

Jerrboongun Residential Support Model

Residential Model for supporting Homeless and at risk Indigenous Youth



The Jerrboongun Residential Support Model was originally developed in 2004 for the Jerrboongun Unity Foundation as a model providing a family home and environment for homeless Indigenous Youth in Melbourne, Victoria. Between 2005 and 2009 Jerrboongun Unity Foundation ran two homes using the Indigenous Homelessness Program model to care for 15 homeless and at risk Indigenous Youth.

Working from a non-judgmental acceptance based model of care and support, the Jerrboongun Homelessness Program is unique in that it provides support, leadership and direction to homeless indigenous youth aged between 15-22 years, encouraging participants to become role models to their family and friends.

In July 2003, two Indigenous athletes (Allan Murray and Xavier Clarke) set out to develop an initiative which would assist making the lives of homeless and traumatised indigenous youth manageable. Having researched a number of models and community organisations, Allan and Xavier approached Peter King from the Centre for Evidence Based Mental Health to develop an intensive residential program that had the flexibility to meet the complex need of homeless indigenous youth. Allan, Xavier and Peter also approached architect Sean Godsell to design a culturally sensitive home with extensive community consultation and consideration of findings from the *Discussion Paper on Indigenous Homelessness in Victoria* which was prepared for the Aboriginal Housing Board of Victoria (May 2001).

Needs identified during consultation with Indigenous communities, youth and health professionals

- A model to build lasting relationships with indigenous youth and develop a level of trust with the youth requiring homelessness and social and emotional well-being services
- To identify activities to keep the young people active and engaged including special guest speakers, bowling, lunch, sports, and the arts
- Support the physical, emotional or directive necessary for at risk Indigenous youth
- Identification of a model to empower Indigenous youth in making decisions with consideration of choices available, influences, challenges and consequences of decisions
- To involve people from all walks of life in the development and understanding of Indigenous youth and Indigenous culture
- Development of strategies to reduce the use of drugs and alcohol in the Indigenous youth community
- Development of an inclusive model which can be replicated in regional and remote regions of Australia



As a result of evaluation of existing programs and extensive consultation with the local Indigenous community two homes comprising of a primary carer, a support carer, up to six young people, supported by a voluntary Community Committee drawn from members of the local community were developed.

The program has a focus on supporting Indigenous youth within all dimensions of their lives. Supporting young people's health, education, identity, relationships, social skills, emotional development, and self care are a focus of this program. The strength of the program lies in the commitment to cultural, community and family values. This translates into long-term love, nurturing and caring - together with the practicalities of feeding, clothing, educating and socialising. The young people are encouraged to be active in school, work or self advancement.

The program also draws on the key elements of Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT) to support young people who struggle to use effective coping strategies. DBT is an empirically based treatment model that has proven effective in treating such young people. DBT empowers program participants with a portable skill set that enables them to

improve the quality of their life and sustain these changes into adulthood. The approach and emphasises on a non-judgmental validating environment supporting Indigenous youth and their families has been achieved through the following strategies:

- Focus on treating behaviors not diagnosis
- Validating, nonjudgmental approach
- Self-assessing skills and improved self-knowledge
- Portable skill set: Targeting emotional dysregulation, interpersonal effectiveness, distress tolerance, and mindfulness
- Behavioral consultation team
- Empirically based
- Individual, family and group therapy protocols
- Emphasis on relapse prevention
- Goal: Gaining a life worth living



Ultimately, the program provides long-term care and support within a holistic environment, with 24-hours-a-day, seven-days-a-week emotional support for homeless and at risk Indigenous Youth.

With success and the support of the corporate community, this project has provided a platform for further homes throughout Australia. With the recommendations of the West Australian and Victorian Parliaments the Jerrboongun Homelessness Program looks set to provide a model for Homeless programs in Indigenous communities throughout Australia.

For inquiries regarding the Jerrboongun Residential Support Model please contact

Peter King
Director, Centre for Mental Health Education
PO Box 6
Hampton VIC 3188
Email peter@cmhe.org

Application to date

- Organisation:** Jerrboongun Unity Foundation (2005-09)
- Locations:** Brighton & Frankston, Victoria
- Population:** Male and female Indigenous youth aged 15-22 years at risk of homelessness with social and emotional wellbeing concerns
- Program Funding:** \$300,000 pa through community financial contributions (primary source of funding), Family Life, Lighthouse Foundation Ltd, Foot Solutions, Deft Clothing, Kiwanis (Brighton), AFL Players Association, Linen House, RMIT University and Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations.

The Jerrboongun program supported 15 at risk Indigenous Youth and ceased in early 2009 following a down-turn in donations and financial support resulting in closure of the program.

- Organisation:** Thiess (2010 to current)
- Locations:** Brisbane, Queensland
- Population:** 1st Year Indigenous Apprentices employed at Thiess
- Program Funding:** The Thiess program supports 6 Indigenous Youth entering an apprenticeship or traineeship with Thiess and is funded privately by Thiess (\$90,000pa) and a small charge to program participants.