

**Submission to House of Representatives Standing Committee on  
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs**

**RE: CAPACITY BUILDING IN INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES**

**Terms of Reference:**

**The Committee will consider building the capacity of:**

- (a) **community members to better support families, community organizations and representative councils so as to deliver the best outcomes for individuals, families and communities.**
- (b) **Indigenous organizations to better deliver and influence the delivery of services in the most effective, efficient and accountable way and**
- (c) **Government agencies so that policy direction and management structure will improve individual and community outcomes for Indigenous people.**

**Dubbo Aboriginal Community Working Party**

The Dubbo Aboriginal Community Working Party (DACWP) is a result of the Dubbo Aboriginal Community Summit in 2001 and comprises Aboriginal members from various language/nation groups within Dubbo. These members were selected on merit following application to become members of the DACWP by the three peak Indigenous bodies in NSW; namely ATSIC, NSWALC and DAA.

Our main role is to move on issues identified at the summit and other impediments that are preventing our people from improving their Cultural, Social and Economic conditions in partnership with the general community.

We are committed to:

- uniting the Dubbo Aboriginal Community
- seeking ongoing advice from the community to identify issues of concern and gaps in service provision
- providing objective, independent and unbiased advice and direction to service providers
- assisting with the co-ordination, monitoring and review of services
- trying to ensure that effective culturally appropriate services are delivered and maintained.

The Working Party; which is "The Red Ochre Community Unity Project" is being funded by Family And Community Services until June 2005.

**Project Aim:** To make a big improvement to the life of Aboriginal people in Dubbo by getting everyone involved to work together for the better delivery of services we really need.

**Strategy:** with the assistance of Department of Family and Community Services to employ two Aboriginal staff to help put into action the ideas and plans of the Red Ochre Community Working Party representing the broad cross-section of Aboriginal interests in Dubbo. The strategy will be to get all the Aboriginal community working together to sort out the most important things to get fixed first and working with all

the key players (Government and Non-government organizations) to have those needs met efficiently and effectively.

**Objectives:** How well we're doing is going to be judged against these things we want to see happen:

- Better delivery of services because everyone knows the plan and what's going on.
- Aboriginal people able to make use of services more easily
- Our community getting along better together so that we really get things done.
- More community members taking part and taking a lead in what's got to be done, especially elders, women and young people having a say.
- A whole shift in our thinking from sorting out a mess to stopping things ever getting so bad in the first place.

**Stephen Ryan Working Party member:**

**Family Violence** is a major concern to the Dubbo Aboriginal community and the need for the community/families/individuals to formulate strategies to prevent domestic violence, child abuse etc is recognised by the various Aboriginal Language groups that form the Dubbo Aboriginal community.

The impact of Family Violence on the Dubbo Aboriginal community is as devastating as it is in remote communities and this is reflected in the statistics relating to **courts, incarceration, educational achievements, hospitalisation, homelessness, employment, health** and so on and has a bearing on our cultural, social and economic conditions.

Of course we are aware of the forced cultural changes that have affected us like forced relocations from homelands, stolen generations and generally our culture being subdued and we need help to come to terms with these past acts if we are going to heal and move forward.

In order for us to heal our minds we need projects that are Family Based, because we are family based peoples and even though 1 person in the family might be deemed to be "sick" the whole family needs to help that person to identify the sickness, its cause and they need to eradicate the cause and heal together.

The DACWP is currently in negotiations with relevant agencies to try and ensure that Family Violence is confronted by the Aboriginal Community and families within this community holistically and that we the Aboriginal community are given the resources to develop and implement family based solutions. Of course the emphasis will be on Family Violence Prevention programs that deal with the causes of this type of violence and are able to lift our self-esteem.

We are aware that Alcohol and Drug abuse are symptoms of family violence, but the experts need to realise the underlying issues that our people are trying to deal with that have built up over time as a result of our cultural ways changing, and us being given no opportunities or no tools to help us to adapt to that change.

Some of the greatest needs are for Culturally appropriate "Family Healing /Rehabilitation/Detoxification centres", Safe Houses for Children/Youth and Men, Culturally appropriate Women's Refuges, Homelessness, School to Work transition

programs, Culturally appropriate schools and curriculum and a general community(Aboriginal and Non Aboriginal) education/awareness program on Family Violence prevention.

We are in the process of formulating the conduct of a Youth Forum where it is hoped that the Aboriginal Youth of Dubbo will provide us with information about issues that are affecting them, and are provided with an opportunity to develop mechanisms to address those issues. Elders, Women's and Men's summits will be conducted as tools to assist us to clarify issues of concern to the Aboriginal community and organise this much needed forum, which might ensure that it is not just a talkfest.

From there we will take up the issues with agencies both Aboriginal and non Aboriginal that hopefully will eventuate in capacity development in the Aboriginal Community which in turn will benefit the whole of the Dubbo community.

**We are closely monitoring the COAG trials that are commencing throughout the nation, and it is hoped that those trials will have a ripple effect on our community, and together with the work we are currently doing will lead to a whole of government approach being adopted in Dubbo, which will ensure an integrated service delivery that is culturally appropriate and assisted through community participation agreements.**

**What we are trying to implement is welfare reform, which will only come through doing business differently than in the past with the Dubbo Aboriginal Community, such as is intended with the COAG trials. But we understand that the Aboriginal community must make commitments and it will take time and a concerted effort from everyone to work together.**

**Notes from an Indigenous Women's conference:**

**Domestic Violence**

Family violence is a major concern to the Aboriginal community. They believe that families have a right to security and to be free from violence and that children need to be protected so that they can protect them when they get older. They believe that some young people have lost respect for the Elders and that some of the Elders do not respect the young people.

Community members believe that there needs to be family intervention and prevention services that culturally appropriate and there needs to be more awareness of domestic violence and child abuse of all kinds so that people will speak out and make the offenders aware that it is not acceptable and so that people will become more responsible. There needs to be programs to educate the men to show them that what they are doing is wrong; to have programs to teach protective behaviours to children; to re-educate them so that they do not have the same violent behaviours and for them to have safe people to trust and access when needed; to build women's self esteem and to understand that women are abusers as well and to address this issue.

There needs to be cross-cultural awareness for main line organizations. For them to understand that Aboriginal women will not attend refuges if there are no Aboriginal workers and can't take the boys over a certain age. To have both male and female police attend – female ACLO's.

It is important for the community to be united in supporting each other; Elders groups talking to the family etc. Kinship communities where everyone helps each other and children are taught to have pride and respect. Parents take back responsibility for children, other parents get-together and help each other; men to be more involved and supportive in communities.

There needs to be a holistic approach to the issues of family violence and child abuse – a place to go for the whole family where the men are counselled as well as the women, where the children are counselled and are still able to go to school.

#### **Notes from Aboriginal Community member:**

##### **Education**

To establish Aboriginal community schools where the children who do not learn by the established method can learn and not be wandering the streets. Have open air classes because the children get bored staying inside too much. Need subjects that are going to be used when they leave school. Some children can't read and write but they can pull a motor down and put it back together.

#### **Experience in a Medical Service:**

##### **Health and Dental**

There is not enough funding for dental programs. It has been proven that dental problems can cause health problems. Some of the issues caused by lack of funding are:

- Aboriginal people's teeth are being pulled out because the cost is too high to do reconstructions and root canal – so Aboriginal people are having to get dentures; which is pretty disgusting in this advanced technological age.
- Only emergency dental repairs – pulling teeth out - can be done because not enough funding therefore Aboriginal people go weeks with toothaches, small holes become big and preventative measures are not taken.

Dubbo Aboriginal Community Working Party