

12 October 2000

The Committee Secretary
House of Representatives
Standing Committee on Aboriginal
& Torres Strait Islander Affairs
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Sir/Madam

In replying to the inquiry into the needs of Urban Dwelling Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Peoples I will address Items 1, 3 and 4 of the Terms of Reference.

Item 1. The nature of existing programs and services available to urban dwelling indigenous Australians.

The Anglican Counselling Service (ACS) routinely counsels Aboriginal people who seek the use of the service at counselling centres throughout the north west of New South Wales. The ACS also provides a weekly free service in a community venue in Tamworth. The objectives in going out to the clients are:

To provide counselling in a familiar environment which is more easily accessible for those without insufficient finances or private transport.

To demonstrate what counselling does for those whose experience of it is limited.

After three years of conducting this program it is apparent there is a need for family counselling that is accessible and immediate and for trained Aboriginal counsellors to staff the service.

Item 3. The situation and needs of indigenous young people in urban areas.

In the emergency cases seen there are numbers of mothers with young children fleeing abusive partners. This abusiveness is often compounded by alcoholism, drug use and intra family friction. It compels the mothers to leave their "places" and their support networks to escape the cycle of violence they and their children suffer.

The absence of fathers in many other families means that the children (especially the eldest child) take on the role of supporting the mother. This results in “inverted parenting” where the child becomes the support and sometimes the parent to the parent and leads to anger and confusion at school, as well as at home, when they are “put in their place” by other adults.

The mothers and grandmothers struggle to manage these angry children.

There is a need for ongoing support for these fatherless families and for the reinvolvement of men in the parenting - if not the fathers then other men as mentors or uncles.

4. The maintenance of Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander culture in urban areas including, where appropriate, ways in which such maintenance can be encouraged.

In working in a longer time frame with some Aboriginal clients there is sometimes a need to reconnect with family, to confront the past and to discover the parts of their culture that have been lost in order to rebuild, in the most appropriate way, the family structures that have been lost or damaged.

There is a need for a project to facilitate local Aboriginal communities with strong connections to their past (eg Toomelah and Walhollow), to explore their stories to become aware of the missing structures in the present indigenous urban culture and devise a means of replacing them.

When local Aboriginal people record their culture and stories in ways meaningful to them, those without a knowledge of their culture can be reconnected with it and with the means to replace what is missing in their family system.

This submission is written to highlight needs within the Aboriginal communities where the ACS provides a counselling and education service. These are:

1. The need for accessible, timely, family counselling where we see insufficient services straining to meet the demands on them.
2. The need for trained Aboriginal counsellors where none exist.
3. The need for Aboriginal communities to be aided in recording their stories so missing family structures can be replaced to enable them to function effectively.

The ACS (a non-government service) does provide counselling services, community education programs and counsellor training courses in the the New England and North West of New South Wales. The current funding level is insufficient for the service to provide any additional services.

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