

Region Riverina

Locally Grown.

14 new locations as On-Country Pathways expands to connect 'young mob' with work

21 January 2025 | By Chris Roe



On Country Pathways now covers 15 communities in Southern NSW. Photo: Supplied.

From humble beginnings in Albury Wodonga in 2022, On-Country Pathways has expanded its First Nations youth employment program to more than a dozen communities across the Riverina Murray.

Program manager Catherine Coysh said receiving stage two funding from the Indigenous Skills and Employment Program (ISEP) had taken the operation to the next level.

"We trialled the program originally in Albury Wodonga, but now that we've received this funding, we've actually expanded to 15 communities in the Riverina Murray area," she said.

"A lot of consultation occurred prior to this funding being rolled out and we heard from the communities about what they perceived the barriers for young people were in seeking employment opportunities, and the programs were built through that co-design process."

The locally grown not-for-profit works with young people aged 15 to 24 and provides the tools and training to build careers across an expanding range of industry sectors.

"The three directors at the start came from the commercial construction business, where they identified that they wanted to provide opportunities for young Aboriginal people to have employment pathways," Catherine said.

"They did a lot of the piloting through their businesses, but the opportunities were outgrown by the number of participants that were wanting to engage with the program."

The lack of a driver's licence is a barrier to employment in many Indigenous communities and the Driver-Mentor Program is an important component of preparing young people for work.

On-Country Pathways recently celebrated its 50th P-plate graduate and continues to work closely with the participants as they transition into employment.

"Mentorship and cultural safety are the two pillars that underpin any of our programs that we run," Catherine said.

"Mentorship is about ensuring that people are job-ready, and also then ensuring that the placement that we're finding for them is culturally safe and ensuring that the match is right for both of them."



Program manager Darren Moffitt presents Jaceisha with a branded OCP Lunchbox as she begins her first full-time job. Photo: Supplied.

Last year, three graduates of the driver-mentor and work experience program secured full-time work with Bouygues Construction Australia, working on the new Culcairn Solar Farm.

Community development officer Brittany Wright said the three would be mentored for another 12 months through the Job Placement Support Program.

“The mentoring component of our program is critical,” she said.

“We need to support our young mob into the work environment and ensure it is a culturally safe place for them to be.”

Bouygues Construction Australia’s Daisy Franz said it was a fruitful process.

“Bringing the right people around the table ensures the application, onboarding and workplace is using a cultural lens as part of their recruitment processes.

“Working together and continuous communication is integral to seeing these types of successful outcomes.”

From its roots in construction, On-Country Pathways has continued to build partnerships with a broad range of local businesses, training organisations, high schools and community groups.

“Our big focus this year will be to form partnerships with local businesses so that we can run the work experience programs and then fill our job placement support program with ongoing employment opportunities,” Catherine said.

“We’ve had really positive experiences and there’s been no dramas working with businesses and helping them to accommodate what’s required to support our graduates in that role.”

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