



Creating economic opportunities for young Aboriginal men and women in the construction industry

The partnership between the Willan Program and Spark North East Link



PLAYBOOK



Introduction

Setting up a program that delivers long-term economic outcomes for young Aboriginal people requires commitment and investment.

Spark partnered with Yellow-Tail Services to design and deliver a program to bring young Aboriginal men and women into the infrastructure construction industry as part of the North East Link tunnel project.

The intent of this Playbook is to share the essential elements of that journey so that other projects can see the value and deeply understand what it takes to do this successfully and further drive outcomes for Indigenous people.

This Playbook has been prepared in partnership with Yellow-Tail Services who created the Willan Program – a pre-employment program to support young Aboriginal people as they enter the workforce.

Yellow-Tail Services have been very generous to share their journey and to have it documented here which demonstrates their ongoing commitment to bettering economic outcomes for Aboriginal people.

PLAYBOOK



The Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoo is known as 'Willan' or 'Kappatj' in the Dhauwurd Wurrung language of the Gunditjmarra.

It is an important animal for the Gunditjmarra people and has a special significance as a 'guiding spirit' that warns of any danger. In return the Gunditjmarra respect it and refrain from injuring it.

If young people went out on their own and got lost along the way, the Willan was called upon by the Elders to find and guide them back home. The Willan would teach and give lessons along the journey so that when they arrived home, they had new skills to help them contribute to the community.

The Journey Overview

The Foundation



Scaling Up



It Takes a Village



Setting Up For Success



Ongoing Support



Play 1



The Foundation

An understanding of what it takes to support young Aboriginal people into work is key.

Yellow-Tail Services understand that the labour hire model of stop-start work isn't the right approach to securing long-term economic outcomes for young Aboriginal people. So, they set about doing it differently, starting by bringing young people into one of their businesses, Pathway Plumbing, as plumbing apprentices and running a pre-employment program to ensure their success.

Yellow realized that it was important to skill people up for success and work with their clients to provide a culturally safe environment for these young people and to spend time unpacking barriers and baggage to create an environment where the young people can thrive.

This led to the design and delivery of the Willan Program, a pre-employment program focused on providing participants with key skills needed to successfully undertake apprenticeships, traineeships and meaningful fulltime employment.

For the Willan Program to be successful, there needs to be a guaranteed job at the end. This is why the partnership with Spark was formed as both parties saw the value in introducing more young Aboriginal people into the construction industry and were willing to provide the support necessary for them to be successful.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- There needs to be both a company who can assist with finding jobs + an organisation that can support the young Aboriginal People
- Early engagement with Yellow-Tail Services is crucial to establish a strong foundation for the program, following their guidance and support
- Make sure there are jobs before running the pre-employment program

Yellow-Tail Services Leadership Role



CASE STUDY

In the mid-2000s Ricky Morris was involved in the 'Build your life' program in Wodonga, which had a 100% success rate. Fourteen young Aboriginal people completed the program and six secured apprenticeships. A culturally safe learning environment and location was provided, as it became apparent that the young people were not comfortable attending the local mainstream education institutions.

Through Pathway Plumbing Service, Ricky has been acting as a guiding spirit for young Aboriginal people for many years and alongside Kaelun Brown have developed the Willan Program. Starting Pathway Plumbing Services provided the opportunity to support the Willan Program so they would have real jobs to help train mob in a culturally safe way where we can learn and teach at the right paces.

Self-funding the program has allowed Ricky and Kaelun to successfully support 22 people through the program who went on to gain full time employment. Now through Yellow-Tail Services they are continuing to grow the Willan Program in partnership with others, including Big Build projects.

The value of the Willan Program is clear, and it is time to upscale with support and resourcing from other organisations such as Spark.



Play 2



Scaling Up



There is evidence that the model works and that it benefits other organisations and the economy more widely.

The opportunity to upscale was recognised during the delivery of plumbing works on the Spark NEL Project.

Realizing its potential, they aimed to extend the model to other subcontractors on the Project, which Spark saw significant value in and endorsed, particularly in supporting key social commitments on the Project. The model is also suitable for direct hires.

A crucial part in this step is to secure buy-in, which involves engaging senior leaders and stakeholders, and being able to demonstrate the programs tangible values and outcomes.

Even more crucial is to understand the need for dedicated resources which are necessary for the successful delivery of the program, inclusive of on-site support staff for individuals new to workforce and/or industry.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

-
- Engage early and get key leaders and decision makers on board the journey
 - Secure the buy-in by demonstrating tangible program values and outcomes
 - Allocation of dedicated resource for successful program delivery

Play 3



It Takes a Village



It is important not to under-estimate the number of people it takes to deliver this kind of employment program, including:

- Yellow-Tail Services to guide you on the journey
- Senior decision makers who have the power to dedicate resources – both time and money
- The sub-contractors and any other parties who will be the employers at the end of the pre-employment program
- Sites superintendents who make the final decision about who is allowed on site to do work
- A dedicated co-ordinator who is there to support and advise both the participants and the employers – in our case it was someone at Spark who worked with site superintendents, the sub-contractors who employed the participants and the participants themselves
- Mentors who can be there to look out for the interests of the program participants – both on site and off site including accessing health, accommodation and travel needs, as well as supporting social and cultural needs

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Engage the employers early and have an open and honest yarn
- Never underestimate how valued the program participants feel when senior people attend briefings and being prepared to give their time to invest in their journey

Play 4



Setting Up for Success

Alongside commitment and resourcing, success is also dependent on Recruitment, Pre-Employment Process + Training

1. Recruitment

Subcontractors/Employers	Participants
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ensure they have a long-term view for the individual to progress in their career with the company beyond the current project• Ensure that they have sufficient scope of works on the project to sustain the employment of the individual for a significant amount of time• Support the subcontractor with interviewing the participant in a culturally safe way	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Engage the Aboriginal community directly• Partner directly with Aboriginal organisations to promote the opportunity• Partner with jobs providers to find candidates

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Involve employers who are committed to supporting the participant beyond a single project
- Work with the Aboriginal Community to identify young men and women to be employed
- Partner with Aboriginal Jobs Providers and Agencies to find candidates

Play 4



Setting Up for Success

Alongside ensuring commitment and resourcing, there are some elements to incorporate into the program design and delivery – Recruitment, Pre-Employment Process + Training

2. Pre-Employment

The pre-employment phase involves:

- Paying participants for one day a week for ten weeks – this was paid by Spark
- The Willan Program providing masterclasses in basic construction skills and mentoring in work readiness such as punctuality, communication and getting to the work site
- Health checks and testing in the first week to ensure support can be provided to address any issues before employment starts
- Educating participants on what it is like to work on a construction site
- Provide participants with the basics if they need it before starting work – such as tools + safety gear

KEY TAKEAWAYS

-
- Pay the participants during the ten-week pre-employment phase
 - Do health checks and testing early
 - Upskill participants with knowledge on what it is like to work on a construction site

Play 4



Setting Up for Success

Alongside ensuring commitment and resourcing, there are some elements to incorporate into the program's design and delivery – Recruitment, Pre-Employment Process + Training

3. Training

Includes:

- Cultural awareness training for the employers and General Supers on site to ensure a culturally safe working environment is provided for the participants
- Opportunities for informal cultural insights to be shared with subcontractors, superintendents and senior leaders.
- A commitment from the subcontractor and the project to provide any training and upskilling for the further development of the participant in the industry.
- Participation in the Certificate II in Civil Construction Pathways at Holmesglen Tunnelling Institute

KEY TAKEAWAYS

-
- Provide support for the employers on culturally safe ways of working with the participants
 - Provide access to the Cert II in Civil Construction Pathways

Spark's Leadership Role



CASE STUDY

Spark has contributed to the delivery of employment programs in several ways:

- Assistance with providing necessary employment documents for certificate registration and sub-contractor onboarding
- Recruiting of sub-contractors
- Recruiting of participants – from both local and regional Victoria
- Pastoral care during pre-employment and employment
- Liaising with superintendents
- Cultural awareness training for Spark employees and subbies
- Tailored project induction for participants at beginning of pre-employment – with key senior leaders including safety, construction, communications, sustainability. Shared experience of pathways in the industry.
- Arranged Health Checks and testing and post-result support in collaboration with the Willan Foundation
- Support getting the tools needed for employment with subbies
- Regular communication with sub-contractors
- Facilitated meeting with Yellow-Tail services and each subbie who has responsibility for supervising the participants
- Support with transport and accommodations

A successful employment program needs both the Willan Program and a company prepared to invest in rolling out the Program on a project.



Play 5



Ongoing Support



In the fabric of employment programs, ongoing support and mentorship are essential for participants and their respective employers. The general support framework is:

**Check in two times in
first two weeks with
participant + employer**

**Check in once more
over next two weeks with
participant + employer**

**Check in monthly for
another five months with
participant + employer**

Important to share the framework with employers so they understand the importance of themselves and the participants attending and then:

- Meet with the participant first in a relaxed, safe environment – ask how things are going.
- Meet with the employer separately.
- Then talk together.

A direct line of communication should be maintained between the employer, Willan Foundation, Project and participant in event of any issues that can be addressed through the Willan Mentors.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Ensure you are resourced and have the people able to provide ongoing support
- Create an environment where the participants feels safe and able to talk about how they are doing