indigenous students with a disability.
• Yes it added a new dimension to my knowledge.
• I thought it was an excellent forum.
• I found it very informative. I like that we got a variety of perspectives from the presentations and gained an overview from DEEWR, an ADN perspective and the perspective of an Indigenous person with a disability. I found the workshop interesting as there were many people in attendance with knowledge and experience in this area.
• The forum was fantastic and yes it was very worthwhile.
• I found the forum worthwhile.
• Very worthwhile gave some great ideas about breaking down barriers which were quite simple.
• Yes it was worthwhile in that for the first time in my experience working as a Disability Adviser that there has been emphasis placed on the issues around disclosure of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students with disability and the doubling of complexity in working with students who have challenges both on a cultural and disability basis.
• Yes it was worthwhile.
• Worthwhile yes, also good to network with colleagues.
• I found the forum worthwhile but see a lot of issues in implementing some of the changes needed, I think we will make some changes but it isn’t currently possible to spend time building relationships in communities as we don’t get the time to visit the people with a disability who have already disclosed and enrolled at TAFE let alone those who haven’t.
• It was interesting, but it will be a challenge to engage students if they choose not to access the services of the DLOs
• Yes it was worthwhile, particularly hearing the concerns and barriers of Tertiary staff.
• Very worthwhile....it was pleasing to realise that I was not alone and also confirming my beliefs as to why, culturally, ATSI students do not utilise disability support networks and services.
• Yes it was. It helped me to look at ways to work and integrate more fully the Koori cohort in our TAFE.
• It helped me with ways to move and work with the KLO who was not there on the day or a representative as I had asked for, knowing it was her first day back from a long leave.
• I am already working across both disability and with Indigenous community so it wasn’t entirely new. My team already work quite collaboratively however did inspire other members of my organisation to work more closely together.

When asked whether attendance at the forum would impact on participants’ future practice, responses were as follows.

• It has made me realise that I have to change and be more conscious of my language and approach when providing learning support services to our Indigenous students with a disability e.g. less use of the word ‘disability’, focus more on using terms like what is the student good at doing, what do they like to be doing when in class, what do they think are their strengths and weaknesses when it comes to learning etc. I know I need to work more with and meet more with the teachers in our Indigenous Learning Centre and to actively promote a ‘working together’ culture.
• Difficult to say as I may not have employment next year.
• I planned one strategy with the Koori unit to be implemented ASAP.
• As a DLO I do not think attendance at this forum will impact or improve the learning of Aboriginal students at my institution.
• Currently, there are no Indigenous students registered. Whilst this might take time, in future Disability Services will be more accessible.
• Opened the door to more fruitful discussions - opened the door to ask questions about culturally sensitive issues.
• The special attention given to the use of applications for students with LD and the sharing of other experiences, particularly acknowledgment of the complex difficulties in language testing gave me an insight into the problems that others also face, and how they overcome them.
• We will aim to work more closely with our ALO and attempt to work with the community.
• I intend to encourage my institute to:
  » review how the ALO and DLO work- currently very separately.
  » review its Disability Action Plan which currently makes no mention of Indigenous groups.
  » link its Disability Action Plan and Wurreker plan.
• Attendance at the forum to me was a great help because I teach Indigenous students who have hearing disability and to learn about the things that are available for our students and the services as well is very helpful.
• The forum gave the impetus for staff from both units to get together and work towards support for Indigenous Students with disability. Areas of expertise need to be shared to support the students at the institute.
• Offering support needs to be introduced in a non-threatening manner; making connection with the community and developing that relationship will hopefully improve what we can eventually provide.
• The role as the Disability Adviser is limited in so far that reaching out to ‘community’ can really only realistically be to the educational community and the Aboriginal services within the institution in which you are employed. There realistically needs to be a shared co-operation between the two services and breaking down of shame associated with disability by both Aboriginal services staff and students. I will be working with staff first in order to be able to have students want to disclose to the Disability unit.
• Not sure yet, but now I have the contacts and knowledge to assist any student with a disability should it be required.
• Highlighted the importance of DLO and ALOs working more closely at La Trobe to ensure support for students is in place and relevant to their particular needs.
• We are going to work more closely with our Koori Liaison Officer so we are more aware of those who may need support but won’t disclose.
• We will attempt to establish closer ties with the ALO in our institution.
• More mindful of Indigenous/disability issues in the tertiary sector.
• It gives me a better understanding of the cultural aspects and how I can begin a conversation about the experiences of ATSI students with our own KLO.
• It means that when I make contact to be more involved and not just hand it over to the KLO. It means I need to do some of my what I call giving out a set of tools to students and this should be more out there than it has been. It also means as we have a new Student Support Officer and will work with her and create an ability for all of us to work more fruitfully.
• Look at having someone on my books as a casual worker could be another road into this area. I do have one worker who has way back Koori blood as she says.
• Work on awareness sessions along with others we are doing at the moment.
• Better awareness of how much work there is to be done
• I will liaise with the ALO more to be sure I understand the best way to move forward for each individual

Feedback on the presentations by guest speakers

• All respondents identified the presentations by Damian Griffis and Steven Widders as appropriate for the event.
• All respondents except one identified the presentations by DEEWR as appropriate for the event.

Additional comments about speakers

• I wanted to hear more from Indigenous learners with a disability, current or recent experiences and of their ability to access the appropriate levels of and types of learning support suitable to their individual learning needs.
• I felt the organiser did a great job of keeping us on track.
• I found all of the speakers informative and interesting to listen to, however in relation to any ‘moving forward’ I would have liked to see someone get up and speak about ideas and plans for what can happen and what is happening. There must be SOMEONE that is getting it right out there?
• (Sorry I missed first part of day)
• All very informative
• These guys were very informative
• A good mix of speakers and information, Steve was very inspirational
• Damian Griffis was very informative
• The numbers man Andy was good in that it helped to see where things stood and you got a perspective of what is and is not happening. Damian certainly showed that things can change if you keep chipping at it and he is certainly getting some results. Steve I think I could sit and listen to all day and have discussion and be a devil’s advocate in questioning him and still have a good outcome.
• DEEWR just give us info we already know. We don’t need the party/government line; we need to know how they will support us in a concrete fashion. They were particularly condescending to an Indigenous audience who already know they are disadvantaged without DEEWR telling them so.

Additional comments provided through the evaluation

• Thanks to Julie and Cressida for all their work and to any others who got this forum together for us all to attend. It was very worth while and timely...
• Thank you for the people who organised the forum, it was most appreciated.
• I really got a lot out of this forum and it was a big eye opener for me and I would like to share the info with my students and community as well.
• I would really like to express my gratitude to you and the rest of the people involved in setting the forum up It was absolutely fantastic well done.
• Good networking opportunity.
• I found the facilitator (Jason Clarke) to be inappropriate and senseless. His interjections of trashy humour and bad language were neither appropriate nor appreciated. He seemed to make the ‘room laugh’ but all I felt was uncomfortable. His list of ‘change it, throw it out, blow it up’ etc was simplistic and inappropriate and gave no actual coal face ideas on moving forward and getting it right. My feedback may seem harsh but I came away from the forum feeling LESS empowered to deal with Aboriginal students with disabilities rather than more empowered.
• Thanks.
• Great forum. There was lots of discussion about the need for cultural awareness training for teachers & support staff - does there need to be some work done in educating the Indigenous liaison staff about disability issues and supports though? (it seemed a bit of a one way conversation at times).
• Thank you for the information and to the speakers.
• I was particularly impressed with Damian and Steve.
• How about having a forum here in Mildura Victoria? We have a big lecture theatre that you can use.
• I think it is important for me to get closer connections between the Koori Support Unit staff and staff in the Student Support Unit as a combined management approach. All of us have our areas of expertise which will benefit the student.
• Due to the distances involved, I would prefer to keep accessing my TAFE Disability Network and work on closer involvement at ‘home’ (I would probably have to choose between the two options). A wiki or e-network similar to some others that we access might be beneficial, with queries/comments sent to all.

Participants were asked to describe with one word their experience of the forum. Responses were as follows.

(Note: a few respondents identified more than one descriptive word in their response.)

77% – informative
59% – motivational
27% – challenging
18% – inspiring
Appendix 1. DEEWR Presentation

Engaging Indigenous people with Disabilities in tertiary education

Apology to Australia’s Indigenous Peoples
(13 February 2008)
“..the core of this partnership for the future is to close the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians on life expectancy, educational achievement and employment opportunities.”

Six ‘Closing the Gap’ targets
- providing all Indigenous four year olds in remote communities with access to early childhood education within the next five years;
- halving the gap in infant mortality
- and halving the gap in reading, writing and numeracy for Indigenous children within the next decade;
- halving the gap for Indigenous students in attaining year 12 equivalent education by 2020
- closing the gap in life expectancy within a generation; and,
- halving the gap in employment outcomes for Indigenous people within a decade.

Victorian Indigenous ABS Census
- Population: 30,141
- Unemployment rate: 15.7%
- Population 0-24 yrs: 52%
- Profile of Indigenous DEEWR Clients
  - More likely to have/experience:
    - a disability
    - lower educational attainment (ie yr 10 or less)
    - Insecure accommodation
    - Unemployed for more than 12 months
Educational Outcomes

- Participation in vocational education and training is high, but majority of enrolments at AQF Certificate I & II
- 37.8% of Victorian Indigenous enrolments in 2007 at AQF Certificate III or above – compared to 51.1% of non-Indigenous enrolments at AQF Certificate III or above
- 66.5% module/competency pass rate for Indigenous students (80.7% for non Indigenous students) - 2008

Table 4: Degree of under-representation of groups, 2007

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>2007 Participation rate % in higher education</th>
<th>Proportion in general population</th>
<th>2007 participation ratio</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Non-English speaking background</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>1.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students with disabilities</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>1.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remote</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>0.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low SES</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>25.0</td>
<td>0.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indigenous</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>0.59</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: All based on ABS 2007 data. ARA participation ratio of 1 indicates appropriate representation of the equity group in the student population. Excludes profound and severe core activity limitation.

Bradley Review

- Indigenous people are vastly under-represented in higher education
- Success & retention rates volatile - significantly below the rates for non-Indigenous students
- 2006: Indigenous students passed their subjects at a rate 23 per cent below their non-Indigenous peers.
- Last six years: retention rate for Indigenous students has been between 19 per cent and 26 per cent below the rate for other students.
- Need to address culture of institution, cultural competence of all staff (academic and professional) and inclusiveness of curriculum.
- In 2006, Indigenous graduates had higher take-up rates into full time employment than non-Indigenous graduates, with rates of 85.6% and 82.4% respectively - improvement on the 2005 results.

Engaging Indigenous people with Disabilities

Indigenous people with disabilities tend to experience further social and economic disadvantage compared to Indigenous people without a disability.

- Fewer years of formal education
- Much less likely to be in workforce/employed
- Lower levels of income
- Likely to be in households experiencing financial stress.

Ref: The health and welfare of Australia’s Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples 2005 – Australian Institute of Health and Welfare.
Engaging Indigenous people with Disabilities in tertiary education

- Recognise diversity of Indigenous experience, know your community
- May find Indigenous people acknowledge health issues but don’t label as disability
- Strategies need to consider the cultural context of client – Sometime we support the disability not taking into account the Aboriginality – need holistic approaches
- Support should include consideration of mainstream and Indigenous specific services, use of range of equity policies and programs – Allow for user choice
  - Some may have negative experiences with mainstream providers (therefore prefer Indigenous specific support)
  - Some may prefer mainstream providers – may feel “shame” in sharing disability with their community, may like anonymity

For mainstream / general services:

- May receive referral for Indigenous person through third party (Indigenous Support Unit, Indigenous organisation)
- Think about meeting on “common” inclusive ground
- Work with Indigenous stakeholders (part of knowing your community):
  - Indigenous Education Units & Indigenous Liaison Officers
  - Aboriginal Co-operatives/Health Services, Land Councils
  - Indigenous Employment Consultants

Share your knowledge - play an educative role within your institution & others
Appendix 2. Aboriginal Disability Network: Damian Griffis

A Way Forward; Building the capacity of the Aboriginal Disability Rights Movement

Presented by Damian Griffis, Executive Officer
Aboriginal Disability Network

Some Facts about disability in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island communities

- Aboriginal people with disability are far more likely to:
  - acquire a disability due to a preventable health condition such as diabetes
  - experience multiple barriers to their meaningful participation in community life. Multiple layers of discrimination.
  - to be unemployed
  - to have withdrawn or not accessed an education at all
  - to have not accessed a service
- Aboriginal people with disability are often supported within the family and community. When the family lives in a economically depressed state this can created added burden.
- The medical model of disability has had a profoundly negative impact on the lives on many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island people with disability.

There are a number of social factors that contribute to the higher prevalence such as:

- Lack of access to good quality healthcare (including health promotion and health prevention programs).
- Lack of access to appropriate housing and urban infrastructure (including clean water and sanitation).
- Greater exposure to violence and abuse.
- The psycho-social impact of colonisation, dispossession from land.
- Substance dependence.

Some Facts about disability in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island communities

- Anecdotally it was believed that the prevalence of disability was twice that of the non-Aboriginal population.
- Recently quantified as 37% of the Aboriginal population reporting a disability or long-term health condition. (Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision, Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage; Key Indicators 2005)
- Conservative result given the lack of data on prevalence of psychological disability (mental illness).
- Very little reference material on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island people with disability.
- Many Aboriginal people do not recognise they have a disability.

Disability in Aboriginal & Torres Strait Island Communities; Social factors

The Lived Experience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island people with disability

- The denial of the most fundamental of human rights i.e, access to shelter, access to education, employment
- Aboriginal people with disability have different experiences depending on where they live and the availability of services.
- The failure of government and non-government service providers to meet the needs of Aboriginal people with disability.
- Very poor access to information. Concerted outreach approach required.
- Lack of awareness of special assistance and other beneficial social programs.
- Diversity of experiences; different jurisdictions at different levels of development with regard the development of the social movement of Indigenous people with disability.

The Lived Experience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island people with disability

- The prevalence of disability in Aboriginal communities. And the prevalence of particular types of disability.
- Undiagnosed disability
  - hearing impairment
  - mental illness
- The problem with identifying as having a disability
- Multiple layers of discrimination. Double and triple disadvantage.

A Way Forward; Building the capacity of the Aboriginal Disability Rights Movement

Presented by Damian Griffis, Executive Officer
Aboriginal Disability Network
The Lived Experience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island people with disability

- Racial discrimination and its implications for Aboriginal people with disability.
- Competing priorities in the Aboriginal rights movement.
- Aboriginal people with disability live in extreme poverty.
- Very low rates of access to Individual Advocacy services.
- Indigenous disability is medicalised.

Building the capacity of regional and state networks

- Currently wide variations between jurisdictions
- QLD, SA & WA (in particular the Kimberly region) have networks at various stages of development.
- Nothing formal happening in NT, VIC, ACT & TAS
- Regions may have different needs and priorities.
- Locally based solutions to unmet need.
- Strong and viable state and regional networks are critical to ensuring a transparent and properly functioning national body

National Aboriginal & Torres Strait Island Disability Advocacy Program

- Commitment is there amongst the disability department heads in WA, VIC, ACT, NT & QLD.
- Phase 1 Individual Advocacy Program Roll Out
  Western NSW, Northern NSW, Sydney Metro, Kimberly Region, Arnhem
- Phase 2 – South East QLD, North QLD, Western QLD, SA
- Phase 3 – Victoria, Tasmania, Pilbara & Perth Metro
Appendix 3. Minutes of ATSIP Reference Group–Wodonga

ATSIP with Disabilities Reference Group

Date: 25th November 2009
Meeting No: 01/09
Venue: Wodonga TAFE A building
Time: 10.00am – 12.00 noon
Convened by: Julie Fry (NDCO)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Invitees</th>
<th>Invitees</th>
<th>Invitees</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jenni Myers (Learning support Coordinator WT)</td>
<td>Leanne Delaney (DLO WT)</td>
<td>Patricia Klauss (ALO WT)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marita Quaglio (DLO LTU)</td>
<td>ALO (LTU position currently vacant)</td>
<td>Julie Fry (NDCO – East Vic)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Josie Klauss (Aboriginal Support Worker WT)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Apologies: Josie Klauss, Marita Quaglio (LTU)

**Item:** Agenda Items: Action By:

1. **Welcome and Introductions**

   Brief overview of the NDCO project that was focussed to improving opportunities, participation and outcomes for ATSIP with disabilities in tertiary education – key objective to bring Aboriginal Liaison Officers and Disability Liaison Officers together to explore collaborative approaches to working with ATSI People with disabilities across tertiary education.

   Forum held in Melbourne in September – ADN CEO Damian Griffis presented. Issues for ATSI students with disabilities impacting on opportunities – up to 30% Aboriginal population experience disability. Disability Liaison Officers reporting that ATSI Students do not access disability services – this results in ATSI students missing out on accessing resources, services, and being introduced to strategies for removing barriers to participation that are a result of disability.
Goal of the project – to establish regional networks that will comprise both disability and aboriginal practitioners in tertiary education – to begin fostering partnerships and collaborative practices.

2. **Issues Discussed**

- Current practice very hit and miss, no coordinated approach with supporting Aboriginal students with disabilities
- Still an expectation that individual students come to disability office for support – not ALO / DLO working together – ATSI students don’t come!
- Have been good examples of collaborative practices in the past at Wodonga where DLO worked with teachers, ALO and a group of students to modify teaching and learning approaches
- Partnership approach needs to be embraced by all players to ensure a good model evolves
- Aboriginal students also present with literacy issues – opportunities to enhance literacy could also be explored within the group
- Need to explore approaches that are not embedded in the deficit medical model – i.e. let’s look at environment, attitudes, practices to remove barriers for aboriginal students with disabilities

3. **Proposed reference group**

It was agreed that the following representatives would be invited to participate on the reference group for the Wodonga and outlying district:

- DLO from La Trobe University (Marita Quaglio)
- ALO from La Trobe University (vacant)
- DLO from Wodonga TAFE (Leanne Delaney)
- ALO from Wodonga TAFE (Patricia Klauss)
- The NDCO for east Victoria (Julie Fry)
- The Aboriginal Mental Health Worker (Karen McMillon)
- LAECG representative
- Aboriginal Support Officer (DEET Di Tattersall)
- Victorian ADN representative (Jodi Saxton – in advisory / consultancy role for the group).

It was also agreed that the ALO’s and DLO’s from Riverina TAFE, Charles Sturt University and GOTAFE will be invited to participate to establish the reference group as regional.

It was also agreed that Jenni Myers (Learning Support Coordinator & Teacher Wodonga TAFE) would act as convenor for the group – Jenni will coordinate a full meeting for March 2010.
The group will meet a minimum of four times per year but will come together in full or as sub groups to work on specific projects. The NDCO may be able to provide some financial support to the group – to host meetings, develop resources etc.

4. **Draft objectives of the group**

- To improve access, participation and outcomes in tertiary education for ATSI People with disabilities
- To improve the capacity of the education provider to genuinely include ATSI People with disabilities
- To facilitate collaborative and culturally appropriate practice between Aboriginal and Disability practitioners in tertiary education

5. **Meeting outcomes and actions**

- DLO and ALO (Wodonga TAFE) will attend ATSI cultural awareness training together and explore ways to modify the training to incorporate issues for Aboriginal students with disabilities and inclusive teaching practices. They will feedback to the reference group.

- All agreed that strategies to address barriers experienced by ATSI students with disabilities need to be recognised and embedded within the organisations Disability Action Plan and the Wurreker plan.

- All agreed that Access and Equity Committees of each organisation need to be advised of the ATSIP with disabilities reference group – and where possible addressing barriers for ATSI students with disabilities is tabled and reported against at these meetings.

- The group will define further how they will move forward as a strategic group at the next meeting.

- The group recommended some local data collection, i.e. how many ATSI students enrolled with each education provider, how many are identifying disability on enrolment and how many would ALO’s & teachers identify as having barriers to learning.

- The group will work together to explore sourcing or developing professional development – awareness raising activities for educators
6. NDCO – Julie Fry advised the group that members of the Aboriginal Disability Network had agreed to work with the NDCO to develop a poster that will spread the message about the prevalence of disability and the impact of disability for ATSI people – and about the need for Aboriginal and Disability services to work together. It is hoped that members of the reference groups being established and students of the education providers can have input into the poster design and wording. Please spread the word, ask students if they have artwork that might be suitable, ask students and colleagues about the messages the poster might deliver.

7. NDCO will contact identified people for representation on the reference group.

Next meeting March 2010 – Jenni Myers will convene the meeting and forward the agenda.
Appendix 4. Minutes of ATSIP Reference Group–Mildura

‘WORKING WITH INDIGENOUS STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES’
Regional Reference group meeting
NDCO Region 15
Thursday 12 November, Mildura

Present: Cressida Metcalf (NDCO), Jody Saxton-Barney (ADN Inc), Belinda Philp (ISO – LaTrobe Uni), Stephen Portell (KLO - SuniTAFE), Janet Nunn (DLO – SuniTAFE & LaTrobe Uni), Terry Payne (Teacher and Disability Support staff worker – SuniTAFE), Joan Taylor (Teacher and Disability Support staff worker - SuniTAFE)

Meeting discussion points and action plan

1. Develop regional reference group

Core group members include:

• KLO/ISOs and DLOs - SuniTAFE and LaTrobe University
• ADN Inc. (Aboriginal Disability Network Inc.) representative available for consultation.

Future members may include:

• LAECG (Local Aboriginal Education Consultative Group) representative
• RIAC (Regional Information and Advocacy Council)
• Mildura Aboriginal Co-Op (HR rep, Health, Education, Disability staff).

2. Establish meeting frequency

Core group members will establish regularity of ongoing meetings for 2010 at next meeting.

• Next meeting scheduled for 16 December 2009.
Future meetings may be planned to:

- Coincide with SuniTAFE Robinvale and Swan Hill campus KLO meetings to enable additional staff members to participate
- Coincide with ADN Inc. representative’s Mildura visits timetable to increase possible contact
- Share information across both units
- Discuss individual student’s needs
- Record discussions/note case studies for further reporting or referral as required
- Confirm key issues and seek additional support as required.

3. **Develop mission statement for group to clarify objectives and vision of group**

Core group members will develop a simple mission statement at next meeting. For example:

The KLO/DLO (*name to be determined*) working group aims to collaboratively address key issues that relate to Indigenous students with disabilities in order to improve and increase levels of participation and outcomes/success in education.

4. **Review unit action plans/mission statements to include active support for Indigenous students with disability**

Core group members will include some discussion at future meetings with relation to inclusion of unit-based positive action statements.

- If possible this will be raised with management or senior staff for consideration.
- The ADN Inc representative may also be consulted for advice/input.

5. **Aim for Reference Group to become a subsidiary to Access & Equity (Diversity) Committee**

Core group members will plan to:

- Minute meeting discussions/actions and feed back to management for consideration at higher level (as/if required)
- Request relevant Committee at each institution table key issues for institutional consideration as/when necessary or on an ongoing meeting agenda item.
Appendix 5. Promoting the Forum

The forum was initially promoted through email dissemination of the flier below:

The National Disability Coordination Officer Program is pleased to host a one day forum

"Working with Indigenous Students with disabilities in Tertiary Education"

The goal of the forum is to explore issues for Indigenous students with disabilities and to highlight opportunities for collaborative practice between Indigenous and Disability practitioners within tertiary education.

We are seeking participation at the forum from Disability and Indigenous practitioners within tertiary education.

The forum is supported by a number of prominent speakers including:

JOY MURPHY
who is an Aboriginal Elder of the Wurundjeri people, has been involved with Aboriginal issues for thirty years. She is Chairperson of the Australian Indigenous Consultative Assembly, and has held executive positions across many sectors of government. Aunty Joy is an Honorary Professor at Swinburne University, a Trustee of the National Gallery of Victoria, a member of the Victoria Police Ethical Standards Consultative Committee and the Equal Opportunity Commission. She is also an Australia Day ambassador, and operates her own business Jarlo Visions.

DAMIAN GRIFFIS
who is a leading advocate for the human rights of Aboriginal people with disability. In 2004/05 Damian undertook a major consultative project visiting Aboriginal communities across the state of New South Wales discussing the unmet needs of Aboriginal people with disability directly with Aboriginal people with disability and their carers culminating in the report entitled Telling It Like It Is. Damian is currently the Executive Officer of the Aboriginal Disability Network which amongst other things is responsible for coordinating the further development of the National Indigenous Disability Peak Organisation. Damian continues to represent the views of Aboriginal people with disability in a range of forums. Internationally he has been a lead advocate in the establishment of the Pacific Disability Forum which is a network of disabled people's organisations from 13 Pacific Island nations.

DATE: Monday 7 September 2009
TIME: 9:30am – 3:30pm
LOCATION: Melbourne
VENUE: Graduate House, 220 Leicester St Carlton, Melbourne

* Refreshments and lunch will be provided

"Funded by the Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations under the National Disability Coordination Officer Program."
Appendix 6. Forum Program Outline

The initial promotional flier was followed up by an electronic flier that provided details on the final program. This was forwarded in both electronic and hardcopy to key stakeholders.

"Working with Indigenous Students with disabilities in Tertiary Education"

Facilitated by Jason Clarke of Minds at Work

In 1977, Jason Clarke achieved the lowest Year 12 score in the history of his school. Today he is one of the most sought after creative minds in the country, consulting on issues of leadership and innovation to some of Australia’s biggest companies and institutions.

COST: FREE. Participants outside metropolitan Melbourne may be eligible for travel/accommodation subsidies. To discuss financial support for attendance please contact Jules Fry at fryJ@weongate.dse.edu.au

REGISTRATIONS FOR THIS FORUM CLOSE ON THE WEDNESDAY 21ST SEPTEMBER.

Program

DATE: Monday 7 September 2009
VENUE: Graduate House, 220 La trobe St, Carlton, Melbourne

9.15am REGISTRATION
9.30am WELCOME & BRIEF OVERVIEW Indigenous Services, the Australian Government Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations.
10.00am INTRODUCTIONS Jason Clarke, Forum Facilitator, Minds at Work.
10.15am WELCOME TO COUNTRY Joy Murphy is an Aboriginal Elder of the Wirangueri people and has been actively involved with Aboriginal issues for thirty years.
10.45am MORNING TEA
11.00am DAMIAN GRIFFS Damian is the CEO of the Aboriginal Disability Network and formerly a senior advocate for People with Disabilities Australia.
11.30am STEVE WIDDERS Steve has advocated for the social inclusion of Indigenous people for many years and worked across education and local government.
12.00pm LUNCH
12.45pm WORKSHOP Exploring barriers in systems, practices and attitudes.
1.30pm GROUP DISCUSSION Facilitating access and improved participation and outcomes for Indigenous students with disabilities. What do we do now? What works? What can we do better?
2.15pm BREAK
2.30pm WORKSHOP Feedback from group discussion. The future. Regional Networking.
3.15pm CLOSEOUT Comments and forum evaluation.
Disability and Aboriginal Liaison Officers need to work together to improve opportunities and successful outcomes in tertiary education for Aboriginal students with disabilities.