

Men engaging with an Aboriginal-controlled rehabilitation facility: *contributions for relationally-informed practice*

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Introduction / Issues: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture is a key part of Australia's national identity and the world's oldest continuous culture. As with many other First Nations peoples, colonisation and has resulted in challenges associated with harmful use of alcohol and other drugs. Aboriginal authors have critiqued 'mainstream' service responses as deficit-based. Culturally-based Aboriginal controlled services have been established.

Method: Men at an Aboriginal-controlled rehabilitation service described their reasons for being involved with the AoD service, and their experiences of practice. This qualitative research project was based on narrative practices and analysis. The project proceeded in close working relationship with the men, community Elder Les Stanley, management and therapist/ researcher.

Key Findings: The men described wanting to be the best Aboriginal men, fathers and community members, that they could be. They described values of the service as culturally-based, free from judgment, and how these contributed to positive developments in their lives. Practitioners sharing their own AoD and other lived experiences, were particularly valued. The men described how these compared with their experiences of 'mainstream' services, as based on 'professional', distanced relations with staff,

Discussions and Conclusions: The project emphasises the importance of Non-Aboriginal workers and agencies developing practices responsive to the intentions, values and knowledges of Aboriginal peoples, and skills in developing supporting relationships that differ from common practices services. The project draws on First Nations and relational literature to document non deficit-based approaches to service delivery to all peoples, irrespective of cultural contexts.

Implications for Practice or Policy: Practice frameworks will be summarised for mainstream services wishing to reduce barriers to respectful and helpful relationships with Aboriginal peoples. A practice framework to assist practitioners to establish respectful therapeutic relationships across differences in cultures, irrespective of the context will also be summarised. A training resource developed will also be available.

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