Mission Australia submission to the Senate Select Committee on Regional and Remote Indigenous communities

February 2009

'The spiritual journey of the joining of two spirits'
By Jade Rose, Mirri Mirri Design, 2007

This painting tells the story of the joining of two spirits. They are the spirits of the Indigenous and non-indigenous people, walking together and then joining to form a great respect and strong friendship. These two spirits share and value each others culture throughout their spiritual journey in life. The spirit creatures within this painting represent communications around a spiritual meeting place. It is a place where great decisions are made and information is shared. The meeting place and the figures are protected by the mighty rainbow serpent, who is a spiritual creator and protector of Aboriginal culture. The joining of hands between the spirit figures show that there is understanding and respect between all peoples and communities. Throughout this spiritual journey a strong bond has been formed, creating a strong and everlasting friendship, caring and sharing with each other, together forever. This is a visual representation of Mission Australia's Statement of Principles for working with Indigenous Australians and this artwork was commissioned by Mission Australia from the artist, Jade Rose.

CONTENTS

SUMMARY

Addressing the significant and entrenched nature of disadvantage within some regional and remote Indigenous communities requires a multi-layered, long term, community development approach. Such an approach requires intensive work and partnerships across governments, community and the business sectors if sustainable change is to be achieved. To date such an approach has not been systematically adopted across regional and remote communities and Mission Australia recommends:

- ➢ **An asset-based community development approach:** where sufficient resources and required timeframes support long-term, community-driven strategies to address community-identified needs.
- ➢ **Provision of flexible, innovative community services:** driven by an asset-based community development approach where strong relationships are built within the community and services are directed by community needs. Services in remote and regional Indigenous communities require support for recruiting and retaining qualified staff, adequate infrastructure to provide required services and funding and resource provisions that allow services to support long-term and sustainable change.
- ➢ **Innovative responses to Indigenous employment** :
    - o Indigenous-specific employment services based on good practice principles and adaptable to specific needs and groups, for example, young Indigenous Australians in the transition from school to work.
    - o Increased Indigenous employment in resource economies in remote and rural Australia, through a targeted model which supports resource companies to recruit, train and retain Indigenous employees.
    - o The development of social enterprises and transitional labour market programs in regional and remote communities.
    - o Public and private sector employment strategies to increase Indigenous employment quotas across all levels of government and the private sector.

Achieving the sustainable, positive change drastically needed in some regional and remote Indigenous communities requires the transformation of policies, programs, approaches and investment, in a way previously unknown in Australia. Mission Australia urges such transformational change, rather than a tweaking of existing arrangements, not only for the wellbeing of Indigenous Australians, but for that of the whole Australian community.

INTRODUCTION

Mission Australia is a national non-profit organisation that works within the community, employment and training sectors. Our vision is to see a fairer Australia by enabling people in need to find pathways to a better life. In 2007-08 Mission Australia's services supported over 330,000 people within Australia. Each year, Mission Australia supports thousands of Indigenous Australians from a diversity of communities across Australia. In particular, we have been active within the Northern Territory for many years, across the community, employment and training sectors.

We welcome the opportunity to provide a submission to the Senate Select Committee on Regional and Remote Indigenous Communities. We note the Terms of Reference for the Committee's Inquiry:

> a. The effectiveness of Australian Government policies following the Northern Territory Emergency Response, specifically on the state of health, welfare, education and law and order in regional and remote Indigenous communities;
> b. The impact of state and territory government policies on the wellbeing of regional and remote Indigenous communities;
> c. The health, welfare, education and security of children in regional and remote Indigenous communities; and
> d. The employment and enterprise opportunities in regional and remote Indigenous communities.

Mission Australia has identified the need for a high level framework approach to address the very significant and entrenched level of disadvantage being experienced by many Indigenous individuals, families and communities today. The focus of this submission will be strategies to create sustainable, positive social change for individuals and families in remote and regional Indigenous communities, flexible service responses for young Indigenous Australians and strategies to increase Indigenous economic participation in regional and remote communities across Australia.

1. CREATING SUSTAINABLE, POSITIVE CHANGE IN REGIONAL AND REMOTE INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES

Mission Australia acknowledges the intent of the Northern Territory Emergency Response and the significant and entrenched level of disadvantage being experienced by many individuals and families in regional and remote Indigenous communities. The experience of organisations such as Mission Australia and many others both within Australia and overseas suggests that solutions to the complex needs of Indigenous communities need to be developed and implemented within a long-term community development framework. Mission Australian recommends that an asset-based community development approach to target the complex needs of regional and remote Indigenous communities be adopted. Without this approach, progress on enhancing the wellbeing of Indigenous Australians will be limited. This approach and its implementation in regional and remote Indigenous communities is described in detail below.

1.1 A framework for change: Asset-based community development

The asset-based community development approach rests on the principle that the recognition of the strengths, resources and assets of individuals, families and communities is more likely to inspire positive action for change than an exclusive focus on needs and problems. It does not deny the real problems many Indigenous communities face but focuses on and harnesses the energy of how all community members can contribute in meaningful ways to community development (Mathie & Cunningham, 2002). This approach takes the premise that communities can and must take a key role in driving the development process by identifying and mobilising existing but often unrecognised assets, and respond to and create local opportunities.

Asset-based community development also acknowledges that Indigenous knowledge is an integral part of the culture and history of a local community and as James Wolfensohn, former President of the World Bank noted *we need to learn from local communities to enrich the development process* (cited in Gorjestani, 2000). The World Bank's experience trying to achieve sustainable community development has been that to pursue approaches which fail to integrate and value local community knowledge and assets is fundamentally flawed with the ultimate result being severe limitations on both social and economic development.

There is now international evidence that an asset based community development approach pioneered by Kretzmann, McKnight and many others has the capacity to bring about significant community change in highly disadvantaged communities, but there are two important provisos - **if sufficient and appropriate resources and the required timeframes are provided**. There has been a general failure to ensure these two conditions in regional and remote Indigenous communities with the consequence being a lack of sustained change for individuals and communities. If fully implemented this approach provides a 'new lens' for looking at the community – a lens that focuses on opportunities and strengths, rather than deficits and a pre-determined and negative future.

1.2   Implementing asset based community development

The steps involved in asset based community development are well documented and there are a number of organisations, particularly those in the international aid area as well as local NGOs who have been working with communities over many years, with experience in implementing this approach. Critical steps, refined to reflect individual community situations, include:

- Building engagement, relationships and trust within the community and with key organisation(s), including about the process – this is a critical and time consuming task, without which the subsequent steps will fail
- Reviewing and mapping the assets of the community (economic, social, cultural, environmental etc)
- Mobilising the community's assets and creating a community vision and plan which integrates social, economic, environmental and cultural priorities and initiatives and builds on what is currently being done in the community.
- Establishing the ongoing governance and funding structure(s) to carry the plan forward
- Implementing, monitoring and reviewing plan and outcomes achieved.

Mission Australia is not under-estimating the challenges involved in this approach and critical to the effectiveness of this process is establishing and maintaining respectful and reciprocal relationships within the community and with key stakeholders. As Sherwood (1999) argues, Indigenous people in Australia have participated in community development for thousands of years, yet they have been forced to adapt to a non-Indigenous community development model for several decades. She emphasises the importance of community development processes being 'initiated by the community and not put upon the community'. Previous efforts in this area, such as Shared Responsibility Agreements, have had mixed results because of this. Mission Australia would argue that the overall approach to addressing Indigenous disadvantage in the Australian context, both through responses such as Northern Territory Emergence Response and more broadly across government, has generally not been based on a form of asset based community development as articulated above.

Lodder (2003) notes an 'inside-out' and 'outside-in' dynamic is needed, where contact with others helps spark new ideas, understandings and gives access to learning from others' experiences. 'Top-down' support is also needed from bureaucracies able to work flexibly and responsively with communities. Flexibility will also be critical to ensure responsiveness to the particular situation of communities. As the 2006 review of the COAG trials noted 'flexible approaches need to be applied which reflect the individual circumstances of communities, the nature of the issues facing communities, and the developmental status of intergovernmental and cross sectoral relationships. There cannot be a one size fits all approach' (Morgan Disney, 2006).

Accountability mechanisms, funding levels, timeframes and outcome measures also need to reflect this flexibility. Whole of government(s) community funding responses are critical in this as is long term and sustained funding (5 to 10 year

minimum). The complex intersection of issues facing many communities will not be 'solved' in the short term nor by one agency or level of government. In more recent years a regularly shifting policy and programmatic environment has only added to the challenges communities face.

Mission Australia is able to provide further information on an effective community development approach if required. There are also a range of programs run by organisations such as Mission Australia in some regional and remote Indigenous communities, that could be part of a community development response in some locations in the NT. These include for example, *Pathways to prevention,* an early intervention and prevention initiative working with children, families, institutions and communities, in the most disadvantaged urban community in Queensland. A significant proportion of the program's clients are Indigenous and a range of well documented outcomes are being achieved. There are a range of other children, youth and family programs which organisations like Mission Australia and others run which could well fit within a community development framework within the regional and remote community context.

National and international evidence shows that an assets-based community development approach is not a 'feel-good' yet ineffective response; rather evidence confirms that without such a comprehensive and relationally based response, no matter what the quantum of investment, sustainable social and economic change will not be achieved. Only an integrated, comprehensive and transformational approach will bring about the significant change required in social and economic outcomes for Indigenous Australians in regional and remote communities across Australia.

1.3 Providing Appropriate Housing in Regional and Remote Indigenous Communities

Clearly one of the outstanding social and health issues for Indigenous people in regional and remote communities is the provision of appropriate housing. In the 2006 Census, 4,118 Indigenous Australians were homeless. A lack of housing in the public and private rental market, poverty, unemployment, discrimination, lack of culturally appropriate houses, lack of culturally sensitive policies and practices and a lack of support to assist Indigenous people to manage and maintain housing tenancies results in many Indigenous people living in unstable, unsecure housing which contributes to poor health and social outcomes (FACSIA, 2006; OATSIH, 2007; SCRGSP, 2007).

Overcrowding is most likely to be reported as a stressor by people in very remote regions (35%), and less likely to be reported by people living in regional areas (9%). In 2005, 63.4% of Indigenous households in very remote areas lived in overcrowded households. Overcrowding in very remote areas is related to the expense and difficulty of maintaining houses, often resulting in inadequate, inappropriate or poorly maintained housing stock (SCRGSP, 2007). When considering overcrowding as it relates to homelessness and health, it is important to do so with respect to the cultural and social factors that influence overcrowding for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and to understand that the experience of overcrowding can be extremely varied. Ongoing, long-term overcrowding not related to cultural gatherings is not part of Indigenous culture, and usually arises from family and social problems like alcohol and drug abuse, poverty and the shortage of low-cost housing. (AHURI, 2008).

Given that housing is integral to social and physical wellbeing (OATSIH, 2007; SCRGSP, 2007), then the provision of culturally appropriate, secure housing in regional and remote communities is of vital significance to achieving positive and sustainable change in regional and remote Indigenous communities. Whilst some initial, significant commitments have been made in this area, considerable work remains to be done.

2 AN EXAMPLE OF COMMUNITY SERVICE PROVISION IN REGIONAL AND REMOTE INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES

In 2007 Mission Australia was awarded a $7.97 million Federal Government contract (through three government departments) to provide integrated youth services over a 3-year period to the four communities of Aputula (Finke), Imanpa, Mutitjulu and Kaltukatjara (Docker River) – the Northern Territory Integrated Youth Services Project. The initiative was aimed principally at providing alternative activities for young people (aged 5 to 25 years) to combat petrol sniffing in Central Australia, a major issue for some regional and remote Indigenous communities. The initiative reflected an understanding that a new and innovative model was needed in order to achieve more effective services to the client group within these communities. Mission Australia's data collection shows that over June and July 2008 close to 8,000 occasions of service were provided to children and young people from across four communities by NTIYS.

Mission Australia's NTIYS provides after-school hours and weekend activities for the target group. Mission Australia works with young people who are disengaged from school and attempts to assist them to re-engage with education. Activities for young people in the four communities include football training and matches, basketball, softball, band practice and/or recording, nutrition/cooking, organised pizza night, camel stew nights, rollerblading, BMX riding, hygiene/hair care, cultural activities such as gathering honey ants, and visiting sacred sites with young people and elders. In some communities Mission Australia's Anangu youth workers operate a school pick-up service each weekday morning, helping to improve school attendance rates. One community council, Mutitjulu, asked Mission Australia to operate a lunch time activities program that encourages young people to stay near the school during the midday break. Afternoon school attendance rates have improved has a result.

Mission Australia's experience with establishing and delivering this initiative offers some insights on the challenges and some of the learnings gained from implementing strategies aimed to increase the wellbeing of Indigenous people in regional and remote communities. These include:
- **Relationships:** The significant time needed to develop strong relationships within a community and the foundational role that such relationships play in delivering any effective service/initiative. The NTIYS has a Youth Advisory Committee (YAC) which meets monthly and its membership has been significantly expanded during the early months of the initiative to include all key stakeholders present in the community. YACs determine the activities to be conducted in the community. The face-to-face meetings encourage

information sharing on issues affecting youth in the community, encourage coordinated responses to those issues and provide opportunity for community input and ownership.

- **Recruiting and retaining staff:** This is a significant challenge as is providing the appropriate support and accountability mechanisms, particularly given the significant isolation and distance of the communities from larger centres such as Darwin and Alice Springs. Over the first few months of implementing the initiative a new staffing structure was developed which: identified a team leader on each of the four communities whose responsibilities include organising activities and assigning staff to activities; split oversight of the projects on communities between two management staff who each attend to two communities; appointed an Operations Manager to oversee service quality, reporting and planning. The movement of outreach staff and service managers is now coordinated so that in the normal course of events community-based staff are assisted by at least one Alice-based staff member. As a consequence staff feel more supported and less isolated. The improved level of interaction allows management to become aware of and address problems early.

- **Benefits of infrastructure:** Delivering services such as the NTIYS requires a complex set of expertise, systems support and infrastructure. As a national community service provider, with a strong and well established corporate infrastructure (including HR, IT, finance and so on) Mission Australia was able to provide the range of supports required to give the project stability. It is clear that in implementing the new NTIYS model, these supports have not always guaranteed the provision of quality services and satisfaction of contractual obligations, but when difficulties arose, the organisation had the know-how, determination, experience and resources to find and apply solutions and re-build its relationships with communities and funding agencies. Whilst new to these communities, Mission Australia was able to bring resources from across the country to bear on delivering this new initiative. Many programs in remote communities are staffed by a single worker who is often inadequately housed and who struggles to find resources and funding for basic equipment and supplies to conduct activities. Funds are often channelled through a small community-based NGO or community council. While many organisations struggle to deliver services on remote communities, Mission Australia suggests that service models reliant on the efforts of an individual and/or small organisation are unlikely to survive their struggle and provide service continuity.

- **Funding and resource levels:** The level of funding of the NTIYS acknowledges the true cost of providing sustainable services in remote communities. Mission Australia's experience in providing the NTIYS has demonstrated that a high level of financial resources is required in order to properly fund the provision of services that will have a sustainable impact on the lives of young people in the remote communities of Central Australia. Mission Australia's experience with this initiative also highlights that contractual arrangements for many of the programs delivered in the NT and other remote communities should be 5 to 10 years, rather than annual or even three year funding. The timeframes required for change, coupled with the necessary investment in staff and infrastructure requires such an approach.

3 CREATING EMPLOYMENT AND ENTERPRISE OPPORTUNITIES IN REGIONAL AND REMOTE INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES

Critical to reducing disadvantage in regional and remote Indigenous communities is increased economic participation. As with the asset-based community development approach, general employment services for Indigenous Australians need to ensure a holistic and multi-level response. The complexity of issues facing many Indigenous clients means that simply dealing with one presenting issue will not bring about positive sustainable change. Further, a response which works with family, extended family and community may be required, particularly for young Indigenous Australians.

3.1 Good practice principles

Mission Australia has previously articulated good practice models for Indigenous employment including:

- *Holistic and strengths based* responses which help build a strong sense of cultural awareness.
- *Program flexibility* as local input is needed to ensure appropriateness.
- *Relationships* at the individual and organisational level to achieve real and sustainable outcomes.
- *Partnerships* with a range of organisations, government agencies and businesses.
- *Mentoring and access to ongoing support* – mentoring should be viewed as 'mainstream' with all employees potentially benefiting from it (Mission Australia, 2005).

Acknowledging and reinforcing the importance of Indigenous culture is a fundamental principle underlying good practice. The experience of Mission Australia is that Indigenous clients are often dealing with low self-esteem and in some cases, limited or no knowledge of their culture, history and heritage. There is clear evidence that strong cultural identity/pride is a 'protective factor' for individual wellbeing (Attorney General's Department, 1999), yet for some Indigenous Australians this is not (yet) the case. Building a strong and positive sense of cultural awareness is an important factor in the personal development of many Indigenous clients.

Particular efforts are required to support the needs of young Indigenous Australians, both to complete higher levels of education and in the transition from school to work. Mission Australia's Youth Employment Strategy (2006) identifies nine foundations for social and economic participation, including employability skills, connectedness (to family, peers, and community), appropriate education and training, and aspirations/goals. Responses are needed which ensure the development of all nine foundations in an integrated way. In particular, it can be difficult for young people to develop aspirations/goals beyond their own family/community experience. Responses which support young Indigenous Australians to explore a broad range of possibilities and opportunities, including work experience, are required.

3.2   Emerging economies

The landscape of significant parts of regional and remote Australia has recently been transformed by new resource initiatives, at a scale previously unknown in Australia's history. Whilst there are other potential 'emerging economies' (for example in the tourism and arts/cultural areas) it has been the size and scope of development in the resources area that has been seen as offering the most potential for Indigenous Australians living in these areas. It is currently not clear what impact the global financial crisis will have on these initiatives. In mid-2008 however, there were over 340 new resource development projects on the drawing board across Australia and around 60% of mining currently occurs on or near Indigenous land. There remains significant potential for these developments to make a major positive economic and social contribution on the wellbeing of Indigenous Australians, however a range of sophisticated and inter-related strategies will be required to realise this.

Some companies such as Rio Tinto and BHP Billiton have developed effective Indigenous employment strategies, however across the resources sector these companies tend to be the exception rather than the rule, with many companies poorly-placed to work successfully with a (potential) Indigenous workforce. Mission Australia has supported work in this area, including at the MacArthur River Mine in the Northern Territory. It has also undertaken a detailed international review of effective Indigenous employment practices to inform its work, drawing particularly on the Canadian experience where there has been a longer and more successful history of Indigenous employment in the resources sector.

The challenges which make it difficult for Indigenous people to obtain and sustain employment (particularly in the resources area) are well recognised and include: restricted access to fundamental literacy; education and relevant vocational skills training; restricted exposure to the mainstream resource sector workforce culture; geographical isolation and a lack of infrastructure such as transport and housing; lack of experience and system capacity to balance family and community obligations with the demands of full time work; restricted access to health support and overall health issues (CSRM, 2006; Tiplady and Barclay 2006).

The most significant barrier for the majority of resource companies managing their Indigenous recruitment, pre-employment training and ongoing learning and development initiatives, is that they lack a sustainable capacity to drive the process. This can particularly be the case when there is a disconnect between centralised recruitment processes and site based operations, a lack of investment in the strategy and a failure to recognise that such investment must occur over many years to be effective. For most resource companies, Indigenous recruitment is not their core business, and they often lack the internal expertise to achieve sustainable outcomes.

Mission Australia's work and research has identified the following best practice components for the recruitment and retention of Indigenous employees within the resources sector:
- Recognise the complexity and size of the Indigenous labour pool in terms of skilled and unskilled candidates
- Develop separate recruitment strategies for skilled and unskilled candidates
- Adopt a range of informal and culturally appropriate recruitment strategies

- Incorporate literacy and pre-employment training within the recruitment process
- Incorporate literacy support, vocational training and mentoring within the workplace
- Develop customized training resources which are culturally sensitive and aligned to the workplace
- Manage the attraction, recruitment and retention process as a single strategy.

Mission Australia has developed an integrated Indigenous recruitment and work-ready training service model which consists of three inter-related work preparation and training courses specifically for the resources sector. Collectively the courses take jobseeker candidates through a three to seventh month 'pre-employment' process that supports their preparation for employment and provides practical exposure to work practices within the resources sector. This is complemented by a range of on-going initiatives once employment has commenced to ensure sustainability of employment. Mission Australia is able to provide further information on this model, including costings, if required.

For a significant number of resource companies the most effective response to developing and managing an Indigenous workforce will be the involvement of a third party organisation(s) with the required skills to develop, implement and manage a complex and inter-connected range of strategies. The role of government(s) in these type of arrangements is critical and can include: policy, programmatic and legislative frameworks that support and encourage such collaborations, including across jurisdictions; flexible funding that can be leveraged with corporate and community funding and in-kind resources; and significant long-term investment and commitment. The timeframe for developing this workforce is significant; hence investment and commitment must be for the long-term. Equally, the benefits, both to Indigenous individuals and communities, the resources sector and the broader Australian community will be long-term.

Equally critical in this area is the provision of related services and supports, such as housing , education, health and family supports. Mission Australia's work - particularly in the Northern Territory - has highlighted the shortage of appropriate accommodation and space for the provision of services, both those that are community based and for visiting specialists. As with the community development approach, integrated and holistic solutions are required and these may require a different role for business and governments. Mission Australia notes the Commonwealth's commitment to employment related hostels in Halls Creek, Derby, Fitzroy Crossing and Broome. Equally the provision of supports across a range of other areas such as health, family support, early childhood etc will be required.

3.3   Social enterprises and transitional labour markets

Mission Australia notes the current and untapped potential of social enterprises and transitional/intermediate labour market programs can have on disadvantaged jobseekers. Policies and programs that explicitly support the development of social enterprises and transitional/intermediate labour market programs can play a role in enhancing the employment of Indigenous Australians, across a range of labour markets including those in regional and remote communities. Mission Australia would be able to provide additional information on its work in this area if required.

3.4   Employment services for Indigenous Australians

One of the major challenges for organisations such as Mission Australia who are delivering employment services to Indigenous Australians, particularly in regional and remote areas, is attracting and retaining suitably qualified staff to deliver the range of programs required. This includes, but is not limited to, professions such as literacy and numeracy trainers, Employment Services consultants, psychologists and social workers. Particularly in remote and regional areas, creative and flexible employment practices, which also take into account the broader needs of employees, are required. This is an issue where collaboration between governments, employment agencies and the corporate sector could stimulate some innovative solutions.

Mission Australia's experience delivering Commonwealth employment services in the NT reinforces that a more effective approach would be to work intensively with a small number of communities (5 to 10) rather than attempting to work with significant numbers of sites (eg 50). One of the cornerstones of the employment services strategy in the NT has become Work for the Dole, however our experience has been that it is very difficult to get Work for the Dole sponsors, who are critical to the program model. More fundamentally trying to address 'employment related' needs within a limited and individual definition of need, is not appropriate for some NT communities. Addressing employment/economic participation within a broader asset based community development strategy would be more effective.

3.5   Public and private sector employment and procurement policies

A diverse range of strategies will be required to increase the employment of Indigenous Australians, this includes public sector employment strategies across all levels of government and private sector strategies.

Mission Australia notes the Australian Public Services' (APS) *Employment and capability strategy for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees* and data from 2006 showing Indigenous employees represented 2% of ongoing APS employees (APS, 2007). More particularly however, it notes that three agencies - Centrelink, Aboriginal Hostels and the (then) Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs - employed half of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees and that almost 87% of all Indigenous employees were APS grade 5-6 or below. The former statistic suggests that many Indigenous employees in the APS occupy 'targeted' rather than more 'mainstream' positions. Clearly both these areas require significant improvement and Commonwealth leadership in Indigenous

employment policies, practices and outcomes would make an important contribution.

This is also an area for further work by many organisations, including Mission Australia, which has a mixed coverage of Indigenous staff across Australia. In a first step to address this, Mission Australia is currently finalising a Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) with clear organisational Indigenous employment targets, and a range of other related strategies regarding cultural awareness training, enhanced relationships with Indigenous organisations and practices which recognise and value Indigenous Australians. Despite the relatively small proportion of staff located in remote and regional areas, the impact of the strategies outlined above can be very significant for these communities. Widespread encouragement of the take up of RAPs or similar instruments which see individual organisations committing to enhancing the wellbeing of Indigenous Australians, including in the employment area, can make an important cumulative contribution.

The 2007 report of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs also notes that in some areas the inclusion of Indigenous employment quotas in government procurement guidelines, particularly in the area of construction of Indigenous housing, is positively impacting on Indigenous employment. Such strategies need to be integrated within a broader education, training and support framework in order that such quotas can be achieved.

4   CONCLUSION

Through the Council of Australian Government's (COAG) 'Closing the Gap' initiative, there is now a clear national commitment to improving the significant and entrenched nature of disadvantage experienced by Indigenous Australians. To achieve the targets set and in particular to enhance the wellbeing of regional and remote Indigenous communities requires a multi-layered, long term, community development approach. Such an approach requires intensive work and partnerships across governments, community and the business sectors if sustainable change is to be achieved. In achieving sustainable change in regional and remote communities, Mission Australia recommends:

> ➢ **An asset-based community development approach:** where sufficient resources and required timeframes support long-term, community-driven strategies to address community-identified needs.
> ➢ **Provision of flexible, innovative community services:** driven by an asset-based community development approach where strong relationships are built within the community and services are directed by community needs. Services in remote and regional Indigenous communities require support for recruiting and retaining qualified staff, adequate infrastructure to provide required services and funding and resource provisions that allow services to support long-term, sustainable change in disadvantaged communities.
> ➢ **Innovative responses to Indigenous employment** :
>   o Indigenous-specific employment services based on good practice principles and adaptable to specific needs and groups, for example, young Indigenous Australians in the transition from school to work.
>   o Increased Indigenous employment in emerging resource economies in remote and rural Australia, through a targeted model which supports resource companies to recruit, train and retain Indigenous employees.
>   o The development of social enterprises and transitional labour market programs in regional and remote communities.
>   o Public and private sector employment strategies to increase Indigenous employment quotas across all levels of government and the private sector.

Achieving the sustainable, positive change drastically needed in some regional and remote Indigenous communities requires the transformation of policies, programs, approaches and investment, in a way previously unknown in Australia. Mission Australia urges such transformational change, rather than a tweaking of existing arrangements, not only for the wellbeing of Indigenous Australians, but for that of the whole Australian community.

REFERENCES

AHURI (2007). Flexible guidelines for the design of remote Indigenous community housing: Positioning Paper No. 98. Authored by John Fien, Esther Charlesworth, Gini Lee, David Morris, Doug Baker and Tammy Grice, RMIT-NATSEM Research Centre, June 2007.

Attorney General's Department (1999). *Pathways to Prevention*, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra.

Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research (CAEPR) (2008) *Re-vitalising the Community Development Program in the Northern Territory.*

Centre for Social Responsibility in Mining (CSRM) (2006) *Indigenous employment in the Australian Minerals Industry.* The Centre for Social Responsibility in Mining, University of Queensland.

FACSIA (2006). Indigenous homelessness within Australia. Prepared by the Commonwealth Advisory Committee on Homelessness, and the Australian Government Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, and supported by the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Homelessness Consultations. May 2006

Gorjestani N (2000) Indigenous knowledge for development: Opportunities and challenges.

House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs (2007) *Indigenous Australians at work: Successful initiatives in Indigenous employment.*

Lodder S (2003) *Working with Indigenous communities*, Stronger Families Learning Exchange Bulletin No 4, Australian Institute of Family Studies.

Mathie A and Cunningham G (2002) *From clients to citizens: Asset-based community development as a strategy for community-driven development,* The Coady International Institute

Mission Australia (2005) *Submission to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs Inquiry on Indigenous employment.*

Mission Australia (2006) *Youth Employment Strategy*

Morgan Disney & Associates (2006) *Synopsis review of the COAG trial evaluations: Report to the Office of Indigenous Policy Coordination.*

Office for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health (2007). Evidence of effective interventions to improve the social and environmental factors impacting on health:

Informing the development of Indigenous Community Agreements. Authored by Dr Andrew Black.

SCRGSP (Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision) (2007). Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage: Key Indicators 2007. Productivity Commission, Canberra.

Sherwood J (1999), "What is community development?" *Aboriginal and Islander Health Worker Journal* 23: pp.7-8

Tiplady T and M A Barclay (2006) *Indigenous employment in the Australian Minerals Industry.* The Centre for Social Responsibility in Mining, University of Queensland.