



3 November 2000

The Secretary  
House of Representatives Standing Committee on ATSI Affairs  
Parliament House  
Canberra, ACT 2600

**Needs of Urban Dwelling Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People  
Submission to the Commonwealth Parliamentary Inquiry**

Anglicare Australia is pleased to have the opportunity to submit the following for consideration by the Committee. This submission profiles four Anglicare related projects that seek to address the needs of urban dwelling Aboriginal and Islander people. The four case studies were prepared as part of a Commonwealth funded *Living in Harmony* Project.

**1. Housing: A critical need for Indigenous Australians<sup>1</sup>**

Anglicare Australia is aware of the critical need for increased and improved housing for Indigenous Australians. Indigenous people are more likely than any other Australians to live in improvised and /or overcrowded dwellings. As a result, indigenous Australians suffer health problems more commonly seen in developing countries of the Third World.

Indigenous Australians are over represented among the homeless and those at risk of homelessness. About 2% of Australians are Indigenous, yet 12% of the adult clients of supported accommodation programs are Indigenous people. Indigenous Australians are six times more likely to need emergency accommodation than non-Indigenous Australians.

Only 31% of indigenous people own or are buying their own home, less than half the rate of home ownership amongst non-Indigenous Australians.

About one third of all households living in improvised dwellings in Australia in 1996 were Indigenous households, and nearly half of all dwellings with 10 or more people living in them were occupied by Indigenous households.

Almost 7 % of Indigenous people in Australia lived in dwellings with 10 or more residents in 1996.

Poor housing and overcrowding are a major cause of poor health, low educational achievement, unemployment and racial discrimination in Australia. Improving the quantity

---

<sup>1</sup> **Sources:** Australian Bureau of Statistics, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, ATSIIC press release

and standard of housing available to Aboriginal and Islander Australians is an essential foundation to improving the lifestyles and life expectancy of Indigenous Australians.

### **Cooperative approach**

These four case studies profile efforts to address the fundamental need for shelter for Indigenous Australians but more than that, they show that cooperation between local black and white communities is a significant element in achieving the aims of the project and sustaining the service. The starting point for each of the projects was a local commitment to work together to address a problem that could be solved.

Anglicare Australia has been using a display based on the four case studies to encourage other Anglicare agencies and Anglican parishes around Australia and indeed local communities at large to work in cooperation with local Aboriginal or Islander communities to address Indigenous housing needs. The four case studies show that it is possible to do something worthwhile.

## **2. Gawombianna Gunyah, Dubbo**

When cuts to the health budget in NSW forced the closure of the Brewarrina, Walgett and Bourke hospitals, Aboriginal people had to travel to Dubbo for hospital treatment. The limited accommodation facilities at the hospital were soon full and the hospital approached the Rev'd Gloria Shipp, Priest in Charge of the Koori Anglican Fellowship, for help. Families coming to town for hospital treatment needed short term accommodation and the Koori Fellowship and Holy Trinity Anglican Church set up a committee to see what could be done.

After much discussion and negotiation with the help of the NSW Churches Community Housing, the NSW Housing Department agreed to provide a house and Anglicare Western NSW agreed to provide a grant to help with the set-up costs. On 23 July, Gawombianna Gunyah was opened by Bishop Bruce Wilson of Bathurst after a welcome by Mr Rod Towney on behalf of the traditional owners, the Wiradjuri people

### **Open to all**

The Koori Fellowship keeps close contact with the hospital and all people coming to the house are referred by the hospital. The Fellowship also employs a part time support worker to assist the families while they are staying in the house and a part-time cleaner to maintain the house. Families staying at the house pay \$10 a night to stay there and there are beds for up to six. The Koori Anglican Fellowship pays the rent for the house and the Department of Housing looks after maintenance. One of the families who have already stayed in the house had family members come from Coffs Harbour to be with the old man who had suffered a heart attack and stroke.

This house is available to everyone.

### **3. Boomerang Meeting Place Mogo, NSW South Coast**

After the old Church on the Princes Highway about 10 kms south of the NSW south coast town of Batemans Bay burnt down, the land owned by the Anglican Church lay vacant until the local Aboriginal Community under the leadership of Tom and Muriel Slockee created a community partnership between Aboriginal Christians and the Batemans Bay Anglican Church. Subsequently, Boomerang Meeting Place Incorporated was formed and the Anglican Diocese of Canberra and Goulburn gave the land to the new Aboriginal community organisation. With funds from insurance on the old Church, a grant from the Viertel Foundation and lots of volunteer effort, the combined Meeting Place/residence was built.

Pastor Tom Slockee had a vision for the land as a place to gather and work together in harmony with different buildings serving different needs and a central meeting place. Aboriginal people live up and down the coast in all the small communities from Batemans Bay to Narooma and need a place to meet and seek help and support. Youth unemployment along the coast is very high and many young Kooris need help and support as well as living skills and short term emergency help. There are many young couples and single mums who need parenting skills and support. The Boomerang Meeting Place was established to meet these needs.

The Elders of the Boomerang Meeting Place invited Pastor Bill Simon and his wife Kaylene to the ministry in September 1998. Pastor Bill is a 'stolen generation' child and in the past has had to fight alcohol and drug problems as well as periods in jail, experiences that have given him unique insights and skills.

One of the programs being developed is to recruit a team of 5 whites and 5 blacks to go to Goulburn jail. Through this program the local Aboriginal community seeks to live the Christian life with visits and giving support to people in prison. There are a lot of young men in Goulburn prison and when their family go visiting, they need a place to stay, but at present there is no where to stay so the Boomerang Meeting Place is considering to address this need in Goulburn.

Links have been established with the Batemans Bay Court and many of the young people placed on community service are sent out to the Boomerang Meeting Place. The police also ask for help to provide accommodation for young people.

#### **A place to feel comfortable**

The ministry is also strengthening the women of the community. An arts and craft group has been building the self esteem of local women. Local Churches have given sewing machines and materials to the Boomerang meeting place and women from around the Batemans Bay area come to sewing very Wednesday morning where they have been making things that "make themselves feel proud of themselves". It has become a place where they can feel comfortable and 'get away from all the things going on a home'.

A woman involved in the local Uniting Church and with experience in counselling helps with counselling on relationship issues and sexual abuse to some of the women who attend the sewing mornings. A Kids Club for kids from the Mogo area provides an opportunity for them to learn arts and craft as well as sport. They have use of the local school oval and the 22 or so kids from 5 to 12 years old come back to the Boomerang Meeting Place every second Wednesday for a hot meal before going home. Local Churches and community groups help with providing the food for the meals.

### **Hard to find a house**

For young Kooris living along the south coast, high unemployment, a lack of permanent jobs and discrimination in accessing housing makes life difficult. Many young Kooris with babies have great difficulty in finding adequate housing. “Some houses have been wrecked by Kooris and now it is hard for all of us to rent a house” explained Dean, a Koori youth living in Moruya. “trying to rent a white house means you have to have all these bits of paper, and some real estate agents are just racist,” he continues. The Housing Commission is putting Kooris into houses in one particular street in Moruya and this is causing whites to move out. “We have asked the Housing Commission not to put us all in the same street, but rather to mix us around through the whole community but they have not listened”, said Dean.

Young people in housing need support services and a manager to see that the rules are followed and everyone is treated fairly, according to several Koori youth from Moruya. The group of young men from Moruya have plans to establish an art and cultural business and hope to establish it in Mogo where there already is a thriving tourist trade. Discussion also runs to a Koori Café and Koori bush tourism to special places in the neighbouring State Forest and nearby National Parks. Ideas abound but progress will inevitably be slow until resources are found to purchase necessary equipment.

### **Support from the local community and Church**

Stage 2 at Mogo is to build a larger Community Centre with an art and craft workshop and a larger meeting place. Plans have been drawn up and proposals for the Centre and for additional housing have been submitted to NSW Government and Aboriginal funding sources. A few years ago the Uniting Church gave the Boomerang Meeting Place a further two parcels of land adjoining the existing block. The site has adequate space for the Cultural Centre and for several houses which will be made available for emergency housing and for families needing drug or relationship counselling. Tax deductible status has been sought by the Association.

The community elders and members have a clear plan for the development of the Boomerang Meeting Place and are grateful for the support they have received from the local Anglicare Eurobodalla.

The Boomerang Meeting Place is keen for this to be seen not as an Anglican ministry but as an Aboriginal ministry open to all who come. The community recognises that they will continue to need support for many years yet because it generally takes from 7 to 10 years for Aboriginal projects to become self sustaining.

The Mogo project shows the value and importance of supporting local community initiatives and the value of a leader with a vision in the local community. However, support is still needed over a longer period of time before it can be reasonably be expected that a community will become self sustaining.

## **4. Winna-Burra Rockhampton**

Winna- Burra, meaning belonging to the fish in Durambal language is a service to the local and itinerant Aboriginal and Islander community in Rockhampton. Based in the Anglicare Central Queensland office in North Rockhampton, Winna-Burra provides a comprehensive information service to homeless, park and town campers and transient people including ex-offenders. It provides medical assistance, emergency relief and accommodation and helps people seeking information on domestic violence and alcohol abuse. Winna-Burra receives funding from Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) through the State Department of Families, Youth and Community Care.

Winna-Burra's outreach worker visits people in the parks every morning and provides any help that they may need. Some times he might help them obtain a Medicare Card and then take them to a Doctor. Other times he may be helping someone to catch a bus back home. On Wednesday and Saturday evenings, Winna-Burra workers collect left over bread from the bakeries around Rocky and deliver it to families who need extra assistance. The bread run is also an opportunity to talk to people and to find out if they need any assistance.

Aboriginal and Islander people drinking in the parks is a common complaint in Rockhampton and a source of racial stereotyping. Some in the parks want to be there with people who don't look down on them according to the Coordinator of the service. Through the services of Winna-Burra, the park people are being helped. They need someone to talk to, someone to look after them. Winna-Burra walks beside the park people and helps them to make lifestyle choices. It takes a long time for people to want to change but once they make the decision Winna-Burra can help them.

Winna-Burra also has links with a farm called Milby north of Rockhampton where up to 12 people could go to dry out. It was an alcohol free area and people would have to come into Rockhampton if they wanted to drink. The farm also provided work for young people under the Work for the Dole scheme and the vegetables would be sold through a cooperative. However, the coop was a victim of the disintegration of services for Aboriginal people, and the closure of the coop resulted in the loss of the market for the vegetables.

### **Discrimination in Housing**

A major cause of housing difficulties in Rockhampton has been a long history of discrimination against Aboriginal and Islander people by real estate agents. For the Winna-Burra coordinator, it has taken ten years of relationship building to get to the stage now where she can phone two real estate agents that Winna-Burra feels comfortable with and receive a list of available house for an Aboriginal family.

Through the Rockhampton Aboriginal and Islander Living Skills (RAILS) program, Winna-Burra provide longer term accommodation for families. If a family can afford it, they are charged rent so that when they have to move out, they can tell the real estate agent that they have been paying rent and therefore can be put into a house in the primary rental market. A major need identified by Winna-Burra is to build Aboriginal specific houses to cater for the accommodation of the extended family. Houses must meet the needs of Aboriginal families and their responsibilities to their extended family. This is a cultural issue.

The transient people come into town to visit a relative in hospital or jail, get left behind after attending a football match, or have come to town for a funeral. They may have come without a change of clothes and have no where to stay. Winna-Burra helps find these people a place

to stay and help them with clothes or food. Centrelink also refers people to Winna-Burra and in some months more than 400 people receive food vouchers or other emergency help.

### **Supports people to recapture their dignity**

Aboriginal people in Rockhampton commonly come from either Woorabinda, Cherbourg or Yarrabah, all former Aboriginal missions where people were taken over many years by the Government from all round the State. Consequently, Aboriginal people are commonly travelling to towns around eastern Queensland to visit relatives or attend funerals. With little or no money, they must sleep rough or rely on assistance from organisations like Winna-Burra. For the Church, which stresses the importance of family, providing emergency housing and assistance to Aboriginal and Islander families must remain a high and active priority.

A leaflet describing the Winna Burra program states: “The participants come from a community of dispossessed people and their lifestyle does not always meet the approval of the dominant society. The Aboriginal and Islander support program endeavours to provide a service which educates, supports and encourages participants to be independent, to recapture their dignity, and teach skills needed to sustain life in the wider society.”

## **5. Ebirra Aboriginal Accommodation - Darwin**

For Aboriginal and Islander people in the remote Top End of the Northern Territory, access to medical services that are taken for granted by most in southern Australia, raises complex social and cultural problems. The most obvious problem is that people in remote areas must travel to Darwin for medical services, as there are few services in the remote communities.

Since the 1950s, the Church Missionary Society headquarters in Darwin had been a place of sanctuary for Aboriginal people visiting Darwin from Anglican missions around the Territory. In 1991, to augment the accommodation available on the CMS site, the Groote Eylandt Aboriginal Trust, with advice from Anglicare Top End, purchased an adjacent property comprising twelve 2 bedroom self contained units. Groote Eylandt people named the new facility *Ebirra*.

The manganese mining on Groote had provided the Aboriginal Trust with a substantial income and funded the establishment of Ebirra Aboriginal Accommodation, a temporary home for people who come to Darwin for medical treatment or to accompany family or friends who are in hospital. The Trust invested in a critical welfare facility for the people of Groote.

### **Home away from Home**

Anglicare Top End leases Ebirra from the Groote Eylandt Trust and up to 60 men, women and children can be accommodated in a safe supportive environment, free from alcohol and violence. Ebirra is a medical hostel providing accommodation for people from Groote as well as from other remote area settlements such as Oenpelli. Close contact is kept with the hospital and patients are often referred to Ebirra by the hospital.

Several residents are renal dialysis patients, often people in their late 40s or early 50s who need dialysis at least 3 times a week as a result of kidney failure. Finding longer term accommodation for renal patients is a constant struggle but Ebirra is committed to keeping beds available for emergency cases and expectant mothers. Limited space and rising demands have placed Ebirra under pressure. There are many requests to accommodate people with

disabilities, a need which Ebirra can only meet in a limited way because none of its units are equipped for disabled access.

### **Culturally appropriate**

Built over 25 years ago, Ebirra is now inadequate to meet the needs of people with disabilities and the growing need for respite care. In response, Anglicare Top End is negotiating for a new block of land and has plans to develop a large multi-service complex that will meet the medical hostel, respite care and increasing aged care needs of Aboriginal people in the north. For example, the plans for the new facility incorporate an open fire place in an effort to meet the cultural needs of their aboriginal residents. Many Aboriginal people staying at Ebirra pine for their distant home and look for the communal sharing that happens around the open fire.

## **6. Recovering Culture for Urban Dwelling Aboriginal Youth**

In urban areas, Aboriginal youth have few opportunities to learn about their culture and to feel proud about their identity. In several States, Anglicare agencies support programs to provide opportunities for Aboriginal youth to 'go bush' to rediscover their cultural heritage. Such programs are critical in helping to Aboriginal youth discover meaning in their lives and can contribute significantly to restoring pride in their identity and stability in their lives. Yet these preventative programs struggle to find the necessary resources, in spite of their greater cost effectiveness to specialist care for high risk youth or the cost of maintaining a young in jail.

### **Recognition of Aboriginal and Islander presence in Dubbo**

The Koori Anglican Fellowship church is prominent in Dubbo because of the giant Aboriginal mural that covers the entire outside wall of the Church. Painted by Gloria's husband, Eddie, son Anthony and other family and friends, the mural has helped identify the church as place where Kooris are welcome. In the school holidays the church became the centre for a vacation care program for more than 30 kids, the majority Koori kids. With limited funding from Government, the Fellowship was able to run an effective vacation program that not only provided Koori kids with opportunities to learn crafts but kept them occupied through the holiday period. The wall mural played a part in ensuring that the Koori kids felt at home.

Eddie and the Shipp family have also applied their artistic talents to three telephone boxes in Dubbo with the blessing of Telstra. The three phone boxes are now decorated with Aboriginal murals and since they have been painted the boxes have been free from vandalism. This small act of painting payphone boxes has been an act of recognition of Aboriginal presence in Dubbo and assisted the reconciliation process. Aboriginal people need to rediscover their Aboriginal identity and one of the main ways this can be done is through culture. The three telephone boxes are symbols of recognition of the presence of Aboriginal people and their culture.

Anglicare Australia believes that public recognition of the presence Aboriginal and Islander people in urban areas is a very important part of building community relations and cooperation between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities. Recognition of presence is a critical step in ensuring that Indigenous Australians feel part of urban Australia today.

### **Darumbal Youth Services, Rockhampton**

Following the Burdekin Report into 'at risk' young people, Anglicare Central Queensland established Darumbal Youth Services. In 1993, the Service gained separate incorporation although retaining links to Anglicare.

Darumbal has three major program activities: emergency accommodation, an alternative education program and an Arts and Craft centre. It maintains two emergency accommodation houses, one for young men and one for young women, funded under the Federal Government Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP). Darumbal also supervises twenty Work for the Dole placements and has restored a park behind their North Rockhampton Art Centre and Youth Drop-in centre. Durambal has recently been given land for a camp at Shoalwater where they hope to take Aboriginal youth to discover their cultural heritage.

The youth service provides financial, material and health assistance to young people. Contact is made through the Drop-in centre. Recently, Durambal has achieved registration as a training organisation and is training young people for work in the hospitality industry, in cooperation with a resort at Hervey Bay. Fifteen young people are currently undergoing training for a variety of jobs.

The Alternative Education Program provides special assistance to children in years 1 to 12 who are experiencing learning or behavioural difficulties. Around 180 kids pass through the program each year, which has one full time worker and around twenty volunteers.

The Arts and Craft centre assist young people to develop their artistic talents as well as providing a venue for display and sales. The cultural program works with schools and takes groups of young people out bush to collect materials for craft. Because Rockhampton is not a major tourist centre, Durambal is exploring leasing art works to Government departments as a means to raise funds and gain exposure for the Aboriginal and Islander artists of Central Queensland.

Anglicare Australia believes much more can be done to help Aboriginal youth rediscover their cultural heritage and regain their identity and dignity. Such programs must be undertaken by or in cooperation with Aboriginal organisations and/or communities, but are relatively inexpensive compared with expensive welfare programs.

## **7. Providing Aged and Respite Care in Remote Areas**

The provision of aged care and respite care in remote areas is, ironically, an important means of enabling Aboriginal and Islander people to live in remote areas, avoiding all the alienation and social tensions of the urban centres.

Groote Eylandt has a terrible legacy from its days as a trading port for Macassan fishermen and Portuguese explorers. Aboriginal people on Groote Eylandt suffer a muscle wasting disease called Machado Josephs Disease, which causes severe physical disability. As a consequence there are a high number of Groote Eylandt residents confined to wheel chairs. Not only does this require specially built houses but also carers willing to assist the disabled on a daily basis.

In response to these special needs on Groote, Anglicare Top End has assisted the local Angarrumanja community organisation to establish Aninga-Langwa Draka, a Meals-on-Wheels service, substance misuse counselling, respite care, relationship education and aged care services. After seeing the respite care available to carers in Darwin, Angarrumanja



leader, Murabudda Wurramarrba worked for several years for a similar culturally appropriate service to be made available to families in his local area.

### **Respite care - helping people remain at home**

Over 90 per cent of all people needing care in East Arnhem region are cared for by family members. The aim of the respite care service, which has now been extended to the East Arnhem region, is to enable the carer in the family to continue their caring. If the carer gives up, the aged, disabled or terminally ill person would have no option but to move to a facility in Darwin, away from their loved traditional lands. For young people this could well mean moving into an aged care nursing home because there are no other facilities available. For the past 8 years, the respite care service has helped people remain in their own home and local community. The program at Groote started with 8 people in the respite care program but now there are 27 people using the service.

Aged care and respite care in remote regions of the Top End is a critical element in helping Aboriginal families to continue to live happily in their own homes and local communities. Without carers in the local community, the disabled and the aged will have no choice but to leave their homeland for distant and alienating Darwin.

### **Aged Care**

Anglicare Top End has established an aged care program on Groote and through this program, 27 older Aboriginal women and men are being assisted to remain in their own homes on Groote Eylandt and nearby Bickerton Island. Carers help with tasks that may include shopping, hunting, transport to church and health services, collecting firewood and banking. Over recent years, the life expectancy for older people has risen considerably, as have demands for aged care services. With assistance from the Federal Government, an aged care facility is being developed at Angurugu on Groote Eylandt.

## **8. Conclusions and Recommendations**

Anglicare Australia believes it is important to encourage cooperative relationships between community organisations in the Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities, especially in urban areas where the potential for misunderstanding and social tension is greatest. Regrettably, racist attitudes are deep seated in the Australian community and more resources are needed to challenge these attitudes and to build cooperative relationships within the community.

Anglicare seeks to build such links between Anglican Churches, church organisations and Indigenous community organisations, especially the National Aboriginal and Islander Anglican Council (NATSIAC) but recognises that the limited human and financial resources available to Indigenous organisations makes this difficult and often slow process.

### **Recommendation 1: Community harmony**

Anglicare Australia commends the Government for establishing the *Living in Harmony* program to challenge racist attitudes and build community understanding and harmony. But more needs to be done to overcome racism in the Australian community and a long term sustained program aimed at schools as well as community organisations is needed. Such a program should involve Aboriginal and Islander people in the planning and implementation.

### **Recommendation 2: Housing**

Anglicare Australia recognises that Indigenous Australians are more likely than any other Australians to live in impoverished or overcrowded houses and Indigenous people are over-represented among the homeless and those at risk of homelessness in Australia and that poor housing and overcrowding are a major cause of poor health, low educational achievement, unemployment and racial discrimination in Australia.

Consequently, we are deeply concerned about the poor housing and overcrowding experienced by Aboriginal and Islander people and urge State and Commonwealth Governments to strengthening programs that work with Aboriginal people to address housing needs.

Anglicare Australia also recognises that the Church could do more to address housing needs and urges the Anglican Dioceses of Australia to meet with diocesan representatives of the National Aboriginal and Islander Anglican Council (NATSIAC) and other local community leaders in their area to discuss housing issues and to identify practical ways in which the Church can assist in overcoming the housing problems faced by Indigenous Australians.

In particular, the Churches can assist in providing short term accommodation for Aboriginal and Islander families who need to come to major urban centres for medical treatment.

### **Recommendation 3: Employment**

Anglicare Australia recognises that employment is a key issue in addressing the quality and affordability of housing for Aboriginal and Islander people. The Government must set targets for the employment of Aboriginal and Islander people and work with employers, including the Churches, to ensure that these targets are achieved. Commensurate with setting targets is the need to ensure that Aboriginal and Islander people have the necessary skills and training to take up the employment opportunities in their home areas.

### **Recommendation 4: Recovery of Culture**

Anglicare Australia calls for more funds to be allocated to programs aimed at helping urban Aboriginal and Islander youth to recover their identity and culture, especially through activities that take young people bush with Elders to rediscover their history and heritage.

### **Recommendation 5: Aged Care and Respite Care in remote areas**

Anglicare Australia calls for greater emphasis in aged care planning for the provision of aged care and respite care services in remote areas to enable Aboriginal people to remain living in their traditional country rather than be forced to move to urban areas for services.

Russell Rollason  
Executive Officer  
Anglicare Australia  
12 Batman Street, West Melbourne. VIC 3003

Phone 03 9328 3544  
Fax 03 9328 3644

Email [anglicare@anglicare.asn.au](mailto:anglicare@anglicare.asn.au)