

Youth Coalition of the ACT

ACCEPTING RESPONSIBILITY

*Understanding and Taking Action
for the Future of Indigenous Young People
in the Australian Capital Territory*

**Commonwealth Parliamentary Inquiry
into the Needs of
Urban Dwelling
Aboriginal and
Torres Strait Islander Peoples**

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

November 2000

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LIST OF RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1 (page 21)

That the Commonwealth Government, in consultation with the Indigenous community, develop a cross-portfolio strategy to address the current and future needs of Indigenous children and young people, to which State and Territory Governments will be accountable.

State and Territory Governments should be required to report on both the actions undertaken in response to the strategy and benchmark the effectiveness of these actions.

Recommendation 2 (p26)

That the ACT Government in collaboration with the local Indigenous community, establish and adequately resource an Indigenous cultural centre, which would provide Indigenous young people with opportunities to participate in Indigenous cultural activities and education (including Indigenous languages).

Recommendation 3 (p27)

That the ACT Government, enter into discussions with local elders into how it could support a mentoring program for Indigenous young people within the ACT area, which is ongoing and adequately resourced.

Recommendation 4 (p28)

That funds be allocated to the local Indigenous community to resource meetings for Indigenous youth within the ACT region. That the issues raised in such meetings be addressed by the Commonwealth and ACT Government in the development of policy around the needs of Indigenous young people, and actioned as a priority.

Recommendation 5 (p31)

That the Government engage with relevant Indigenous agencies in researching best practise models to allow these services to engage Indigenous young people at risk of drug using and who are currently drug using, in holistic educational, preventative and early intervention programs.

Recommendation 6 (p33)

That an Indigenous controlled detoxification and rehabilitation facility be established for Indigenous young people within the ACT.

That the participation of Indigenous youth is made possible and encouraged in all areas of policy development and service delivery. That such participation is formalized and included in organizational aims, objectives and mission statements and supported by funding to provide a range of peer education options.

Recommendation 7 (p34)

That cultural awareness training be mandatory for all staff working in mainstream health services, with provision for initial training and updates.

Recommendation 8 (p35)

That Indigenous controlled outreach services be funded to allow drug and alcohol education and support to be taken into Indigenous communities.

Recommendation 9 (p39)

That mainstream human services organisations be funded to have at least two Aboriginal Liaison Officer (ALO) positions, preferably with at least one designated male position and one designated female position (to deal with culturally sensitive issues regarding ‘men’s’ and ‘women’s’ business). Funding must be sufficient to ensure the provision of ongoing training and professional support to ALOs.

Recommendation 10 (p39)

That employment of Aboriginal Liaison Officers should come with a whole organization commitment to prioritising staff development funds for non-Indigenous staff (at all levels) to engage in cross cultural training with qualified Indigenous trainers.

Recommendation 11 (p40)

That Indigenous identified positions be placed and funded at a sufficiently high level within mainstream organisations to influence policy decisions.

Recommendation 12 (p42)

That additional funding be allocated for prevention and early intervention programs, which are not just accessible to Indigenous young people already involved in the juvenile justice system. These programs could be based on a sport and recreational activity framework.

Recommendation 13 (p43)

That the Australian Federal Police (AFP) continue to employ Aboriginal Liaison Officers (at all levels) and continue to train police in cultural awareness and extend this to include issues specific to Indigenous young people. Cultural awareness should be fully integrated into community policing at an operational level.

Recommendation 14 (p44)

That teachers in the education system be provided with training and support to assist in the identification of Indigenous young people 'at risk' in the education system.

Recommendation 15 (p44)

That funding be provided to Indigenous controlled programs to strengthen relationships between Indigenous communities and schools.

Recommendation 16 (p44)

That a review be undertaken of Indigenous young people in the juvenile correctional facility within the ACT to explore where Indigenous young people may be falling through the gaps and to develop best practise model for coordinated case management between services.

Recommendation 17 (p46)

That a strategic framework for post release options, including housing, education and support for Indigenous young people exiting juvenile detention systems be developed. This framework should include pathways to appropriate long-term options as a matter of necessity.

Recommendation 18 (p48)

That the Commonwealth provide additional funds to those government departments responsible for statutory child protection, to resource multi-skilled Indigenous Units, the primary tasks of the Unit being: preventative and early intervention work to support and work with Indigenous children (0-18 years) and their families, and the provision of support to Indigenous young people 'exiting' the care system.

Recommendation 19 (p50)

That the Government allocate specific funds for Indigenous agencies to resource preventative and early intervention programs aimed at supporting Indigenous families.

Recommendation 20 (p52)

That further funding be allocated to providing appropriate literacy and numeracy assistance to Indigenous children and young people from Kindergarten to Year 12.

Recommendation 21 (p58)

That best practise models for the engagement of Indigenous young people in education programs be identified and promoted.

Recommendation 22 (p61)

That State and Territory Governments ensure that primary and secondary school curricula include substantial compulsory modules on the history and continuing effects of forcible removal. (Recommendation 8a Bringing Them Home report)

Recommendation 23 (p61)

That the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies be funded by the Commonwealth to develop the modules. (Recommendation 8b Bringing Them Home report)

Recommendation 24 (p64)

The Youth Coalition recommends the development of similar scholarship opportunities for Indigenous young people within the human services. Such scholarships should be accessible to a greater number of Indigenous young people through the attachment of required academic support, such as bridging literacy and numeracy assistance.

Recommendation 25 (p66)

That resources be directed to expanding and further developing cross-cultural training for workers in SAAP services.

Recommendation 26 (p67)

That SAAP workers provided with training around supporting Indigenous young people with mental health and/or drug and alcohol issues particular to the 'residential' situation.

Recommendation 27 (p67)

That SAAP agencies be required to develop and implement access and equity strategies for Indigenous young people, and that this be a requirement of ongoing funding.

Recommendation 28 (p74)

That the Government resource a national Indigenous body to advise on SAAP as a mechanism for effective consultation on policy and planning issues.

Recommendation 29 (p75)

That the Government redress the imbalance in housing benefits for Indigenous people through increased resources being put into programs directed specifically toward addressing housing needs.

The Youth Coalition of the ACT

The Youth Coalition of the ACT is the peak youth affairs body in the ACT. Our role is to provide co-ordination and analysis of the implications of various ACT and national policy and program decisions for young people being those aged between 12 – 25 years. The Youth Coalition also develops policy platforms that reflect a broad range of constituent views in relation to the needs and aspirations of young people who live in the ACT.

The Youth Coalition works collaboratively with a wide range of other service providers and organisations. A board appointed by its membership annually manages the Youth Coalition. It is the view of the Board that all the Youth Coalition processes and forums be as inclusive as possible and also advocates on behalf of the interests of young people.

Introduction

The Youth Coalition welcomes the opportunity to provide input into the Commonwealth Inquiry into the Needs of Urban Dwelling Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. The Youth Coalition is however unclear as to whether the current Inquiry comes with a Commonwealth Government commitment to devote additional funding to address the needs and relative disadvantage of the urban Indigenous population;

or whether this will play a part in reallocating existing funding.

The Youth Coalition considers the Inquiry timely within the context of continuing discussions at all levels of Australian community regarding the issues of Reconciliation, which includes “*recognition of rights to equality, non-discrimination and effective participation,*”, and will therefore assist in improving the livelihoods of Indigenous Australians.¹

As our core business relates to young people, our submission will address the third Term of Reference of the Inquiry, this being;

“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).”

Our submission will focus on the situation and needs of Indigenous young people within the ACT and surrounding areas. Whilst it is acknowledged that many Indigenous young people experience success, it is necessary to view Indigenous disadvantage at a systemic level, rather than allowing it to be

¹ Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, Social Justice Report 1999, *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner*. Report No.2/2000,p14

viewed at an individual level.

Our submission will therefore focus on the continuing disadvantages facing Indigenous young people and those areas requiring advancing.

When assessing the situation and needs of Indigenous youth within the ACT, the Youth Coalition considers that it is necessary to make comparisons between Indigenous people in the ACT and the total ACT population, and not between Indigenous people in the ACT and Indigenous people interstate.

In order to inform our submission to be representative of the views of the youth sector and the Indigenous community, the Youth Coalition undertook a process of consultation with members of the local Indigenous community, and Indigenous and non-Indigenous workers within the sector.

The Youth Coalition thinks it is essential for the Committee to consider the current Inquiry in the context of previous major documents pertinent to the welfare of Indigenous people within Australia, namely;

*The Royal Commission into the Deaths of Aboriginals in Custody (1991)

*The 'Bringing Them Home' National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families Report (1997)

*Our Homeless Children (1989)

*The Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission Social Justice Report (1999)

*The Standing Committee Inquiry into the Health of Indigenous people (1999)

*The Convention on the Rights of the Child

*The National Aboriginal Health Strategy (1989)

The Youth Coalition recognises the work made by Government at a local and national level to address issues raised in these documents. There is however significant action required in continuing to advance these issues.

Background

Indigenous youth within Australia do not enjoy a position of equality within our society. By virtue of age and cultural background, Indigenous young people continue to be one of the most disadvantaged groups in Australian society. In an era of increasing youth suicide, drug use and unemployment, young people have specific needs, which require specific attention.

Indigenous young people in the ACT will be more likely to experience markedly poorer health, poorer nutrition, injury,

lower levels of education, greater poverty, higher levels of unemployment, imprisonment, racism and discrimination, and the prospect of a considerably earlier death than their non-Indigenous counterparts. These disadvantages are coupled with increased barriers to accessing human services due to age and cultural background.²

The ACT Indigenous population is a unique, diverse population made up of the local Ngun(n)awal people and Indigenous people from all areas of Australia.

ABS data suggests that the Indigenous population in the ACT is between 3, 226 to 3, 723 people.³ The difficulties associated with collecting accurate information regarding the Indigenous population due in part, to a lack of consistent data collection mechanisms across all service providers and a reluctance of some Indigenous people to identify their cultural status (anecdotally: due to stigma, for fear of reduced service), suggests that this figure may be under-representative. Consequently, this data cannot be relied on for informed decision making about priority areas and funding allocations. The Youth Coalition commends the actions being made by Government to implement the recommendations of the Royal

² Australian Institute of Health and Welfare,1999. *Australia's Young People – Their health and welfare*, pxi)

³ ACT Department of Health and Community Care, Epidemiology Unit,1998. *Aborigines and Torres Strait Islander people in the ACT*. Monograph No.4.).

Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody regarding data collection.

Anecdotal evidence indicates the Indigenous population within the ACT to be closer to 5,000. Furthermore, the geographical position of the ACT means that it is accessed for services and employment opportunities by a large number (approximately 3000) of Indigenous people from surrounding areas, such as Queanbeyan, Yass, Cooma and Tumut.⁴ This raises a number of cross border issues for Indigenous young people accessing services, relating to lack of coordination of services and eligibility for programs across borders. The need to address cross border issues has been highlighted in a number of previous Government inquiries⁵, and needs to be addressed to ensure that services within the ACT are appropriately resourced to cater for this group.

The Jervis Bay Territory, which includes the Aboriginal community of Wreck Bay, (a combined Aboriginal population of 419) is also within the ACT Government's jurisdiction. Unfortunately our submission is unable to address the issues for Indigenous young people within the Jervis Bay Territory

⁴ ACT Department of Health and Community Care, 1997. *The health of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the ACT*, Health Status Monitoring Epidemiology Unit.

⁵ For example, ACT Legislative Assembly, *Report on the inquiry into Services for Children at risk in the ACT*, 1997, and, The Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia, *Inquiry into Indigenous Health – Discussion Paper*, 1999.

due to limited resources, however it is our understanding that service delivery to the Jervis Bay Territory appears to be negatively affected by cross-border issues as a result of its location.⁶

Currently the ACT Government is responsible for education and child protection services and also the provision of a community nurse to the Jervis Bay area. Additional health services are purchased from the NSW Health Department.

The Indigenous population within the ACT

The Indigenous population within the ACT is increasingly young with the proportion of children and young people in the Indigenous population estimated at around 48% compared to 28% of the non-Indigenous population.⁷

866 (1.2%) of the 71, 277 young people in the ACT identify as Indigenous. This compares with the proportion of Indigenous people within the ACT aged over 26 years being just 0.6%.

It is therefore crucial that policies and strategies be developed which address the current and future needs of Indigenous children and young people in order to provide increased opportunities and hope as these young people mature. It is

⁶ Barratt, Leonard, 1999, *Examples of Concerns Raised by the ACT Indigenous Community* paper.

⁷ Australian Bureau of Statistics & National Youth Affairs Research Scheme, 1996. *Australian Capital Territory's Young People*. (It should be noted that this info excludes that from the Jervis Bay Territory).

also important that services be developed with regard to the specific needs of Indigenous young people, rather than simply being modeled on adult services where the issues are very different.

“The young age structure of the Indigenous population also ensures that the disadvantage faced by Indigenous young people in Australia is not going to ‘sort itself out’ or simply go away. Indeed, the disadvantage faced by Indigenous youth today has the potential to increase and further entrench the disparity between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians over the coming decades, unless great effort is made by governments to reduce the sources of inequality now.”⁸

Gugan Gulwan Youth Aboriginal Corporation

There is only one Aboriginal specific youth service within the ACT. Gugan Gulwan Youth Aboriginal Corporation is staffed by three (3) Indigenous workers, and assists young people with accommodation, education, parenting, health and justice issues. The service also employs a drug and alcohol outreach worker and has recently received funding from the ACT Government for an additional position. However, the potential for Gugan Gulwan to engage in proactive work with Indigenous young people cannot be realized due to limitations

⁸ Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, Social Justice Report 1999, *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner*. Report No.2/2000,p34

imposed by the current level of funding.

Furthermore, of the eight (8) mainstream youth centres currently operating in the ACT, there is only one identified Indigenous youth worker position.

Gugan Gulwan is situated in the suburb of Red Hill, a location which makes it difficult to access by Indigenous young people, and requiring staff to undertake a large outreach component, with a majority of Indigenous youth residing in suburbs where there are flat complexes of high density public housing.⁹

A cross-portfolio approach

The current situation and needs of Indigenous young people should be viewed in the context of the historical, social and economic issues of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history. As such, it is essential to approach the issues of health, education, employment and housing as being inextricably linked.

A cross-portfolio approach is therefore necessary to adequately address the well-being of Indigenous children and young people. This approach needs to be proactive in essence

⁹ Australian Bureau of Statistics & National Youth Affairs Research Scheme, 1996. *Australian Capital Territory's Young People*, p11 (It should be noted that this info excludes that from the Jervis Bay Territory).

and developed through processes such that it is ‘owned’ by the local Indigenous community. It should also recognise and encourage the building of partnerships based on respect and understanding, between the Indigenous community and mainstream services, thereby increasing the capacity of services to address the needs of Indigenous youth.

Recommendation 1

That the Commonwealth Government, in consultation with the Indigenous community, develop a cross-portfolio strategy to address the current and future needs of Indigenous children and young people, to which State and Territory Governments will be accountable.

State and Territory Governments should be required to report on both the actions undertaken in response to the strategy and benchmark the effectiveness of these actions.

The Youth Coalition recognises the role of Government in enabling the Indigenous population to active participation and self determination as essential human rights principles, which need to be addressed if the disadvantages of the population are to be addressed. The principles of self-determination and effective participation are the major ‘themes’ underlying our submission.

HEALTH

“Without reconciliation, which acknowledges the grief and distress of Aboriginal people, and the allocation of funds for Aboriginal people to have greater self-determination with respect to their health, their health will continue to suffer.”¹⁰

The major factors affecting Indigenous health appear to be multifaceted, relating to socio-economic status, social and cultural factors, including past dispossession and dislocation, access to good quality health care and poor nutrition.¹¹

It is therefore essential to view the health needs of young Indigenous Australians within a holistic framework, which is consistent with the World Health Organisation definition of health and reflected in the National Aboriginal Health Strategy working party definition, being;

“Not just the physical well-being of an individual but the social, emotional and cultural well-being of the whole community.”¹²

¹⁰ Healthlink Editorial Committee, *Healthlink-The Health Promotion Journal of the ACT Region*, Winter 1998, Vol 2, Issue 5, p4)

¹¹ House of Representatives Standing Committee on Family and Community Affairs, 1999, *Inquiry into Indigenous Health-Discussion Paper*, p4.

¹² House of Representatives Standing Committee on Family and Community Affairs, 1999, *Inquiry into Indigenous Health-Discussion Paper*, p4.

Winnunga Nimmityjah

Winnunga Nimmityjah Aboriginal Health Service is the only community controlled health service in the ACT. Winnunga Nimmityjah is funded by the Commonwealth, with the ACT Government providing accommodation for the service, but no additional funding. Such services are considered essential to improving the livelihoods of Indigenous young people, as stated by the National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (NACCHO);

*“Community control is central to developing suitable promotion and prevention strategies for Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islanders. Community control is a process which allows the local Aboriginal community to be involved in its affairs in accordance with whatever protocols or procedures are determined by the Community.”*¹³

It is the Youth Coalition’s understanding that the ability for Winnunga Nimmityjah to provide a holistic health service to an increasing client group is severely limited with no increase in base Commonwealth funding for the last 12 (twelve) years.

¹³ National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (NACCHO) 1997, *Memorandum and Articles of Association and Mental Health Promotion and Prevention National Action Plan: Under the Second National Mental Health Plan: 1998 – 2003*.

The evidence relating to the significantly younger life expectancy for Indigenous peoples and the often preventable causes highlights the need for community controlled services to engage in preventative work with a focus on chronic disease management.

A community meeting facilitated by Winnunga Nimmityjah in October 2000, to inform the current Inquiry into the Health of Indigenous people within the ACT highlighted the following issues pertinent to the health of Indigenous young people in the ACT:

- *the need for additional resourcing of existing health services to allow for holistic service provision and proactive work to be undertaken

- *the increasing number of Indigenous young people using heroin in the ACT

- *the difficulties experienced by Indigenous young people in effectively accessing mainstream services

- *mainstream services in general are not working for the Indigenous community

- *the lack of a cultural framework to foster the identity of Indigenous young people

- *the entrenched racism within the ACT Community

- *the need to address cross-border issues as a barrier to Indigenous young people's access to services

The Junction Youth Health Service

The Junction Youth Health Service was established as an innovative and collaborative way of responding to the health needs of homeless young people and those otherwise at risk. Funding for the service comes from the Innovative Health Services for Homeless Youth Program, the program being a response to the Burdekin report.

The Junction reports a large number of Indigenous young people accessing the service. Indigenous young people made up 12% of the initial client contacts in 1999/2000. The presentation of Indigenous young people to the service appears to be a result of the philosophies on which The Junction is based (those of holistic health, social justice, equality of rights, access and equity) and the undertaking of collaborative projects with Gugan Gulwan Youth Aboriginal Corporation. The need for an Indigenous counsellor position for Indigenous young people accessing The Junction was identified in the review of The Junction in 1999, however has not been funded to date.

Opportunities for the development of cultural identity

Community members spoke of the challenge faced by Indigenous youth in the ACT in regard to establishing their identity as Indigenous people, whilst balancing their involvement in the Indigenous and mainstream community.

Indigenous young people are faced with the dual difficulty with establishing an Indigenous identity and culture, as well as establishing themselves in mainstream society. This is also exacerbated by the often negative media portrayals of Indigenous people, which are often regarded by Indigenous young people as a direct challenge to their identity.¹⁴

“There is often no-one for Indigenous young people to turn to, to ask questions in response to the portrayal of Indigenous people in the media..” (Indigenous youth worker)

The combination of the disadvantage currently experienced by the Indigenous population, the diversity of the ACT Indigenous population, and the dominance of the non-Indigenous population are considered to have reduced the opportunities for Indigenous youth within the ACT to become involved in their culture. Consequently, Indigenous young people are then seen to lack the benefits of identity and self-esteem associated with growing up in a community where they are able to ‘know who they are.’

Recommendation 2

That the ACT Government in collaboration with the local Indigenous community, establish and adequately resource an Indigenous cultural centre, which would provide Indigenous

¹⁴ National Clearinghouse for Youth Studies, Youth Studies Australia, *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Youth*, Vol 14, No.4,1995.

young people with opportunities to participate in Indigenous cultural activities and education (including Indigenous languages).

There is a need to support and resource an infrastructure to provide Indigenous young people within the ACT opportunities for developing their cultural identity. This should extend to mainstream school systems providing Indigenous young people with access to cultural education.

Furthermore, the Indigenous Elder system needs to be recognised and supported by Government and the community as a whole.

Recommendation 3

That the ACT Government, enter into discussions with local elders into how it could support a mentoring program for Indigenous young people within the ACT area, which is ongoing and adequately resourced.

Whilst the Youth Coalition acknowledges the development of a number of strategies for the ACT Government to consult with the local Indigenous community, Indigenous young people within the ACT also need to be provided with opportunities to meet and to have a ‘voice’ which is heard at a local government level. Such opportunities may be provided

through the resourcing of meetings of Indigenous youth within the ACT region.

Recommendation 4

That funds be allocated to the local Indigenous community to resource meetings for Indigenous youth within the ACT region. That the issues raised in these meetings be addressed by the Commonwealth and ACT Government in the development of policy around the needs of Indigenous young people, and actioned as a priority.

These meetings must be adequately resourced to ensure strategies can be employed (e.g assistance with transport, accommodation) to ensure access to all Indigenous youth in the region.

Heroin use-the impact on Indigenous young people within the ACT

“No one seems to be listening.” (A local Indigenous woman who lost her 26 year old son to heroin in July 2000)

The Youth Coalition urges that attention be given to the problems of the cultural dislocation of Indigenous youth in the ACT, as the consequences appear to have a far-reaching effects with the adoption of the dominant culture by Indigenous youth. *“This includes youth culture and the*

adolescent paraphernalia that goes with it...included in this dominant culture is the use of mind altering drugs.”¹⁵

The local Indigenous community, youth and health services have reported a large increase in the numbers of Indigenous young people using heroin. Tragically, this has resulted in an increase in the number of drug related deaths and incarcerations of Indigenous young people, the effects of which are far-reaching into a community so small in size.

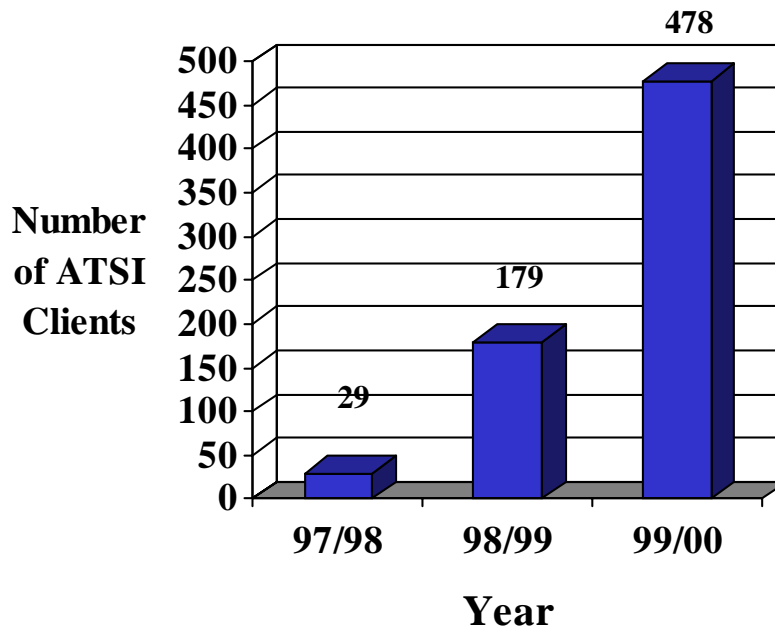
Assisting Drug Dependents Incorporated (ADD Inc), a local community agency, report a marked increase in the number of Indigenous young people who are using heroin and presenting at their Late Night DRIC Youth Program and Skills Plus program (both programs provide a needle exchange service).

The Late Night DRIC Youth Program is an after-hours program for young people under the age of 25 years who are drug users. The number of Indigenous young people accessing this service has historically been 2% of the total number of young clients. The service has seen a marked increase in young Indigenous clients presenting, from 7% in 1998/1999 doubling to 14% this financial year(1999/2000). This information has significant implications for drug education and service provision.

¹⁵ Assisting Drug Dependents Inc (ADDInc), 1998. *Getting to Stop-Blueprint for action on exit options for young drug users in the ACT*, p14)

Graph 1¹⁶

Number of ATSI Client Visits to Late Night DRIC Comparison: 1997-2000



The issue of heroin use by Indigenous young people needs to be addressed by looking at the cause of the problem in the context of the severe disadvantage experienced by Indigenous families, and the lack of opportunities available to these young people.

ADD Inc recognizes its resources are limited in regard to what can be offered to Indigenous youth, and therefore believes that a continued focus on community awareness, education, networking and feedback is essential to provide the most

¹⁶ Assisting Drug Dependents Incorporated (ADD Inc), 2000, *Annual Report 1999-00*, p6

beneficial case management and appropriate treatment, hence a holistic harm-minimisation prospective towards drug use by Indigenous young people.

It is imperative that there is provision for Indigenous young people who are drug dependent to be dealt with in a proactive manner under a health and well-being focus, rather than in a purely reactive manner through the justice system. The Indigenous community has expressed frustration in being unable to address this problem and the related issues within their community due to the lack of resources available to them, and what seems to be a lack of proactive preventative and early intervention measures.

Recommendation 5

That the Government engage with relevant Indigenous agencies in researching best practise models to allow these services to engage Indigenous young people at risk of drug using and who are currently drug dependent, in holistic educational, preventative and early intervention programs.

Access to existing rehabilitation and detoxification services

Conversely, there has not been an increase in the number of Indigenous young people accessing detoxification facilities within the ACT, suggesting there may be barriers for Indigenous young people in accessing these services.

Family members and youth workers report difficulties in accessing mainstream drug ‘detox’ services for Indigenous young people, due to lack of beds available and age and cultural inappropriateness of the facilities.

Often, policies of mainstream ‘detox’ units are seen as conflicting with the kinship system within the Indigenous community and therefore creating a barrier for Indigenous young people accessing ‘detox’ services by limiting the amount of support that can be provided through this kinship system.

There are no ‘detox’ facilities specifically for Indigenous young people or non-Indigenous young people within the ACT. Indigenous young people wishing to access ‘detox’ services either by choice or by direction of the court, are then required to access those facilities established for adults, or youth specific facilities interstate. For Indigenous young people accessing ‘detox’ services interstate, means further isolation from support systems within their community. Anecdotal evidence suggests that Indigenous young people will rarely stay in such a facility as a result.

Concerns have also been raised by those dealing with Indigenous young people in the juvenile justice system in regard to the lack of referral options for Indigenous young people who are drug dependent and appearing before the court

on criminal matters. As a consequence of the lack of appropriate 'detox' facilities as alternate options to committals, it is not unusual for a Indigenous young people to undergo a detoxification process whilst remanded in the Quamby Juvenile Detention Centre.

Previous research supports the need for an Indigenous controlled detoxification and rehabilitation service specifically for Indigenous young people as being essential to cater for the specific cultural needs (and age specific needs) of this group. The service should be based on local needs and resources in order to reflect the diversity within the Aboriginal community and their corresponding needs.¹⁷

Recommendation 6

That an Indigenous controlled detoxification and rehabilitation facility be established for Indigenous young people within the ACT.

That the participation of Indigenous youth is made possible and encouraged in all areas of policy development and service delivery. That such participation is formalized and included in organisational aims, objectives and mission statements and

¹⁷ Assisting Drug Dependents Inc (ADDInc), 1998. *Getting to Stop-Blueprint for action on exit options for young drug users in the ACT*, p14.

supported by funding to provide a range of peer education options.¹⁸

Indigenous young people also need to have a choice of quality health services to access, as accessing mainstream services may be preferred at times due to the desire to remain ‘anonymous.’ This highlights the need for mainstream services to become culturally sensitive at all levels, from policy development to direct service provision.

Recommendation 7

That cultural awareness training be mandatory for all staff working in mainstream health services, with provision for initial training and updates.

Home detoxification options

Community members have reported that home ‘detox’ has been suggested as an alternative option for Indigenous young people by existing ‘detox’ services. Home detoxification requires a level of stability and support which many young people may not experience. Anecdotal evidence suggests that there are a large number of Indigenous parents and grandparents in our community, who are unsupported and ill-equipped in assisting young relatives in home ‘detoxing.’

¹⁸ Assisting Drug Dependents Inc (ADDInc), 1998. *Getting to Stop-Blueprint for action on exit options for young drug users in the ACT*, p14.

Recommendation 8

That Indigenous controlled outreach services be funded to allow drug and alcohol education and support to be taken into Indigenous communities.

The resourcing of youth outreach drug and alcohol, health and mental workers could also provide an effective way to access those marginalised Indigenous young people.

Injecting drug use and the prevalence of Hepatitis C

Limited information is available regarding the Hepatitis C infection rate for Indigenous young people within the ACT, due perhaps in part to the low rate of young people in general who present for testing (anecdotally: due to fear of being judged, fear of knowledge of the disease or due to attitudes of helplessness).

The increase in the number of Indigenous young people who are injecting drug users and the prevalence of Hepatitis C infection as a result of injecting drug use, indicate that this should be treated as an area of emerging need. As such, these concerns should be dealt with in future strategies aimed at addressing the health needs of Indigenous young people.

Mental health, self-harm and risk taking

The Youth Coalition has been alarmed by reports of increasing self-harm and risk taking behaviours amongst Indigenous young people within the ACT.

Previous research has linked self-harm by young people with depression, violence and a loss of control over one's life and a sense of helplessness.

*“This socially imposed impotence leads to high levels of violence – violence which can be directed either outward or inward.”*¹⁹

Behaviours such as high speed car chases, break and enters, engaging in physical fights with weapons and drinking petrol have been reported. These concerns are consistent with the proportionally higher rates of hospitalisation due to injury for both young Indigenous males and females in comparison to their non-Indigenous counterparts. It is essential that these concerns be addressed as issues of health and well-being.²⁰

There has also been a marked increase in the primary diagnosis of mental disorders among Indigenous people in the

¹⁹ Report by Dr Ian O'Connor to the National Inquiry into Homeless Children by the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission - *Our Homeless Children-Their Experiences*,p104.

²⁰ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare,1999. *Australia's Young People – Their health and welfare*, pxi)

ACT since 1995 – 1996. This rate is significantly higher for Indigenous males compared with all other ACT males.²¹

There has also been recognition of an increasing number of Indigenous young people who present with mental health issues and who also have drug and alcohol issues. This indicates a need for a coordinated case management approach by drug and alcohol and mental health services which are culturally sensitive to ensure that Indigenous young people do not ‘fall through the gaps.’

Current service providers indicate the following barriers for Indigenous young people accessing mental health services within the ACT:

- *lack of awareness and pathways to existing services, long waiting lists
- *stigma attached and fear of having rights taken away and of being medicated
- *previous negative encounters with past or present services
- *the reluctance to approach a non-Indigenous person for assistance to accessing a service
- *the lack of Indigenous staff ‘faces’ in health services, and the inability of mainstream services to understand the cultural issues specific to Indigenous peoples.

²¹ ACT Department of Health and Community Care, Epidemiology Unit, 1998. *Aborigines and Torres Strait Islander people in the ACT*. Monograph No.4.

*lack of stable accommodation

Aboriginal Liaison Officers and Indigenous Identified positions

The Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) currently have half an Indigenous identified worker position, and this will soon increase by another full-time position. This position provides Indigenous young people with someone with whom they can immediately relate.

The importance of ‘trust’ as a factor for Indigenous young people accessing mainstream services needs to be considered when looking at the position of Indigenous workers within mainstream services.

It is often the case that Indigenous identified positions within mainstream services are created in isolation, resulting in Indigenous workers being unsupported, overworked and high staff turnover. This means that once an Indigenous worker leaves the organisation, the relationship and knowledge of the young Indigenous person leaves with them. These issues have a direct impact on the service delivery to Indigenous young people, organisations reporting that Indigenous young people will be less likely to access a service once the worker known to them has left.

Recommendation 9

That mainstream human services organisations be funded to have at least two Aboriginal Liaison Officer (ALO) positions, preferably with at least one designated male position and one designated female position (to deal with culturally sensitive issues regarding ‘men’s’ and ‘women’s’ business). Funding must be sufficient to ensure the provision of ongoing training and professional support to ALOs.

Designated Aboriginal Liaison Officer positions within mainstream organisations also have the potential to provide a two way learning opportunity for non-Indigenous staff within the organisation. Unfortunately, Aboriginal Liaison Officers report that this opportunity is rarely acted upon, with the existence of a Aboriginal liaison position being viewed as an opportunity for non-Indigenous staff to abrogate their responsibility as health workers to Indigenous clients.

Recommendation 10

That employment of Aboriginal Liaison Officers should come with a whole organisation commitment to prioritizing staff development funds for non-Indigenous staff (at all levels) to engage in cross cultural training with qualified Indigenous trainers.

Again, the placement of Indigenous identified positions and the incorporation of cultural awareness training in mainstream

services, will increase the potential for partnership building between Indigenous and mainstream services.

Furthermore, it is important that Indigenous identified positions are created at policy making level where service delivery to Indigenous young people can be influenced, thereby making the organisation more accessible.

Recommendation 11

That Indigenous identified positions be placed and funded at a sufficiently high level within mainstream organisations to influence policy decisions.

Suicide – An increasing concern

Due to the limited information in regard to the suicide rate of Indigenous young people within the ACT, information at a national level will be referred to.

Concerns about suicide among Indigenous people are warranted. Recent estimates suggest that the overall suicide rate in Indigenous communities may be 40 per cent higher than in the general population.²²

Most Aboriginal people who die by suicide are under 29 years

²²Commonwealth Department of Health and Aged Care, 2000, Living is For Everyone – A framework for prevention of suicide and self-harm in Australia, Learnings about suicide p25.

of age and male. The high suicide rates for males are consistent with their higher rates of injury and death from unnatural causes. Deaths and self-harming incidents in Indigenous communities include children as young as 8 years of age.²³

The Youth Coalition commends the Commonwealth Government's support for the development of the Living Is For Everyone (LIFE) framework for prevention of suicide and self-harm, and the recognition of Indigenous young people as requiring specific attention. However, Commonwealth support must also extend to the allocation of funds for the development and implementation of culturally appropriate suicide prevention programs for Indigenous young people.

Furthermore, evidence suggests that the suicides of Aboriginal youth cannot merely be responded to as a part of the national youth suicide problem. *"Their suicide has different well-springs, histories, sociologies, patterns, and even rituals. It is qualitatively different, and needs to be viewed and responded to differently."*²⁴

²³ Tatz, Colin, 1999 *Aboriginal Suicide Is Different*, Aboriginal Youth Suicide in New South Wales, The Australian Capital Territory and New Zealand: Towards a Model of Explanation and Alleviation.

²⁴ Tatz, Colin, 1999, *Aboriginal Suicide Is Different*, Aboriginal Youth Suicide in New South Wales, The Australian Capital Territory and New Zealand: Towards a Model of Explanation and Alleviation, p2)

Contemporary Separations

Indigenous young people in the Juvenile Justice system

The over-representation of Aboriginal people in prisons at a young age identified by the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (1991) does not appear to have improved.

The Youth Coalition has welcomed the new ACT Children and Young Person's Act (1999), which contains the principle of 'arrest as a last resort.' However, data on arrests and detentions of Indigenous youth do not yet appear to reflect the practical application of this principle.²⁵

An Indigenous person aged between 10-19 years, is 19.0 times more likely to be in a juvenile correctional facility within the ACT than a non-Indigenous young person.²⁶

Recommendation 12

That additional funding be allocated for prevention and early intervention programs, which are not just accessible to Indigenous young people already involved in the juvenile justice system. These programs could be based on a sport and recreational activity framework.

²⁵ Canberra Journey of Healing Network, 2000, *Are we Bringing Them Home in 2000*, Second Community Progress Report on ACT action towards the 1997 Bringing Them Home recommendations p49.

²⁶ Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, 2000 *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice*, Statistics: *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples* p9.

The Youth Coalition is supportive of the research being undertaken by the Canberra Journey of Healing Network, a community organisation, into a proposal for an Indigenous Youth Healing Place for Indigenous young people in the ACT and surrounding areas. The proposal for the healing place has extensive support within the Indigenous community and related agencies, and could offer a number of programs to divert young people from the legal system.²⁷

Anecdotal evidence suggests that Indigenous young people are ‘targeted’ by police more so than their non-Indigenous counterparts, and that Indigenous youths may at times receive lengthier periods of detention than non-Indigenous youths for similar offences. Accordingly, Indigenous youths are also less likely to appeal sentences, possibly due to lack of knowledge of, and the intimidating nature of the court process.

Recommendation 13

That the Australian Federal Police (AFP) continue to employ Aboriginal Liaison Officers (at all levels) and continue to train police in cultural awareness and extend this to include issues specific to Indigenous young people. Cultural awareness should be fully integrated into community policing at an operational level.

²⁷ Canberra Journey of Healing Network-*Proposed Indigenous Youth Healing Place, Confidential Consultation* report as at 31 August 2000)

Evidence suggests that the majority of Indigenous young people who are involved in the ACT juvenile justice system have previous or ongoing involvement in their lives by statutory Child Protection services.²⁸ Furthermore, anecdotal evidence indicates that many of these young people have left the school system early and have low literacy and numeracy skills. This evidence indicates that the majority of Indigenous young people in the juvenile justice system may have been identified as being ‘at risk’ well before their involvement in the juvenile justice system.

Recommendation 14

That teachers in the education system be provided with training and support to assist in the identification of Indigenous young people ‘at risk’ in the education system.

Recommendation 15

That funding be provided to Indigenous controlled programs to strengthen relationships between Indigenous communities and schools.

Recommendation 16

That a review be undertaken of Indigenous young people in the juvenile correctional facility within the ACT to explore where Indigenous young people may be falling through the

²⁸ Office of the Community Advocate, 1999, *Statutory Involvement of ACT Youth Justice Services and ACT Family Services*, 1999 Research Project.

gaps and to develop best practise model for coordinated case management between services.

Quamby Youth Detention Centre

There have been a number of positive changes in the functioning of the Quamby Youth Detention Centre in the ACT since the Coroner's Report on the 1996 death in custody at Quamby. Quamby has actively increased the number of Indigenous workers within the Centre, and have established positive working relations with Gugan Gulwan and Winnunga Nimmityjah.

Quamby has also implemented appropriate health, mental health, and education programs. For example, education programs will be designed to meet the individual needs and interests of Indigenous young people. It is however unfortunate that similar educational opportunities cannot be made more available to Indigenous young people prior to a committal.

(It should be noted, that due to insufficient resources this submission will be unable to comment on the situation for Indigenous young people in Belconnen Remand Centre)

Post Release Options

The Youth Coalition is concerned by the identified gap in post release options available to Indigenous young people leaving Quamby. A strategic framework for post release options for

Indigenous young people involving all stakeholders (the relevant government departments, community agencies and Indigenous community), needs to be developed. Such a framework would assist in the development and funding of resources to ensure that Indigenous young people exiting Quamby are linked to appropriate support, secure housing, counselling, education, extra-curricular activities and income prior to release to ensure that their reintegration into the community is a successful one.

Recommendation 17

That a strategic framework for post release options, including housing, education and support for Indigenous young people exiting juvenile detention systems be developed. This framework should include pathways to appropriate long-term options as a matter of necessity.

Indigenous children and young people (0-18years) in the care and protection system

The high number of Indigenous children on care and protection orders is cause for alarm. In 1996, Indigenous children accounted for 15% (1, 951) of the 13, 241 children on care and protection orders, yet they make up only 3% of the

population aged 0-17 years. This over-representation was evident in all States and Territories.²⁹

In the ACT in 1999, Indigenous children and young people in care were represented at over eight (8) times in comparison to their non-Indigenous counterparts. Furthermore, anecdotal evidence suggests that the numbers of Indigenous children placed in care with Indigenous families is in the minority, despite the incorporation of the 'Indigenous placement' principle in the new ACT Children and Young Person's ACT (1999).³⁰

Previous research indicates that young people who have been in the care and protection system are significantly disadvantaged in comparison to other young people. A particular problem facing Indigenous young people who have been in the care and protection system is the lack of accommodation and support mechanisms available to them on 'exit'. The existing gaps increase the probably of these Indigenous young people experiencing homelessness and the continuum of associated health disadvantages.

²⁹ Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, 2000, *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice, Statistics: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples*, p11)

³⁰ Canberra Journey of Healing Network, 2000, *Are we Bringing Them Home in 2000*, Second Community Progress Report on ACT action towards the 1997 Bringing Them Report.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that there is a serious under-resourcing within the Family Services Indigenous Unit in the ACT (which is also required to service the Jervis Bay Territory). The Unit forms part of the statutory care and protection agency in the ACT, and is responsible for investigating allegations of child abuse, providing ongoing support to families and case management for Indigenous children and their families. The Family Services Indigenous Unit has a staff number of two (2), severely limiting the Unit's ability to engage in proactive, rather than reactive work.

Recommendation 18

That the Commonwealth provide additional funds to those government departments responsible for statutory child protection, to resource multi-skilled Indigenous Units, the primary tasks of the Unit being: preventative and early intervention work to support and work with Indigenous children (0-18 years) and their families, and the provision of support to Indigenous young people 'exiting' the care system.

Preventative programs within the community

“That the Council of Australian Governments ensure the provision of adequate funding to relevant Indigenous

organisations in each region to establish parenting and family well-being programs.”³¹ (*Recommendation 36: Bringing Them Home report*)

Culturally appropriate family support training and living skills programs are required to be established to support Indigenous young people and their families.

The Youth Coalition has recently been informed of the development of Gugan Gulwan Youth Aboriginal Corporation’s Reconnect Program, which will be developed in collaboration with two mainstream community organisations.

The program will operate as an early intervention program to prevent Indigenous young people becoming unnecessarily involved with the statutory care and protection, and juvenile justice systems. The program will provide respite care and short term family support systems within the Indigenous community for Indigenous young people where there is a need due to dysfunction within the immediate family. The program has been initiated and developed by Gugan Gulwan in response to addressing a need within the local community, and in this context, the program will be one which is ‘owned’ by the Indigenous community.

³¹ Recommendation 36: *Bringing Them Home*-National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from their Families (1997)

Considering the over-representation of Indigenous children and young people on care and protection orders, early intervention programs initiated by the Indigenous community are essential. The ability of Indigenous communities to develop preventative and early intervention programs should not rely on the success of agencies in applying for individual grants, but should be encouraged by the Government through the allocation of specific and ongoing funding.

Recommendation 19

That the Government allocate specific funds for Indigenous agencies to resource preventative and early intervention programs aimed at supporting Indigenous families.

EDUCATION

“There is a need to educate the educators.” (Indigenous health worker)

The ACT Education Department recently received criticism from the Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs in relation to the poor outcomes for Indigenous students in the ACT. Furthermore, the current ACT Legislative Assembly’s inquiry into youth at risk and the education

system has again highlighted the existing racism toward Indigenous young people within ACT schools.³²

Overwhelmingly, community members and service providers view mainstream schooling within the ACT as not meeting the needs of Indigenous youth. The education system has a unique opportunity to engage Indigenous young people, to create an inclusive culture and to play an important role in equipping these young people for life and as a deterrent to involvement in crime and other self-harming behaviours.

The link between education achievements, employment and income are well documented. Existing data shows that the higher a person's educational achievement, the more likely they are to be in employment and the more highly paid that job is likely to be. In addition, studies have shown that improving educational status improves health status independently of income. Other consequences of lower education participation rates have been documented in the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, which states that;

“Low self-esteem, diminished educational opportunities, and a consequential lack of employment prospects, are significant

³² The Canberra Times, 10 November 2000, *Inquiry told of teacher's racism*, Danielle Cronin.

*factors in the disproportionately high rate of Aboriginal imprisonment.”*³³

Indigenous young people in the ACT tend to have lower literacy and numeracy rates than other students. Community Education and Training, a non-profit registered training program in the ACT, reported increased demand for outreach literacy programs for Indigenous young people who are still in the mainstream school system, but who cannot get enough support to improve their literacy.

Recommendation 20

That further funding be allocated to providing appropriate literacy and numeracy assistance to Indigenous children and young people from Kindergarten to Year 12.

Furthermore, Indigenous students have higher truancy and drop-out rates than other students. Indigenous young people are leaving school earlier than their non-Indigenous counterparts, and the gap between Indigenous young people and other residents leaving school at age 17 to 18 years is widening. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the school leaving age for Indigenous young people is becoming increasingly younger, from the upper levels of primary school and the lower levels of high school.

³³ Department of Health and Community Care, 1997, The Health of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the ACT,p41.

Indigenous community workers indicated that current mainstream school systems do not seek input from the local community in regard to working with Indigenous young people in a cooperative or proactive manner. When advice is sought from the community it is seen to be generally following the suspension of a young Indigenous person.

‘Meeting the Educational Needs of Aboriginal Adolescents’, a report commissioned by the National Board of Employment, Education and Training (April 1995) identified a number of significant elements within mainstream school systems which were successful in engaging Indigenous young people. These elements included:

- *policies, programs and strategies which foster and support the development of identity within Indigenous students (including Indigenous languages where appropriate).

- *programs which recognise the lifestyles of Indigenous young people and their families, and the impact of these lifestyles.

- *the incorporation of life-skills and work skills within the curriculum.

- *the involvement of the local Indigenous community.

- *timely and appropriate assessment of the academic needs of Indigenous young people and the provision of assistance (e.g. through provision of individual tutoring).

The House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training, Report of the Inquiry into Truancy and Exclusion of Children and Young People from School (1996), reiterated the educational needs of Indigenous young people. The Committee recommended that the key objectives identified by the 'Meeting the Educational Needs of Aboriginal Adolescents' report be met, a recommendation which is still highly relevant.

“Schools which are successful, respect and value all of their students as individuals. They communicate with Aboriginal families and create an environment which welcomes and fosters the identity of the young people. They have a curriculum which meets student’s needs while making educational demands.”³⁴

Working cooperatively with, and being guided by Indigenous families and community members in the education of Indigenous young people is an important strategy that the ACT Department of Education and ACT schools needs to adopt.

Consultative bodies such as the Indigenous Education Consultative Body and Aboriginal Students Support and Parents Awareness Committees (ASSPA) provide valuable

³⁴ 'Meeting the Educational Needs of Aboriginal Adolescents', a report commissioned by the National Board of Employment, Education and Training, April 1995,pxi

opportunities for the Indigenous community to be involved in the education of Indigenous young people. However, community consultation indicates that these structures are not being fully utilised by education systems.

Furthermore, an ASSPA Committee is unlikely to be formed in schools where there are few Indigenous students, which may lead to further isolation of these young people and their families where there is a dependence on the individual schools to establish effective strategies for participation.

Further barriers to education

Anecdotal evidence suggests that many Indigenous young people are carers for their parents or siblings where issues of drug and alcohol dependence, domestic violence, mental health or other health issues may inhibit their parents ability to parent. These young people often mature faster than their peers, and due to other demands made of them, mainstream schooling may seem of little relevance and inaccessible.

Indigenous young women are more likely to experience pregnancy at school age than their non-Indigenous counterparts, and will consequently experience a younger

school leaving age and the follow-on affects of limited employment opportunities.³⁵

Both these groups of Indigenous young people require substantial support if they are to continue school attendance.

The possibility to provide this support and engage these young people existed in the Full Service Schools model, however this program has not received funding from the ACT Government to continue past the current financial year.

Alternative education programs

“We need to be more responsive, cleverer and smarter about how we address the issue for Indigenous young people.....Educational and other facilities need to be more prepared, responsive and open-minded in forging partnerships with the Indigenous community.”(educator)

Galilee, a community organisation, has developed educational programs, which have successfully engaged Indigenous young people. These programs are farm-based alternate school programs for young people who have experienced schooling disruption due to homelessness.

³⁵ ACT Department of Health and Community Care, Health Status Monitoring Epidemiology Unit, *The health of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the ACT*, 1997.

Unfortunately, access to Galilee's alternative high school education program is limited to clients of Family Services. An Indigenous young person who would benefit from this program should not have to be a client of Family Services in order to gain entry. Government must be more proactive in the educational opportunities it can provide Indigenous young people, with the provision of funding for placements within such programs as required.

Galilee report an over-representation of Indigenous young people in their education programs, which appear to be the result of the larger social problems experienced by the Indigenous community and the inability of mainstream education structures to address these needs.

Galilee report that there is a profound need for literacy and numeracy and other education services for Indigenous young people within an educational context which is responsive to their social and cultural needs. Such programs should also take account of pre-vocational and skill development needs that would allow disadvantaged youth to enter vocational pathways.

Galilee is of the view that its education programs are relevant

to Indigenous young people due to the following factors:

*small numbers of young people within the education programs.

*flexibility of response to individual needs.

*program capacity to be culturally responsive.

*established links with the Indigenous community and service providers.

*the program is farm-based and gives scope to the young person to negotiate a learning pathway.

*the program ties the educational content to skill development and pre-vocational strategies.

Whilst there is an argument for the creation of more alternate and flexible learning programs such as that run by Galilee, there is also an argument for the need for the mainstream school system to address its current structure in regard to its relevance for Indigenous young people.

Recommendation 21

That best practise models for the engagement of Indigenous young people in education programs be identified and promoted.

Since the advent of school based management within the ACT school system, there is a reliance on individual schools to recognise Indigenous students as at risk of not achieving and

of developing responsive strategies. However, it would be far more effective if an overarching framework with adequate resourcing was established by the ACT Department of Education to which all ACT schools were accountable.

Support for continuing education in tertiary institutions

The presence of Indigenous student services within tertiary institutions provide valuable educational opportunities and a culturally sensitive environment for young Indigenous students.

Such an example is that of the Yurauna Centre which was established by the Canberra Institute of Technology (CIT) in 1990 as an Indigenous Student Support Centre. The Yurauna Centre's establishment was consistent with the main goals identified in the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy (1989).

Since its establishment, the functions of the Yurauna Centre have progressed positively beyond that of a student service provider in response to changing policies and demands.

Whilst providing an initial point of access for Indigenous students, The Yurauna Centre's program also offers cultural, financial, educational, post-course and counselling support.

Furthermore, it is also important to recognise the need for institutions such as the CIT to create educational opportunities

which are culturally sensitive for Indigenous young people, particularly those who found mainstream schooling unsatisfactory. For example, the Yurauna Centre is currently trying to meet the needs of several Indigenous young people (aged between 15 and 25 years) who have exited the mainstream high school system with low levels of literacy.

In order to remain responsive to the increasing needs of Indigenous students and the community, Indigenous student services must be appropriately resourced, and safe-guarded against internal funding cuts.

Furthermore, recognition must be given to the responsibility tertiary institutions have in addressing the goals of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy (1989). This responsibility is two-fold, through supporting the role of current Indigenous student services in addressing the goals of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy (1989); and in recognizing the responsibility of the entire institution to these goals through the development of policies and programs that ensure a holistic approach.

Cross cultural training

The education system also has a unique opportunity to engage non-Indigenous people of all ages in cross cultural education and the effects on the Indigenous population of the Stolen

Generation, an important step in addressing existing prejudice and promoting understanding. As such, the Youth Coalition urges the Government to support the recommendations of the Bringing Them Home report addressing this issue, these being;

Recommendation 22

That State and Territory Governments ensure that primary and secondary school curricula include substantial compulsory modules on the history and continuing effects of forcible removal. (Recommendation 8a Bringing Them Home report)

Recommendation 23

That the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies be funded by the Commonwealth to develop the modules. (Recommendation 8b Bringing Them Home report)

A Government mandate of the inclusion by all educational institutions of cross cultural education and the Stolen Generation within core curriculum would be a demonstration of the Government's commitment to these issues.

EMPLOYMENT

Overall, Indigenous young people in the ACT have a higher unemployment rate and a lower labour force participation rate than their non-Indigenous counterparts. At the time the

Census were conducted in 1991 and 1996, Indigenous unemployment rates had risen while unemployment rates for all ACT residents had remained steady.³⁶ Furthermore, the relatively young age structure of the Indigenous population will mean that over the next decade there will be a substantially higher proportion of Indigenous people entering working age, which must be reflected in Government policy and planning.

Barriers to employment

For Aboriginal people in the ACT region aged 15 years and over who had left school, only 8 per cent were undertaking study for a qualification. A large number of these young people (84%) felt that they would have difficulty undertaking further study, the main barriers cited being financial, transport or travel, child care, unstable or overcrowded living conditions, and lack of prerequisites.

These barriers indicate that the provision of basic practical support (transport and financial) could be of assistance to young people wishing to undertake further studies.

Supporting the development of literacy and numeracy skills

Community consultations indicated that there is an urgent

³⁶ ACT Department of Health and Community Care, Health Status Monitoring Epidemiology Unit, *The health of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the ACT*, 1997.

need to address the employment opportunities for Indigenous young people within the context of increasingly early school leaving age and low literacy and numeracy skills. Indigenous young people entering traineeships may need bridging literacy and numeracy assistance to undertake traineeships. Alternatively, Indigenous young people should have access to these services with the prospect of a traineeship attached.

Information on alternative supported education options and traineeship programs currently available, needs to be made available to Indigenous young people in the upper primary and lower high school years and their families. Informing young Indigenous students and their families of existing education and traineeship opportunities and of the ways to access these opportunities may provide alternatives for those young people who may be at risk of early school leaving.

Current strategies

Community agencies identified the need for small businesses, government and enterprise in general to become more knowledgeable in regard to the existing Indigenous Employment Program, an initiative of the Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs (DETYA).

The Youth Coalition commends the development of the Indigenous Employment Strategy (1999) as one part the response by the ACT Government to the recommendations of

the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody. The establishment of the Ginninderra Scholarships for Indigenous nursing and medical students through the ACT Department of Health and Community Care has also been welcomed. The lack of Indigenous professionals within the human services is apparent within ACT Services.

Recommendation 24

The Youth Coalition recommends the development of similar scholarship opportunities for Indigenous young people within the human services. Such scholarships should be accessible to a greater number of Indigenous young people through the attachment of required academic support, such as bridging literacy and numeracy assistance.

A number of community organizations, such as Volunteering ACT, have recognised the need to create real employment opportunities for Indigenous young people, and have been working closely with the Indigenous community, and other not-for-profit organizations in an effort to address this need. Such initiatives should receive the continued support of Government.

HOMELESSNESS

Information collected from our consultations suggests an increasing number of Indigenous young people are experiencing homelessness.

Many Indigenous young people are often having to deal with quite complex family issues, such as; unemployment within the natural family, vast numbers of health issues including drug and alcohol and mental health issues, family violence and family breakdown. Such issues may lead to Indigenous young people experiencing a lack of security of accommodation, and seeking support from their peer group rather than remaining within the family unit. Indigenous young people who are homeless are then often without visible means of support, leading to compounded disadvantage in education, employment and health.

Accessing the Common Youth Allowance has become increasingly difficult, serving to exacerbate the problems encountered by Indigenous youth. Community workers described the process to access the allowance payments as intimidating and incompatible with the often transient lifestyles of many Indigenous young people; and therefore their access to basic income support is blocked.

Access to Support Accommodation Assistance Programs (SAAP)

Many Indigenous young people who are homeless enter Supported Accommodation Assistance Programs (SAAP) as a 'last resort', living instead in over-crowded conditions with peers.

During our consultations numerous barriers to Indigenous young people accessing and remaining in SAAP services were identified, namely;

- *the lack of culturally appropriate services
- *confidentiality issues
- *stigma associated with entering a refuge
- *drug and alcohol and/or mental health issues
- *presentation of challenging behaviours
- *rules and regulations within the service
- *fear of coming to the attention of 'social services'
- *incidents of discrimination

A recent example provided by a youth worker in regard to finding a placement for a young Indigenous boy highlights this issue;

"A co-worker rang a refuge in the ACT to have a young boy placed. She was asked a series of questions and when it was

identified that this young person was Aboriginal, they quite simply stated that “we do not deal with your kind here.”

These barriers indicate a need for the review of policies within SAAP services to ensure access, and also the need for resourcing to engage SAAP staff in training regarding the issues identified above.

Recommendation 25

That resources be directed to expanding and further developing cross-cultural training for workers in SAAP services.

Recommendation 26

That SAAP workers provided with training around supporting Indigenous young people with mental health and/or drug and alcohol issues particular to the ‘residential’ situation.

Such training could include sourcing trainers from within SAAP agencies where models of good practise exist.

Recommendation 27

That SAAP agencies be required to develop and implement access and equity strategies for Indigenous young people, and that this be a requirement of ongoing funding.

There is also a need to increase service linkages between mainstream SAAP services and members of the Indigenous community and Indigenous services to ensure best outcomes for Indigenous young people within SAAP services and the provision of ongoing support upon exiting the service. Ensuring links are made between Indigenous young people at risk of homelessness and mentors within the local Indigenous community can provide support which may not be forthcoming from the young person's immediate family.

The development of strategies involving the relevant stakeholders which adopt a holistic approach to meeting the needs of Indigenous young people are crucial, particularly for those Indigenous young people with drug and alcohol or mental health issues.

It should also be noted that the existence of only one youth refuge in Queanbeyan means that a number of Indigenous young people access accommodation services within the ACT. This presents Indigenous young people from Queanbeyan with the additional difficulties of continuing education and/or employment programs in Queanbeyan whilst residing in the ACT.

Pathways to access

The 1998 report on 'Homelessness in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander context and its possible implications for

the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP)' prepared for the Department of Family and Community Services, reflect the strategies suggested by community members to improve Indigenous young people's access to SAAP services:

*increasing the number of Indigenous staff in SAAP services with the provision of adequate support and training.

*increasing Indigenous representation on SAAP management committees

*adopting a more coordinated, comprehensive and proactive stance to access and equity issues in mainstream services

*engaging in more liaison and networking between SAAP services and Indigenous agencies and services

*increasing the number of services which are Indigenous-managed

Effective processes for change – A case study

The following case-study contributed by the coordinator of Lowana Young Womens Service provides an example of the ongoing work a youth accommodation service has undertaken in addressing access issues for Indigenous youth.

Lowana Young Womens Service is a gender-specific mainstream youth accommodation service in the ACT. As a feminist-based service model, Lowana involves all workers in the decision making processes regarding the direction of

service delivery. Lowana is also unique in that the service does not operate with “key” workers, all workers collectively case-manage the residents in the house. There is diversity in both work and client race/ethnicity.

In 1996/97 the Lowana Annual Report identified that there were no young women from an Indigenous background entering the service. The service was unable to specify reasons for this anomaly but did identify that there was some reluctance on the part of residents to openly identify as Indigenous. It was assumed this was due to fears of racism and discrimination within mainstream services, both by workers and clients. The Service Management Plan for the following year included resolutions to strengthen linkages with Indigenous support services, actively recruit workers from an Indigenous background and provide cross cultural training to all staff.

During the following year, Lowana became actively involved in Indigenous issues, which served to broaden the Lowana workers collective and individual perceptions of Indigenous people. The common rooms and office of the Refuge were decorated with posters of Indigenous people promoting pride in culture, and the Aboriginal Flag was hung, and remains, in the front entrance. The importance of visual confirmations that the service was an ‘okay’ place to explore cultural ties was taken seriously. In-house sessions for all residents were,

and still are, conducted by Indigenous women on topics such as racism and the Stolen Generation.

Also during 1997/98 the service secured joint funding through SAAP and DEET to employ an Indigenous woman to train in youth work. The successful applicant went on not only to complete the Certificate in Youth Work III, but was also awarded both the Aboriginal and Community Sector Trainee of the Year Awards by Vocational Education and Training Authority (VETA). Having exposure to Indigenous culture had raised awareness among the staff to consult with the Indigenous worker where issues may arise. An agenda item for staff meetings titled 'Cultural and Linguistic Diversity' was added to ensure the impetus did not fade and meant the staff would be prompted to consider cultural issues at least once a week at meetings. The Annual Report for 1997/98 confirmed that the strategies were working, with 14% of clients identifying as being from an Indigenous background.

In late 1998, a one day workshop was organised with Indigenous facilitation for the entire staff team in cross cultural training. By the Annual Report for 1998/99, young women entering the service identifying as Indigenous had reached 18%. For 1999/2000 the rate has remained relatively static at 17.6%. Although these percentages are alarming statistics for homeless issues with young Indigenous women given the region's small population size, they confirm that it is

possible for mainstream services to be culturally appropriate without being race-specific.

One could assume the service has reached its goals, but the truth is that remaining culturally sensitive is an ongoing process. This service is now working to attract community participation by adult Indigenous women on their Management Committee. The service is committed to community involvement as a way the Indigenous community can impact on services provided to them and their children. Lowana takes the view that mainstream service provision needs to be confronted to become more culturally sensitive and the skilling of Indigenous women in managing community organisations is the logical next step to continuing commitment to reconciliation.

Indigenous hostels

Currently, there are no specific accommodation options for Indigenous young people (or other members of the Indigenous community) within the ACT. Moves are presently being made to establish a refuge for Indigenous young people with the development of a crises/short term accommodation facility, a joint venture by the Office of Youth (Department of Education and Community Services) and Aboriginal Hostels Ltd.

It is our understanding that the service is being developed in response to the high number of Indigenous young people

being detained overnight in Quamby Youth Detention Centre as a result of breaching bail conditions due to lack of accommodation. The service will house up to six (6) young Indigenous males, with Youth Justice and Family Services clients taking priority. This initiative may need provision for expansion once its value is demonstrated.

The Youth Coalition welcomes this initiative, however is concerned that the service is at this point a twelve (12) month pilot project without any assurance of continuing. Community members have raised concern in regard to the development of short-term 'pilot' projects', identifying that sufficient time is required for Indigenous young people to build trust in a service.

It is also our understanding that Aboriginal Hostels Ltd operate on a tariff system for residents. It is our concern that the \$80.00 per week cost may be a barrier to access for many Indigenous young people who may be in need of crises accommodation.

The Youth Coalition has been recently informed about the possible development of a medium-term accommodation service initiated by Youth Justice, where there will be some allocation for Indigenous young people leaving Quamby, however the details of this are unclear at this point. The Youth Coalition believes that it is essential however, that a

variety of culturally appropriate accommodation options are developed to support the diversity of housing needs of Indigenous young people (ie: not only those involved with youth justice or child protection agencies).

There is no national Indigenous body to advise on SAAP, and therefore the mechanisms for seeking the advise of Indigenous people on a range of policy and/or planning issues do not exist.³⁷

Recommendation 28

That the Government resource a national Indigenous body to advise on SAAP as a mechanism for effective consultation on policy and planning issues.

Current housing options for Indigenous young people are not meeting the diverse needs of this group. There is an acknowledged lack of available, affordable and safe housing options for Indigenous young people.³⁸ Often bedsitter flats in large flat complexes are not a suitable option for vulnerable Indigenous young people, particularly those with dual diagnosis of mental health and drug and alcohol issues.

³⁷ Department of Family and Community Services, 1998, *Homelessness in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander context and its possible implications for the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program-Executive summary* (p9)

³⁸ Morgan Disney and Associates, 2000, *Research Project on the Outcomes for Young People in ACT YSAAP*, commissioned report for the ACT Department of Education and Community Services.

Additional funding needs to be directed to address the backlog of waiting lists for Indigenous young people requiring community and public housing options to ensure access to longer term stable accommodation with the provision of adequate support mechanisms. This should be done in consultation with Indigenous young people who will be directly affected.

Currently, the amount of funding allocated to address housing need for the Indigenous community is not sufficient relative to the level of disadvantage experienced.

“Housing benefits expressed on a per capita basis indicate that non-Indigenous people receive between 9 and 21 per cent more benefits than Indigenous people. Given the greater housing needs of Indigenous people, existing policies are ‘inequitable and inadequate’ and this justifies ‘increased resources being put into programs directed specifically towards addressing their housing needs.’”³⁹

Recommendation 29

That the Government redress the imbalance in housing benefits for Indigenous people through increased resources

³⁹Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, Social Justice Report 1999, *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner*. Report No.2/2000,p43.

being put into programs directed specifically toward addressing housing needs.

Conclusion

*“There needs to be a lot of education. There’s fear on both sides you know. It’s not just fear on the Aboriginal side but non-Aboriginal people have got a fear of us. And that’s the sad thing you know, we’re all human beings, we’re all people.”*⁴⁰

Perhaps most ironically, this quote captures the commonality between all Australians and sets a common goal to which we can and should strive toward in the alleviation of existing inequities for Indigenous Australians.

The Australian nation has arrived at a crucial point in regard to its treatment of Indigenous issues, and as such, it is an opportune time for change. Indigenous young people of today *“are the first generation to grow to maturity free of the restrictions of racist legislation. But freedom is more than freedom in law – it is freedom of choice.”*⁴¹ Being provided freedom in law whilst remaining excluded from freedom of choice is at further cost to Indigenous people.

The Australian community has begun to demonstrate their commitment to Indigenous affairs, and Government must now

⁴⁰The Canberra Times, 7 October 2000, *Prejudice in Aboriginal health issues*, statement by Julie Tongs, coordinator, Winnunga Nimmityjah health service.

⁴¹ Australian and New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry, Vol 29, No.3, September 1995, Hunter, Ernst. *Aboriginal youth and mental health*, p382

recognise the leadership role they need to take to progress reconciliation. This includes a formal Government apology for past injustices against Indigenous Australians.

We require a Government capable of setting a positive example that flows from Federal politicians to electorates, through government officials and public sector employees to our communities to ensure all Australians have the ability to live in full health and positive environments. Indeed, Government must be prepared to use its best endeavours to help the process of improving community relations between Indigenous people and the wider Australian community.

The value of forming positive collaborative partnerships with the Indigenous community has been recognised by a number of government and community organisations on an individual basis. The benefits of such partnerships cannot be underestimated and must be encouraged at all levels to ensure a more comprehensive approach to addressing the needs of Indigenous young people.

Given the far-reaching consequences for Indigenous young people, it is a critical time for Government to act, to create real opportunities for Indigenous youth to express their identity in ways which are empowering. This, in part, means moving existing structures and policies beyond consultation and toward self-management, truly reflecting the principles of self-

determination for improving the effectiveness of service delivery.

It is here that Government must recognise that improved outcomes for Indigenous young people will require “*far more than providing equity of access, it will demand positive discrimination in education..*”⁴², and indeed in all areas. As an investment in our common future, policies, strategies and programs which create real choice and opportunity are essential.

From the consultations that have taken place to produce this submission, it is apparent that Indigenous young people are wanting to embrace their identity, despite the challenges they confront, and are willing and able to take responsibility for their part if given the opportunity.

⁴² Australian and New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry, Vol 29, No.3, September 1995, Hunter, Ernst. *Aboriginal youth and mental health*, p382

APPENDIX ONE – *List of agencies and individuals consulted*

Aboriginal Hostels Ltd

ACT Shelter

ADD Inc

Canberra Journey of Healing Network

Community Education and Training

Gugan Gulwan Youth Aboriginal Corporation

The Junction Youth Health Service

Lowana Young Women's Service

Queanbeyan Aboriginal Health Service

Queanbeyan Youth Resources

Winnunga Nimmityjah Aboriginal Health Services Inc

Yurauna Centre - CIT

Mr Paul Adcock

Galilee Inc

Ms Bindi Bennett

Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service

Mr Perry Fletcher

Belleden Youth Service

Ms Delephene Fraser

*Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Student Association
(ATSISA), University of Canberra*

Ms Rhonda Fuzzard

Canberra Youth Refuge

Ms Robyn Holder

Victims of Crime Coordinator

Mr Alistair Jones

Canberra Community Housing for Young People

Ms Angela King

ATSIC

Ms Cecilia McKenzie

Canberra Institute of Technology (CIT) Student

Ms Georgia MacGuire

*Youth Connections, Department of Education and
Community Services*

Magistrate Shane Madden

ACT Children's Magistrate

Mr Andy Miles

Barnardo's Transition Program

Ms Glenda Munroe

Open Family Indigenous Foster Care program

Ms Natalie Oliver

Tumladden (youth refuge)

Mr Michael Quall	<i>Youth Coalition of the ACT Chairperson AFP Aboriginal Community Liaison Officer</i>
Ms Dorothea Randall	<i>Indigenous Education Unit, ACT Department of Education and Community Services</i>
Mr Alasdair Roy	<i>Child Advocate, Office of the Community Advocate</i>
Mr Terry Sutherland	<i>ACT Mental Health Services</i>
Ms Michelle Thorne	<i>Woden Youth Centre, Living in Harmony project</i>
Mr Darryl Towney	<i>Quamby Youth Detention Centre</i>
Mr Roger Westcombe	<i>Volunteering ACT</i>
Ms Rhonda Woodward	<i>Rape Crises Centre, Canberra</i>

The Youth Coalition of the ACT wishes to extend thanks again to all those who participated in the consultations held to inform this submission.