

30 Marian St
Leederville WA 6007
11.10.2000

Dear Committee,

Unfortunately I haven't the time and energy at 80 to write a proper submission re the needs of Urban Dwelling Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Peoples. It is a subject very dear to my heart as I have been with them mostly living with homeless ones or having a drop-in centre for the past 25 yrs except for 3 yrs in Roebourne. For the past 3 yrs I support them as best I can from my convent home.

I see lack of suitable accommodation – a safe place to lay one's head – as the most vital need. Without it people can suffer mental or physical health problems. Children cannot go to school (no showers or suitable clothing) or they move from school to school (very stressful for them and teachers and worrying for most parents) or they have no suitable place to do their homework. This results in a lack of education which leads later to lack of employment and in the present, far, far too often sniffing problems and trouble with the law not to mention a bad impression gained from on-lookers who don't see the basis of such behaviour, and difficulties arise for reconciliation.

There is a grave shortage of welfare housing in W.A. particularly I suggest for Aborigines who have a greater increase in children than non-aborigines. There is need for many more 4 or 5 bedroom houses not only for a family but for visits from relatives who naturally and I would say beautifully, turn to their relatives in need. A toilet inside and one outside would relieve families of stress especially at times of deaths or illness where families come to give or get support. Housing money is a federal problem.

Incidentally, it is very, very hard for people to pay for funerals. It is vital to go to funerals – about the last ritual left for urban aborigines. This should be remembered when relatives are in prison also cousins are like brothers and sisters, so too uncles and aunts. Whenever possible they should be allowed to go to the funeral. Fares to funerals can be very expensive as the deceased needs to be laid to rest in their own country. Surely at least the grave site could be free for our Indigenous brothers and sisters. As Graeme Dixon so movingly puts it, "Six feet of Land Rights". We could surely manage that!

Too often where unemployment fuels alcohol and drug problems, gambling and domestic violence, prison can follow. Then the one who returns from prison is faced with huge rent failures and damage bills. It is very, very hard to become rehoused. Often too the debt is laid at the feet of the innocent person who perhaps snapped and retaliated and ended up "inside".

There aren't suitable places for people wanting to dry out to get off drug, alcohol and sniffing. Where are there places for parents/parent with children or even individuals? This is vital, especially for homeless ones.

There's much more I could say, but there have been reports and reports written time and time again and very little if any results followed. e.g. in **1898** there was one presented to the Council in W.A. saying prison was an unsuitable way to deal with Aborigines. We still have Deaths in Custody. I've known 13 personally plus 2 families of a prisoner.

Please don't let your report end the same way!

It breaks my heart to see the wonderful gifts the Aboriginal culture has to offer the wider community becoming fainter and fainter through our lack of positive action. I've seen wonderful Aboriginal friends burnt out or dead long before their time because reports have ended in nothing after all. "All 0" as someone said.

Please do something. I get annoyed when I hear Mr Howard say he can't say sorry but he's looking after health, education and housing. He obviously hasn't met personally many aborigines. He doesn't know how they feel about an honest admission of past mistakes which have tentacles in the present. He doesn't know how they feel about being homeless, sick, hungry, and in need of a wash. Or what it's like not to be able to read or fill in forms or use their latent artistic gifts. Or what it's like to live on a welfare cheque.

I'd better stop. Please try to stand in the shoes of the Poor. May God direct you in your work.

Yours sincerely,

Sr Bernardine Daly

[This letter was copied in full from a handwritten letter submitted from Sr Bernardine Daly and received on 13 October 2000.]