

(0:00) Welcome to the NESAs Now podcast, your front row seat to insights, innovation and inspiring (0:07) voices from across the employment services sector. (0:10) Tune in as we explore the issues that matter most with real conversations that drive impact (0:16) and progress. (0:27) So, Hi Paul.

(0:28) Hello. (0:29) Lovely to see you and thank you for giving your time today. (0:33) Absolutely.

(0:34) So, the NARI Institute, the NESAs, has had a longstanding relationship with the NARI Institute (0:42) and we're looking to build that and take that to even greater heights. (0:48) Yes. (0:48) So, can you tell us a little bit about the NARI Institute? (0:52) You're our valued partner and, you know, what do you do? (0:58) We started 25 years ago, myself and two other teachers.

(1:02) I'm a teacher, so three of us decided to set up a non-profit to help. (1:07) We were at the coalface of seeing what was happening to our young people and we thought (1:12) with our expertise and our passion and enthusiasm to make change, we did that and we're still (1:18) going 25 years later. (1:19) So, we have a broad approach to community.

(1:25) So, we help all facets of the Aboriginal community in terms of youth. (1:30) We've got a focus on youth, particularly in education, but now we've diversified into (1:35) training and employment because we see that as a core function of changing the gap, to (1:40) close the gap. (1:42) So, if people want a job that feels good, gives them independence, all that sort of stuff.

(1:46) But getting a job, as we know, isn't as easy as it is, so that requires training. (1:53) And to do that, which is why Nisa came knocking, we believe that if we provided appropriate (1:59) and cultural, effective training for our providers, they'd be better at helping our (2:05) people get jobs. (2:06) So, that's why we still focus on youth and the community, but we've strengthened our (2:13) hold in the training sphere.

(2:14) The Employment Services, it's a broad church, it's a broad range of programs from youth (2:22) to parents, to people with disabilities, skills, education, English language, digital (2:31) training, it covers the lot. (2:34) And there are thousands upon thousands of First Nations people who access these services. (2:43) Have you had any feedback from your community and from the community about Employment Services? (2:51) What they like about the Employment Services they engage with? (2:55) And, you know, some of the things that they find that they could, you know, suggest some (3:01) improvements.

(3:02) The first thing they enjoy, our people enjoy, is the support. (3:06) It's so important. (3:07) Some people who leave school early don't know how to write a job letter, all those (3:15) things that we take for granted.

(3:18) And the Employment Services providers do wonderful work there. (3:22) Getting to understand the First Nations client is so important. (3:26) In fact, it's pivotal to get good outcomes for both the service provider and the client (3:34) because if you understand your client better, understand their worldview, where they're (3:39) coming from, what they need, what they require for their family and themselves, you'll obviously (3:44) provide a better service.

(3:46) So, probably the only thing is that there's probably not enough Indigenous Employment (3:52) Service providers and officers spread throughout. (3:56) Not dedicated just to Indigenous people, but they would like to see, we have a saying in (4:01) schools, black kids love seeing black teachers. (4:04) So, with the Employment Services, if they've got an Indigenous person that they can communicate (4:09) and connect with that person, it just makes them feel more comfortable, which is so important.

(4:14) And I'm sure that can be related to other diversities as well. (4:18) So, to be comfortable, you've got to be comfortable. (4:22) Then you can tell them what you want, what you need, what you want to do, and then the (4:25) service provider can obviously tailor a program to suit them.

(4:28) It's quite interesting what you're saying, being comfortable. (4:32) So, looking at the six modules that NARI has produced and kindly shared and we're hosting (4:39) on the NISA Academy website, we have six individual modules and then it's offered as a bundle. (4:46) So, there's an orientation approach, which is foundation level, if you want to think (4:51) of it, that's how I think of it anyway, and then there's that competence level, which (4:56) when you do all of them together, it really does give you a more comprehensive and complete (5:01) understanding.

(5:04) So, why were some of those modules chosen, particularly the communication module and (5:11) the interacting with the community module, but also the one that's talking about shame (5:18) factor? (5:18) Yeah. (5:19) So, being a teacher for 40 years, lecturing at universities for over 20 years, I've written (5:27) courses for universities throughout Australia over the last 20 years. (5:31) So, these courses were developed based on experience, feedback from different clients, (5:40) undergraduate teachers, postgraduate teachers, people in the community.

(5:43) So, this was taken and we collected all this knowledge and put it in a package that would (5:49) be effective, relatable and also understandable for people. (5:55) So, the course doesn't offer any, doesn't intend to shame anybody, doesn't intend to (6:01) guilt anybody or make them feel bad about anything. (6:04) It's for our service providers to understand us, understand what makes us tick, understand (6:13) how to communicate.

(6:14) Communication and engagement is so important because that is the bread and butter of all (6:18) our service providers is that if you're not an effective communicator, irrespective of (6:23) who your client is, you're not going to get the desired outcome. (6:27) So, learning about another culture is so important and I thought we would do it in such a way (6:33) that it's a linear trajectory where we can have foundational knowledge and build on that (6:39) to get you comfortable and confident as the course goes on. (6:44) You go, well, I didn't know that.

(6:45) So, if I had a dollar for every time someone said that, I wouldn't be sitting here. (6:48) I'd be sitting on a beach somewhere. (6:51) But a lot of people say, I didn't know that, which is good.

(6:53) I love sharing that knowledge. (6:55) I love people getting new learnings. (6:57) So, the course is designed based on feedback.

(7:03) So, we didn't do it just ad hoc. (7:06) It's based on evidence and that's important. (7:09) And I think what is really great about it is that it is really helpful to the employment (7:17) services but equally applicable if one is in an individual support or an aged care setting, (7:24) a community services setting, you know, working in any service provision that is about service (7:31) and support to First Nations.

(7:34) So, I have done some of your training and I have done quite a bit of other cultural (7:40) awareness training. (7:41) But what I really loved about the NARI modules were that they didn't feel Queensland-centric. (7:49) Even though you're a Queensland boy in a Queensland company, they didn't feel Queensland-centric.

(7:55) They were very inclusive about whatever group, culture or community, whether it's in Western (8:03) Australia, you know, far north Queensland or down in Tasmania. (8:08) I found that was relatable. (8:10) Was that quite deliberate? (8:11) Absolutely, because a long time ago when I was working for Reconciliation Australia, (8:18) I used to travel Australia to travel to every community over three years and learning all (8:23) the nuances of different tribes and different language, different words, different understandings, (8:30) protocols.

(8:32) So, to encapsulate that and put that in a training package would be too convoluted, (8:37) too complicated for people to understand. (8:39) So, I made it specifically generic that can be applied throughout Australia. (8:44) So, it helps everybody.

(8:46) So, at least they would be prepared or understand some of the basics when they go into more (8:51) of a culture and community. (8:53) They go, I get that, I know what they're doing, I understand that. (8:56) Some people who are in specific areas, like we had a client in northern New South Wales (9:02) wanted us to apply the training to suit their mob and I engaged with the local mob down (9:07) there in Grafton and had some contacts there.

(9:10) So, we can specialise it for certain regions, but we've deliberately made it generic. (9:15) To make it easier for everybody. (9:18) And I guess that actually creates the opportunity for individuals to take the learning and build (9:23) the local relationships and really contextualise it into their area.

(9:27) And that's how you're doing your service provision. (9:31) Now, Paul, you mentioned school kids and people leaving school. (9:37) We were having a conversation before about young people and when they leave school that (9:43) they often have or they can experience uncertainty about their pathway and the like.

(9:50) And I'm thinking of some of our services, particularly our apprenticeship services, (9:54) going to schools and interact within that school to create vocational pathways. (10:02) So, what are some suggestions or some of your observations regarding engaging with kids (10:09) at the school level or in a school environment to encourage them to think along a vocational pathway? (10:17) Because tertiary's not for everyone. (10:19) That's right.

(10:20) But vocational is a really strong, solid and highly valuable pathway to a career. (10:29) And I think you'll find more First Nations students are moving towards that, which is fine. (10:34) I work in the school system and it doesn't bother me whether they go vocational or tertiary (10:40) as long as they're doing something positive.

(10:43) With regards to your question, I would identify the key contact in every school that deals (10:49) directly with those First Nations students. (10:52) Get your background information and try to undertake some engagement with the family (10:57) and the community of that school. (10:59) See what the vibe is between the mob and the school and build up the confidence and awareness (11:06) and say, tell them what you're there for, be honest with what you're doing.

(11:11) And you'll get a couple of kids wanting to do it. (11:14) If you're there to sell a story or to sell a vision or whatever, be genuine. (11:21) But also be realistic too.

(11:25) You'll find a lot of kids will come up, I don't know if my grades are good enough. (11:29) And then you go, well, we can help you with that. (11:33) Because a lot of people are a bit scared of trying something new, particularly First Nations, (11:37) if they don't feel they've got the skills to do it.

(11:40) But if you provide an opportunity or an answer to say, hey, look, we can help you get there, (11:45) then you'll pique their interest. (11:48) And if you think from the parents' side, if you can guarantee the parents that you're (11:52) going to continue to support them to get where they need to go, you've got them won. (11:55) So that's probably my best advice.

(11:57) Right at the start, you indicated that for anyone, having a job creates an anchor. (12:05) These are my words, but it creates an anchor, it creates a purpose, (12:09) and it creates people's opportunity for greater self-esteem and confidence (12:15) and being proud about what they do. (12:18) So that's from the individual's perspective.

(12:22) The employer's also part of the equation there. (12:25) So what are some potential, you know, would you suggest employers could get value (12:32) out of the cultural awareness package and why, and in the workplace? (12:38) So it's not just employers, it's the workplace and colleagues? (12:41) Yeah, culture's important. (12:43) And I don't mean Aboriginal culture in the traditional sense.

(12:45) I'm talking about workplace culture. (12:47) If it's a happy place, if diversity is shared and valued and respected (12:52) and not challenged in respect of what race or religion you are, (12:56) you've got a happy workplace. (12:57) People feel included.

(12:59) They feel part of something, a team that's doing something good. (13:02) So if you've got that, and it's important that with employers, you know, (13:08) leading employers and people who lead companies, their leadership should reflect that. (13:15) They should embrace diversity.

(13:17) They should embrace learning about the people who work with you, (13:21) where they come from, what makes them tick, how you best can support them, (13:25) how can you help them maybe progress. (13:29) That's important. (13:30) So if you look after your workforce, you look after your company, (13:35) everyone's happy, and productivity scores.

(13:38) So what are some typical or examples of ways people can create a trust relationship (13:47) or, you know, what are the things to do and the things, more importantly, (13:52) to possibly avoid? (13:54) And I think the training actually goes into some of those elements of, you know, (13:59) what doesn't work. (14:01) Are you talking about a boss at a job or a... (14:04) No, just in terms of if you've got in a community. (14:07) So if we have some of our teams who may go out to a community meeting, you know, (14:15) what are some of the things they should do and not do? (14:17) The first thing you should do is do a recon trip.

(14:20) Yeah. (14:21) And find out as much background about the place, the politics, (14:27) which is unfortunately quite real in a lot of our communities. (14:30) Find out who the influencers are in town or the people with the biggest voice.

(14:35) Might not be the most important voice, but they might have the biggest voice. (14:39) Find out who's who in the zoo, so to speak. (14:44) I would do that before you go to... (14:46) You can't just organise a meeting with one person there and rock up (14:50) and then everyone expects, you know, the next guy to be teachers.

(14:56) Do your recon, do your homework. (14:59) Find out who's who in the zoo. (15:01) Find out what people are interested in.

(15:03) So when you go there, you are totally armed with all the information, local knowledge, (15:08) so you will cop some curly questions. (15:11) At least you'll be ready for it. (15:12) At least you'll know where it's coming from.

(15:14) At least you know how to answer it straight away without standing there with a blank face. (15:18) That's so important. (15:20) So don't rock up unannounced.

(15:21) Don't rock up at a day's notice. (15:23) And don't rock up thinking you have all the answers because you don't. (15:27) That's so important.

(15:28) People do not like... (15:30) Our people don't like smart arrogance. (15:33) Explain to people that you're there to work with them, (15:36) not for them, not to them, with them. (15:40) It's so important.

(15:41) And that's a bit fatiguing for some of our communities that, you know, (15:46) the last thing they want is organisations coming there and saying, (15:49) we're here to help you. (15:52) Don't say that. (15:53) What should they say? (15:54) We're here to work with you.

(15:56) We're here to listen. (15:59) We're here to... (16:00) The most important word you said in that sentence was listen. (16:03) We did.

(16:04) We're here to listen to you to see if we can help you. (16:09) We have a certain skill set that we can offer. (16:12) We just don't know whether we can help you.

(16:15) But you tell us what you need, what you would like, (16:17) and we can tell you if we can help you. (16:20) Don't make any guarantees. (16:23) Like I said, don't say you've got all the answers.

(16:25) If you listen to them and respond to what they're saying, (16:29) the dialogic exchange will be much better. (16:32) And the relationship will build from that. (16:35) And just be honest and personal.

(16:40) Genuine. (16:41) Genuine, yes. (16:43) Authentic.

(16:45) We can pick that a mile away. (16:47) And I think that message comes through loud and clear in the training. (16:51) People who've maybe completed cultural awareness training in the past (16:56) and say, well, I've done it, (16:58) why should they do it again? (17:03) And what can the NARI course and the NARI Institute course offer (17:07) that is, you know, potentially new insights (17:12) or, as you said, learn something new? (17:17) Their courses aren't as nuanced as ours.

(17:22) It's probably as research. (17:23) A lot of it comes from a first-person narrative. (17:26) Whereas we talk about things that are real (17:31) in terms of a lot of the courses and other cultural awareness, (17:35) they're personal stories that affected that person (17:38) so they felt compelled to write a course.

(17:42) Ours has an academic lens. (17:44) Ours has a, you know, best evidence lens. (17:48) And we know it works.

(17:50) We know it doesn't work. (17:51) And we know in the last 15 years (17:54) that there's been a huge uptake in cultural awareness now. (17:58) Since RRA's done that, the Reconciliation Action Plan, (18:02) one of the key determinants is you have to do cultural awareness.

(18:07) So a lot of people are ticking boxes (18:09) as opposed to engaging in new learning. (18:13) Big difference. (18:14) So ours is new learning.

(18:15) It isn't a ticker box. (18:17) But it will enlighten you to go, (18:19) wow, I didn't know that before, (18:22) that I know this will help me be better at my job, (18:26) plus doing it on a personal journey of learning. (18:29) So that's probably the separation between us and other courses.

(18:35) So, like, ours is tertiary level too, so that helps. (18:38) Yes. Yes.

(18:40) And as I said, I have done lots of courses in the past, (18:45) but I did learn something new, (18:48) which is always a good sort of feedback. (18:53) Where's a good place for someone to go (18:56) if, after doing the training, their interest is piqued (19:01) and they want to actually, you know, understand a bit more (19:04) and find out more? (19:05) Are there any particular resources? (19:09) I'm sure we have a page on our website (19:11) in the modules called Furthering Your Discovery. (19:15) So if there's something that piques your interest, (19:17) you can click on that and it goes to videos, books, essays, (19:22) articles, papers, stuff like that.

(19:25) So, in other words, it doesn't stop with the six modules. (19:30) There is that intensity. (19:33) It's a trigger for you if you do have an interest (19:35) in any aspect of it, any subtopic in the modules.

(19:39) But there's stuff there for you to do your own further journey. (19:43) So it's important. (19:44) And the thing I've found with some of the content (19:47) is I think it will help people who are launching to create (19:52) potentially their first Reconciliation Action Plan.

(19:55) And we've done that. We still do that. (19:58) We've got quite a few RAPAs, we call them.

(20:01) We've got a few RAP clients and I do a lot of schools as well, (20:05) but helping the corporates understand their social, (20:10) you know, corporate responsibilities. (20:11) I get a buzz helping because they go, (20:15) we want to be part of this. (20:17) And that's where the RAP program comes in.

(20:20) It's not about feeling sorry or having best intentions, (20:23) it's putting those intentions into action (20:25) and actually actively doing and contributing (20:28) in their sphere of influence to close the gap. (20:31) And is that where potentially the genesis of the respect (20:35) and the inspire and the stage of the plan (20:40) which reflects the maturity of the organisation has come from? (20:44) A lot of people don't know that the RAP came from Canada. (20:48) Yes.

(20:49) It was built from Canada because the Canadians (20:51) did it over their First Nations. (20:53) It took them something like 28 years to, (20:55) across every demographic, every population set, (21:00) all across the whole part of the country. (21:02) And they've got, you know, Aboriginal banks, universities, (21:06) everything over there now.

(21:07) So they're doing really well. (21:08) It's a bit of a slow burn over here, (21:11) but there is an impact happening, albeit slow. (21:17) And there's lots and lots of tools and resources (21:19) on the Reconciliation Australia website.

(21:22) Absolutely. (21:22) It's an excellent website that people can access (21:24) if they're wanting to share and supplement their knowledge. (21:28) Absolutely.

(21:29) Excellent. (21:29) All right. (21:30) Well, thank you, Paul.

(21:31) I've really appreciated your time. (21:33) I know you're a very busy man, (21:35) and the Ngari Institute has a lot of activity on the go. (21:40) And it's not just the training and cultural awareness, (21:44) but you are a very diverse and expert organisation (21:48) and, of course, available to help and support (21:51) our individual members and providers (21:53) should they have any requirements for a RAP (21:57) or other sort of training and activity.

(22:01) So thanks for your time. (22:02) Thank you.