ABORIGINAL HOSTELS LIMITED

Submission to the

House of Representatives

Standing Committee on Indigenous Affairs

Inquiry into educational opportunities for

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Students

"Beyond the School Gates"

November 2015

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Cover Photo: Students and staff from AHL's remote hostels in Thursday Island, Katherine, Kununurra, Wadeye and Tennant Creek attend AHL's annual Aspirational, Cultural and Educational event in Sydney, November 2015.

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PREFACE

Aboriginal Hostels Limited (AHL) has been providing accommodation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people for more than 40 years. Within its portfolio of multipurpose, medical and education hostels, the organisation operates nine hostels catering for students living away from home in order to attain their secondary education. These hostels are of strategic importance for the organisation, and significant effort has been made in recent years to maximise the impact of AHL's service model for these students. On that basis, this submission has been prepared to assist the Committee in its deliberations.

AHL's submission primarily addresses the Inquiry's terms of reference relating to the provision of boarding school education and engagement and achievement of students in remote areas. The submission presents an overview of the organisation's unique service model in its secondary education hostels, and includes relevant evidence from the literature about community support models beyond school-based services which contribute to improved education outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

The submission stresses the important role partnerships and community connections play in delivering effective student retention and attainment outcomes, and makes a call for greater recognition of the important role played by AHL and other non-school based organisations in contributing to these outcomes.

The submission concludes with a call for policy settings which allow for greater flexibility in responding to the educational aspirations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and their families, as well as enabling factors which encourage social investment partnerships in Indigenous education.

1. ABOUT AHL

1.1 AHL is the leading provider of short-term accommodation for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who need to live away from home to access education, employment, health and other services to improve their quality of life and economic opportunity.

1.2 Established in 1973 to provide safe, comfortable, culturally appropriate and affordable accommodation for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, the company's current accommodation network stretches across remote, regional and metropolitan Australia. While available bed capacity fluctuates from year to year, the company provides around 1,800 beds each night through its 47 multipurpose, medical and education hostels.

1.3 Across its portfolio of accommodation facilities AHL makes an important contribution to supporting Australian Government priorities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

1.4 AHL is a wholly owned Commonwealth company within the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet portfolio. AHL's income is made up of a combination of Australian Government appropriation (subsidy), tariff collected from residents and operating agreements to manage facilities owned by the Northern Territory and Australian Governments.

1.5 AHL is one of the largest providers of employment and training for Indigenous people, with more than 70% of the organisation's 500–strong workforce identifying as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander.

2. OUR COMMITMENT TO EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES

2.1 AHL operates nine secondary education hostels Australia-wide which provide affordable accommodation for up to 300 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students living away from home to gain a secondary education.

2.2 This affordable accommodation provides a stable environment for secondary students to attend school in order to achieve their education goals, including their Year 12 Certificate. An additional three tertiary education and training hostels provide accommodation for students accessing vocational and higher education, including industry and trades training.

2.3 Most secondary students are eligible for the ABSTUDY living away from home allowance to help meet the cost of AHL's hostel accommodation. Some out of pocket expenses such as school fees, weekly student allowance, school uniforms and excursion fees are covered by AHL.

2.4 AHL's secondary education hostels are also now eligible for the recently broadened ABSTUDY Under-16 Boarding Allowance. AHL works closely with the Department of Human Services (DHS) under a Memorandum of Understanding to ensure the application, approval and payment processes are streamlined and do not act as a disincentive for students and families in preparing to live away from their home communities to attend school.

2.5 AHL's vision for its secondary education students is to close the gap in Year 12 completion rates. AHL does this by providing safe, affordable and culturally relevant accommodation together with the level of support, care and high expectations of students needed to ensure that they are well equipped to take up future employment, training and higher education opportunities.[1]

2.6 At just one of these hostels, Fordimail Hostel in Katherine, more than 1,400 students have been able to access secondary education over the course of 40 years.

2.7 Students are encouraged to participate in extra-curricular activities after school and each secondary education hostel provides recreation rooms, study areas, and a range of sporting facilities including basketball courts, sports ovals and organised activities including music lessons, youth groups and art classes.

2.8 Each of the AHL's nine secondary education hostels is located close to secondary schools. AHL's houseparents, residential youth workers and hostel staff provide 24-hour support to ensure students enjoy the opportunity to study in a safe, comfortable environment, with transport to and from school, tutorial and homework support, and onsite computer technology all provided. AHL ensures that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are able to undertake schooling supported by an environment that is free of negative or damaging behaviours and influences.

2.9 In major regional and metropolitan areas AHL's model of care is based around a house parent model. In remote locations, AHL's model of care is closely aligned with a boarding facility approach. These hostels employ residential youth workers and provide mentoring and extra-curricular activity designed to support educational outcomes and develop life skills. This model was developed

[1] A new national standard for the management of boarding schools (and residences) has been released (Australian Standard for Boarding Schools and Residences AS 5725:2015). AHL is currently assessing the impact of the new Standard, with particular reference to elements relating to quality of service, student wellbeing and engagement with schools, home communities and parents.

specifically for operations at AHL's Wadeye facility (operated under contract with the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet) and AHL has moved to replicate this approach over the past year at Kununurra.

2.10 In addition to its secondary education offering, AHL operates three tertiary education facilities in New South Wales—in Armidale, Newcastle and Sydney—that provide students with access to major universities and higher education facilities. These hostels, in which students and trainees reside on a more self-managed basis, support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to gain tertiary and trade qualifications to improve their employment opportunities.

AHL's Education Facilities

SECONDARY EDUCATION HOSTELS			STUDENT PLACES	ATTENDING SCHOOLS
Biala Hostel (for girls)	Sydney	NSW	17	Mackellar Girls Campus
Kirinari Hostel - Sydney (for boys)	Sydney	NSW	30	Endeavour Sports High School Gymea Technology High School
Kirinari Hostel - Newcastle (for boys)	Newcastle	NSW	16	Hunter Sports High School Cardiff High School
Grey Street Hostel	Dubbo	NSW	8	Dubbo College, including Delroy, South and Senior Campuses
Fordimail Student Hostel	Katherine	NT	36	Katherine High School, St. Joseph's College
Kardu Darrikardu Numida Hostel	Wadeye	NT	40	Our Lady of the Sacred Heart Thamarrurr Catholic School
Wangkana Kari Hostel	Tennant Creek	NT	42	Tennant Creek High School
Canon Boggo Pilot Hostel	Thursday Is.	QLD	36	Tagai High School Thursday Island High School
Kununurra Hostel	Kununurra	WA	42	Kununurra High School
TERTIARY EDUCATION AND TRAINING				
Tony Mundine Hostel	Sydney	NSW	29	Various industry trades training providers
Durungaling Hostel	Newcastle	NSW	10	University of Newcastle Aboriginal School of Studies (including Wollatuka)
Ee-Kee-Na Hostel	Armidale	NSW	14	University of New England, various industry trades training providers

Student Accommodation Places by Remoteness

3. CREATING SOCIAL IMPACT IN SECONDARY EDUCATION

3.1 Over the past 12 months AHL has begun a process of consolidating its various secondary education activities into a uniform Social Impact platform for secondary education. This model defines the organisation's priorities and objectives, links them more directly to activities in our secondary education hostels, and builds a framework for measuring social impact over time. With this emerging body of evidence, AHL will be in a stronger position to promote the social return of the organisation's education work to potential investment partners with an interest in driving educational outcomes for young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

3.2 While the focus has been on developing a social impact model to drive service improvements and student outcomes in AHL's secondary education facilities, the longer term aim is to be able to demonstrate outcomes on which to base a tangible return on investment for potential partner organisations.

3.3 Key components of the theory of change on which AHL is building its social impact model have been focus tested and peer reviewed to validate the underlying assumptions among AHL's secondary student cohort. Focus groups undertaken with students at Biala Hostel in Sydney, and at Kununurra Hostel in Western Australia have been consistent in finding that:

- Parents and students value education and the opportunities provided by AHL's secondary hostels
- Students' community involvement outside the school and hostel context are essential in maintaining engagement and school retention
- Ongoing communication with parents and engagement with family members is a primary driver of student commitment to remain at school, and in an AHL hostel.

The theory of change map at **Figure 1** demonstrates how AHL's secondary education hostels leverage a broad range of co-factors in driving stronger outcomes.

Access to education delivers a lasting legacy[2]

> *"I look back on those years as one of the key points for me learning about who I am as a person and as an Aboriginal person. My path since then has been huge"*
>
> *Maurice, former Kirinari Hostel student*

> *"Since I was a little girl I wanted to get my HSC, to go right through school, and now I've come here to the hostel I can do it"*
>
> *Leslie, former Biala Hostel student*

> *"I still think of my life at the hostel and how it played such a significant role in my life. My sister went there when I left, so that's part of that history as well"*
>
> *Amy, former Durungaling Hostel student*

[2] Student quotations taken from 100 Success Stories, Celebrating 34 years of student hostels, AHL and AISTSIS, 2007

Figure 1:

AHL'S SECONDARY EDUCATION SOCIAL IMPACT MODEL
VISION
Closing the Gap in year 12 completion rates
END GOAL/ IMPACT
Students have sufficient education and life skills to progress to further education and/or work
INTERMEDIATE OUTCOMES
Students are more confident, resilient and self-reliant
Students feel physically, socially and culturally secure
Students attend and stay at school to complete year 10
SHORT TERM OUTCOMES
Students gain life skills & resilience
Students gain confidence & self-worth
Students learn personal responsibility & discipline
Basic, emotional & cultural needs are met
Reinforces school course work
Improved school attendance
Parents value school retention
ACTIVITIES
Facilitate access to external services
Nurture individual skills & interests
Monitor chores, behaviours &parent liaison
Provide beds, meals, pastoral care, access to culture
Monitor homework & arrange tutoring
Facilitate attendance at school
Partner with schools, parents & community leaders

4. WHAT WE KNOW WORKS

4.1 AHL's secondary education facilities provide affordable, clean accommodation; three meals a day; and transport to and from school. Over the years, these hostels have gradually expanded their services beyond the provision of food and shelter. AHL continues to allocate significant resources to provide additional services, such as tutoring and extracurricular activities, that help students to successfully attend and finish school. Over time as we build our expertise and apply a stronger focus on measurement of outcomes, a number of key success drivers have become evident.

4.2 Not surprisingly, given the commitment required to live away from home for long periods of time, students in AHL secondary education facilities—from Biala Hostel for girls in Sydney to Kununurra Hostel in remote Western Australia—understand the value of education and the need to attend school.

> *'I have been here for almost a year as I came at the end of last year. I am proud of myself for pushing myself to go to school. It is hard moving away and living away from family'—Biala Hostel resident*

> *'I came here because I will go to school all the time, I was only going to school sometimes at home'—Kununurra Hostel resident*

> *'The hostel helps me to go to school every day'—Kununurra Hostel resident*

Evidence for success

4.3 In 2012-13, 58.5% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people aged 20-24 had achieved year 12 or equivalent attainment, compared to 86.5% of non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people.[3] The rates vary significantly by region, with an achievement rate of 36.8% for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people aged 20-24 in very remote areas.

4.4 The main factors that influence completion rates for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are access, attendance and achievement[4], with barriers to access including geographic location, discrimination, cost and low levels of literacy.

4.5 Absenteeism among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students is markedly higher than non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Ongoing absenteeism contributes to lower academic achievement, which makes school completion more difficult.[5]

Ready for school, ready for life

4.6 A major study of effective strategies to improve school completion highlights the importance of programs to directly meet the individual needs of at risk students, with strong and active links to welfare providers. Integrated service models and on-site support services have a positive effect on engagement.[6] Protective factors such as resilience, coping and connectedness have been linked to better educational outcomes.[7]

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[3] Closing the Gap Prime Minister's Report 2015, page 17.
[4] Helen S & Lamb S, Resource sheet no. 6: Closing the school completion gap for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, Closing the Gap Clearinghouse, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, page 1.
[5] Closing the Gap Prime Minister's Report 2015, page 12.
[6] Helme S and Lamb S, resource sheet no 6:, Closing the school completion gap for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, Closing the Gap clearinghouse 2011, p10.
[7] Rowling L & Gehrig S, Mental Health of Young People: Exploring the relationship between alienation from school, resilience, coping and spiritual health, 1998 p 3.

4.7 Evidence shows that there are several factors linked to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student's individual life experience which have a direct impact on their capacity to engage with school and learning. These include basic material and support needs, foundation skills (communication and social interaction), behaviour /engagement in risk-taking or criminal activity, life and vocational goals and aspirations.[8]

4.8 Studies have shown that completion of year 10 or year 11 increases an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student's chance of employment by 40% and completion of year 12 increases employment prospects by a further 13%,[9] however there is a marked difference in students' self-perception of their career opportunities and aspirations. Non-Indigenous students tend to report definite future plans whereas Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are less decided and lack detailed knowledge about what would be involved in achieving their chosen career path.[10] The development of aspirations in students is an important factor in enhancing self-esteem and self-identity.[11]

Nurturing individual skills and interests

4.9 A key success factor that has been identified for improved educational outcomes is a strengths based approach, focusing on what students know and can do as a starting point.[12]

4.10 Adolescence is the period in which a person's self-identity is most subject to change. In developing a positive sense of self, each person needs to experience a sense of autonomy, achievement and belonging. Studies show these factors play a crucial role, particularly for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth, in remaining motivated to engage in education.[13]

4.11 The key to what works with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in boarding facilities is the quality of relationships which can be established – warm, caring but also direct, clear and firm about rules and responsibilities.[14]

4.12 Building links and relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander elders and traditional owners can assist with fostering a sense of pride and belonging to the local Aboriginal and Torres

[8] Bourke C, Rigby K, Burden J. Better Practice in School Attendance: Improving the School Attendance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Students. Commonwealth Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs 2000, pp26-31.
[9] Jones A & Harris-Roxas B, The Impact of School Retention and Educational Outcomes on the Health and Wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students: A Literature Review, Sydney, 2009: Centre for Health Equity Training Research and Evaluation UNSW, p 8.
[10] Jones A & Harris-Roxas B, The Impact of School Retention and Educational Outcomes on the Health and Wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students: A Literature Review, Sydney, 2009: Centre for Health Equity Training Research and Evaluation UNSW, p 21.
[11] Jones A & Harris-Roxas B, The Impact of School Retention and Educational Outcomes on the Health and Wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students: A Literature Review, Sydney, 2009: Centre for Health Equity Training Research and Evaluation UNSW, p 15.
[12] Doyle H & Hill R, Our Children, Our Future – Achieving improved primary and secondary education outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, AMP Foundation, Effective Philanthropy and Social Ventures Australia, p55.
[13] Impact of school retention on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student well-being, p 14.
[14] What Works. The Work Program: Improving Outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Students. Core Issues 6: Boarding, Australian Government Department of Education, Science and Training, p4.

Strait Islander culture and community, resulting in improved education outcomes and improved well-being.[15]

Taking care of the basics

4.13 There is a strong link between student safety, wellbeing and learning[16], while poor health and nutrition have been identified as key factors impacting both the ability of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children to attend school and to be able to participate effectively when they do attend.[17]

4.14 Similarly, poor or overcrowded housing has been identified as having a negative impact on education outcomes. Students who have trouble getting enough sleep are one and half times more likely to be absent from school than other students.[18]

Academic supports outside the school setting

4.15 Academic achievement is one of the strongest influences on year 12 completion. Supplementary support programs that target improvement of academic skills are crucial.[19]

4.16 Three factors that have been found to significantly influence Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' reading performance were home educational resources, engagement in reading and academic self-concept. Schools in the What Works study addressed challenges related to academic self-concept among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students by engagement and motivation strategies and personalised learning plans and homework programs[20].

4.17 The two most important factors influencing children's educational motivation and engagement are home resources (access to computers, books, study space) and the nature and quality of parenting style regarding education at home.[21]

4.18 An example of a successful initiative in this area is the Graham (Polly) Farmer Foundation's Follow the Dream/Partnerships for Success program. This program provides after school tuition and individual mentoring support and case management in cooperation with schools. It enables Aboriginal secondary school students who apply and are selected to participate to complete Year 12, enter tertiary studies or undertake other post school training or employment. Under the program, students

[15] Jones A & Harris-Roxas B, The Impact of School Retention and Educational Outcomes on the Health and Wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students: A Literature Review, Sydney, 2009: Centre for Health Equity Training Research and Evaluation UNSW, p 13.
[16] Closing the Gap Clearinghouse Resource Sheet no 33, Positive learning environments for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people. July 2014, p 11.
[17] Doyle H & Hill R, Our Children, Our Future – Achieving improved primary and secondary education outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, AMP Foundation, Effective Philanthropy and Social Ventures Australia, p39.
[18] Doyle H & Hill R, Our Children, Our Future – Achieving improved primary and secondary education outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, AMP Foundation, Effective Philanthropy and Social Ventures Australia, p40.
[19] Helme S and Lamb S, resource sheet no 6, Closing the school completion gap for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, Closing the Gap clearinghouse 2011, p8.
[20] What Works. The Work Program 2011, Using personalised learning plans. Core issues 10, Australian Government, Department of Education, Science and Training, p 5.
[21] Higgins D & Morley S, resource sheet no 32, Engaging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents in their children's education, Closing the Gap clearinghouse 2014, p 3.

are encouraged to progress to further studies through university, TAFE, apprenticeships and traineeships, with projects individually funded through private industry and State Government.

Facilitating school attendance and retention

4.19 Perhaps the strongest predictor of academic success, and one of the most difficult to sustain, is school attendance. Non-attendance at school has a significant impact on learning outcomes and has been shown to be a strong predictor of early exit from the school environment. The attendance rate between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students widens greatly in the early secondary years, with rates of absenteeism being significantly higher in remote and very remote communities.[22]

4.20 Home factors such as parental engagement and support (or in the case of AHL: house parents and residential youth workers) have also been shown to affect attendance and engagement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.[23]

4.21 AHL has experienced the same difficulties in maintaining acceptable levels of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student retention as the public schools its students attend. AHL's year 7/8 to year 12 retention rates sit against the background of the much larger social issue of a persistent gap between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educational retention and attainment. AHL's student hostel retention rate closely mirrors national Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander school retention figures – including the disparity between males and females from year 7/8 to year 12.[24]

4.22 While retention rates have seen an upward trend in recent years, there is a greater need for innovation and widespread community supports beyond the school gate to sustain this momentum. Evidence shows that attendance levels are significantly higher among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students when teachers and parents communicated about how the children are progressing at school.[25]

4.23 The What Works study on the success of remote schools found that when schools and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and communities work in partnership, students achieve better results.[26]

Case Study 1: Kardu Darrikardu Numida, Wadeye NT

This facility breaks new ground as a secondary education accommodation model, and is one of three large scale facilities operated by AHL within remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Students at Kardu Darrikardu Numida attend Our Lady of the Sacred Heart Thamarrurr Catholic College. In 2014, while the annual overall attendance rate at the college was 54 per cent, the attendance rate for Kardu Darrikardu Numida students was almost 70 per cent. This demonstrates that

[22] Helme S and Lamb S, resource sheet no 6, Closing the school completion gap for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, Closing the Gap clearinghouse 2011, p5.
[23] Ockenden L, resource sheet no 33, Positive Learning Environments for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people, Closing the Gap clearinghouse 2011, p7.
[24] Helme S and Lamb S *resource sheet no. 6* for the Closing the Gap Clearinghouse 2011
[25] Helme S and Lamb S, resource sheet no 6, Closing the school completion gap for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, Closing the Gap clearinghouse 2011, p7.
[26] What works. The Work Program. Success in remote schools: A research study of eleven improving remote schools, 2012, National Curriculum Services, p5.

the level of school attendance among students at the AHL facility is higher and more consistent than that of the other secondary students at the college.

This success reflects the extensive support that Kardu Darrikardu Numida receives from the community, service providers, cultural leaders, the college, parents and students.

> *'Hostel staff are more successful at getting kids to school than school attendance officers'—Wadeye community member*
>
> *'Best attendees come from the hostel'—Wadeye teacher*
>
> *'I like to stay at the hostel because we like to go to school'—Wadeye student*
>
> *'Hostel enhances benefits for learning'—Wadeye parent*

A formative assessment of the Wadeye model undertaken in late 2014 found that the Hostel delivers a facility and model that successfully provides a safe, professionally well run, community and parent supported, results oriented and culturally acceptable wrap around serviced establishment. The model provides for secondary aged children in Wadeye and surrounding areas who enjoy a learning environment that maximises their potential to achieve a quality secondary education and a quality of life that they deserve and aspire to.

The facility has extensive support from the Wadeye community, service providers, cultural leadership, the Secondary College, parents and students. The facility is achieving its objectives and is demonstrating the value and importance of having optional boarding facilities in a remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community of a similar size and demographic profile. Furthermore, a community such as Wadeye, with a history of ongoing violence and unrest, lends itself to alternative models of schooling to maximise attendance and education outcomes.

Jodie's story

Jodie is just one of the success stories of students from the Kardu Darrikardu Numida Hostel at Wadeye. She was one of the first girls to start at the hostel in February 2013, and just a little over two years later, she and three other girls from the hostel have successfully transitioned to a mainstream boarding environment at the Worowa Aboriginal College in Victoria.

The Worawa curriculum is aligned with the Australian curriculum and personalised learning gives students the knowledge, skills and confidence to walk in two worlds with pride in their Aboriginal culture and identity.

Case Study 2: Kununurra Hostel, Western Australia

In 2014-15, AHL trialled a new approach to service delivery to improve utilisation of its secondary education accommodation facility at Kununurra, Western Australia.

The trial was based on a model developed specifically for the Kardu Darrikardu Numida Secondary Student Hostel in Wadeye. Its aim was to test the model as a pathway to attracting more skilled and experienced staff; attracting and retaining greater numbers of students; and providing a broader range of student support services.

The trial was supported by an extensive community engagement project undertaken in collaboration with experienced local Aboriginal community development organisation, Wunan Foundation, which facilitated workshops and consultations in communities across the East Kimberley region.

Thirteen Aboriginal communities were consulted and more than 200 individual interviews were completed with parents, students, school staff and other key stakeholders.

The outcomes of this project supported the design of student-centred, community informed strategies aimed at improving access to education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

Since the completion of the community engagement project and the implementation of the residential youth worker model, the Kununurra Hostel has increased student intake significantly, from under 10 per cent at the start of the school year to over 90 per cent by mid-2015. This increase affirms the effectiveness of the new service delivery model and the importance of AHL's ongoing partnerships, communication approaches and engagement strategies.

5. PARTNERSHIPS IN ACTION

5.1 Within its available resources, AHL would not achieve its ambitious education agenda for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students without the support of corporate and community-based partner organisations and state, territory and Commonwealth agencies.

5.2 AHL has reallocated internal resources to leverage a growing range of diverse partnership arrangements to assist the delivery of its strategic objectives in the education domain, including with the Clontarf Foundation, Aboriginal Children's Advancement Society, Police Citizens Youth Club, Barclay Bank and the Ted Noffs Foundation.

5.3 Examples of these partnerships in operation at the local-level include:

- Kirinari Hostel for boys in Sydney currently has 16 boys participating in the Clontarf Program through Endeavour Sports High School. These links provide two-way support, so that AHL's students gain access to sporting opportunities, excursions, social engagement and career path pipelines, while Clontarf can be assured accommodation places for talented students identified through its programs.
- Kirinari boys also volunteer at the Ted Noffs food bank for the homeless facilitated by Clontarf. The hostel has also developed a partnership with Police and Citizens Youth Club with boys participating in a leadership program in Newcastle. A partnership with Barclay Bank has been developed, with the Bank now having donated 30 PCs to the hostel and delivering a program on-site for Year 10, 11 and 12 boys to enhance interview skills that may lead to bank apprenticeships.
- Kirinari Hostel in Newcastle has developed a partnership with the Wilcannia Men's Group – a key community that the hostel draws students from.
- The Aboriginal Children's Advancement Society provides practical support and assistance for students at both Kirinari sites.
- Biala Girls Hostel in Sydney is progressing a partnership with the NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group on pathways to leveraging the AECG's state network into both schools and local communities throughout NSW.

5.4 At a systems level, AHL is working with key partners to improve the capability and capacity to broaden opportunities for students. This includes the Stronger Smarter Institute which is working to embed culturally appropriate best practice and resilience across AHL's secondary education workforce.

5.5 A range of commercial, educational and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community based organisations are also assisting AHL with its Aspirational, Cultural and Educational (ACE) Experience for Secondary Students - an annual professional development week to be held this year in Sydney for year 10-12 students who are succeeding academically, committed to completing their secondary education and interested in exploring further study and employment options.

5.6 At an inter-governmental level, potential alignment with AHL's core work in secondary education boarding has been canvassed with the Northern Territory Government in relation to its Indigenous Education Strategy 2015-2024.

5.7 A key feature of the Strategy is a phasing out of remote secondary education in the Northern Territory, and a shift to student boarding in regional centres where there are more available secondary education services.

5.8 AHL is well-placed to support the Northern Territory Government to implement two key elements of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Strategy Implementation Plan 2015–2017:

- Element 3: Pathways — Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children complete schooling well equipped to take up employment, training and higher education opportunities; and
- Element 4: Engagement — Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children at all stages of schooling attend school regularly and are supported in their education by their families and community.

5.9 Over the short to medium term, AHL is keen to work with the Northern Territory Government to explore options to:

- Ensure that students are able to be supported in their education by their families and community while away from home;
- Better maintain home links, reduce homesickness and alleviate parental and community concerns relating to children being located long distances from home; and
- Participate in the induction process by providing accommodation for potential students and families during intensive short visits to urban and regional schools to familiarise themselves with their new school and community environment prior to term commencement.

6. CONCLUSION

6.1 For more than 40 years, AHL has created unique opportunities for young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to go to school, pursue apprenticeships and training and to attend university. AHL's accommodation and support services help young Indigenous Australians to acquire the life skills necessary to make informed choices about their future, meet the demands of employment and take much needed skills and training back to their communities.

6.2 AHL considers that a good education and successful transition into the workforce are central to advancing the independence of current and future generations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people. AHL is one of the few secondary education accommodation providers catering for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in rural and remote areas at a reasonable cost, irrespective of their academic proficiency.

6.3 There are few organisations with a track record which has proven so successful in attracting acceptance from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents, which are able to provide a practical and cost effective educational pathway for the majority of remote students through a mix of regional and urban based hostel facilities.

6.4 AHL's Board and management are keen to position the organisation to deliver a progressively expanded role in providing a home-like environment for remote secondary students by:

- Utilising and growing AHL's capability for increasing engagement within and outside government to contribute to policy priorities and work with key stakeholders with a common purpose;
- Focusing efforts on priority areas of education in locations where there is high demand and market and program failure; and
- Enhancing capability to respond more quickly to opportunities where they arise – in ways that offer options to Government that embed efficiency and sustainability into further investment in secondary education places for remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

6.5 In achieving these aims, AHL sees an opportunity for greater innovation and philanthropic support through new investment approaches in support of the development of education services. Further work is needed to develop legislative enablers which can encourage innovative financial vehicles such as social benefit bonds which can provide a return on investment for corporate and philanthropic partners.[27]

6.6 The current funding environment is one in which government is reducing outlays while at the same time seeking better outcomes. AHL is encouraged by recent announcements made in relation to the Prime Minister's Community Business Partnership, at the recent Philanthropy Meets Parliament event and by the Government response to the Financial System Inquiry which is aimed at fostering the growth of impact investment in Australia.

6.7 Progress on these initiatives will create new opportunities for organisations such as AHL to forge new partnerships which can deliver social impact and maximise education opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

[27] Several social impact investment projects are currently being piloted by the NSW Government. One NSW based Social Benefit Bond is already delivering a return on investment of 8.9 per cent.
More information at http://www.dpc.nsw.gov.au/programs_and_services/social_inpact_investment

6.8 AHL considers that proactive approaches across all levels of government and with the third sector are necessary to increase educational opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people, and makes the following recommendations to the Inquiry:

Policy Alignment

Recommendation: Policy at the national and state/territory levels must be more closely aligned in order to ensure future demand for student accommodation and support is met.

This includes policy settings and strategies which would enable greater flexibility and more effective responses to demand trends and supply challenges as they arise. The expansion of the supply of home-like accommodation and related services to enhance education outcomes for remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students as part of an overall approach can improve life outcomes.

Innovation Incentives

Recommendation: Legislative enablers and allied incentives are required to encourage innovation and attract social investment partners to the Indigenous education domain.

There is momentum for greater innovation and philanthropic support that could be seized through new investment approaches, such as social benefit bonds, to further develop and expand the range of available education services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.