

Minister's Awards for Excellence Rural and Regional Employers of New Apprentices – Nomination

Business/Employer Details

Business Name: Alice Springs Desert Park and Arrernte Council

Description of Business: Alice Springs Desert Park is a major environmental and tourism facility focusing on Central Australia. It attracts 90,000 visitors per year and is the largest attraction in Alice Springs.

Arrernte Council is an Aboriginal organisation committed to the training and employment of indigenous people.

Business Category:

Alice Springs Desert Park – Cultural & Recreational Services
Arrernte Council – Community Services

Business Address (Postal)

Alice Springs Desert Park
PO Box 2130
Alice Springs. NT. 0871

Arrernte Council
PO Box 8474
Alice Springs. NT. 0871.

Business Address (Physical)

Alice Springs Desert Park
Larapinta Drive
Alice Springs. NT. 0870

Arrernte Council
9 South Tce
Alice Springs. NT. 0870.

New Apprenticeship Details

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|---|---|
| Total Number of Employees: | ASDP - 44 |
| Total Number of New Apprentices: | ASDP Guide Program – 4 |
| Gender of New Apprentices: | 2 male, 2 female |
| Indigenous: | Yes. Restricted to local indigenous people. |
| With a disability: | No. |
| Non-English speaking background: | No. |
| How long have your New Apprentices been with you: | 12 months. |

SELECTION CRITERIA

1. Evidence of a planned approach to supporting New Apprentices in the workplace

A planned induction process

The induction of New Apprentices (NA) at the Alice Springs Desert Park (ASDP) is a formal and documented process.

Prior to the commencement of their apprenticeship, candidates undertake a 4-6 week trial period of work at the Park to determine their suitability and keenness and to allow them to assess their own interest in the field of work prior to commencing as a NA. The candidates remain on Arrernte Council's (AC) Community Development Employment program during this trial.

Selection of NAs is done following the trial period and applicants are required to submit formal applications against selection criteria and to be interviewed to further assess their suitability for the position. They are trained in job application techniques as part of this process.

Once selected as a NA, their formal induction to the work place at ASDP is structured and clearly documented. The process takes several months to cover and has checklists, prompting questions and appropriate written information (see attachments) as well as requiring that the NAs work in most of the areas of the Park to ensure they know all of the Park team and the full operations of the Park. At the end of the process the NAs have a clear understanding of their role at the Park, their Unit's role place within the Park, and the roles and personnel of all other Units at the Park, the Parks and Wildlife Commission of the NT and the Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Environment. They know reporting lines, processes for applying for leave, emergency procedures and all of the appropriate information for working safely and resolving problems in the work place.

A designated supervisor or mentor

The joint nature of the program has created an ideal situation for both AC and ASDP to provide supervisors and mentors with slightly different roles and abilities to provide support, guidance and encouragement.

The NAs are faced with many issues which they may need to overcome if they are to successfully complete their apprenticeships. For most of them, the NA is their first job and they have never before been required to regularly and promptly attend a place of work or school. Most did not have drivers licenses at the commencement of their NA and ASDP is not served by public transport and so the NAs were reliant on family or friends for transport to work. Unemployment and alcohol and other substance abuse is common in the Alice Springs community as is welfare dependence and the NAs are subjected to considerable pressures to conform to this lifestyle rather than work to complete their apprenticeships.

For the NAs to succeed in the face of these pressures both AC and ASDP must provide a highly supportive environment where the development of self-esteem, confidence and a strong work ethic are fundamental to the NAs' growth otherwise the development of their technical skills will never occur. Jodie Clarkson, the Senior Park Guide at ASDP is highly skilled in these areas. She has a very strong emphasis on nurturing every member of her team and a strong team-based approach to management. The rest of the Guide Team in turn demonstrate high levels of support for each other and for the NAs. Excluding the NAs, there are 7 members of the Guide Team, 4 males and 3 females, 4 local Aboriginal people and 3 non-Aboriginal people. This balance is important in ensuring that culturally-appropriate and gender-appropriate support and mentoring is available in the work place.

Outside of the work place, Tony Linn from AC provides supervision and support which goes well beyond that normally provided by a work-place supervisor. Tony works with the NAs to address issues outside of the work place which would otherwise impede the NAs abilities to complete their apprenticeships. This may involve supporting the development of a strong work ethic, assisting with solving transportation problems, negotiating with families to ensure that they support the NAs and implementing financial management arrangements to ensure that the NAs are able to keep and save significant amounts of their income for themselves.

A structured approach to training

The formal and extended induction process is the first part of this process at ASDP and this process of having clearly identified and documented work place training continues through out the course of the whole apprenticeship. The expectations and on-the-job training of the NAs is clearly set out at the beginning of the apprenticeship and this translates down to clear weekly and daily work programs which are designed to ensure that the NAs gain all of the competencies necessary to successfully complete their apprenticeships in the expected time.

The Institute of Aboriginal Development (IAD) is the off-the-job training provider and has significant experience in providing culturally-appropriate training in Tour Guiding. IAD structure their delivery to ensure that the NAs complete a Nationally Accredited Certificate II in Tour Guiding which is directly applicable to the work that the NAs are doing at ASDP and that the local tourism industry requires (See attached example of a Certificate of Academic results). Training at IAD combines classroom based learning with appropriate field trips and hands on learning.

A structured approach to monitor the progress of the New Apprentices

The seven full-time Guides work alongside the NAs to provided training and support and to also monitor their progress as they develop the skills necessary. .

The use of checklists at ASDP also ensures that all aspects of the apprentices training and development are covered during the course of the apprenticeship.

IAD monitors completion of the off-the-job training through assessment of work and attendance records.

Opportunities for the New Apprenticeships to provide input to and feedback on their training.

The supportive, team-based approach within the Guide Unit at ASDP and the combination of male and female and Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal staff ensures that a nurturing, open environment is provided where communication and feedback is actively sought and encouraged.

Having a supervisor with ASDP and one with AC also makes it easier for the NAs to provide feedback because they can choose who they feel most comfortable to speak to depending on the issue.

2. Flexibility in delivering training

Meeting individual New Apprentices needs

A starting point for commencing the New Apprenticeship program in the Guide Unit at ASDP was that the NAs would not be essential for the delivery of the Park's tourism work. The full-time Guide Team is adequate for the operations of the Park and NAs were only taken on to provide training opportunities to assist young local Aboriginal people to enter the tourism industry. This has meant that the sole focus has been on delivering effective training for the NAs allowing almost unlimited flexibility in training delivery. At no stage during their apprenticeships were the NAs required to miss any off-the-job training because of on-the-job requirements. Similarly on-the-job training could be easily adjusted to reinforce the off-the-job learning at particular times.

The joint AC and ASDP approach to these apprenticeships also allowed a high degree of flexibility to meet the cultural requirements of the young Aboriginal people undertaking the apprenticeships. This flexibility ranged from allowing and supporting cultural leave, to providing appropriate working hours to accommodate NAs who because of their home situation were unable to get to work at the normal start times, to assisting with management of the personal finances of the NAs to ensure that they did not lose their income to family and friends.

Relationship between off-the-job and on-the-job training

All of the modules in the Certificate II in Tour Guiding were chosen for their direct relevance to the work and on-the-job training that the NAs undertake at ASDP. Where possible, work programs at ASDP are adjusted to ensure that they are directly relevant to and built on the off-the-job training that the NAs are doing at the time.

Some of the off-the-job training provided by IAD is actually delivered on site at ASDP and other modules or components of modules are delivered by ASDP staff.

3. Success in implementing New Apprenticeships

Ensuring the completion for New Apprentices

Many of the steps taken by ASDP and AC to ensure the completion of the New Apprenticeships have already been outlined in this nomination. They include:

- Careful selection process of appropriate and motivated NAs including pre-employment work trial.
- Planned and thorough induction process which ensures NAs have strong sense of place in the work place and know that they are valued.
- Supportive and nurturing work environment with Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, female and male mentors, supervisors and role models who genuinely care for the well-being and development of the NAs
- Working closely with the ASDP supervisor and other Guides who monitor the development of the required skills on the job.
- Flexible and culturally appropriate work practices and a work-place with experience and skills in employing and training Aboriginal young people.
- Culturally appropriate support outside of the work place, working in the homes with the NAs and their families where appropriate.
- Culturally appropriate and experienced off-the-job training provider.

It was also decided prior to the commencement of this program that the NAs would benefit from peer support from other NAs and so funding allowance was made to take on 4 NAs at the same time and selection ensured that there would be a balanced gender mix. This has been proven to be an important part of the success of the program.

Over and above this is a clear and strong desire on the part of both AC and ASDP to utilise New Apprenticeships to address the issue of indigenous unemployment and the resultant problems that arise from this in the Alice Springs community. The New Apprenticeships were commenced solely with the aim of giving opportunities for young local Aboriginal people to develop the skills necessary to gain permanent and meaningful employment in the tourism industry or in other industries in Central Australia or elsewhere. This focus on outcomes for the NAs rather than for the employer or host-employer has been paramount throughout and has resulted in the successes achieved.

How the business has overcome a difficulty in implementing New Apprenticeships due to being located in a rural or regional community

Many of the issues faced by young Aboriginal people in a community such as Alice Springs have been described elsewhere in this nomination as have the actions taken by ASDP and AC to ensure that these impediments do not hinder the NAs undertaking their apprenticeships. However, in the case of these New Apprenticeships there have been more advantages resulting from living and working in a small community than disadvantages.

This program of New Apprenticeships at ASDP was made possible due to personal contacts and relationships between key players at ASDP, AC and DEWRSB which developed through workshops and meetings on indigenous tourism opportunities and addressing problems with indigenous unemployment in Alice Springs. These relationships would have been more difficult to form in larger cities.

Further the ability to work within the homes of the NAs and with their families to ensure the NAs had the support they needed was only possible because AC is a community based Aboriginal organisation in a small town where everyone knows each other and knows the families and relationships which make up the community.

Again, the small town nature of Alice Springs meant that the vast majority of the communication between the NAs and their supervisor from AC and between the ASDP and AC supervisors was face to face rather than being reliant on less effective communication of phones or emails.

These interpersonal advantages which arise in a small town regional community contribute significantly to the success of the program.

Success in implementing New Apprenticeships

Four NAs commenced their training as Park Guides twelve months ago and only one was dropped from the program. The other three have now successfully completed their Certificate II in Tour Guiding and will complete their on-the-job training within a month.

All three have shown outstanding improvements in self-esteem, confidence and work readiness. They are now capable Tour Guides with the knowledge and skills necessary to deliver cultural and environmental tourism products to an international and demanding audience.

They have proven their ability to persevere with work and training and are now ready for full time employment or higher level training. All three are now of a standard where they will win permanent employment as Guides at ASDP when those positions arise and as a consequence are at the standard required by the rest of the tourism industry in Central Australia.

Should they wish to continue to develop their careers in tourism or change to other careers, they are now confident employable young people with good skills and excellent work reputations.