

Submission regarding employment opportunities for indigenous Australians. 29 Aug 2016

I work for an employment services provider in a remote Aboriginal community in the Northern Territory. I would like to contribute to this discussion from the perspective of employment opportunities for remote indigenous Australians.

As you will be aware, employment rates in remote indigenous communities is very low. Education levels are also low. In my experience, many remote indigenous Australians find it difficult to travel in search of work, for reasons such as connection to family and country, language difficulties, and lack of education, work experience, qualifications, and confidence. Too often young indigenous Australians transition directly from school to welfare, and once there, it can be difficult for them to find the confidence to enter the world of work.

It seems to me that the types of jobs often taken by backpackers would be also provide the perfect opportunity for young indigenous Australians to get exposure to life outside of their home communities, and experience the satisfaction of working and earning money in jobs that are within their capability. The fact that many of the jobs are seasonal means that young people can see an end point for the work, at which time would be able to return to the familiarity of their home community, which reduces the fear of travelling away.

In my experience working with indigenous people, it is often those who have travelled outside of their home communities who are the most confident and who tend to take the few jobs available to indigenous people in remote communities. This suggests to me that travelling and living in different communities is a valuable experience in building the type of confidence that increases the employability of indigenous Australians. This would be even more true if the very reason for travel was for employment.

It seems to me that by employing backpackers from overseas, local employers in the agricultural and tourism sectors are missing an opportunity to support the Australian effort to “bridge the gap” of indigenous disadvantage. This is not necessarily their fault. For in order to a relationship to develop between these industries and indigenous workers, there is need for a mediating service that can make these particular groups of employers and employees aware of each other, and support them to connect and grow a mutually beneficial relationship. I would like to see the government support the development of one or more labour hire companies specifically focused on labour hire both within aboriginal communities (for local employment) and that can support indigenous Australians to access employment opportunities such as work in tourism or fruit-picking and farmwork across the country. I would also like to see a campaign that encourages employers to look for opportunities to employ indigenous Australians, in a manner that goes beyond including clauses in their advertisements encouraging them to apply.

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