

Mentoring Indigenous young people: the Tribal Warrior program



A post release program for young inner city Aboriginal offenders has successfully prevented re-offending and greatly improved relationships between police and the Aboriginal community. The “Clean Slate Without Prejudice” program for young people recently released from correctional centres is run by the Redfern Local Area Command working in partnership with the Indigenous-owned Tribal Warrior Association (TWA). Participants complete a “Behaviour Undertaking”, and agree to various conditions, including seeking assistance from mentors from the TWA.

The program began in July 2009 when 10 young Aboriginal males, all with a history of violent crime, undertook boxing and fitness training and voluntary work with the TWA. They also attended forums on health and exercise, family violence, victims of crime, and substance abuse. Only one of the 10 participants reoffended.

The program currently has eight participants. Qualified TWA mentors assist those on the program to obtain accommodation and employment and to attend seminars, forums and Redfern Police Station to meet with police.

The Redfern Local Area Commander, Superintendent Luke Freudenstein, liaises with the Department of Corrective Services to ensure that residents of the Command Area recently released from custody are referred to the program. Participation in the program can also be supervised by the Probation and Parole Service.

The program is available for suitable people granted bail, or subject to bonds to be of good behaviour.

The TWA is operated by Aboriginal Elders from Redfern and inner Sydney under the leadership of Chief Executive Shane Phillips. It provides certified commercial maritime training leading to employment

opportunities in the maritime industry and mentoring to underprivileged Australians, with an emphasis on Aboriginal youth. The TWA has also developed a certified course in “mentoring diverse cultures” to assist people to overcome life barriers and provide education and employment opportunities and assist those mentored to gain independence. In June 2010, Victor Morgan was appointed as manager of the Tribal Warrior mentoring program.

The mentoring program is funded through the State Department of Community Service (DOCS) and the Federal Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs. The training for the mentoring certificate course is funded through Centrelink and the Federal Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations.



The Tribal Warrior Association provides certified commercial maritime training, employment opportunities and mentoring opportunities to encourage education, self-respect and independence amongst young people and also offers a post-release program for young Aboriginal offenders. The TWA also organises and provides authentic Indigenous ceremonies and cultural performances for public and corporate events. Photo courtesy of TWA.

The program currently has up to 50 people aged from 7–25 working with seven trained mentors. By 2012, it is planned that 30 paid mentors will work with young people, although this is dependent on ongoing funding.

Police regularly train with Aboriginal young people and meet with them as part of the mentoring program. This interaction has developed a good level of trust between the Aboriginal community and police. An Aboriginal community day held once a month, the “Family and Culture Day”, has local police involvement and requires alcohol and drug dependent persons to leave the Block in Redfern for the day.

Statistics from the Redfern Local Area Command show that in 2009, the percentage of young

Aboriginal men charged with robbery had decreased by 80 per cent.

The Honourable Justice Blanch commended the TWA programs in the December 2010 decision *MW v R* as an effective way of dealing with bail, bond and parole conditions.¹

Further information about the TWA programs may be obtained from Victor Morgan, Manager, Tribal Warrior Mentoring — Victor@tribalwarrior.org, telephone 9699 3491 or from the TWA website at www.tribalwarrior.org.

Endnotes

- 1 *MW v R* [2010] NSWCCA 324 at [67].



Photo courtesy of TWA

Megan Davis, member of the Ngara Yura Committee



Megan Davis is the first Indigenous Australian elected to the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. She will join the Forum this year for a three-year term after being nominated for the position by the federal Government. Megan is a Cobble Cobble woman, originally from south east Queensland. Megan joined the Ngara Yura committee in 2008 and brings to the committee her valuable experience as an international human rights lawyer, Director of the Indigenous Law Centre and Associate Professor of Law at the University of New South Wales. Congratulations Megan!