

Lessons from a community relations intervention to reduce intergroup conflict.



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Brief history

Kalgoorlie-Boulder is a city of about 25,000 people, east of Perth. It is on the traditional lands of the Kapurn and Wongatha people.

Gold discovered in the region at Southern Cross (1888) and Coolgardie (1892), leading to a massive gold rush. The non-Indigenous population of the eastern goldfields was >50,000 by 1893.

The Indigenous population residing within Kalgoorlie quickly fell, to as few as 4 in 1901, and taking another 30 years to reach 150.



White Kalgoorlie has always been blunter in expressing its views than has most of the rest of the country.

For example, Mason wrote in his popular book on *Darkest Western Australia* (1909), 'a treatise bearing on the habits and customs of the Aborigines and the solution of 'The Native Question'', that

The solution was to be the wholesale castration of all 'initiated offenders', as hanging was an 'ineffective deterrent', 'imprisonment only developed his native cunning and treachery', and 'education is even worse...the more a nigger is educated, the bigger scoundrel he becomes' (pp. 56-60).


The publisher of Mason's book, Hocking & Co, was and still is the publisher of the *Kalgoorlie Miner* newspaper.



Christensen (1978, 1981) identified 4 broad sectors comprising the Aboriginal population of Kalgoorlie:

Campers: Transient; living in temporary shelters; living in camps on the sides of town; two camps still exist today; white residents dislike this group the most

Residential town core: first comprised 'mixed-race' people officially categorised as 'half castes not deemed as Aborigines'; numbers in this category were small as inclusion required adopting European codes of appearance and severing ties with other Indigenous people



Reserve population: relatively recent groups, living at the Parkeston and Ninga Mia settlements, a product of assimilationist policies of the Dept of Native Welfare in the 1950s, in the hope that providing simple, permanent housing might allow 'full-blood' Aborigines to come to appreciate the benefits of European material culture

Institutionalised: those Indigenous people residing temporarily in justice- or health-related facilities

Overview of project development

Tensions in City of Kalgoorlie-Boulder

Tensions played out publicly in local daily paper

Sought intervention from HREOC

HREOC devised and implemented strategy to reduce intergroup tensions

Evaluation suggests positive outcomes

The HREOC strategy

Four key elements

1. Tracking your rights
2. Advocacy training
3. Mediation
4. Protocol

Tracking your rights

Tracking your rights - training for agency staff to better equip them as community advisors on equal opportunity and human rights issues.

Delivered by an independent consultant to 32 community members drawn from government departments, community organisations, and family groups.

Intended to provide an understanding of human rights and equal opportunity legislation.

Training was in 2 sessions, each of 2 days.

Advocacy training

Advocacy training – Indigenous community members are trained as contact personnel for other residents needing advice on human rights issues and help with claims under equal opportunity legislation.

7 Indigenous members of the Kalgoorlie-Boulder community self-selected for the advocacy training program.

Aim was to provide information on anti-discrimination legislation, and participants were encouraged to become reference personnel to whom other residents suffering discrimination could turn for advice.

Sessions initially for 5 days, with a follow-up session 8 months later.

Mediation

Mediation – with community meetings to identify contentious issues, and work towards protocols for future engagement.

A mediator was appointed to work with community members to develop and disseminate an Indigenous Consultation Protocol.

Series of community meetings with Indigenous and non-Indigenous community members.



Protocol

Indigenous Consultation Protocol – developed both as a community education document and as an opportunity for public demonstration of support for the ideals of reconciliation and community dialogue.

Aims of strategy

- ❑ Foster publicly-agreed, locally-owned protocols for negotiation about relevant issues within the city in both Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities to enable them to engage in more informed, proactive, and effective consultation with the community.
- ❑ Raise awareness of, and enactment of, their human rights among members of the Indigenous community by the provision to the community of information on human rights, discrimination, and the roles and responsibilities of key agencies.
- ❑ Development of the capacity of Indigenous community leaders to defend the human rights of Indigenous residents of Kalgoorlie-Boulder by the provision of intensive Advocacy training to a small group of Indigenous people.
- ❑ Development of greater awareness of issues around discrimination and human rights via the provision, to key groups in the commercial and business communities, of Cultural Awareness and Anti-Racism training.

Methods

- ❑ Brief quantitative summary of participation in various components of the community relations strategy
- ❑ Interviews (sometimes several) with key sponsors, stakeholders, and participants in the strategy, and other residents from Kalgoorlie-Boulder and the Eastern Goldfields region
- ❑ Analyses of reports pertaining to Indigenous people and issues in the local daily newspaper

Results

Tracking your rights

Data from post-training questionnaire and semi-structured interviews.

Results mixed:

Post-training questionnaire showed positive responses

Participants were less supportive later, reporting that the training was 'overwhelming', 'difficult to remember', 'not easy to use in the workplace'

The training program was largely unknown to people outside of those who participated directly in the program



Advocacy training

Generally positive views of the training. The training program was widely known among all groups of interviewees, who were supportive of the program.

Several participants were critical of the amount of support they received for their role as unpaid community reference personnel. The expectation that they be publicly promoted as 'racism deputies' exposed them to vilification and threat of assault. Their employers were not compensated for time taken nor for office infrastructure used in responding to calls for assistance.



Mediation process

This appeared to be a resounding success. Almost all groups of people interviewed were aware of the mediation process, and almost all were positive about the process and the outcomes.

General conclusions

- ❑ Overall, attitudes to the Community Relations Strategy were positive and supportive of the process and of HREOC's involvement.
- ❑ The **Tracking Your Rights** advocacy training led to participants being better informed on issues of racial discrimination and human rights, and were better able to advise other Indigenous residents about procedures to follow.
- ❑ The **Mediation** process was done in a careful, culturally-appropriate and inclusive manner. Divisive issues were addressed rather than avoided.
- ❑ The **Indigenous Consultation Protocol** was well-received, and is still displayed in many offices and waiting rooms as a public demonstration of support for the **Strategy**.

General recommendations

Successful elements of the Kalgoorlie Boulder intervention.

- ❑ Use of a high-profile public figure to promote the intervention
- ❑ Good use of local media to promote the intervention
- ❑ Working with community leaders, thereby leading to establishing non-discriminatory norms
- ❑ Early engagement with civic leaders
- ❑ Successful recruitment of key agencies as partners (ATSIC, DIA, CKB)
- ❑ Cooperation with the State Equal Opportunity Commission
- ❑ Effective use of existing HREOC programs (the Tracking Your Rights program)
- ❑ Training of advocates to promote equal opportunity and human rights legislation and complaints processes

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- Successful elements of the Mediation process include:
 - Early one-on-one meetings between mediators and community members
 - Preliminary 'shared interest group' meetings involving Indigenous and non-Indigenous people together
 - Meetings (large) to define contentious issues
 - Meetings (large) to progress developments of protocols
 - Process for *public* endorsement of the Indigenous Consultation Protocol by individuals, organisations, agencies, and corporations
 - Publication of the Protocol on a poster format, designed for public exhibition (much like a 'quality assurance' document)
 - Cooperation of the Kalgoorlie media



Difficulties to be overcome.

- ❑ Scheduling difficulties
- ❑ Frequency of training sessions
- ❑ Retail sector not adequately represented at mediation meetings
- ❑ Some negativity from prominent local politicians

Broad conclusions

- ❑ Interventions must be tailored – there is no off-the-rack program
- ❑ Questions of ‘who is racist’ or ‘to what extent and in what ways are people racist’ are generally not very important to an intervention
- ❑ More important are questions of structure and resources, and the role of norms governing behaviour
- ❑ Focusing on key people (the sociometric stars) makes an intervention more potent and its effect more widespread
- ❑ Broader structural problems will always limit the effectiveness of an intervention, both immediately and long-term