

## **Wide Bay/Burnett Training Alliance**

### **Joint training calendar generates lasting results for disability organisations**

#### **Summary**

In 1997 a group of disability service organisations in Wide Bay/Burnett collaborated to improve training options for staff. By working together, these organisations have maximised access to training resources, systems and funding so staff can benefit from training tailored to the sector's local needs. Although the Wide Bay/Burnett Training Alliance no longer exists, three organisations still share resources and are contemplating shared administration functions and systems.

#### **Partners**

- Fraser Coast Family Networks
- Town and Country Community Access
- Bay Support Services, and
- a range of other disability organisations.

#### **Background**

The alliance brought together disability service organisations from Bundaberg, Kingaroy, Murgon, Munduberra, Hervey Bay and Maryborough. The alliance's work has been absorbed by the Wide Bay /Burnett Disability Sector Training Fund Coalition (the coalition). Three former alliance organisations continue to share a training calendar to develop better services and on site training.

#### **Drivers for collaboration**

The training alliance concept was initiated in 1997 by a small group of parents and service providers from Maryborough and Hervey Bay as a result of a lack of training resources, funds and options available for small, non-government agencies in the region. Limited training meant organisations could not deliver consistent quality services or confidently expand services.

As political and legislative pressure mounted for better training for direct care staff, organisations in the Wide Bay/Burnett region faced a number of issues, including:

- lack of training funds
- lack of training availability
- limited appropriate training in the local area
- staff availability for training
- problems obtaining and developing timely accredited training, and
- difficulties coordinating training across multiple organisations.

Managers of small services knew they could not rely on attracting realistic recurrent funding to solve their individual organisations' training needs. The solution was to work together.

#### **The collaboration story**

Initially about 15 service managers and family members collaborated to develop an annual staff training calendar. This saw each organisation conduct a training needs analysis and, based on the findings, the group developed a training calendar that addressed training needs to the best of the group's abilities and resources. A training day was scheduled for the third Wednesday of each month, with voluntary facilitators drawn from participating agencies and the community. Facilitators included people with a disability and family members, advocates, service managers, therapists, government staff and experienced service personnel.

The alliance had representatives from disability organisations in Bundaberg, Maryborough, Hervey Bay, Kingaroy and local Disability Services Queensland staff. Fraser Coast Quality Lifestyles Agency gained seed funding from Disability Services Queensland for a part-time coordinator for the training calendar for one year.

The alliance had limited ability to attract training to the area or develop new training topics outside the skill set of the participating parents of children with a disability, service managers and Disability Services Queensland staff. The local TAFE could only offer a Certificate III qualification with content that required major upgrading to meet organisations' needs.

Alliance members convened a workshop with the Industry Training Advisory Body (ITAB) to determine staff roles and requirements and match staff skills to relevant qualifications. This exercise confirmed that most staff needed a Certificate IV qualification.

Two years of negotiations, analysis and planning with ITAB and TAFE followed, after which the alliance attracted funding through the Queensland Department of Employment and Training's Community Training Partnerships Program to customise 14 modules of the Certificate IV Community Services (Disability Work).

Initially more than 20 managers, parents of children with a disability and senior staff from alliance organisations gained Certificate IV Assessment and Training qualifications. The alliance's commitment to assist TAFE with industry-based assessors enabled staff to be assessed in the workplace by alliance staff without compromising the privacy and confidentiality of consumers.

With trained staff in place, the alliance set about acquiring appropriate accredited training. Meanwhile Disability Services Queensland established the Disability Sector Training Fund and under the auspice of ITAB.

ITAB approached the alliance to establish a Disability Sector Training Fund committee to facilitate local training funds.

In 2002 the Queensland Department of Employment and Training provided an additional \$121,000 in funding for up to 200 staff from 21 organisations to be assessed on prior experience and skills and to undertake training towards the Certificate IV qualification. By the project's

end in June 2003, 160 participants had undertaken training or recognition of prior learning.

As the alliance had then completed most of its objectives, it transferred regional training coordination to the coalition, with a number of original alliance members occupying coalition committee positions. The coalition collaborated with TAFE to customise and deliver a Diploma of Business Management for service managers.

### **Tools and strategies for collaboration**

The alliance did not use formal instruments for collaboration, as partners did not believe this was necessary. The three organisations now considering sharing administration systems will develop agreements as required.

### **Outcomes**

The alliance's collaborative efforts have resulted in:

- improved skill levels. Expertise now exists in most local disability service organisations.
- strong relationships. Those developed with the Queensland Department of Employment and Training, ITAB, TAFE and the Disability Sector Training Fund have been fruitful, generating changes in the quantity, quality and relevance of training available to the local disability sector.
- support for staff. TAFE continues to provide high-level support for staff to complete qualifications, with the course coordinator visiting each centre once a month. TAFE now responds quickly to changing requirements, based on input from local organisations.
- ongoing sharing of training resources. Three organisations continue to operate a combined training calendar and are trialling a part-time training coordinator across the three organisations.
- recognition of alliance efforts. In 2000 the alliance received an award for excellence from the Minister for Disability Services Queensland and its training development model was promoted state-wide as an example of community partnerships in regional development.

### **Success factors**

The alliance was successful because it was able to:

- identify common goals, common values and a shared purpose
- identify shared threats
- find an industry champion. The Alliance found that working with ITAB Representatives, such as Wallace Westbrook, opened doors into TAFE
- compromise when necessary, and
- meet stakeholders' agendas as well as organisations' objectives. The Alliance had to work within the agendas and priorities of TAFE, ITAB and the Disability Sector Training Fund.

### **Challenges**

The alliance faced the following challenges:

- difficulties coordinating activity across three cities and five shires, and
- an imbalance between members in understanding about projects. The three organisations still working together advise that membership of any new initiative will be limited to a smaller number of organisations.

**The future**

Fraser Coast Family Networks, Bay Support Services and Town and Country Community Options are working towards sharing specialised skills and resources to meet increasing requirements for continuous improvement and better accountability. Discussions have commenced about formalising arrangements for centralised human resource management, including the recruitment of a full-time training coordinator. A common financial accounting program is also under discussion. Co-location remains a possible objective for at least two organisations.

The three organisations will continue to work with TAFE to upgrade and customise disability qualifications to better fit with the services' changing needs. Eventually the services plan to bring Certificate III training in-house with TAFE providing guidance and granting the accredited qualification.

**Contact for more information**

Wayne Stark, Executive Officer, Family Coast Family Networks, phone (07) 4123 4735 or email [fcfamnet@bigpond.com](mailto:fcfamnet@bigpond.com)