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Submission to the Inquiry into the high level of involvement of Indigenous juveniles and young adults in the criminal justice system

Nepean Community and Neighbourhood Services is a medium sized non-Government organisation who receives \$1.6 million dollars in Government Funding. Approximately half of our grants \$815,000 is dedicated to Aboriginal specific projects. We receive funding from the NSW Community Services covering various funding streams including CSGP, Families NSW, Brighter Futures and Aboriginal Child Youth and Families Strategy and Better Futures overseen by NSW Commission for Children and Young people. We have also recently been successful in attracting Families, Housing, Community Service and Indigenous Affairs (FHCSIA) funding. Our organisation covers the Penrith LGA & has over 20 staff almost half of our staff are Aboriginal, our organisations has been successful at attracting and maintaining Aboriginal staff due to recognition that as Anglo employers we need to implement specific strategies and adjust our work practice to accommodate Aboriginal employees.

We are writing in relation to 6 of the 7 points outlined in the Terms of Reference. We are writing in relation to our expertise working within a social justice framework utilizing a Community Development methodology working with families, children, young people and communities.

Although we will address terms of reference below a key message we would like to get across to this inquiry is early intervention this can take many forms but we would suggest that making funding available through Attorney Generals for Crime Prevention projects targeting 8-12 year olds would be a priority. Engaging children at an early age and providing activities that build resilient young people is key to avoiding the Criminal justice system.

**How the Development of Social norms and behaviors for Indigenous juveniles and young adults can lead to positive social engagement;**

Our organisation is particularly skilled at providing opportunities for Indigenous families and young people to socialize together with non-Aboriginal peoples at events celebrating Aboriginal cultural events. These include acknowledgement of the Apology to the Stolen Generation, Reconciliation week activities, Sorry day ceremonies and NAIDOC week activities in partnership with other organisations in Penrith LGA. It is important, we believe, to highlight and show recognition in the community to significant Aboriginal cultural dates. We involve local Aboriginal students who participate in our Making Tracks program to dance at

many of these events and they receive accolades for their performance. It is demonstrating to Aboriginal people that we value their rich heritage and wish to celebrate along side them and are proud to have their heritage apart of our own history; whilst acknowledging the terrible tragedies we have perpetrated against them in the past.

**Any initiatives which would improve the effectiveness of the education system in contributing to reducing the levels of involvement of Indigenous juveniles and young adults with the criminal justice system;**

Our organisation provides a program in Primary school called Making Tracks (Penrith). This program is funded by the Commission for Children and Young People through Better Futures. It is a 10 week program aimed at engaging and re-connecting Aboriginal students with their education. The program covers student confidence, conflict Resolution skills, resilience building skills and Aboriginal Cultural activities. The program is planned to be extended to High school students in the future.

The importance of having Aboriginal Education Officers employed in schools and having specific space available to speak confidentially with Aboriginal students cannot be underestimated. These positions provide an Aboriginal face who understands the often complex lives children and young people deal with on a daily basis within the home. These positions have altered in the past few years and have become less community focused and are more school based. The original concept was as a liaison between the parents/community and the school not taking on the role of teachers aide.

Schools being flexible enough to provide Personalised Learning Plans for Koori kids experiencing complex family circumstances can also be of benefit to young people who are trying to remain engaged with the Education system against sometimes overwhelming circumstances.

We would also like to highlight the value of alternative off campus educational programs such as Links to learning funded by Education and Training and the value these types of study may provide to Aboriginal young people who simply find it very difficult to remain engaged with mainstream education options. However we would like to emphasize that in order to be successful with Aboriginal students it is imperative that Aboriginal people be employed to run the program. This point raises the issue of organisations needing to have specific strategies to attract Aboriginal employees and have support mechanisms in place to maintain these positions as well as providing appropriate cultural training to non-Aboriginal staff.

Wider promotion of NSW Aboriginal Land Council Scholarships may assist eligible applicants with remaining in education.

**The effectiveness of arrangements for transitioning from education to work and how the effectiveness of the 'Learn or earn' concept can be maximized.**

All transitions require careful management for success. Aboriginal young people require often more assistance than non-Aboriginal people with major transitions. Funding Aboriginal specific positions within Job Service Agencies who would attend schools to promote apprenticeships or other employment activities would be beneficial. Aboriginal specific positions within Schools industry partnership a Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) funded program would benefit students making the transition.

**Best practice examples of programs that support diversion of Indigenous people from juvenile detention centres and crime, and provide support for those returning from such centres;**

The promotion of sporting clubs and networks to attract and act as a diversion to Indigenous young people is paramount to helping young people make healthy life choices.

Funding needs to be made available to provide Aboriginal young people with the means to engage with sporting clubs by providing grants to pay registration and uniform fees, this could perhaps be promoted so parents are aware and will ask for this assistance.

There needs also to be incentives to sporting clubs to target and attract Aboriginal young people and pathways created to enable talented sports people to excel at their chosen sport.

**The scope for the clearer responsibilities within and between government jurisdictions to achieve better co-ordinated and targeted service provision for Indigenous juveniles and young adults in the justice system;**

What we would first advocate is for an all of Government approach to ensuring the well-being of Aboriginal children and young people; with targets and milestones to be achieved by all areas of Government.

For Aboriginal young adults and young people already engaged with the justice system to have legal representation that advocates on their behalf is integral. The Aboriginal Legal Service only works with Aboriginal Adults. Having a proportion of Legal Aid identified specifically to work with Aboriginal young people would assist. Aboriginal young people are overrepresented in juvenile detention system perhaps this may stem from poor representation from a legal service that has little understanding of Aboriginal youth.

We are supportive of initiatives such as circle sentencing which occur at Parramatta criminal court and would like to see initiatives such as this extended to other courts.

Having Aboriginal Community Legal Officers (ACLO's) present at Police Stations with significant Aboriginal populations specifically servicing Aboriginal young people and providing mentoring / leadership activities, case management activities in collaboration with Police Citizens Youth Club (PCYC) may assist to monitor offenders as they leave the justice system.

**The extent to which current preventative programs across government jurisdictions are aligned against common goals to improve the health and emotional well-being of Indigenous adolescents, any gaps or duplication in effort, and recommendations for their modification or enhancement.**

Community Development programs targeted at Indigenous communities working across the life span from children to elders does make a difference in the lives of Indigenous persons. These programs need to be delivered by Indigenous staff. Increasing funding for programs targeting Indigenous children, families and young people in areas of high Indigenous populations are integral to engagement of Indigenous persons with the service delivery system. Engagement with positive helpful services at an early age can remove stigma of accessing help when it's most needed. Having Indigenous staff deliver these services is integral to their success.

We would like to thank you for the opportunity to submit our expertise to this inquiry and hope that this information has been of some assistance to you and that this will flow through to improved outcomes for Aboriginal young people and young adults involved in the criminal justice system. We would be happy to attend to give further evidence to this inquiry if required.

Many thanks

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