



## Total Immersion CEO

Saturday, July 26, 2008

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Beyond the call of duty: Cate Ashmore moved in with a group of Aboriginal students to teach them the skills needed to get a job.

**Cate Ashmore is dedicated to changing people's lives. She tells Denise Carter about a program she runs for students from indigenous communities**

Cate Ashmore and her husband Jim will always be remembered by a particular group of people.

Late last year they put their lives on hold for six weeks to live with a group of Aboriginal students who had found it hard to find gainful employment.

As employee trainers, Cate and Jim's company, Dedicated Training and Consulting Group, was drafted in to help the students from the Aboriginal community of Groote Eylandt in the Gulf of Carpentaria.

A similar project had been deployed in the past, but without success, so Cate and Jim decided to take a different approach and actually move in with the students.

"We hired a home for six weeks and lived in with them. It was hugely intense and challenging for all parties," she

says.

"We had strict ground rules – no alcohol, no drugs and we looked after them 24/7 once we picked them up from the airport."

On top of the usual hospitality skills, like housekeeping, food and beverage, senior barista training, and an introduction to computers, the students, aged between 17 and 26, acquired general life skills such as time management, personal grooming and smart spending.

The mentor couple left their home, and their dogs, to teach the students how to go grocery shopping, prepare meals and organise lunches.

In the evenings, the group played cards and watched DVDs, and on weekends the couple took them fishing, jet skiing, bushwalking and to see the Taipans play.

One of the initial challenges the group faced was plain shyness, Cate says.

"They didn't know us," she says.

"Sometimes they got frustrated and angry, so we encouraged communication."

Despite the stress of having to manage her usual home life as well as her new family, Cate says the experience was wonderful.

"The personal reward is incredible," she says.

"To see young people's confidence levels change completely, and to see that they can now go for a job interview like any other candidate."

In fact, Cate enjoyed it so much she has run the program twice and plans to do it again.

The first program was a complete success and all of the participants found and maintained work at the Grootte Eylandt resort.

Cate says the second program was a lot easier because the youngsters knew what to expect.

Cate plans to take her work further as her business develops.

"My goal is to do more indigenous programs," she says, "and then ideally to go on the road to remote communities."

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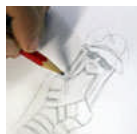
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