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Foundation skills focus for Northern Territory employers

Foundation Skills Workplace Champion, Yvonne Webb, has been working with SMEs in the Northern Territory to build awareness of foundation skills and the impact they can have on business objectives. Through a series of workshops employers have learned about the foundation skills described by the Australian Core Skills Framework and the Core Skills for Work Developmental Framework, but more importantly they have explored the role that these skills play in their own workplaces.

A series of three interactive workshops provided an opportunity for employers to discuss the specific skill needs of their organisation and develop an understanding of how these skills can be consistently identified, described and developed in a workplace context. By simplifying and contextualising the language of national frameworks, Yvonne helped employers to apply concepts to their own workplace and employees.

Workshop participants used the Core Skills for Work Developmental Framework to identify specific skill areas that are priorities in their workplace. The Framework descriptors were then used to focus more closely on what might be going wrong in the workplace and to identify what strategies might be used to encourage and develop the desired practices and performance levels of their employees.

Employers were encouraged to consider the skill demands of the workplace as well as the skill needs of individual workers.

If employers have an on-going challenge with incomplete workplace incident forms, they should think about whether the problem is the person completing the form, or the form itself. Both have an impact on productivity, but the solutions are going to be different.

Yvonne Webb, NT Workplace Champion, CHARTTES

Yvonne also offered NT employers the opportunity to work one-on-one with her to identify and address foundation skills challenges in the workplace. By visiting worksites and speaking individually with employers and their workers, Yvonne is able to help organisations step back from their day-to-day business and think about what is holding them back and, more importantly, what can be done about it. Yvonne has found that businesses respond to a practical focus on workplace literacy expectations – employers are not asked to address the reading and writing skills of their workers, but to think about the workplace documents they are expected to read, understand and act on.

There is no quick fix for addressing workplace literacy issues, but by looking at the reading and writing demands as well as at individuals' skills there are many actions that employers can take to improve workplace performance.

Yvonne Webb, NT Workplace Champion, CHARTTES

The **Australian Core Skills Framework (ACSF)** describes the skills of learning, reading, writing, oral communication and numeracy across five levels of performance. The framework can be used to consistently describe and compare the foundation skills required in workplace and training settings and the skills held by learners.

The **Core Skills for Work Developmental Framework (CSFW)** describes employability skills over five stages of development. The framework provides a series of detailed statements that reflect performance at different levels across a range of skill areas. The statements can be used in the development of job descriptions and professional development plans.



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HPA - Helping People Achieve

Tony Burns, CEO of a Darwin-based not-for-profit, participated in the foundation skills workshops conducted by Yvonne Webb. After the first session, Tony enthusiastically took up the offer to have Yvonne visit his organisation.

HPA – Helping People Achieve is a non-government organisation that provides services to Territorians with physical and intellectual challenges in Darwin and beyond. The organisation’s mission is to assist people with physical and intellectual challenges to achieve their full potential.

HPA employs around 100 staff including administrative staff, disability services workers and supported employees working in a number of business units:

- Kokoda Industries – producing a range of timber and aluminium outdoor furnishing and landscaping products and industrial rags
- ausdesigns™ – Aboriginal Art on Fabric creating a range of practical and decorative products featuring Aboriginal designs and screen printing and embroidery services
- Darwin accommodation services – providing group homes, training units and self-contained units for consumers with intellectual disabilities

www.hpa.net.au

We tend to work in the business, not on it, but I think it’s important to learn all the time. There are always improvements that can be made.

Tony Burns, Chief Executive Officer, HPA – Helping People Achieve

HPA – Helping People Achieve has been operating for 51 years and Tony is keen to take the organisation to greater heights by expanding and exploring new markets. For Tony, the foundation skills workshops provided an opportunity to think about what the organisation can build on and what can be tweaked in the workplace to make the business run more smoothly.

Planning and organising, collaboration and workplace communication are the priority areas that Tony has focused on. At HPA this has led to a number of practical actions:

- bringing staff together to work on ways to better organise business information
- streamlining workplace documents and digital file management systems
- putting consistent meeting procedures into place
- simplifying workplace documents to improve their clarity and consistency
- aligning performance appraisal documents and processes to organisational values.

Through their involvement in these activities HPA staff have been developing their foundation skills in the target areas, benefiting the organisation not only through improved processes but also through increased worker confidence and responsibility.

It’s been great to work with Yvonne, looking at the little things that can be done to make our business run more efficiently. Our team is inspired to keep thinking about how we can improve on a daily basis.

Tony Burns, Chief Executive Officer, HPA – Helping People Achieve



Helping People Achieve

**NATIONAL FOUNDATION SKILLS
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Working with employers

Workplace Champion, Yvonne Webb, takes a holistic approach to thinking about foundation skills in the workplace. She works with organisations to identify and define foundation skills and then consider them from two perspectives:

1. what the organisation and the job role requires
2. the abilities of the individuals.

By focusing on organisational values, Yvonne is able to help employers to identify the particular skills that are important in their workplace and to think about the types of structures that can be put in place to help workers build and apply those skills. NT employers have been receptive to the workshops and are keen to learn more about how to develop foundation skills in their workforce.



Yvonne's aim in working with HPA was to explore the aim, values and culture of the organisation and encourage Tony and his staff to think about what was helping them and what was holding them back. By looking at the various skills described in the Core Skills for Work Developmental Framework, it was clear that areas of concern for HPA were planning and organising. This is particularly important in the digital space and also hinges on the digital literacy skills of workers. At HPA time was being wasted looking for files and duplicating information that already existed. Finding more efficient solutions for file sharing involved staff working together to agree on a workable strategy and implement it collaboratively.

Improving communication at HPA has focused on more effective use of signs and noticeboards. Although essential workplace information, including health and safety notices, was displayed it wasn't being read by staff. Solutions have involved:

- using plain English, relevant workplace terminology and simplified formats with appropriate use of colour and space
- rotating pieces of information and focusing on one topic at a time so that the information communicated is fresh
- creating a structured campaign for important health and safety notices so that relevant messages are released at appropriate points in time.

When foundation skills are valued by an employer then organisational structures can be put in place to build them. The Core Skills for Work Developmental Framework gives employers a way of recognising and focusing on the skills that are important in their workplace.

Yvonne Webb, NT Workplace Champion, CHARTTES

Seven Workplace Champions have been appointed as public ambassadors for foundation skills

The Foundation Skills Workplace Champions aim to raise employer awareness of the benefits of addressing foundation skills in the workplace by sharing positive outcomes from their own organisations.

Foundation Skills Workplace Champions

- Anthony Kittel, Redarc Electronics Pty Ltd
- Victoria Jacques, Villa Maria Aged Care
- Yvonne Webb, CHARTTES Industry Training Advisory Council, NT
- Vince Ball, ACT Regional Building and Construction Industry Training Council
- Graeme Finlayson, Oak Training and Development, Tasmania
- Ro Coroneos, Lend Lease
- Kim Moore, Unitywater

Further information on individual champions is available on the website of the National Foundation Skills Strategy Project: <http://www.statedevelopment.sa.gov.au/nfss>

Support for the Workplace Champions is being provided by Michael Taylor from the Australian Industry Group, and the National Foundation Skills Strategy Project Team.

The National Foundation Skills Strategy Project (NFSS) 2014-2015 is a joint initiative by Australian governments to support priority action areas from the National Foundation Skills Strategy for Adults.

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