

Aboriginal Careers in Mental Health (ACIMH) PRELIMINARY EVALUATION REPORT: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Aboriginal Careers
in
Mental Health

A Mental Health Coordinating
Council Initiative

Introduction

What follows is a summary of findings from the preliminary evaluation of the Aboriginal Careers in Mental Health (ACIMH) Program overseen by the Mental Health Coordinating Council (MHCC).

The independent evaluation was conducted by EJD Consulting & Associates in November-December 2013 with a specific focus on Group A and B trainees. While the Group C trainees had commenced in the Program at the time of the research, it was agreed that detailed analysis of this group should be incorporated into next report when full data sets become available.

The evaluation included feedback gathered from trainees, mentors, host organisation supervisors and coordinators, as well as Program managers and Program trainers. The methodology included end-of-block training surveys, a survey monkey survey of all stakeholders, as well a series of focus groups and interviews.

Program Inputs

In 2012 ten community managed mental health organisations in NSW agreed to participate in the Program and host the Aboriginal trainees. These comprised:

- New Horizons
- NEAMI
- Richmond PRA
- The Benevolent Society
- Schizophrenia Fellowship NSW
- Uniting Care Mental Health Parramatta/ Parramatta Mission
- Anglicare Bondi
- Lyndon Community.

(Plus Aftercare and Mission Australian in respect to Group C trainees) ¹ .

As at November 2013 a total of 46 trainees were recorded as commencing in the Program, with nine individuals exiting to date. Trainee numbers in Group A and B totalled 31.

¹ As noted above detailed data related to these two host organisations and their Group C trainees will be included in the final evaluation report due in December 2014.

Program Outputs and Outcomes

As at November 2013 all stakeholder groups expressed satisfaction with the Program to date, with clear benefits consistent with the Program aims.

For trainees, the major benefits were defined as:

- having access to quality education and training while in paid employment
- opportunity to study and develop a career in a culturally appropriate context
- being able to learn new skills and knowledge with the opportunity to then utilise these skills in the workplace
- future job prospects, particularly within mental health
- opportunities to meet, network, and share ideas and experiences with other Aboriginal trainees.

For host organisations, the major benefits were defined as:

- having a structured means of recruiting, training and supporting new Aboriginal staff
- having the means to support Aboriginal staff in the workplace, including through peer-to peer options, access to mentors and to expert Program staff
- having opportunities to improve the organisation's internal policies and practices as well as an expanded capacity to work with Aboriginal communities
- being part of a sector reform program focused on expanding the Aboriginal workforce.

All stakeholders reported the block training to be very useful, of high quality and culturally appropriate. Trainees reported that their skills, knowledge and confidence were all significantly improved since commencing the Program. Both trainees and supervisors reported observed improvements on each of the following key trainee outcome measures:

- Knowledge of mental health
- Skills in working in the mental health sector
- Professional and personal development
- Confidence and capacity in learning and studying.

All stakeholders highly rated the Program resources, with the Program website and Yarn Up newsletter being particularly valued and useful. While the Employee Network was considered useful by the majority, the responses were less positive than other Program initiatives.

Stakeholders were extremely positive about the overall Program management. There was unanimous praise for the quality of support and advice provided by the various MHCC Program staff.

In terms of host organisation cultural capacity and operations, most stakeholders reported improvements in their internal policies and practices since commencing the Program, though it was noted there was still room for improvement. One ongoing issue centred on practical options for increasing recruitment and retention of Aboriginal staff. There was also the issue of ensuring consistency in support and a culturally appropriate work environment for Aboriginal staff, particularly in circumstances where no other Aboriginal colleagues are immediately available.

The major challenges identified in the evaluation were associated with maintaining the positive momentum established to date, including ensuring the trainees are able to continue to “juggle” their study and work commitment up unto graduation.

Conclusion

The evaluators concluded that the ACIMH Program was tracking extremely well, with very positive responses from participants about their ongoing involvement in the Program.