

4.0 Promising practices: dismantling barriers to service provision

Three learning tools follow, that:

- examine **'promising practices'** for disability service provision;
- offer examples of working reflexively to **demonstrate culturally secure service provision**; &
- provide a reflexive practitioner **personal checklist**, to be added to.

4.1 learnings from Nancy Poole's story:

Some 'promising practices'

Nancy Poole's stories were heard at a Bunbury presentation by the Healthway Visiting Research Fellow, Nancy Poole from: The British Columbia Centre for Excellence in Women's Health in Canada (www.bccewh.bc.ca; www.hcip-bc.org;) Email: wavelength@telus.net. Because of connecting with networks of service-providers in areas related to Aboriginal service provision, Enable had received a flier for this presentation: our CEO and Research and Development worker attended.



Nancy described her work with Inuit women, integrating women-centred health approaches into prevention and policy initiatives designed to prevent Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD).

She outlined some **promising practices** that made for the best outcomes in treating the substance abuse during pregnancy that resulted in FASD.

These named 'promising practices' seemed to describe the principles and service developments that were working well for us as our critically reflexive project progressed:-

1. Outreach and engagement:

- make approaches to individuals and indigenous-specific organizations to **offer information, work to establish trust - ensuring that these approaches are respectful**, and that information given is honest and in appropriate, accessible language and form
- work to **establish a safe space and context for connections** or service-provision that's not intimidating or exclusive – e.g. not in government, religious or other buildings symbolic of remembered oppression or unfreedom, but maybe in a park or coffee shop.

- where appropriate, make **initial approaches through a trusted advocate** or family/community member
- **keep trying;** allow time for trust to develop, changes of mind or long consideration...
- approaching indigenous-specific organizations to **invite collaborative approaches** to making disability support services effective and appropriate

2. Discussion and brief intervention/planning

- Practice active, deep listening to Aboriginal individuals and their extended family/community supporters to demonstrate respect and encourage trust – **take the time it needs:** remember that a spiritual connection to the land, hunting and gathering and growing seasons suggests a **very different traditional understanding of time and process** than one established to support agriculture and industrialization
- Listen to the silences and the 'no reply' responses to approaches or questions; spend time waiting, and reflecting on whether the silence means: 'rethink your question: do you already have the answer, or does it need to be a different question?'
- Be aware of the need to '**unpack the language**' you use around 'disability', 'family' and 'community', listen for or try out new/different language for describing/meeting these support needs. **This process can uncover the prejudices we all have,** and so make space for difference.
- **Apply your 'practice wisdom'** – based on 'big-word' values of **Love, Respect, Bravery, Honesty, Humility, Truth - to what you hear** in deep listening:
- **Address pressing need appropriately** and be truthful re: intentions

3. Awareness building and Stigma reduction:

Ensure that your organization:

- is **aware of First Nations' issues, events, activities:** global, national, regional and local, and connects with these as part of its community engagement;
- demonstrates a **commitment to culturally safe service**-provision;
- **supports moves toward a rights-based service structure** that addresses inherent, explicit and covert racism in all human services;
- is **open-minded in promoting broad access to Aboriginal cultural production** and cultural awareness;
- initiates and supports broad-based **community development** and inclusion;
- identifies and **acknowledges community strengths**

4. Holistic support

- work to **develop partnerships and practical connections with other services** and agencies to promote broad access to services;
- ***always include the offer of transport*** a range of issues that sit around the historical relationship to government may result in a lack of transport;
- support or instigate the **establishment of drop in, advocacy, support centres** in your community where services can be available or linked with concurrently

5. 'Practice wisdom' for disability service providers

Offering culturally secure and effective services requires a **willingness to be different**, i.e.

- Be willing to maintain **broad personal, social and cultural awareness**: e.g. what is the history of Aboriginal people's experience of government funded services and 'protection'? **How do I fit into/feel about that history?**
- Be critically aware and reflexive, i.e. evaluating your service practice in relation to that broad awareness: e.g. **What is the emotional effect of government department form-filling for Aboriginal people, given their experience?** Can I be more flexible about this and other processes for the sake of changing lives?
- Remember that **the DSC as your funding body has commended** to you the practices of **creativity and flexibility** in service provision to Aboriginal people,. The Commission intends to support and enhance this practice in the context of a **Substantive Equity policy framework**: meeting unequal need with unequal access will be to 'turn things on their head'.

4.2 Culturally Secure **Service Provision** - *what does it look like?*

Some practical examples of working reflexively to achieve culturally secure service provision:

Holistic - attempts to address issues in holistic, not a 'single-issue focus' way

Requires:

Awareness of issues affecting local communities.

Meeting with and listening to local Aboriginal reference groups (ask for direction to them from your local council), and/or with Indigenous-specific service organizations. They are broadly and specifically aware of local people's concerns and needs.

Outreach to individuals, families, communities.

Time for these community development activities.

Respect for local people's concerns and 'disabling' factors, as described *by them*. (Our learning: it worked well to meet and describe our project and services offered in **safe, neutral, public spaces** (e.g. local park, café) with **understanding** (ie **awareness**) of the issues for local people that services will need to address...)

Example:

- Djidi Djidi Aboriginal school – we approached the school's Principal (a person whose reputation was one of displaying **practice wisdom**, who'd been 'working effectively in the area' for years) ready to **LISTEN re: local issues**.
- **Outreach** involved cultural **connections** re: *Samson and Delilah*; placed invitation to approach us (with *Samson and Delilah* ad.) in school newsletter – **no response...** so, we went back to the Principal, negotiated 'Family Day' connections where we could be present and describe services available; learned more from Principal re: *definitions of students 'learning disorders'* when they're actually hearing probs.; that *differential ability* doesn't generally cause exclusion in Aboriginal communities, and is understood in different ways: 'So, he can't read/write that well: but he cooks up a great meal and - can he tell a good joke"!- principal reporting family conversation re: student. **Ongoing, updated:** when a new Principal was appointed, we made sure to meet him: year 6 students produced artwork for our conference presentation on this project.

Builds trust & close relationships with local indigenous people

Requires:

Honesty: 'Show your cards' first. "We trust when you *try* to assist, fail, but come back and try again" (storyteller). **Humility** through **awareness:** – allows acknowledgement of our own **received culture of prejudice**, helping us to avoid discriminatory practice). It's not about blame, but **compassion**, understood as 'the wish not to promote the causes of suffering'.

Examples:

- Offer an **honest commitment and keep it** – e.g., ours to story-tellers on permission forms: “we’ll get Cultural awareness learning for staff at all organizational levels”. (KIFSA E.O.’s recognition of need for this at project outset) – done.
- **Connection** with Maali Mob day centre for older Aboriginal persons (invited them to hold day centre at our place when we were due to visit them re: developments re: referrals to Enable and their air con failed..) **Later, Enable and Maali mob jointly hosted Reconciliation week morning tea** at their day centre.
- **Collaborative training** for our Support Workers with Aboriginal Health Workers, on Victor’s advice (storyteller) that we “ .. should go and meet the educator for the AHW course there”- learning exchange – serendipity – cultural awareness and possible future staff exchanges will be developed through this process.

Staff are Knowledgeable, Culturally Competent & Trained re: Indigenous and Noongar Culture

Requires:

Respect for difference– and “**loving perception**” of Others, rather than “arrogant perception”. **Awareness** – there’s PLENTY of Aboriginal ‘life being lived’, performance and creative production out there: willingness to share cultural learnings – esp. with persons displaying **humility** of ‘novices’.

Examples:

- **Question language:** ‘Aboriginal Cultural Awareness *Training*’ – or we prefer ‘learning’ – open, interactive, ongoing; invite, e.g. – demonstrates openness to new and different ways of ‘being and doing’.
- **We explained our project, and asked for advice:** we were, without exception, advised with grace and generosity of appropriate ways to approach our concerns. For example: ‘Mary: look at your own staff first’- (Social Worker with indigenous-specific organization); and ‘Remind them of the power of their own culture; then leave them alone’ (worker with long experience of remote community building projects).
- Providing Val’s cultural awareness **learnings** which we first accessed at her voluntary offering of them to a support group for survivors of child abuse. These are to be provided **across organization**.
- **Reflexive praxis (i.e. actively practicing humility, honesty re: practice,** open to **flexible, creative** application of services) keeping informed, and having an **open mind** – emails, share news re: local issues, visual arts, drama, film etc.

Controlled and/or managed by Indigenous people

Requires:

Humility, bravery, respect. As Disability Services Commission funded organizations, we work under the auspices of the current Disability Services Commission's **Director General's personal injunction to be 'creative and flexible' in our approach to Aboriginal service provision.** Our advice from Aboriginal Policy officers is that it may be best to make connections without: briefcase, agency uniform or forms (each having symbolic reference to processes in which Aboriginal persons were disempowered) to be completed. Perhaps instead we might ask permission to write down any really necessary information, or to use a tape recorder out of respect for the storyteller and to assist us in attending to what they say, to retain necessary information. **Integrity, creativity** in indigenous partnerships may mean **'going out on a limb'** for mainstream services. The setting up of an Aboriginal School in the South West meant **'going out on a limb' of the Education Department's integration policy...** but it was what was 'needed', and it worked. Remember that as service agencies, we are in accord with and informed by the Disability Service Commission's Substantive Equality framework.

Example:

- Listening to traditional cultural approaches: e.g. the **'deep listening'** that shows respect for the story...
- Seeking input and advice at every stage on our planning for services to Aboriginal persons from those working on/experienced/informed in cultural security issues (i.e. addressing racism as it affects service provision) – e.g. at Enable we approached: Mapping and Gap Analysis contributors; Aboriginal health and human service workers; Policy educators and presenters – Rod Garlett at NDS; until recently Jim Morrison at DSC; Nancy Poole Inuit experience; John Sherwood, teacher educator; Community projects officer at South West Development Commission, and DIA; etc.

Services Understand and Acknowledge the IMPACT of history

Requires:

Under-standing i.e. being there, out of denial, *close to the text* of atrocities, cultural genocide, ongoing racism – **'bearing witness'** to consequent evidence of loss and grief – in dysfunction, or in creative production. Strength and possibly need for **service-provider support** in engagement re: e.g., triggers/bringing up 'complex grief' processes.

Examples:

- Learning to listen through *Samson and Delilah* – shared with mixed audience; learning about the producer – shared; learning about silence, differential ability, racism, **abuse** and **hope** through *Samson and Delilah...*
- *Stone Bros.* – shared; learning about the healing power of comedy in *Stone Bros.*
- **Helen's art practice** and teaching experience at the prison – her community artworker presence as input to our praxis
- *Demonstrating* acknowledgement by willingness to be creative and flexible (Getting services right, 'Policy and Practice guidelines' - DSC)

Services Recognise, Understand and Acknowledge indigenous culture and incorporate (embody) indigenous ways of knowing and being

Requires: **'Quality' learning time** (and so, **funding** – one Curtin researcher suggesting 50% more), **attention, respect, awareness, understanding.**

Examples:

- **Response** to different understandings of time, 'loosening up' on it. (Our learning – sometimes waiting (e.g. for Les Wallam re: "Cultural Awareness", offers time for reflection/a new take on the issue/need; sometimes no answer means 'rethink your question/request' ... Remember respect for necessary **healing processes.**)
- **'Deep listening'** to other understandings of 'differential ability', 'ageing', 'family', 'community', etc. Many cultural/family commitments, many funerals for our 'storytellers'.

Employ indigenous staff in service delivery and/or front line roles

Requires: **Love** (communicating with, supporting and **working productively together** in is a **loving, respectful** process). **Flexibility** as a 'Family friendly' employer re: extended family, healing processes, culturally different responsibilities. Implications for future Quality Assurance management and Supervision: Acknowledge complex role for Aboriginal staff, i.e.: job + culture-sharing with fellow-workers + 'all-hours' Aboriginal community mediation with mainstream service provider agencies.

Examples:

- Our learning: reflexive process. Examine our practices: decolonized'
- Then Victor's story re: importance of having an 'Aboriginal face' to the organization – providing a visible signal of cultural **safety** ... then having Victor working on reception for some months...
- Approaches have been made to us from experienced Aboriginal professionals: in child protection, community support and academics expressing interest in working with our organization...we are now employing Aboriginal staff in a range of positions across the organization

Serious effort is made to engage, talk and consult with indigenous people and use that information to re-design their services – &TIME = MONEY=FUNDING...

Requires: **Bravery:** engagement and consultation imply the **respect** (and **humility**) to acknowledge where you may be getting it wrong or even doing harm over time. Listening, in our experience, has been an enriching, humbling and inspirational experience.

Examples:

- 'Knocking on doors' of indigenous-specific agencies; **waiting for the right time** 'differently'-defined – listening two, three or more times + making relationship gradually.
- **Asking** to visit Maali mob day centre with info; Val: Dome coffee shop x 2; Under the Norfolk Pine at Busselton x 1; phone calls, email.... Victor: at work, at my home, at his home, at the Dome...
- Professional commitment involved in **being present to stories that may call up your own pain, loss, grief**. 'Learning organizations' promote strategies for self-care and psychological safety.
- Reflexive praxis *is* 'theory into/becoming practice'...

Services provide transport to and from provision...

Context-awareness = understanding *why* transport is a necessity; and substantive equality measures are necessary. Recognising 'what needs to be done'= leadership: and responding with honesty, bravery, humility and love to ma requires **practice wisdom** in the **application of substantive equality principles** - to 'turn our practices on their head' – and **awareness** re: differential need for practical supports to access services. And awareness of the historical context of uneasy relationships with government, authority and formal, directive structures. As one dramaturge and storyteller reminded us: *we* are the Strangers in a Strange Land, needing translation ...

**Q. How do providers of culturally secure services need to be different?
A. Love Respect Bravery Honesty Humility Truth**

Practice Wisdom

And a 'reflexive' check list for you to add to:

- **Commit to ongoing cultural awareness learnings – not just 'training' ... Watch and enjoy the movies - like: Samson and Delilah; Stone Bros.; Bran Nue Dae; Liyarn Ngarn: available through W.A. inter-library loans or http://www.antar.org.au/shop/sound_vision; for film buffs 'flickerfest'(http://www.flickerfest.com.au/distribution/Catalogue_list.aspx?s=3715 for catalogue)**
- **ENJOY 'learning to listen'; it's our access to the rich culture of the oldest peoples and cultures on our planet ...**
- **Remember: listen *deeply, slowly, more than once...or twice..* - 'unpack the language' – what *are you saying/hearing?***
- **Always recognise that it may be felt to be more secure and appropriate for meetings to be in neutral spaces – and with family/associates.**
- **When you don't get an 'engagement' response from prospective Aboriginal service-users – what do you think? what do you feel? What do you do?**
- **Be honest: take care to make only undertakings that are reliable ...**
- **Think about: your appearance – if you usually wear a formal looking work 'uniform', consider changing to clothes that don't set you apart from the person you're speaking with ...**
- **Nurture trust ... remember that lack of trust is a sensible survival skill for First Nations Peoples with regard to mainstream services ...**
- **Consider: with your understanding of Aboriginal experience, are there any implicit or explicit program barriers to your service?**
- **Allow yourself and your staff/colleagues to consider 'turning things on their head' – making radical changes where you begin to see that things don't work for service-provision to Aboriginal people ...**

- **As Disability Service Organizations, support and be visible at Aboriginal events. You have a mandate to be creative and flexible!**
- **Ask for 'maps' – of local culture and families, and for advice about who to approach and how for links to reference groups and Elders. Try your local council first ...**
- **Be prepared to wait ... 'time' ideas don't travel well across cultures...**
- **Be flexible and willing to reassess the forms of service provided in response to felt and expressed need: *'WE want to look after our own people: but we want to know there are services there to support that when we need them'...***
- **Ensure that substantive equality principles inform your work, consistent with the values underlying 'promising practices': e.g. 'equal or the same application of rules to unequal groups can have unequal results'; 'equal outcomes, not simply equal opportunity'. Modify the rules to enhance access when your knows it's necessary!**

5.0 Recommendations:

5.1 The Disability Services Commission may now choose to be seen urgently to promote and support the taking of 'quantum leaps' (DSC: 2008) by service providers in directly addressing the urgent need for culturally secure (non-racist) service provision, based on principles of Substantive Equality

Initially, as proposed by Stopher and D'Antoine (DSC:2008):

"Invest in building partnerships:

Disability service providers must develop meaningful and lasting partnerships, first and foremost, with the Aboriginal community at national, regional and local levels. Then, in partnership with Aboriginal people, advance toward developing partnerships with other agencies such human and social services, businesses and non-government organisations. The continued employment of Aboriginal people in disability service organisations and the appointment of Aboriginal advisors to the Commission will greatly assist the relationship-building process.

Build on existing disability policy and practice:

The Commission must build on current strategies. The Access for Aboriginal People Policy and Practice Plan and the newly-launched Reconciliation Action Plan focus on addressing the disability-related issues discussed in this paper. Implementing these Plans need to receive sharp focus and be continued and extended over the coming 15-20 years."

5.2 The Disability Services Commission may now choose to explore ways to support, affirm and celebrate the specific 'partnership' process suggested by Stopher and D'Antoine (2008: above) that has proved promising in the 'Learning to Listen' project. This will include:

5.2.1 Acknowledge that a functional prerequisite for the Commission's recommended partnerships to flourish is an initial honest openness to **interpersonal, interactive cultural awareness learnings and exchange**, and implicit professional **accountability** for their practical application.

5.2.2 With regard to **5.2.1**, DSC's valuing, promoting and educating for **ethical leadership** and for the development of **practice wisdom** in service provision is essential. Also essential is disability service agencies' evolution as **'learning organizations'**, characterized as they are by **psychological safety** as a context for **'heartful'** listening, **creative risk-taking and service modification**.

Some factors to be considered in relation to the partnership processes:

5.2.3 The challenge of awareness. Cultural awareness learnings, in the 'psychological safety' offered by 'learning organizations' (which disability service providers with concern for both inclusivity and integrity are bound to become) are central to this process. Different understandings of 'disability', 'community', 'family' and of human relationship to land and place will be observed. Acknowledgement of the atrocities and genocidal practices that have characterized colonial Australia's relatively brief history have provoked (during our project experience of reviewing available cultural awareness learnings) anger, shock and the conceptual 'fuzziness' of denial-being-addressed and reality brought to light.

5.2.4 The broad scope of the suggested partnership process will require open-minded organizational approaches to engaged **community development** by disability service organizations. This will have valuable flow on effects across organization's endeavours. **Funding and resourcing** will be required for the process.

5.2.5 Differential resources across service organizations in terms of staff skills; capacities; professional commitment; and to what Nancy Poole termed '**big word-values**'; are all considerations for DSC funding policy development here.

5.3 Employment of Aboriginal staff in Service organizations:

Whilst it is clearly in the best interests of all disability organizations and their service users to seek to employ Aboriginal persons at all levels in Disability service organizations, some factors in relation to service agency employment must be recognized and formally addressed by employing organizations:

- **Aboriginal employment in mainstream service organizations** has been observed by one Aboriginal academic storyteller to involve what she terms a '**cultural tax**': Aboriginal workers are expected (usually implicitly) to provide cultural awareness learning to their colleagues, and often to deal with all Aboriginal service matters. There is also the cultural community expectation that the worker will act as mediator with mainstream services for their people, advocating for that community with their employing organization. This '**cultural tax**' places a **continuing strain on individuals, and it needs to be acknowledged within organizations' HR structures.**
- Aboriginal people are likely to encounter **chronic health issues, and continuing early deaths in their communities**, often involving complex loss and grief processes in their extended families that are causally connected to dispossession, placelessness and the effects of the Stolen Generations experience. One young member of an indigenous-specific partner organization in our project noted that **he'd needed to attend five funerals in the past year**: this is an important cultural expectation, and will continue to arise frequently until the range of 'gaps' is effectively addressed.

5.4 The Disability Services Commission may choose to liaise with Health department to continue funding action research for 'learning organizations' service developments, and concurrently examine quality management agendas/evaluation structures for cultural safety

DSC may choose to support action research and development agendas that explore promising practices in both Aboriginal primary health care, and disability service needs in the most equitable, respectful, cost-efficient, effective and culturally secure (non-racist) ways. This acknowledges the argument for rights-based disability service provision and accountabilities that many believe¹ are essential to addressing the life-expectancy gap. This supported research agenda may include, but is not limited to:

- developing **more accurate assessment of service need**, and by extension, of the necessary increase to funding and other **resourcing requirements**, that is based on 'vertical' (i.e. 'unequal but equitable access for unequal need'²) as opposed to 'horizontal' equity measures of resource allocation;
- developing innovative and effective ways of **ensuring that staff at all levels** in disability service organizations **access meaningful, interactive cultural awareness learnings** to underpin and develop practice wisdom for necessary service improvements.
- reviewing quality management processes and the range of currently available tools that situate **culturally secure Aboriginal service provision as evidence of best practice**;
- consider Disability Services Commission **weighted funding per Aboriginal service-user** - in recognition of the time and resources required to establish culturally secure service-provision, and substantive equality
- enhance disability service-providers' involvement in community access to and **promotion of Aboriginal Visual and Performing arts** and cultural production, promoting awareness and the social and economic value of First Nation's peoples' creative and performative capacities.
- reinforcing the efficacy, cost-effectiveness and life-saving potential of **stably and well-funded early childhood health assessment** services;
- describing, **promoting, and celebrating the importance of First Nations' culture and language reclamation as a national treasure**, and a recognized social determinant of health and well-being, contributing with great effect to healing (and when shared, to reconciliation processes);
- enhance encouragements to employ/train Indigenous workers for positions across disability service organizations: this process offers the cultural awareness of persons working together to achieve shared goals.

¹ E.g. Joanna Shulman, Director and Principal Solicitor of the NSW Disability Discrimination Legal Centre, ABC Radio National 'Life Matters', 'Disability discrimination grows', 8.3.10; and Dr. Alexandre Kalache, World Health Organization; SWAMS Social and Emotional Wellbeing team, Bunbury, 13.12.09.

² Mooney, G., Closing the 17 year gap means opening not just the Treasury coffers but our hearts

5.5 The Disability Services Commission will promote and resource service organizations' awareness & under-standings to establish cultural safety

- Enhancing culturally secure (non-racist) service provision by promoting a critically **reflexive praxis** (i.e. 'theory/reflection-becomes-practice') **through 'learning and leadership' combined. Substantive equality** may be founded on this.
- Effective 'learning organizations' are assisted to evince a culture of **'flourishing' and psychological security** to support new cultural learnings.
- Ethical 'risk-taking' characterises effective leadership: support informed/creative/flexible service provision through **recognition and sharing** across the sector. **Approve 'going out on a limb' for cultural security.**
- Offer L.A.C.'s and service-providers access to important and 'mind-opening' **interpersonal, interactive cultural learnings** such as National Disability Service's powerful 'Yarn Time' facilitations of stories from Aboriginal elders.
- Acknowledge (and report to Federal government on) **funding/learning** required to resource service-providers' quantum leaps in culturally secure practice – **TIME to listen; time to source ongoing local knowledge and links; take on and appropriately support Aboriginal workers; engage in community development; enhance practice-wisdom; provide alternative/extra resources** for service modifications. Major expenditure is a necessary, but not a sufficient factor in providing equity of service-provision and outcomes for differently-abled Aboriginal persons.
- Promote and support service-providers' **awareness** around:
 - revisiting and clarifying organizational values and **human rights**;
 - using the **'big words'** underpinning human rights/substantive equality values, including: Respect, Bravery, Honesty, Humility, Truth, Wisdom;³
 - acknowledge and promote the range of benefits to organizations and individuals of an honest and aware approach to culturally secure (non-racist) practice.

³ Nancy Poole presentation 'FASD: First nations and Inuit women in Canada', Bunbury, 28th August 2009.

