



Committee Secretary  
House of Representatives Standing Committee on Indigenous Affairs  
PO Box 6021  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

23 January 2020

**RE: Pathways and participation opportunities for Indigenous Australians in employment and business inquiry**

To the Committee,

I am writing to provide a submission for the pathways and participation opportunities for Indigenous Australians in employment and business inquiry.

Tjanpi Desert Weavers is an award-winning, Indigenous governed and directed social enterprise of the Ngaanyatjarra, Pitjantjatjara and Yankunytjatjara Women's Council (NPYWC). For 25 years, Tjanpi (meaning 'wild grass') has empowered Aboriginal women across a 350,000 sqkm area of the tri-state region of NT, SA and WA to earn an income and remain in their communities on Country.

Tjanpi's submission to the Inquiry will address the following 'terms of reference':

- Employment pathways available to Indigenous Australians;
- Barriers to employment for Indigenous Australians, including access to employment and training; and
- The experience of successful enterprises initiated and owned by Indigenous Australians.

**Employment pathways available to Indigenous Australians**

In our 25 years of experience servicing this region we have observed very few culturally appropriate and meaningful employment pathways open to *Anangu* (Aboriginal) people, and, even fewer open to *Anangu minyma* (women).

When jobs are available we see that they are often unskilled and there can be diversity in the professional development, training, and supervision or mentoring afforded to employees. We also recognise that employment of Indigenous Australian across the NPY region is evolving and changing and casual observation may not recognise the shifting landscape and the nuance of responses and changes across a number of organisations.

One employment pathway that is available in the region and that has had a high level of successful engagement is the Indigenous Arts Worker program funded under the Indigenous Visual Arts Industry Support program (IVAIS). The funding provides the capacity for Indigenous owned and governed art centres across Australia to employ Indigenous arts workers, including Tjanpi. The funding provided by IVAIS has enabled Tjanpi to create three Arts and Culture Assistant (ACA) roles for Anangu women. In our experience, these roles have not only provided valuable employment opportunities for women in the region,

**Tjanpi Desert Weavers - NPY Women's Council**

**POSTAL** PO Box 8921, Alice Springs, NT, 0871 3 Wilkinson St, Alice Springs NT 0870

**Phone** 08 8958 2336 **Fax** 08 8958 2378 **Email** [tjanpi@npywc.org.au](mailto:tjanpi@npywc.org.au) **tjanpi.com.au**



Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara  
Yankunytjatjara  
Women's Council  
(Aboriginal Corporation)



but have increased our capacity to service the region. By increasing our servicing capacity, we have been able to support more artists to earn an income through their fibre art.

The ACA role within Tjanpi also departs from the industry norm that focuses Indigenous employment on unskilled positions. Instead ACAs are mentored and supported to take on a pivotal role in the operations of the enterprise, including purchasing artwork, conducting skills development and coordinating community visits. ACAs also regularly travel to Tjanpi's head office in Alice Springs to attend training and participate in operational meetings and planning. It has required additional resourcing to support a very intensive, hands-on approach to developing Anangu staff.

### **Barriers to employment for Indigenous Australians, including access to employment and training**

In Tjanpi's experience engaging Arts and Culture Assistants within our social enterprise, we have encountered a number of barriers to employment for Indigenous Australians. These include:

- An absence or lack of job readiness amongst a majority of Indigenous Australians in remote central Australian communities (e.g. workplace readiness, English literacy and numeracy, computer skills). This means, that even when employment opportunities become available, Indigenous Australians are not equipped with the education level, training, skills or confidence to engage with them, resulting in the recruitment of external, non-Indigenous employees.
- Absence or paucity of ready-to-access identity documents for Indigenous Australians to complete mandatory organisational checks (e.g. a driver's license or birth certificate to complete a Working with Children Check or criminal history check).
- A lack of resourcing and funding for businesses and organisations to provide the appropriate amount of support, training and mentoring to Indigenous Australians that they require to be a successful and long term employee.
- The geographic remoteness of communities and the absence of infrastructure (e.g. office or workshop spaces) to create employment or provide training and supervision.
- The extensive social and cultural obligations Indigenous Australians experience to care for and support large, extended families in multiple locations across a large geographic area, often requiring absences from the workplace for extended periods.
- The high levels of trauma amongst Indigenous Australians in the region and a lack of trauma-informed workplaces that enable them to thrive in a work environment.
- A lack of child-care facilities for working parents.

It is also our experience that these barriers to employment are not insurmountable, but require organisations and businesses to deploy innovative solutions informed by feedback from Indigenous communities. In recent years, Tjanpi and NPYWC have taken on this feedback and evolved our practices to increase successful engagement of Anangu employees. Some of our strategies have included:

- Prioritising Anangu employment within the enterprise and organisation.
- Providing high-levels of culturally appropriate support, training and mentoring to Indigenous staff working within the enterprise and organisation.
- Developing a strengths-based employment and performance framework that deploys personal strengths to aid empowerment and resilience.





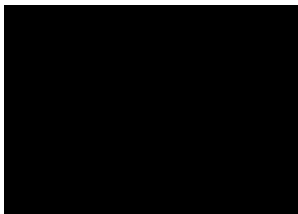
- Developing a trauma-informed workplace to support recovery.
- Providing flexible working conditions to support cultural maintenance and recognising the inherent value it that brings to an organisation and its employees.

### **The experience of successful enterprises initiated and owned by Indigenous Australians**

Tjanpi has demonstrated success in smashing through the impediments to Indigenous Australian employment. We have achieved this through two mechanisms. Firstly, as discussed above, through the engagement of ACAs within the enterprise, and, secondly, by enabling Anangu women to create their own self-employment and earn an income through selling their fibre art.

This is achieved with two Creative Development Officers and five ACAs purchasing artwork up-front from 400+ fibre artists from a small network of remote offices and by travelling out to 26 communities in our service region. The purchased work is then brought to Tjanpi's Alice Springs head office and retailed by an experienced Sales and Marketing team through our gallery, online store and a national network of accredited wholesalers. This model of operation enables women to work from home and remain on Country whilst supporting their extended families with payments from their artwork. Our data shows that artists can earn in excess of \$10,000 a year from artwork - a considerable addition to the average household income of \$24,000 p.a<sup>1</sup>.

Yours faithfully,



Michelle Young  
Manager  
Tjanpi Desert Weavers, NPY Women's Council

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<sup>1</sup> Anangu Pitjantjatjara SA median total income (excl. Government pensions and allowance) ABS, 2017

