



Commissioner for Children and Young People
Western Australia

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Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs
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Dear Dr Dacre

Inquiry into the contribution of sport to Indigenous wellbeing and mentoring

Thank you for the opportunity to submit to this Inquiry into the contribution of sport to Indigenous wellbeing and mentoring. I consider this Inquiry an important opportunity to improve wellbeing outcomes for Aboriginal children and young people given the multiple positive benefits of sport.

Role of the Commissioner for Children and Young People in Western Australia

I was appointed as Western Australia's (WA) inaugural Commissioner for Children and Young People in December 2007 pursuant to the *Commissioner for Children and Young People Act 2006* (the Act). Under the Act my role is to advocate for the half a million children and young people in WA under 18 years of age, having a specific responsibility for promoting and monitoring their wellbeing.

In performing my functions under the Act the best interests of children and young people must be my paramount consideration. I must also give priority to and have special regard to the interests and needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people, and have regard to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCROC).

I am also required under section 19(b) of the Act, to promote the participation of children and young people in making the decisions that affect their lives, and to encourage government and non-government agencies to seek the participation of children and young people appropriate to their age and maturity.

Caring for the future growing up today

It is with these responsibilities in mind that I make my submission focusing on the Inquiry's term of reference – *sporting bodies increasing opportunities for Indigenous participation, including opportunities for Indigenous women*

Overview

As part of my *Wellbeing Monitoring Framework*¹, tabled in the WA Parliament in February 2012, participation in sport and cultural activities is one of the 33 measures in the report on *The State of Western Australia's Children and Young People*.

Participation in sport and cultural activities has been included as a measure of wellbeing as it can have many benefits for children and young people. In addition to supporting physical and mental development, sport can develop team work abilities, communication skills and a sense of connectedness to community.²

Pertinent to sport and the wellbeing of Aboriginal children and young people, Article 29 (1) (a) of UNCROC states that:

*State parties agree that the education of the child shall be directed to the development of the child's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential.*³

Based on 2008 data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS)⁴, in Australia, for Aboriginal children and young people aged four to 14 year, almost half (47%) had played organised sport in the last 12 months. Of these children and young people 51 per cent were boys and 43 per cent were girls. Aboriginal girls and boys four to eight years of age had lower participation rates (30% and 34% respectively) than Aboriginal girls and boys aged nine to 11 years (57% and 63% respectively), and 12 to 14 year olds (51% and 69% respectively).

For Aboriginal boys aged four to 14 years, the three most popular sports were Australian rules football (17%), rugby league (16%) and outdoor soccer (10.5%). For Aboriginal girls aged four to 14 years, the most popular sport was netball (13%) followed by swimming (7%) and basketball (7%).

In terms of educational attainment, the ABS 2008 survey found that of all Aboriginal people whose highest educational attainment was Postgraduate degree, Graduate degree/Graduate certificate or Bachelor degree, participation in sport was the highest at 39 per cent, whereas the lowest participation rate (25%) was reported by Aboriginal people whose highest educational attainment was junior secondary education.

¹ Commissioner for Children and Young People WA 2012, *Wellbeing Monitoring Framework* [website], viewed 8 October 2012, Commissioner for Children and Young People WA, <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/crc.htm>

² Commissioner for Children and Young People WA 2012, *The State of Western Australia's Children and Young People – Edition One*, Commissioner for Children and Young People WA, p.135

³ Office of the United Nations High Commission for Human Rights, *Convention on the Rights of the Child* [website], viewed 8 October 2012, <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/crc.htm>

⁴ Australian Bureau of Statistics 2008, *Indigenous People's Participation in Sport and Physical Activities* [website], viewed 8 October 2012, <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Products/4156.0.55.001~June+2010~Main+Features~Indigenous+People's+Participation+in+Sport+and+Physical+Activities>

In relation to increased opportunities to develop friendships and contacts which create a diverse social network, the ABS 2008 survey found that over one-third (36%) of Aboriginal people who reported that a few to half of their friends were Aboriginal participated in sport and physical activities. Of all people surveyed who reported that most of their friends were Aboriginal, 28% took part in sport and physical activity, whilst the participation rate was 23% for Aboriginal people who reported that all of their friends were Aboriginal.

What children and young people say about sport

In 2009, I commissioned research into the wellbeing of children and young people. Fun and activity were one of the top eight things that children and young people said was important to their wellbeing.⁵

Specifically sport was important to many children and young people. Children and young people loved team games and sport of all kinds played a big role in lots of young people's lives. Aboriginal boys in particular spoke animatedly about their footy.⁶

A lack of places to go and things to do was identified by most children and young people as a problem and was particularly commented upon by children and young people in regional and remote areas who said facilities were non-existent, over-crowded or available only for adults.⁷

In my role as Commissioner, I travel extensively throughout WA consulting with Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children and young people as well as government and non-government agencies. Many Aboriginal children and young people have told me how important sport is to them. Some children and young people, particularly those in regional areas have told me that there are not enough activities of any kind for them to participate in. Specific to sporting activities, children and young people have commented that:

- it is difficult to get recognition for sporting and other talents if you are not able to participate in metropolitan contests
- they are unable to participate in organised sporting activities due to the associated costs
- more resources are required to provide recreational opportunities on weekends and in outlying Aboriginal communities
- there is a lack of transport to and from sporting activities.

Involving children and young people

Directly involving children and young people in decisions that impact on them and taking their views into account in the development of laws, policies and programs results in better outcomes for children and young people. I therefore recommend that

⁵ Commissioner for Children and Young People 2010, *Research Report: Children and Young People's Views on Wellbeing*, Commissioner for Children and Young People WA, p.28

⁶ Ibid, p.45

⁷ Ibid, p.47

the Inquiry pay specific attention to submissions from Aboriginal children and young people and from organisations that represent their views.

Additionally, the Inquiry may like to consider meeting with representative groups of Aboriginal children and/or young people, either those who have made a submission or those who provide advice to organisations who have. In my experience hearing from children and young people directly about issues that affect them is both informative and inspiring.

The Inquiry may be interested to know that the Joint Committee on Cyber-Safety undertook to consult with young people through on-line surveys as part of their *Inquiry into Cyber-Safety*.⁸

Additionally, a copy of my *Involving Children and Young People – Participation Guidelines* is available on my website at www.ccyp.wa.gov.au

Evidence-based programs

My *Wellbeing Monitoring Framework* includes a report: *Building Blocks: Best practice programs that improve the wellbeing of children and young people – Edition One*.⁹ I contracted the development of this report to the Australian Institute of Family Studies who based on set criteria identified best practice programs and programs that were promising. The following programs have been assessed as either a best-practice program or a promising program.

1. Clontarf Academy is run nationwide by the Clontarf Foundation and is a best practice program. Using the passion that Aboriginal boys have for football, the Clontarf Foundation exists to improve the education, discipline, self-esteem, life skills and employment prospects of young Aboriginal men. By doing so it aims to equip them to participate more meaningfully in society. Qualitative and quantitative research has found that the program has a significant impact on school retention rates and participants' ability to secure employment after high school.
2. Deadly Sista Girlz¹⁰ is run by the David Wirrpanda Foundation in WA, New South Wales, Australian Capital Territory and Victoria and is a best practice program. The program aims to empower Aboriginal girls by offering a safe, stable and trusting environment in which they can discuss current and personal issues and receive guidance from positive Aboriginal female role models. An evaluation using mixed methodology found that the program had a significant impact on participants' self-esteem, personal relationships and awareness of healthy lifestyle choices.

⁸ Joint Select Committee on Cyber-Safety 2011, *High-Wire Act: Cyber-Safety and the Young* [website], viewed 9 October 2012, http://aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/House_of_Representatives_Committees?url=jssc/report.htm

⁹ Commissioner for Children and Young People WA 2012, *Building Blocks: Best practice programs that improve the wellbeing of children and young people – Edition One*, Commissioner for Children and Young People WA

¹⁰ *Ibid*, p.83

3. The Nyungar Sports Education Program¹¹ at Balga Senior High School in WA is a best practice program. The program is an intervention program designed to encourage Aboriginal adolescents in the Swan Region (covering the northern suburbs of Perth) to attend school regularly. Qualitative research has found the program has had a significant impact on retention rates of participating students
4. The Sports Mentoring Project¹² run by the Stride Foundation in New South Wales is a promising program. It has an Aboriginal focus and aims to re-integrate disadvantaged and disengaged students into the school environment, improve their employment prospects, build skills and help them set goals for the future, thereby increasing young people's connection with their community, school and peers. It also provides them with the opportunity to engage in activities that have valued outcomes for themselves and the community.

In developing this submission I noted that there are a number of Aboriginal sports and mentoring programs operational across Australia for children and young people. I recommend that the Inquiry establish an evidence base for Aboriginal sports and mentoring programs in Australia and that any new Aboriginal sports and mentoring programs are formally evaluated.

I thank you for the opportunity to contribute to this Inquiry and look forward to reading the final report.

Yours sincerely

MICHELLE SCOTT

Commissioner for Children and Young People WA

12 October 2012

¹¹ Ibid, p. 31

¹² Ibid, p. 68