

Submission to the Senate Community Affairs Committee in relation to the Stronger Futures in the Northern Territory Bill 2011 and two related bills

By Elaine Peckham

Elaine Peckham is a Central Arrente Mbantua woman. She is the founder of the Central Australian Aboriginal Strong Women's Alliance (CAASWA). Elaine lives on her homeland called Iteyepintye. Elaine has represented Aboriginal women of the NT at the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women's Alliance in Canberra.

Hello my name is Elaine Peckham I'm a Central Arrente woman from Mbantua which is the Arrente name for Alice Springs. I now live out on my homeland called Iteyepintye West of Alice Springs.

I would like to speak openly and honestly about the Intervention being myself a person that has lived with the Intervention. A time where our human rights were taken away from us.

I've been going through the Intervention, like many others as a mother, grandmother and great grandmother. I was on Income Management from the start of the Intervention until last year.

Today I speak for myself. We respect other Aboriginal people and some of us have different views on things like the Intervention. But I do know that there are people that are hurting because of the Intervention and Income Management but because they are hurting it is hard for them to talk about it. It's not as easy as some people think for people to talk about it. Everyone has different feelings. Many find it hard to talk about. Feels emotional. You have to believe in yourself to talk about it so openly.

I went through the Intervention and know how it made me feel emotionally and physically and what it did to my health as a diabetic. It stressed me out. I had to keep very strong. I got the Central Australian Aboriginal Strong Women's Alliance started because I wanted Aboriginal women from Central Australia to have a voice, especially women who live with the Intervention. I didn't want something like that to happen to the next generation. We are not selfish people and we are thinking of the next generation, our children and their children through our cultural beliefs and our obligations. We want to be on the same level as government. Talking straight talk together. Sharing the two cultures.

People should be assessed person by person. And that assessment needs to be done in a way that doesn't shame them and so that they can understand everything that is going on. For parents who are not sending their children to school and so they are on Income Management the person interviewing them should ask the parents the reasons why they're not sending their children to school and let the parents explain what those issues are and how they can then help them, how they can accommodate them and support their needs.

The person that's interviewing them could say "what do you think will help". The person interviewing might be unsure on how they can accommodate them but they can learn. And then they can look at how they can address the issues together and really talk it out and in a way where there's not someone in a higher position and one lower. They should sit down together at the same level. I think that this would be better for both people. Because what always happens is one person saying that they know it all and patronising the parent and the other person not really understanding what exactly what is going on, and then decisions are made regardless.

I know of mothers that are good mums. They're on Income Management because they're unemployed but they are wanting to do the activities that could get them getting off Income Management such as a computer course. But they can't because they can't get there because they've got no transport or childcare for their kids. It can be hard to travel to town, even for people in town camps. Transport is a barrier. And if I still had children at home you have to find someone to look after them so you can go to town. There has to be someone to care for the kids. These are barriers that need to be worked on.

There's barriers for people who live outside Alice Springs to engage with services. How can people be accommodated so that they can do courses in their communities and in town and get good skills?

People who work with Aboriginal people really need to understand that Aboriginal people coming into a different environment, that they're not used to, will feel uncomfortable and shy.

We thought that we were moving forward but this is bringing up things from people's past.

What the Intervention has done in the past and will continue to do to us is stop us believing in ourselves. Most of us have done nothing wrong and we have always been accountable people all our lives as far as I can remember. But we're feeling like we've done something really wrong, like we are bad people, and we are being put down. And now we are feeling it emotionally in ourselves and are hurting and are suffering from what the Intervention has done to us.

Please don't be judgemental of Aboriginal people and treat us as equals. And we are really trying to work with the Government and not just sitting back. We are trying to meet the Federal Government half-way but they are not meeting us half way. They're not listening. They believe that they know what is best for Aboriginal people. But we know otherwise.

Little Children are Sacred Report was important but the recommendations weren't followed.

People need to work with Aboriginal people in a respectful and honest way.