

Engagement of Aboriginal People and Communities

Regrettably, we were disappointed with our lack of success in engaging Aboriginal people in our community consultations and surveys. Through the lack of feedback we received from the 'Connections Project' consultations, it is clear that there is much to be done to better reach out and engage Aboriginal clients, their families, communities and service providers.

Connection with Aboriginal people and communities remains an area of significant challenge for the Association, but we have a strong desire and commitment to better engage and improve our service delivery to Aboriginal people.

We know that there are many people who could benefit from receiving support from the Association, in particular Aboriginal people. The small numbers of Aboriginal people seeking our support can be attributed to many factors - cultural considerations, geographical isolation, confidence in seeking our service, appropriateness and relevance of information and the need for continual nurturing of relationships to build trust, to name but a few.

The final report of the '2010 Connections Project' made a number of recommendations to address some of these issues. Data collected throughout the 'Connections Project' did not however, clearly identify participants of Aboriginal descent and this has limited the findings we can draw on this matter. In future, we will ensure the inclusion of information specific to Aboriginal peoples to better inform our findings.

Some facts

- As a proportion of the Association's State-wide client base, Aboriginal people represent less than 4%.
 - 54% of the Association's Aboriginal clients live in regional/remote areas throughout WA.
 - Trachoma is the leading cause of blindness worldwide, and is predominantly a disease prevalent in undeveloped countries, with the exception of Australia. In many remote Indigenous communities, the rates of Trachoma are as high as anywhere in the world (Centre for Eye Research Australia).
 - People with diabetes are at a high risk of eye damage leading to impaired vision or blindness. The Kimberly population in Northern Western Australia has the fourth highest prevalence of Type 2 diabetes in the world (Diabetes WA).
 - The rates of blindness and vision loss in Indigenous Australians are at least ten times higher than in non-Indigenous Australians (Centre for Eye Research Australia).
- Through our discussions with Aboriginal service providers we have sought to understand what we need to change to better engage Aboriginal people who are blind or vision impaired. Two approaches emerged:
- Active engagement whereby the Association seeks interaction and engagement with Aboriginal people and groups.
 - Passive engagement, creating and allowing opportunities for Aboriginal people and communities to acquire information of their own initiative & desire.

What we learned

It is clear that the development of trust and consistent, respectful relationships are key to engaging Aboriginal people and communities. Over the last 15 years the Association has provided targeted support to Aboriginal communities in the Kimberley region and has developed some positive and enduring connections.

Given the broad geographical spread of WA however, it is impractical to maintain permanent local contacts across all of our Aboriginal communities. This is where partnerships with local Aboriginal service providers are vital. The local service providers are the permanent local contacts who have established connections and trust among their local communities. Through working in partnership with these local service providers, we hope to get word out to people about who we are and what we do.

Support the Association can provide

We want Aboriginal people who are blind or vision impaired to be confident in approaching us for information or support in maintaining or regaining their daily independence.

The support we can provide to Aboriginal people who are blind or vision impaired and local service providers includes:

- Visiting you and your community
- Talking with you about blindness or vision impairment and how it affects you
- Exploring what practical techniques, learning or aids could help you to be more independent
- Providing assistance to get aids, equipment or assistive technology that you require
- Training and upskilling of local service provider staff with a view to these local contacts being able to share in knowledge and skills that will benefit local residents.

Did you know?

In an effort to reduce barriers to accessing our services, people in the Kimberley region are not required to become members of the Association in order to receive a service.

Further to this, Aboriginal people in the Kimberley region can receive impromptu, one-off services during visits by an Association staff member.

What we will do next

- We will continue to nurture the connections we have already made with Aboriginal people, communities and service providers.
- We will develop a range of printed, written and pictorial information specifically relevant to Aboriginal people and communities.
- We will distribute this information to Aboriginal Service Providers / agencies, so that they in turn can spread the word to the people and communities with whom they have connections.
- We will explore the possibility of increasing key staff resources dedicated to the development of connections with Aboriginal communities and service providers.
- We will more actively promote our services to Aboriginal people and communities via local radio, the internet, local service providers and local publications.

Do you know someone who is blind or vision impaired that might be interested in having a chat with us?

If you would like to talk with someone, find out more or arrange a time to meet, please call and ask for the Duty Officer.

Ph: (08) 9311 8202

Toll free for country callers: 1800 847 466