

Person-centred, strength based approach to workforce development

Xenia Girdler, consultant with Global Reconciliation, has been working in Australia's Northern Territory for the past six years designing and delivering a range of education and training programs for community service workers. In February 2016, Xenia was engaged by Sunrise Health Service Aboriginal corporation in Katherine to design a workforce development framework to support a new, community-based worker role.

[Sunrise Health Service \(SHS\)](#) is an Aboriginal controlled corporation which provides medical and allied health to 14 remote communities in the Eastern region of greater Katherine. The catchment area stretched across 75,000 square kilometers and provides services to over three thousand clients. This new entry-level health worker position required a multi-skilled workforce able to deliver consistent, quality, on-the-ground support to SHS remote health clinics.



Underpinning SHS approach to health and community care is [The Sunrise Way](#), which emphasises the need for a holistic approach to service delivery. [The Sunrise Way](#) is a Cultural Framework built on Respect, Understanding and Commitment. Integral to this is the acknowledgement that improvement in health outcomes for people in remote communities requires a concentrated effort on supporting change, providing hope and offering choices. [The Sunrise Way](#) acknowledges the pivotal role community based care can provide and as such articulates the need to provide meaningful employment and education pathways for Aboriginal people.



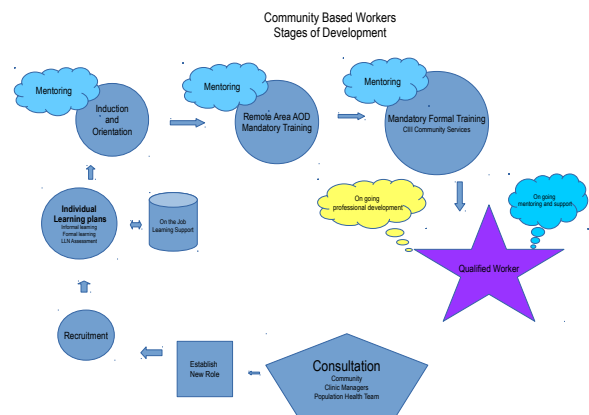
The new SHS community worker positions provide:

- Integral liaison between community and clinic

- Entry level generalist roles which open up further employment opportunities
- Strength orientated pathways for people to realise their full potential
- Community capacity building opportunities
- Role modelling for younger people

The project Xenia worked on had a number of distinct phases which resulted in a staged capability-based approach to the recruitment, support and development of Aboriginal workers with SHS. Further, Xenia created a suite of customised tools to support strength-based staff development.

The framework Xenia designed takes into account the unique nature and realities of remote communities, some of which are the most isolated in the world. People living in this part of Australia lack access to services taken for granted in other parts of the country. Workforce recruitment and development approaches, including education and training which operate in more urbanised areas can't, and don't, work in remote community environments.



The new competency-based based approach and corresponding tools and templates use readily accessible language and outlines the specific skills, knowledge and attributes which are required to operate effectively. This approach provides clarity around the education and training needs as well as allowing people who lack formal education to have their life-skills captured and acknowledged. There is an emphasis on conversational-style approaches to interviews, a recognition of in-formal learning and in-built support opportunities for people whose first language is not English. As part of the project Xenia sat and talked with new recruits and mapped their informal learning against the specific requirements of the community worker role. The final documents are a rich acknowledgement of people's abilities and provide an insight into employment and education aspirations which were not apparent when they were first engaged using the more traditional job-interviewing approach.



Education and Training was another important aspect to this project. Once the vocational requirements for the new community worker role had been established it was possible to

build a Mandatory Training Register which included in-house and external training requirements. As part of this, Xenia also created SHS specific criteria for the delivery and assessment of training to ensure workers were able to successfully complete the programs.

Xenia worked with SHS for six months and travelled thousands of kilometers facilitating workshops, having conversations and interviewing stakeholders. The outcome is a customised workforce development framework which recognizes the skills people bring with them through their life-experience whilst supporting the education training and mentoring needs of staff. This strength and capability based approach will provide much needed opportunities for employment, education and training to Aboriginal people living in remote parts of Australia.

