

The Needs of Youth

Introduction

- 5.1 Of all the issues examined by the Committee for this inquiry, none has struck Members as more pressing than the absolute urgency of addressing the needs of young Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders, and particularly those alienated from both their own heritage and the broader community.¹
- 5.2 In 1996, 71% of Indigenous students left school before year 12, in comparison with 26% of all students.² Between 1995 and 1997, the death rate for young Indigenous males between 15 and 24 years old was 2.8 times higher than their non Indigenous counterparts. Despite the likelihood that suicide rates are under-recorded, it appears that the Indigenous youth suicide rate is two to three times higher than the rate for non Indigenous young people.³ In 1994, nearly half of 18 to 24 year old Indigenous males had been arrested at least once and one third of them had been arrested more than once.⁴ These figures reflect national data and mask regional variations. However, in one regional example, local groups

1 There is some debate about what ages are encompassed by the definition of 'youth'. The Committee has taken a flexible approach, but worked on the general premise that Indigenous youth are those aged from 12 to 25 years old.

2 Australian National Training Authority, *Partners in a Learning Culture: Australia's National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Strategy for Vocational Education and Training*, 2000, p. 11.

3 See: C Tatz, *Aboriginal Suicide is Difference: Aboriginal Youth Suicide in New South Wales, the Australian Capital Territory and New Zealand: Towards a Model of Explanation and Alleviation: A Report to the Criminology Research Council on CRC Project 25/96-7*, July 1999, p. 10. See also: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women's Task Force on Violence, *Report*, 1999, p. 102.

4 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs Commission (ATSIC), *ATSIC Annual Report 1999-2000*, p. 29.

estimated that some 200 of the 1,300 or so Indigenous youths in the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) (and 500 Indigenous people of all ages) used illegal drugs in 2000 and that most of those were polydrug users taking at least heroin.⁵ In evidence to the committee, Indigenous youth have been variously described as:

- an 'apocalyptic generation who do not envisage a future';⁶
- including 'a sizeable minority with no apparent social norms';⁷ and
- with 'a deep-seated hostility to white society'.⁸

5.3 Their disadvantage is made worse because governments and policy makers cannot obtain an accurate picture of the full extent of the problems, as indicated in a government submission to the inquiry:

Like the rest of their community... it is difficult to meaningfully assess the needs of young Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders due to the paucity of data available.⁹

and by a non government agency in Western Sydney that:

where we work, the needs of young people by and large have not even been identified, let alone met.¹⁰

and, finally, that:

their needs are currently left largely unaddressed.¹¹

A Positive Approach Is Needed

5.4 While deeply troubled by the evidence before it, Members did not want to diminish the achievements of Indigenous young people who are not on drugs, nor law breaking and are either employed, at school or other institutions of learning. The Committee notes that Indigenous students, attending educational institutions, as a proportion of all students increased at all levels in 1991 and again in 1996. Of particular note is the jump in the number of Indigenous people obtaining tertiary degrees in the last decade. In 1991, 0.6% of the Indigenous population obtained a

5 P Dance et. al., *They'll Just Read About Us in Storybooks: Estimations of the Number of Young Indigenous People using Illegal Drugs in the ACT and Region*, unpublished, February 2000.

6 Burns Aldis Community Development Consultants, *Submissions*, p. S360.

7 Bourke Shire Council, *Submissions*, p. S213.

8 ATSIC, Victorian State Office, *Submissions*, p. S586.

9 Australian Capital Territory Government, *Submissions*, p. S1179.

10 Burns Aldis, *Submissions*, p. S361.

11 ATSIC, Wongatha Regional Council, *Submissions*, p. S106.

bachelor degree, but by 1996 this figure had risen to 1.5% of Indigenous people.¹² Similarly, in the same period, the percentages of Indigenous people with associate diploma degrees rose from 0.5% to 1.2% of the total Indigenous population.¹³ Members also acknowledge that Indigenous families and communities take pride in and recognise the value of their young people and try to integrate them in the community.¹⁴

- 5.5 Rather than stereotyping Indigenous young people (particularly when in groups) as a threat, involved in anti social or self harming behaviour, the Committee believes a far more constructive approach is to emphasise the contribution they make or can make to Australia's future. On that note, the chapter turns to examine some of the pressures on young Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders and then discusses possible solutions and initiatives.

Pressures Faced by Young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People

Alienation

- 5.6 In a compilation of the evidence to the Committee, Members identified the following problems facing young Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders in urban areas in particular (although also to varying extents in non urban areas):
- substance abuse (alcohol, heroin, marijuana, amphetamines, tranquillisers, petrol, glue);
 - emotional and physical abuse (racism, being 'put down', sexual abuse, family violence);
 - poor school attendance, low levels of education, high unemployment with poor job prospects;
 - difficulties finding accommodation (moving from house to house, using emergency shelters);

12 IESIP SRP National Coordination and Evaluation Team, *What Works: Explorations in Improving Outcomes for Indigenous Students*, March 2000, p. 358. 5.7% and 7.7% of the total population had bachelor degrees in 1991 and 1996 respectively.

13 IESIP SRP National Coordination and Evaluation Team, *What Works: Explorations in Improving Outcomes for Indigenous Students*, p. 358. 1.3% and 2.6% of the total population had associate diplomas in 1991 and 1996 respectively.

14 ATSIC, Victorian State Office, *Submissions*, p. S587.

- lack of parental involvement or control (dysfunctional families, lack of respect);
- poverty (affecting lifestyles, health, entertainment, lack of food); and
- being young single parents with poor parenting skills.¹⁵

Unfortunately, young people may suffer from more than one of these disadvantages listed.

- 5.7 One aspect of their lives that all Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders – young and old - share is the need to balance and reconcile their Indigenous culture with their involvement in the mainstream community. This can be particularly stressful in urban areas where mainstream culture is so dominant, and even more so for young Indigenous people. One group spoke of the stress for young people when ‘establishing their identity as Indigenous people, whilst balancing their involvement in the Indigenous and mainstream community’.¹⁶ Similarly, ATSIC spoke of the ‘challenges’ for young urban people ‘coming to terms with who they are’.¹⁷ The result may be alienation from both cultures with a loss of traditional principles and a lack of respect for mainstream values.

Substance Abuse

- 5.8 The Grannies Group in Adelaide sees the adverse effects of drug and alcohol abuse as the greatest problem facing Indigenous people in urban areas.¹⁸ The group acknowledges the efforts put into mainstream strategies to address drug and alcohol related problems, but believes they need to include specialist Indigenous services if they are to have an impact on Indigenous young people. Similarly, the Victorian Aboriginal Health Service Injecting Drug Use Project has found that a major problem for young Aboriginals in Victoria is a lack of access to appropriate detoxification and rehabilitation services.¹⁹ In the ACT, there has been an increase in the number of deaths due to heroin overdoses but not an increase in the number of Indigenous young people using mainstream

15 See Grannies Group, *Submissions*, p. S134; Burns Aldis, *Submissions*, p. S362; ATSIC, Victorian State Office, *Submissions*, p. S595; National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (NACCHO), *Submissions*, pp. S1563-64.

16 Youth Coalition of the ACT, *Submissions*, p. S887.

17 ATSIC, *Submissions*, p. S679.

18 Grannies Group, *Submissions*, p. S139.

19 See NACCHO, *Submissions*, p. S1558.

detoxification centres – suggesting that there are barriers to access for young Indigenous people.²⁰

Community initiative

Kaingani Tumbetin Waal – Callington, SA

Kaingani Tumbetin Waal is an initiative of the South Australian Aboriginal Sobriety Group. It offers a rehabilitation and prevention program designed for young Aboriginal males and females ‘at risk’ and courses are carried out on a property leased from the Aboriginal Land Trust.

Up to ten 13 to 18 year olds participate in a ten week residential course that provides drug rehabilitation and strategies to remain drug free.

Participants are also taught independent living skills, computing and literacy skills and outdoor activities.

It also offers ‘time out’ from the influence and pressures of substance abuse in urban areas.²¹

- 5.9 The National Illicit Drug Strategy, *Tough on Drugs*, is the Commonwealth’s mainstream strategy to reduce the supply and demand for illicit drugs. It includes funding for the treatment of illicit drug users, prevention strategies, training and skills development for front line workers who come into contact with people who use drugs or who are at risk of using drugs.²² The strategy, administered by the Department of Health and Aged Care, has the support of the Council of Australian Governments.
- 5.10 Through its Non-Government Organisation Treatment Grants Program, the Strategy has provided grants to a range of non government organisations across the country to treat drug users.²³ The Committee has noted the number of organisations funded under the Program that target Indigenous people and the others that target young people in general. The

20 Youth Council of the ACT, *Submissions*, pp. S890-93.

21 South Australian Government, *Submissions*, p. S1200.

22 Department of Health and Aged Care, National Illicit Drug Strategy, www.health.gov.au/pubhlth/strategy/drugs (August 2001).

23 See: Non-Government Organisation Treatment Grants Program, Department of Health and Aged Care, National Illicit Drug Strategy, www.health.gov.au/pubhlth/strategy/drugs/illicit (August 2001).

Committee believes, however, that further focus should be given to services targeting specifically Indigenous young people.

Recommendation 16

- 5.11 **The Department of Health and Aged Care consider Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth as a priority target group for the Non-Government Organisation Treatment Grants Program of the National Illicit Drug Strategy.**
- 5.12 The Committee also notes that the Strengthening and Supporting Families Coping with Illicit Drug Use Measure, which is part of the National Illicit Drug Strategy, will fund services to families where a young person is suffering from the effects of illicit drug use. Two programs funded under this measure, one in South Australia and the other in Victoria, focus on the needs of Indigenous families in urban areas.²⁴
- 5.13 In response to the specific needs of Indigenous people, the Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs launched the National Indigenous Substance Misuse Council in June 2001. The Committee also notes that the National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation has a draft national strategy to tackle Indigenous drug and alcohol abuse with solutions based on consultation with community groups. This strategy addresses the following priority areas:
- reducing access to specific substances;
 - providing advice on early intervention measures;
 - ensuring access to intervention and treatment options and programs; and
 - ensuring people in custody have access to appropriate polydrug services.

Recommendation 17

- 5.14 **The Commonwealth Government and National Indigenous Substance Misuse Council consider the National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation's draft national strategy - the *Substance Misuse in an Aboriginal Community Controlled Primary Health Care Setting* - so that a decision on implementation can be made at the earliest possible date.**

24 Department of Family and Community Services (FaCS), *Submissions*, p. S464.

- 5.15 The Committee was particularly concerned at evidence it took from witnesses about the extent of heroin (and other drug) use in the ACT by Indigenous people of all ages. Witnesses believe that there are some 500 heroin users of all ages in the ACT and that up to 200 of the Territory's 1,300 Indigenous youth are users.²⁵ While having not taken direct evidence from witnesses on this issue in other states, an extrapolation of the ACT figures to the national level would suggest a most alarmingly high number of Indigenous young people using heroin.
- 5.16 The Committee notes that the ACT Legislative Assembly's Standing Committee on Health and Community Care has just tabled a report on the health of Indigenous people in the ACT.²⁶ That Committee noted that Indigenous people made up less than one percent of the ACT population, but that in 2000, made up 27% of those who died in the ACT from drug overdoses.²⁷ That Committee recommended, among other things, that the ACT Government identify barriers to Indigenous people using detoxification services in the ACT and implement policies to remove the barriers.²⁸
- 5.17 This Committee awaits with interest the findings of the inquiry by the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Family and Community Affairs into the social and economic costs of licit and illicit substance abuse. While that broad ranging inquiry is not Indigenous specific, its findings should be of relevance to reducing the rate and impact of Indigenous substance abuse – which the Committee views as a most serious issue.
- 5.18 So seriously, in fact, does the Committee view the issue, that it thinks the Commonwealth and ACT Governments should conduct a full joint inquiry into the use of illicit drugs in the ACT. Such an inquiry should investigate the extent and underlying causes of the widespread use of illicit drugs. Such an inquiry should also investigate the economic, health and social impact of illicit drug use on the Indigenous and wider ACT community. Those involved in the inquiry should include Commonwealth and Territory health officials, the police and, of course, Indigenous health and community groups.

25 Winnunga Nimmitjiah Aboriginal Health Service, *Transcripts*, p. 505. See also: P Dance et. al., *They'll Just Read About Us in Storybooks*, p. 20. See also Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory, Standing Committee on Health and Community Care, *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health in the ACT*, Report No. 10, August 2001, pp. 73-75.

26 Legislative Assembly *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health in the ACT*.

27 Legislative Assembly, *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health in the ACT*, p. 69.

28 Legislative Assembly, *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health in the ACT*, recommendation 24.

Recommendation 18

- 5.19 **The Commonwealth Government seek the agreement of the Government of the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) to conduct a joint inquiry into the extent and underlying causes of illicit drug use in the ACT. The inquiry should also investigate the economic, health and social impact of illicit drug use on the Indigenous and wider ACT community.**
- 5.20 Of course, the impact of substance abuse is not restricted to Indigenous people in the ACT alone. The most recent source of national information on the use of illicit drugs by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in urban areas are the 1993 and 1994 National Drug Strategy surveys. According to these surveys, over half the Indigenous population aged 14 years and over in urban areas had tried at least one illicit drug, compared with 38% of the general urban population. About a quarter of the Indigenous urban population in the surveys also said they were currently using an illicit drug compared to 15% of the general population.²⁹
- 5.21 The Committee notes that in 1999 the Ministerial Council on Drug Strategy endorsed the establishment of the National Drug Strategy Reference Group for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples.³⁰ The Reference Group, among other things, provides advice to the national expert advisory committees of the Ministerial Council's Intergovernmental Committee on Drugs about strategies to address the specific drug issues relating to Indigenous people. The Committee encourages the Ministerial Council to make tackling illicit drug abuse by young Indigenous people, particularly in urban areas, a priority and recommends accordingly.

Recommendation 19

- 5.22 **The Ministerial Council on Drug Strategy consider placing a priority on developing and implementing strategies to reduce illicit drug use among young Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders, particularly those living in urban areas.**
- 5.23 While acknowledging the gravity of the drug problem in Indigenous communities, the Committee again wishes to stress that many young

29 Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) & the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *The Health and Welfare of Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples*, 4704.0, 1999, pp. 57-58.

30 See: www.health.gov.au/hfs/pubhhlth/nds/mcnds/.

Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders and their families are leading successful and productive lives without the taint of substance abuse.

Violence

- 5.24 The latter part of this inquiry has been conducted in the midst of a national debate about the appalling affects of violence and abuse within Indigenous families and communities.
- 5.25 It is not easy to quantify the incidence of violence or its impact among young people. There is: anecdotal evidence; evidence of hospitalisation rates due to injuries (transport accidents, self inflicted injury, attempted suicide, interpersonal violence); the number of applications for domestic violence orders; and surveys of individuals.³¹
- 5.26 As an indication, hospital separations for intentional injury inflicted by others on Indigenous males are over six times higher than for all males and 20 times higher for Indigenous females than all females.³² The rate of sexual abuse among young girls involved with the criminal justice system is between 70% and 80%.³³ As appears a common problem in Indigenous data collection, the official records are likely to under represent the true picture.³⁴
- 5.27 Furthermore, the statistics tend to show only some of the consequences of violence on the individuals involved. What they do not portray is the way that acts of violence affect those who witness it and those who are caught up in its consequences. Families and communities too are distorted by the violence of individuals. Accordingly, strategies to address the various forms of violence have to incorporate whole of family and whole of community responses in addition to coordinated action by Commonwealth and state agencies. Individuals including Elders and community leaders must be involved and lead the way, helping to eliminate violence. Cultural issues must not impede or prevent the implementation of initiatives.
- 5.28 In 1999, the Ministerial Council for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs agreed to the need for a national strategy for tackling Indigenous family violence and in 2001 a National Forum on Indigenous Family

31 ATSIIC, *Submissions*, p. S1559.

32 ABS, *Hospital Statistics: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders*, Occasional Paper, 1997-98, 4711.0, p. 34.

33 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women's Task Force on Violence, *Report*, 1999, p. 99.

34 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women's Task Force on Violence, *Report*, 1999, pp. 98-100.

Violence was held. The Commonwealth's response was the Partnerships Against Domestic Violence initiative. Program initiatives include the Indigenous component of the Office of the Status of Women's National Partnerships Against Domestic Violence Grants Programme and ATSIC's National Family Violence Legal Prevention Program. A further component of the Partnerships Against Domestic Violence Programme was the Walking into Walls national Aboriginal awareness raising campaign which took place in 2001.

- 5.29 In addition, state and territory agencies are also developing a range of initiatives to tackle violence in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, especially in Queensland.³⁵
- 5.30 In July 2001, state, territory and Commonwealth ministers for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander affairs and ATSIC agreed to a common seven point strategy to reduce Indigenous family violence. The seven priority areas are:
- reducing alcohol and substance abuse;
 - child safety and wellbeing;
 - building community capacity (including cultural strength);
 - improving the justice system;
 - creating safe places in communities (safe havens);
 - improving relationships (focusing on perpetrators and those at risk of offending); and
 - promoting shared leadership (empowering women).³⁶
- 5.31 At the meeting, ATSIC also announced that it would establish a National Indigenous Women's Forum to give Indigenous people a direct national voice in proposing solutions to family violence.
- 5.32 The Committee welcomes the initiatives to tackle this most pressing issue. However, Members are concerned that the programs, grants and pilot studies not be spent or conducted in isolation without best practice solutions being available across the nation. The Committee fears that the energy and good will of individuals, communities and agencies may dissipate in a flurry of small scale, short term and ad hoc initiatives.

35 See: Queensland Government, Response to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women's Task Force on Violence Report, *The First Step*, May 2000 and *The Next Step*, December 2000.

36 Hon Philip Ruddock MP, Minister for Reconciliation and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, *Media Release*, 28 July 2001.

Recommendation 20

- 5.33 **The Commonwealth continue to take a leadership role to ensure that initiatives funded under the National Indigenous Family Violence Grants Programme are coordinated with equivalent state and territory initiatives to provide long term and holistic solutions to Indigenous domestic violence.**
- 5.34 In September 1996, the then Minister for Family Services launched a proposed plan of action for the prevention of child abuse and neglect in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities after widespread consultation with Indigenous communities.³⁷ As with more recent studies, the proposed plan of action identified alcohol and substance abuse and the breakdown of family structures as contributing factors to child abuse and neglect.³⁸ The Committee understands that the recommendations of this plan have yet to be implemented and recommends accordingly.

Recommendation 21

- 5.35 **The Commonwealth Government reconsider the recommendations of the Proposed Plan of Action for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect in Aboriginal Communities and consider whether those recommendations can be integrated into more recent strategies.**

Truancy

- 5.36 One consistent message received by the Committee was that there is a correlation between truancy and anti social or self harming behaviour by Indigenous young people. As the Tangentyere Council in Alice Springs told the Committee:

While kids are in school they are not petrol sniffing, they are not committing criminal offences, they are not harming themselves and others. This activity makes them fitter, stronger and tired. At the end of the school day they have less energy for nefarious activity.³⁹

37 Secretariat National Aboriginal & Islander Child Care (SNAICC), *Proposed Plan of Action for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect in Aboriginal Communities: National Prevention Strategy for Child Abuse and Neglect*, 1996.

38 SNAICC, *Proposed Plan of Action*, p. 5.

39 Tangentyere Council, *Submissions*, p. S288.

- 5.37 Drawing the same conclusion, Aboriginal police liaison officers in Perth work with members of the local Aboriginal community and families to conduct truancy patrols on the basis that truancy is ‘the dominant cause of most juvenile offences’.⁴⁰
- 5.38 Of course, the more frequently students are at school and the longer they are retained in the education system, the greater their chance of employment or post school training when they finally do leave school.
- 5.39 The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy (AEP) is the national policy on Indigenous education supported by all governments. Under the aegis of the AEP, the National Indigenous English Literacy and Numeracy Strategy (NIELNS) has been developed to ensure that Indigenous students reach levels of literacy and numeracy comparable to other Australians. As an example of need, 71% of year 5 students nationally met the national year 5 identified performance standards in reading and writing while only 23% of Indigenous students met the standards.⁴¹
- 5.40 One of the NIELNS objectives is to lift the school attendance rates of Indigenous students to national levels, although how this is to be achieved is up to each state and territory. Several surveys from year 1 to year 12 indicated that Indigenous students have nearly twice the absentee rate of non Indigenous students.⁴²
- 5.41 There exists a mutual responsibility for encouraging and supporting young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders to attend school. Governments and departments of education have an obligation to ensure that they offer a culturally appropriate learning environment where children are stimulated and can see their schooling and the curricula as relevant. There may also be complex underlying reasons for truancy and other forms of non attendance at school. Some of these reasons include: a belief by students that school is irrelevant; embarrassment and resentment caused by feeling less successful scholastically than other classmates; hunger; transport difficulties; and an inability to afford textbooks, sporting equipment and excursion fees. An appreciation of such factors by schools will help them develop programs to reduce the incentives for truancy.

40 Western Australian Government, *Submissions*, p. S1135. See also Northern Territory Government, *Submissions*, p. S1387.

41 See: IESIP SRP National Coordination and Evaluation Team, *What Works: Explorations in Improving Outcomes for Indigenous Students*, March 2000, pp. 370-71.

42 IESIP SRP National Coordination and Evaluation Team, *What Works*, p. 372. Note that students can be absent from school without being truant.

However, at the same time, families should also be encouraged to take responsibility for supporting their children to attend school.

- 5.42 In this context, the Committee notes that one of the themes of the AEP is to increase Indigenous parental and community involvement in education decision making. Under the Aboriginal Student Support and Parent Awareness (ASSPA) Scheme, local ASSPA committees are established between schools and local Indigenous communities to improve Indigenous participation at school and involve parents in the education of their children. The ASSPA committees often also run homework centres, funded under the Aboriginal Tutorial Assistance Scheme, at which Indigenous school students can complete homework and receive assistance if required.⁴³ It is vital that full reports on the progress of AEP be published and that these highlight any impediments encountered with proposals to tackle them.
- 5.43 Nevertheless, the Committee believes that more needs to be done at the state and territory level to reduce truancy and recommends accordingly.

Recommendation 22

- 5.44 **The Commonwealth Government, in conjunction with state and territory governments, review current strategies and consider further strategies to reduce the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander truancy rate in schools.**

Such strategies should include those targeting:

- **Indigenous parents and highlighting to them the benefits of their children's regular and ongoing attendance at school; and**
- **Indigenous Elders, as community leaders, intervening on behalf of the young to help ensure the success of the strategies.**

Sport

- 5.45 The Committee has already noted a correlation between truancy, boredom and Indigenous self harm and anti social behaviour. Another factor that increases the likelihood of such behaviour is boredom. The Kurrawang Aboriginal Christian Community in Western Australia believes that school attendance can reduce boredom which, in itself, is also a significant cause of problems. The Community concludes that:

43 Department of Education Training and Youth Affairs, *Submissions*, p. S828.

People who are occupied, either as students or at work, have greater self-esteem, less boredom and less opportunity to create “mischief”.⁴⁴

- 5.46 Boredom can also arise because of a lack of recreation facilities, youth clubs, discos and employment opportunities for young Indigenous people in urban areas.⁴⁵ Boredom can ‘find outlets in drugs, alcohol and fights’⁴⁶ as:

the nexus between the availability of recreational opportunities for young people and diversion from anti-social activities is difficult to dispute.⁴⁷

- 5.47 The Committee believes that young people – Indigenous and non Indigenous – require positive outlets and pathways for their energies. The Committee accepts however, on the evidence, that there is a lack of culturally appropriate clubs, activities, sporting groups and the like for young Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders, particularly in country towns. To this end, the Committee notes with approval that the Commonwealth funds the Youth Activities Service Program which provides young people, aged 11 to 16 years old, with structured activities and positive peer supports outside school hours. The aim is to help them avoid patterns of destructive behaviour.⁴⁸
- 5.48 It has been repeatedly put to the Committee that a successful strategy for reducing boredom and providing a mechanism for broader engagement is to establish sporting activities and organised recreation at a community level for males and females and for all skill levels.⁴⁹ Sporting activities can also foster self esteem, social interaction skills and teamwork.
- 5.49 The difficulty in attracting funding for sports and recreation is that other areas of high need, such as the health, housing and education sectors, tend to receive priority. Similarly, there is reluctance to view, and thus fund, facilities such as sports grounds as an integral component of the infrastructure necessary to build a sustainable community.⁵⁰

44 Kurrawang Aboriginal Christian Community, *Submissions*, p. S104.

45 See Western Australian Government, *Submissions*, p. S1133.

46 ATSIC, Victorian Office, *Submissions*, p. S595. See also National Aboriginal History and Heritage Council, *Submissions*, p. S431.

47 Burns Aldis, *Submissions*, p. S363.

48 FaCS, *Submissions*, pp. S462-63.

49 ATSIC Wongatha Regional Council, *Submissions*, p. S108; Youth Coalition of the ACT, *Submissions*, p. S904; Gindaaja Yarrabah Youth Sports and Recreation Aboriginal Corporation, *Submissions*, p. S52; ATSIC Binaal Bill Regional Council, *Submissions*, p. S1096.

50 Burns Aldis, *Submissions*, p. S361; ATSIC, *Submissions*, p. S793.

Sport and Recreation – Dareton, NSW

Using Commonwealth and New South Wales Government grants, Dareton's Namatjira Working Party employed the community's landscape gardening apprentices to participate in the building of a football oval and a basketball court.

The community has formed the Namatjira Regional Sporting Association which has developed a calendar of sporting and recreational activities.

The Sporting Association and Collingwood Football Club host an annual trip to Melbourne for Dareton school children, selected on the basis of their attendance, attitude and performance at school each year.

Shortly after completion of the oval and the introduction of a night patrol, the NSW Police Service noted a reduction of approximately 50% in the incidence of petty crime and the Ambulance Service reported a reduction in the ambulance call out rate of 75%.⁵¹

- 5.50 ATSIIC supports a number of sporting programs, some in conjunction with the Australian Sports Commission and delivered in partnership with state and territory agencies. The National Sport and Recreation Program, for example, is designed to assist in the development of Indigenous athletes, coaches, administrators and trainers.⁵² However, the Committee is aware of the pressure on ATSIIC's budget and is reluctant to encourage it to divert funds from other priorities.
- 5.51 In May 2001, the Government released the report of the Youth Pathways Action Plan Taskforce commissioned by the Prime Minister.⁵³ The report recommends the development of local programs that build the confidence and self esteem of young people and create for them coherent local networks of support. A suggested mechanism is through participation in cultural, sporting and recreational activities.⁵⁴ The Government has already indicated its broad support for the findings of the Taskforce and

51 Burns Aldis, *Submissions*, p. S361. See also: Secrets of Successful Communities: The Namatjira Housing and Infrastructure Project, www.communitybuilders.nsw.gov.au/ (August 2000).

52 ATSIIC, *Submissions*, p. S793.

53 Youth Pathways Action Plan Taskforce, *Footprints to the Future: Task Force Report*, 2001.

54 *Footprints to the Future*, recommendation No. 5.

has responded with several measures in the 2001-02 Commonwealth budget with more comprehensive responses promised in the 2002-03 budget.⁵⁵ Accordingly, the Committee makes the following recommendation.

Recommendation 23

- 5.52 When responding fully to the Report of the Youth Pathways Action Plan Taskforce, the Government review funding arrangements to reflect the significant value of sport and organised recreation: in their own right; as diversionary tactics; and as means of building the confidence and self esteem of young Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders.**

Influencing their own Future

- 5.53 The Committee believes that young Indigenous people may feel less of a sense of alienation from the wider community if they can directly provide advice to governments and others on the issues that are of most importance to them.
- 5.54 The Commonwealth Minister for Education, Training and Youth Affairs formed the National Indigenous Youth Leadership Group in October 2000 specifically to raise awareness about the particular issues facing young Indigenous people. The leadership group offers an opportunity for direct dialogue between the Commonwealth Government and young Indigenous Australians. At its first meeting in July 2001, the Leadership Group told the Minister that its primary concerns were the issue of sexual and domestic assault; the need for more positive role models in Indigenous communities; and the need for more young people to be involved in community decision making.⁵⁶
- 5.55 Several states also have established or are establishing Indigenous youth councils. These draw on the experience of mainstream youth advisory councils which exist more commonly. The councils are made up of young people elected by their peers to represent their communities and are designed to enable members to advise governments about issues facing young people and ways in which to address them. They also provide a forum for young people to develop, coordinate and manage their own

55 Senator Hon Amanda Vanstone, Hon Dr David Kemp MP, *A National Commitment to Young People: The Report of the Prime Minister's Youth Pathways Action Plan Taskforce Footprints to the Future*, Joint Release, 22 May 2001.

56 Dr David Kemp, MP, Minister for Education, Training and Youth Affairs, *Media Release*, 18 July 2001, K163.

initiatives and are an excellent training ground for the next generation of community leaders.

Partnerships

Aboriginal Youth Councils – Western Australia

In 1999, Western Australian government agencies and ATSIC sponsored a state wide Aboriginal Youth Forum. As a result of the forum, the State Aboriginal Youth Council was established.

The purpose of the Youth Council is to provide Aboriginal youth with a voice in communities and government and to provide a conduit to influence government policy.

It will also foster the development of future Aboriginal leaders in Western Australia.⁵⁷

ATSIC Victoria and Aboriginal Affairs Victoria are working together to establish a similar Indigenous Youth Council in Victoria.⁵⁸

Recommendation 24

The Commonwealth Government fund the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission to take a leadership role in and also encourage the establishment of regional and state based Indigenous youth advisory councils and youth participation charters as mechanisms to better engage Indigenous young people in decision making processes and provide role models for their peers.

The Commonwealth Government also encourage Commonwealth agencies, state, territory and local government boards, committees and community organisations to involve young people in their decision making processes.

Crisis Accommodation

- 5.56 The extent of homelessness among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people is often masked and difficult to quantify. Young Indigenous

57 Western Australian Government, *Submissions*, p. S1132.

58 ATSIC, Victorian Office, *Submissions*, p. S700.

people appear reluctant to use the mainstream services for emergency and temporary accommodation, instead seeking accommodation in the extended family.⁵⁹

Transience

- 5.57 Homelessness, thus, often manifests itself as transience which brings its own problems – discontinuity of schooling and gaps in education, not to mention placing pressures and overcrowding on other family units. Lack of a permanent address also brings difficulties in accessing government allowances, such as the Youth Allowance which has been described as ‘intimidating and incompatible with the often transient lifestyles of many Indigenous young people’.⁶⁰
- 5.58 The difficulties facing young people seeking stable, long term accommodation away from their family are compounded by the lack of alternative housing options. Indigenous specific housing is provided under the ATSIC funded Community Housing and Infrastructure Program and the Aboriginal Rental Housing Programs funded by the Department of Family and Community Services. However, due to the demand for housing under these programs, families and those with young children receive priority for the housing stock which, in any event, is often unsuitable for single or young people.⁶¹ Similarly, Aboriginal Hostels Ltd has places for transients, but these places are severely limited too. The Committee will view with interest a review of unmet housing needs of young Indigenous people being funded by the Queensland Government that is due for completion towards the end of 2001.⁶²

Supported Accommodation Assistance Program

- 5.59 The Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) is a joint Commonwealth, state and territory mainstream program to assist people (young and old) who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. SAAP provides transitional supported accommodation with the goal of resolving the crisis that led to the homelessness in the first place, re-establishing

59 See; Bega Garnbirringu Health Services, *Submissions*, p. S60; Youth Council of the ACT, *Submissions*, p. S928.

60 Youth Coalition of the ACT, *Submissions*, p. S927.

61 See: Aboriginal Housing Board of Victoria, *Submissions*, p. S375-76; ATSIC, Victorian Office, *Submissions*, p. S582; Queensland Government, *Submissions*, p. S1304; Wongatha Wonganarra Aboriginal Corporation, *Transcripts*, p. 38.

62 Queensland Government, *Submissions*, p. S1304.

links with families where appropriate; and/or re-establishing a capacity to live independently of SAAP.⁶³

- 5.60 SAAP is overseen by a joint Commonwealth, state and territory committee, but is administered on a day to day basis by state and territory governments. These governments have agreements with non government organisations and some local governments for the delivery of SAAP funded services.
- 5.61 In 1998-99, just over 10% of SAAP agencies targeted Indigenous people and nearly 40% targeted young people. Just under half the agencies providing SAAP services to Indigenous people were Indigenous managed. In the same year, Indigenous youth made up 35% of total Indigenous clients – a figure roughly comparable with the percentage of all clients who were youth.⁶⁴
- 5.62 In 1998, Keys Young Pty Ltd reviewed Indigenous homelessness, including the accessibility of SAAP to Indigenous people.⁶⁵ The review recommended, among other things:
- an increase in the level of management support for Indigenous managed SAAP services;
 - increased service links between SAAP agencies and local Indigenous organisations and services;
 - providing further cross cultural training for non Indigenous SAAP workers; and
 - providing more outreach activity and adopting a holistic approach to Indigenous homelessness.⁶⁶
- 5.63 The SAAP Coordination and Development Committee established a working group to review the Keys Young report and recommend an implementation strategy. As part of the strategy agreed to by the Committee, the states and territories are consulting Indigenous organisations and communities to develop more appropriate services for Indigenous SAAP clients, particularly for those escaping family violence and for Indigenous young people.⁶⁷ The reforms are being implemented in

63 FaCS, *Submissions*, p. S466.

64 FaCS, *Submissions*, pp. S467-68.

65 Keys Young Pty Ltd, *Homelessness in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island Context and its Possible Implications for the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP): Final Report*, Prepared for the Department of Family and Community Services, 1999.

66 See: FaCS, *Submissions*, pp. S491-92.

67 FaCS, *Submissions*, p. S492.

conjunction with the Commonwealth Advisory Committee on Homelessness.

SAAP and Indigenous Young People

- 5.64 As the states and territories are responsible for the delivery of SAAP services, there may be regional variations in the speed and extent of reforms, depending on the priorities of the particular jurisdiction.
- 5.65 Evidence to the Committee suggests that young Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders still face barriers to accessing SAAP funded services. The barriers, as assessed by young Indigenous people, include:
- the lack of culturally appropriate services for young Indigenous people (as distinct from Indigenous people of all ages);
 - incidents of discrimination from SAAP agencies with a non Indigenous focus;
 - fear of coming to the attention of ‘social services’;
 - feelings of shame and, particularly in services run by Indigenous organisations, fear of lack of confidentiality.⁶⁸
- 5.66 The Northern Territory Government also noted a lack of facilities under SAAP arrangements for younger children (under 16 years old) seeking alternative accommodation.⁶⁹
- 5.67 The Committee acknowledges the reforms being undertaken to make SAAP funded services more accessible to Indigenous people. However, Members are concerned that the needs of young people, as a sub group of the Indigenous client group, are still not receiving adequate attention. At the same time, the Committee wishes to reinforce the need to also provide for younger dependent children escaping family violence.

Recommendation 25

- 5.68 **The Commonwealth Government, in partnership with the states and territories, place greater urgency on providing services under the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) for:**
- **young Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders, including those in their early teenage years;**
 - **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children**

⁶⁸ See: Youth Coalition of the ACT, *Submissions*, p. S928; ATSIC, *Submissions*, p. S1549.

⁶⁹ Northern Territory Government, *Submissions*, p. S1385.

escaping domestic violence; and

■ **those living in smaller rural towns.**

- 5.69 Of course, early intervention in the lives of those at risk of homelessness is better than providing a service once a person has left home. SAAP services are complemented by the mainstream Reconnect Program. This program, for the young homeless and those at risk of homelessness is delivered by community organisations and aims to reconnect young people with their families, and reintegrate them with the education system, employment market and their community. Activities funded include counselling services, referrals to specialist services, respite care, and sports and recreation.⁷⁰

Conclusion

- 5.70 The Committee appreciates that many of the anti social and self harming activities undertaken by some Indigenous young people arise from a variety of underlying problems. Thus the symptoms cannot be treated in isolation and must be tackled in a holistic way and integrated with programs that strengthen families.
- 5.71 Furthermore, to be lasting, solutions need to be preventative, rather than only swinging into action once a problem has become acute. In this regard, the Committee notes that the Commonwealth Government's Youth Pathways Action Plan Taskforce report recommends bringing parents, schools, communities and government agencies together to encourage the successful transition of young people from childhood into adulthood. The Committee commends the direction of the Taskforce report, but wishes to emphasise that Indigenous young people are a category most 'at risk' and deserving the Government's highest priority.

Recommendation 26

- 5.72 **When determining further responses to the report from the Prime Minister's Youth Pathways Action Plan Taskforce, *Footprints to the Future*, the Commonwealth Government develop specific initiatives for young Indigenous people on the basis that they are one of the most 'at risk' groups.**
- 5.73 As a final note, the Committee wants to stress again that, while many young Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders are battling with complex

70 FaCS, *Submissions*, p. S462.

disadvantages, others are managing the transition to successful and productive lives as adults.

- 5.74 The Committee believes that another way of building self confidence and self esteem, is for the establishment of a 'clearing house' to disseminate information about successful Indigenous youth initiatives. The clearing house could be accessed by Commonwealth, state and territory policy makers, community groups, service providers and young people themselves. While the Committee envisages that the clearing house would be primarily computer based, it could also incorporate a telephone based advisory service with access to a register of potential mentors. Such a clearing house could be modelled on the National Child Protection Clearinghouse administered by the Australian Institute of Family Studies and funded by the Department of Family and Community Services.⁷¹ The Committee recommends accordingly.

Recommendation 27

- 5.75 **The Commonwealth Government establish a 'clearing house' to collect, share, monitor and distribute information on issues affecting young Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders. The 'clearing house' should be funded by the Department of Family and Community Services (FaCS); administered by FaCS and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission and designed in consultation with Indigenous groups. It should be run along the lines of the National Child Protection Clearinghouse.**

71 See: www.aifs.org.au/nch/nch.html.