



Hon Lou Lieberman
Chairman
House of Representative Standing Committee on Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander
Affairs
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

October 11th, 2000

Dear Hon Lieberman

Please find attached YACWA's response to "*Needs of Urban Dwelling Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples*".

This response has been formulated through consultation with our membership, via mail, email, group and individual meetings. These responses have been collated by Janine Brown and a small working party.

We trust that this response provides some useful feedback and input for you. We would also like to draw your attention to our commitment to any continued involvement in the evolution of this policy as per the points at the end of the document.

Yours sincerely

Rose Carnes
Executive Officer



**NEEDS OF URBAN DWELLING ABORIGINAL AND TORRES
STRAIT ISLANDER PEOPLES**

**RESPONSE BY THE YOUTH AFFAIRS COUNCIL OF WA TO THE
COMMONWEALTH PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY**

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The Youth Affairs Council (YACWA) appreciates this opportunity to reply to the Government Inquiry on the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People.

YACWA is the peak body for non-government Youth Affairs in Western Australia. It is a membership based organisation with statewide representation. The membership is drawn from a wide range of people including students, young people and those who work with and for young people of all cultural diversities. This submission was developed from a range of sources and compiled by Janine Brown and Rev. George Davies (Juvenile Justice).

YACWA feels the needs of the indigenous people are of an importance and concern and we are therefore enthusiastic to address the Terms of Reference. This submission is based on information re needs of urban dwelling indigenous people in the metropolitan area of Perth. Many of the concepts however, apply more broadly to urban areas other than metropolitan centers.

**NEEDS OF URBAN DWELLING ABORIGINAL AND TORRES
STRAIT ISLANDER PEOPLES**

**TERMS OF REFERENCE -- COMMONWEALTH PARLIAMENTARY
INQUIRY**

1. the nature of existing programs and services available to urban dwelling indigenous Australians, including ways to more effectively deliver services considering the special needs of those people;
2. ways to extend the involvement of urban indigenous people in decision making affecting their local communities, including partnership governance arrangements.
3. the situation and needs of indigenous young people in urban areas, especially relating to health, education, employment, and homelessness (including access to services funded from the supported accommodation assistance program);
4. the maintenance of aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture in urban areas, including where appropriate, ways in which such maintenance can be encouraged;
5. opportunities for economic independence in urban areas and;
6. urban housing needs and the particular problems and difficulties associated with urban areas.

INTRODUCTION

Just as the inquiry is focused on building and providing better opportunities and outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people so are we committed to offering maintenance of culture, identity and service solutions.

In the main the terms of reference focus on:

- Cultural maintenance
- Economic independence
- Service delivery
- Addressing needs such as : Homelessness, Health, Employment. Education.

With the many services available to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people it is obvious that the Government has sought solutions for its' indigenous people. However although the services are out there the problem does lay in indigenous people knowing about them, recognizing them, accessing them and utilizing them.

Having services is vital for all, but it is the use of them that allows for growth, change and opportunity. If one truly seeks the user then our message needs to be **“WELCOME”** - NOT, move on or , remove yourself. We need to provide a place to direct young people welcome them when they get there and where they feel they have somewhere to go and be. The whole concept of “move on” and no-where to move on to only creates feelings of rejection and resentment, thus feeding the spiral of negative messages. Change the message and you may change the behavior!

At present there is no place for Indigenous people to go, there is no “home away from home”, and there is no standing body with a resource library and access to all existing services. The reality of a Holistic Resource / Network / Referral / Drop in Center, particularly in the heart of Perth is a way in which ALL of these issues can be addressed.. In order to address all the terms of reference in a real and continuing way it is vital that services LINK and network together through a main source such as a “Holistic Center”. A Center provides all for its service users. It is a place to feel comfortable, safe, free to express yourself, it is unintrusive and a place where our indigenous people can maintain their own culture and identity.

1) The nature of existing programs and services available to urban dwelling indigenous Australians, including ways to more effectively deliver services considering the special needs of those people;

The nature of existing programs and services are about improving opportunities and outcomes for indigenous people. Programs such as the Business Development Programme, the Indigenous Business Incentives Programme (IBIP), the Business Funding Scheme (BFS) and the Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP) are all services available aiming at and promoting the Economic independence of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People. These services do allow for indigenous culture, identity and maintenance but percentages of service users could be higher if they were made readily known and available to the indigenous people in urban areas.

A Center is a way, in which such services can be better delivered by being promoted explained and most importantly made KNOWN to these people. Centres are full of useful information as well as offer a place to rest and relax. Workers within these centres do counsel, as well as refer and are able to provide sufficient knowledge of resources and services available. The Center is a place where on going support can be offered. People accessing these services although informed about them are not just left to tackle the “red tape” on their own. Rather they have support and help in understanding how to access and use them, thus increasing their skills and self motivation and confidence.

In considering the special needs of indigenous people one can not go past the need for us all to exist within our own culture and to have the opportunity and availability to do so. At present where do the indigenous people go? Many of them are on the streets whereas with a Centre they can have their own music, their own Art, entertainment and have ownership and a place they can call “theirs”. Until we address the inner problems of identity and respect we will never succeed in addressing the outer. For as long as the message is felt to be rejection and objection then the problems that face our indigenous people will continue to increase..

To effectively deliver the needs of indigenous people we have to answer their calls, and hear their voices and include all of us as equals at all stages of planning, development, implementing and evaluating. Many indigenous people speak of “our own place”, wanting a place where their identity, culture and personal welfare can be alive and well. Places like “The Cave “ did provide this but were regretfully shut down and since then the aboriginal people have been back on the streets in larger numbers.

As noted in the Noongar Patrol April Report 2000 ¹, over 3 nights 535 aboriginal people were on the streets, only 41 referrals were made and the rest were left to stay on the streets. Over half had drug related issues and in the main simply had no-where to go. A Center can :

Stop / prevent substance abuse of any kind as the people have a place to be, have something to do, can make a coffee etc and so do not have the same need to turn to other forms of “support” such as drugs. If people are in pain or have problems there are professionals to speak to. If someone needs accommodation then the networks are there. The Center is a cure addressing all levels of issues. We need to listen and do something about providing such places.

¹ Noongar Patrol System. Report for Month of April 2000. Submitted by Aboriginal Advancement Council of W.A.

2) Ways to extend the involvement of urban indigenous people in decision making affecting their local communities, including partnership governance arrangements.

Involvement of urban indigenous people will happen if it is related to and for indigenous purposes. Input and involvement from urban indigenous people, allowing them to develop models that are culturally appropriate would lead to greater access and use of Government services and partnerships which already exist.

Providing an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Centre will give them the opportunity to meet, relate and discuss matters of concern and give answers to indigenous issues. The Center can be an avenue for an indigenous voice, allowing them to be heard through means of the system and its' workers.

In June 1998, it was a recommendation of the City of Perth Youth Forum to **“encourage community and service organisations to develop underage facilities and venues, to provide a place to meet and socialise with unstructured activities in a safe and secure environment. Ensure the participation of community members and young people in the planning, development and management of any new facility”**.

This action plan was recommended two years ago and still the concept of a unity and a place to provide for unity still exists. It is time for cries to be heard and action implemented.

3) *The situation and needs of indigenous young people in urban areas, especially relating to health, education, employment, and homelessness (including access to services funded from the supported accommodation assistance program);*

The reality is that many indigenous young people are still on the streets, unemployed and in many cases suffering from ill health. Again it is not that these services are not provided but rather that indigenous people are more focused firstly on the depth and identity of their culture. If they have no-where to go, no-where to recognize and maintain their culture then how can one expect them to “feel” good and be enthusiastic about employment or education.

In offering a safe place for them you encourage inner growth, positive outlooks, bright spirits and in that create the need and want for personal achievement and growth.

A Center also provides an opportunity for workers to help and support. Often “at Risk” clients can be identified and helped whereas if they are not there they are inaccessible to the worker and yet again left on their own. The centre is about identifying the above needs and having the means to access the available resources by using the referral system and various networks.

Until indigenous people are included at all levels of planning, development, implementing and evaluation, any attempts at providing “culturally appropriate” services are bound to fall short of the mark. We need to ask, invite, include, listen and be prepared to be led.

4) *The maintenance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture in urban areas, including where appropriate, ways in which such maintenance can be encouraged;*

Unless indigenous culture is maintained – it will die. Encouragement is about interest and interest is about encouraging to be committed and focused to a better self, community and society. For this “Wholeness” to exist then we must acknowledge and respect the make-up of all of our societies’ people.

Giving our indigenous people a place or places of their own immediately encourages them to step out and seek services that are there. The first service is that of the centre itself and from there anything is reachable. The ownership of that property allows yet again the indigenous person to feel a sense of belonging, welcome, free to practice and be their culture, discuss and be involved in issues that effect indigenous people, and an opportunity to have their say . There is no reason why such a Center could not link in with the rural and remote areas offering support in both traditional and modern day living for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander person. The enthusiasm is out there. We just need to reach it by offering a place of their own and somewhere they are free to deal with and respond to various issues.

5) Opportunities for economic independence in urban areas.

Much is currently available in regards to independence. As mentioned earlier many programs run in support of offering the means through finance, business backing and through partnerships and different programs. These programs, particularly the CDEP program have been very successful. Currently the unemployment rate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is 26%. If it wasn't for the CDEP program the unemployment rate would be around 40% as the program accounts for approximately 1/4 of the indigenous employment rate. By these figures it is obvious that participation from our indigenous people is there, with a strong response to programs that suit cultural and individual needs. Imagine if we could access more people, more agencies and more "across the board" interest!

6) Urban housing needs and the particular problems and difficulties associated with urban areas.

Across the board young people need housing. A YACWA campaign in May 2000 showed a definite lack of emergency, medium term and long-term housing. Our indigenous young people are no different housing is hard for the homeless and the SAAP shelters are usually FULL. Again in the Noongar Patrol April Report "**NPS had no success in securing accommodation for a youth. They tried several places**". One can honestly say that more accommodation options are needed.

Urban settings make the ongoing cultivation of many aspects of culture difficult. Once again we need to ask, listen and respond to identified needs. Some suggestions include provision of communal living/housing as an option and linking urban people with their traditional rural communities.

CONCLUSION

Improved opportunities for growth overall for the urban dwelling Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is imperative. Centers, such as the Cave have been very successful in the past and have the opportunity to yet again prove successful.

The Centre is not just an “off the street” solution but rather a way we can give and provide our indigenous people with a place of their own and promote the “message” of “WELCOME”. Centres as specified provide for such a wide range of needs, they address

- * personal issues,
- * cultural issues,
- * offer counseling,
- * support,
- * referrals,
- * link with accommodation shelters, employment and training centres and
- * most importantly allow the individual to exist as such for both themselves and with and for their community. Centers have games, culture nights, training days, music, art. and allow the young people to communicate in a safe and stable environment.

The Center is the main body allowing for and providing a wide range of options and solutions. The services are out there let's access them, use them and spread them around the communities in which they can benefit.

YACWA, as the voice for the W.A. youth sector, is committed to providing / encouraging active participation of all young people in their community. We therefore strongly encourage active, equal participation by indigenous young Western Australians at all levels of planning, developing, implementing and evaluating whatever initiatives be planned.

For further information regarding this submission please contact either the writers or Executive Officer of YACWA on 08 93880640