



National Indigenous Drug and Alcohol Committee
"the leading voice in Indigenous drug and alcohol policy"

Locally designed and operated Indigenous community models and practices that address Indigenous alcohol and other drugs misuse

PURPOSE

The purpose of this paper is to provide information on the benefits of having locally, designed, implemented and supported initiatives and practices that address Indigenous alcohol and other drugs misuse.

BACKGROUND

The combined use of drugs and alcohol and the breakdown of healthy relationships with family, friends and the community that it can cause as well as the associated harm, are of major concern to all tiers of government particularly those working in health, family and law sectors. In Indigenous communities, alcohol and other drug misuse can have a devastating impact on the individual, family and the community with the incidences of violence, crime and ill health often becoming even more serious as a result.

Due to a range of casual, cultural and socio economic factors addressing alcohol and other drug misuse is complex. NIDAC has found through consultation with Indigenous Australians, that a holistic approach that is locally designed and operated by local Indigenous people, is favoured. The benefit of locally designed and operated initiatives is that they can be tailored to community needs and in a cultural context that is owned and supported by the community. This enhances the strengths and builds resilience of a community and combined with the added support of services provides for a more sustainable and long term solution. Locally designed and operated initiatives can also be adapted and modified to suit changes in local needs. The secondary effect is that it also provides local employment and up skilling which can strengthen a community to deal with future issues and in itself, become sustainable.

COMMITMENT TO ADDRESSING INDIGENOUS ALCOHOL AND OTHER DRUG ISSUES

As part of the Federal Government response to addressing drug and alcohol problems across Australia, the National Indigenous Drug and Alcohol Committee (NIDAC) plays a critical role in ensuring that Indigenous Australians have a voice in the development of relevant policies and programs that impact on their communities. NIDAC has been instrumental through feedback from consultation and the expertise of its members in providing quality and independent advice to government on ways alcohol and other drug issues can be addressed amongst Indigenous Australians.

NIDAC also closely monitors the National Drug Strategy Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People's Complementary Action Plan and is guided by its nationally coordinated and integrated approach to reduce drug-related harm among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People.

The National Drug Strategy Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People's Complementary Action Plan clearly identifies government's commitment to:

- Key Result Area 1 – enhance the capacity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander individuals, families and communities to address current and future issues in the use of alcohol, tobacco and other drugs and promote their own health and well being.
- Key Result Area 4 – provide a range of holistic approaches, from prevention through to treatment and continuing care that is locally available and accessible, and
- Key Result Area 5 - enhance the capacity of Indigenous community controlled organisations to provide quality services.

The principles of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People's Complementary Action Plan clearly endorse local planning by Indigenous communities and central involvement in the planning, development and implementation of strategies by local Indigenous communities.

The Federal Government is also committed to closing the 17yr health gap disparity between Indigenous and non Indigenous Australians. It is a party to all major human rights treaties recognising that Indigenous people have a fundamental right that is enjoyed by all other Australians, and which includes self determination and their health and well being.

BENEFITS OF LOCALLY DESIGNED AND OPERATED INITIATIVES

NIDAC believes that establishing and supporting locally designed and operated community initiatives helps to build the capacity of individuals, shows the strengths, resilience and the skills they need to take control of their lives and makes a powerful contribution to the community and the lives of future generations.

In a James Cook University evaluation of community empowerment programs monitored over the past 5 years, it clearly established that "not only does the program help strengthen individuals in their own lives, it's an effective way to engage Aboriginal communities to address issues like health, education and family violence" ¹

In this evaluation, tools utilised to study community empowerment in relation to Indigenous health were the Family Wellbeing Empowerment Program and Indigenous Mens Support Groups that focus on building community strengths.

EXAMPLES OF LOCALLY DESIGNED AND OPERATED INDIGENOUS COMMUNITY BASED INITIATIVES

Although there are numerous initiatives across Australia, some more well known or documented than others, the following examples (including the ANCD publication attached²) are provided to demonstrate what Indigenous Australians and communities have done and achieved as a result of a vision and commitment to improve the health and well being of their

¹ Tsey, K. (2000-2010) *Empowerment Research Program* James Cook University School of Indigenous Studies

² Stempel, P., Siggers S., Gray D., Stearne A. (2003) *Indigenous drug and alcohol projects elements of best practice* Australian National Council on Drugs

people.

I want to be heard

Winnunga Nimmitjiah Aboriginal Health Service developed a project in response to widespread concern amongst Indigenous Australians living in the ACT about substance abuse. In conjunction with the Indigenous community including the Elders of the Ngunnawal community the project looked at local substance abuse issues and how they could be addressed. The recommendations succeeded in establishing an Aboriginal residential treatment centre and Indigenous involvement in its service design and delivery.

Putting the brakes on petrol sniffing Mt Theo-Yuendumu Substance Misuse NT

In 1994, local Walpirri elders decided on a "zero tolerance" approach to petrol sniffing and with the support of the traditional owners, the local school, local government and the Tanami network, young petrol sniffers were sent to Purtulu, an isolate Mt Theo outstation to recover, learn traditional culture and break their addiction. At the same time a comprehensive youth program was started in Yuendumu to divert youth from petrol sniffing and support those returning from Mt Theo. The program has helped to develop a strong, skilled and dedicated group of young leaders for Yuendumu. The success of the Mt Theo program comes from local Indigenous people taking control and supporting one another, upholding local cultural values. To date, it has transformed the lives of over 400 Indigenous youth from the region and is regarded in Australia and overseas as a leader in petrol sniffing prevention. Other interested communities have sought the advice of local community members on ways substance misuse can be addressed in their own community.

Tackling Violence head on

A peaceful rally of Indigenous women from Redfern came together to protest about the violent rape of a local woman and as a result, without any government funding, the Blackout Violence program was established. The focus of the campaign was on empowering the Indigenous community to deal with domestic violence. This campaign, supported by Indigenous men, women and children reflects their determination to change community views and deals with issues to stop domestic violence. Following its success, a national rollout of the program was supported. The program has also drawn interest and support from a wide range of groups, including police, courts, universities, community groups and health services.

Healing past hurts

Yorgum Aboriginal Family Counselling Service WA is an Indigenous specific service which began in 1991 when a group of Aboriginal refuge workers came together and established an Aboriginal counselling course. At first they provided counselling and staff support on a volunteer basis before attracting funding from World Vision and the WA government. Utilising Indigenous staff, the primary focus was to empower Indigenous people to take control over their lives, draw on their cultural strengths and operate according to Indigenous protocols. The importance of Yorgum's work was reinforced in 2002 by a WA inquiry into family violence and child abuse in Aboriginal Communities.

The Grannies Group

The Grannies Group in South Australia is a peer support network of senior Aboriginal men and women who have taken action to preserve culture and belonging within their families and

communities. They have helped raise awareness of drug and alcohol issues through community education sessions using their own stories and issues. These community leaders support and influence a large network of families and offer their cultural guidance.

Tiwi Islands Alcohol Management Plan

In an effort to reduce the domestic violence, substance misuse and suicide and self harm attempts, a group of local Indigenous leaders and community members approached the local and Territory governments for assistance. A locally designed and operated alcohol management plan was developed that took into account issues in 4 townships, Nguiu, Wurankuwu (Bathurst Island), Milikapiti (Melville Island), Purlingimpi (Garden Point).

A tailored plan which includes alcohol permits, hours of supply and punitive measures was implemented. Punitive measures are considered by a local committee who also consult with local families about the agreed punishment. An incident which incurs a month or over banning from the local club also mandates attendance and achievement of competency in an Alcohol Awareness and Rehabilitation course.

Bourke Substance Abuse Management Plan

Bourke tops NSW in more than half of the major crime categories, including sexual offences, assault and domestic violence. It is also No. 1 for hospitalisation due to alcohol-related health issues.

A forum held in July 2008 was the first initiative of a group formed by local Indigenous community leaders to tackle alcohol misuse in the Bourke community. A proposed range of radical solutions to alcohol abuse and the violence it causes, forms the basis of a five-year alcohol management plan for the area. The plan includes:

- Restrictions on takeaway alcohol, "including restrictions on takeaway hours, limits upon quantity and restricting some types of alcohol, such as full-strength beer, casks and flagons"
- Some houses or entire streets voluntarily declared alcohol-free
- Responsible Service of Alcohol courses to high school students, to insert alcohol education into the school curriculum, and
- Restrictions on the supply of glassware and bottles throughout Bourke to reduce injury and damage from broken glass.

Makin' Tracks

In 1999, in response to the prevalence of substance misuse, in particular petrol sniffing, South Australian Indigenous communities have the opportunity to locally design and develop strategies of their own to tackle issues. Facilitated by a mobile patrol and with the combined support of service agencies and stakeholders, Indigenous communities in the cross-border region of Central Australia have been empowered to develop local plans that meet their needs. The mobile patrol covers the state of SA and includes communities as far north as Alice Springs and to Kalgoorlie and responds on the invite of communities who want to tackle issues themselves.

The mobile team facilitates:

- community discussions;

- community education/awareness programs;
- provides training programs;
- community development; and,
- supports community initiatives.

A commitment to link communities with the services and resources and enable collaborative work has been a strength of the project. As the project developed, work was increasingly undertaken in towns (such as Whyalla and Port Lincoln) with funding extended to 2010.

NSW Aboriginal Justice Advisory Council

Communities have welcomed the opportunity to take responsibility for reconciliation by shaping programs and services that will promote healing within their communities. In all, 60 Government and non-Government agencies and more than 700 Aboriginal community members have had direct involvement in the Aboriginal Justice Plan in NSW. For the first time top down community consultation was replaced by ground up community negotiation. Indigenous Australians, assisted by the Aboriginal Justice Advisory Council (AJAC), have led the development of a plan using their direct and equal voices to drive the agenda. This extensive negotiation is the cornerstone of the Plan. This level of consensus has been brokered by the hard work of the Aboriginal Justice Plan Taskforce to ensure a unified approach to reducing Aboriginal over-representation in the justice system.

Aboriginal Community Night Patrols

One of the longest running community-controlled initiatives in Indigenous communities has been the 'night patrol'. These local initiatives help Aboriginal communities to reduce harm and crime and to promote and improve the safety of vulnerable members of the community such as young people, women and those affected by alcohol or drugs. Local Community Patrols are comprised of volunteers who are willing to act as "eyes and ears" of the community and prepared to act responsibly by documenting and reporting any/all suspicious activities. Generally the evaluations have been very positive.

Recently, Blagg and Valuri (2004) identified over 100 self-policing initiatives operating in Aboriginal communities throughout Australia. They suggest that underpinning these initiatives is 'a commitment to working through consensus and intervening in a culturally appropriate way to divert Indigenous people from a diversity of potential hazards and conflicts'.

2008 Award Winners

Australian Crime and Violence Prevention Awards

Groote Eylandt and Milyakburra Liquor Management (NT) is a unique crime prevention project targeting the 4000 predominantly Indigenous members of the local community to reduce alcohol-related violence. The liquor-management project was originally started when an Indigenous elder, Mr Walter Amagula, approached the officer in charge of the local police station requesting support in reducing the levels of alcohol-related violence in Alyangula.

A liquor-management plan was introduced, bringing in alcohol restrictions on Groote Eylandt and Milyakburra to reduce alcohol-related violence in the local communities. This involved the issuing of liquor permits to residents and the establishment of a liquor permit committee, which

makes recommendations to the Liquor Commission on the suitability of applicants or the levels of alcohol permitted by the applicant.

The project also included the predominately European community of Alyangula. The system is managed by a voluntary alcohol-permit committee made up of key stakeholders such as Indigenous elders, community councils, a local mine, and government departments. An evaluation in 2007 found a significant reduction in alcohol-related crimes, such as a 52 percent decrease in property crimes and a 75 percent decrease in public drunkenness as well as a rise in employment rates. (also a winner in the 2008 National Drug and Alcohol Awards)

Domestic Violence - it's not our game (QLD)

A ground-breaking campaign in Far North Queensland uses the popular local rugby league team as role models to create a culture in which domestic violence is not the norm

Normanton Building Safer Communities Action Team (BSCAT) and the Normanton Stingers Rugby League Club, jointly decided to address domestic violence problems by creating the campaign with the team adopting the slogan 'Domestic Violence—it's not our game'. The penalty for team members who participate in domestic violence is exclusion from games and ultimately from the team.

Commercial advertisements are run on Imparja Television during the football season, featuring the players and the 'Domestic Violence – it's not our game' message. Car stickers and a banner bearing the slogan are displayed at games and community events. The team's football jerseys and supporters' shirts and the Junior Stingers' jerseys permanently display the slogan.

The project has decreased the prevalence of domestic violence in Normanton, with a 55 percent drop in domestic violence rates and aims to expand throughout Queensland's northwest region.

National Drug And Alcohol Awards

Prime Ministers Award - Central Australian Youth Link Up Service (CAYLUS)

Established by the Tangentyere Council in Alice Springs CAYLUS was funded in response to Indigenous community and Alice Springs town camps concerns about petrol sniffing. A recent report forecast the cost of institutional care of long-term sniffers in the NT will rise to approximately \$10 million annually. At one point there were as many as 500 petrol sniffers in the central region of the NT. Consequently, the health, social and economic cost implications of this group's petrol vapor abuse were enormous.

CAYLUS works with 14 Central Australian Indigenous communities, providing them with options and a means to address petrol sniffing, which can include a volatile substance misuse management plan, diversionary activities, and coordinating the case management of young petrol sniffers. CAYLUS has developed the following resources for Indigenous communities:

- The Brain Story, an educational Indigenous designed tool for education people what happens to your brain as a result of petrol sniffing
- Business Retailers Kit, a resource designed to help retailers in Alice Springs take measures that can reduce petrol sniffing.

Indigenous Outreach Program

The Drug and Alcohol Services Association (DASA) of Alice Springs, a drug and alcohol agency found that among Indigenous clients there seemed to be a lack of understanding about the effects of alcohol on personal health, family, and broader society. In addition, most clients had difficulty accessing general services. One of the greatest barriers experienced was that English was often not their first or second language. As a result, many people were not linked into services in town. Health, social security, the bank, the justice system, at times, appeared worse than a maze. Some individuals got stuck in town simply because they could not navigate their way out. Increased alcohol abuse often meant that as time went on they lost the motivation to make positive decisions about their lives.

Using local Indigenous Australians, this Program provides a community outreach centre for Indigenous people who need specialised support to reduce the harm associated with alcohol and licit substance abuse/ misuse.