

Jobs scheme cooking up a future by Tony Barrass - May 29, 2010



Apprentice chef Cassie Carlton, 18, with a barramundi at Nyarli Lagoon, Home Valley Station, in Western Australia's east Kimberley region. Pic. Colin Murty
Source: The Australian

ON the plains of the Pentecost River, 150km west of the Northern Territory border, a ground-breaking concept embracing mentor and protege - black and white - is delivering sustainable jobs to indigenous workers such as Cassie Carlton.

A few years ago, her dream of being a pastry chef would have remained just that, but now the 18-year-old has the confidence and skills to aim for the top.

Aware of the social and cultural challenges facing so many young Aborigines wanting jobs in remote Australia, the Indigenous Land Corporation is using its Home Valley Station in the east Kimberley to develop "transferable" skills into long-term employment.

The plan is proving that opportunity in these parts, once the exclusive domain of cattle barons, is seeping into the local indigenous workforce through traineeships in tourism, agriculture, hospitality and horticulture.

The ILC has greatly upgraded accommodation on the 250,000ha station, changing what was once an outback cattle operation into a sophisticated tourism and pastoral concern, a move strongly supported by traditional owners who have watched past indigenous traineeship ventures fall by the wayside because of the tyranny of distance, poor management skills and a lack of commitment from both sides.

The ILC employs experienced team leaders in key areas to help youngsters navigate their way through their traineeships and, most importantly, learn a trade. Aboriginal employees now number almost half the station staff, with that percentage growing.

Anthony Campagna is one such leader who has just signed a three-year contract with ILC to run Home Valley's restaurant. He hopes to be replaced one day by Ms Carlton or another indigenous youngster hungry for success.

It's a long way from his past few employers -- the exclusive Peppers Moonah Links and Victoria's Metropolitan Golf Club -- but Mr Campagna loves the idea of helping disadvantaged youth.

"I've told Cassie to stick it out for a couple of years, learn your trade, and then the world's your oyster," Mr Campagna told *The Weekend Australian*.

Ms Carlton, who has almost finished her certificate three in commercial cookery, loves her work. "It's a great environment to work," she said. "I love my boss -- he never shouts at me, even when I overcook some things.

But I'm getting better . . . I know I can't rush things; I've got a long way to go, but that's OK."