The Community Services Skilling Plan team is working on a diverse range of workforce and sector development initiatives for the Department of Communities, Home and Community Care (HACC) Services.

This HACC initiative is a key commitment under the HACC Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Service Development Plan and involves showcasing best practice HACC Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander service delivery models to promote innovative and positive service delivery practices to meet the cultural needs of their communities and build cultural capacity within the HACC sector.

This is the second of three publications that are distributed to all HACC organisations.

Through these publications HACC organisations and service providers have the opportunity to showcase their initiatives and to learn of activities and service models other HACC services are implementing. Our contact number is 1800 835 866.

Tracks artwork and story © Alana Manns, Mandandanji nation, 2009

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Good Governance: The importance of getting it right

Warringnu Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Corporation has been operating in Charters Towers for 18 years and has developed significantly during this time. When Warringnu was originally established, a small range of services was delivered to just 20 clients and the organisation was constantly looking for a property they could call home. Today Warringnu delivers a range of services to over 120 clients. These include centre-based respite, social support, transport, domestic assistance and home maintenance. They are also the proud owners of their own house and respite centre. Debbie Urquhart, Manager of Warringnu, says “If we did not have our governance right, we would not have all that we have today – our house, our respite centre and our buses.”

Warringnu invests in a range of strategies to support good governance. A number of the Warringnu staff including Debbie have completed the Certificate III in Governance and the Introduction to Governance workshop delivered by the Office of the Registrar of Indigenous Corporations (ORIC). “Governance training is not cheap, but it is really important,” says Debbie.

Board members at Warringnu also participate in governance training. Board members need to know a range of things including the organisation’s responsibilities around finance, government reporting and standards. Debbie provides training to board members on their roles and responsibilities and also arranges for an external trainer to provide training on governance to board members every couple of years.

“Some board members are in their 70s and they don’t want to do a Certificate in Governance. They just want to know the basics and they want the information simplified”. Warringnu has developed a Handbook for Board of Directors which provides simplified and clear information on their roles and responsibilities and on a range of organisational policies.

Debbie has also found a range of resources on the internet that she uses to help inform and train the board. These include an Indigenous Governance Toolkit that has been developed by Reconciliation Australia. “When we have board meetings we often refer to the Indigenous Governance Toolkit when an issue comes up.” When Warringnu is faced with a more complex governance issue they always call on their governing body ORIC for support. “We email ORIC when we have a governance issue that we don’t understand and they always get back to us,” says Debbie. “They even came to our Annual General Meeting one year and provided us with some advice on governance.”

Debbie suggests that organisations wishing to strengthen their governance should consider the following:

- Understand your governing body and stay in contact with them. Don’t be afraid to contact them if you don’t understand a ruling or your obligations under the constitution.
- Review your policies on governance and keep them updated.
- Ensure new board members understand governance and simplify information so they do understand. Don’t just hand them a book on governance. Take the time to go through governance handbooks with them.
- A board needs to be confident in the manager, and the manager needs to make sure that they keep everything up-to-date. Managers can do this by regularly checking emails, following the news and communicating with their Home and Community Care (HACC) area manager. Networking is a really important part of staying informed, and
- Practice accountability on a regular basis and don’t get relaxed about it. Stay on top of your reporting and quality requirements.
LifeTec showed Rocky how to modify the seat of his boat.

LifeTec Occupational Therapist, Jamie Matveyeff, showing Rocky a range of pressure cushions.

LifeTec demonstrating a range of products to assist with everyday living.
LifeTec Queensland is a not-for-profit, HACC funded organisation that provides information, education and advice on assistive technologies. Assistive technologies are devices that can help improve the quality of life, functional independence, and the safety and wellbeing of older people and younger people living with a disability. LifeTec conducts regular outreach visits to communities, where they take products and disseminate information about assistive technology options to regional and remote parts of Queensland.

LifeTec recently visited the Northern Peninsula Area and the Thursday Islands where they were busy talking to both community groups and individuals. One of the people LifeTec assisted during the visit was Rocky (Robert) who was referred to LifeTec by Queensland Health Occupational Therapist, Robyn.

LifeTec worked with Robyn and Rocky, who has paraplegia, to identify and resolve a number of issues relating to Rocky’s mobility and a recent pressure injury.

LifeTec assisted Rocky in the following ways:

- by demonstrating a static pressure care mattress and trialling two pressure cushions to relieve his pressure injuries. Rocky was given verbal and written instructions on how to use and adjust the pressure cushions. LifeTec arranged funding through the Medical Aids Subsidy Scheme (MASS) program to purchase the pressure care mattress.
- by giving him advice and information on lightweight sports/active use wheelchairs that would resist the extreme environmental demands of the region (salt water, sand, heat etc.)
- by providing advice on modifications to the aluminium bench in his boat, believing it to be the cause of his pressure injuries.

The advice and supports LifeTec offered Rocky will assist him to continue to live comfortably and independently within the community.

LifeTec also visited the Thursday Island HACC Centre where a number of clients were very interested in devices that could assist them with their arts and crafts. “Many of the HACC clients come to the centre for the social experience, and arts and craft plays a big role in this,” said Jamie, LifeTec Occupational Therapist. “Too often we are focused on the functional rather than the recreational activities such as arts and crafts which is something that many of the HACC clients in the Thursday Islands really value and get so much enjoyment from.” An embroidery magnifier which hangs around the neck, leaving your hands free to embroider, was a particular hit amongst HACC clients in the Thursday Islands.

LifeTec can deliver a number of community presentations to clients and carers during their outreach visits. These include falls prevention, mobility, transfers, communication and Great Gadgets. The Great Gadgets presentation provides an introduction to a variety of products to help with everyday tasks including dressing, meal time, transport and mobility. LifeTec does not sell any of the products they demonstrate.

LifeTec can also deliver interactive, hands-on, skill development workshops on assistive technology for health care professionals during their outreach visits.

Contact LifeTec on 1300 885 886 to find out when they will be visiting your area next.
Yarrabah Aged Persons Hostel delivers comprehensive community care to over 80 people living in the Yarrabah Community. The Hostel facilities are used to deliver HACC centre-based respite and for the preparation of meals-on-wheels for HACC and CACP’s clients living in the Yarrabah community.

Clients and staff from Yarrabah Aged Persons Hostel out and about after the Cyclone
Yarrabah is an Aboriginal community with just over 4000 people. It is about a 45 minute drive south-east of Cairns and is separated from Cairns by the Murray Prior Range and an inlet to the Coral Sea. The coastal location of Yarrabah saw Yarrabah Aged Persons Hostel preparing for the onset of Cyclone Yasi earlier this year.

Yarrabah Aged Persons Hostel had received warnings from the government earlier in the year of some severe weather events in the upcoming 2010/2011 summer season. They successfully applied for a grant through the Department of Health and Ageing to trim trees surrounding the hostel grounds.

Preparing the grounds of the hostel was an important preventative step as Yarrabah Aged Persons Hostel not only provides a home to 15 low and high care residents, but is also a provider of Community Aged Care Packages (CACP), an Older People Action Program and a HACC program. The hostel facilities are used to deliver HACC centre-based respite and for the preparation of meals-on-wheels for HACC and CACPs clients living in the Yarrabah community.

When a cyclone watch was declared on Monday 31 January, a warning order was issued to staff, many of whom decided to shelter at the hostel. Staff at Yarrabah Aged Persons hostel are multi-skilled and their presence at the hostel during the cyclone meant that services could continue to be delivered. Hostel residents also chose to stay during the cyclone, whilst HACC clients remained in their own homes which were mainly located on higher and safer grounds. All necessary supplies including food were ordered and delivered or picked up on the Tuesday and Wednesday, and Cyclone Yasi crossed the north coast of Queensland in the early hours of Thursday, 3 February 2011.

Yarrabah Aged Person Hostel survived the cyclone with no damage to the grounds and minimal disruption to HACC services. In fact, the hostel not only continued to deliver care, support and meals to their clients in the community, they also supplied midday meals to approximately 25 SES and council workers for three days. “In the overall scheme of things, we were lucky we didn’t incur a direct hit,” said James Canuto, manager of Yarrabah Aged Persons Hostel.

Whilst Yarrabah Aged Persons Hostel continued to successfully function in the onset and aftermath of the cyclone, the staff and management at the hostel were able to identify a few areas that could be improved for the next storm season.

Lessons learnt included the need:

- for a larger fuel container for the generator. The current generator’s fuel capacity is 80 litres which lasts for approximately 12 hours
- to ensure all aged care equipment including the generator is serviced regularly
- to arrange alternative means for accessing finances in the event of an emergency to relieve personal pressures on staff, and
- to maintain a current list of important contacts including local council representatives and account, human resource and IT managers.

“It is not the time to be critical of anyone’s performances before and after the event,” said James. “We need to learn from the mistakes and fix them before the next crisis.” Yarrabah Aged Persons Hostel is planning to meet with council and community representatives to ensure effective planning and preparations occur prior to the next summer storm season.

Disaster management planning is not only considered best practice amongst HACC programs; it is also an important component within the Community Care Common Standards. Now is a great time for HACC managers and board members to start discussing disaster management plans with their local councils.
The Ngoonbi Cooperative Service, established in 1975, has grown significantly over the years and today offers a range of programs and supports to the local Kuranda community. These programs include community housing, community support services (e.g. legal services, financial management, employment support), emergency relief, a sports and recreation program and a home and community care (HACC) program. The Ngoonbi Cooperative Service is a Centrelink agency.

The Ngoonbi HACC program delivers a mix of centre-based respite, transport, domestic assistance, home maintenance, respite care, social support, information and support to over 90 clients in the community.

The diversity of services and programs delivered by both the Ngoonbi Cooperative Service and the HACC program means that clients of Ngoonbi are able to receive a wide range of supports from the one place.

The Ngoonbi HACC Program delivers a number of activities in partnership with other programs offered by the Ngoonbi Cooperative Service. “We are a creative agency and we go over and beyond to deal with all the issues in between,” says Ngoonbi HACC Coordinator, Sheryl Quartermaine. “If a client needs advocacy, then the Ngoonbi Community Support Services step in. If a client needs extra services, then we use client coordination to make sure they get that extra support.”

Perhaps one of the most successful partnerships has been between the Ngoonbi HACC and Ngoonbi sports and recreation program. A sports and recreation officer visits the HACC day respite program at least once a month and engages the elderly and younger people with disabilities in a range of exercise programs. The sports and recreation program also assists HACC clients to take regular walks and to participate in an aquatonics class (low impact aerobics) once a week at the Kuranda Aquatic Centre.

The benefits of this partnership have been numerous. “Participants benefit by participating in low impacting exercises and by interacting socially,” says Sheryl. Most importantly, the “HACC clients enjoy the activities with the sports and recreation program and look forward to it each week.”

Exercise programs for the elderly can increase their strength, balance, coordination, mobility and confidence. They also provide a great opportunity for the elderly to get out of the house and socialise.

A partnership between your HACC services and the local sports and recreation program is a great way to increase the overall wellness of Elders in your community.