



BLOODWOOD TREE ASSOCIATION Inc.

ENQUIRY INTO INDIGENOUS GRANTS DEBACLE

Bloodwood Tree Association is a medium not-for-profit charitable Aboriginal organisation based in South Hedland (Port Hedland municipality) within the Pilbara Region of Western Australia.

The organisation's roots go back to the early 1970's when the Barker family formed the Bloodwood Tree group to help combat alcohol abuse, family violence, crime-related activities, unemployment, homelessness and despair resulting from Australia's first iron-ore mining resources boom from the late sixties onwards.

The body was incorporated in 1977 under the State Act and was able to gain funds through the Australian Government for Substance Misuse projects, while in the 1980's was also successful in forming a partnership with Aboriginal Hostels Limited to access funding for a six-bed community Hostel in Port Hedland.

In 2001 following discussions with the Human Rights Commission, AHL and the State Department of Housing combined to build a new 20-bed Aboriginal Hostel in South Hedland, with AHL funding the operational component of the program and the State Housing Department entering into an agreement with Bloodwood Tree in relation to the care and maintenance of the then \$1 million facility. Today valued at some \$4 million.

Funding for both the Substance Abuse (later changed to Substance Use) program was utilized by Bloodwood Tree to manage the organisation and actively advocate for further programs and funding to help combat the horrific substance abuse and associated violence and morbidity rates evident within South Hedland, brought about by the lack of services and facilities for Aboriginal people, including appropriate housing, training and employment and general services.

Bloodwood Tree's record with meaningful outcomes from the Substance Use funding (through OATSIH) was evident with a number of projects including the successful 2001 Pilbara Substance Misuse Review that became a catalyst for change in the way alcohol ruled people's lives, particularly Aboriginal people.

The success with the new Hostel In 2001 was a result of this funding, while in 2005, and following Bloodwood Tree's direct involvement in a three-year campaign to reduce the availability of alcohol, the Director Liquor Licensing of WA imposed liquor restrictions within the municipality of Port Hedland, bringing reduced hours of trade for packaged liquor including no Sunday trading, along with restrictions on certain quantities and external advertising of alcohol.

The 2001 Review that led to these restrictions noted that "The health of Aboriginal people in the Pilbara is significantly worse than that of the non-Aboriginal population" and that "Death rates are 5 and 6.5 times higher for Aboriginal men and women, and hospitalisation rates 3.5 times higher among Aboriginal people, than among non-Aboriginal people in the region."

The Review went on the state that "In Port Hedland the priorities of informants were health promotion, supply reduction, a treatment centre, cultural initiatives, socio-economic initiatives and counselling"



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In 2006 Bloodwood Tree amalgamated with the Port Hedland Sobering Up Centre group, and took charge of the Sobering Up, Night Patrol and Homeless Support Services. Through these services along with Hostel services for accommodation, Bloodwood Tree realized the priorities of the community informants under the Substance Misuse program with a number of health promotion messages including FASD, No Grog, Keep it Below .05, Youth and Alcohol, A local Taxi Accord and Responsible Service of Alcohol in conjunction with the liquor outlets.

The supply reduction has been evident since the introduction of the liquor restrictions in 2005, with the State Drug and Alcohol Office requested to obtain and publish like figures over the past decade for comparison, while funding was advocated for through a feasibility study for a local drug and alcohol rehabilitation centre starting in 2003 and culminating in 2014 with the completion of a \$14 million facility in South Hedland.

Bloodwood Tree was successful also in gaining funds through a "Royalties for Regions" program to employ two Drug and Alcohol counsellors and an admin support person in 2012, with some 267 active clients on their case-load today.

As part of the counselling services, successful cultural "Back to Country" programs are delivered with alternative small funding from State agencies, while Bloodwood Tree was one of the drivers in the 2003-4 "Local Employment Strategy" that saw a huge push for the mining companies and contractors in the start of the resources boom, to train and employ local and Aboriginal people into their business at a local level. This initiative saw more than 1,200 local Aboriginal people placed into jobs from 2003 up until 2014. Today our organisation hosts a VTEC program to put some 90 Aboriginal people into jobs by December 31 2014.

The Hostel (named Bunara Maya meaning home from home in local language) plays an important part in all of these Substance Use programs, particularly as a "half-way house" for those former prisoners from Roebourne Regional Prison (some 60% are from Hedland), 200 kilometres down the highway, as there is no formal facility for those released prisoners. The Hostel can and also has been used as an overflow from the Hedland Refuge (Womens Shelter) with delineation between the Women and family section and Men's section of the Hostel.

Bunara Maya Hostel also plays an important role in training and employment services, with a large proportion of homeless Aboriginal people (A Housing wait list stretching back eight years and more than 300 applications), needing safe and secure accommodation facilities to enable them to work effectively, and this was very evident during the mining resources boom days when Bloodwood Tree was placing Aboriginal people into jobs.

Bloodwood Tree made application through the IAS on September 25 2014 for the two Australian Government programs: Substance Use (OATSIH funded) for two years from July 1 2015 through until 30 June 2017; and Aboriginal Hostels Limited for the Bunara Maya Hostel for operational funds from January 1 2015 (AHL only funded 6 months in the new financial year 2014-15). This application was to be responded to by November 2014 with funding available from 1 January 2015 or 1 July 2015 for Financial year funds.

The application listed its successes and its forward service delivery strategy to help the local Aboriginal people in their daily struggle without a home, without family, but with alcohol, drugs, violence, assaults and hopelessness. As depicted, Bloodwood Tree has had a number of positive successes and outcomes over the years it has been servicing the community.



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It was with utter despair that on 23 November 2014 the Department of Prime Minister & Cabinet advised via email that “Minister Scullion has accepted the department’s advice that more time is required to effectively assess applications made under the Indigenous Advancement Strategy (IAS) national round. The Government now expects the results of the round to be announced by early March 2015.” And that.....

“As a result, we are also very mindful of the overriding priority to enable organisations to continue providing the services that people need. Therefore, the department will directly contact those organisations with current ongoing service delivery contracts to discuss interim funding arrangements.”

As the Hostel funding was only available to 31 December, Bloodwood Tree made enquiries as to how and when the mentioned “interim” funding would be made available. To cut a long story short, Bloodwood Tree had to make numerous telephone calls to anyone and everyone, including the Prime Minister’s office and Minister Scullion’s office as well as our local PMC office, the PMC offices in Perth and Canberra, our local Member’s office (Melissa Price), while also involving our local ABC and print media in an effort to discuss this “interim funding arrangement”.

On 24th December 2014, Bloodwood Tree was advised by the Perth PMC’s office that it needed to fill out a “Demand Driven Activity” form for the interim Hostel funding which needed to be submitted by January 17 – which was an issue as most staff were on leave. However this 17-page document was completed with mostly the same information as was in the original IAS application, and submitted by the deadline of January 16.

Bloodwood Tree finally received interim funds on 15th March 2015 for the Hostel operational funds from Jan 1 to June 30 2015.

Previous to that and on 4th March 2015, Bloodwood Tree also received a letter via email from Minister Scullion stating that “...your organisation’s application for funding through the Indigenous Advancement Strategy (IAS) Grant Funding Round 2014 has been successful.” This was then followed up with a telephone call on the same day some three hours later, from the Perth PMCs Office, advising verbally that we were “successful” with ONE year’s funding for the Substance Use program, and the Hostel would not be funded after June 30th 2015. That comment equated to a less than 20% success rate of \$208,000 total from the requested \$1.3 million application in total.

Today (25th March) Bloodwood Tree has still NOT received any formal written advise of the funding under the IAS, nor received any feedback from the IAS in relation to the application, nor any assistance with how we might manage the closure of a facility for Aboriginal people that has been servicing the community for more than thirty years in South Hedland.

There has also been NO discussion with PMC in relation to why only ONE year’s funds were approved under the IAS application for the Substance Use program, and NO formal response to the appeal over the IAS decision on funding that was lodged on 12 March.

The forced closure of the Bunara Maya Hostel will see our organisation put FIVE (5)Indigenous people back onto Centrelink payments, while at the same time the Government is paying our organisation to work with and place up to 90 Indigenous job seekers into jobs through the VTEC program.



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The Indigenous Advancement Strategy was broadcast with the Government “..committed to improving the lives of Indigenous Australians through increased participation in education and work, and making communities safer.....”, however there has been little or no consultation with the Indigenous Australians or the Aboriginal organisations that services them on how this should be done in our local remote and regional community of South and Port Hedland.

It is Bloodwood Tree’s view that services to the Indigenous people should come from local Indigenous groups with the capacity to deliver meaningful outcomes, and that to bring an “outside” organisation into a remote regional area in an attempt to deliver services to Indigenous people is a recipe for disaster.

The de-funding of local groups with the concept of awarding contracts to the large National organisations will not in our opinion, resolve the issues that we have embedded within our area.

Bloodwood Tree appreciates your intervention into the IAS and the very poor and unprofessional way in which it is being and has been managed and rolled out.

Please do not hesitate to contact the undersigned if further information is required.

Yours sincerely

~~Bob Neville~~
Assistant CEO

25 March 2015