

Grannies Group



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Submission prepared for:

**The Inquiry into the Needs of
Urban Dwelling Aboriginal and
Torres Strait Islander Peoples**

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Recommendations

The Grannies Group submits the following recommendations for the Inquiry to consider. Supporting arguments are to be found in the body of the submission.

1.0 Ways to deliver existing programs available to urban dwelling indigenous Australians and services more effectively

1.1 Program initiators and co-ordinators should:

- ❑ consult with members of the relevant indigenous communities
- ❑ get local members of indigenous communities involved in the delivery of the programs or services
- ❑ avoid tokenism; that is setting up indigenous committees for purpose of consultation, then ignoring what they say or by passing the committees during the process of policy development or service delivery
- ❑ involve member(s) of indigenous communities in setting priorities that are relevant for the delivery of the services of programs.

2.0 Ways to extend the involvement of urban indigenous people in decision making affecting their local communities

2.1 A set proportion of the members of governing Boards of agencies that have an impact on indigenous communities should be drawn directly from the relevant communities.

3.0 The situation and needs of indigenous young people in urban areas

Drug abuse

- 3.1 Specialised counselling on a one to one basis needs to be available to indigenous drug users as part of their rehabilitation program.
- 3.2 Counsellors need to be fully trained prior to working with indigenous people who have drug-related problems or are involved in substance abuse generally.
- 3.3 Counsellors should have formal training and qualifications in Aboriginal culture.
- 3.4 An Indigenous Detoxification Centre fully staffed by Indigenous persons should be established.

Domestic violence

- 3.5 Additional resources need to be allocated to enable at least three more Aboriginal Women's shelters to be established; one each for the Northern, Western and Southern areas of metropolitan Adelaide.

Alcohol abuse

- 3.6 The Aboriginal Sobriety Group (ASG) and the Aboriginal Drug and Alcohol Council should:
 - Consult and involve the indigenous community in their policy development processes

- ❑ Embark on a significantly expanded outreach program to include country areas such as the Riverland, Port Augusta, Whyalla and the Murray Mallee
- ❑ Investigate the level of efficiency of their service delivery
- ❑ Undertake ,an indigenous community focussed evaluation of the services that they provide.

Jobs

- 3.7 Employers should be made more aware of their social responsibilities regarding the engagement of qualified skilled trades person.
- 3.8 Feasibility of setting up a community-based support system for indigenous apprentices should be investigated.

Education and Training

- 3.9 Resource allocation for the Homework Centres scheme that DETYA operates as part of the Aboriginal Tutorial Assistance Scheme (ATAS) should be increased.
- 3.10 More effort should be directed at making parents in Indigenous communities aware of the guidelines related to the setting up of Homework Centres.
- 3.11 Information about the following supportive DETYA programs should also be widely disseminated to Indigenous parents:
 - ❑ Aboriginal Student Support and Parent Awareness (ASSPA)
 - ❑ Vocational Education Guidance Assistance Scheme (VEGAS)
 - ❑ Aboriginal Tutorial Assistance Scheme (ATAS).

- 3.12** Appropriate training and skills development should be made available for Aboriginal parents interested in setting up Homework centres or becoming involved in other DETYA programs such as Aboriginal Student Support and Parent Awareness (ASSPA) and the Vocational Education Guidance Assistance Scheme (VEGAS).
- 3.13** Increased effort should be directed at developing community based strategies that will help support indigenous young people to remain at school until they have acquired enough skills to begin apprenticeships.
- 3.14** Presentation of Indigenous culture by indigenous community groups to schools should be strongly supported.

Single parents

- 3.15** Government support should be directed towards community based groups that are prepared to provide appropriate mentoring and support for indigenous single parents.

4.0 The maintenance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander culture in urban areas

- 4.1** Support should be provided for community groups that promote Indigenous cultural practices in urban areas.

5.0 Opportunities for economic independence in urban areas

- 5.1 The ATSIIC support scheme for indigenous small business should be broadened to include support for community based enterprise start-ups.

6.0 Housing and homelessness

- 6.1 The AHA should involve our communities effectively in policy-making processes.
- 6.2 A stock of housing should be built up and dedicated for rental to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders.
- 6.3 The AHA should assist in developing a pool of skilled indigenous trades persons to carry out maintenance on the housing stock.
- 6.4 The AHA should implement an adequate level of maintenance for the Aboriginal housing stock.
- 6.5 The AHA should screen contractors that apply to carry out maintenance on the housing stock.
- 6.6 The AHA should request from the Federal Government more flexible guidelines related to the allocation and use of funds for housing at the State level.

Let us introduce ourselves

We are a group of Indigenous people mainly grandmothers, who live in metropolitan Adelaide. Our work in the Indigenous community covers the entire metropolitan area.

And what is our work?

We devote most of our spare time in doing what we can to help our young folk. The young in the Indigenous community that we are often involved with include people who:

- ❑ have spent or are spending time in jail
- ❑ have heroin or other drug addiction problem(s)
- ❑ experience frequent rejection by landlords when trying to finding somewhere to live
- ❑ are single parents
- ❑ come across persistent and acute difficulties in their attempts to find paid employment.

And so the list goes on. Sadly, it is not uncommon to find one person with, not simply one of the problems we have listed above, but a multiplicity of them.

With our extensive knowledge of what is going on in our community we decided some time ago that we were not going to sit by and watch the desperate plight of our children and our grand children keep getting worse.

So far we have lobbied government Departments so as to bring our deteriorating circumstances of family and community to their attention. We are constantly trying as much as we can to get resources allocated to the problems that we have described. Naturally, we put our own time into counselling our people and provide support for professional counsellors who work with our young people that are in difficulty.

We also have regular meetings to inform ourselves about relevant events that are taking place outside our community and also to work out effective ways of helping our offspring and their children to overcome their problems.

Why we are making this submission

This Inquiry provides a highly useful opportunity for Indigenous urban dwelling communities in Australia, such as ourselves, to let the Federal Government know about issues that we have to contend with as a minority group in the Australian community.

In previous years we had no choices. But today, we have decided that there are some alternatives for action that are open to us. A typical example of this is our initiative in setting up the Grannies Group. The Grannies Group exists to support present and future generations of Indigenous people in their struggle to overcome difficulties related to substance abuse and other problems that we discuss in detail in this submission.

But we do not intend to tell you only about what our problems are although these are many and varied. We also put forward our ideas and comments to you because we believe that if the Government accepts and acts on them they will assist in resolving the problems in our communities or at least in alleviating them.

The approach we take in this submission is to address each of the items in the Terms of Reference in turn.

Terms of Reference Item 1

“the nature of existing programs and services available to urban dwelling indigenous Australians, including ways to more effectively deliver services considering the special needs of these people”

In our opinion, existing programs and services that are targeted at indigenous people in urban dwelling areas deliver less than their potential or in a few cases miss the mark altogether. The reasons vary in detail for each under performing program or service. However the basic causes are always the same and they include:

- ❑ failure to consult with members of the relevant indigenous communities
- ❑ failure to get local members of indigenous communities involved in the delivery of the programs or services
- ❑ tokenism; that is setting up indigenous committees for purpose of consultation, then ignoring what they say or by passing the committees during the process of policy development or service delivery
- ❑ failure to involve member(s) of indigenous communities in setting priorities that are relevant for the delivery of the services or programs.

We have clear examples of these unsatisfactory management practices that cover a range of programs and services. However we have selected housing because it is an area of critical concern to us. We present our comments and arguments related to housing provision in urban dwelling areas in Terms of Reference Item No 6 of this submission.

There are several different ways of approach that will make programs and services have better chance of success.

Important among these is that the Federal government should be more flexible in the guidelines that it attaches to funds it channels through State agencies for programs and services in indigenous communities.

Flexible guidelines will enable consultations between relevant State agencies and our communities to be more fruitful. State Government agencies and groups such as ours will be able to tailor ways of working to meet specific community priorities and needs.

Greater flexibility will also make it possible for all parties involved to handle the issue of setting priorities in service delivery as part of the process of designing a particular program or program or service. When priorities are set in this manner, from the ground up, our communities understand them more easily; community members see service delivery as fairer and overall co-operation and community involvement is much greater.

We must emphasise that, with the exception of racism, we do not see the difficulties that we have to deal as being generally different from those that other people in the mainstream Australian community have to contend with as well.

The key differences are in the intensity of the problems we experience, how intractable they are, difficulties in making progress that is sustainable over time, the very widespread nature of the problems we need to overcome as individuals and as communities if we are to be able to survive.

Our special needs are therefore more resources, much more than we are getting at present. Government agencies and groups such as ours need to work together to find ways that genuinely take the views of our communities and what we are capable of doing into account before applying the resources.

Terms of Reference Item 2

“ways to extend the involvement of urban indigenous people in decision making affecting their local communities, including partnership governance arrangement”

As we see it, there appear to be two basic methods by which urban dwelling indigenous Australians may take a greater role in decisions affecting their communities.

The first method is the situation where a Committee comprising indigenous people play an advisory role to the Board of an organisation. The second method is where a set proportion of Board membership is drawn directly from the indigenous community.

The second method presents far better opportunities for community views to be considered in the decision making process. We are currently having difficulties influencing housing policy making in South Australia; that are at least partly due to the faults built into the Advisory Committee model that we use. Put simply, Boards can choose to ignore Advisory Committees and thereby sideline views and aspirations of indigenous communities.

We shall deal with the specific problems that we are experiencing in having an effective voice in housing policy in South Australia in Terms of Reference item 6 of this submission.

Where the direct Board participation model is applied, it will be essential to put selection mechanisms in place that will ensure that the indigenous members of the Board are truly representative of the community.

Terms of Reference Item 3

“The situation and needs of indigenous young people in urban areas especially relating to health, education, employment, and homelessness (including access to services funded from the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program).”

As we said earlier in this submission our initial motivation in setting up the Grannies Group was to try and do something to lessen the plight of our own offspring and their children involved in substance abuse. Since then our range of activities has widened considerably to include priorities that we have listed in the next section.

Priority areas for action

Based on our direct and practical experience of problems facing indigenous young people we believe key areas for action in order of priority are:

- ❑ Drug abuse
- ❑ Domestic violence
- ❑ Alcohol abuse
- ❑ Housing and homelessness
- ❑ Jobs
- ❑ Education and training
- ❑ Single parents

Drug abuse

Considerable effort has been put into helping people with drug-related problems and substance abuse generally but the overall situation seems to be worsening.

Factors that are contributing to this outcome are the declining level of support services that are available to drug offenders. Funds are urgently required to enable professionally trained staff to be engaged to work with young indigenous drug users.

To arrest the deteriorating situation and set current programs on the course to achieve better results the following suggestions need to be acted upon without delay:

- ❑ Specialised counselling on a one to one basis needs to be available to indigenous drug users as part of their rehabilitation program
- ❑ Counsellors need to be fully trained prior to working with indigenous drug users
- ❑ Counsellors should have formal training and qualifications in Aboriginal culture
- ❑ An Indigenous Detoxification Centre fully staffed by Indigenous persons should be established.

As a group we stand ready to provide all the support we can to professionals that State and Federal Governments may appoint to implement these initiatives.

Domestic violence

Domestic violence continues to be a serious problem in our community. At present there is only one shelter in metropolitan Adelaide for indigenous women and their children. The shelter is Nunga Miminis Shelter Inc at North Adelaide. Since its establishment in 1991, Nunga Miminis has provided shelter for 837 women and 1361 children.

A shelter such as Nunga Miminis provides vitally needed services for our community.

More shelters are urgently required. Additional shelters may be located at different parts of the metropolitan area thereby making it easier for victims of domestic violence to reach them. At least three more Aboriginal Women's shelters are urgently needed, one each for the Northern, Western and Southern areas of metropolitan Adelaide.

Domestic violence problem: Muriel shares some of her past experience

I lived a very violent domestic life for about a period of 7 years and in that time I had 3 boys and a girl. Each time I thought of leaving I was so unsure, insecure of my life and everything around me. I thought things would change in the short times each day that my husband was sober and for this reason I would tolerate things for my children and myself. I would pretend to my neighbours and friends that everything was fine and try to smile despite what was happening in my home. I would try and run away with my children thinking I could manage but I kept going back because he would eventually find us and take us to where he worked in the railways. You must understand that this was a home to the children and me and in 1960 and early 1970 I did not have anywhere else to go for support. Women's Shelters did not exist at this time. I often ran away but because I was so badly injured I could not go very far. The police, the doctor's, the hospitals' and the welfare became involved. He would kick me in the face and my back as well as the rest of my body. I could only walk properly after I came out of the hospital. The welfare would send me to my Aunties home to rest and think about my future. During this time my children were sent to a Salvation Army home for a period of 2 years. I would visit them on weekends and holidays until I was given a lovely home at Klemzig for my children and me where we lived for 10 years. My children were able to complete their education at the Klemzig Primary and the Marden High schools without the threat of domestic violence. I moved to Cheltenham and the children continued their education at Croydon High School. They became involved with the local football club, painting and carpentry with the local TAFE College. I am very proud of my life today where I live a very quiet existence. I encouraged my children to be involved with the Lutheran Church and this involvement continues today. I would say to any persons living in and with Domestic Violence today, I know what it is like to be scared and that this existence becomes a rut after a while, but believe me when I say that you just have to make the final move. Nunga Mimini's is a shelter for women in domestic violence and there are other services available that were not available during the 1960's and 70's. Life is there to be enjoyed. I am living a most enjoyable life. Life isn't easy but just be strong and know that you will get your rewards. So I say to all the Mothers, be strong and say a little prayer.

Alcohol abuse

The two main programs in Adelaide aimed at indigenous people who have problems related to alcohol abuse are the Aboriginal Sobriety Group (ASG) and the Aboriginal Drug and Alcohol Council (ADAC).

ADAC seems to have a preventative approach in the way it works and generally adopts a fairly low profile with regard to the indigenous community. We believe that ADAC's programs will be more effective if it provides more information to the indigenous community about what it does.

In contrast to ADAC the ASG has a high profile in the indigenous and mainstream communities. One of the programs that the ASG runs, known as the Mobile Assistance Patrol (MAP), has yielded positive results and it is clearly a very useful service.

However the indigenous community as a whole does not have much of an input into the policy-making processes of either ADAC or ASG.

We believe the work that ADAC and ASG carry out can be significantly enhanced in volume and quality if the programs are open to influence from the indigenous community to a much greater extent than they are at present.

In particular, the ASG and its client population will benefit if the ASG takes following steps:

- ❑ Consult and involve the indigenous community in policy development processes of the ASG

- ❑ Embark on a significantly expanded outreach program to include country areas such as the Riverland, Port Augusta and Whyalla and Murray Mallee

- Investigate the level of efficiency in its service delivery

- Undertake an indigenous community focussed evaluation of the services that it provides.

Housing and homelessness

Housing is important because it is a critical requirement for people who are being rehabilitated, looking for jobs, taking training courses or caring for family as single parents.

The two main sources of assistance for people in our communities when confronted with housing problems and homelessness are the Aboriginal Housing Authority and the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP).

The contribution the SAAP makes towards housing and homelessness problems of Indigenous people in metropolitan Adelaide is useful but limited in scope and scale.

The issues that we confront in our search for a fair and equitable access to housing through the Aboriginal Housing Authority are discussed in detail in Terms of Reference Item 6 of this submission.

Jobs

In their pursuit of paid employment there are three options that are open to the young and others in the indigenous community and they are:

- ❑ Seek employment in the mainstream community
- ❑ Enrol for an apprenticeships through Statewide Group Training or the Office of Employment and Youth – Aboriginal Programs
- ❑ Community Development and Employment Program (CDEP) and other programs

For the young an apprenticeship offers a promising path to a career. With a traineeship or a New Apprenticeship qualification behind them the young indigenous person should be in a better position to find employment.

If they are good quality apprentice getting a job with their employer after the apprenticeship provides one of the best points of entry into the work force.

However some employers are unwilling to hire apprentices they have trained because the subsidy provided ends when the apprenticeship is completed. Accordingly such employers prefer to put on another apprentice so as to be able to obtain the apprenticeship subsidy.

Clearly, such a use of the apprenticeship subsidy goes against the logic and the purpose of the scheme.

The apprenticeship subsidy that is designed to assist in employers in training a young person for the workforce is also the very thing that in some cases prevents them from getting a job when they become skilled trades persons.

This is a matter that needs to be addressed as soon as possible.

Employers should be made aware of their social responsibility in engaging qualified skilled trades persons, particularly those that they help train.

In seeking employment after an apprenticeship as well as during the apprenticeship the young trades person needs transport, adequate housing, work clothes etc. Often their support systems do not stretch far enough to be able to offer consistency in terms of punctuality and predictability in attendance at the work site.

It would be useful to investigate the feasibility of setting up a community based support system that provides career planning advice, transport services for a defined period and accommodation options to the young person during the apprenticeship period and/or immediately afterwards.

Such a support system is in some ways similar to the Homework Centres program that the Federal Department of Employment Training and Youth Affairs, Indigenous Education Unit has established. Under the Scheme DETYA assists interested parents in setting up in homework centres in schools.

Job related problem: Johnny explains his problem and reasons for his anxiety

My name is Johnny and I am 24. Earlier on like I had some troubles with the Police. A bit of dope, stealing a car for a joy ride, yelling at police. That kind of stuff. Unruly behaviour the cops called it.

I was seventeen or eighteen then and I am all over with that now. That kind of way of living.

My girl friend is pregnant. Her name is Susie and she is really nice.

My sister Julie and her partner Danny got jobs in Adelaide so they moved here from the Riverland. And now I get cheap rent with them. And I got my self a job as builder's labourer. Really good boss. Picks me up for work and drops me home.

I was real pleased when he said for me to become his apprentice. But to do that I have do some study at TAFE. The boss can't drive me to TAFE. My sister and her partner take their car to work and its Danny's work car anyway

I have no cash to buy a car. And I cannot get a bank loan because they say I have no job history,

And I can't travel to TAFE by public transport from the work site because it's too far and I wont get to TAFE on time.

I am afraid if I don't take the apprenticeship my boss will give me the sack and put on someone else. This job is a really good chance for me. And I need to make it work.

And there is the baby due in six months. I would really like to finish my apprenticeship and then set up family with Susie. But I feel caught. Don't know where to turn.

Education and Training

Education and training programs have been mentioned in the section under “Jobs”. Some bear repeating because they have the potential to have profound and long term effects on the young people involved. We refer particularly to the Homework Centres operated through DETYA. These Homework Centres help to instil effective learning habits into the students. Good learning habits are of crucial importance and when acquired will stay with the Indigenous pupil through their school days and on to study at the tertiary level as well.

Homework Centres program forms part of DETYA’s Aboriginal Tutorial Assistance Scheme (ATAS). Information about the scheme, and the Homework centres in particular, should be widely disseminated in our communities so that parents can become aware of the guidelines for establishing a centre in their school.

Resources for the Homework Centres and ATAS should be increased.

Other supportive DETYA programs are:

- ❑ Aboriginal Student Support and Parent Awareness (ASSPA)
- ❑ Vocational Education Guidance Assistance Scheme (VEGAS)

Again, information about these DETYA programs should be made widely available to Indigenous parents. Further, it would be helpful for Indigenous parents to obtain some training and skills development relevant to these programs so that they can initiate and take part in the associated procedures effectively.

A serious and persistent problem area for the young in our community is lack of proficiency in literacy and numeracy. Our young people are not staying at school long enough to be able to pick up these key competencies. As a result they have difficulties in entering apprenticeship programs and the workforce generally.

Increased effort should be made to develop community based strategies that will help support our young people to remain at school until they have acquired enough skills to begin an apprenticeship. The idea of a community based support system for indigenous apprentices (See the section on Jobs) could form part of the strategies.

Adequate performance by young indigenous person does not only depend on the energy and enthusiasm that the student applies to their work.

The environment, the attitude of peers and the treatment of Indigenous culture in the curriculum are all factors that impact on the Indigenous student.

The most effective means of countering racism that young Indigenous people experience at school will be by enhancing the awareness and knowledge of Aboriginal culture that non Indigenous students have. Members of our group have presented aspects of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture in schools with highly encouraging results. What has been particularly pleasing has been the observation by indigenous children that racial taunts and other discriminatory behaviour from fellow pupils had lessened considerably following the lessons on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture presented by members of our group.

Single parents

Most single parents in indigenous communities are female. Problems they have to deal with include limited personal resources, racial discrimination by landlords and isolation.

We believe that with the injection of modest resources from State and/or Federal governments community based groups such as ours will be able to provide appropriate mentoring support for indigenous single parents.

Terms of Reference Item 4

“The maintenance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture in urban areas, including where appropriate, ways in which such maintenance can be encouraged;”

Maintenance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture in urban areas will help in fostering cohesiveness and individual sense of belonging in our communities. The initiatives and the activities are things that only those of us in the communities can provide for our people.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural practices that we can promote in urban areas include dancing, story telling, weaving, cooking, woodcarving, language, traditional parenting skills, and development of community support systems.

Assistance that Government provide for such practices will enable the parts that are not culturally sensitive to be taped or recorded and distributed to schools, clubs and other interested groups throughout the wider community.

Terms of Reference Item 5

“Opportunities for economic independence in urban areas and;”

Opportunities for economic independence in urban areas will grow as individuals in our communities build enterprises run them successfully and prosper. Health, education and training and adequate housing are the essential prerequisites of economic independence.

At present ATSIC provides support and assistance for indigenous individuals that wish to set up and operate their own business. The ATSIC support scheme for indigenous small business should be broadened to include support for community based enterprise start ups.

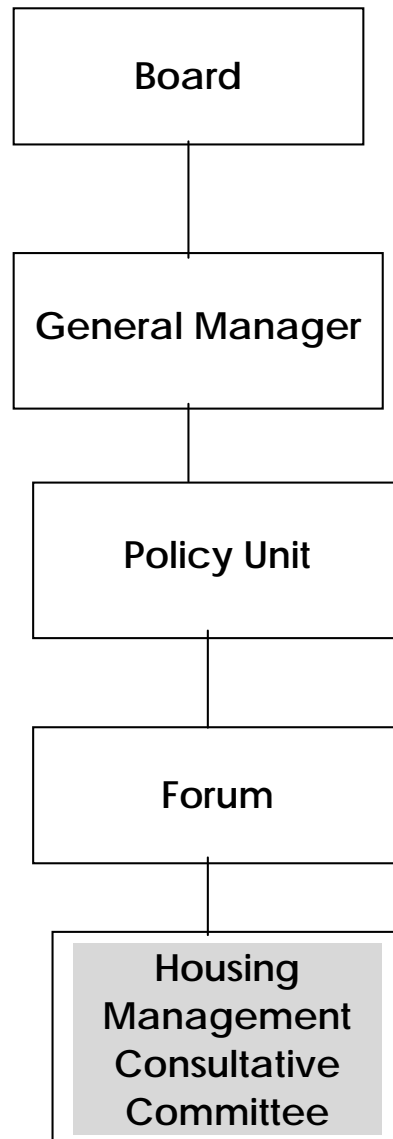
Terms of Reference Item 6

“Urban housing needs and the particular problems and difficulties associated with urban areas.”

Problems that have arisen in housing provision for Aboriginal and Torres Strait islanders in Adelaide are creating extreme dislocation and difficulty for many in our community. Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander people are living in squats or overcrowded conditions while others are completely homeless.

Reasons for this desperate situation stem from the way in which the Aboriginal Housing Authority (AHA) operates at present. To explain we have presented a diagram of the basic Operational Structure of the AHA on Page 26.

Aboriginal Housing Authority – Operational Structure



As shown in the diagram, indigenous community representation in policy making is achieved through the Consultative Committee. What is happening at present though is that the Policy Unit by overlooks the Consultative Committee when providing advice to the Board.

Our group held a workshop, detailed our concerns and sent them to the Authority. These were ignored.

So at present there is no Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander input into the policy development process. The most important consequence of this situation is that Indigenous Communities are not consulted nor do they take part in the setting of priorities for the allocation of housing. Further, policies and procedures are changed without any consultation with the Housing Management Consultative Committee.

The consequences of this situation are severe and continuing.

Specifically issues such as the racial discrimination that we experience when we seek private rental housing are not being adequately addressed. Our housing problems have harmful effects on family stability, create health problems for many in our community, increase our indebtedness, makes the search for employment intolerably difficult, contributes to a lowering in self esteem and heightens the daily level of stress that we have to cope with.

This situation will change only if there is indigenous community participation in the setting of priorities for the allocation of rental housing.

Essentially what we are fighting for is fair treatment for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander applicant for rental housing.

Changes that we recommend should take place without delay are as follows:

- ❑ The AHA should involve our communities effectively in policy making processes
- ❑ A stock of housing should be built up and dedicated for rental to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders
- ❑ Assist in developing a pool of skilled indigenous trades persons to carry out maintenance on the housing stock. At Murray Bridge CDEP workers carry out repair and maintenance of houses rented to Indigenous people. This approach should be investigated to determine whether it could be applied to indigenous rental housing stock in other parts of Australia.
- ❑ Implement and adequate level of maintenance for the housing stock
- ❑ Screen the contractors that apply to carry out maintenance on the housing stock
- ❑ Request from the Federal Government more flexible guidelines that are related to the allocation and use of funds for housing at the State level.