Module 1 Self as Worker in the Workplace

The ways that non-Indigenous workers interact with Indigenous Australians individuals, families and groups is the central theme of this training package. In module 1, workshop participants reflect on their interactions and relationships with Indigenous Australians.

Each person will have had his/her own unique experiences and will have been in contact with different people who have influenced their beliefs and feelings.

From these experiences and contacts, non-Indigenous workers will have formed opinions about Indigenous Australians - even if they have had no direct contact with Indigenous Australians before. These opinions, beliefs and feelings will influence how they work, especially in new situations.

From the beginning of the workshop it is important that workers start to acknowledge the influence of past experiences and present values in their professional practice, and especially the new learning situation, so that if any change in behaviour is needed, the change can be acted upon quickly.

This module provides workers with an opportunity to acknowledge their experiences and values.

Module 2 Past and present

Having focused on the experiences of the worker, we turn to the experiences of Indigenous Australians in Australia. After colonisation, legislative policies and practices were used to control all aspects of the lives of Indigenous Australians. Many Indigenous Australians remember this past vividly through their own experiences and those of their relatives who hand down stories through generations. The experiences of Indigenous Australians in mainstream society today in their interactions with government departments, private businesses and community organisations is affected by this history.

Much of the current situation can be related to these legislative policies. For those non-Indigenous people working with (or intending to work with Indigenous Australians) an appreciation of past policies and practices assists in a deeper understanding of factors still affecting Indigenous Australians.
Module 3 Identity and Everyday Ways of Life

It is widely acknowledged that the ways of going about the everyday business of life differs markedly between traditional Indigenous Australians and non-indigenous people. It is often said that all but the traditional, tribal, remote, or desert Indigenous Australian person has lost his/her culture. If we accept that the everyday way of conducting life, bringing up children, providing our families with food and shelter, leisure and recreation, passing on history and beliefs in God or other creative beings, constitutes culture then everyone has a culture, not just tribal people. All it means is that we are different, and different groups have different ways of doing these everyday things. Often groups do things in a similar way, so there are many similarities too.

Non-Indigenous workers mostly have European or Asian backgrounds and have different ways of doing everyday activities from Indigenous Australians (includes traditional Indigenous Australians as well as those living contemporary urban and rural lifestyles). Furthermore, the law of Australia is drawn from a specific country (Anglo-Celtic Britain), and this law determines how things should be done in Australia. Non-indigenous workers need a greater understanding of the diversity of Indigenous Australian cultures to develop teaching and learning policies and practices that are more effective in taking account of Indigenous Australian contents.

It is important for teachers to recognise differences, and see where they may cause conflict or difficulty, as well as recognising the similarities that make us all human.

Module 4 Communicating

Within cultures, communication styles reflect accepted ways of interacting and doing. Often cultures have their own languages, or at least, styles of speaking, and ways of passing on information to its own members.

Communication is often a significant barrier to good relations between cultures because the potential for misunderstanding is great. Recognising possible barriers (e.g. language and communication styles) and learning ways to overcome them by improving our own communication styles and behaviours are important.

Module 5 Relating

For many reasons there is an imbalance between the status of many Indigenous Australians and non-Indigenous workers. One imbalance relates to history where government departments had ultimate control over the lives of Indigenous Australians. Another relates to the present organisational or bureaucratic structures. Again, another relates to the different understanding of, or familiarity with bureaucratic processes between many Indigenous Australians and non-Indigenous workers.

How can workers acknowledge and attend to differences in power or status when interacting with Indigenous Australians? A good working relationship is needed to provide services in ways that assists Indigenous Australians to be self-reliant and self-determining.

This module focuses on the creation of better relationships by finding ways to overcome relationship barriers.

Module 6 Working in my Local Area

In Western Australia there is some general Statewide data comparing Indigenous Australians and non-Indigenous populations (e.g. demographic information) which is useful for workers. However, because of the diversity of Indigenous Australian groups, it is important for non-Indigenous workers to be aware of such differences in their specific localities.

This module provides workers with tools to acquire information about ways of working in different local situations so as to accommodate local cultures and customs. This information assists a worker to adapt her/his work more effectively to the realities of the local situation.

Module 7 Working Together - Planning

How can Indigenous Australians and non-Indigenous people work together in ways that are satisfying and productive? This session applies what has been learned in Modules 1-6, to devise practical strategies for recognising where the potential barriers might be and working together to learn ways to overcome them. There are no easy answers and the facilitators won't have simple, quick solutions to problems that have been generations in the making. This module provides methods to analyse and plan for different ways of working. Each person is ultimately responsible for this task; facilitators and participants can work together to devise some plans and guidelines for positive changes.

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