



QUEENSLAND TOURISM
INDUSTRY COUNCIL

Tourism Indigenous Employment Champions Network

PLATTERS ON WILLOW

CASE STUDY – 2016

THE BEGINNING

Platters on Willow began around nine years ago from a small request made by the Indigenous Liaison officer of Redbank Plains State High School. Jenny Cartmill asked the Cookery Teacher to make some damper with her students to provide to local Elders at the **Embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Perspectives in School** (EATSIPS) program. Not wanting to just provide the basics, Kara Pulou unknowingly started what became the Platters on Willow journey.

When describing the start of her journey and the first morning tea she made Kara states, “I looked up native Australian food on the internet and discovered the amazing ingredients available. I drove to Redcliffe to Dreamtime Kullilla Art and Bush Tucker Products and proceeded to spend a fortune, wanting to try every spice and fruit available. I went back to school and experimented with the ingredients and produce with my students and we created an afternoon tea using the native ingredients that I had found. The afternoon tea was received so well that it brought some of the Elders to tears, saying what wonderful memories the flavours had brought back to them of their childhood”.

Platters on Willow was born from a simple request that naturally grew by word of mouth across the region given the unique nature of the product. In

2008 Platters on Willow catered its first community event, the opening of the Murri Courthouse in Ipswich. It was for this event that this school project needed a name, Platters for the style of food served and Willow after Willow Road that houses the school.

Platters on Willow grew rapidly and we found ourselves working in this special niche market of Indigenous inspired cuisine. For me, it is about **passion and creativity** of the beautiful ingredients that not many Australians know about and the wonderful students that are a part of our business, particularly the Indigenous students. It's about **not being afraid to try** new ingredients, recipes and interacting with clients as this is really important in developing student's confidence. It is also about the education, exposing all Australians to the wonderful Indigenous culture and food and especially for my Indigenous



Kara Pulou and Cedella McGrady

students and guests. In turn, it gives our students **real life work** experience and a Certificate II in Hospitality. ~ Kara

From its start Platters on Willow has grown from strength the strength now employing over 150 staff (students) and catering for over 50 functions over a 40 week school year.

NOT A TYPICAL TOURISM BUSINESS

Platters on Willow is highly valued in the school community, local community and the hospitality industry. The operational difficulties lie in that there is nothing to compare it to; this means getting financial support, flexibility in timetables and transport is a constant struggle for the business alongside the normal challenges of a hospitality business.

Platters on Willow is a self-sufficient business that also has to factor in costs that other businesses would not consider. These include the cost of Kara's teaching TRS (to cover a supply teacher taking class when she is out at a function), transport costs – school bus, ute, other support teachers (or parents) to drive to functions and upgrading equipment to enable the business to be portable and industrial. The business also only runs in school terms (with a few notable exceptions) meaning the working year is condensed into the 40 week school year.

In terms of clients reception to the business Kara says: ***“We find that industry and our clients are hugely impressed by Platters on Willow, but where we fit into the big picture of industry is still a bit of a mystery. We are not a typical Indigenous business as I am not Indigenous and have to explain to people that I am just a cook that loves the ingredients. I did seek permission from Elders to prepare and service the Indigenous inspired food,***

as I did not want to offend anyone. I “employ” Indigenous students and non-Indigenous students to work in Platters on Willow and also support grass root Indigenous business by buying the ingredients from my supplier that comes direct from many communities”.

For the students of all backgrounds, there is a great appreciation for Platters on Willow for many different reasons. Students find value in the practical hands on experience, they love to cook. Real life work experience not only gives students a taste of the industry, it also develops their confidence and provides them with experience that is integral in such a competitive industry, positioning them to have employment on completion of their schooling.

This early engagement is identified by the QTIC Indigenous Tourism Employment Champions Network as integral for introducing the future workforce into an industry of which many are unfamiliar. By working with students, families and the community, there is a greater chance that these students will consider a long-term career in the tourism industry. Through early introduction, there is a stronger chance of industry retention. Hands-on work experience and training is positioning students for success as they leave school.

“To see a student’s face the first time coming out to serve at a function after they have cooked many times at school for functions, is priceless. Getting the face to face praise from clients is life changing for many, especially the shy kids. For Indigenous students, it is the added bonus of learning more about their heritage and connecting to their culture through food. Students are able to feel a sense of pride and respect in their culture and achievements.”

~ Kara

THE IMPORTANCE OF PARTNERSHIPS

Not one business alone can help achieve the goals of Indigenous employment but by working together, learning from other businesses and forging strong partnerships we can achieve success together.

A key partnership for Platters on Willow is the Gateways Schools Network. The Gateway offers Platters on Willow opportunities for professional development that is practical and relevant to industry. They also offer resources to support the staff and students and fantastic industry connections. Relationships such as those with Gateway Schools and the Queensland Tourism Industry Council help to break barriers to industry and create opportunities for students in industry.

Other partnerships include local schools who use Platters on Willow to run bush tucker talks and tasting with the kids. Furthermore, Platters on Willow is developing relationships with Indigenous

training organisations who provide students work experience through the organisation.

The major supplier for Platters on Willow is Dreamtime Kullilla-Art, the close relationship with this supplier ensure that Platters on Willow has the opportunity to experience new products and discover the origin and history of the produce that is used. This creates further engagement for students with the cultural significance of the ingredients.

The QTIC Indigenous Tourism Employment Champions Network actively encourages all businesses to take a partnership approach noting that it is integral to the success and growth of Indigenous employment in the tourism and hospitality industry.

IMPORTANT PARTNERSHIPS



gateway schools to

**food, wine and
tourism industry**



GREATEST OPPORTUNITIES FOR BUSINESSES HIRING INDIGENOUS EMPLOYEES



"I feel that our Indigenous students gain knowledge and experience working in Platters on Willow. They do shifts, sometimes commencing at 5am and not getting back to school until 11.30pm at night. But mostly, they have gained confidence, pride and a deeper understanding of their cultural cuisine that is priceless and enriches their lives. They know it's hard work on your feet completing long shifts and hard physical work, but they enjoy the comradery of their peers, the thrill of the satisfied customer and the adrenaline of the work.

They leave ready for employment.

"For me, forming direct links to other businesses interested in hiring great Indigenous kids would be extremely valuable. Forming direct partnerships with Platters on Willow, that employers can ring me and ask '*do you have any students that might want to work at*

... or apprenticeship at ...' would be valuable, because teachers know these students and how they work, their personality, their goals or jobs they might be interested in as we spend so much time with them, particularly on functions. We have many candid conversations about life and encourage them to give things a go. Catching the students at school and helping them to match up with employers, is what we are trying to do to help break the barriers.

"This year we are really focused on developing relationships and links with industry to help our students obtain employment when they leave. An important part of this is ensuring employers are able to support students through understanding the cultural differences that if ignored can create barriers to employment."

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

Platters on Willow aims to have a fully industrial kitchen, portable equipment, 12 seater van and a purpose built trailer within the next five years – these improvements would allow for strong business growth. To achieve this Kara is actively seeking Government Grants and local business support. Given Kara's role as a teacher as well in addition to running Platters on Willow, finding the time to write grants and sponsorship proposals is a huge challenge, but one that she hopes will help strengthen the business in the long term.

Due to the unique operating nature of the business, the next five years will be a testing time as Kara aims to get the program officially recognised thereby facilitating flexible timetables and time concessions for the commitment to the program.

More partnerships are also being developed with potential Indigenous RTO's linking with the program to offer work experience opportunities. Other local Indigenous Schools are also building relationships with Platters on Willow with potential opportunities for work experience and teaching opportunities.

One of the key goals of the program is to get more Indigenous youth into the industry; Kara understands that the best place to reach Indigenous youth is in the school system. By catching them early there is gentle exposure to industry with the guidance of people they trust (teachers and mentors). Furthermore, there are opportunities to forge trust with industry representatives that can help nurture

the students through consideration of cultural programs. Early engagement is really making a difference, showcasing career opportunities available in hospitality and creating early engagement among students.

"I have seen firsthand how building this relationship of trust can grow their confidence. I have past Indigenous students that I am still in contact with that talk to other Indigenous adults about Platters on Willow and how it has helped them. After hearing about adult job ready courses, I thought, why can't their be one for teenagers, still at school?"

Platters on Willows supports Indigenous training and skills development introducing the industry to young adults as they begin their career path. Through continued support, training and the understanding of cultural nuances Platters on Willows is able to work within best practice guidelines to guide students towards a long-term career in the industry. Platters on Willows is just one of the many businesses helping to support the QTIC Indigenous Tourism Employment Champions Network goal of achieving 1,000 Indigenous staff in the tourism industry by 2020 through early engagement and tailored training.

"One piece of advice to tell other managers would be – be open.

"Be open to meeting students; letting them see your workplace; have open conversations about the workplace and opportunities; and be open to giving the Indigenous students a go.

Have that cultural understanding to show respect, for example a lot of the students are shy at first but give them time and encouragement and they usually rise to the challenge and gain confidence."



**For further advice & information please
contact Queensland Tourism Industry Council**

A Level 5, 189 Grey St, South Brisbane 4001

P (07) 3236 1445

E info@qtic.com.au

W www.qtic.com.au

*This case-study has been prepared with resources provided to
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