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Report by  - SEAN O’TOOLE  - 2012 Churchill Fellow

To study

Building capability and enhancing career development for Aboriginal people working in human services
(New Zealand, United States of America, Canada)

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Signed Sean O’Toole Dated 20th June 2013
Building capability and enhancing career development for Aboriginal people working in human services (New Zealand, United States of America, Canada)

This image was taken in the National Museum of the American Indian in Washington, DC. It depicts the names of all of the tribes that still exist throughout North America. The message is clear - despite the terrible loss and the attempts at genocide that resulted from the colonisation of the North American continent, the evidence of these great cultures and traditions still exists.
Acknowledgements

Thank you to the Churchill Trust for supporting my application and affording me the great privilege of attempting to make a difference in the lives of many Aboriginal people, families and communities in Australia. I hope that in some small way this difference could also be extended to the places and people I visited and to their work with local indigenous groups.

In particular, I would like to thank my wife Lisa Elias who accompanied me on the journey and provided technical and administrative assistance as well as valuable advice and encouragement along the way. I would also like to acknowledge my family, my parents and in-laws who cared for our children while we were away.

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This experience has left me with a heightened awareness and a profound sense of wonder about the ancient cultures that co-exist beside us every day. We cannot hope to make a positive impact on the lives of indigenous people if we don’t attempt to understand their cultures and traditions. I am grateful to have met so many indigenous people who inspired me with their stories and their achievements, often against great odds.
PROGRAM OF VISITS AND INTERVIEWS
(MARCH - APRIL 2013)

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Robin Utz, U.S Department of Education
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Executive Summary

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This project aims to strengthen the capability and career options for Aboriginal people working in the human services sector by identifying best practices internationally in learning approaches and career development. Ultimately, this means the human services sector will have a workforce with greater cultural intelligence and a better understanding of how to address the needs of Aboriginal children and families they work with so that they, in turn, can lead safer, healthier and more resilient lives.

The predominant theme of this research project is the parallels that exist across cultural and geographic boundaries among the indigenous peoples of the western world. An understanding of cultural differences is at the heart of good organisational education and career development programs that have a meaningful impact on indigenous employees. The importance of family and community to their lives must be understood and integrated into the workplace and the learning experience. This encompasses the role of elders; recognition of traditional knowledge and life experiences; and, the importance of mentoring and peer support. The oral/visual learning style; use of humour in teaching and learning; group or collective learning experiences; and, the value of silences are also common themes. The concept of a traditional learning space crosses all cultures. The role of honouring and valuing the learning experience via ceremony, prayer and celebration is important for both participants and their family and community.

This research provides some key insights and new ideas to re-shape our approach to developing careers and life-wide education opportunities for Aboriginal people. It encourages links with local elders; and a change to the style of delivery to Aboriginal participants, creating a learning environment where they feel more comfortable.

Beyond the dissemination of my findings to key groups, decision makers and human resources professionals I am fortunate to be able to implement many of the recommendations in my role as Director of Learning & Development with the NSW Department of Family & Community Services. I have access to extensive Learning & Development (L&D) networks in the public and private sectors across the country. I will actively promote these findings and provide support and advice where it is requested.
Introduction

Various ecological conditions in which Aboriginal people lived resulted in the creation of widely divergent ways of life. But, despite these variations, a common thread runs through each of these cultures. It is estimated that of the world’s current population of 6.6 billion, about 300 million are indigenous. They are the inhabitants of lands occupied by their forebears for hundreds of generations.

In the countries visited, the descendants of the original inhabitants have suffered greatly as colonisation destroyed their way of life and threatened their culture and traditions. Once vast populations have been wiped out and successive generations have become more marginalised and less self-sufficient. Many are forced to become dependent on welfare.

Education can be a catalyst for change. The word education comes from the Latin ‘educare’ which means to bring out what lies within, to express what is otherwise dormant. The foundations for this project have evolved in my work as an adult educator over the past 20 years. I have always been drawn to work where I could try to make a difference in the lives of those who have not had the same benefits and opportunities that I have enjoyed. I believe that it is never too late to begin the education process, to begin a career and to make a change in your life direction.

The public sector is the single largest employer of Aboriginal people in Australia. It offers education, training and career opportunities that smaller employers often can’t. The work of the public sector in social welfare spheres such as child protection, provision of social housing, health, ageing and disability services is critical to Aboriginal communities who are grossly over-represented as clients in these areas.

A change in mindset is essential for educators if we are to understand and value cultural differences. I found the following table, compiled by the Aboriginal Human Resource Council in Canada a great starting point:
DIFFERENCES BETWEEN TRADITIONAL ABORIGINAL CULTURES AND MAINSTREAM WESTERN CULTURE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TRADITIONAL CULTURE</th>
<th>MAINSTREAM WESTERN CULTURE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Community is the foremost of all values</td>
<td>Individualism is the foremost value</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The world is understood mythically</td>
<td>The world is understood scientifically</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The future tense is dominant</td>
<td>The present is the dominant tense</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goals are met with patience</td>
<td>Goals are met with aggressive effort</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ownership is often communal</td>
<td>Ownership is reward for hard work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ageing is a source of wisdom</td>
<td>Ageing is decay and loss</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eye contact is thought overassertive</td>
<td>Eye contact is part of conversation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Silences are acceptable anywhere</td>
<td>Silences are a waste of time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening skills are prized</td>
<td>Communication skills are prized</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soft spoken words carry farthest</td>
<td>Emphasis carries the day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nodding signifies understanding</td>
<td>Nodding signifies agreement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Handshake is soft, signalling no threat</td>
<td>Handshake is firm, assertive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family is extended family</td>
<td>Family is nuclear family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responds to praise of the group</td>
<td>Responds to praise of the individual</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Aboriginal Human Resource Council of Canada (2007)

Impact of early education experiences

Childhood and secondary education is often a very challenging experience for indigenous people. Compulsory attendance at mission-based and remote Christian-based boarding schools meant Native American children were often removed from reservations and sent away from home. This is isolating and traumatic. There are numerous reports of abuse at boarding schools. These experiences create a very poor learning environment.

One interview subject who experienced this system said she prevailed because she had been motivated by a strong desire from her grandparents to see her succeed. Another said a central motivation was her father, who had himself been a pioneer and completed a master’s degree in the 1970s. Another said her education benefitted from her desire to seek out teachers who would support and believe in her and give her extra work.

Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada is one of the central federal government departments responsible for meeting the Government of Canada's obligations and commitments to First Nations, Inuit and Metis people. Senior officers from the department describe the school education
experience of many indigenous people in Canada as having common themes of lack of hope and despair. In this context education only succeeds if basic life skills are in place.

While there are often psychological barriers to overcome, it is never too late to revive the education process.

In both the U.S. and Canada, several of the universities visited have access programs for indigenous people who are restricted from university entry due to their limited secondary education background.

These access programs take a portfolio approach detailing life experiences and achievements. The focus is usually an essay that addresses subjects such as previous education challenges, why the individual wants to attend university and how they will overcome some of the challenges they face. Applicants are also required to provide some references that support their applications and outline their community involvement. Adult educators need to understand the impact of these past experiences, particularly in the early stages, to encourage the participation of indigenous people in the education and career development process.

**Persistence and personal goals**

Fredricka Hunter - The Director of Native American Student Services at the University of Montana makes the point that we should talk about persistence, not retention when it comes to keeping indigenous people in education programs or in careers. She acknowledges that there are many barriers but stresses that they shouldn’t stop anyone from achieving their goals. It is too easy to give up. Having clear personal goals is an important way of reminding yourself to stay focussed and to persist.

Lonyx Landry, a member of the Wyiot tribe in Northern California is a community leader who plays a valuable support role for Native American students at Humbolt State University. Lonyx received some critical advice on his own education journey from a prominent local elder, which he is eager to pass on to others. He believes the ingredients for success as a Native American in the education arena are:

- Have a strong sense of self identity (How do you see yourself? For example - are you an athlete or a scientist?);
- Have a sense of cultural connectedness (Do you participate in ceremonies and cultural events?);
- Seek out a mentor who cares about your welfare and pushes you to succeed.
**Barriers to success - self-promotion and recognising success**

Many of the people I interviewed expressed the view that indigenous people are often not able to recognise and celebrate their success. They have trouble talking about it. However, promoting the notion of personal success and the value of mainstream education is vital in order to encourage others to set goals and to aspire to similar achievements.

According to Dave Beck, the Professor of Native American studies at the University of Montana:

>“The Indian needs to be better educated than the white person to do the same job. The white person has the option to do the job without considering its impact on Indian communities and people, and often does so without thinking about it. We can’t go easier on Indian students; that only teaches them that we think they are lesser than non-Indian students. The educational experience needs to be as rigorous as for anyone else. Of course this needs to be balanced with the provision of plenty of support so they don’t fail and their confidence is built.”

**Impact of family commitments on learning and career development**

Family issues mean students often face conflict between family responsibilities and studies.

Balancing family needs such as: attendance at funerals; health of family; parenting; and, course attendance and study can be a great challenge. Obligations to support family and community commitments means that indigenous people often unexpectedly leave a learning experience for a period of time and as a result fall behind and can’t maintain the progress of other learners.

Kinship and community are key philosophical underpinnings to education success for Native American students. The family links and connections to school and to the educators can be a vital component in the student’s success. Educators need to embrace the central role of family and community which will also be a great motivator and ultimately help determine levels of participation and success.

**Indigenous education institutions**

Universities and vocational education providers specifically serving the indigenous population are a powerful symbol of independence and aspiration. They acknowledge the uniqueness of the indigenous learning experience and stand alongside other education institutions as an alternative and credible learning pathway. It was noted that these institutions take many forms and have a prominent role in all of the countries that were visited.
Unfortunately, Australia does not have indigenous educational institutions on this kind of scale.

Australia’s education providers have made some progress towards encompassing indigenous knowledge systems and culture into the mainstream but there is an absence of large-scale tertiary education providers for indigenous people in this country. There are indigenous education units in most Australian universities. They perform an important role in student support. They provide an Aboriginal presence on campus and offer networking opportunities for students and staff, but fall short of being able to offer the sort of services or pathways that exist in other similar countries. Ultimately, the dominant culture of the institution can isolate the indigenous learner.

Similarly in the VET sector most TAFE institutes have an Aboriginal college or unit performing a similar function. There are also some stand-alone providers such as Tranby College in NSW, the Tauondi Community College in South Australia and the Batchelor Institute in the Northern Territory. The Batchelor Institute is a dual-sector institution providing both VET and higher education qualifications. It began in the 1960s to support Aboriginal teaching aides and assistants and evolved to offer a range of short courses in other subject areas. It was granted autonomy as a higher education provider in the 1990s.

The following are examples of some of the indigenous education providers in the countries visited.

The tribal college system in the United States

Since the 1950s, the tribal population in the United States has increased to the point where 70% of Native Americans now reside in urban areas. Post-secondary education institutions developed to serve these communities.

Central to this was the creation under federal law of tribal colleges in the 1970s. These colleges generally serve geographically isolated populations who have no other means of accessing tertiary education. The American Indian Higher Education Consortium controls 37 tribal colleges in the U.S. and one college in Canada. They operate more than 75 campuses in 15 States and boast students from about 230 tribes.

Funding for the colleges comes from the U.S federal government. These institutions are embedded in tribal communities. They mostly offer accredited two year vocational training programs and in some cases up to four year bachelor degrees. Their purpose is to provide educational needs for people who are going to stay on the reservation or to prepare them for study at a public university. Most tribal colleges have articulation arrangements with state universities.

Employment opportunities that Native Americans commonly get post-school are government jobs or roles with tribal government. Tribal colleges support
this by offering training for employment in key areas such as teaching, natural resources, tourism, emergency medical and health care work.

Haskell Indian Nations University (Kansas)
Founded as a residential boarding school in the 1880s, Haskell has evolved into an accredited university that offers both associate and baccalaureate degrees. In 1993, the institution had an official name change and became Haskell Indian Nations University. Today, Haskell has an average enrolment of over 1000 students each semester. It is funded by the Bureau of Indian Education and does not charge tuition fees. Students represent federally recognized tribes from across the United States. Students select programs that will prepare them to enter baccalaureate programs in elementary teacher education, American Indian studies, business administration, and environmental science; to transfer to another baccalaureate degree-granting institution; or to enter directly into employment. Haskell integrates American Indian/Alaskan Native culture into all its curricula. This focus of the curriculum, besides its intertribal constituency and federal support through the Bureau of Indian Affairs, makes Haskell unique.
First Nations University (Canada)
In the early 1970s in Canada, the First Nations leadership had a vision to create educational institutions and increase participation in higher learning for First Nations people. They wanted these educational institutions to be places where indigenous people could feel comfortable.

Three institutions were formed. The Saskatchewan Indian Cultural Centre was the first of the three (started in 1972). Its role is to assist in developing traditional and contemporary cultural skills of First Nations people and to advocate the preservation of First Nations languages, cultures, traditional arts and history.

In 1976, the Saskatchewan Indian Community College was established. In 1985 it became the Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies. SIIT initially delivered on-reserve adult academic upgrading, introductory skills and trades, and basic management training to First Nations adults throughout Saskatchewan. The programming mixture has evolved to include certified technical, vocational and trades programming throughout the province. More recently, SIIT continues to develop unique programming to meet the growing vocational and technical training needs for both industry and students.

In May 1976, the Federation of Saskatchewan Indians (now the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations) entered into a federation agreement with the University of Regina, to establish the Saskatchewan Indian Federated College (SIFC). The agreement provided for an independently administered university-college, the mission of which is to serve the academic, cultural and spiritual needs of First Nations’ students. In 2003 the College officially changed its name to The First Nations University of Canada (although remaining closely affiliated with the University of Regina). The FNUC has an
average annual enrolment of about 800 students and a student body of about 2500.

First Nations University of Canada’s courses, programs, and instructors are accredited by the University of Regina, and all University of Regina classes are open to First Nation University students. The FNUC’s courses are also open to all students - not just First nations students. Among the key courses offered are: Indigenous Education, Indian Social Work, Business and Public Administration, Health Sciences, Nursing and English, Indigenous Health Studies, Indian Communication Arts, Indian Fine Arts and Indian Art History, Indian Languages, Linguistics, Indigenous Studies, Environmental Health and Science, Resource and Environmental Studies.

The First Nations University campus in Regina, Saskatchewan, Canada

Te Wānanga o Aotearoa (New Zealand)
Te Wānanga o Aotearoa is a tertiary education provider established in New Zealand in 1983 to improve the social and economic wellbeing of those who have previously had negative experiences with the secondary education system. It offers programs from certificate through to degree level. It is a Māori-led organisation, grounded in Māori values, committed to the revitalisation of Māori cultural knowledge. It is also focused on breaking inter-generational cycles of non-participation in tertiary education. The organisation works towards ‘whānau transformation through education’.

Te Wānanga o Aotearoa is currently one of the largest public tertiary education institutions in New Zealand and is among the largest indigenous peoples colleges in the world. The organisation delivers educational programs to more than 35,000 students each year at more than 100 sites across New Zealand.

A key objective is to eliminate, as much as possible, barriers that have previously prevented Māori and Pacific people from participating in tertiary education. These include economic barriers, geographical barriers, barriers created by family and work commitments, and barriers created by a history of unsatisfactory engagement by Māori people with the mainstream
secondary and tertiary education systems. To eliminate these barriers, Te Wānanga o Aotearoa offers very low fees for courses and a range of flexible learning hours and innovative student support strategies. Courses are delivered in subject areas including traditional Māori knowledge, business, computing, teaching, social science and the arts.

Australia needs an independent indigenous post-secondary vocational and higher education institutions. These institutions are not just an alternative to the mainstream institutions. They are symbolic. They acknowledge differences in teaching and learning styles, offer a bridge to the mainstream and an independent, culturally-appropriate education experience for indigenous people to aspire to.

**Structured development experiences**

*Mentoring*  
Indigenous culture places great value on the wisdom that comes with age. The concept of mentoring in all its forms is highly valued and often integral to the indigenous learning experience.

The expectations about mentoring for indigenous people and what it aims to achieve is basically the same in all of the countries visited. None of the organisations visited had a comprehensive formal mentoring program like the ones which have operated in the NSW public sector. The comment about this more formal approach is that it seems impressive and would produce good structured relationships but is too limiting in terms of numbers of pairs. Instead, other jurisdictions prefer to have more pairs catered for and a less rigid, resource-intensive mentoring framework.

The universities I visited largely rely on informal mentoring relationships for both indigenous students and staff. Some universities encourage mentoring relationships for indigenous students with professors, and for first year students, peer mentoring with established students. Peer mentoring is supported by weekly study sessions facilitated by the senior students. These sessions cover topics such as how to make good study notes, how to learn study skills and are combined with their course materials.

This process could be replicated in organisations where indigenous staff are undertaking tertiary studies for the first time and experienced colleagues are utilised to help them navigate the study/assessment requirements. They key aspect of this approach appears to be the ‘training’ of the peer supporters both in how to facilitate the process and be a guide. This process is described as a combination of academic coaching, mentoring and tutoring.

While this process is organic, good matches are commonly cited as the key to success. I got the impression that behind the scenes is where the effort is placed. What was also stressed is that there has to be a commitment to mentoring from the top of the organization to make a difference.
The NZ Government Leadership Development Centre commented that they are increasingly seeking senior Māori people to be mentors for Māori people. The mentoring has a dual purpose - serving cultural/community needs and career. Mentoring in the NZ government is relatively informal and unstructured and is not time limited. There is an initial workshop and matching process before it begins, but no further contact from the organiser. The Centre is also challenging linear career thinking with immersion experiences, which they say works very well for Māori staff who may not have the skills or personal confidence to attempt to set up this kind of development initiative for themselves.

It was acknowledged that mentoring is often dependent on luck. This relates to meeting the right mentor at the right time in your career or being in a position to capitalise on the advice the mentor provides. Mentoring for indigenous people is also about the re-creation of a familial feel. Some of the best mentors for indigenous people are not indigenous themselves.

Some general observations that people I interviewed made about mentoring:
- Mentoring indigenous people is partly about teaching people to say ‘no’ to the competing demands they have to deal with.
- It is also about how to juggle priorities and meet obligations.
- Mentors are also used to help with time and work priority management.
- Geographical proximity is important to success. The pair needs to be able to meet face-to-face where possible.
- Elders from the community are often used as mentors.
- All of the organisations I visited had mentoring programs or supported mentoring occurring informally.

In universities in both NZ and Canada there were many examples of internal mentoring programs within the student body or from the student body with secondary schools. The mentors in this context aren’t always indigenous students. Participating in a mentoring program of this kind is often rewarded with acknowledgement or some form of credit on an individual’s academic record or transcript. Academic or support staff often refer students who benefit from these programs. The mentoring can include tutoring, support and assistance with time management, study strategies and how to navigate university life.

**Internships**

The concept of an internship is not as common in Australia but in North America it is often a good transition pathway for students to gain real world experience in a workplace prior to committing to a full-time career.

The George Washington University in Washington D.C. offers an internship program for Native American students from other U.S. universities called ‘a semester in Washington’. The 15 week experience focuses on applied politics. It combines academic studies (6-9 credits of coursework); an internship; mentoring with young professionals in the Washington D.C area; and, a networking component with key political players. Over the seven
years the program has operated, more than 100 alumni are now working in advocacy or education and are directly involved in the political process.

Greg Lebel, the Program Director cites the role of mentors as central to the program:

“students typically won’t come to us with their issues so the mentor layer is critical. It provides a coping mechanism.”

One of the early Native American Alumni Kraynal Alfred, who now works on the program, talked about life changing advice she received from her mentor during the program. She was part way through studies in law when she came to Washington and her mentor’s advice was: “Don’t be a lawyer. There are already enough lawyers. You need to be a manager. Reservations need more managers with business qualifications”.

A similar program is also offered by the American University in Washington D.C. called Washington Internships for Native Students (WINS). A meaningful internship experience is at the heart of the WINS program and provides professional, real-world work experience. Special arrangements are made with a variety of federal agencies, private firms, and American Indian /Alaska Native/Native Hawaiian organizations to provide a focused, academically-supervised internship experience for WINS participants.

Academic courses are designed specifically for the WINS program and focus on issues important to indigenous communities through a combination of lectures, discussions, relevant readings, research projects and guest speakers.

Cultural and social activities take place throughout the program, beginning with an extensive orientation and culminating in a farewell banquet. Recent summer events have included picnics with advisory board members and internship supervisors, and a summer powwow to honour WINS participants.

The role of elders

Elders are the keepers, interpreters and sources of wisdom about culture in traditional Aboriginal societies. They have always assumed prominent roles as healers, guides, advisors and as living symbols of indigenous values36.

The University of Manitoba in Canada is one of many North American higher education institutions who value the contribution of indigenous elders. Specifically, they have adopted an “elder in residence” approach. The elder is chosen from the local community, generally via an informal process. The elders work with their students following a traditional mentoring approach. Elders can also be called upon to teach specific areas of indigenous knowledge.
Where there is an elder in residence program there are usually support systems to assist the elders such as an ‘elder’s helper’ who is always with them, and a set of guidelines or a protocol which informs both the elder and the organisation of the expectations and limits of the role.

The role of the educator

The dominant form of teaching in western culture is still the expert-novice model. This often works against the preferred indigenous learning style and presents challenges for the way indigenous people like to communicate. The Māori term ako means to both learn and teach, in a kind of reciprocal arrangement. The Māori approach to learning is to acknowledge that while we are teaching we are also learning, and that as learners we also know things that we can share/teach others. This Māori approach is more prevalent in some teaching contexts than others, and is more important for some students and teachers than others.

One of the principles that underpins Māori approaches to learning is the concept of whanaungatanga. The root word of this concept is ‘whānau’, which is the Māori word for family or kinship relationships. By adding the ‘tanga’ suffix the term extends more widely to mean ‘relationships’. In the context of teaching and learning, from a Māori perspective, there is a strong emphasis on the importance of relationships and the connections that people have or can develop with each other. In turn, this is about spending time with and getting to know each other in a learning setting. Participants can then build on these relationships. In the context of student learning and the development of staff, it seems that Māori people generally have had more success when working in collectives.

Their respect for elders works against challenging ideas and critical thinking in the academic setting. They are comfortable with silence, so participation via the novice-expert model of teaching is difficult. Educators need to ask a question and wait some time for their response or coax a response with the right questions. They need to create classroom situations where people are comfortable speaking. This is possible if there is a respectful atmosphere and an emphasis on open-ended discussion questions. If they pose a question, they need to wait for the student to answer.

“Non-indigenous facilitators need to learn to sit with the quiet”
Mary McCarthy (Director, Social Work Education Consortium, University of Albany)

In the classroom the dynamics of a session need to carefully incorporate the pace of group discussions, use of silence and careful listening on the part of the facilitator. Collectively, the view I gained from a range of educators is that the best non-indigenous facilitators sit back and let the participants set the pace of the course. One of the best examples I was given was that non-indigenous facilitators need to be able to “sit with the quiet”. The use of
humour is also particularly important and was highlighted as a means of relaxing participants and making them feel comfortable.

From a facilitator perspective, the key to working with indigenous students is having patience and not expecting instant responses to questions. Indigenous students can tend to shut down in mixed groups and it can be very challenging to get them to participate. They often have better learning outcomes and don’t shut down if they are grouped together.

The Māori experience of traditional organisation learning programs is that there is not enough two-way discussion and too much lecture style presentation. The formal lecture setting doesn’t allow enough room for robust discussion about differences, or provide time to digest and unpack the theory presented and think about how this may be relevant to their world view.

A challenge for educators that was frequently noted was how to manage their own expectations about an individual student whose attendance may be infrequent and who does not conform to the educational policy of the organisation or institution in relation to timely submission of assessments.

Some Canadian universities have adopted a policy called ‘stop out not drop out’ which is designed to give indigenous students expanded deadlines and longer timeframes than usual to complete their studies. They would rather see them maintain an enrolment than become a casualty of the often unforgiving expectations of the attendance and assessment process.

**Indigenous learning settings and spaces**

*Marae*

In modern New Zealand, marae are Māori public ceremonial meeting spaces. Maraes have been embraced by tertiary education institutions throughout New Zealand since the early 1980s and there are now marae at five of the eight New Zealand universities. They provide an authentic instructional space that enhances quality learning.

They inspire a personal and emotive learning experience, with students studying the Māori language and culture. They promote self-discovery.

They usually comprise a large open area (the marae atea) that is typically grassed and dominated by the presence of a meeting-house that is often, but not always, decorated with traditional forms of Māori art such as carving and weaving. Maraes complexes also typically include a detached building reserved for cooking and eating. A common additional feature is the inclusion of shelters opposite each other across the marae atea for hosts and visitors to sit in while the ‘rituals of encounter’ are carried out.

A relatively new phenomenon is the development of ‘urban marae’ that exist outside the context of the traditional tribal structures of other maraes. They evolved in response to the migration of large numbers of Māori people
from rural areas into cities in the 1950s and 1960s. These ‘urban marae’ provided an alternative cultural space for Māori who found themselves separated from their kin and gave them an opportunity to interact with other Māori in a similar situation.

There are now Marae on the campuses of five of the eight universities in New Zealand

The marae is regarded as ‘a strong symbolic cultural pedagogical tool for both teaching and learning’. The environment provides opportunities to practice traditional Māori teaching pedagogies such as ako. It highlights the notion that learning is reciprocal and that knowledge is acquired both through the act of learning but also through teaching. It also recognises that learning does not always happen in formal contexts and acknowledges that learning also occurs through working alongside elders and watching, observing and developing behaviours with their guidance.

Traditionally, whānau (extended family) played an important role in Māori education by identifying aptitude and encouraging children to learn through play and mimicry of elders.

Māori students perceive cultural security to be a critical factor towards maintaining a sense of wellbeing while undertaking university study.

Recent research also suggests that Māori adult learners prefer learning approaches that require positive interdependence and collaboration, especially if this allows for family involvement and opportunities for oral communication. These culturally-appropriate strategies were found to increase self-esteem and create a sense of ‘whānau’ with its shared responsibility, commitment, positive interaction, connectedness and solidarity.
At the University of Montana there are 800 Native American students engaged in 88 different major study programs. Professor Dave Beck has worked in a variety of tertiary settings with Native American students over many decades and his view is that making those students at home on campus is critical to their success. Like the Marae on the campuses of universities in New Zealand, the Native American Studies building on the University of Montana campus is a symbol of how seriously the university takes Native American issues. The building represents a cultural and meeting place for the students on campus.

While it originated in New Zealand, the concept of a Marae has also been adopted in North America. At the University of Manitoba in Canada, some of the social welfare courses often contain a cultural camp. This is modelled on the Māori tradition and usually involves going to a Marae and hearing from elders about traditional knowledge systems.

“Our cottages represent a way for students to learn more about their cultural identity and are a ‘safe place to be an Indian”
Lonyx Landry (Adviser INSREP, Humboldt University)

Humboldt State University is located in northern California and has some outstanding examples of student support services for Native Americans. Humboldt is part of the 23-school California State University system, it has about 8000 students and Native Americans make up about 2% of the student body. Humbolt County has a large Native American population with about 12-15% of the total county population. There are eight regional tribes in the local area and they each have unique cultures and dialects.

The Indian natural resources and science engineering program INRSEP and Indian tribal education and personnel program ITTAP have been providing support services for Native American students on campus for 40 years. Humboldt also offers a unique Native American studies program that provides in-depth knowledge of Native American perspectives in a variety of career paths, including: tribal law and government; natural resources and the environment; language and literature; and, a variety of social sciences.

Humboldt has extensive personal support, mentoring and tutoring for native students. After graduation, many native students take on leadership positions in their professions and communities.

The cottages where INRSEP and ITTAP are located on campus have become a refuge and a cultural home for students on campus and an important link with the community, providing a place for Native American students to relax and seek advice about employment pathways, research opportunities and grants. The cottages represent a way for students to learn more about their cultural identity. They also offer a connection to local elders.

**Indigenous learning styles**

Indigenous people in all countries visited share many common learning styles. They often come from disadvantaged backgrounds and may be lacking in
basic literacy and numeracy skills. Consequently, the educator can often reach the false perception that they are not intelligent. This is not uncommon as high school graduation rates and university entry rates are well below those of all other students.
HIGH SCHOOL COMPLETION RATES FOR ALL COUNTRIES

Given this perception and the accompanying lack of individual self-belief, it is critical that educators nurture a belief in their own abilities and make them feel comfortable in educational settings. We need to raise awareness in those teaching them. Their humility works against public learning and practice. A common learning style for indigenous people is to see a demonstration and go away and practice privately until they master the skill.

The National Child Welfare Workforce Institute (NCWWI)
This is a federally funded consortium comprising nine universities from across the U.S who are committed to build the capacity of the nation’s child welfare workforce. They operate a Leadership Academy for both supervisors and middle managers. One of the aims when they commenced their work in 2008 was to get a critical mass of tribal (Native American) child welfare staff and managers to undertake their programs. Their work with Native American supervisors and managers over the past five years has revealed that when there are just a few Native Americans as part of a group in a learning setting, the Native Americans don’t readily join in the discussions or speak up. A feeling of safety or confidence in a group learning setting only comes when there is a critical mass of Native American participants. They have even found that the learning is most meaningful and beneficial to participants when the group is comprised solely of Native Americans.
Another innovative strategy the NCWWI employs is the provision of a comprehensive pre and post-course coaching program for every Native American participant. The coaching is conducted by partnering Native American staff from the National Resource Center for Tribes. The pre-course sessions happened once a week for four weeks leading up to the first training session. These sessions involved discussions about the logistics associated with the course, what the learning outcomes and requirements are, analysing the pre-course learning materials and getting participants to focus on a major project they would be assigned and a leadership plan they submitted with their initial application.

This strategy, while resource and people intensive, effectively sets the scene for the learning experience and breaks down the common barriers Native American learners have to the initial engagement with a learning experience such as this. The post-course coaching works in much the same way and tracks the participants’ post-course application of learning outcomes and activities over a six-month period. The notion of providing coaching pre and post course is designed to be responsive to individual learning styles and to encourage engagement and participant motivation.

“The balance (of being an educator in the Native American context) is like having your feet in two canoes”

Miriam McNab (Assistant Professor First Nations University)

First Nations University
Academics interviewed at the First Nations University in Canada reported that indigenous students are generally behind other students in reading, study skills and analytical skills. However, they are proficient users of technology and readily engage with social media. At the FNU, Facebook is used in classes, and staff utilise YouTube as a teaching resource given the learning style of participants.

Miriam McNab, an Assistant Professor at the First Nations University in Canada, described her challenge as an educator in this context as like “having your feet in two canoes”. She is challenged to balance indigenous and traditional knowledge systems with a mainstream university education for her students. Having indigenous faculty members for relating and role modelling is important to this process.

NZ Defence Force
Māori people are best represented in the NZ military ranks in the army (29%) and the navy (19%). There is just 8% representation in the civilian arm of the military and 6% in the air force.

The most successful learning mode for Māori people in the military context has been described as a ‘hands-on’, tactile, oral, visual style. Māori soldiers relate well to storytelling as a basis for their learning. The movement in the broader public sector context in NZ to collaboration is a leadership style that suits the Māori in the military. Broad capabilities such as knowing the
system and how to operate within the bureaucracy, having confidence, planning, knowing yourself and how to get on with others is a style of leadership that is accepted in the military and suits Māori learners.

**Considerations for educators**

Indigenous people have deference to authority figures. Non-indigenous educators often take this the wrong way and perceive them to be passive learners. Techniques that support this learning style might include provision for journaling, or taking time to make students feel less analysed and judged. It is also important for a facilitator not to make them the spokesperson for all indigenous people.

Indigenous learners are also very visually oriented. Visual stimulation for the learner can be as simple as having things printed on coloured papers or having bright colours on computer screens.

Conversely, they can struggle with discussion-based learning. They aren’t always taught or may not have absorbed the same study skills at school. As adults they may need to learn to take notes and read with a purpose to be able to study effectively. Basic learning concepts such as how to read analytically and how to answer an assignment question are often unfamiliar.

In the Canadian context, Eastern Arctic (Inuit) people will do everything they can to avoid confrontation. The competitive nature of bureaucracy tends to work against this. The best learning & development experiences for this group contain the following:

- emphasis on the use of humour, particularly self-deprecating humour
- allowing for participants’ desire to be humble

**Concepts of space**

Conventional physical learning spaces often present a challenge for the indigenous adult learner. For example, the Inuit concept of the curved surface as it relates to a learning space which is traditionally a classroom with four walls means the formal learning setting can be confronting and uncomfortable for this group.

Where possible, learning environments need to encompass cultural images and icons. Where it is not possible to integrate learning in a setting such as a Marae, cultural camp setting or tipi, a room should be decorated in the appropriate colours, with flowers, tiles, paintings or artefacts. Indigenous thought and art should be displayed throughout the learning institution.

The design of classrooms used in indigenous learning institutions in North America share some common characteristics. They are often smaller and have circular seating configurations which are referred to as talking circles.
Increasing the participation of indigenous people in management roles

Indigenous people face significant barriers to becoming managers in traditional public sector organisational structures. In the North American context, tribal leaders have been taught that they are only a leader when their tribe or community says they are needed, or elevate them to that status. The corporate model, where an individual largely decides they will apply to be a supervisor or manager and that application is largely self-guided is often a foreign notion to indigenous people. They operate from a collective rather than hierarchical or top down approach.

“Kōre te kumara e kōrero mō tōna ake reka’ - The Kumara (sweet potato) never speaks of its own sweetness” (Māori proverb)

The ability to self-promote, to direct others, to delegate, negotiate corporate politics and corporate communication can be a problem for indigenous people. They also have deeply felt values about judging others which can be counter to management decision making. These things don’t come naturally and significant cultural norms are often against them.

Government employment (because of the way it is organized in hierarchies) can tend to attract people to management roles because they are interested in power. The nature of a government enterprise often works counter to personal humility, and the community orientation that is common to indigenous people. Values alignment is therefore critical in positioning indigenous managers in organisations. However, the concept of self-promotion for indigenous people is changing with Generation Y being more comfortable with this.

In the NZ military, officers are said to have to “see through the eyes of their team” in order to lead. The military experience can be very challenging for Māori people as they often don’t want to be high achievers and climb the promotional ladder. Coaching and mentoring is used extensively to arrest this reluctance, but it is often a form of mentoring where what is described as ‘tiger tips’ or short pieces of succinct advice are offered Māori to Māori that work best.

In the NZ public sector, organisations increasingly demand contextualised management development programs for Māori staff. The NZ Ministry of Social Development has run a management development program for emerging leaders who are Māori since 2001. The program was first conceived to address the under-representation of Māori and Pacific staff in management roles in the organisation. There were originally 23% Māori staff in the organisation but only 18% Māori in management roles. The Te Aratiatia (Māori management development program) has successfully addressed this imbalance.

The program Te Aratiatia (translated means a series of pegs to assist in climbing a steep incline) is residential and held over a two one week blocks
in a Marae. The beginning of the program is about establishing trust among participants.

The core principle underpinning the program is about connections, homeland, and familial ties. It differs from the organisation’s mainstream emerging leaders program as it brings a Māori perspective to the topics covered. While it is seen as successful and an excellent learning experience for the collective, there is some conjecture about its effectiveness for its purpose of seeing large numbers of participants into management roles.

Most large government organisations in North America have accelerated career development programs aimed at fast-tracking indigenous staff into management roles. This approach is not uncommon in both Australia and New Zealand. I had the opportunity to speak to both those running the programs and many of those who have been in a position to be fast-tracked. The experience from the program participants is mixed. These programs can breed resentment from non-indigenous staff and from their line managers and even agency executives.

The experience can lead to career paralysis, as participants do not have the ability, self-confidence or work experience to support the role or promotional opportunity that has been afforded them. Those who do succeed have a common message - that it is not possible to progress without the support and assistance of a strong mentor or sponsor who not only provides insights about organisation culture and politics and how to navigate them but who can assist with real work experiences and projects that provide a platform for on-the-job learning and immersive experience.

**INDIGENOUS PEOPLE IN PUBLIC SECTOR AND SENIOR PUBLIC SECTOR ROLES IN THE COUNTRIES VISITED**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COUNTRY</th>
<th>TOTAL NUMBER OF STAFF</th>
<th>INDIGENOUS STAFF</th>
<th>INDIGENOUS STAFF IN SENIOR EXECUTIVE ROLES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Australia (Commonwealth)</td>
<td>170,000</td>
<td>2.1%</td>
<td>0.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Zealand</td>
<td>43,000</td>
<td>16% Māori 8% Pacific</td>
<td>16% Māori 8% Pacific</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USA (2010)</td>
<td>2,841,000</td>
<td>2.1%</td>
<td>4.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada (2011)</td>
<td>282,000</td>
<td>4.3%</td>
<td>3.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Tools and learning experiences to enhance the learning and career development experience

The Canadian Aboriginal HR Council

The Council was formed by current president and CEO Kelly Lendsay in 1998 as a national not-for-profit organization. Today they are a national Canadian based organization with a mandate to advance the full participation in the economy of Aboriginal Peoples in Canada and Indigenous Peoples around the world.

The Council’s products, services and networks are designed to help organizations understand the value of inclusion and advance inclusion workplace strategies at the local, regional, national and international levels. Organisations they work with build workplaces of inclusion that position them as employers-of-choice for indigenous talent, while building partnerships that work with the indigenous community they want to reach. Their programs also help members of the indigenous community obtain essential skills, design a career path and connect to employers.

Two programs offered by the council could have direct relevance to both Aboriginal employees and organisations in the Australian context.

Organisation Assessment Tool:
This instrument contains 220 questions and attempts to pinpoint areas where workplaces have tension points with Aboriginal people. Behaviours, strategies, recruiting procedures, onboarding, and corporate and social responsibilities with local communities are some of the things it addresses. It takes the form of a survey, which is distributed to key informants in the organisation. Empirical data is gathered which gives people a voice and guides action and change for the future.

Guiding circles:
Guiding circles is based on a workshop with a series of exercises to help individuals establish a career plan. The process investigates their strengths, through the identification of their essential skills or capabilities.

The premise of Guiding Circles is that indigenous people need to be encouraged to take a different approach to understanding their strengths and building their career plan.

It examines how we can get people to understand their personal competencies and strengths and uses these findings to help articulate individual career goals. This process is geared towards the HR practitioner in an organisation. To date it has been used by over 1000 people. It has been very well received in the aboriginal community.

The Medicine Wheel
The medicine wheel is a representation of traditional theology, philosophy and psychology. It embodies the teachings of the creator for all aspects of life for indigenous people in North America. It is presented symbolically in
the form of a sacred hoop used variously for astronomical, ritual, healing and teaching purposes. One of the central philosophies of the medicine wheel is the goal to “live life in a good way” or minaatsiwin, which involves finding the balance between the four dimensions on the wheel.

In the guiding circles process it is used as a metaphor for personal development. The medicine wheel metaphor for employee development views this process in a holistic way, unlike employee development in the traditional sense. All aspects of an individual: physical, psychological, emotional and spiritual are considered equally.

The Medicine wheel at Little Big Horn in Montana and a depiction of uses of the medicine wheel as a learning tool

North American education processes tend to follow very linear methodology and can be very PowerPoint driven. The guiding circles approach is more reflective of the cognitive processes indigenous people use.

The objective of learning in North America is to express things in terms of cause and effect. Through this process participants gain personal insights, understand what they are good at and get to know their key capabilities. Through guiding circles, participants can objectively view their strengths in relation to their community and family. In contrast, more traditional assessment instruments such as the Myers Briggs Type Indicator or the DISC profile, look exclusively at the individual in relation to others.

Digital storytelling
Digital storytelling works on several levels. Digital stories provide alternative views and perspectives that demystify stereotyped representations about indigenous peoples. These 3-5 minute personal narratives are being created by numerous individuals including family members, health specialists, educators, artists, traditional healers and tribal leaders.
Digital storytelling emerged as a grassroots movement in the early 1990s. It uses new digital tools to help diverse people create personal narratives that are powerfully compelling and emotionally engaging.

A community-based, learner-centered approach combining first person narrative with digital images and music is utilised.

Indigenous people have an oral culture so the electronic medium is the perfect vehicle for self-expression and learning. It is empowering to see the stories of others and learn from their experiences. It is inspiring for an indigenous person to be able to share their story.

Stories in this format are powerful tools for organisations for recruitment (ie placed on facebook or other social media) and for training and promotional purposes.

Annie Belcourt, an Assistant Professor in Pharmacy and Community Public Health Science departments from the University of Montana provided me with an example of a short YouTube clip which depicts her life journey. She now uses this resource to help with retention and recruitment of Native American students. The resource provides a story of hope for others. Annie’s digital story emerged from her interest in new ways to engage communities using technology and social media and, in particular, reaching out to youth with shortened attention spans. The company she used called nDigiDreams is operated by two Navajo women who have used empowerment based methodology to produce similar digital stories for 1200 people all over the U.S.

Ceremonies and events to support the indigenous learning experience

Starting a tertiary education is daunting. It often involves the initial shock of both the formal academic requirements and the challenge of navigating the bureaucracy of educational institutions. There is a siloing effect in educational institutions where students have to fend for themselves and navigate their own way through the various supports and systems. Clear communication is needed to provide linkages for students to the services they seek. Often indigenous students encounter racism and discrimination (institutional) for the first time. They can often feel like “the other” or different to the general student body.

It was evident in the institutions I visited that one way of countering this feeling of confusion for the indigenous learner was to encourage their involvement in cultural events and ceremonies which serve to integrate them, their families and the local community into the educational experience.

At the University of Montana they achieve this through a regular Friday luncheon of soup and through powwow events. Powwow is essentially a celebration of Native American culture involving displays, dance, drumming,
information exchange and food. It is a social event and brings Native American community members onto a campus or into the learning environment. It creates goodwill and respect for cultural values and traditions. Powwow can take several forms such as: an orientation powwow for new students; a children’s powwow, which honours the birth of new indigenous children in a community; or, a regular cultural event, which celebrates the education and community life of an organisation and education institution.

Poster for the annual powwow called ‘Big Time’ at Humboldt University, California

Indigenous students graduating from universities in North America may also be part of an honouring ceremony. This is a traditional event that involves their families. It differs from a traditional graduation in format and has an emphasis on entertainment and speeches. Traditionally, elders are asked to both open and close the event. These events are often more relevant for indigenous students than the formal graduation process.
One of the central reasons these events are so important for the indigenous community and the student is that in many cases the student is the first in the family to go to university or receive formal qualifications. There is often a sense of mistrust from within the family about educational institutions. Consequently, the families’ trust needs to be earned and the student needs family support to navigate the culture and systems of a university environment. Culturally relevant and grounded advice and support is critical to this transition.

It is common in tertiary institutions in North America to provide a lodge or culturally appropriate space where students or learners can go to observe cultural practices. Ceremonial practices such as smudging (the burning of sage where the smouldering has a purification effect) are common in these spaces. This space is often where the elder in residence is located. It is also common for all students to gather for pipe ceremonies (a prayer) once per term.

Most western learning organisations and tertiary education institutions commonly provide a ceremony or celebration for participants (and often invited guests such as family and friends) at the conclusion of the education program. In some cases this takes the form of a formal graduation ceremony. However, it is actually more important to place this sort of ceremony at the beginning of the education program or experience for indigenous participants. I saw a range of examples where this front-end support ceremony is being used. It usually involves elders and community members as well as extended family. It serves to set the context, value and importance of the learning experience as something of value for the community and the family as well as the individual’s own learning journey.

At the School of Indian Social Work at the First Nations University in Canada, there is a compulsory culture camp every summer. Students take a week to ten days to live in a camp setting. They receive all-day lectures from elders, participate in ceremonies and experience traditional teaching and learning. This takes place in a rural setting in tipis and tents. The cultural camp is worth 9/120 credits towards the bachelor degree.

**Traditional knowledge systems**

Canadian academic David Newhouse describes indigenous knowledge as:

“including theories of the universe and how it works; the nature of human beings and others; the nature of society and political order; the nature of the world and how to live within it, and human motivation, among many other aspects of life.”

A common theme in all of the countries visited was the lack of recognition for traditional knowledge systems that indigenous people may have experienced, and how these teachings often didn’t seem to have a place in
supporting career development or progression or a link to other forms of learning.

Central to the traditional knowledge systems is the role of elders. A principle of indigenous cultures in all of the countries visited is the concept that age equals accomplishment. With age usually comes an understanding and engagement with traditional knowledge.

The acquisition of indigenous knowledge does not follow the usual learning pathways of other traditional forms of western education. It is not something that can be read or simply described. Gaining indigenous knowledge requires cultural immersion from elders as teachers and from personal experiences. Elders provide the bridge between indigenous communities and students, both indigenous and non-indigenous. As community historians they can bring indigenous oral traditions into the classroom.
Conclusions and Recommendations

I have divided my recommendations into two broad categories. The first group are initiatives that could be implemented in organisations where there are significant numbers of indigenous staff. The second group are general recommendations designed to improve education and career development opportunities for this and the next generation.

ORGANISATION (NSW PUBLIC SECTOR) RECOMMENDATIONS

Create support systems for Aboriginal people undertaking education and professional development
Where specific education programs are being run for indigenous participants or where indigenous people are participants in general education programs, a range of support systems need to be in place. These will vary according to the individual needs of those involved but an analysis of these needs should be undertaken pre-program. Involvement of elders, family and recognition of the importance of professional development also apply and are detailed elsewhere in the report. As a minimum, coaching support should be offered on a weekly basis prior to the course or activity to prepare the participant and support their expectations. Coaching should also be made available post-course to assist them to embed their learning and integrate any post-course activities into their on-going work.

Create professional development and education programs that target only Aboriginal staff
Consideration should be given to establishing courses and development initiatives targeting only an Aboriginal cohort. In addition to Aboriginal management and leadership programs, a program for emerging leaders or managers should be created which focuses on individual presentation, career development and the interview and selection process.

Create an Aboriginal career development tool
An Aboriginal career development tool in the Australian context should be created. One option would be to license the ‘Guiding circles’ tool utilised by the Aboriginal Human Resource Council in Canada and then customise it to incorporate local culture and desired capabilities. The concept of creating an individual career plan in the Aboriginal context and identifying individual capabilities and strengths will link with several of the initiatives recommended in this report.

Partner with elders
Local elders should be identified and invited to play a role as ‘elders in residence’ within the organisation’s learning and development framework. This role would involve contracting their advice and expertise to assist with curriculum development and incorporating traditional knowledge into learning & development programs, where appropriate. They could also assist with some course delivery, provide an advice or guidance role for Aboriginal
course participants and staff, and be invited to play a part in ceremonies and events to celebrate the success of Aboriginal staff and culture.

**Generate greater interest and involvement and support from the families and community of Aboriginal staff at all stages of the education process**

Organisations need to consider how they can create greater involvement from the local Aboriginal community and families of staff who are undertaking learning & development initiatives. Consideration should be given to pre-course events to celebrate the opportunity and importance of education experiences.

**Develop support materials to educate the non-Aboriginal educators**

Support materials should be developed for staff and educators who are working with Aboriginal participants. These materials should outline some of the critical factors which impact on or support Aboriginal learning styles. This could encompass classroom management techniques, best use of learning materials, alternative assessment strategies and how and where to find additional support for individual participants.

**Create learning spaces that are supportive of Aboriginal culture**

Consideration should be given to how existing classrooms and learning spaces could be enhanced to encompass Aboriginal culture and make them more appealing spaces for Aboriginal participants. Creating cultural experiences which value and highlight Aboriginal knowledge and traditions should also be incorporated into learning experiences where appropriate. Further investigation should be undertaken to determine what Aboriginal learning spaces in the local community might be utilised as an appropriate part of an organisational learning and development program.

**Utilise the digital storytelling medium**

The digital storytelling medium described in this report should be used wherever possible to encourage Aboriginal staff and elders to document their life stories and successes. These tools can then form part of a promotional and recruitment package to attract and encourage people to join the organisation and to inspire those in the organisation to set and achieve their goals.
General Recommendations

A more co-ordinated and flexible approach is needed to encourage greater participation in post-secondary education

Australia needs a co-ordinated approach to post-secondary education for Aboriginal people. We need to define a range of pathways and promote them. We need an Aboriginal university or designated higher education institution. We need to do more to provide access pathways from secondary education to university and vocational education. We need a more flexible approach in this area to provide access encompassing oral assessment, referee reports, community support and understanding and acknowledgement of traditional knowledge.

Mentoring arrangements should be established between Aboriginal staff from the public sector and students in both high school and university

The public sector is the largest single employer of Aboriginal people in Australia. Existing Aboriginal public sector employees should be utilised where possible and practical as mentors for secondary and post-secondary Aboriginal students. They could encourage the completion of their studies and mentor their development into full-time employment. This will have the dual benefit of encouraging more Aboriginal people to work in the public sector and provide a valuable learning experience for the Aboriginal mentors.

Internships should be part of the university experience for Aboriginal students

Universities should consider approaching public sector agencies and large corporate organisations to establish an internship model for Aboriginal students. The model could work along similar lines to the ‘semester in Washington’ outlined in the report, and could be incorporated with credit into a particular course of study and aligned with an experience in the workforce in that discipline.

Immersion experiences should be introduced for Aboriginal staff across the public sector

In the public sector, immersion experiences should be considered for Aboriginal staff at all levels and across all departments. This would encourage professional mobility and career advancement. This would involve three month secondments to roles which are substantially different from those currently being performed, which would not otherwise be open to a staff member through traditional recruitment practices. A similar initiative was successfully trialled in the NSW Department of Community Services in 2011.

Immersion experiences enable a wide range of staff to develop a better understanding of Aboriginal staff, their culture and aspirations. The Aboriginal staff member participating in the secondment will potentially be able to make a direct contribution from an Aboriginal perspective to service delivery, program management and policy development. Additionally, host
areas will benefit from having a perspective from outside the work area, while staff will gain benefits from networking and collaboration.

**Mentoring should be public-sector wide for Aboriginal staff**
Mentoring should be made available for Aboriginal employees across the public sector and across the various departments. This would provide a wider exposure for Aboriginal staff to different work environments and encourage greater aspiration and opportunities for career development. Senior indigenous staff in all countries visited consistently cited having a mentor, and the exposure, encouragement and opportunities that mentor provides as their most critical success factor. Consideration should also be given to linking people with mentors such as Aboriginal elders and others outside organisational boundaries.
Profiles of indigenous populations in Australia and the countries visited

Indigenous people are more likely to be poor, face serious health issues and housing issues and have more frequent contact with the criminal justice system. A critical factor in reversing all of these trends is access to and success with education, beginning at the earliest stages of life. For indigenous people the completion of secondary level education is the single most important factor that can lead to improvements in the circumstances of their lives.

While many of these disparities are well known and well documented, the following summary represents some key comparisons among the countries visited.

Australia
Australia’s total population is 21 million. The indigenous population in Australia is 458,000 (2.2%)\(^6\).

There is overwhelming evidence of the social exclusion of indigenous people from the mainstream of society in Australia.

Aboriginal Australians aged over 15 are completing school at half the rate of other Australians; they are also half as likely to have a non-school qualification and four times less likely to have a Bachelor degree. These outcomes are even more profound when the consequences of education achievement for Aboriginal people are measured against other outcomes. Those aged over 15 who finish school are four times more likely to be in full-time employment, rate their physical and mental health higher, are half as likely to smoke or engage in excessive alcohol consumption and have half the rates of diabetes and cardio-vascular disease\(^4\).

Aboriginal Australians have a reduced life expectancy compared to the non-Aboriginal population. On average, men live 18 years less and women 19 years less\(^1\). Just one generation ago life expectancy for indigenous peoples in Canada, New Zealand and the United States was significantly less than that of the non-Indigenous populations of those countries. Pleasingly, significant gains have been made in this area in all jurisdictions in recent decades. It is problematic to attempt to make meaningful comparisons between jurisdictions because of the different ways life expectancy is calculated. However, it is apparent that in Australia, Aboriginal males live on average 8-13 years less and females 10-12 years less than indigenous males and females in these other countries\(^2\).

Aboriginal Australian’s are also grossly over-represented at all levels of the criminal justice system, including contact with the police, juvenile offending, courts and ultimately imprisonment. The rate of imprisonment
for Aboriginal people in Australia is 14 times higher than that of non-Aboriginal Australians. Aboriginal people make up 27% of Australia’s total prison population.

Aboriginal people in Australia have numerous disparities when it comes to health and well-being. They have far higher rates of chronic and communicable diseases than the rest of the population, with two to three times the rate of infant mortality before the first birthday.

Aboriginal Australians find it harder to escape the welfare cycle because of often impoverished domestic circumstances. Their median gross income is just 62% of that of other Australians, Aboriginal households have greatly increased rates of over-crowding and only half as many own their own home.

The proportional rates of Aboriginal children entering Australia’s child protection systems are vastly higher than the rates for other children. Aboriginal children are seven times more likely to be the subject of a care and protection order or to find themselves in out of home care than other children.

Canada

Canada’s total population is 33.4 million. The indigenous population in Canada is 1,170,000 (3.8%), according to the 2006 census.

The three formally defined indigenous groups in Canada are:
- 60% are North American Indians (also called First Nations peoples)
- 30% are Metis (people of mixed race who have forged a distinct identity with a defining language)
- 10% are Inuit from the northern arctic regions

There are significant gaps between the levels of secondary and other higher levels of education experienced by Canadians generally and those of indigenous background. 53% of Canadians aged 15 and over had trade certificates, college diplomas and more than 20% had university degrees. 34% of the indigenous population had no formal level of education including high school diploma compared to 15% of the non-Aboriginal population. In 2006, 41% of the indigenous population aged 25 to 64 years had post-secondary certification; and only 8% had a university degree.

Like Australia, the median age of the indigenous population in Canada is 13 years younger than the non-indigenous population. The gap in life expectancy of the indigenous population is 7.4 years lower than that of the non-indigenous population.

Aboriginal people are also significantly over-represented as offenders in the Canadian criminal justice system. Incarceration rates of indigenous people are five to six times higher than the national average. Statistics from Correctional Services Canada show that while indigenous people represent
only 3.8% of the Canadian population, they account for 18% of those who are incarcerated in federal institutions. Major health indicators are very poor. Cancer rates for the indigenous population are lower than the non-indigenous population but rates of stroke and heart attack are almost double.

The number of indigenous children involved with the child welfare system across Canada is also growing, and it rose by 71.5% between 1995 and 2001.

**United States of America**

The USA has a total population of 315 million. The indigenous population is 5.2 million (1.65%).

The median age is 8 years younger than the general population. Life expectancy for Native American men is 67 (general population 74) and women 74 (general population 79).

77% of Native Americans aged over 25 have a high school diploma compared to 86% of the general population and 13% compared to 28% of the general population have a Bachelor’s degree. About one quarter of Native Americans work in management, professional or related occupations.

One quarter of Native Americans live below the poverty line (compared to 15% of the general population) and approximately one third do not have health insurance. In 2010, the unemployment rate for Native Americans was 15.2% compared to the general population rate of 7.7%.

U.S. Bureau of Prisons census figures show disproportionate rates of incarceration in states with the highest Native American populations. In South Dakota where Native Americans make up 9% of the total population, they represent 30% of adult prison population. In Montana, they represent 7% of the total population but 19% of men and 33% of all women inmates are Native American.

American Indians and Alaska Natives have had generally poorer health status than average in the United States, including disadvantages in death rates, morbidity, disability, and cancer.
New Zealand

New Zealand has a population of just over 4 million. There were 565,329 people who identified as belonging to the indigenous Māori ethnic group in the 2012 Census, representing 15.4% of the total population. Life expectancy is 70 years (general population 78) for males and 75 years (general population 82) for females 20.

The rates of Māori people who did not finish high school are roughly the same as those of the general population at 33%. This is unlike any other indigenous population in the countries visited. However, post school the picture changes. 40% of Māori adults have no further formal qualifications, compared to just 25% of the general population. One in seven Māori have a vocational qualification while less than 5% have a degree compared to 10% of the general population22.

Among the inequalities that exist between Māori and non-Māori there are pronounced disparities across a range of health conditions, with Māori having higher rates of chronic disease, including cancer, diabetes, cardiovascular disease and asthma17.

Adult Māori are twice as likely as non-Māori adults to smoke tobacco. Also, Māori adults are one-and-a-half times more likely to be obese than non-Māori. The prevalence of diabetes was almost double for Māori than non-Māori populations27.

Nearly 43 percent of Māori households had children deemed at high-risk of harm, compared with 6 percent in the general population18.

The number of Māori young people aged 15-24 not in education or employment was 22% compared to the general population for this age group of 12.3%19.

42% of all criminal apprehensions by police in New Zealand involve a person identifying as Māori. Māori men and women are also grossly over-represented in the nation’s prison system with as many as 50% of the male prison population and 60% of the female prison population being Māori21.
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GLOSSARY

ako (Māori): The concept of ako describes the learning and teaching relationship, where the educator is also learning from the student.

Hui (Māori): Meetings or gatherings

First Nations: Status and non-status indigenous people of Canada. There are currently over 630 First Nations governments or bands spread across Canada. They total nearly 700,000 people.

Inuit: Aboriginal people of Arctic Canada. About 45,000 Inuit live in 53 communities in: Nunatsiavut (Labrador); Nunavik (Quebec); Nunavut; and the Inuvialuit Settlement Region of the Northwest Territories. The word “Inuit” means “the people” in the Inuit language called, Inuktitut and is the term by which Inuit refer to themselves. The term “Eskimo,” applied to Inuit by European explorers, is no longer used in Canada.

Marae (Māori): Māori cultural space and learning environment. Cultural, social, education context.

Métis: one of the recognized Aboriginal peoples in Canada. They trace their descent to mixed First Nations and European heritage. Almost 400,000 people identify themselves as Métis.

Powwow: A term formerly applied to feasts, dances and public meetings of Native Americans prior to a grand hunt, a war expedition or a council. Today the powwow is utilized as a cultural and social event in many large education institutions or settings across North America where there is a significant Native American student population. These events provide an opportunity to celebrate the traditional culture and values and to invite the local community to engage with the institution.

Smudging (North America): An act of prayer among Native Americans involving the burning of sage, cedar or sweetgrass in an abalone shell, tin can, or other container that will hold the ashes safely.

Tipi (Teepee): The dwelling or lodge of plains Indians from the Dakota tipi meaning “place where one lives”.

VET: Vocational Education and Training (VET) is the sector of the tertiary education system in Australia offering accredited training in job-related and technical skills.

Whanaungatanga (Māori): family or kinship. Adding a tanga suffix broadens meaning to wider relationships extended to family or community.

Wānanga: (Māori) In the education system of New Zealand, a wānanga is a publicly owned tertiary institution that provides education in a Māori
cultural context. It also refers to tribal lore, knowledge and learning or an instructor, a wise person or an expert.