

Cross Cultural Training

TO ENSURE protocols are maintained and respect is shown for the differences between cultures, MHACA organised two days of Cross Cultural Training for its staff, held on 23-24 October. Facilitated by Laurna Wilson and Christobel Swan, the training assisted staff in developing an awareness and understanding so they are better able to build relationships with clients—as well as workers in agencies—through respectful interaction and better knowledge of some aspects of Anangu culture.



Laurna Wilson and Christobel Swan with Jamie and Kristy

In this training, Laurna and Christobel covered: basic protocols; using language and interpreters appropriately; family tree patterns and skin relationships; engaging with an individual through networking with family; understanding mental wellness / illness from an indigenous perspective; and when, why and how to access Ngangkari.

One of the aims of the training was to develop 'intercultural competence'.

'Intercultural competence' can be defined as the ability to have successful communication with people of other cultures. It involves developing ways of connecting with other people in spite of cultural variations in perception, thinking, feeling and acting. Like a lot of skills and competencies, we can learn a lot through lived experiences.

"People who've had experience living with people from other cultures might

have unknowingly developed these competencies," said one of the MHACA staff. "But I think the skills you need to relate well across cultures can actually be picked up from all over the place, so it's important to respect the ways that all kinds of life experience can contribute to this process."

As an article on Building Intercultural Competence suggests: "To have intercultural competence, we need to draw heavily on our capacities for respect and empathy. We also need to be willing to widen our experiences of other cultures, other people, other value-systems and different behaviours. Perhaps one of the hardest things, though, is that to have intercultural competence, we have to be willing to continually engage in a personal evaluation of our own strengths, weaknesses, preferences and emotional stability."

sensitivity & awareness

In addition to these factors, the training highlighted that some of the basic needs of 'intercultural competence' are sensitivity and self-awareness.

"Sometimes, I don't think we realise that our first instinct is to be defensive of our differences," said one of the MHACA staff in their feedback. "This defensiveness isn't really helpful, but it does make sense. In intercultural situations, we are often talking about things that we value very deeply. So we're dealing with territory where there are potentially hidden landmines of hurt and offence. Learning to walk towards someone else and meet with them in this territory is definitely a skill."

"What we learn is that the important thing is respect," says MHACA management. "You find cultural differences everywhere: not just between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people, but also within the same organisation or even family. Everyone has their own history, their own life and experiences. They come from different places and different backgrounds. And we respect each other when we find ways of seeing beyond our selves and our own needs and expectations in order to meet the needs of others."

It is a journey that we are all going on, and it is good to see where others are at, especially since we are all actually walking parts of it together. We want to be able to look out for each other in this territory, to point out potential 'danger zones' and to learn to live in this territory with confidence, compassion and care. ✕



MHACA staff with Laurna and Christobel at the cross cultural training