



AUSTRALIAN SENATE

SENATE COMMUNITY AFFAIRS LEGISLATION COMMITTEE

Inquiry into Stronger Futures in the Northern Territory Bill (and two related bills)

NTCOSS response to QoN

Senator SIEWERT: Could I just go to the figure you quoted of \$200,000 per school. Where did that come from?

Ms Gell: The \$31 million that was invested in the trials across the 44 sites. On our calculations, breaking that down and using some new figures that we got from DEEWR as well, that was the figure we came to.

NTCOSS response to QoN: NTCOSS's calculation formula for cost per school was done by Jonathan Pilbrow (Central Australia Coordinator). This calculation was based on the statement that "the Government's trial of the scheme has been running in 44 schools for three years at a cost of \$31 million."¹ Therefore NTCOSS calculated:

\$31 million divided by 44 trial sites = \$704,545 (per site for 3 years)

\$704,545 divided by 3 (years) = 234,847 per school, per year

CHAIR: Have DEEWR confirmed that figure?

NTCOSS response to QoN: NTCOSS on notice: DEEWR's costing formula is not on a per school basis and therefore no they have not been able to confirm that figure. When I explained the formula that we used they said that they would not be able to provide a more detailed costing than what our formula created.

Senator CROSSIN: So you have just taken the raw number of schools with the amount of money and divided it—is that all you have done?

Ms Gell: The person who actually did that calculation is my coordinator, Jonathan, who is on six months leave at the moment, but I could provide that breakdown. It is more detailed than that. I am happy to provide that on notice.

CHAIR: I just wanted to check whether DEEWR had confirmed that figure, because it was a new figure to us.

NTCOSS response to QoN: After looking through email correspondence DEEWR provided statistics and not figures. However I have spoken with DEEWR and key points from that conversation are highlighted above.

Ms Gell: DEEWR provided some figures. They did not provide the \$200,000 figure but they did provide some information that helped us create that figure. We are happy to provide that breakdown.

CHAIR: That would be great.

Senator CROSSIN: Does the figure DEEWR provided you with go towards the amount of money that was put into Centrelink, brochures that were produced, attendance officers that were funded or the extra 200 teachers that were funded? What does that money consist of?

Ms Gell: I would need to give you that on notice. I am happy to.

NTCOSS response to QoN: To date we were not able to source a breakdown of the \$31 million cost of the 3 year SEAM trial. We have been told that the \$31 million supported implementation and service delivery costs in both Queensland and the Northern Territory, from 2009 until 30 June 2012. DEEWR

¹ "The Government's trial of the scheme has been running in 44 schools for three years at a cost of \$31 million." <http://www.abc.net.au/7.30/content/2011/s3365089.htm>. 14 November 2011.

have informed us that their costing is based on figures including expected number of customers and number of income support recipients.

Senator SIEWERT: I want to go to other costs as well. One of the things the government have announced as part of the funding—they have not announced all the funding that is going to go with Stronger Futures—is that they are looking at putting in more intensive case management and social workers. I am trying to get my head around how many social workers would be needed to properly implement something.

Senator BOYCE: How many per hectare in the Northern Territory?

Senator SIEWERT: We are talking about rolling this out. It is a significant step from where it is at the moment. I am wondering if you have given any thought to the intensive case management. Certainly, if you look at the evaluation you see one of the things that do get a bit of a tick is case management. In fact, my reading of it—and, of course, it is my interpretation—is that what has really made the difference between the 2009 process and the 2010 process has been contact with social workers. So I am wondering if you have given any thought to what you would recommend in terms of how much one-on-one you would need with caseworkers and therefore how many caseworkers you would need to implement it properly.

Ms Bartjen-Westermann: There are some models, such as a family support centre as well as the type of family support, and they work with approximately six to nine families depending on the complexity of the situation, so some situations initially need a lot of intervention and then it can be monitored with reduced intervention and then you can withdraw and maybe leave it to other agencies that you refer to. That seems to be the manageable number of families to deal with, to deal with all the complexities that come across to a caseworker. It is often not caseworkers by themselves; caseworkers need to link in with other agencies intensively and cross-sectorally as well, so that means with education, with alcohol and other drugs and with health as they have a major impact.

Senator SIEWERT: So where would you suggest that those workers could be located? I do not mean physically. Yesterday and today we have talked a lot about wraparound services in dealing with all the complex issues that you have, in fact, just touched on. So I do not actually mean that you put one in this centre and one in that centre; I mean it in terms of the sorts of services that you have just been talking about. I am happy for you to take it on notice if you would prefer to.

Ms Bartjen-Westermann: We might do so. There are some thoughts and ideas, but to have some really solid feedback I would rather do that.

NTCOSS response to QoN: NTCOSS welcomes the opportunity to elaborate on Senator Rachael Siewert's question.

NTCOSS believes that in order to address the complex contextual issues in the Northern Territory integrated children and family support services need to be embedded in a wider collaborative approach by government, non- government organisations (Aboriginal controlled and mainstream organisations) communities and evidence based. This view is strongly supported by the Child and Family Welfare Association of Australia, who in 2007, urged the Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments to

“have a co-ordinated, whole of government approach resulting in community partnerships that build on mutually agreed agendas which all parties can commit to in the long term”. (CAFWAA, 2007,p.24).

At the 2011 NT Council of Social Services conference in Darwin, Howard Bath provided a presentation referring to the Child Protection context in the Northern Territory –the very issues which gave rise to the NTER – now being followed by the suggested Stronger Futures Bills. Howard Bath outlined in his presentation

“ it requires more than a limited emergency response - it requires a multi –year, multi government development program based on a considered, rather than a news –bite – filtered, appraisal of the needs; that addresses a range of economic, social, safety and wellbeing needs, that is based on genuine consultations with Aboriginal communities; and that harness the

skills and perspectives of both NGO and government service providers as well as academic and research institutions.”

In line with this it is worthwhile mentioning that the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner makes reference in his report to the feedback he has been receiving from communities about the uncoordinated government service provision and its subsequent negative bearing on communities and its members (Social Justice report,2010). The commissioner is joining the queue of people calling for a reform of service delivery in remote areas and provides a concrete example of how a cross sectoral approach has had positive results . The report outlines a positive collaborative approach showing the way ahead namely the Fitzroy Futures Forum, which has evolved since 2000 and is referred to as a “hybrid governance mechanism for participation and engagement between local aboriginal communities, government and other community people and organisations “(Social Justice Report 2010,p 83).

The example provided appears to be tailored specifically to that community and reflects the crucial aspects of taking local circumstances, genuine engagement, dialogue and relationship building between community members and other stakeholders into consideration. The report furthermore refers to an example where the cooperation between government and communities did not result in positive outcomes. It highlights the crucial aspect that processes are not sufficient to achieve change, these processes need to be underpinned by a framework that is culturally competent at all different layers of organisations and interactions. In this context cultural competency is not to be understood as having knowledge about everything related to cultural issues. It rather pertains to acceptance of and respect for difference, to see others as different not deficient. It incorporates diversity at all different levels of an organisation i.e. mission & value statements, policy development and implementation and Lum (2003 p6)recites it as

“a set of congruent practice skills, behaviours, attitudes and policies that come together in a system, agency or among professionals and enables the system, agency, or those professionals to work effectively in cross cultural situations.”

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner has adopted the concept and refers to the importance of a “skilled and culturally competent workforce” (Social Justice Report 2010, p 112).

If best practice is to be achieved, intense consideration must be given on how cultural competence is reflected in service provision (SNAICC policy paper- FaHCSIA paper 3 2011). Principles of cultural competence provide a foundation for effective engagement and should be considered as integral to the delivery of quality services and regularly evaluated on its merits. Change is the most significant aspect of today’s society and so is striving for cultural competence. There is no ideal completion point, it is a long- term, ongoing and persistent development, which at times might appear like a merry –go round and lead to frustration. Yet, dealing with this frustration is part of the nature of attaining cultural competence. Just as cultures are not static and monolithic, cultural competence requires an ongoing adjustment on different levels.

Attention to cultural competence is at the core of best practice in the development and provision of social services to address the issues faced by community members in the Northern Territory. In order to achieve meaningful inclusive partnerships, stakeholders need to be familiar with this concept and specifically with co- cultural group communication processes and its potential for exclusive and inclusive discourse. Co- culturally groups are referred to by Orb (1998p21) as

“people who have not traditionally had continued access to or influence upon or within the dominant culture” and develop specific communication strategies when interacting with dominant group members.”

Kenneth Liberman (1990) outlines this more explicitly in relation to his research with Pitjantjatjara, Pintupi and Ngaanyatjarra groups. His research highlights the difference in discourse and importance of being aware about communication styles when entering into a dialogue.

Previously and after the consultation phase for the Stronger Futures package voices have been heard stating that residents were not consulted whereas government voices state that they believe to have consulted in an extensive way. This is a classic example of the above mentioned aspects in that those two perceptions clash and don't match up. One party is talking about numbers and possibly process whereas the consulted party is referring to the actual discourse style, content, timeframe and lack of cyclical consensus seeking consultation processes.

Another positive example cited in the Closing the Gap Clearinghouse (AIHW,AIFS) 2011, was the Cherbourg primary school case study. It is outlined how high absenteeism and low academic achievement was reversed by different steps some of which clearly involved engaging with community powerbrokers, active listening, mutual planning and implementation of changes.

In the Closing the Gap Clearinghouse Issues paper No 1 Indigenous specific reasons for non-attendance have been cited as

“lack of recognition by schools of indigenous culture and history; failure to fully engage parents, carers and the community; and ongoing disadvantage in many areas of the daily lives of Indigenous Australians (Biddle et al.2004;Herbert et al. 1999; Schwab 2001)”. Again these identified issues relate very much to the lack of implementing cultural competency on a government level and thereby missing out on opportunities to shift behaviour in collaboration with others. NTCOSS would like to outline that the Stronger Futures Bill misses its chance to be very innovative and invest in culturally competent educational social inclusion models. Some of the aspects mentioned and presented are not concrete and are rather intangible. However, this does not make it less important or less critical quite the opposite- cultural competence if applied will provide a framework which will greatly assist in developing place based, inclusive, mutually agreed upon service development models by a collaborative and broad cross sector which are hopefully well resourced and bipartisan. NTCOSS calls on the Committee to recommend that the Government reconsider the Stronger Futures expansion of the SEAM program

Senator SIEWERT: Okay, thank you. This is in terms of the consultations and the additional things that people said they wanted—monitoring, more teachers and engagement. Did you go to any of the consultations that were held, so that is for a start? Secondly, have you had other processes of surveying people that you work with to get that information in order to come to those conclusions?

Ms Gell: I was able to attend two, one in Alice Springs and one in Mutitjulu. Because I work part-time and cover six policy areas, I was really keen to get—and at the same time they were really keen to get—as much information from the consultations as possible. So I asked a number of colleagues that work in different NGOs if they could please feed back any information, and we did have a good information share across a number of NGOs in Darwin and Alice on the length of time, the number of people in attendance, the issues discussed and the format where interpreters were used. I got information in the end from about 15 or so different consultations. Senator Siewert, were you asking in particular as to the format or what people were saying?

Senator SIEWERT: It is more about what people were saying. You made a comment about those three things and it was if people said more than was reported or if people were saying they just do not want SEAM as they want other things. Sorry, that is where I am at.

CHAIR: So it is not more than was reported; it is that they offered alternatives.

Senator SIEWERT: Sorry, yes; I beg your pardon.

Ms Gell: The list that I gave was actually cut and pasted from the Stronger Futures report, so that is where the information came from.

Senator SIEWERT: So were there other things as well?

Ms Gell: I do not have a list of them with me, but I could go through transcripts and pull those out. I know there is a number of transcripts of at least eight of the consultations that therefore have word for word what people asked for. I know that things that were raised seemed to be some of the dominant things. I am not sure at this stage but I could provide on notice additional things that were raised as ideas, if that is useful.

Senator SIEWERT: Yes, thank you.