



Engaging remote Indigenous communities

Northern Territory Power and Water



Many remote Indigenous communities in the Northern Territory rely on stressed groundwater or freshwater sources and are exposed to critical water shortages. Communication on the importance of water conservation with these communities has been difficult. Power and Water Corporation has employed, mentored and trained local Indigenous Water Conservation Ambassadors to educate the remote community of Galiwin'ku on positive water behaviours and water efficiency.

Implementation

Residents of the townships in these remote communities retain ties to traditional culture with English as a secondary language. They are not well educated on the systems and processes of water or other utility services, i.e. where it comes from, where it goes and the governance that surrounds it. Therefore they do not often make the connection between water that comes out of the tap and local issues of water stress. The communities are plagued with other social pressures such as high levels of unemployment and water efficiency is not high on the agenda for most. As they often live in public housing, there is no price signal to use less water. Power and Water Corporation in the Northern Territory face a strong cultural, language and distance divide in getting their water efficiency messaging across.

Through consultation with the local Indigenous communities, Power and Water began to understand that effective engagement would need to come from those with the same cultural and language backgrounds, and with understanding of community needs and values.

In 2012, Power and Water employed, mentored and trained four local Indigenous Water Conservation Ambassadors to educate the remote community of Galiwin'ku on positive water behaviours and water efficiency. Power and Water worked with local organisations, Community Development Employment Program providers and Community Enterprise Australia to assist in ensuring the right community ambassadors were chosen and provide culturally appropriate training and ongoing mentoring.

Following the success of this program, in 2013, Power and Water took part in the Low Income Energy Efficiency Program (LIEEP), a Federal Government funded project which in the Northern Territory was trialled in six remote communities, including Galiwin'ku.



The LIEEP program built upon the community engagement process used in Galiwin'ku, and also took the opportunity to leverage this funding in energy efficiency to include some water efficiency education/services. The program involved recruiting and training 80 local Indigenous community members in local languages, and preparing communications materials that spoke to the communities. Part of the training also involved more general activities such as experience in workplaces.

Power and Water are now leading the way to explore opportunities with other government agencies who may have the need for similar Indigenous community engagement programs to pool resources and implement joint training or employment programs.

Benefit / Outcome

- Water efficiency outcomes with savings of up to 8 per cent observed after household water education survey.
- Upskilling and empowering remote Indigenous community.
- Employment opportunities in a region where unemployment rate is high.
- Better relationship with and understanding of the local community.
- Sustainable management of water.

Further References

For more information please go to Power and Water's website (powerwater.com.au/sustainability_and_environment/remote_sustainability_initiatives).