

The Committee Secretary
House of Representatives Standing
Committee on Aboriginal and
Torres Strait Islander Affairs,
Parliament House,
CANBERRA 2600

Dear Sir/Madam,

Re: Inquiry into the Needs of Urban Dwelling Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples.

The Institute for Aboriginal Development is an independent Aboriginal community-controlled language resource centre and adult education college serving the Aboriginal community of Central Australia. Its activities include:

- Education programs which range from literacy and numeracy to vocational and tertiary-level courses;
- Aboriginal language cross-culture and cultural maintenance programs;
- Providing interpreter services and language research; and
- A publishing arm, IAD Press, which produces material for and about Aboriginal people, language and culture of Central Australia.

IAD is one of five founding members of the Federation of Independent Aboriginal Education Providers.

IAD's core client group is urban dwelling Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Adults and as such we are in an excellent position to provide information to your enquiry.

In relation to your first Term of Reference:

- i. The nature of existing programs and services available to urban dwelling indigenous Australians, including ways to more effectively deliver services considering the special needs of these people.**

The major Commonwealth funded program, in which IAD takes part, is the Indigenous Education Strategic Initiatives Program (IESIP). This program provides support for a range of our activities, in particular, adult education and training. While IESIP has traditionally been considered an additional support for Indigenous education, in the case of IAD, the failure of the Northern Territory government to fund our core operations has meant that IESIP has become a primary source of funding. This means, in effect, that Aboriginal students are funded at a higher level when they attend the mainstream VET sector in Alice Springs than if they attend their own Aboriginal community controlled college.

IESIP has a number of components, one of which is Transitional Program Assistance (TPA). In recent months, DETYA has informed us that, in order for providers to access

moneys formerly allocated under this source, we must indicate how funded programs address the 6 Key Elements of the National Indigenous English Literacy and Numeracy Strategy (NIELNS). IAD, like the Commonwealth, is committed to addressing the appalling literacy and numeracy levels, which characterise much of Aboriginal Australia, however, the NIELNS strategy was developed for the school sector. It has little relevance to the adult VET sector and includes indicators such as, “involving parents” and “improving preschooling experiences”. Instead of being an effective accountability system for Indigenous VET providers in receipt of IESIP moneys, the exercise has been one of trying to make our already effective adult education provision fit into a largely irrelevant school based framework.

A further hurdle in the process of meeting the IESIP accountability requirements is that one of the Performance Indicators on the IESIP Quadrennial agreements is the percentage of module completions at Certificate 4 level and above on the Australian Qualifications Framework. As you can see, DETYA’s accountability is a contradiction in terms. On the one hand, we are being asked to concentrate on the Literacy and Numeracy needs of Aboriginal students and, on the other hand, on students at Certificate 4 and above, a level at which poor Literacy and Numeracy is significantly less of an issue.

IESIP Performance Indicators are determined by DETYA in Canberra. There is no room in the current system for the needs of individual communities of Aboriginal people to determine their own educational priorities. Performance indicators are related to national trends and requirements and don’t take into account the specificities of life for Aboriginal people living, in our case, in Central Australia.

For example, we have recently been contacted by Tangentyere Council, which represents people living on Town Camps in and around Alice Springs. Tangentyere have indicated that the primary educational need of Town Campers is basic literacy and numeracy training but that these people are unlikely to attend a campus of a mainstream provider. If IAD responds to this very important community need through culturally appropriate training, we will be addressing the 6 Key Elements of the NIELNS Strategy but will be in danger of jeopardising our percentage of courses at Certificate 4 and above.

Your first Term of Reference asks for feedback addressing ways that delivery of programs to Urban Dwelling Aboriginal people can be improved. In terms of Commonwealth funding in general and the IESIP program in particular, our recommendations are as follows:

- 1) That States and Territories in receipt of Commonwealth moneys be required to ensure equitable distribution of these funds to the Aboriginal Independent Community Controlled sector.
- 2) That DETYA review the funding and accountability systems for the IESIP program to ensure that it adequately provides for and monitors the specific needs of students taking part in the Aboriginal Independent Community Controlled sector.

- 3) That Independent Aboriginal Community Controlled Providers be able to argue a case as to why nationally determined Performance Indicators are not relevant to the specific educational needs of their local community.
- 4) That Independent Aboriginal Community Controlled Education providers be able to negotiate their own Performance Indicators with the Commonwealth based on the legitimate and clearly evidenced needs of their own communities.
- 5) That a review of IESIP funding to Indigenous Independent Adult Education providers be conducted by the Commonwealth to improve the current processes for ensuring that the needs of Aboriginal adults are being met.

In relation to your second Term Of Reference:

ii. Ways to extend the involvement of urban indigenous people in decision making affecting their local communities, including partnership governance arrangements;

IAD's Board is made up exclusively of local Aboriginal people. It includes representatives of local Aboriginal Organizations and elected community and student representatives. Its Director and Deputy Director and a high proportion of its professional staff are Aboriginal people living in Alice Springs. Community control and accountability are further ensured by policies, which allow for all committees including Course Development and Course Monitoring Committees to be made up of a majority of Aboriginal people. In short, the guiding principle behind IAD's operations is Aboriginal Self-Determination.

This level of involvement of urban indigenous people in decision making affecting their own education and that of their community, does not happen by chance. It is a result of intensive planning, training and community development, well above that required by mainstream providers of services to Aboriginal people. Our experience shows, however, that instead of community controlled providers being funded at a level that supports this type of community ownership, we are, in fact, funded at a lower level than the mainstream providers. We are also asked to account in ways that are essentially mainstream and are against the needs and wishes of the community to whom we feel we are essentially accountable.

Our recommendations in relation to this Term of Reference are:

- 1) That Aboriginal community controlled organizations that extend the involvement of urban indigenous people in decision making affecting their communities, be funded at a level at least matching that of mainstream providers in any given State or Territory.
- 2) That Commonwealth funded programs, such as the IESIP program, maintain enough flexibility so that when Aboriginal people determine their own needs, these can be negotiated and not over-ridden by nationally determined trends and requirements.

In relation to your third Term of Reference:

iii. The situation and needs of indigenous young people in urban areas, especially relating to health, education, employment and homelessness (including access to services funded from the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program);

IAD has been running a very successful Work Skills program for a number of years. Its target group is young Aboriginal people and its aim is to prepare them for the workforce or for further study in a supportive and culturally appropriate environment. The course has had very good outcomes in terms of employment and articulation into further education. At the moment we are only equipped to take 14 young people and we are operating with a lengthy waiting list.

The education needs of Aboriginal young people are quite specific. Programs need to be culturally appropriate. They need to include role modelling by Aboriginal Elders and teachers and need to operate in an environment where success is expected.

Courses such as our Work Skills program are rare in Alice Springs, despite the enormous need. Unfortunately, without such opportunities, the future for many of the young people in our community will be characterised by long-term unemployment, ill health, substance abuse, and, in many cases, incarceration for trivial offences under the Mandatory Sentencing regime.

Our recommendations in relation to your third Term of Reference would be:

- 1) Ensure that existing Commonwealth funded education programs include provision for culturally appropriate education opportunities for young Aboriginal people.
- 2) Expand available funding for programs specifically aimed at increasing the educational opportunities for young Aboriginal people.

In relation to your fourth Term of Reference:

iv. The maintenance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture in urban areas, including, where appropriate, ways in which such maintenance can be encouraged.

IAD's Language and Culture Centre operates a very successful Languages in Schools program, which provides training for school students in Arrente Language and Culture. We also offer an Interpreter Service which operates for Aboriginal people whose first language is other than English and a Dictionaries Program which produces Aboriginal language Dictionaries and curriculum documents. We believe that our Language and Culture Centre is a model of effective programs which encourage cultural maintenance for Aboriginal people. The projects within IAD's Language and Culture Centre are funded from a range of sources including ATSIC. As with much of our activity, these programs run on shoestring budgets and leap from one funding shortfall to the next. We

welcome the opportunity to discuss the success of our Language and Culture programs in more detail. Our recommendation in relation to this Term of Reference is:

1. That the Commonwealth fund a study of Best Practice in Aboriginal Language and Culture Programs.
2. That Commonwealth funding to ATSIC for Language and Culture Programs be increased.

In relation to your fifth Term of Reference:

v. Opportunities for economic independence in urban areas;

I am sure that you will appreciate the close relationship between effective, culturally appropriate education and economic independence. Our recommendation in relation to this Term of Reference is quite straightforward:

- 1) Ensure that Independent Community Controlled Aboriginal Education providers are supported to provide high quality, culturally appropriate education through adequate funding and Performance Indicators that match the aspirations of the communities they serve.

In relation to your sixth Term of Reference:

vi. Urban housing needs and the particular problems and difficulties association with urban areas,

IAD runs a short course called “Living Skills” in collaboration with Tangentyere Council, Territory Housing, the Aboriginal Urban Housing Authority and the Renal Unit of Alice Springs Hospital. The course was developed due to concerns that there were Aboriginal members of the community in ill health who were not accessing essential medical services such as Renal support because they were unable to maintain tenancies in Alice Springs. This course is aimed at allowing Aboriginal people to understand their rights and responsibilities in relation to urban living. It is aimed at alleviating some of the factors, which prevent Aboriginal people maintaining tenancies. Once again, despite the importance of this program, it runs on short term funding, with one off grants having to be sought for every three-week program. Some of the major housing issues facing Aboriginal people in Alice Springs include:

- The requirement by both Territory Housing and private Real Estate Agents in Alice Springs for two tenancy references before people can rent a house. For people who have previously lived outside urban areas or in other people’s houses, this poses a major obstacle to accessing housing.
- The inadequacy of much public housing to meet the needs of extended family.
- Lease holders incurring costs for repairs to rented housing due to damage done through overcrowding.

In terms of your sixth Term of Reference, our recommendations would be:

1. That the Commonwealth consider funding programs which assist Aboriginal people to maintain tenancies in an urban environment.
2. That the Commonwealth support programs, which enable Aboriginal people to purchase their own homes.

As evidenced above, IAD is currently working in a range of areas covered by your Inquiry and is an excellent position to provide further information on your Terms of Reference. We would like to extend an invitation to the Senate Committee to meet with us, at your convenience, to discuss any of the issues raised in our submission in more detail. We look forward to your response.

Yours faithfully

Richard Hayes
Director
Institute for Aboriginal Development