



Australian Government

A U S T R A L I A N A P P R E N T I C E S H I P S

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Call centre supports Indigenous clients

Centrelink Call Cairns

North Queensland region



Centrelink Call Cairns is Australia's first call centre to tailor its services to Indigenous customers. It provides culturally appropriate telephone services to customers living in remote Cape Yorke and Torres Strait Island communities. This service is now offered nationally with four sites across Australia.

Team Leader, Kerensa Butcher says the pilot program to employ Indigenous Australian Apprentices is getting great results.

'It's been really successful. We currently have three Indigenous women doing Certificate III in Customer Contact. Throughout the certificate they'll cover things like using technology, basic administration and working in teams,' she explains.

Four weeks of induction are held in the workplace and the Australian Apprentices give feedback during this process to help future members of the program.

'They don't just learn from the training—it's about being able to socialise and mix with existing employees who share their experience and provide guidance and support,' Kerensa says.

The apprentices and trainees benefit from an adult learning approach where different learning needs are identified by the supervisor and training is tailored to the individual.

'We take into account any barriers they may have, including learning or employment experience. Some are young and don't have much experience in the work place,' Kerensa says.

'There can be some challenging situations. Particularly now with the global financial crisis,' she says.

'For instance, people that have never been unemployed before are calling Centrelink and they may not know what the procedure is.'

Training is conducted in the workplace, so the supervisor can discuss things with the Australian Apprentice directly after the call. This is where having a dedicated team leader is so important.

Work in a call centre can be intense. Kerensa says it's important to let Australian Apprentices and trainees take real calls and then work with them afterwards to identify what they did well and to explain different approaches.

'This is the first time we have taken on apprentices. Having the same team leader with them has made them feel comfortable and supported,' Kerensa says.

Both Kerensa and Deputy Manager Katrina Colley appreciate what their Australian Apprentices contribute.

'Having the apprenticeship allows us a longer time frame to train them in all the skills required and we can give them a more specific training plan,' Kerensa explains.

Their current Australian Apprentices were chosen from 120 interviewed candidates. Katrina says they are all proud to be chosen.

'We think we're lucky to have them. To see these girls, who feel privileged and enthusiastic, they light up the environment here,' Katrina says.

'I've been so proud of their commitment, flexibility and resilience,' Kerensa agrees.

