

House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs

Needs of urban dwelling Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples

Hearing – 29 November 2000

Questions on Notice

Department of Family and Community Service (FaCS)

Question: ATSI 135 of the Hansard

Mr Lieberman asked for information regarding successful Indigenous-managed programs that would provide good examples to other Indigenous communities

The following are projects and services that could be used as examples.

Kntitty Jundoo Playgroup – Mackay, Queensland. The aim of the playgroup is to promote parent and child interaction and to provide children with developmental opportunities. Indigenous parents and children are able to access health and community support services that are culturally appropriate and so improve their education and health standards.

The Tangentyere Council – NT is a voluntary organisation formed to address the needs of Indigenous people living in eighteen town camps on the fringes of Alice Springs. The Council is comprised of members from the camps and has acquired leasehold title to the land on which they camp. The Council works in partnership with charitable organisations and the federal and territory governments to improve the living environment of the camps and provide support services in housing, infrastructure, employment, training, education and other social services.

Yuringka - Mt Druitt NSW is auspiced by the Indigenous Social Justice Association and conducts life skills programs and assists young people address literacy/numeracy issues. In the initial program, 40% of young people who attended sought further education in either a secondary school or TAFE. The Advisory Committee is comprised of community members and Indigenous people working in Juvenile Justice, Centrelink and community organisations. FaCS, the NSW Government and private organisations including the Greenhills Foundation, Franklins and PGH Bricks provide funding. Much of the success of Yuringka stems from a management structure defined as 'reconciliationist'. This recognises that the organisation needs to work with non-Indigenous people who have insight into and respect and sensitivity for Indigenous issues.

Mentor Program Towards Family Harm Minimisation - Adelaide. This program was developed by Indigenous women to combat the devastating impact of Indigenous youth suicide and drug overdoses on families and the Indigenous community and is delivered by the Aboriginal Drug and Alcohol Council.

Bamaga Vacation Care Program – Bamaga, Queensland. This program offers activities to 5 -10 year-olds from 8am to 5pm and to 10 – 17 year-olds from 1pm to 9pm and provides fun activities including sports, craft and movies as well as nutritious meals. A youth worker is available to discuss drug and alcohol issues and a community health worker provides training in nutrition and a quasi-aerobics class to encourage exercise. The management committee consists of interested parents and community workers and Elders are actively involved in the program. The major impact of this program for the local community has been a reduction in break-ins, fewer children on the streets and an increased representation of parents in the workforce.

Koolyangarra Child Care Centre – Brisbane, Queensland. The Service supports the Indigenous community by providing culturally appropriate childcare. The service has a holistic approach to childcare and actively cooperates with other health and welfare services to allow the development of a comprehensive, flexible and integrated approach to needs of the community. It has had a positive impact on the community by providing strong links to the community and strong support to Indigenous families and their children.

Minya Bunhii Children's Centre - Integrated Service - Ceduna. An integrated childcare centre and pre school service developed in response to the needs of the community and involves a partnership between the commonwealth, state and local community.

Question: ATSLA 136 of the Hansard

Ms Hoare asked to be provided with the percentage of Indigenous people on allowances and the percentage of those receiving other payments, in comparison to non-Indigenous people.

In answer to the question:

There are a number of social security payments that are referred to as primary payments. These form the bulk of pensions and allowances and include payments such as Youth Allowance, Age Pension, Newstart Allowance and Disability Support Pension. Primary payments are mutually exclusive; ie an individual can receive only one primary payment. Additional payments and benefits are also available to people in specific circumstances to supplement primary benefits. These include Family Tax Benefit, Child Care Benefit and low income concession cards. In some circumstances people may be entitled to an additional payment or benefit even though they may not be in receipt of a primary payment.

- 29.5% (or 5241) of couple families, in which at least one person identifies as Indigenous, receive no primary payment but are in receipt of an additional payment or benefit. This compares to 38.1% (or 839,078) of non-Indigenous couples.
- 2.7% of couple families, with at least one Indigenous member, receive a primary payment and three additional payments or benefits compared to 1.4% of non-Indigenous couples.
- In couple families where both people identify as Indigenous, 11.2% receive a primary payment and two additional payments or benefits, compared with 28% of non-Indigenous couples.

- 57.3% of single parent families identifying as Indigenous receive a primary payment and an additional payment or benefit; this compares to 65.9% of non-Indigenous people.

Data regarding single and couple families in receipt of a primary payment and/or an additional payment or benefit as at 21 January 2001, is at Attachment A.

Question: ATSI 138 of the Hansard

Ms Hoare requested a copy of the paper on building stronger Indigenous communities and service provision to Indigenous people presented by Delilah MacGillivray at the *Generating Service Delivery Opportunities and Outcomes for Aboriginal Communities* Conference at Alice Springs on 11-12 April 2000.

A copy of Ms MacGillivray's speech is at Attachment B.

Question: ATSI 140 of the Hansard

Mr Haase asked if Centrelink was aware of probable roting in Kalgoorlie concerning an individual accessing others' benefits and if Centrelink was doing anything to control or investigate it.

In answer to the question:

The Manager of the Kalgoorlie Centrelink Customer Service Centre provided verbal information to Mr Haase on 16 January 2000.

Questions: ATSI 146 and ATSI 143 of the Hansard

Mr Haase requested information on regional variations in the Healthabit research and Mr Lieberman requested a summary of the research.

Due to the complexity and sensitivity of the Healthabit data, the principals (Mr Paul Pholeros and Dr Paul Torzillo) have indicated their willingness to appear before the Committee to provide a summary of the data and information on the regional variations. They can be contacted on 02-9973 1316 or through PO Box 495, Newport Beach NSW 2106. They would be available to give evidence in camera when the Hearing is in Sydney

Question: ATSI 144 of the Hansard

Mr Lieberman requested information regarding programs exclusively available to Indigenous people and details of parallel programs available to other customers

In answer to the question:

Multifunctional Aboriginal Children's Services (MACS) – Indigenous families may face barriers accessing child care services funded by FaCS for a range of cultural, social and economic reasons so MACS were established to provide Indigenous families access to formal child-care. Its aim is to provide affordable child-care that meets the cultural needs of Indigenous families and the social and developmental needs of Indigenous children.

Parenting Program. In response to recommendations from the *Bringing them home* report, FaCS is establishing Indigenous parenting and family well-being programs. The funding for these programs will be \$5.9 million over four years. This recognises that past separation policies have caused Indigenous parenting skills to be undermined. There is capacity under the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy to fund community driven initiatives to enhance parenting skills and family wellbeing for both Indigenous and non-indigenous families.

Commonwealth State Housing Agreement (CSHA). Under the four-year 1999 CSHA, the Commonwealth provides more than \$4 billion to state and territory governments to fund housing assistance for those whose needs cannot be met by the private market. The states and territories will contribute around \$1.5 billion over the same period. There are three tied programs under the CSHA: Community Housing Program, Aboriginal Rental Housing Program and the Crisis Accommodation Program. The remainder of CSHA funds is predominantly for public housing.

FaCS is responsible for the administration of the Aboriginal Rental Housing Program (ARHP) and states and territories are responsible for the services carried out under the Program. There is agreement to work towards providing safe, healthy and sustainable housing for Indigenous people. State and Territories can use ARHP for capital construction, upgrades and house maintenance and other related housing functions such as asset management training for Indigenous housing workers.

Aboriginal and Islander Child Care Agencies (AICCA) are funded to undertake the placement of Indigenous children in accordance with the Aboriginal Child Placement Principle and related family welfare matters. The Commonwealth currently funds sixteen Agencies; fourteen of which also receive funding from State Governments.

Community Development Employment Project Participant Entitlements. As a result of changes to the Social Security Act, CDEP participants are now able to test their eligibility for additional benefits, such as health care card, rent assistance, pharmaceutical and telephone allowances, automatic family allowance and bereavement payments. Eligible participants have had access to these additional entitlements since 20 March 2000. Eligible participants also receive a CDEP Participant Supplement payment, currently \$20.80 per fortnight, similar to payments available to Work for the Dole participants.

Question: ATSI 146 of the Hansard

Mr Lieberman requested examples of best practice in the provision of housing.

Attachment C contains several examples of best practice in the provision of Indigenous housing.

	Contact officer:	Cleared by:
Name:	Michael Ingram	Barry Smith
Position	Acting Director, Indigenous policy Unit	Assistant Secretary, Community Branch
Contact number:	6212 9387	6212 9150

Cleared by your Executive Director: YES

ATTACHMENT B

Ms MacGillivray's speech given at the *Generating Service Delivery Opportunities and Outcomes for Aboriginal Communities* Conference

Centrelink's Commitment to Maximise Service Provision to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities 'A National and Regional Perspective'

Presenter: Delilah MacGillivray, Business Manager, Centrelink National Indigenous Services

Introduction

Thank you to the conference organisers for the opportunity to address this conference on Centrelink's behalf today. I would like to start this presentation by firstly acknowledging the traditional owners of this country. Thank you to them. I would also like to introduce my Centrelink colleagues who will help me to answer questions if we have time at the end.

Setting the scene

My presentation today aims to do the following three things:

- provide a big picture perspective of Centrelink
- give you a snapshot of what our Indigenous customers say they value about Centrelink services; and
- give you an understanding of some of the work Centrelink is doing to maximise service provision to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities - from both a national and regional perspective. (The term 'Indigenous' used throughout this document refers to Indigenous Australians and does not replace the need to understand the diversity between and within both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures.)

Centrelink the big picture

Centrelink was officially launched in September 1997 and was created with a vision to become a one-stop-shop linking people to Australian Government services. We now have business agreements with nine key agencies and we deliver 70 different products and services.

Centrelink delivers services on behalf of a range of Government Departments. These departments develop Policies and rules, Centrelink has the responsibility for implementation and delivery. For the Department of Family and Community Services (FaCS), we provide social security payments to millions of Australians. For the

Department of Employment, Workplace Relations and Small Business (DEWRSB) we are the gateway to the Job Network. For the Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs (DETYA) we administer, among other programs, Abstudy and assistance for isolated children. On behalf of the Department of Veteran's Affairs, we provide services to this country's veterans at a number of regional locations. We administer the Tasmanian Freight Equalisation Scheme for the Department of Transport and Regional Services, to support Tasmanian industry development. For the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry we support rural industries by administering the Farm Family Restart Scheme and Exceptional Circumstances Relief Payments.

Increasingly, we are working with other Government agencies to broaden the community's access to government services. We provide agencies such as the Child Support Agency with access to facilities and support to enable them to strengthen their regional activities. In partnership with Service Tasmania we are working to increase awareness of Commonwealth and State Government activities.

Size and Scope

- Centrelink is a massive organisation with six point one million (6.1 million) customers, of which about 114,000 have identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander.
- We have twenty two thousand (22,000) employees, of which about 800 are Indigenous, including about 200 in identified Indigenous specialist positions.
- We provide services in more than 1000 locations around Australia, including 303
- Customer Service Centres; 23 Centrelink Call Centres; 42 specialist service centres; 400 visiting services (including remote visiting services) and over 265 Agents.

Challenges

- We have challenges in making sure that we respond to our **customers** - we have to listen, be perceptive and responsive and deliver in tangible terms exactly what they are entitled to.
- We have challenges in ensuring that the **\$46 billion** in taxpayer funds we pay out each year on behalf of our client agencies is paid out in accordance with the law.
- We have challenges in creating and consolidating a **partnership** with the community. We have challenges in being where the action is - whether it is with communities facing short term natural disasters, long term structural adjustment as in parts of rural Australia, or with Communities such as the "business community" or communities with needs characterised by ethnicity or Indigenous status.
- We have challenges in delivering better, more **productive service**. In six years we will deliver a one billion dollar efficiency dividend and a new service delivery model. The challenge of productivity improvement will provide benchmarking for other high volume businesses.
- We have challenges in using **technology** well. Our service delivery depends on it, and our work provides a good test-bed for technological ways of doing business.
- We have challenges in showing the way in the new **public administration**. We are a public administration pioneer, and very concerned with big picture restructuring and internal best practice.

How then does Centrelink meet the challenges of maximising service delivery opportunities and help to improve outcomes for Indigenous Australians?

I am pleased to report that three years after Centrelink's inception, we have some sound foundations, from work we have done with client departments and internally, to build a national strategic focus on services to Indigenous customers and communities. Our ultimate aim is to provide and maintain a Corporate direction and commitment through Centrelink's Business Plan and other strategic documents, including a Centrelink Statement of Reconciliation, to improve outcomes for Indigenous customers and communities on the ground.

As mentioned earlier, we provide services on behalf of client departments, therefore, do not have direct responsibility for policy development. I should mention that FaCS, DEWRSB and DETYA specifically require us, as part of our agreements with them, to focus on and enhance our services to Indigenous Australians with regard to their policies and programs ie. strengthening families and building stronger communities, Indigenous job seekers and Abstudy education allowances. In supporting DEWRSB's Indigenous Employment Policy, for example, Centrelink registers, assesses and refers Indigenous job seekers and Community Development Employment Program (CDEP) participants to Job Network, follows up to ensure commencement and also issues Wage Assistance Cards to those eligible. We also run Employment seminars to provide information on employment programs and job seeker obligations. Some of these seminars have also included Job Network members and other agencies. As a service delivery agency Centrelink ensures not only that Indigenous Australians have equal access to and an equitable share of the products and services it provides to the Australian public but that they are culturally appropriate and tailored to their needs where possible. We work collaboratively with our client departments and other government departments such as the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) and Prime Minister and Cabinet to try to achieve an integrated Government approach. We know that this is what communities want because inflexibility of policies and funding approaches can hinder what they and Regional Councils, the elected arm can do.

Let us now take a look at what our Indigenous customers have said to us through customer feedback mechanisms such as Value Creation Workshops and telephone surveys.

Listening to our Customers - What our Indigenous customers have said

Value Creation Workshops

Centrelink has pioneered the use of a customer feedback tool, which helps us to respond directly to customers in a specific location. Using easily understood technology we gather customers' views on the quality of the service they have experienced. The staff answer the same questions as the customers, and in doing so attempt to anticipate how the customers will respond. We did a lot of work on the workshop concept to make it more appropriate for our Indigenous customers and to allow for more discussion. We have also trained Indigenous facilitators and Customer Service Champions to complement the

setting up and running of workshops to ensure they are culturally appropriate. Workshops have included focuses on job seekers, families, youth and students (specifically Abstudy) and Agents. The workshop data I am about to present came from urban, rural and remote locations (some in discrete communities) throughout Australia, where Centrelink staff and Managers travelled to the town or community.

The following data from (22) workshops held with 389 Indigenous customers displays the top ten values and the common area of concern counterpart with its importance ranking:

Rank	Value	Irritant	Rank
1	Flexible & easy access to offices & services	Difficult or poor access to offices/services	7
2	Fast & efficient service	Slow & inefficient service	2
3	Relevant, up-to-date & understandable information	Not getting the information I need	1
4	A comfortable office with good facilities	Poor office layout & lack of facilities	10
5	Staff who understand my culture	Lack of cultural understanding	5
6	Smiling & friendly staff	Poor staff attitude	3
7	Simple forms & letters	Too many & too difficult forms	4
8	A payment system that meets my needs	Inflexible policy or process that doesn't meet our needs	6
9	To be treated with respect & courtesy	Poor staff attitude	3
10	Well trained staff	Lack of multiskilled staff	17

In responding to customer feedback, staff identified the following key areas of focus to improve services to its Indigenous customers:

- Clearer, simpler information
- A higher level of cultural awareness by staff
- An office environment that meets needs
- Staff attitude
- A fast and efficient service
- Better access to Centrelink and services
- Personalised service
- Stronger links with the community
- Reduction in mistakes
- Better privacy
- Friendlier service
- Improved forms and processes.

Some of the practical suggestions made by customers and staff include:

- Non-Indigenous staff to accompany Indigenous staff on community visits
- Cultural awareness training for staff
- Office commitment to the role that Indigenous staff can play in improving service delivery to Indigenous customers
- Full staffing of reception bays in peak periods
- Full-time Customer Liaison position
- Ring customers before interviews to confirm the need for an interview
- Prepare a New Claim handout package and conduct New Claim seminars
- Introduce a 'Fast Lane' for forms lodgement
- Offer an interview room if privacy is an issue
- Make available a telephone, photocopier and fax for customer use

As well as getting direct and uncensored feedback from our Indigenous customers (in some cases through interpreters), these workshops have also proven to be a positive cultural awareness experience for non-Indigenous staff. In many cases, just experiencing the sheer isolation of some of the towns and communities, has been a learning experience and provided some useful insights for many Customer Service Centre staff and Managers. Any previous assumptions about access to services generally tend to take on new meaning.

Telephone surveys

The CSC and Call Centre Customer Satisfaction Survey is another tool we use to capture customer feedback. Some 60,000 Customers who have had a recent contact with Centrelink are asked a structured series of questions. This 6 monthly survey allows us to determine the key drivers of customer satisfaction both over time, and across programs.

The following table lists the key drivers for Indigenous customers, compared to those for customers overall:

National	Indigenous
Service Attributes	Service Attributes
Staff helpfulness	Staff helpfulness
Staff speed and efficiency	Access to correct person
Accuracy of information	Queue handling
Way staff treated you	Communication - explaining
Appointment system	Staff friendliness
Communication - explaining	Staff speed and efficiency
Staff friendliness	Communication - listening
Communication - listening	Office environment
Queue handling	Accuracy of information
Office environment	Appointments system
Access to correct person	Way staff treated you
Image Attributes	Image attributes
Easy to deal with	Easy to deal with
Understands Customers needs	Caring organisation
Caring Organisation	Understands customers' needs

You will see that one size does not fit all ...

With the exception of the first key driver 'staff helpfulness', the drivers for Indigenous customers are quite different to those for customers overall. For example the top four national drivers are 'staff helpfulness', 'speed and efficiency', 'accuracy of information' and 'way staff treated you, while for Indigenous customers they are 'staff helpfulness', 'access to correct person', 'queue handling' and 'communication - explaining'.

Customer Charter

We have developed a Customer Charter that is reviewed each year, in part using feedback from these surveys. Equally important is an internal document "The Centrelink Customer Charter in Practice" that takes each of the statements in the Charter and links them to the appropriate Customer Service behaviours that are needed to support the Charter commitments.

As outlined above, Value Creation Workshops provide one way of responding directly to community concerns about service delivery. They also provide an opportunity to feedback any policy issues to client departments or other agencies. Surveys also allow Centrelink to respond appropriately.

Modes of service delivery

Community Agent and Visiting Services

In addition to Customer Service Centres and the Call Centre Network we have a number of Community Agents, visiting services (including Remote Visiting Teams) to help supplement services to urban, rural and remote customers and communities. There are also Indigenous specialist officers who provide direct customer service (Indigenous Customer Service Officers) and officers who are available to work with communities on specific community development/social planning initiatives (Indigenous Services Officers).

The Community Agent Program is a contractual arrangement that allows a Centrelink service to be run out of a community. Depending on local needs, the levels of these services vary across Australia, from a basic information dissemination service in some locations to outposted full time staff in others. Many locations are supported by on-line Call Centre, technological support and visiting services. There is a continuing need to examine and try new approaches, some of which are outlined later. We have a commitment to help work towards getting it right for communities. Agent arrangements, if we can get it right, help us to enhance our services in locations where customers cannot easily access a Customer Service Centre.

Interpreter Services

Interpreter and/or suitably qualified bilingual staff are employed to ensure that Indigenous peoples are not linguistically disadvantaged in claiming and maintaining their correct entitlements or services.

Indigenous customer and staff feedback reflects that customers generally contact Indigenous staff directly as they prefer to deal with them on a one-to-one basis. There is

also a significant amount of customer contact being made through intermediaries such as Community Agents, Interpreters and Indigenous community organisations.

Call Centre Services

Specific Call Centre queues are in place for Centrelink's Indigenous customers. The Indigenous queues in Palmerston and Cairns answer enquires from areas such as the Kimberley, all of the Northern Territory and far north Queensland that includes the Torres Strait Islands. These two centres take over 20,000 calls per months. Abstudy calls are taken from all over Australia by five Call Centres, which include Cairns, Palmerston, Perth, Port MacQuarie and Townsville. A CDEP queue will run for six months to handle enquires regarding the new CDEP Participant Supplement. There is also an 1800 telephone service that is located in Mt DrUITT and extends throughout Western Sydney to the Central Coast.

Availability of Indigenous specific queues and deliberate strategies to recruit Indigenous staff generally, has helped to build rapport with individuals and communities. The success of Indigenous specific sites has seen the call load increase at a rapid rate, whilst maintaining a short wait time for customers.

In the last twelve months, Indigenous staffing numbers within the Call Centre network have increased and also created opportunities for staff to move to management positions. Centrelink Call has revised the mainstream recruitment process to help attract Indigenous peoples to Call Centre positions. The Townsville Call Centre which is not an Indigenous specific queue, recently selected 18 Indigenous staff as a direct result of intensive publicity in the community (ie. local Indigenous radio, newspaper, word of mouth and promotion within Indigenous organisations).

We are continually reviewing Call Centre services to meet Indigenous communities' needs. The Call Centre network and Customer Service Centres work closely to identify areas for improvement.

Indigenous Information Products

The majority of Indigenous specific information products such as posters, pamphlets and videos are produced nationally through the Indigenous Information Officer (IIO) in the Communications and Marketing Team (CMT). Separate blank border posters with both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander designs allow the flexibility to disseminate relevant information or messages locally.

The IIO works closely with Centrelink's network of Indigenous Services Unit Managers and other specialists, as well as national teams to develop culturally appropriate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander information products including contractual arrangements for radio and television broadcasts.

Some of the work has included:

- specifically designed posters that reflect the diversity of both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander customers, including a flower emblem design which we promote for use nationally to ensure consistency of products

- a contract with the Brisbane based National Indigenous Radio Service to broadcast products and services to community radios around Australia
- three series of the Talk About video promoting products
- publicity strategies for the Community Development Employment Program (CDEP) budget initiative, Abstudy, Family Assistance Office and other initiatives
- an Indigenous magazine
- ongoing evaluations of products and strategies.
- **Enhanced service delivery including local initiatives and community partnerships**

So far I have touched on national strategic directions, the importance of customer feedback, some progress we have made and some traditional modes of service delivery. Centrelink continues to build on these existing service delivery arrangements through both Government and community partnerships, which create opportunities to listen to customers and communities and help to facilitate a process to develop flexible solutions to local and individual circumstances. The following examples reflect a proactive move towards reengineering service delivery and tailoring products to the needs of Indigenous customers, many of which go far beyond those traditional modes of service delivery. The approaches include all or a combination of the following: working in partnership with communities; customer needs research (local/national surveys and Value Creation Workshops); cost analysis; property negotiation; fitout design and support; product delivery design; staffing requirements planning; local employment and training, Information and Technology support (including Internet, Agent CD, electronic banking); field support roles; contract development; external stakeholder consultation; national and/or local coordination; national and local Government and non-Government strategic partnerships, to name a few.

It is through such partnership approaches that:

- Centrelink's Kalgoorlie Customer Service Centre is working with local Government and Indigenous community organisations to address domestic, family and community violence in the Western Australian Goldfields. The local office is working actively on two committees which include a broad group of agencies representing community health, housing, police, Aboriginal Affairs and the hospital and a locally focused Kalgoorlie Advisory Group which feeds into the larger group.
- Our Palmerston Office in Darwin has a dedicated officer who has worked with the Maningrida community and other Government agencies that service that community, to develop an improved community service model. This arrangement includes a plan to train community people to run an enhanced agency service ie. a small office, with technological support, which takes account of community needs and kinship relationships.
- The Cloncurry office was created as a direct result of a Value Creation Workshop.
- We are working closely with FaCS and other agencies to explore ways to improve services to communities through community pilots in the Northern Territory, Queensland, Victoria, New South Wales and South Australia. These pilots allow Centrelink to work closely with interested communities and other Government agencies to identify where Centrelink's service delivery can improve and where the bottlenecks are in other agencies' policies or funding. Some of the work in progress includes:

- Working with the Tangentyere Council here in Alice Springs to explore ways of improving Aboriginal customers' awareness of and access to electronic banking arrangements. Such an approach requires a commitment from a range of agencies such as financial institutions and Government at both local and national levels. In November 1999 a range of such agencies including, the Australian Bankers' Association, Traditional Credit Union, First Nations Credit Union, Centrelink, ATSIC, DEWRSB, Tangentyere Council, Papunya Regional Council and other stakeholders met in Alice Springs to discuss banking issues, which had resulted from a report from Neil Westbury. This pilot is work in progress from that meeting.
- Working with the Papunya Regional Council to identify appropriate servicing arrangements to take account of specific locational needs. This work will explore the possibility of creating a small office or agent arrangement to service a cluster of communities.
- Working with the Palm Island community off Townsville to build on existing arrangements (as outlined below) such as an outposted Centrelink staff member, take an integrated Government approach and explore opportunities to enhance the community's capacity to grow. This community has already done some work that Centrelink, as a lead agency or facilitator, can help the community to progress. The Centrelink Regional Office has worked with the Palm Island Community Council to establish a small Centrelink office. The Office consists of two Indigenous Centrelink officers with full access and processing capabilities and an Indigenous Community Agent. Both Centrelink Officers are Palm Island residents. The overall service is managed, coordinated and monitored by a senior Indigenous Services Officer located in Townsville who maintains close links with the Palm Island Community Council, together with the Centrelink Regional Manager.
- Working with communities in Yarrabah, Cairns, Cherbourg, inner city and outer urban Melbourne, Wreck Bay and Port Augusta to trial a Statement of Care approach to paying Family Allowance which was developed as a result of a series of workshops in October 1998. It recognises the shared responsibility for children in many Indigenous communities. The trial alleviates the need for carers to formally advise Centrelink when a child moves between carers.
- Working with client departments and the Australian Bureau of Statistics to improve the reliability of Indigenous customer data, through system enhancements, a publicity strategy and staff training.
- Working with DEWRSB to improve outcomes for Indigenous job seekers and CDEP participants. Centrelink's Areas have developed specific Area plans and strategies for improvement, which include working collaboratively with other Agencies.
- Centrelink also expects to be able to offer weekly payments for certain Indigenous customers in the Alice Springs region from September this year. This is intended to assist those who have difficulty with managing funds over a fortnight.
- Centrelink is in a position to work with other Government departments and agencies to help facilitate an integrated Government approach. One area where Centrelink can work to improve its relationship with communities is through Regional Councils, the Indigenous communities' elected arm. In many locations, Centrelink works closely with Regional Councils, however, we would expect these arrangements to gain momentum and have a heightened focus with the current ATSIC restructure and other discussions on Regional Autonomy.
- Centrelink is also in an ideal position on the ground to provide feedback on the impact or relevance of Government policies on Indigenous customers.

- Centrelink is developing a culture which supports and promotes the principles of Workplace Diversity which reflects the profile of the local community:
- Thursday Island Customer Service Centre is managed and staffed by Torres Strait Islander peoples.
- Palmerston's Indigenous Call Centre has won a Regional Diversity Award for its specific focus on improving Call Centre network services to remote communities.
- In the last customer survey, the Walgett Customer Service Centre which has an Indigenous Manager, was the top performing office, with the highest customer satisfaction rating.

The Future - Life Events

Customers have told us they want an organisation that responds to them as individuals and to the complexities of their life circumstances. That is what we are aiming to provide which will further build on other responsive approaches.

Since November 1998, Centrelink has been working towards a new Customer Service Delivery Model, the life events model. It will mean customers won't need to know about Government processes, they won't need to know the names of the different payments and services and they will only have to tell their story once. People will come to us with a life experience, such as having a baby, and we will put together the best package of products and services to meet their needs. We will streamline requirements from different departments into a single service offer and we map all the services we supply to a single point of contact. We do the searching, not the customer. This requires a major re-design of our systems. This approach supports Centrelink's vision towards becoming a one-stop-shop.

The life events model is complemented by one-to-one service which means that when people come to us they are allocated an individual Centrelink officer who can be their main point of contact with Centrelink. One-to-one service means customers receive more personalised, professional service and a more holistic assessment of their needs. One-to-one service means decisions are made more quickly, backlogs are kept at a minimum, decisions are more accurate and there are fewer appeals or requests for review because the quality of information is better and more likely to be trusted. More importantly, people don't have to come back to us as often as they did.

In further developing this life events model, we will ensure that our Indigenous customers' needs are taken into account.

In conclusion

In conclusion our proactive approach to:

- listening and working in partnership with our Indigenous customers, communities and their elected representatives;
- the ongoing trial and subsequent implementation of innovative service delivery options;

- the insights from the community pilots in progress; and
- our willingness to work collaboratively with client departments and other agencies toward the integration of Government services;
- will help us to continue to tailor Centrelink's services to the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in urban, rural and remote locations while simultaneously meeting our legal requirements as determined by client department agreements.

Centrelink has only begun the task of linking together many of the streams of Commonwealth activities. Improvements in the future will come from breaking down the stove pipes further and who knows maybe even across levels of Government. We acknowledge that we can improve on what we are doing now, however, believe that we are on the right track and have sound foundations to build on.

ATTACHMENT C

The following are examples of best practice in asset management in Indigenous housing organisations. Details of these and others are outlined in the November 2000 Report by the Commonwealth-State Working Group on Indigenous Housing, *Identification of Strategic Asset Management Best Practice for Indigenous Housing Organisations*.

North Peninsula Area Demonstration Projects

The Queensland State Government allocated \$4.38M in 1997/1998 and \$4.8 M in 1998/99 to provide health, safety, amenity and standard upgrades to houses in five the Deed Of Grant In Trust communities which are closely located in the Northern Peninsula Area of Cape York. Cross department and agency co-ordination resulted in additional expenditure on major housing and infrastructure in the area at the same time.

A total of 314 houses were prioritised by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Housing for major health and safety upgrades which included (water supply, washing areas, kitchens, power supply etc). At the same time, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Housing also funded the Aboriginal Co-ordinating Council's housing facilitator project, to support community councils in the area to develop and implement housing management policies and procedures on a range of management levels. This included tenancy management, arrears management, repairs and maintenance management and allocations of houses.

A training program for housing and infrastructure trades was incorporated as part of the demonstration project, ensuring that local community people were able to participate in the work that was generated by the project. Local qualified tradespeople from each of the five communities were employed wherever possible.

Tenants reported that they were more committed to paying rent once the upgrades had been done, and community response was excellent. The fact that the project was intensely implemented and the work was completed on time was an important factor in raising the morale within the communities. Even though it meant that people were *invaded* twice (in Phase 1 and then in Phase 2), morale was raised in the whole community. Councils reported that they had a clearer mandate to enforce their policy of ensuring that payment of wilful damage was the responsibility of the tenants.

The project manager for the concurrent ATSIC NAHS program (GH&D) were unanimously supported and engaged by the Northern Peninsular Area community representatives for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Housing Demonstration Project at initial consultative meeting.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Housing's current 5 year plan includes meeting the backlog of upgrades in remaining Deed Of Grant In Trust communities, so that housing on these communities is brought to the same standard which is enjoyed by all Australians. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Housing will jointly co-ordinate housing management support with the capital works program where possible.

Umoona / Coober Pedy

Umoona is a discrete community within the township of Coober Pedy. Umoona Community owns approximately 54 houses and the Aboriginal Housing Authority owns an additional 56 ARHP houses. It is also responsible for the administration of the Rural & Remote Housing Program (R&RHP), which combines funding from the State and the housing component of the ATSIC Community Housing & Infrastructure Program (CHIP). Houses built with these funds are deemed community owned houses. There are no mainstream public rental houses in the town.

Umoona Council's model of housing management is unique in South Australia in that it manages both the Umoona Community owned and the statewide Aboriginal Housing Authority rental houses, under the umbrella of the elected Housing Management Committee.

The Housing Management Committee comprises of representatives of the Umoona Community and Aboriginal Housing Authority tenants from the broader rental program. Administration of these programs is carried out by the Umoona Council office in conjunction with the State Housing Authority.

The Housing Management Committee makes decisions on a range of issues, from the design and planning of new housing, upgrade and R&M requirements, allocation of houses and the setting and collection of rents through to tribunal decisions on eviction.

Obvious benefits of this model are the closer coordination of the Aboriginal Rental and the R&R Housing Programs. It enables the HMC to tailor accommodation to meet special needs of the applicant, the standardisation of some aspects of policies and procedures applicable to both programs and brings the direction of the R&RHP and the Rental Program closer together.

Economies of scale are achieved through the construction of housing for all programs. The co-ordination of planning for a sustainable building program achieves the time required for accreditation under the community building/training program through the local CDEP.

In the last three years a total of 3 R&RHP and 6 ATSIC houses funded through the NAHS program have been built at Umoona with 12 community members achieving various stages of the Civil & Construction Worker Certificates, 3 of whom are currently completing their final year.

Murdi Paaki

MPH manages about 60 houses in Bourke, and 300 in the Murdi Paaki region. It also owns some houses, but its main aim is to provide management services. It enters agreements with individual housing providers, for terms of five years or more and it provides a management structure as well as training. There is a General Manager, a Finance Manager and assistant, a Property Manager and two Field Officers, and a Training Manager position (currently vacant). All apart from the second Field Officer are based in Bourke, and the GM reports to a Committee.

There are also five assistant property manager positions that are currently being advertised and filled. This arrangement is funded for two years, and the successful candidates will undertake TAFE training in Bourke and at the end of the two years will qualify as real estate agents. MPH's General Manager and Property Manager are also the TAFE teachers responsible for the course. The Assistant Property Managers are not

bound to MPH and may move on to another job once qualified, but MPH sees this as an opportunity to continue training new candidates.

Rent collections in Bourke are at 96%, and the only reason that it is not about 100% is that there are 3 houses that are not tenatable. All rent is collected electronically as direct debits in an arrangement with the Commonwealth Bank of Australia, and all tenants must agree to these arrangements when they enter a tenancy agreement. Every Monday MPH issues instructions to the CBA through the DIAMONS system based on its database on renters. The CBA in turn issues instructions to the banks and other financial institutions to collect the rent from the tenants' accounts and credit MPH through its SUN accounting system. The entire system cost MPH around \$8,000 to establish, and the ongoing cost to MPH is just a few cents per transaction. There is no direct cost to the tenant.

This is superior to the Centrelink system because it does not rely on the tenant being on Government benefits; it can be established for anyone with a bank account. If tenants cancel their authorisations, MPH is informed immediately electronically. The electronic rent collection arrangements are complemented by the work of the Field Officer who visits the tenants on a regular basis.

MPH has Visual Rental Management an asset management software package also run by the Department of Housing (DOH). It allows the asset manager to maintain a view of every transaction related to a particular property. MPH staff keep the database up-to-date. The policy is to undertake cyclical maintenance and when the procedures are established in the immediate future, inspections will be undertaken quarterly on all houses. In the meantime, small maintenance jobs are undertaken immediately they are reported to prevent them growing into large problems.

The advantage of the MPH approach is that it removes management from the immediate community, and isolates it from other social problems that arise. The problems arise from two perspectives. First, community-housing managers find it difficult to manage the houses of the members of their own community. MPH finds that communities are sick of dealing with the usual problems of community housing (collecting rent, dealing with tenants that are family, etc.) and gladly pass the management job over to MPH. Second, members of the community are suspicious of their own members collecting the rent. MPH finds that Aboriginal people are happy to pay rent if their houses are properly maintained, and MPH managers are not dealing with family and so they find it easier to do their job properly.

Before MPH offered its services there were 52 housing providers in just 16 communities, and none of these providers were large enough to be sustainable on their own. MPH offered stronger management, as well as the opportunity to take advantage of NAHS, HIPP and TRIP programs.

Oombulgurri

Oombulgurri is a former Anglican Mission that was established in 1913 and is the location of the Forrest River Massacres of 1926. In the 1960's the mission accumulated debts and the living conditions for the resident Aboriginal people declined. The church eventually closed the mission in 1968 and moved the population to the Three Mile Reserve at Wyndham. In the early 1970's the social dislocation of the Wyndham people led to a small group of elders relocating to Oombulgurri. These elders re-established a 'dry' community using cattle production for consumption and sale, with the assistance of the Institute of Cultural Affairs (ICA - a US based missionary organisation) and

Commonwealth funding. After a period, the community felt that their role in determining the community direction had been overtaken by the ICA. The ICA was removed by the Government in 1978. In 1985 the community moved to self-management.

Oombulgurri currently supports 350 people and has 44 houses. The community was one of the original participants in the demonstration projects that commenced in 1996/97. Significant planning has been undertaken with the community to determine needs and priorities in a range of areas including housing, health, training and employment and law and order. The housing was generally in a poor state and had suffered significant deterioration since the early 1990s. The design of dwellings, their size and their amenity no longer met the expectations of residents.

Oombulgurri participated in the Management Support Program and considerable effort was put towards capital upgrading through community training and employment and addressing community management and housing management in particular. Major funding contributions from HIPP and the demonstration project have contributed to a general improvement in the community. Training and employment opportunities have emerged.

The demonstration project is based on a holistic approach to service delivery and the success of project consultations with stakeholders reinforced the importance of ensuring effective community management structures exist prior to investing in physical infrastructure.

The Aboriginal Communities Strategic Investment Program (ACSIP) has been the catalyst for increased involvement and co-operation between different agencies at the community level – both State and Commonwealth agencies. A large number of projects have been completed including completion of 16 new houses; a power house upgrade; upgrade of power transmission lines; a horticultural project; sewerage reticulation upgrade and the sealing of internal roads and upgrade of main access roads. Work is also taking place on council office extensions; the provision of power meters to community buildings; the construction of a Special Constable's facility and a carpenters workshop.

Oombulgurri has an effective management team and community council that has enabled decisions to be made in respect to new infrastructure.

A housing management plan has been developed that sets out rental and tenancy policies and procedures and a work team has been developed with 11 community members. Upgrading of \$718,000 has taken place to all community dwellings and the capacity of the work team has reached a level that they can undertake repairs and maintenance to all dwellings. Maintenance is funded by rental income, which has improved since the introduction of the Centrepay facility.

Additionally, Oombulgurri has established the Dadaway Building Company, which has made successful in-house bids for projects under the demonstration project such as the warden's facility and the community workshop.

Ngukurr

Ngukurr Community is located at Roper River in the Katherine region of the Northern Territory and is governed by the Yugul Mangi Community Government Council.

The community has a population of 1500 in 129 dwellings organised into 20 clan groups. Housing is managed as part of general local government operations.

Ngukurr was chosen as one of five communities to participate in a Pilot Program for Community Housing Management in 1992. The aim of the program was to develop good housing management on selected communities and measure its effect in financial terms.

The objectives of the program were to:

- develop efficient housing management through:
- developing strategies to resolve cultural and other barriers to effective housing management;
- investigating the training needs of community managers and councils in respect to housing, and
- facilitating the implementation of identified training initiatives.
- examine the cost effectiveness of strategies for management of community housing stocks by obtaining quantitative data on costs and benefits of various management strategies including training, and evaluating the benefits against the costs of the strategies.

In addition to these objectives, a key part of the Program was to develop a five year Housing Plan. The Housing Plan was developed with input from the Community. It identified the housing needs of the 20 clan groups represented on the Council. A detailed survey of all dwellings was carried out. The survey identified all repairs and maintenance required to bring the dwellings in the community up to a safe and healthy standard. The local building team with the assistance of qualified tradesmen (plumbers, electricians etc.) carried out the repairs and maintenance work identified in the survey.

A training package was developed as part of the Community Housing Management Program.

Three Yugul Mangi Council employees were part of the team involved in the development of the training package for Certificate II and Certificate III in Housing Administration & Management. These two certificate courses are NTETA accredited and are delivered through recognised service providers, including Batchelor College. All three Yugul Mangi housing officers successfully completed both certificate courses.

A housing management database was developed as part of the Pilot Program and was installed on the Yugul Mangi housing office computers. The database enables housing officers to record rent collected, repairs and maintenance required on houses and to maintain an up to date waiting list for those in need of housing.

The council has found that by employing trained housing officers wait lists are being kept, houses are being allocated fairly, repairs are being carried out without delay and rent is deducted regularly each fortnight from CDEP wages or DSS benefit payments.

Average rent collected per house per fortnight by the Community Council is \$66, the minimum target rent being \$60 per fortnight.

The increase in rent collection (\$205,000 collected by the Council during 1998/99) has enabled repairs and maintenance to be carried out without delay. The payment of rent and sense of ownership has resulted in better care of the community houses.

More appropriate housing designs to accommodate the large number of family members making up the households have been developed by the community. The designs have

meant including such things as additional toilet and shower facilities, providing secure food storage areas and out door living areas.

There have been changes made to the type and design of health hardware (taps, pipes, showers, toilet cisterns, shower bases etc.) used in the houses and these have proved successful. The trialing and installation of new health hardware products has resulted in a reduction of repairs and maintenance to 'wet' areas. The reduction in health hygiene related illness is noticeable when taps, showers and toilet cisterns are kept in working order.

The 'owner builder' approach has proved to be most effective, particularly for those housing managers with building experience. The local building team under supervision of the housing manager builds houses on fully serviced sites using subcontracted tradesmen and local labour, in accordance with specifications approved by the community and the proposed tenant.