

## **Building the capacity of individuals, families and communities**

### **Introduction**

5.1 This chapter will explore the final element of the terms of reference: strategies to assist Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders better manage the delivery of services within their communities. In particular, it examines strategies to build the capacities of:

community members to better support families, community organisations and representative councils so as to deliver the best outcomes for individuals, families and communities.

5.2 The preceding chapters each had an overarching theme. The theme for the government chapter was integration, for the Indigenous organisations chapter it was governance, and for this chapter it is empowerment. The Committee takes empowerment to involve the strengthening and support of individuals to enable them to address their needs and aspirations, and to increase their control over decisions affecting their own lives.

5.3 This chapter will address building the capacity of individuals, families and communities at a number of levels, starting with primary capacity building areas. This approach is based on the assumption that until certain basic requirements are met, greater capacity building undertakings will be largely ineffective. The chapter will look at ways Indigenous groups are successfully addressing and challenging issues in their communities.

- 5.4 The Committee wishes to acknowledge a number of underlying issues, including historical circumstances; the multifaceted, complex and entrenched nature of Indigenous disadvantage; the inter-related and overlapping nature of both the causes of Indigenous disadvantage, and possible measures to address Indigenous disadvantage; regional differences, and the differing policy options open to rural, remote and urban areas; and lastly, to acknowledge calls from the Indigenous community to take responsibility for, and ownership of, decision making and solutions.
- 5.5 This chapter is intended to give voice to many of the Indigenous Australians and representatives of non-government organisations who gave their time to the Committee to be heard.

### Setting the scene

- 5.6 Many submissions argued the importance of addressing underlying issues that affect Indigenous people's capacities, such as basic health, education and infrastructural issues. For example, the Centre of Aboriginal Economic Policy Research (CAEPR) argued that:

...[T]he issue of capacity development cannot be divorced from wider issues like the education, health, housing and employment status of Indigenous people...<sup>1</sup>

- 5.7 A number of submissions emphasised the abilities of Indigenous people to provide solutions to their own problems. For example, the Faculty of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies argued:

Indigenous people no longer want to be treated as a category of disadvantaged Australians who need more "passive" service delivery, but as distinct political communities with rights and responsibilities.<sup>2</sup>

- 5.8 Similarly, Arwarbukarl Cultural Resource Association told the Committee:

...Aboriginal people are probably the best at being experts on our own culture, who we are and how we interact with each other. We are the ones who are living it day to day and know how things are

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1 Professor Jon Altman, Centre of Aboriginal Economic Policy Research (CAEPR), Australian National University (ANU), Transcript (23.10.02), p. 22.

2 Faculty of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies and Centre for Indigenous Natural and Cultural Resource Management, Northern Territory University (NTU), Submission 27, p. 21.

working in our communities and what can be done to improve our situation in this society.<sup>3</sup>

- 5.9 The Fred Hollows Foundation contended that less time should be spent ‘inventing’ solutions, when the answers may already lie in community initiatives:

Whilst Aboriginal communities are more than well aware of their problems and can identify workable solutions, they are rarely given the support they actually need to put the solutions into effect... Supporting community initiatives reinforces community empowerment and engages community members in supporting their own people, rather than placing control outside the control of the community.<sup>4</sup>

- 5.10 Many submissions to the inquiry emphasised the importance of physical and social health and well-being for Indigenous people:

Capacity building at the individual and family level aims ultimately to ensure that people have the capacity... [that is] the health, well-being and the confidence, as well as access to decision making processes, to make informed decisions about issues which affect them.<sup>5</sup>

- 5.11 The complexity of the issues, the diversity of solutions and the importance of empowerment were emphasised to the Committee in many submissions, for example, Indigenous Business Australia told the Committee:

No one single issue is going to resolve or build capacity within communities; it is going to be a combination of strategies. I think that the underlying issue is that individuals, communities and family groups need to feel that they are empowered or going to be empowered to make decisions and that their lives are not going to be determined by service agencies or external forces.<sup>6</sup>

- 5.12 The stark contrasts in Australia were emphasised by the Fred Hollows Foundation:

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3 Mr Abie Wright, Arwarbukarl Cultural Resource Association (ACRA), Transcript (07.04.03), p. 556.

4 The Fred Hollows Foundation, Submission 36, p. 20.

5 Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS), Submission 10, p. 9.

6 Mr Ronald Morony, Indigenous Business Australia (IBA), Transcript (04.12.02), p. 304.

In a country which enjoys one of the highest standards of living and, with the exception of its Indigenous population, one of the highest life expectancies in the world, the harsh reality for all Indigenous communities is one of very poor health, short life expectancy, low education standards, poverty and very poor living conditions.<sup>7</sup>

- 5.13 The Committee agrees that until basic issues of dysfunction and disadvantage in Indigenous communities are addressed, greater capacity building efforts will remain largely ineffective. The following sections will canvass primary healthcare and early intervention, basic primary education, adequate housing, and basic access to justice, law and safety related services, going on to discuss employment and training.

## Primary healthcare and early intervention

- 5.14 The Committee notes the World Health Organization definition of health:

A state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.<sup>8</sup>

- 5.15 Indigenous understandings of health go a step further and have a community focus. The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Council defined health as:

Not just the physical well-being of the individual but the social, emotional, and cultural well-being of the whole community.<sup>9</sup>

- 5.16 The Committee received evidence on the multifaceted, interlinked nature of disadvantage. For example, one submission pointed to health research showing that unless people gained control over their lives, their health would not improve.<sup>10</sup> Similarly, one submission cited the National Aboriginal Health Strategy Working Party (1989) which stated:

It is not merely a matter of the provision of doctors, hospitals, medicines. Health to Aboriginal peoples is a matter of determining

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7 The Fred Hollows Foundation, Submission 36, p. 5.

8 World Health Organization, 1946, cited in Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), *The Health and Welfare of Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples 2001*, p. 3.

9 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Council (NATSIHC), 2001, cited in ABS, *The Health and Welfare of Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples 2001*, p. 3.

10 Central Australian Remote Health Development Services Ltd. (CARHDS), Submission 21, p. 2.

all aspects of their life including control over their physical environment, of dignity, of community self esteem, and of justice.<sup>11</sup>

## A coordinated approach to primary healthcare

5.17 The Tangentyere Council told the Committee:

... there are three parts to primary health care. There is the treating of illnesses, there is the prevention of illnesses and there is health promotion... In order to get an effective primary health care strategy going, you need to run those three concurrently.<sup>12</sup>

5.18 A Tangentyere Council member emphasised the importance of preventative measures, rather than curative programs, and highlighted the interconnected nature of issues impacting on health:

... [Tangentyere's] remote area night patrols are very much an injury prevention strategy that works upstream. I am very tired of seeing all the dollars go to the curative model and never the upstream models. It is prevention that we try to work on by having good housing and good environmental health. If you are working upstream, you are preventing illnesses. We know the statistics of Aboriginal people at the end curative model.<sup>13</sup>

5.19 The Committee received evidence from a small number of organisations promoting health through sports clubs. The Committee commends this lateral approach to health. Rumbalara Football/Netball Club told the Committee:

Nobody funds us to run a football club, but people fund us to run health promotions and those types of things... [The] Rumbalara Aboriginal Cooperative and the medical centre ... use the vehicle of the club to get access to the young people. They run [health] programs through that, and we support those programs.<sup>14</sup>

5.20 VACCHO emphasised to the Committee the importance of community-based, locally owned, culturally appropriate and adequately resourced primary healthcare facilities, arguing that:

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11 Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation Inc. (VACCHO), Submission 28, p. 2.

12 Mr William Tilmouth, Tangentyere Council, Transcript (25.09.03), p. 1293.

13 Mr William Tilmouth, Tangentyere Council, Transcript (25.09.03), p. 1292.

14 Mr Paul Briggs, First Nations Australian Credit Union, Rumbalara Football/Netball Club, Common Fate Endorsed Program, Transcript of discussion (17.02.03), p. 379.

The implementation of a community controlled and holistic model of health service provision is essential to improving health outcomes for Aboriginal people.<sup>15</sup>

## Aboriginal Community-Controlled Health Services

5.21 The Committee received evidence from several Aboriginal Community-Controlled Health Services (ACCHS). ACCHSs have been operating in Australia for over 25 years and have made a positive impact on the health and wellbeing of Indigenous people.<sup>16</sup> In 2001, there were over 120 ACCHS delivering culturally appropriate, holistic primary healthcare around Australia.<sup>17</sup> A member of the Aboriginal Health and Medical Research Council of New South Wales advised the Committee that:

The philosophy... with the medical services is that the local Aboriginal community controls their services. That then makes them culturally appropriate and they are able to best adapt to local Aboriginal community needs, with the flexibility and speed required. Most importantly, they are able to make Aboriginal health services accessible to the community.<sup>18</sup>

Some positive outcomes... are the improved health of Aboriginal communities in which they [ACCHS] deliver health services; a drastic reduction in hospital admission rates; early intervention programs, which improve health; programs such as immunisation, which are extremely successful at the moment; education, in terms of health; employment; and increased community morale. Empowering communities to deal with their own problems and make their own decisions within their own areas is extremely important to the restoration of Aboriginal health in this country...<sup>19</sup>

5.22 The witness also argued:

Aboriginal community-controlled health services have a proven track record for being stable and viable... The services have

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15 VACCHO, Submission 28, p. 2.

16 VACCHO, Submission 28, p. 3.

17 Ms Sandra Bailey, Aboriginal Health and Medical Research Council of New South Wales (AHMRCof NSW), Transcript (08.04.03), p. 646.

18 Ms Sandra Bailey, AHMRCof NSW, Transcript (08.04.03), p. 647.

19 Ms Sandra Bailey, AHMRCof NSW, Transcript (08.04.03), p. 647.

competent staff, effective corporate governance and financial accountability.<sup>20</sup>

5.23 Yet despite this success, the VACCHO noted that:

Although ACCHS provide an invaluable service to the Aboriginal community and play a vital role in the health and wellbeing [of Aboriginal people,] it is fair to say that the majority ACCHS are struggling through [the] burden of poor facilities and [a] general lack of proper resourcing.<sup>21</sup>

5.24 Many ACCHS have formed partnerships with State and Territory governments, building on the recommendations of the 1989 *National Aboriginal Health Strategy*. In New South Wales, for example, the ACCHS formed a partnership with the State health department and have an advisory role, representing the Aboriginal community on health issues.<sup>22</sup> The Committee was told:

The partnership is very important because it recognises Aboriginal community-controlled health services as an entity and as an equal partner. If we are going to fix Aboriginal health, we have to get on with the business and we have to do this together. If the public health system is delivering health services to Aboriginal people, it makes sense that they ask the Aboriginal people what is the best way to do it.<sup>23</sup>

5.25 The Committee notes the release of the *National Strategic Framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health: Framework for action by Governments* in July 2003, which builds on the work of the 1989 *National Aboriginal Health Strategy* (NAHS).<sup>24</sup> The document is intended to complement the NAHS, which remains a landmark document used extensively by health professionals today. The new framework for government action builds on the NAHS and addresses approaches within the contemporary policy environment and planning structure.<sup>25</sup>

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20 Ms Sandra Bailey, AHMRCof NSW, Transcript (08.04.03), p. 656.

21 VACCHO, Submission 28, p. 3.

22 Ms Sandra Bailey, AHMRCof NSW, Transcript (08.04.03), p. 651.

23 Ms Sandra Bailey, AHMRCof NSW, Transcript (08.04.03), p. 651.

24 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Council (NATSIHC), 2003, *National Strategic Framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health: Framework for action by Governments*, Canberra.

25 *ibid*, p. ii.

## Aboriginal Health Workers

- 5.26 An essential component of the Aboriginal Community-Controlled Health Services is Aboriginal Health Workers, as one witness argued:

... Aboriginal health workers... are the cornerstone of the Aboriginal medical services. They are crucial to providing the linkage between the health professionals—doctors, nurses and specialists—and the Aboriginal patient. They have a very important role in terms of bridging the cultural gap, which has been a barrier to accessing health services in the past.<sup>26</sup>

- 5.27 Central Australian Remote Health Development Services described the role of an Aboriginal Health Worker:

A health worker has defined roles in care, in dispensing of medication. They have certain tasks to do—very basic things—and then they refer the case to the registered nurse if they think they cannot handle the case or if there is a doctor on duty at that time they freely talk to the doctor about management of the case.<sup>27</sup>

- 5.28 The Committee heard that, though the role of Aboriginal Health Workers was originally intended to involve acting as a first point of contact talking to people in communities to promote good health, prevent illness and identify instances of the need for a doctor or nurse, this was not the reality. Rather, due to the shortage of Aboriginal Health Workers and other medical professionals, the role involved a much larger component of primary healthcare service delivery, rather than preventative health promotion.<sup>28</sup>

The reality is that that [original purpose] does not happen because we do not have many health workers out there. Therefore, they get involved in providing primary health care —sick care in the health centre—rather than going out to the community and doing the identifying, the promoting and the preventing, which is believed to be the job of a health worker.<sup>29</sup>

- 5.29 Early intervention is critically important, particularly in areas where education and advice can empower people and reduce the advancement

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26 Ms Sandra Bailey, AHMRCof NSW, Transcript (08.04.03), pp. 651-652.

27 Mrs Maryanne Amu, CARHDS, Transcript (25.09.03), p. 1262.

28 Mrs Maryanne Amu, CARHDS, Transcript (25.09.03), p. 1261.

29 Mrs Maryanne Amu, CARHDS, Transcript (25.09.03), p. 1261.



or effect of a disease. Diabetes is becoming a major problem for Indigenous Australians, and one area of primary intervention for diabetes is in the area of nutrition. A representative from Koori Diabetes Service Victoria told the Committee:

We asked them [Koori people] what were the main problems with diabetes management, and they said there were no Aboriginal nutritionists in the state, or virtually in Australia... [And so] we are going to train Aboriginal health workers to take another path—that is, to be nutritionists. They can then be implemented into their own medical services, or wherever they want to work, but the point is that we will have Aboriginal nutritionists working amongst Aboriginal people.<sup>30</sup>

## The cultural context

5.30 The Committee received evidence concerning the benefits of Indigenous people or other appropriately trained people, providing health services to Indigenous people, particularly highlighting the advantages of effective communication. Mr Richard Trudgen told the Committee:

... poor communication stops people receiving almost all news or knowledge from outside their language and cultural domain... It also includes what may well be life-saving information from health professionals. It stops them knowing what they are giving consent for, how to comply with medical instructions and how to intervene in their own health problems. In this way, poor communication directly impacts on high mortality rates.<sup>31</sup>

5.31 One witness conveyed a story from Richard Trudgen's book *Why Warriors Lie Down and Die*,<sup>32</sup> which emphasised problems that can arise when the language and worldview of a doctor and patient are different. In this case, the patient, a Yolŋu man, had had kidney problems for 13 years and was being diagnosed with an enlarged heart, requiring dialysis. He visited a specialist who diagnosed his condition, and yet:

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30 Mr Colin Mitchell, Koori Diabetes Service Victoria, Transcript of discussion (19.02.03), p. 509.

31 Aboriginal Resource & Development Services Inc., Submission 15, p. 2.

32 Mr Stuart McMillan, Aboriginal Resource and Development Services Inc., Transcript (27.11.02), p. 235. Trudgen, R., 2000, *Why Warriors Lie Down and Die: Towards an understanding of why the Aboriginal people of Arnhem Land face the greatest crisis in health and education since European contact*, Aboriginal Resources and Development Services Inc., Darwin, pp. 98-112.

... because David [the patient] repeated all that the specialist had said to him in rote fashion, the [nursing] sister had assumed that he understood. [The sister did not understand that] The Yolŋu people are an aural society and are clearly taught to repeat messages very accurately. Sometimes the message carrier will not even know the meaning of the message but will repeat the words accurately... [The] sister also said that David could ask his Aboriginal health worker relatives.... [but did not understand that, as] He was an older male—he could not ask questions of young females, even one that was a close relative.<sup>33</sup>

- 5.32 The story went on to note that the patient David still did not understand his condition, so Trudgen offered to accompany him to revisit the specialist and to translate the doctor's explanation in a way David could understand, both linguistically and conceptually. Thus:

After 13 years, a 30-minute consultation and 20 minutes of extra conversation had made a significant difference in David's level of understanding and his ability to do something about his health condition. Why had that happened? Firstly, he had asked the questions and received the answers in his own language. Secondly, the understanding had come through the world view and conceptual knowledge base which he had. It did not appear just like a white fella story to shut a black fella up.<sup>34</sup>

- 5.33 This example clearly shows the benefits of understanding both the underlying conceptual issues and the cultural protocols in order to achieve clear communication. Another witness told the Committee that:

We do not have enough [Aboriginal Health Workers]. We have very few men. A lot of Aboriginal men will not go to a woman.<sup>35</sup>

- 5.34 Again, this quote highlights a cultural protocol which mainstream agencies and service deliverers may not be conscious of, but which will fundamentally affect a program's potential to succeed.

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33 Trudgen, R. cited by Mr Stuart McMillan, Aboriginal Resource and Development Services Inc., Transcript (27.11.02), pp. 236-237.

34 Trudgen, R. cited by Mr Stuart McMillan, Aboriginal Resource and Development Services Inc., Transcript (27.11.02), p. 236.

35 Dr Paul-David Ryan, Apunipima Cape York Health Council, Transcript (07.07.03), p. 803.

## Linking health, literacy, training, education and health promotion

- 5.35 Northern Territory North Zone ATSIC Commissioner Hill told the Committee:

We believe you need to be healthy to be educated and you need to be educated to be healthy...<sup>36</sup>

- 5.36 Central Australian Remote Health Development Services (CARHDS) told the Committee that:

We [CARHDS] have been pushing very hard here the idea that literacy is a critical health issue. Self-management is a critical health issue... The term that has been used at our board level is that English is the language of negotiation.<sup>37</sup>

- 5.37 A witness from Apunipima Cape York Health Council spoke of the importance of raising the ‘personal wellbeing index’, explaining that improving health was not just about more professionals or about more money, but about education and early intervention:

We have a lot of young men suiciding. We are not going to stop Indigenous suicides by putting in more mental health professionals. We reduced cardiac issues, for example, in this country not by having more cardiologists but by health literacy—change of diet, more exercise, more awareness. The cardiologists help manage it better. We could put lots of shrinks in Cape York but it would not reduce suicide. But if we raise what I call the personal wellbeing index—that whole thing of a man or a woman being able to have employment and enjoy the benefits of family and of culture and of life across the spectrum—then we will reduce suicide.<sup>38</sup>

- 5.38 The Committee received evidence indicating that many Indigenous people did not use mainstream services when they were available due to fear or misunderstandings of the current hospital system.<sup>39</sup> One emphasised the need to engage hospital liaison officers:

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36 Commissioner Kim Hill, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC), Transcript (27.11.02), p. 210.

37 Ms Dorothy Lucardie, CARHDS, Transcript (25.09.03), p. 1260.

38 Dr Paul-David Ryan, Apunipima Cape York Health Council, Transcript (07.07.03), pp. 802-803.

39 Ms Jill Gallagher, VACCHO, Transcript of discussion (19.02.03), p. 490.

Hospital liaison officer positions are vital... They can engage in our community and inform people about accessing public hospitals to their full potential.<sup>40</sup>

- 5.39 Another witness articulated how a partnership between Rumbalara Aboriginal Cooperative and the local hospital involving an Aboriginal health worker undertaking liaison work, had had a major impact on pre and post natal care:

People would just present [to the hospital] to deliver their babies. There was no history or antenatal sort of stuff. Our [Aboriginal Health] worker has done a lot of work with the individuals and the hospital, as well, to improve those things. The worker has encouraged the hospital to be a little bit more supportive and to provide more culturally sensitive services. Antenatal and postnatal care is now conducted here at Rumbalara, and their [the hospital's] paediatrician and their obstetrician come out here. With teenage pregnancies, they are able to work with the younger mums and support them and their families through those times, and the Aboriginal worker provides that crucial link.<sup>41</sup>

- 5.40 The Committee sees this sort of empowering education as vitally important to encourage Indigenous people to use mainstream services and to learn what those services have to offer. This sort of health promotion can help break down barriers and encourage good health.

### **Training Aboriginal Health Workers**

- 5.41 Concerning the training of Aboriginal Health Workers, CARHDS informed the Committee that:

Literacy is a critical health issue for people to gain employment and to take on the role of Aboriginal health worker.<sup>42</sup>

- 5.42 Literacy can be challenging for prospective Aboriginal Health Workers when English is not their first language. CARHDS told the Committee:

There are very low literacy levels and, quite often, numeracy levels among senior people who take the Aboriginal health worker positions. You are looking at English as a foreign language. People

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40 Ms Jill Gallagher, VACCHO, Transcript of discussion (19.02.03), p. 490.

41 Mr Justin Mohamed, Rumbalara Aboriginal Cooperative, Transcript of discussion (17.02.03), p. 385.

42 Ms Dorothy Lucardie, CARHDS, Transcript (25.09.03), p. 1260.

who speak three or four different languages then try to gain English on top, and it is a culture which normally does not use literacy...<sup>43</sup>

- 5.43 In order to facilitate the training of Aboriginal Health Workers, CARHDS operate a system where the workers identify their training needs and then CARHDS deliver that service in a way that is acceptable to the workers:

The critical factor about that was that the Aboriginal people, the participants themselves, were in control of that learning and were identifying what they needed to learn. So it was not an external agency saying, "You need to learn these things to meet this qualification"; it was about the Aboriginal health workers, saying, "These are the things I need to learn about." And we [CARHDS] delivered according to that. So it is about who is driving what the learning outcomes are going to be.<sup>44</sup>

- 5.44 The Committee frequently heard that training for Aboriginal Health Workers is best undertaken *in situ*, that is, in a practical way in an environment the worker is comfortable and familiar with:

Aboriginal health workers need to work together with people who are in work practice on the ground. That is the best education. I do not want to see people going off into [learning] institutions....<sup>45</sup>

## Conclusions

- 5.45 English literacy and numeracy are crucial to empowering Indigenous people to be able to help themselves and to care for others in the health context.
- 5.46 Ongoing medical training for Aboriginal Health Workers is best provided *in situ*, in areas identified by the workers.

## A complementary health system

- 5.47 The Central Australian Aboriginal Congress stated that it, and Aboriginal Medical Services Alliance Northern Territory (AMSANT), should be viewed as part of the health system, not as something outside of it.<sup>46</sup>

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43 Ms Dorothy Lucardie, CARHDS, Transcript (25.09.03), p. 1260.

44 Ms Dorothy Lucardie, CARHDS, Transcript (25.09.03), p. 1267.

45 Dr John Bouilly, (private capacity), Transcript (23.09.03), p. 1257.

46 Ms Donna Ah Chee, Central Australian Aboriginal Congress, Transcript (25.09.03), p. 1277.

Congress highlighted that Aboriginal Medical Services are part of the overall complementary health system of Australia.<sup>47</sup>

5.48 The Committee also acknowledges the work of organisations such as CARHDS, which offers orientation programs for medical staff coming into Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations. The CARHDS program has several stages, involving information exchange to reduce the culture shock that often accompanies exposure to life in a remote Indigenous community; a personal support focus to prevent the likelihood of isolation; and introductions to relevant local agencies and staff.<sup>48</sup> These sorts of programs fill a specialist niche, and Aboriginal community-controlled organisations are well placed to undertake such cross cultural training, both with their own employees, and with those of mainstream agencies.

5.49 Koori Diabetes Service Victoria told the Committee how it fulfilled a function of training Aboriginal health workers, and providing cross-cultural advice to mainstream specialists:

We are designing programs where we will train up the [Aboriginal] health workers, so we are handing the power back to the health workers in their own communities... If we empower them and make sure they have a diabetes clinic in their own service then we will see a lot more Kooris accessing the services. In the cross-cultural context, next month we are going to Mildura to talk to GPs, specialists, endocrinologists and dieticians about how to work in with the Aboriginal community regarding diabetes.<sup>49</sup>

## Conclusions

5.50 Evidence presented to the Committee emphasised the multiple overlapping causes of ill-health and highlighted the need for a holistic approach to improving health outcomes. Education and enhancing communication were viewed as integral to this.

5.51 Health education and health promotion are vital to improving the health status of Indigenous people by allowing them to help themselves. The Committee commends the focus of many submissions on preventative healthcare and early intervention. Health promotion activities and

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47 Ms Donna Ah Chee, Central Australian Aboriginal Congress, Transcript (25.09.03), p. 1277.

48 Ms Dorothy Lucardie, CARHDS, Transcript (25.09.03), p. 1265.

49 Mr Colin Mitchell, Koori Diabetes Service Victoria, Transcript of discussion (19.02.03), p. 509.

facilitation positions such as those of Aboriginal Health Workers and Hospital Liaison Officers are invaluable in improving health outcomes for Indigenous people through encouraging access to health services.

- 5.52 Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services provide valuable, appropriate, effective health services to many Indigenous people, yet suffer from funding insecurity. The Committee commends partnerships between ACCHSs and Commonwealth, State and Territory governments and their health organisations, which enhance the effectiveness of, and increase communication between, organisations.
- 5.53 The Committee therefore commends efforts to improve health outcomes for Indigenous Australians, and, in particular, supports:
- initiatives focused on health education and early intervention that work in a preventative rather than curative way, particularly those working to enhance health for children and young people;
  - the recruitment of additional Indigenous Health Workers and Liaison Officers;
  - the resourcing of ACCHSs in an equivalent way to other health service providers;
  - the fostering of partnerships between ACCHSs, mainstream health services and government agencies, to share knowledge and resources, build support for the ACCHSs, and encourage the placement of health professionals in Indigenous communities; and
  - the co-location, where appropriate, of mainstream and Indigenous medical services in order to share resources and infrastructure.

## **Primary education, numeracy and literacy**

- 5.54 The Committee views education as of the utmost importance. Basic numeracy and literacy form a strong foundation on which empowerment rests, and they are essential for banking, using services, understanding funding applications, providing services, gaining employment, and enterprise development.
- 5.55 The Committee received considerable evidence addressing the importance of education, particularly basic numeracy and literacy; why education is failing many Indigenous students; and how elements of the way education

is designed and delivered could be developed to be more relevant and beneficial to Indigenous people.

## Setting the context

5.56 The Committee would like to acknowledge the National Indigenous English Literacy and Numeracy Strategy (NIELNS), which aims to achieve English literacy and numeracy for Indigenous students at levels comparable to those achieved by other young Australians. NIELNS focuses on six key elements: achieving attendance; overcoming hearing, health and nutrition problems; pre-schooling experiences; getting good teachers; using the best teaching methods; and measuring success, achieving accountability.<sup>50</sup> The Supporting Statement from Indigenous Australians endorsing the NIELNS strategy states:

Our people have the right to a good education. Our children need the skills, experiences and qualifications to be able to choose their futures. Our communities need young people coming through with the education and confidence to be effective leaders. We need young people who can be advocates for our people, able to take their place in Australian society and business and still keep their culture strong.<sup>51</sup>

5.57 Many Indigenous people highlighted the importance of education as a pathway to employment. A member of the Palm Island Community Justice Group told the Committee:

Education is the key to getting our black doctors and our black lawyers; education is the key to having our black politicians. Numeracy and literacy is a priority for us.<sup>52</sup>

5.58 Indigenous Business Australia (IBA) also characterised education as the building block to achieving employment and economic development.<sup>53</sup> Yet Professor John Lester told the Committee that we have reached a crisis point in school attendance:

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50 Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST), *National Indigenous English Literacy and Numeracy Strategy*, <<http://www.dest.gov.au/schools/indigenous/nielns.htm>> (accessed 10.05.04).

51 *ibid*

52 Councillor Deniece Geia, Palm Island Aboriginal Council, Transcript (08.07.03), p. 816.

53 Mr Ronald Morony, IBA, Transcript (04.12.02), p. 299.



The biggest issue that I think we face is that our students just are not engaged in classrooms.<sup>54</sup>

5.59 Author of the independent review of Indigenous education in the Northern Territory, *Learning Lessons*, Mr Bob Collins told the Committee:

... every Australian, irrespective of their ethnic background, needs as a minimum year 7 literacy and numeracy. That is the last year of primary school. You have no hope of having any degree of control over you own life if you have not got that minimum standard. It does not matter who you are or what your background is.<sup>55</sup>

5.60 The Committee agrees that education is vitally important, particularly primary literacy and numeracy as basic building blocks to further education and the ability to function in Australian society. The Committee acknowledges that education must engage people and be meaningful in order to improve attendance, uptake and outcomes. The following sections will explore arguments for making education more relevant to Indigenous Australians.

## Linking culture, language and education

5.61 The interrelated issues of language, culture and self-esteem were frequently brought to the Committee's attention in relation to education. A teacher from a remote community school told the Committee:

I think any student who feels very confident in themselves and has a very clear understanding of their self-identity is naturally going to bring those skills into other subject areas. If they feel good about themselves, they are going to feel good about everything else they are doing.<sup>56</sup>

5.62 Similarly, Reconciliation Australia's 2003 report *Reconciliation: Together we're doing it* stated:

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54 Professor John Lester, Umulliko Indigenous Higher Education Research Centre, University of Newcastle, Transcript (07.04.03), p. 566.

55 The Hon. Bob Collins, (private capacity), Transcript (27.11.02), p. 167.

56 Mrs Ingrid Walkey, Strelly Community School, Transcript (06.08.03), p. 976.

...a strong sense of who you are and how you feel about yourself, your culture and your place in society affects how you behave and how you take responsibility for solving your own problems.<sup>57</sup>

## Language

- 5.63 Although many government-based submissions emphasised the need for English language acquisition, many Indigenous people emphasised the need for the teaching and retention of both traditional languages and English:

Language is important to our children. They have to learn both ways: our language and English.<sup>58</sup>

- 5.64 Mr Richard Trudgen emphasised the importance of understanding how to communicate:

... miscommunication is occurring on both sides... That is not the fault of the teachers, doctors, sisters and support staff who go to Indigenous communities. It is not the fault of the Indigenous people. In a sense it is the fault of a society that is not approaching the transfer of knowledge in an intellectual way and not using good theory to say that if you need to understand something you probably need to understand it in your first language, which you think and construct knowledge in.<sup>59</sup>

- 5.65 Trudgen went on to argue that:

The argument is clearly that the best acquisition of English occurs when you teach as long as you possibly can in the first language. The literature is complete—it is irrefutable—in that the longer you teach in their first language, the better the acquisition of English is going to be.<sup>60</sup>

- 5.66 Mr Bob Collins told the Committee:

... there are no kids in classrooms in Australia that face a bigger challenge than an Aboriginal kid in a remote community learning

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57 Reconciliation Australia, 2003, *Reconciliation: Together we're doing it: 2003 Reconciliation report*, Canberra, p. 2

58 Mr Monty Hale, Nomads Charitable and Educational Foundation, Transcript (06.08.03), p. 964.

59 Mr Richard Trudgen, Aboriginal Resources and Development Services Inc., Transcript (27.11.02), p. 238.

60 Mr Stuart McMillan, Aboriginal Resource and Development Services Inc., Transcript (27.11.02), p. 241.

English. You cannot get, in my experience, two cultures that are more dissimilar in their world views than the Western culture we belong to and traditional Aboriginal culture... In an Aboriginal community, one of the very few places where standard Australian English is routinely spoken is the school. It is not spoken in the community outside the school gate... If you do not go to school very often—the only place in the community where standard Australian English is spoken—your chances of acquiring good English are pretty grim. English needs to be taught as a foreign language in Aboriginal communities, not as a second language.<sup>61</sup>

5.67 The Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs (DIMIA) told the Committee:

For a school teacher whose job is to impart literacy and numeracy skills to a student, if that student does not have the basic capacity to communicate in ... English..., then the relationship is doomed from the start.<sup>62</sup>

5.68 However, DIMIA emphasised to the Committee that:

All communication has to be adapted to its audience in order to communicate.<sup>63</sup>

5.69 Some schools do teach traditional languages. A teacher from Strelly Community School told the Committee:

... I think it is highly important that we continue to teach Nyungmarta [language] in the school for the students' benefits in maintaining their cultural identity, maintaining the language—keeping its importance—and valuing where these students are coming from: their community, beliefs and culture. It is an incredible self-esteem aspect of their education as well, I believe—self-identity.<sup>64</sup>

5.70 In some schools, cultural camps are used as a vehicle for traditional language acquisition or retention. A representative from Nomads Charitable and Educational Foundation told the Committee:

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61 The Hon. Bob Collins, (private capacity), Transcript (27.11.02), pp. 168-169.

62 Mr Stephen Oxley, Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs (DIMIA), Transcript (04.06.03), p. 694.

63 Mr Peter Vaughan, DIMIA, Transcript (04.06.03), p. 687.

64 Mrs Ingrid Walkey, Strelly Community School, Transcript (06.08.03), p. 975.

Initially, we started with a very heavy bilingual component. That has been cut back over the years, simply because the emphasis has been on numeracy and literacy. We have had to do it. Many of the bilingual aspects are carried out in camps. The people go out and live traditionally for a week at a time and Nyangumarta is the main language spoken at those camps.<sup>65</sup>

5.71 The importance of language was emphasised to the Committee throughout the evidence, in terms of schooling and education, cultural pride and self-esteem, and the global importance of language retention.

5.72 The Committee therefore commends efforts to teach and retain traditional languages, and thus enhance the self-identity of students, and supports the teaching of English as a second language in schools where English is not the community's first language.

### **Culture and history**

5.73 Much evidence emphasised the importance of Indigenous children knowing and understanding their history and their culture. One witness told the Committee:

If we do not know who we are and where we have come from, we do not know where we are going.<sup>66</sup>

5.74 Arwarbukarl Cultural Resource Association (ACRA) told the Committee:

We think that identity has a lot to do with our kids and has a lot to do with the problems they are facing today. A lot of our kids do not know who they are. They know they are Aboriginal, but that is the extent of what they know. They do not know the traditional ways. They do not know their language. They do not know how to go out and gather bush tucker. They do not know protocols. They do not know how to interact with a lot of the elders in their community... We established Arwarbukarl, with the help of Yarnteen, because a lot of our people are not aware of our traditional history...<sup>67</sup>

5.75 Mr Patrick Dodson, of the Lingiari Foundation, emphasised the importance of Aboriginal people learning about their spirituality as a basis

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65 Mr Raymond Butler, Nomads Charitable and Educational Foundation, Transcript (06.08.03), p. 960.

66 Mr Abie Wright, ACRA, Transcript (07.04.03), p. 556.

67 Mr Abie Wright, ACRA, Transcript (07.04.03), p. 555.

for ethical and moral behaviour, and personal and community growth and development:

The foundations for behaviour are often imparted in that same process of learning the spirituality of your country and of your roles and functions within an Aboriginal society.<sup>68</sup>

- 5.76 Reconciliation Australia's submission contained a quote from the National Indigenous Men's Issues Conference by Professor Mick Dodson, which stated:

We need to work on creating an education system that is more responsive to our boys and young men. Better education, qualifications and skill will aid our self-determination and care for our community. Of course that alone is not enough, we have to play our roles as fathers or uncles or cousins or big brothers telling our young men and boys what it means to be accepted as a proper decent functional Aboriginal man.<sup>69</sup>

### Valuing education

- 5.77 Mr Patrick Dodson spoke about the importance of developing a culture around valuing education:

You have to start at the pre-primary age group, basically, and create a sense of what the learning environment is about... Gradually you build on the desire to learn. I think that is an important ingredient. If you do not get a sense that education is about a pursuit for knowledge, if it is simply about discipline and compliance to the disciplinary structures, then you are never going to go anywhere in the school system.<sup>70</sup>

- 5.78 Another component in the valuing of education is the link between education and employment, with one witness telling the Committee:

... when talking to a lot of the young [Indigenous] people today what they say to me is, "Why should we bother? All we can look forward to is CDEP." We have to be able to provide a hope for

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68 Mr Patrick Dodson, Lingiari Foundation, Transcript (08.08.03), p. 1100.

69 Professor Mick Dodson, cited in Reconciliation Australia, Submission 55, p. 13.

70 Mr Patrick Dodson, Lingiari Foundation, Transcript (08.08.03), p. 1103.

those young people and say, “You have a future beyond CDEP”...<sup>71</sup>

- 5.79 A witness from the Catholic Education Office of Western Australia told the Committee:

I believe that we will really value education when we Aboriginal people control some of the schooling, in terms of having teachers, principals and things... You go to Beagle Bay and you see those two [Aboriginal] teachers who are there now. Those kids do not just aspire to go through school; their aspiration is to study when they finish school... I think our valuing of education is growing where we have got good exposure, but I think we have to do better for people in some of our remote communities.<sup>72</sup>

## Attendance

- 5.80 The need to address underlying quality of life issues and to make education more relevant was emphasised by Mr Bob Collins:

... I think the major impediments still remain making education relevant to Aboriginal people. In terms of where Aboriginal people prioritise things, with most Aboriginal people that I know education is not high up on the list. Getting through the day is the challenge.<sup>73</sup>

- 5.81 A witness in Lombadina told the Committee that some parents lacked the will to send their children to school:

Nowadays, the kids here, if they do not want to go school, they do not. There is no parent discipline I suppose, in that sense, to make their kids go to school... You cannot just look at what is here now, you have to look behind the history and at why people are like that. There are big issues from way back why parents are like that... There is a breakdown in the families in my generation where they have lost their parenting skills.<sup>74</sup>

- 5.82 The Dubbo Aboriginal Community Working Party also linked education to parents, and suggested the need for families to be supported:
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71 Mr Ronald Morony, IBA, Transcript (04.12.02), p. 304.

72 Mr Norman Brahim, Catholic Education Office of Western Australia, Transcript (05.08.03), p. 957.

73 The Hon. Bob Collins, (private capacity), Transcript (27.11.02), p. 169.

74 Mr Peter Sibosado, Djarindjin Aboriginal Corporation, Transcript (07.08.03), p. 1029.

... the support mechanisms need to be put into families, because our teenage mums and dads are becoming younger and younger and there is nothing there to support them or educate them on the importance of education. If they have not had it then they are not going to pass it on to their kids, so that is a big issue.<sup>75</sup>

5.83 The same witness went on to indicate that the structure of schools and the capacity of teachers contributed to lack of attendance and interest:

... the structure of school is not for our kids: being stuck in classrooms all day and having teachers who do not really understand them or know how to support them... [The teachers] have not got the level of expertise...<sup>76</sup>

5.84 The Committee received evidence on a number of innovative programs aimed to encourage attendance and therefore improve educational outcomes. These are discussed in the following paragraphs.

#### **Gumala Mirnuwarni (coming together to learn)**

5.85 The Gumala Mirnuwarni (coming together to learn) program in the Pilbara (WA), has been in place since 1997, originally arising from the community's desire to see their children participating in schools.<sup>77</sup> It has involved collaboration and partnership between children, parents, schools, State and Commonwealth education authorities, three resource partners and a philanthropic organisation, in a program designed to improve educational outcomes for local Indigenous students.<sup>78</sup> A representative of Rio Tinto outlined one element of the project:

It is a personal commitment contract. The document is, "I, the child, agree to go along to school and I, the family member, agree to support my child going to school." So there is a reciprocity contract, I suppose, rather than a formal legal document... If the child does not participate in school, then they are not welcome at the after-school program, the special program, that has been set up

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75 Mrs Shirley Wilson, Dubbo Aboriginal Community Working Party, Transcript (07.11.03), p. 1433.

76 Mrs Shirley Wilson, Dubbo Aboriginal Community Working Party, Transcript (07.11.03), p. 1433.

77 Ms Janina Gawler, Rio Tinto Ltd., Transcript of discussion (19.02.03), p. 470.

78 Reconciliation Australia, Submission 55, p. 11.

for them. So there is an expectation that their participation in school will lead to enhanced benefits.<sup>79</sup>

5.86 The results of Gumala Mirnuwarni have been extremely successful, with the initiative outlining its key strategies and history as follows:

- Education Enrichment Centres were established in Karratha and Roebourne, as places where students can study after school, with supervision and support. Homework and individual tutoring was undertaken. The centres were set up with educational resources including computers with internet access. Attendance was open to any student, not just project students.
- The Aboriginal Tutorial Assistance Scheme (ATAS) has been accessed via a bulk funding arrangement with DEST.
- Each student was assigned a school-based mentor, who meets regularly with the student to monitor academic progress and general well-being.
- Extra curricular activities could be arranged to develop confidence and abilities. These included visits to industry and education facilities, cultural awareness camps and self-esteem and learning workshops.
- Cultural awareness workshops were run for school staff.
- Family support for students.
- The project adopted a low profile with no publicity.
- The project sought to engage a full range of community and government organisations in working together.<sup>80</sup>

5.87 DEST told the Committee that:

The government have recognised how successful the Gumala Mirnuwarni project was and we have taken it on board. We have not actually replicated it, but used it as a basis for work that was done under the Australians Working Together banner. Working Together for Indigenous Youth has rolled out the idea of compacts around the country, where you have the important mix of industry and local or regional community interests, or agencies working together with family, with schools, with industry and key partners. We acknowledge the importance of that.<sup>81</sup>

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79 Ms Janina Gawler, Rio Tinto Ltd., Transcript of discussion (19.02.03), p. 474.

80 DEST, *Learning for all: Gumala Mirnuwarni – Coming together to learn*, <<http://www.dest.gov.au/archive/iae/analysis/learning/1/gumala.htm>> (accessed 12.05.04).

81 Ms Kate Brodie, DEST, Transcript (18.06.03), p. 712.



- 5.88 DIMIA highlighted the importance of innovative approaches to improving school attendance which have been initiated by some Indigenous communities:

... we need to be encouraging innovation. I think there are a lot of novel or new ideas being tried in Indigenous communities in order to get better engagement with the education system. It is things like the no school, no pool thing.<sup>82</sup>

### No School, No Pool

- 5.89 A report<sup>83</sup> investigating the benefits of salt water swimming pools in remote Aboriginal communities in Western Australia discussed the *No School, No Pool* concept.
- 5.90 After the publication of reports suggesting that Aboriginal children may benefit from reductions in pyoderma (known locally as 'skin sores') and otitis media (glue ear) through access to salt water swimming pools, the Western Australian Government built 25 metre, part shaded, salt water pools in three remote Aboriginal communities.<sup>84</sup> In order to encourage school attendance, entry to the pool was allowed on the production of a pass earned through school attendance, therefore, no school, no pool.
- 5.91 Swimming in salt water provides the equivalent of a nasal and ear washout and cleans the skin. The trials showed a number of positive health and social benefits including a reduction in pyoderma and glue ear, increased school attendance, children learning to swim (reducing rates of drowning), and a reduction in petty crime. The report concluded that:

The community's enthusiasm for the intervention and support for the study have been key to the success of the project... The costs involved [in the provision of salt water swimming pools] will be a small price to pay for the reduction in severe chronic disease and improved health, educational, and social outcomes in this seriously disadvantaged segment of Australian society.<sup>85</sup>

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82 Mr Stephen Oxley, DIMIA, Transcript (04.06.03), p. 686.

83 Lehmann, D., Tennant, M., Silva, D., McAullay, D., Lannigan, F., Coates, H., and Stanley, F., 2003, *Benefits of swimming pools in two remote Aboriginal communities in Western Australia: intervention study*, PubMed Central, BMJ Publishing Group.

84 *ibid*

85 *ibid*

## Conclusions

- 5.92 The Committee commends creative and innovative approaches to encouraging school attendance, particularly when there are positive spin offs in other areas, such as social and health improvements.

## Pathways, early intervention and the utilisation of role models

- 5.93 The Committee received evidence on the importance of providing role models and of creating pathways for young Indigenous people in education, and beyond education.

## Yamuloong Association

- 5.94 A witness from Yamuloong Association described its school-to-work program to the Committee, in which it encourages Aboriginal young people to stay in school, to go on to further education, or to go directly into employment:

... we currently have relationships with 22 different high schools and we run what we call school-to-work orientation programs that are fully focused around providing our Aboriginal kids with identity, motivation, self-esteem and career opportunities.<sup>86</sup>

- 5.95 One of the ways in which Yamuloong builds self-esteem and motivates Indigenous youth is to provide role models:

We put in front of the kids Aboriginal people who are currently going through university obtaining a degree or who have completed some formal training at university. The reason we do that is to promote role models. We continually promote role models within that program by introducing the kids to people who may have failed at school but have succeeded after school with university and so on.<sup>87</sup>

- 5.96 Yamuloong's approach is preventative, working with students right through from primary school to secondary school:

We have taken the approach that, rather than trying to fix the problem when they have left school, we will attempt to fix the problem whilst they are in school.<sup>88</sup>

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86 Mr Sean Gordon, Yamuloong Association Inc., Transcript (07.04.03), pp. 553-554.

87 Mr Sean Gordon, Yamuloong Association Inc., Transcript (07.04.03), p. 563.

88 Mr Sean Gordon, Yamuloong Association Inc., Transcript (07.04.03), p. 554.

- 5.97 Yamuloong highlighted the importance of encouraging confidence in young people:

We need to equip Aboriginal people as best we can to go out there and live in society and actually interact and coexist with pride in themselves and their culture...<sup>89</sup>

- 5.98 The Yamuloong Association told the Committee that its workplace English language and literacy program had had excellent results:

We put 10 young Aboriginal boys into that [workplace English language and literacy] program who were aged between 16 and 21. The 10 boys in the program were all around the numeracy and literacy level of year 3 or year 4, which was astonishing. I have two of those young blokes working here with me. What we achieved with those guys was to move them from year 3 or year 4 levels up to year 6. The change in their attitude, motivation, confidence and self-esteem, just in getting up three grades, was unbelievable.<sup>90</sup>

#### Cape York Youth Network

- 5.99 The Cape York Youth Network coordinator told the Committee that they have developed a youth strategy to encourage learning, training, working, and saving, by getting young people involved in CDEP to abide by four mandatory requirements in order to receive their CDEP pay:

First, they have to be in some form of literacy and numeracy training, whether it be in school or on an adult literacy and numeracy program being run in Aurukun. Secondly, they have to be in some form of real training such as training in small motors, light engineering, digital network activities, IT communication, libraries and so on—training that is real. Another mandatory requirement is that they participate in youth enterprise activities... [such as in the] Aurukun youth enterprise DVD store... The fourth requirement involves getting each young person who has signed up on CDEP to put away \$15 of their CDEP and put it into an account to provide a youth resource bank.<sup>91</sup>

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89 Mr Abie Wright, ACRA, Transcript (07.04.03), p. 562.

90 Mr Sean Gordon, Yamuloong Association Inc., Transcript (07.04.03), p. 563.

91 Mr Donald De Busch, Cape York Youth Network, Cape York Partnerships (CYP), Transcript (07.07.03), p. 774.

- 5.100 This innovative ‘carrot and stick approach’<sup>92</sup> is helping to develop, encourage, educate and train young people.

**Moree Aboriginal Employment Strategy**

- 5.101 The Committee also commends the work of the Aboriginal Employment Strategy (AES) in Moree, facilitated by Mrs Cathy Duncan and Mr Dick Estens, which focuses on employment through mentoring, working from a business perspective. They told the Committee:

We are a company that looks at the words “pride”, “passion” and “commitment” and instils them back into our Indigenous communities. Aboriginal people are very proud people, but for many years there has not been a lot for them to be proud about... We try to look at what our people want to be and take them there in reality.<sup>93</sup>

- 5.102 The AES is about working in partnership with the wider community and in reuniting factions within the Indigenous community to work together toward the same goal:

We are an organisation that is in partnership, and we are only as good as our partners. As Indigenous people, we are only as good as the non-Aboriginal people that stand with us and walk with us. We tend to work together, learn together and live a little bit together. We realise that in society we all live in different worlds... I think in Moree we have been successful in creating what I like to call modern-day corroborees. It is about getting Aboriginal people to start to work together, because we have a lot of factions.<sup>94</sup>

- 5.103 The AES takes a pragmatic view of education:

We have put together programs that have looked at school to work transitions—not warm and fluffy government ones but ones that are real, such as for a kid who was not coping in school and needed to be taken out in year 8 and given two days a week in a workplace. Now that young gentleman is in the third year of a panel-beating apprenticeship. I do not believe any kid needs to be taken out of a school but, at the end of day, schools are white institutions which were not created for Indigenous kids. We have

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92 Mr Donald De Busch, Cape York Youth Network, CYP, Transcript (07.07.03), p. 774.

93 Mrs Cathy Duncan, Aboriginal Employment Strategy Ltd. (AES), Transcript (07.11.03), p. 1384.

94 Mrs Cathy Duncan, AES, Transcript (07.11.03), p. 1385.

to look at the structures that are around Indigenous people and, if they are falling through them, look for avenues out.<sup>95</sup>

- 5.104 The innovative approach of the AES involves long-term, sustainable development:

We are about building sustainable jobs for our people for life. We are about leaving lasting relationships in communities that build for their children and for the future.<sup>96</sup>

### **Education: not just for children and young people**

- 5.105 The Committee received many submissions indicating that it is not just the education of children that is important, but, in many cases, the education of the whole community. A member of Ardyaloon Incorporated told the Committee that:

I think education is at the basis of a lot of the issues, too, and I do not mean education as in necessarily just our children; I am talking about the community as a whole.<sup>97</sup>

- 5.106 The Catholic Education Office of Western Australia told the Committee:

In our schools, our focus is to try and develop community through the development of children. In that whole process, we engage in lots of activities which try to empower families and Aboriginal people within the community to help us in that task.<sup>98</sup>

### **St Pauls Island Council**

- 5.107 St Pauls Island Council in the Torres Strait told the Committee that the Council takes a supportive and consultative approach to the community's training and education needs, and plans for and invests in the community's education by putting money aside.<sup>99</sup> The school children also come in to the community council twice a year so they are involved in the process, and the council members act as mentors.<sup>100</sup>

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95 Mrs Cathy Duncan, AES, Transcript (07.11.03), p. 1384.

96 Mrs Cathy Duncan, AES, Transcript (07.11.03), p. 1386.

97 Ms Gayle Cook, Ardyaloon Inc., Transcript (07.08.03), p. 1060.

98 Mr Norman Brahim, Catholic Education Office of Western Australia, Transcript (05.08.03), p. 946.

99 Mrs Suzanne Hodgson, St Pauls Island Council, Transcript (06.11.02), p. 93.

100 Mrs Suzanne Hodgson, St Pauls Island Council, Transcript (06.11.02), p. 93.

- 5.108 The Council also invests in adult education, as the community felt under-skilled and wanted to address the problem. The community saw tradespeople and professionals coming in, working, then taking their skills and money away with them. They did not want this to happen, so enlisted the Council to help them skill up their own people to form an economic base in the community.<sup>101</sup> St Pauls Island Council emphasised to the Committee the importance of their community members learning from people outside the community and gaining new skills:

... we said: what is the point of our people being qualified and only ever working here? We want to be able to pass on skills that people can use anywhere in the world, not just in the Torres Strait. So we encourage everybody to go away for 12 months and learn from other people as well and see how things are done differently down south—learn something, bring it back. What that does is expand their experience and they have got more chance of helping the people up here.<sup>102</sup>

#### Flexible education structures

- 5.109 In course of the inquiry, the Committee was made aware of other initiatives to enhance the education opportunities for Indigenous young people. Examples included the initiatives being undertaken in Balga Senior High School in Western Australia (particularly the Child Care Centre), and the pilot of the Core of Life program being undertaken in conjunction with the Talking Realities program at Whyalla in South Australia. These initiatives are innovative approaches to encouraging attendance through recognising barriers to school attendance, such as teen pregnancy. The Balga initiative involves a crèche on the school grounds and support for young mothers to continue their education, while the Whyalla program involves life education and the encouragement of young people to take responsibility for, and to understand their actions.

#### Conclusions

- 5.110 The Committee was heartened by such innovative approaches to building capacity and empowering people, particularly the successful use of role models and supportive mentoring to inspire and encourage people into work or education. Many submissions focused on the lack of pathways for young Indigenous people. The type of approaches mentioned above help
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101 Mrs Suzanne Hodgson, St Pauls Island Council, Transcript (06.11.02), p. 87.

102 Mrs Suzanne Hodgson, St Pauls Island Council, Transcript (06.11.03), p. 93.

identify those pathways and support Indigenous people to achieve in the areas of education and employment.

### The capacity of teachers

- 5.111 Concern over the ability of teachers to relate to, understand and teach Indigenous students was highlighted in a number of submissions. One witness told the Committee that the capacity of the teacher has an impact on the children's interest and attendance:

It depends on the types of teachers... We have had teachers before who are very good and they really care for the kids. You see it in the way they encourage the kids to learn and also help them to help themselves do all sorts of things.<sup>103</sup>

- 5.112 Another witness told the Committee that Indigenous communities can have difficulties in attracting teaching staff:

The image of dysfunctional communities that has been created by the press means that we are getting fewer and fewer applications for teachers. In the early days, we were overwhelmed with them, but over the last two years we have found it very difficult to get suitable teachers.<sup>104</sup>

- 5.113 The Catholic Education Office of Western Australia told the Committee that it employs and provides professional development and training to 120 Aboriginal teaching assistants across WA.<sup>105</sup> A major focus of the Office is on encouraging Aboriginal teachers to return to their local communities once they are trained, highlighting the importance of Aboriginal teachers as role models to Aboriginal children:

At the moment, for example, in Beagle Bay we have two Aboriginal teachers who come from that community, who have done their training and are now contributing to that community in a real and significant way. If you are talking about capacity building, I cannot think of better examples.<sup>106</sup>

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103 Mr Andrew Sampi, Djarindjin Aboriginal Corporation, Transcript (07.08.03), p. 1029.

104 Mr Raymond Butler, Nomads Charitable and Educational Foundation, Transcript (06.08.03), p. 961.

105 Mr Anthony Giglia, Catholic Education Office of WA, Transcript (05.08.03), p. 950.

106 Mr Anthony Giglia, Catholic Education Office of WA, Transcript (05.08.03), pp. 950-951.

5.114 DEST brought to the Committee's attention the work of Adrian Brahim, ATSIC Kalgoorlie Regional Manager, who was preparing teachers to work in remote Indigenous communities by:

... presenting a video and saying to teachers and the universities in Perth, "Before you come out, have a look at this video. Have a look at the environment, the language, the social and alcohol issues et cetera. Understand where you are going and that you need to change your views of the world".<sup>107</sup>

5.115 In relation to remote communities and teachers, Bob Collins told the Committee that a lot of cross-cultural education was 'completely useless', as the way it was delivered could often have detrimental effects.<sup>108</sup> He explained that one young teacher had received complex cross-cultural education on skin relationships and information on what was and was not appropriate behaviour, but that:

By the time she had finished it [the course], she was terrified to talk to an Aboriginal or look at one...<sup>109</sup>

5.116 However, Mr Collins explained that Indigenous communities themselves could deliver useful cross-cultural orientation. He went on to explain that a community in the Tiwi Islands had produced its own resource material:

... the community has produced its own resource material... which includes a significant component of language. A lot of common names and common conversational... is given to teachers at the time they are recruited to go to the Tiwi Islands. It is friendly material for them because they are teachers. They are used to reading books. By the time they get to the island, they are in a position to ask informed questions. Local people are then employed and paid—resources are available to do this—to come into the school to talk to the recruits about that community... I think that is the way it should be delivered. It should be delivered in the communities.<sup>110</sup>

5.117 In relation the development of teaching methods, the South Australian Government told the Committee that it is building up research by requiring that Aboriginal education teachers conduct action research

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107 Mr Shane Williams, DEST, Transcript (18.06.03), p. 707.

108 The Hon. Bob Collins, (private capacity), Transcript (27.11.02), p. 173.

109 The Hon. Bob Collins, (private capacity), Transcript (27.11.02), p. 173.

110 The Hon. Bob Collins, (private capacity), Transcript (27.11.02), p. 173.



(research while doing).<sup>111</sup> An important element of this is sharing information about what works for Indigenous students with teachers and other schools:

What works for different schools may be slightly different but they can be adapted. We insist that Aboriginal education teachers initiate action research and, with the Aboriginal Education Unit's support, that these people write up their projects showing baseline data improvements or, if there have not been improvements, why there have not been improvements. We publish that so that it can be shared. We also hold conferences for those teachers to share that information.<sup>112</sup>

- 5.118 The witness went on to state that in South Australia, all schools where there are 20 or more Aboriginal students have an Aboriginal education worker, who is an Aboriginal person, and that there are approximately 70 Aboriginal teachers at the school level and 13 at the preschool level.<sup>113</sup>
- 5.119 The Committee commends the gathering of research on establishing methods to achieve better educational outcomes for Indigenous students.

### Special needs students

- 5.120 The Committee received some evidence on the rising number of Indigenous children requiring 'special needs' teaching as a result of poor hearing or deafness from glue ear and learning difficulties from foetal alcohol syndrome. A witness from Palm Island told the Committee:

A lot of children in our schools suffer with ADD and a lot of children have alcohol syndrome. There is no real support there for them to learn.<sup>114</sup>

- 5.121 A representative of Apunipima Cape York Health Council explained that:

We know that children affected by foetal alcohol syndrome find it difficult to socialise. It is a bit like ADD: they do not react in the same way to external stimulus as children not affected by that

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111 Ms Jillian Miller, Aboriginal Education Unit, Department of Further Education, Employment, Science and Technology, South Australian Government, Transcript (23.09.03), p. 1180.

112 Ms Jillian Miller, Aboriginal Education Unit, Department of Further Education, Employment, Science and Technology, SA Government, Transcript (23.09.03), p. 1180.

113 Ms Jillian Miller, Aboriginal Education Unit, Department of Further Education, Employment, Science and Technology, SA Government, Transcript (23.09.03), p. 1181.

114 Councillor Delana Foster, Palm Island Aboriginal Council, Transcript (08.07.03), p. 816.

syndrome, they need different routines of feeding and schooling, they have poor concentration in school. They really need intensive assistance at community level right through their cycle.<sup>115</sup>

5.122 The Committee acknowledges the increase in the incidence of health and environmental problems affecting learning. The increasing incidence of deafness and foetal alcohol syndrome are of great concern. Adding to these illnesses are the cumulative affects of reduced energy levels and developmental progress from poor nutrition, and the negative effects of alcohol and substance misuse on school attendance and learning abilities generally. The young age of the Indigenous population and the expected population increases will only exacerbate these problems unless appropriate and sustainable health and community related capacity building can take place.

5.123 Many Indigenous organisations recognise the current issues and are working with early intervention and education programs. For example, in recognition of the causes and effects of foetal alcohol syndrome, Apunipima Cape York Health Council is implementing a prevention program:

... the intervention strategy that Apunipima is working on now is to ensure that girls from the age of 12 or 13 onwards, just as they are reaching puberty, understand the impacts of drinking on their future children, to ensure that mothers intending to become pregnant—and fathers too—understand the impacts of drinking on children and to ensure that there are community support networks for children who are affected. So it is a program that can work at a number of levels and has great potential.<sup>116</sup>

### **Community ownership of and involvement in schools**

5.124 The research undertaken as part of the Harvard Project on American Indian Economic Development indicated that Indigenous community involvement in schools positively affected attendance rates, which improved literacy and numeracy. Additionally, Indigenous community involvement led to a feeling that they were *their* schools, rather than

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115 Ms Jacqueline Lavis, Apunipima Cape York Health Council, Transcript (07.07.03), p. 765.

116 Ms Jacqueline Lavis, Apunipima Cape York Health Council, Transcript (07.07.03), p. 765.

someone else's schools imposed on them.<sup>117</sup> A member of the Harvard Team went on to tell the Committee:

When our people get involved in the curriculum and on our own school boards in our own communities, the community begins to benefit. The children have a reason to go to school, to stay in school. They are taught in their own culture, they are taught in their own language... but they are also taught about the larger society as well. That has not happened everywhere, but where it occurs, changes are made—in literacy and in lower welfare dependency.<sup>118</sup>

5.125 A member of the Palm Island Aboriginal Council told the Committee:

It is about community ownership. Give us the school and we will run it. We will own it and we will put in our own programs and we will set up our own disciplinary measures.<sup>119</sup>

5.126 Professor Lester, who was the first Aboriginal professor of Aboriginal studies in New South Wales and the first Aboriginal principal of a TAFE college in Australia, told the Committee:

... there could be no more important area than getting communities to come up with their own answers. We need to have the capacity to work with communities in that regard. Education should be delivered flexibly enough so that it is responsive to community needs, not dictatorial of what people in ivory university towers perceive is needed in communities... That is the way we have to go: let the community articulate its needs and let education support and develop it from that point on.<sup>120</sup>

### Indigenous education advisory bodies

5.127 The Committee received evidence from the Victorian Aboriginal Education Association (VAEA), which is a State-wide Koori-controlled community organisation consisting of representatives from early childhood through to tertiary education, from all over Victoria. It is the

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117 Professor Stephen Cornell, Udall Center for Studies in Public Policy, University of Arizona, Harvard Project on American Indian Economic Development, Transcript (03.11.03), p. 1369.

118 Mr Neil Sterritt, Sterritt Consulting Ltd., Harvard Project on American Indian Economic Development, Transcript (03.11.03), p. 1369.

119 Councillor Deneice Geia, Palm Island Aboriginal Council, Transcript (08.07.03), p. 816.

120 Professor John Lester, Umulliko Indigenous Higher Education Research Centre, University of Newcastle, Transcript (07.04.03), p. 572.

peak advisory body to the State government in relation to education policy and strategic programming.<sup>121</sup>

- 5.128 The VAEA believes it may have been the first Koori community representative group to form a partnership with a State government in relation to education.<sup>122</sup> The partnership document is referred to as Yalca, and the VAEA have renewed it with successive governments since its inception in 1990.<sup>123</sup> The initial focus of the partnership document was the provision of services and the development of those services to be more amenable to, and accepting and welcoming of, Koori students. The partnership has evolved and is now focussed on outcomes and on the student. Mr Bamblett told the Committee:

We are [now] saying, “Let’s focus on the student; let’s get the student to the table.” You can have the best programs in the world but, if you do not have the students sitting at the desk in the learning environment, they are not going to learn.<sup>124</sup>

- 5.129 The VAEA also have a strong focus on community engagement and involvement, and on encouraging community participation. The involvement of community representatives has grown in the last two decades, from five to 27 communities.<sup>125</sup>

- 5.130 The VAEA argued the importance of making learning environments welcoming to Koori people, but also emphasised the importance of changing parents’ attitudes to school and attendance:

We [VAEA] want to put in place education centres so we can change the pattern, so we can change parents’ attitudes. We want to work with parents and say, “It is important that your children attend school every day. They have to be there for the literacy and numeracy lessons. They can’t come late because schools are structured in a particular way and there’s a lesson your children have to learn.” We work in the early childhood area and that is where we have to start. We have to start at the very beginning to ensure that our Koori kids are getting through and completing

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121 Mrs Geraldine Atkinson, Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Inc. (VAEA), Transcript of discussion (19.02.03), p. 495.

122 Mr Lionel Bamblett, VAEA, Transcript of discussion (19.02.03), p. 498.

123 Mrs Geraldine Atkinson, VAEA, Transcript of discussion (19.02.03), p. 496.

124 Mr Lionel Bamblett, VAEA, Transcript of discussion (19.02.03), p. 498.

125 Mr Lionel Bamblett, VAEA, Transcript of discussion (19.02.03), p. 498.

VCE, or even getting to year 9 and being able to read and write and become numerate.<sup>126</sup>

5.131 The Committee commends such a collaborative approach and the pooling of knowledge and cooperation to achieve shared goals. The Committee is heartened to see such a State-wide Koori body working toward improving educational outcomes. The Committee also commends the VAEA in working with parents to encourage an approach that values education.

5.132 A witness from Victoria indicated to the Committee that, though significant developments have been made in support and advisory services (such as the VAEA), these valuable resources were not being accessed by many schools:

We keep talking about partnerships. There does not seem to be that partnership. We have regional Koori education development officers, we have the local Indigenous education groups, but schools ignore their existence. They think that they know how to deal with these issues, and they do not.<sup>127</sup>

### Conclusions on education

5.133 Though educational outcomes are still unacceptably low for Indigenous Australians, the Committee recognises that improvements are being made through the efforts of Indigenous organisations, Indigenous communities and Indigenous people themselves, as well as through the efforts of government, particularly with collaboration and partnerships with Indigenous groups.

5.134 The Committee acknowledges that improving across the board educational outcomes will take time, and that capacity building and empowering approaches can produce outstanding results through encouraging and supporting people to take responsibility and control over their own futures.

5.135 Action needs to be undertaken at a variety of levels to achieve short term results and to prepare for longer-term achievements. Contributions to improving educational outcomes will vary depending on the situation, particularly in differences between urban, regional or remote settings.

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126 Mrs Geraldine Atkinson, VAEA, Transcript of discussion (19.02.03), p. 501.

127 Mrs Linda Haynes, South West Institute of TAFE, Transcript of discussion (18.02.03), p. 404.

- 5.136 The Committee supports efforts to invest in Indigenous-led organisations working to empower and support Indigenous students and create pathways from school to work, or school to further study.

## Banking services and financial literacy

- 5.137 The matter of Indigenous people having access to, and understanding of, banking services in rural and remote areas is of concern to the Committee. There is much evidence to suggest that a lack of understanding of financial matters is detrimental to the ability of some Indigenous people to save money, to ration income, to navigate banking related technology, to avoid exploitation by dishonest operators, to access capital, and to function as full members in the economy. As one submission noted:

Individuals without access to banking services are... at an economic disadvantage. Without the ability to save, individuals are denied a range of economic opportunities and, in particular, the opportunity to break out of the “poverty trap”.<sup>128</sup>

- 5.138 The Committee received evidence highlighting the difficulties that arise when people do not understand how the banking system works, such as checking an account balance multiple times without realising this will incur large fees. Capacity needs to be built both at the level of the individual and at the level of banking institutions, both of which can be enhanced with the help of governments.

## The banking industry

- 5.139 Indigenous Business Australia (IBA) emphasised the lack of banking services in many remote communities, and went on to tell the Committee:

When we talked to the banks some of them were very surprised at the information that we provided to them of the difficulties that are confronted in remote communities.<sup>129</sup>

- 5.140 It is of concern to the Committee that some banks were not aware of the issues faced by people in rural and remote parts of Australia. There is a substantial body of knowledge relating to Indigenous banking issues in Australia. This can be seen through inquiries such as the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Corporations and Financial Services, 2004 report

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128 Stegman, cited in FaCS, Submission 46, p. 23.

129 Mr Morony, IBA, Transcript (04.12.02), p. 299.

*Money Matters in the Bush: Inquiry into the Level of Banking and Financial Services in Rural, Regional and Remote Areas of Australia*; through workshops such as that undertaken in 2002 by Reconciliation Australia;<sup>130</sup> through research by organisations such as ANU's Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research and papers such as *Banking on Indigenous communities: Issues, options, and Australian and international best practice*<sup>131</sup> produced in 2002; through information produced by banks such as Westpac and its Regional Community Partnerships section; and through publications produced by Indigenous organisations such as Cape York Partnerships. Thus, it appears to the Committee that it is not a lack of information, but a lack of will and commitment by key players.

5.141 In relation to the way governments interact with banking institutions, Mr Joseph Elu of IBA told the Committee:

... in Canada and America they treat banking and financial services as an essential service to the community where regulators put down certain rules that apply and if you do not meet those rules you lose charter. In Australia, governments and/or regulators treat banks as if they are untouchables... [The] banking board of Canada took it on themselves to ... [produce] a curriculum that is written by the banks and put into the education system to teach kids on financial and banking services. And, of course, the ABA here say they have no money to do such things.<sup>132</sup>

5.142 The Committee notes the Canadian banking situation with interest and believes the concept merits further investigation. The Committee supports the recommendation made by the Joint Committee on Corporations and Financial Services, recommending that the Australian Bankers' Association examine the work being undertaken by the Canadian Bankers' Association, with a view to adopting similar practices.<sup>133</sup> However, the Committee believes this should be undertaken in partnership with the Commonwealth Government and with Indigenous input.

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130 Reconciliation Australia Banking Workshop, held in Sydney 2002.

131 See <<http://www.anu.edu.au/caepr/Publications/WP/CAEPRWP18.pdf>>

132 Mr Joseph Elu, IBA, Transcript (04.12.02), p. 297.

133 Parliamentary Joint Committee on Corporations and Financial Services, 2004, *Money Matters in the Bush: Inquiry into the Level of Banking and Financial Services in Rural, Regional and Remote Areas of Australia*, Recommendation 26, p. 253 – The Committee recommends that the banking industry take a far more active and constructive role in improving the level of financial literacy for all Australians but particularly among Australia's Indigenous people. It recommends that the ABA examine closely the work being undertaken in Canada by the Canadian Bankers' Association with a view to adopting similar practices.

- 5.143 The Committee believes the Commonwealth Government needs to take a leadership role in ensuring the banking industry is aware of the unique challenges faced by Indigenous people in remote and rural areas, and that banking organisations work with governments and communities in addressing such issues. A successful model of such a tripartite partnership involves Westpac, FaCS and Cape York Partnerships, previously discussed in chapter four.

### Support services

- 5.144 The Committee cannot emphasise enough that it is not just the provision of services to rural and remote Indigenous communities that is essential, but also the accompaniment of such banking services with education and support. For example, in relation to the banking program in Tangentyere, FaCS told the Committee:

... because they have banking officers there to train people in terms of banking, initially the loss of cards, replacement of cards and that sort of thing was pretty high. But over the life of the project people became used to using cards and using the ATM, which we had installed by Westpac at Tangentyere. It was a safe environment, and they could call on a banking support officer for help to use it. People can choose to take the card or to store it at Tangentyere, and indications are that it is actually working well.<sup>134</sup>

- 5.145 Indigenous Business Australia also emphasised the importance of support and education services:

... what we are trying to build in is not only putting in facilities—just putting in an ATM in remote communities is not the answer—but coupling that with education and support; and we looked at a couple of examples. The one being run by Tangentyere Council and the Traditional Credit Union out at Darwin are providing that level of support.<sup>135</sup>

- 5.146 Both young people and adults may require financial literacy training, which indicates the need to introduce an understanding of financial matters in school environments, together with teaching adults as they access services. Literacy and numeracy in general are much lower for Indigenous than for non-Indigenous Australians, and this contributes to

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134 Mr Barry Smith, FaCS, Transcript (25.06.03), p. 735.

135 Mr Ronald Morony, IBA, Transcript (04.12.02), p. 300.



problems surrounding financial literacy. The need for training involves knowledge of basic banking, and once that foundation is established, the need for more complex financial training will arise for some people, particularly in relation to business and enterprise development, as one witness told the Committee:

Aboriginal people, when going into business, do not have a history of business. They do not have generations in business, like the Greek community or the Vietnamese community—when those cultures migrate here, they have that history and they also have families to support them [in business]. Our communities do not have that. They are starting up on their own. A lot of them do not have the assets to be able to go to a bank and say, “We want to borrow money.” ... It is a basic lack of business understanding... We do not have Aboriginal people in business or with a history of being in business. We have a few successful models that we can look at, like Balarinji, but not much apart from that.<sup>136</sup>

## Strategies to build financial literacy

5.147 The need to assist some Indigenous people to understand financial matters is clear, as is the need for governments, communities and banks to work together. The Committee received evidence from a number of innovative programs and partnerships designed to empower Indigenous people to operate in the economy, such as:

- the Traditional Credit Union, which was established in 1994 to provide culturally appropriate financial services to Aboriginal people living in remote communities in the Northern Territory, particularly those disadvantaged by a lack of existing services;<sup>137</sup>
- the First Nations Credit Union, which was established in 1999 as a division of Australian National Credit Union, to assist Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples take better control of their finances and economic futures by establishing an independent Indigenous Credit Union owned and operated by Indigenous people;<sup>138</sup>

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136 Ms Esmail Manahan, Transcript of discussion (18.02.03), p. 401.

137 For more information see Traditional Credit Union Limited, <<http://www.tcu.com.au/home/default.asp>> (accessed 02.06.04)

138 For more information see First Nations Australian Credit Union, <<http://www.australiancu.com/firstnations/home/default.asp>> (accessed 02.06.04)

- the Family Income Management initiative, which is a partnership between Westpac, FaCS and Cape York Partnerships to assist families share their resources and build an understanding of responsibility which will re-empower families and individuals through the prioritised and planned use of financial resources;<sup>139</sup>
- the *Money Story* initiative, a financial literacy program, which is used by Indigenous organisations across Northern Australia to improve people's abilities to participate in decision making and management;<sup>140</sup> and
- the Centrepay system provided by Centrelink, where recipients of eligible payments from Centrelink nominate amounts to pay for services such as rent or power, which are automatically transacted, free of charge.<sup>141</sup>

## Conclusions

- 5.148 Access to basic banking services and an elementary knowledge of how banking works are fundamental to improving the quality of life of Indigenous people.
- 5.149 There are many innovative initiatives working to address the lack of banking services in some communities and the lack of financial knowledge of some groups, though much more could be done to address such issues. The Committee hopes to see a greater commitment by the banking industry, working together with governments and Indigenous communities.

## Crime, safety and justice

- 5.150 This section will cover crime, safety and justice issues, exploring sentencing models, preventative measures, community justice groups, night patrols and partnerships with police. The Committee received

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139 For more information see Cape York Partnerships, Family Income Management, <<http://www.capeyorkpartnerships.com/project/families/fim.htm>> (accessed 02.06.04)

140 For more information see Friends of the Fred Hollows Foundation: Hugh Lovesy, <[http://www.hollows.org/resources/profiles/hugh\\_lovesy.htm](http://www.hollows.org/resources/profiles/hugh_lovesy.htm)> (accessed 02.06.04)

141 For more information see Centrelink, Centrepay, <<http://www.centrelink.gov.au/internet/internet.nsf/services/centrepay.htm>> (accessed 02.06.04)

evidence of a variety of approaches to increasing community safety, reducing crime and making justice processes more effective and relevant. A separate section specifically addressing family violence and alcohol and substance misuse follows.

## Cooperative justice models

- 5.151 The Committee received evidence on various models of cooperative justice, such as the Koori Court in Victoria and Circle Sentencing in New South Wales. These are not the only examples of such cooperative approaches, but they are some on which the Committee received evidence.

### The Koori Court, Shepparton Magistrates' Court

- 5.152 The Committee received evidence on the implementation of the Victorian Aboriginal Justice Agreement, which arose from a long period of consultation with Aboriginal community groups and successive Victorian Governments to produce a series of reforms, including the trial of a Koori Court system.<sup>142</sup> The first task of the Justice Agreement included the development of a Liaison Officer role to provide magistrates with insights about Koori offenders, to link offenders and their communities and connections for the purposes of court and sentencing, to ensure that the Court continued to engage in cultural education, and to ensure the flow of information between local communities, the chief magistrate and the executive team.<sup>143</sup>
- 5.153 The second task included the development of an Aboriginal bail justices training program, involving the recruitment and training of Aboriginal people to fill bail justice positions. The Senior Magistrate told the Committee:
- The bail justices program was part of a recognition that Aboriginal people were not in the justice system in positions of power or in positions where they were having their knowledge recognised, and also their knowledge of the manner in which their communities could be assisting in bail processes.<sup>144</sup>
- 5.154 The third task of the Agreement was the development of the Koori Court, created under the *Magistrates Court (Koori Court) Act 2002*, to sentence

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142 Dr Kathryn Auty, Victorian Magistrates' Court, Transcript of discussion (17.02.03), p. 346.

143 Dr Kathryn Auty, Victorian Magistrates' Court, Transcript of discussion (17.02.03), p. 346.

144 Dr Kathryn Auty, Victorian Magistrates' Court, Transcript of discussion (17.02.03), p. 347.

Koori defendants who have pleaded guilty. The Koori Courts are part of a two-year pilot program. The Shepparton Koori Court began in 2002, and the trial was extended to Broadmeadows in 2003. The Koori Court system was based on the Nunga Court model in South Australia. Queensland also operates an Aboriginal Court, the Murri Court in Brisbane.

- 5.155 The Koori Court involves tailoring sentences to the cultural needs of Koori offenders in order to address concerns arising from the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody and to reduce re-offending rates. The Court process is more informal than other Courts, and involves the Magistrate, a Koori Elder or Respected Person, the Aboriginal Justice Worker, and Koori defendants and their families, all of whom can contribute during the court hearing.<sup>145</sup> The Koori Justice Officer emphasised the importance of the involvement of Koori Elders and Respected Persons in the Court:

... the elders and respected persons play a role in laying down the law and what the community code of conduct is... It is good having a magistrate who is able to hand down sentences and also speak about what the law is which we live under[,] but then our elders and respected persons can also speak about the cultural laws and how they are linked.<sup>146</sup>

- 5.156 The Senior Magistrate told the Committee of the importance of affording respect to Indigenous Elders and Respected Persons:

So in terms of capacity building... we think that what we are doing is ensuring that the respect that people have previously had afforded to them in their communities is carried in through the doors of the courts.<sup>147</sup>

- 5.157 The Magistrate went on to emphasise the significance of actively promoting the accessibility of the Koori Court in Shepparton:

That [community spirit and accessibility] simply cannot be underestimated. By having Aboriginal people work in the courts we have effectively stripped it of its white veneer... In building

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145 The Magistrates' Court of Victoria, *What is Koori Court?*  
<<http://www.magistratescourt.vic.gov.au/CA256CD30010D864/page/Specialist+Court+Jurisdictions-Koori+Court?OpenDocument&1=60-Specialist+Court+Jurisdictions~&2=20-Koori+Court~&3=->> (accessed 21.05.04).

146 Mr Daniel Briggs, Koori Court Division, Shepparton Magistrates' Court, Transcript of discussion (17.02.03), pp. 355-356.

147 Dr Kathryn Auty, Victorian Magistrates' Court, Transcript of discussion (17.02.03), p. 349.

capacity for Aboriginal people and justice in Shepparton the answer is to have the door open and your ear open as well, and that is what we are trying to do.<sup>148</sup>

- 5.158 The Committee notes the March 2004 announcement of the intention to create a Children's Koori Court to address juvenile over-representation in the justice system.

### Circle Sentencing

- 5.159 The Committee received some evidence on the Circle Sentencing trial in New South Wales. At the time of hearing evidence, Circle Sentencing in NSW involved a trial in Nowra. One witness told the Committee:

It is not a separate Koori court; it is part of the existing court. When someone is going to be sentenced, the whole court adjourns out to somewhere where everyone sits down in a circle and talks about it—people from the community, the elders, the magistrate, representatives from the police, the offender, and his or her family. It takes all day to do one sentence, so it is very resource intensive.<sup>149</sup>

- 5.160 It was argued that the outcomes of this approach were better than sentencing Indigenous people through the conventional court system, both in terms of compliance with community service and periodic detention orders, and in terms of the community feeling that justice had been served. However, the model was criticised for being resource intensive.<sup>150</sup>

### Youth conferencing

- 5.161 A similar approach to the conference style of Circle Sentencing had been developed in NSW, relating to the *Young Offenders Act 1997*. One witness told the Committee:

... [The process] involves conferences which are not quite like circle sentencing but on a vaguely similar model where you involve community members, the young offender and their family members or support people, and the victim. The feedback from

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148 Dr Kathryn Auty, Victorian Magistrates' Court, Transcript of discussion (17.02.03), p. 354.

149 Mr Richard Wilson, Sydney Regional Aboriginal Corporation Legal Service, Transcript (08.04.03), p. 641.

150 Mr Richard Wilson, Sydney Regional Aboriginal Corporation Legal Service, Transcript (08.04.03), p. 641.

our clients is that having to face their victims is much harder than going to court and being told by the magistrate not to do it again or even being locked up for a short period of time. I think the police still see it as a softer option, ironically, when our clients see it as a harder option. That is having some impact in terms of letting young people know the results of their actions... [But] It is something that perhaps is underutilized, because it involves the police in seeing it has a hard option.<sup>151</sup>

- 5.162 The evidence suggests that the perpetrator seeing the implications of their actions and being shamed by their community can work as a stronger deterrent than impersonal punishments such as incarceration. Measures to prevent further offending, such as supporting young people to find work or participate in education and training activities are commendable.

### Conclusions

- 5.163 The Committee considers that preventative and supporting approaches to justice will contribute to reducing the overwhelmingly high incidence of Indigenous incarceration. Though such measures may at first seem resource intensive, if the result is a reduction in repeat offending, then the initial costs will result in savings to both the criminal justice system and society in general over the long term.
- 5.164 The acknowledgement of tradition and custom, the involvement of elders, and the inclusion of the offender's family and community members, have been shown to be effective, particularly with an approach that acknowledges and discourages wrongdoing, while at the same time offering support and encouragement to change the offender's behaviour.
- 5.165 The Committee commends the Koori Court and Circle Sentencing models, while also acknowledging the work of other cooperative justice models throughout Australia.

### Community responses to crime and safety

- 5.166 The Committee received evidence from communities that were addressing crime in positive ways, such as through the development of community policing initiatives, called Aboriginal Community Patrols, Night Patrols,

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151 Mr Richard Wilson, Sydney Regional Aboriginal Corporation Legal Service, Transcript (08.04.03), p. 642.

Street Patrols, Bare Foot Patrols, or Mobile Assistance Patrols, depending on locality, and the development of Community Justice Groups.

- 5.167 The Western Aranda Rel-aka Aboriginal Corporation explained to the Committee that it was working to build the capacity, pride and respect of their community:

We talk about the past, the present and the future. We talk about how the old people used to look after the land before, how they were strong with law and culture. We are trying to bring that to the present now, to our children now, to work towards our future so they can be strong like the elders, looking after their land and culture and be responsible and respectful. That is what the committee works for.<sup>152</sup>

- 5.168 In relation to their committee focussing on family violence, the Western Aranda Rel-aka Aboriginal Corporation told the Committee:

We have perpetrators on our committee. We have victims on our committee. Everybody says, "Why do you have people like that?" We wanted them on the committee so they can see the wrongs that they are doing and that hurting their people is not tolerated anymore. We speak openly about it. We have people sitting there that lost many, many people. And that is when I can refer to the sad stories, why we get together and talk about our own people. And we embarrass our own people: "You were like this. You were a woman basher. Now you are a committee member." It is good. So we kind of put them down and we praise them. We show them where they used to be. Nobody is perfect. We have all got our own mistakes, our own children. So we use that. We do not just go and say, "You are bad. You did this and that." No, we say, "You were bad but now you're coming a long way to be good."<sup>153</sup>

- 5.169 Many witnesses to the inquiry explained to the Committee that the will exists in many communities to address crime and violence. A member of the Tangentyere Council told the Committee:

The women [here] are a driving force in regard to having a safe community. If they want a safe community, they will stand up and

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152 Mrs Alison Hunt, Western Aranda Rel-Aka Aboriginal Corporation, Transcript (25.09.03), p. 1329.

153 Mrs Alison Hunt, Western Aranda Rel-Aka Aboriginal Corporation, Transcript (25.09.03), p. 1334.

they will make it safe, such is the force of some of the grandmothers.<sup>154</sup>

- 5.170 Tangentyere Council told the Committee of a program it ran that was designed to reduce repeat offending relating to driving licences:

... we are part of a drink-driving licence thing in the jail. About 60-odd per cent of the Aboriginal population are in there either because they have not got a licence or for a drink-driving offence. So what we have done is work very closely with IAD [Institute for Aboriginal Development] and the prison officials to set up a driving school in the prison that gives people their licences before they are released. A lot of those people have never had a licence before. It would be the first time that they have had a licence and they may value it a lot more. So we are hoping that that will reduce the amount of people going to jail for those offences.<sup>155</sup>

- 5.171 Many Indigenous groups have set up committees and councils to address crime and safety issues in their communities. These range from formal Justice Councils, to men's, women's and youth groups.

- 5.172 The Queensland Government told the Committee about the legislative changes it had instituted to provide statutory power to community justice groups:

The amendment to the Community Services (Aborigines) Act [QLD] provides, for [the] first time, statutory backing and legislative support for community justice groups. We are confident that those sorts of alternative governance mechanisms are absolutely critical to Aboriginal communities... The community justice groups are particularly important in providing, revitalising and re-energising Indigenous law in both of its forms—law and lore. It is a key pillar in terms of restoring justice in communities by applying the first principle of justice—that is, it should be administered by your peers. So, for the first time, community justice groups will be recognised in legislation. Ten groups on the mainland have now been submitted to our minister to be processed through into statutory regulation.<sup>156</sup>

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154 Mr William Tilmouth, Tangentyere Council, Transcript (25.09.03), p. 1303.

155 Mr William Tilmouth, Tangentyere Council, Transcript (25.09.03), pp. 1299-1300.

156 Mr Tony Dreise, Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy, Queensland Government, Transcript (09.07.03), p. 858.



5.173 The Committee is heartened to see Indigenous groups taking responsibility for addressing crime and safety issues in their communities, and commends State and Territory governments that are supporting and working with such groups. A number of submissions highlighted the personal danger members of such justice related groups may face from community opposition:

It is not always easy... for people such as community justice group members on the ground, living in the community. It takes a lot of courage for them to be involved in these things...<sup>157</sup>

5.174 The Committee acknowledges the strength of people trying to address such complex and demanding issues.

#### Cross-cultural training for police

5.175 A number of Indigenous organisations indicated the development of partnerships with local police. These partnerships took a number of forms, with one common theme being communities providing training for local police, to help them understand Indigenous perspectives and the particular issues and intricacies of a particular community. For example, the Rumbalara Aboriginal Cooperative informed the Committee:

Next week for two days we have cross-cultural training with the police. Ten local policemen—it is compulsory for them—are going to spend time at Barmah, where the main family groups here originated from. They are coming over here for the day to do some cross-cultural training with the police, giving them a little bit of knowledge about the local community and not just the text book stuff. It will give them a little bit more face-to-face and hands-on experience.<sup>158</sup>

5.176 A witness from the Victorian Aboriginal Community Services Association told the Committee that it undertook cross-cultural training for the judiciary in Victoria:

We have had them go away for the weekend and stay at the one place. They have been able to have the sort of program where they are exposed, if you like, to the stories from Aboriginal people, the things that are there and the things that they need to be aware of

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157 Ms Barbara Flick, Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy, Queensland Government, Transcript (09.07.03), p. 873.

158 Mr Justin Mohamed, Rumbalara Aboriginal Corporation, Transcript of discussion (17.02.03), pp. 384-385.

when Aboriginal people front them. It has borne some good fruit. We have made some good friends out of it, and there are people who have worked pretty well in terms of the Koori Court and other things.<sup>159</sup>

- 5.177 The Committee supports the exchange of information that forms part of such cross-cultural training exercises, and the building of networks and relationships that form a foundation for working together towards a shared goal.

#### Legal services

- 5.178 The Committee received evidence concerning differential funding received by mainstream service providers in comparison to Aboriginal community controlled organisations:

...we [the Sydney Regional Aboriginal Corporation Legal Service] are... a community controlled organisation—that is, controlled by members of the Aboriginal community through our board—and we provide services very similar to those of the Legal Aid Commission but the resourcing we get per staff member would be nothing like what the mainstream service gets per head of staff. So the onus is always on us to do things very cheaply. Obviously, it is our objective to not compromise the service we provide. What we are getting at is that we are striving to provide a very high standard of service but we are not resourced per staff member, or per matter dealt with, in the same terms as the mainstream service—which is not to suggest we want to become part of the Legal Aid Commission. I do not think we would be effective if we lost our community control.<sup>160</sup>

- 5.179 The Sydney Regional Aboriginal Corporation Legal Service also told the Committee that it received a flow of clients coming over from mainstream service providers, increasing its client base each year, but that it did not believe this was accounted for in funding formulas. The organisation acknowledged how much it relied on the dedication of its staff, but that the current level of under-resourcing was unsustainable.<sup>161</sup>
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159 Mr Alfred Bamblett, Victorian Aboriginal Community Services Association Ltd, Transcript of discussion (19.02.03), p. 505.

160 Mr Ralph Scott, Sydney Regional Aboriginal Corporation Legal Service, Transcript (08.04.03), p. 640.

161 Mr Ralph Scott, Sydney Regional Aboriginal Corporation Legal Service, Transcript (08.04.03), p. 640.

- 5.180 This point replicates that made in previous chapters of the report, where Indigenous organisations were not recognised or rewarded for doing well, and were in fact sometimes disadvantaged for doing well by having a greater strain on already limited resources.
- 5.181 The Committee notes the current inquiry by the Joint Committee of Public Accounts and Audit into Indigenous Law and Justice (as advertised in April 2004),<sup>162</sup> and the Government's announcement of proposed reforms to enhance the competitiveness of Indigenous legal aid tenders.<sup>163</sup>

## Family violence

- 5.182 The Committee acknowledges the Commonwealth's *Partnerships Against Domestic Violence* (PADV) initiative launched in 1997. The Commonwealth initiative works, together with the States and Territories, to conduct a wide range of innovative projects to stimulate new activities and enhance existing work, coordinated by a taskforce housed in the Office of the Status of Women.<sup>164</sup> Initial research into PADV has shown:

... that any response to family violence in Indigenous communities needs to acknowledge the social, cultural and historical context of that community. Indigenous family violence is associated with a complex set of factors. Historically, programs have been ineffective because they have: ignored the impacts of colonisation on community, spiritual and cultural identity and wellbeing; compartmentalised the associated problems of family violence; lacked a whole-of-community focus; not adopted a developmental approach to service delivery and community involvement and ownership.<sup>165</sup>

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162 See Joint Committee of Public Accounts and Audit, *Inquiry into Indigenous Law and Justice, Terms of Reference*, <<http://www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/jpaa/atsis/tor.pdf>> (accessed 12.05.04).

163 See Senator Amanda Vanstone, Minister for Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs, *Legal Aid Reforms To Benefit Indigenous Australians*, Media Release, Parliament House, Canberra, 04.03.04.

164 See Partnerships Against Domestic Violence (PADV), *What is Partnerships?* <<http://www.padv.dpmc.gov.au/partner.htm>> (accessed 14.05.04).

165 PADV, *Indigenous Family Violence, Phase 1 Meta-Evaluation Report*, p. 13, <[http://www.padv.dpmc.gov.au/oswpdf/meta\\_indigenous04.pdf](http://www.padv.dpmc.gov.au/oswpdf/meta_indigenous04.pdf)> (accessed 13.05.04).

5.183 The Committee notes the preference of the term ‘family violence’ over ‘domestic violence’, as articulated in a PADV paper:

Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders do not believe that the term “domestic” violence adequately describes what is happening within their families and communities and have indicated they prefer to use the term “family violence” to bring into focus “the trauma of the inter-connecting and trans-generational experiences of individuals within families, to show the continuity between how we have been acted upon and how, in turn, we may then act upon ourselves and others”.<sup>166</sup>

5.184 The PADV paper presents a definition of family violence from the *Tjunparni: Family Violence in Indigenous Australia* report, where ‘family violence’ involves the behaviours and experiences of:

... beating of a wife or other family members, homicide, suicide and other selfinflicted injury, rape, child abuse and child sexual abuse. ... When we talk of family violence we need to remember that we are not talking about serious physical injury alone but also verbal harassment, psychological and emotional abuse, and economic deprivation, which although as devastating are even more difficult to quantify than physical abuse.<sup>167</sup>

5.185 The causes of family violence in Indigenous communities were identified in a report commissioned by PADV which identified multiple causes for the high rates of violence in Indigenous communities including:

- Marginalisation and dispossession;
- Loss of land and traditional culture;
- Breakdown of community kinship systems and Indigenous law;
- Entrenched poverty; and
- Racism.<sup>168</sup>

5.186 The PADV paper notes the influences of alcohol and drug misuse:

... research in Indigenous communities indicates a direct correlation between the two [family violence and alcohol and drug misuse], with between 70 and 90 per cent of all assaults being

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166 PADV, *Meta Evaluation, Indigenous Projects*, Bulletin 6 April 2001, p.1, <<http://www.padv.dpmc.gov.au/oswpdf/meta6a.pdf>> (accessed 13.05.04).

167 *ibid*, pp. 1-2.

168 Blagg, H., cited in PADV, *Indigenous Family Violence, Phase 1 Meta-Evaluation Report*, p. 27, <[http://www.padv.dpmc.gov.au/oswpdf/meta\\_indigenous04.pdf](http://www.padv.dpmc.gov.au/oswpdf/meta_indigenous04.pdf)> (accessed 13.05.04).

committed while the perpetrator was under the influence of alcohol or drugs.<sup>169</sup>

- 5.187 The need for community strength and family healing were emphasised in the paper, along with Indigenous ownership and restorative approaches to justice:

Many Aboriginal writers identify ownership and control of the issue of family violence as an imperative for Indigenous people in Australia at this point in time, and favour restorative approaches to justice.<sup>170</sup>

In Indigenous approaches to addressing family violence, community development has been advocated, with a strong emphasis on community ownership of strategies and programs of change... The community development approach is not unique to family violence. Indigenous community leaders have had a commitment to this approach to address a variety of issues in their communities, to strengthen communities and promote healing.<sup>171</sup>

- 5.188 The PADV began in 1997 with initial funding of \$25 million. In the 1999-2000 budget another \$25 million was committed for phase two, over four years.<sup>172</sup> Of this funding, \$6 million was allocated to support Indigenous community based projects focused on reducing family violence over the 1999-2003 period.<sup>173</sup> In the 2003-2004 budget the PADV was extended for one year.<sup>174</sup> The Committee is concerned that the funding only provides for a small number of initiatives in Indigenous communities. For example, in 2000, there were 31 initiatives funded to address Indigenous family violence, while in 2001 there were 37 initiatives funded.<sup>175</sup>
- 5.189 The Committee is concerned that the Government's support for PADV may be declining over time, and that a significant investment in enabling

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169 PADV, *Indigenous Family Violence, Phase 1 Meta-Evaluation Report*, p. 27, <[http://www.padv.dpmc.gov.au/oswpdf/meta\\_indigenous04.pdf](http://www.padv.dpmc.gov.au/oswpdf/meta_indigenous04.pdf)> (accessed 13.05.04).

170 *ibid*, p. 44.

171 *ibid*, p. 37.

172 PADV, *Partnerships Phase 2*, <<http://www.padv.dpmc.gov.au/partner2.htm>> (accessed 01.06.04).

173 Indigenous Family Violence Grants Program, PADV, *National Indigenous Family Violence Grants Programme*, <<http://www.padv.dpmc.gov.au/IFV/ifvgp.html>> (accessed 01.06.04).

174 Budget 2003-2004, *Budget Paper 2, Women's Program Funding*, <<http://www.budget.gov.au/2003-04/bp2/html/expend-16.htm>> (accessed 01.06.04).

175 Indigenous Family Violence Grants Program, PADV, *National Indigenous Family Violence Grants Programme*, <<http://www.padv.dpmc.gov.au/IFV/ifvgp.html>> (accessed 01.06.04).

and supporting Indigenous communities to address family violence, over the long term, is required.

5.190 The PADV has produced numerous reports for many different aspects of the partnership, with the aim of the evaluations to:

- document the range of activities and evaluate the effectiveness of the initiatives while promoting good practice and disseminating knowledge and information on domestic violence;
- inform government decisions about the future directions for national action to prevent domestic violence; and
- assist in meeting accountability requirements for the overall initiatives funded by Partnerships.<sup>176</sup>

5.191 The diversity of the projects that received funding through the PADV, combined with the inherent difficulties in measuring family violence, result in complications in terms of overall evaluation and accountability. However, the Committee believes a summary of the impact PADV may have had on reducing Indigenous family violence is required.

#### **Recommendation 14**

**The Committee recommends that the Commonwealth Government's Partnerships Against Domestic Violence (PADV) produce a report to Parliament on the impacts of PADV initiatives funded to address Indigenous family violence and that procedures be implemented to ensure that the report presented to the House of Representatives stands referred to this Committee.**

#### **Alcohol and drug misuse**

5.192 The Committee received some evidence on the detrimental effects of alcohol and drug misuse in Indigenous communities, and received evidence of some community responses to preventing and addressing such effects.

5.193 One witness with many years experience working in the fields of drug and alcohol misuse and Aboriginal health told the Committee:

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176 Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, *Partnerships Against Domestic Violence: National Evaluation of Partnerships*, <<http://www.padv.dpmc.gov.au/evalu.htm>> (accessed 01.06.04).

I do not think... [that you] can just ban alcohol in communities because what happens is half the community leaves, and it is usually those in the productive ages. They go and live in town and spend most of their time in town. They leave their kids at home so their grandparents are trying to look after the kids. The kids then get into all sorts of strife because the grandparents cannot look after fit, young, active kids. Either that or there is a lot of alcohol running back into the community. What is not happening is we are not teaching people in any way how to handle alcohol. We are just saying, "Don't have it." That has not worked. Somewhere along the line we have got to start to introduce ideas of the more responsible consumption of alcohol.<sup>177</sup>

- 5.194 A representative of Queensland's Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy reinforced the need for Indigenous communities to be part of the decision making process:

We need to address this question about alcohol in the communities—and not with prohibition. We have to work with the community to get them to set the standards, not have government imposing the standards.<sup>178</sup>

- 5.195 A member of the Cape York Land Council reported that the community in Arukun had developed an alcohol management plan and created a justice group:

Now Aurukun is one of the safest communities to live in Cape York. It was one of the most volatile places, but because Aboriginal people got up and took responsibility, with the support of Indigenous lead organisations and the council, now the school attendance has doubled. There has been no domestic violence in that community—nothing.<sup>179</sup>

- 5.196 The Committee was also impressed with the success of the community alcohol management arrangements in place at Lombadina, where the canteen opens for restricted hours and persons are limited to a set number of drinks each evening.<sup>180</sup>

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177 Mr Andrew Biven, (private capacity), Transcript (23.09.03), p. 1242.

178 Ms Barbara Flick, Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy, Queensland Government, Transcript (09.07.03), p. 867.

179 Mr Richie Ahmat, Cape York Land Council, Transcript (07.07.03), p. 786.

180 Mr Basil Sibosado, Lombadina Aboriginal Corporation, Transcript (07.08.03), pp. 1019-1020.

- 5.197 The Committee received some evidence on the importance of safe houses as a way of preventing violence and abuse brought on by alcohol and drug misuse. The Dubbo Aboriginal Community Working Party advised the Committee:

One of the things that came out of the seminar regarding domestic violence was a safe house. That is what we need in our community—a safe house. The other issue about domestic violence is that the women's refuge here is totally booked out; you cannot get in there. They would like to see the perpetrator, meaning the male, taken from the house instead of the mother and the child. The child and the mother could remain in a safe environment and the guy could be taken from the house and not put in jail but put in a safe place as well. He could recuperate overnight and deal with what has happened the next day, because it is usually related to either drugs or alcohol.<sup>181</sup>

- 5.198 A representative from the Apunipima Cape York Health Council relayed the Aurukun community message in relation to alcohol and government services, in which they favoured supportive responses to perpetrators:

The Aurukun messages are clear. The community justice group there is a very powerful group of older people. They are asking that there should be counselling services to support people who are detoxifying from the effects of alcohol. They are asking that their out-station movement be supported so that they can take people away from the community on country so that they can access different lifestyles of exercise and nutrition via bush tucker. They are asking that all government agencies do not turn their back on community and think it has been ticked off, that there is ongoing support for rehabilitation and detoxification and that assistance is provided to the community to manage the issues that then surface once alcohol has been taken away from the community.<sup>182</sup>

- 5.199 The Committee did not seek specific evidence on strategies to address alcohol and substance misuse and their effects on the capacities of Indigenous communities. Within the Committee there are divergent views as to the best measures of addressing these issues. The Committee notes
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181 Mrs Shirley Wilson, Dubbo Aboriginal Community Working Party, Transcript (07.11.03), p. 1427.

182 Ms Jacqueline Lavis, Apunipima Cape York Health Council, Transcript (07.07.03), p. 766.



the view of the Member for Kalgoorlie that policies of banning alcohol in Indigenous communities and creating 'dry' communities may create additional problems such as binge drinking, corruption and smuggling, and can suffer from inadequate policing. The Committee also notes the view of the Member for Kalgoorlie that the following measures would assist in addressing the problem:

- the Commonwealth Government call upon State and Territory governments to increase resources to assist Indigenous communities control the illegal trafficking of alcohol and other drugs and the abusive use of petrol, spray cans and glue;
- more emphasis be placed on the introduction of controlled legal alcohol sales within communities, provided that:
  - ⇒ all members of management committees of social clubs or other relevant community organisations have local police clearance; and
  - ⇒ access to relevant premises is granted to members only;
- action be taken to enable the courts to empower community elders to ban visits by individuals known to be disruptive, violent or engaged in illegal or fraudulent activities;
- agencies and their representatives work to obtain commitments from community leaders to participate in programs to dramatically reduce drug and alcohol abuse in Indigenous communities; and
- agencies, following negotiation with community leaders and representatives, assess the potential of establishing voluntary trials whereby food vouchers are provided in lieu of Centerlink payments, thus ensuring that community members are spared the temptation to spend lump sum payments on drinking binges and substance abuse, and that trial outcomes in terms of behavioural change and health issues be documented for future reference.

The Committee has concluded that this is such an important issue that the Government should refer to the Committee the issue of alcohol and substance misuse in Indigenous communities for inquiry and report.

**Recommendation 15**

**The Committee recommends that the issue of strategies to address alcohol and substance misuse in Indigenous communities be referred to this Committee for inquiry and report.**

**Young people at risk**

- 5.200 The Rumbalara Aboriginal Cooperative informed the Committee of its youth and family program, which involved working with families where children may need to be removed, in partnership with the Department of Human Services (DHS):

[The burri program] ... is about four years old now. “Extended care” is the other term we use for foster care, because foster care is sometimes not a very positive term. We work with families and the local Department of Human Services. We know that some kids will need to be removed. We try to educate and train up a group of foster care parents from the community—some are Aboriginal and some are not. We make sure they culturally keep to our values and principles. On the other side of it, the program works with the family where the child may have been removed from to get them ready to have their child back. That is our whole philosophy behind it, and that seems to work fairly well.

We have embarked on a couple of other programs which include the family in decision making. So when children are removed or orders are put on them we get the whole family to sit around the table—a bit like the Koori courts—with DHS and we say, “This is why there has been a notification made and these are the things which would stop the notification going any further.” It may be that the child needs to attend school more regularly, and when you have a group of family members around maybe a brother or someone will say, “I can pick them up and make sure they get to school.” That saves the whole mess of going through the system and getting involved in the courts and all the rest of it. That has worked very well. It is only a new program; it is being evaluated as we speak.<sup>183</sup>

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183 Mr Justin Mohamed, Rumbalara Aboriginal Corporation, Transcript of discussion (17.02.03), pp. 385-386.

5.201 The Rumbalara organisation advised the Committee that it tries to prevent problems, rather than clean up after them. It also outlined a young offender diversionary scheme it was about to launch, stating that it:

... [is] looking not only at the issue at hand but also at the underlying issues, whether it is anger management, dealing with grief and all those sorts of things.<sup>184</sup>

5.202 With a similar approach, the Tangentyere Council told the Committee of a program it has been developing through negotiation with the community and service providers in Alice Springs to help young homeless Indigenous people. The program would involve the provision of crisis accommodation and appropriate family placement, through a family care agreement, to ensure stability for the young person, Tangentyere would then take responsibility for that young person:

It ensures that young Indigenous children are not taken out of their communities, that they are cared for appropriately within appropriate structures. But the statutory responsibility for that will be moved from the government to Tangentyere Council for that program and those young people.<sup>185</sup>

## Conclusions

5.203 The reported pervasiveness of family violence in Indigenous communities is of grave concern. The location and size of some communities make support services or intervention difficult to deliver. The Committee was heartened to see strong community responses to family violence. Community owned processes that change attitudes to violence, help offenders to change their behaviour, and support victims, can be highly successful.

5.204 Family violence responses involve a wide range of overlapping service provider domains, including justice, law enforcement, health, and family services. Cooperation between service providers is essential, as is cooperation between service providers and Indigenous families and communities. The evidence from Indigenous people argues that Indigenous communities understand their issues and know the solutions,

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184 Mr Justin Mohamed, Rumbalara Aboriginal Corporation, Transcript of discussion (17.02.03), p. 386.

185 Ms Jane Vadiveloo, Tangentyere Council, Transcript (25.09.03), p. 1298.

and that one of the most effective activities of service providers is to support communities to deliver their own solutions.

## Housing

5.205 As summarised in chapter two, inadequate housing is a major issue for Indigenous people, particularly in remote areas where the costs of housing construction and repair are high and environmental conditions harsh. Home ownership for Indigenous people is much lower than national averages, with rental accommodation largely provided by a variety of community and government housing organisations in rural and remote areas. Overcrowding is a major issue. The Committee takes housing to include not only the structure of the house itself, but also health infrastructure relating to sanitation, such as running water.

5.206 Overcrowding is recognised as a major contributor to the spread of disease, as a member of the Bawinanga Aboriginal Corporation told the Committee:

...a lot of the diseases and a lot of the illnesses that occur in Maningrida are environmental. Rheumatic heart disease, tuberculosis, shingles and a lot of the gastrointestinal conditions that occur in children are directly attributable to overcrowding. If we could reduce the amount of overcrowding and increase sanitation, we would eliminate a huge number of the illnesses that affect our community.<sup>186</sup>

5.207 Many groups are addressing housing and health issues through prevention and good environmental health, such as Tangentyere Council.<sup>187</sup> Housing quality is also linked to education, as the Northern Territory Office of Indigenous Policy told the Committee:

[In some communities] ...you have 16 people living per house, what does that do in terms of people's ability to attend school, or to get a decent sleep at night?<sup>188</sup>

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186 Mr James Lamerton, Bawinanga Aboriginal Corporation, Transcript (25.11.02), p. 135.

187 Mr William Tilmouth, Tangentyere Council, Transcript (25.09.03), p. 1292.

188 Mr Neil Westbury, Office of Indigenous Policy, Department of the Chief Minister, Northern Territory Government, Transcript (27.11.03), p. 179.

5.208 Adequate and appropriate housing is not only a fundamental need for individuals and families in Indigenous communities, but the existence of buildings are necessary in areas such as the provision of office space or employee housing. For example, Kardu Numida in Wadeye told the Committee that the shortage of public rental accommodation meant that if the organisations wanted to employ staff, it had to build them a house.<sup>189</sup>

5.209 The housing shortage common in most Indigenous communities is not just a factor of there not being enough houses now, or the houses requiring repair, but also a lack of housing for the future. A member of Maningrida Council told the Committee:

Unfortunately, we are still running at approximately 14 people per house, which seems to indicate that there are a hell of a lot of houses yet to be built for Maningrida to go back to a nice balanda standard of two people per bedroom... Of course, we will never catch up, because the population is expanding very rapidly. That expansion is not just by natural increase, but [as] Maningrida becomes a larger regional centre with... more services... it attracts more and more people and the housing problem is exacerbated accordingly. If we got funding to build 100 houses tomorrow morning and then we stopped the population from increasing somehow or other, we would still bring the average down to about 10 or 11 per house. One hundred houses cost millions of dollars, which they are never going to give us anyway.<sup>190</sup>

5.210 Maningrida Council told the Committee that the life span of Indigenous housing is short, which relates to the different standards of Indigenous specific housing construction:

... certain types of houses really only have a lifespan of 10 years. They are supposed to last for 15 years... we have just gone over to block construction, which at least has the ability to go beyond 15 years. They are pretty solid, they are easy to maintain and they do not rust out or anything like that. We have a maritime environment here, so it is a problem.<sup>191</sup>

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189 Mr Terry Bullemor, Kardu Numida Incorporated, Transcript (26.11.03), p. 153.

190 Mr John Horgan, Maningrida Council, Transcript (25.11.02), p. 135.

191 Mr John Horgan, Maningrida Council, Transcript (25.11.02), p. 135.

- 5.211 Some evidence received by the Committee referred to the importance of a sense of ownership over houses. This was considered to reduce damage and extend the life of houses. St Pauls Island Council told the Committee:

With the system we have in place now with the community members, we actually get them to sit with the council to look at the designs of the houses they want. They get to pick the colour scheme, whether it is high-set or low-set, whether they need to put another room in, revamp the whole design of the house to their liking. We negotiate with them. It gets that feeling of ownership of the building, and you find out the infrastructure then has an extra year in the life span, whereas before, with the contractors, people moved in and they saw a house that they had no input into and the life span was basically cut in half. Doing all of these little things within the puzzle has really created a feeling of ownership amongst community members.<sup>192</sup>

- 5.212 St Pauls Island Council also brought the Committee's attention to the benefits of local community members constructing houses:

[Back in the 80s] You just got what you got; the council got the material, contractors came in, they built it up, and we ended up with families of 15 living in three-bedroom houses... [Recently,] we tapped into the apprenticeship program and started putting our boys in by bringing in local tradesmen. That cut the costs down; we could actually build an extra house with the budget that we got... If you bring in an outside contractor, that will only give you one house. But, because we did it locally, we could build two houses—a four-bedroom and a three-bedroom house, or a different design that would actually cater to our needs... This established employment within the community and got our people trained and qualified; it achieved the goals of what the community wanted...<sup>193</sup>

### Home ownership

- 5.213 The Rumbalara Aboriginal Cooperative told the Committee of its strategies to encourage Indigenous home ownership:

We are talking with people and working with people who have never had anyone in their family line own a home. So it is not as if

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192 Mr John Kris, St Pauls Island Council, Transcript (06.11.03), p. 89.

193 Mr John Kris, St Pauls Island Council, Transcript (06.11.02), p. 89.

they can go to mum or dad and ask them how to do it or go and speak to their bank; those structures are not there... If we can provide that support through our business and say, "We recommend you go to this bank" and then ask the bank to look after these people for us then we are playing a similar role to that of parents in the wider Australian community, which a lot of our people do not have.<sup>194</sup>

## Conclusions

5.214 The Committee notes the conclusions of the Commonwealth Grants Commission in its *Report on Indigenous Funding 2001*, which found, inter alia, that:

- Indigenous people rely more heavily than others on renting, especially public housing and community housing, and initiatives to promote home ownership are needed if this situation is to be changed;
- overcrowding and poor quality housing is more prevalent in rural and remote regions, while housing affordability is a greater problem in urban regions;
- ATSI and State housing bodies are improving the sustainability and viability of the community housing sector through the development of new management models; and
- there are several different ways the housing needs of Indigenous people are being addressed and there have been strong moves to better co-ordinate, plan and target Indigenous-specific funding through the:
  - ⇒ development of formal agreements with the States to jointly plan and co-ordinate programs and, in some cases, to create Indigenous housing authorities that are responsible for service delivery;
  - ⇒ development of new management models for community housing; and
  - ⇒ targeting of specific funding to rural and remote regions.<sup>195</sup>

5.215 The Commonwealth Grants Commission also concluded that the small amount of mainstream funding allocated to remote regions in the past suggested that these funds were not targeting areas where Indigenous

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194 Mr Justin Mohamed, Rumbalara Aboriginal Corporation, Transcript of discussion (17.02.03), p. 387.

195 Commonwealth Grants Commission, 2001, *Report on Indigenous Funding 2001*, pp.172-173.

need was greatest. However, there have been improvements in the measurement of housing need over the last decade. The Commission found that the improvement of administrative data has improved measurement of need, will further assist in the better targeting of housing funds, and will address the current distribution of Indigenous-specific funds to accord more broadly with needs.<sup>196</sup>

## Employment and training

### Indigenous Employment Policy

- 5.216 The Indigenous Employment Policy was introduced by the Commonwealth Government in July 1999, and has three elements: Job Network, the Indigenous Employment Programme (comprising a number of projects) and the Indigenous Small Business Fund.
- 5.217 Job Network is a national network of private and community organisations (Job Network members) dedicated to finding jobs for unemployed people, particularly the long term unemployed.<sup>197</sup> Some Job Network Members provide specialist services, one of which is providing services for Indigenous people.<sup>198</sup>
- 5.218 The Indigenous Employment Programme comprises:
- the Corporate Leaders Project, which involves a partnership between Australian companies and the Commonwealth Government, where companies commit to employing Indigenous Australians and the Commonwealth provides flexible funding and a mix of assistance;
  - the Wage Assistance initiative which helps Indigenous job seekers find long term employment either through Job Network or their own efforts. Employers are eligible for funding to assist with costs;
  - the Structured Training and Employment Projects (STEP) scheme which involves the provision of flexible financial assistance to businesses

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196 *ibid*, pp.172-173.

197 Australian Employment Services, *Job Network*, <<http://www.workplace.gov.au/Workplace/ESDisplay/0,1282,a0%253D0%2526a1%253D537%2526a2%253D629,00.html>> (accessed 18.05.04).

198 *ibid*



which offer structured training, for example, apprenticeships, leading to lasting employment opportunities for Indigenous job seekers;

- the National Indigenous Cadetship Programme (NICP) which supports companies prepared to sponsor Indigenous tertiary students as cadets. Cadets undertake full-time study and work experience during long vacation breaks and are usually employed by the company at the completion of their studies;
- the Community Development and Employment Projects (CDEP) Placement Incentive initiative which provides a \$2 200 bonus to CDEP sponsors for each placement of a participant in a job outside CDEP and off CDEP wages; and
- the Voluntary Service to Indigenous Communities which matches skilled volunteers with the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.<sup>199</sup>

5.219 The Indigenous Small Business Fund (ISBF) can fund Indigenous organisations to assist Indigenous people to learn about business, develop good business skills and expand their business. It also provides funding to individuals for the development of business ideas that have good business potential.<sup>200</sup> This is complemented by the Indigenous Capital Assistance Scheme, which aims to increase employment opportunities for Indigenous Australians by giving Indigenous businesses access to culturally appropriate commercial finance and professional advice, as well as mentoring support services, through a participating financial institution.<sup>201</sup> Additionally, a trial is currently underway in Cape York (QLD), Murdi Paaki (NSW) and Shepparton (VIC) called the Self Help Programme, which involves individual assistance to Indigenous Australians to establish their own businesses through financial literacy training, self-employment initiatives, business advice and support, and a small repayable grant system. The trial began in April 2003, initially for 12 months, was expanded and is now due to finish in April 2005.<sup>202</sup>

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199 *ibid*

200 *bid*

201 Australian Employment Services, *Indigenous Capital Assistance Scheme*, <<http://www.workplace.gov.au/Workplace/ESDisplay/0,1282,a3%253D5980%2526a0%253D0%2526a1%253D537%2526a2%253D524,00.html>> (accessed 18.05.04).

202 Australian Employment Services, *Self Help Programme*, <<http://www.workplace.gov.au/Workplace/ESDisplay/0,1282,a3%253D5795%2526a0%253D0%2526a1%253D537%2526a2%253D524,00.html>> (accessed 18.05.04).

## Community Development and Employment Projects

- 5.220 The CDEP scheme arose from Indigenous communities wanting an alternative to the effects of passive welfare dependency, and involves the voluntary pooling of funds that would otherwise have been social security entitlements, which are then paid out as wages to CDEP participants.
- 5.221 Community Development and Employment Projects (CDEP) involve Indigenous community organisations being funded by ATSIC (at the time of report writing), to undertake employment projects that relate to needs in the community, the activities of which develop the participant's work and employment skills, with the long term goal being employment in the mainstream labour market. Participating in a CDEP involves remaining qualified for income support and receiving a CDEP Participant Supplement (CPS) of an extra \$20.80 per week on top of income support.<sup>203</sup>
- 5.222 There are a limited number of CDEP positions. After the Spicer Review in 1997, there was a freeze on the expansion of CDEP positions, which had previously been increased each year. In the 2003-2007 period however, the budget allocated funding for the expansion of CDEP by 1 000 places per year.<sup>204</sup>
- 5.223 In April 2003, Indigenous Employment Centres (IECs) commenced operation. IECs assist CDEP participants to find work outside CDEP in areas where there are job opportunities. The services offered by an IEC may involve increasing job search skills, accessing training, helping to find employment, ongoing mentoring and support, and help to access other services.<sup>205</sup> This initiative is intended to move Indigenous people from CDEP to mainstream employment.
- 5.224 The Government's Welfare Reform Agenda produced the *Australian's Working Together* package, in response to the McClure Report which reviewed Australia's welfare system and recommended improvements and changes. A key policy platform of the reform agenda was the

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203 Centrelink, *Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP)*, <<http://www.centrelink.gov.au/internet/internet.nsf/services/cdep.htm>> (accessed 18.05.04).

204 DIMIA, 2003-2004, *Part C: ATSI Budget Statements, Section 2: Outcomes and outputs information* <[http://www.immi.gov.au/budget/budget03/2003-04\\_imia\\_pbs\\_14\\_atsis\\_section2.pdf](http://www.immi.gov.au/budget/budget03/2003-04_imia_pbs_14_atsis_section2.pdf)> (accessed 24.05.04).

205 Australian Employment Services, *Indigenous Employment Centres*, <<http://www.workplace.gov.au/Workplace/ESDisplay/0,1282,a0%253D0%2526a1%253D537%2526a2%253D630,00.html>> (accessed 18.05.04).

principle of ‘mutual obligation’, which imposes expectations on eligible job seekers in return for the receipt of unemployment allowances.<sup>206</sup> Part of the ‘mutual obligation’ policy involves the encouragement of people to look for work more actively and to take part in activities to increase their skills, working on the idea that individuals have a responsibility to help themselves and to contribute to the community.<sup>207</sup> The ‘mutual obligation’ principle resulted in changes to CDEP, with a greater emphasis on employment, and less on community development.

- 5.225 An accurate picture of CDEP involvement can be hard to generate, for example, the 2001 Census recorded 17 800 Indigenous CDEP participants, yet 32 000 participants were recorded for administrative purposes at that time.<sup>208</sup> The majority (69 per cent) of CDEP participants were in very remote areas, while 10 per cent were in remote areas.<sup>209</sup>

### CDEP: an assessment?

- 5.226 Information submitted to the inquiry by the Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research stated:

CDEP schemes have been operating in Indigenous communities since 1977. However, under the 1987 Aboriginal Economic Development Policy and more particularly since the Spicer Review of CDEP (Spicer 1997), the original emphasis on “community development” has gradually been replaced, at the policy level at least, by a focus on the scheme’s capacity to facilitate enterprise development and to prepare individuals for employment in the mainstream labour market.<sup>210</sup>

- 5.227 As with most programs in Indigenous affairs, CDEP has been subject to many reviews. Criticisms have been levelled at the CDEP program for a number of reasons, including the assumption that as many as one third of participants did not work.<sup>211</sup> Criticisms have also been levelled at various

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206 CDEP National Program Centre *Australians Working Together: Helping people to move forward*, <<http://www.atsic.gov.au/programs/economic/CDEP/Doc/2>> (accessed 18.05.04).

207 *ibid*

208 ABS, 2004, *Labour force status of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples*, Year Book Australia 2004, cat. no. 4713.0.

209 *ibid*

210 Martin, D., 2001, *Community development in the context of welfare dependence*, The Indigenous Welfare Economy and the CDEP Scheme, CAEPR, ANU, Exhibit 16, p. 33.

211 Spicer, I., 1997, *Independent Review of the Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP) Scheme*, p. 2.

government stakeholders for loading up responsibilities and expectations on CDEP organisations, without any additional monetary reimbursement.<sup>212</sup>

- 5.228 The Committee received evidence both criticising and supporting CDEP, with some suggesting that CDEP is good in theory, but fails to be implemented appropriately, as one witness told the Committee:

I am concerned that CDEP is not being used to fully support and provide services to Aboriginal communities. As a result of that, our Aboriginal communities are disintegrating and domestic violence is increasing. Everything that is happening could be reduced if CDEP were better operated in the communities.<sup>213</sup>

- 5.229 Another witness told the Committee that CDEP has evolved and is now less effective than when in its original form:

In its holistic form the CDEP is a fantastic program if it is left to achieve the community outcomes and if it is left to the community to decide this is where it is going. But when you start tweaking this and that, the program becomes unmanageable... The CDEP is an example of where they have just tweaked here and there and made it an unmanageable program.<sup>214</sup>

- 5.230 CDEP is providing positive results for some communities, such as Worn Gundidj Aboriginal Cooperative in Warrnambool (VIC), where a CDEP wage subsidy is passed on to host employers, who take on an Aboriginal person as an apprentice, with the employer paying the difference between the gross wage, super, and the funding from CDEP.<sup>215</sup>

Among the local ones, we have a cabinet-making apprentice, a builder, a solid plasterer, fibrous plasterers and several bricklayers—there has been huge interest from young kids to do bricklaying apprenticeships—and they are all hosted with mainstream businesses who support them in their job and provide

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212 Bartlett, P. 2001, *CDEP and the sub-economy: Milking the CDEP cow dry*, The Indigenous Welfare Economy and the CDEP Scheme, CAEPR, ANU, Exhibit 16, p. 194.

213 Mrs Mary Attwood, Port Hedland Regional Aboriginal Corporation, Transcript (06.08.03), p. 984.

214 Mrs Leah Armstrong, Yarrteen Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders Corporation, Transcript (07.04.03), p. 561.

215 Mrs Jennifer Lowe, Worn Gundidj Aboriginal Cooperative, Transcript of discussion (18.02.03), p. 433.

them with all the workplace experience and training that they need to fulfil their apprenticeships.<sup>216</sup>

- 5.231 Participants can choose a trade, and Worn Gundidj will find an employer to host them to undertake apprenticeship training in that trade area. The program has been so successful that employers now come to Worn Gundidj asking if they have anyone available to undertake an apprenticeship.<sup>217</sup> This type of CDEP activity has also proven to be a transition off CDEP:

Their contract ends when their apprenticeship ends, so the expectation is that they cease employment with us on CDEP and gain full-time employment with that host employer, or move interstate with their trade certificate and get a job somewhere else.<sup>218</sup>

- 5.232 The work of Worn Gundidj is commendable; however, this approach to CDEP is only possible in areas where there are job markets. The possibilities for CDEP organisations in urban areas or regional centres are very different to those in more remote areas where businesses and job opportunities may not be available. In such remote areas, the work undertaken by CDEP participants is more likely to be based around municipal service provision and activities centring around contributing to the community.

- 5.233 In some Indigenous communities, CDEP is providing funding for a range of service delivery activities. Tangentyere told the Committee:

In terms of what currently exists with placements, the CDEP participants are employed within a night patrol service... Our nutrition and our maintenance/security person are both CDEP subsidised positions. We have... positions located at Centrelink offices. The positions located with our HOPS and old people's services are CDEP subsidised positions. The positions that provide fencing and those sorts of services are CDEP subsidised positions. So really the CDEP at the moment is subsidising positions across quite a lot of service delivery areas, from health to municipal services to old people's services, learning and education.<sup>219</sup>

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216 Mrs Jennifer Lowe, Worn Gundidj, Transcript of discussion (18.02.03), p. 433.

217 Mrs Jennifer Lowe, Worn Gundidj, Transcript of discussion (18.02.03), p. 433.

218 Mrs Jennifer Lowe, Worn Gundidj, Transcript of discussion (18.02.03), p. 434.

219 Ms Jane Vadiveloo, Tangentyere Council, Transcript (25.09.03), p. 1294.

- 5.234 The Committee is concerned that the delivery of essential services is being undertaken by people subsidised by a CDEP wage, when in other equivalent-sized communities workers are being paid competitive salaries to deliver similar services, often through government funding. This two-tiered system is not equitable.

### Training and employment

- 5.235 The Committee received evidence on vocational training and how important it is that it be linked to CDEP, yet evidence was also received indicating that such mandatory training can result in courses that are ineffective:

All over the place, I find there are training providers who simply want black bums on seats... Too often, particularly in regional and country areas, Aboriginal groups and other groups are stuck with what are in a lot of instances lazy training providers, who purely want to get bums on seats. There needs to be a severe look at that system within the education system.<sup>220</sup>

- 5.236 When discussing the privatisation of tertiary training providers, one witness told the Committee:

In order for Indigenous people to get the best results out of their education and training, the people who are delivering services must also share the same passion and compassion for people to get those skills. In a lot of cases private companies enrol a lot of people on the first day purely to obtain the training bucks that come with it, end of story.<sup>221</sup>

- 5.237 Evidence suggested a number of problems in relation to training, such as: there being many locations where training was not available; locations where training was available, but was not relevant to local job markets, or where there were no job markets; and training that was tokenistic, with training providers being ineffective. The Committee also received evidence suggesting that training could be a great source of pride, give trainees confidence, improve skills, and increase employment.
- 5.238 The Committee contends that training issues differ markedly depending on the location, the connections between training and job markets, and the calibre of the training providers. Successful programs tended to be those
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220 Mr John Collyer, Worn Gundidj, Transcript of discussion (18.02.03), p. 405.

221 Mr Mark Manado, Kimberley College of TAFE, Transcript (08.08.03), pp. 1119-1120.

that had good links with local businesses, that provided appropriate and effective training, that supported trainees into jobs, and that followed up on trainees by providing support and mentoring.

## Conclusions

- 5.239 This chapter has canvassed issues brought to the Committee's attention in relation to building the capacity of Indigenous individuals, families and communities. The chapter has particularly focused on Indigenous-driven initiatives, and on giving voice to Indigenous Australians who contributed to the inquiry process. The Committee believes it is important to convey the successes of Indigenous-driven initiatives working to address areas of dysfunction and disadvantage, and has done this throughout the chapter.
- 5.240 The overwhelming argument within the evidence has been the need for Indigenous people to be more involved in the design and delivery of services. This functions on many levels, from policy advice, to training mainstream providers, to directly providing services to participating in effective partnerships. The evidence also indicated that in many cases, Indigenous people understand the issues and the solutions, but are not supported or resourced to implement initiatives in a sustainable way.
- 5.241 The 'no one size fits all' argument was a common theme, as the diversity of Indigenous people, communities and locations often result in generalist approaches to service delivery being ineffective. On a policy level, diversity can be problematic, and a diverse approach may appear expensive and time-consuming, but the Committee contends that it is more cost-effective to address needs in a targeted, real and effective way, than to apply general programs that are ineffectual. The evidence suggested that no one was better placed to understand location- or community-specific issues and to contribute to the design and delivery of targeted services better than Indigenous people themselves.
- 5.242 Another theme in the evidence was the inequitable funding between non-Indigenous and Indigenous organisations providing equivalent services, such as local government amenity and infrastructure services, or community controlled health services. The Committee agrees that organisations providing similar services should receive equitable funding.
- 5.243 Education was highlighted as a major issue, particularly the need for the achievement of benchmarks in basic numeracy and literacy. Education was seen as a fundamental cornerstone of capacity building, as it creates the ability to operate in Australian society. However, the maintenance of

Indigenous language and culture were emphasised by many Indigenous people, together with the importance of English literacy.

- 5.244 Health is critical. As a report on Indigenous health stated, 'health is life'. The Committee commends approaches to health that involve prevention through health education by Indigenous people, for Indigenous people. The Committee also supports greater investment in positions that facilitate Indigenous access to mainstream services, such as Hospital Liaison Officers.
- 5.245 Justice, crime and safety issues are problematic in many rural and remote areas where police and justice services are not readily available. The Committee commends community responses to crime prevention, and welcomes Indigenous approaches to address alcohol and substance misuse, particularly those that involve supporting and educating community members to take responsibility for their actions and to change their behaviour. The Committee is generally supportive of cooperative justice models, but awaits proof of their success, which can of course only be gauged in the long term.
- 5.246 Housing is a major issue, with overcrowding and poor sanitation having negative ramifications, particularly those affecting good health. The Committee is very supportive of efforts to train community members to produce houses and housing products locally. The Committee acknowledges the many changes that have recently occurred in the housing policy area, and awaits the results of these improvements over the long term.
- 5.247 The Committee is generally supportive of CDEP and has seen communities where initiatives have had positive effects on the community, while also receiving evidence of CDEP initiatives that were not functioning appropriately or well. Training appropriateness and effectiveness are dependent upon location and provider calibre.
- 5.248 The Committee was heartened to receive evidence of many Indigenous-driven initiatives and looks forward to seeing them provide real, lasting and positive change to the lives of Indigenous people. The Committee strongly encourages governments and their agencies to work with and support Indigenous groups to achieve shared goals and real outcomes.