

CHAPTER 5

COMMUNITY-BASED SOLUTIONS

We believe that strategies which improve young Aboriginal people's lives and the health and well-being of their families and communities will be the most effective of all in combating substance misuse among young people.¹

Introduction

5.1 The success of interventions to prevent Indigenous petrol sniffing depends on how effectively a proposed solution addresses the causes of petrol sniffing. As discussed in chapter 2, the causes of petrol sniffing cover a myriad of issues including cultural, familial, social and economic. For truly successful interventions, a combination of solutions must be utilised including diversionary activities, management of substance supply and demand as well as strategies that address basic survival issues of housing, safety, poverty and hunger.

5.2 Many Indigenous and remote communities endure harsh conditions, not only associated with limited access to housing, schooling, health care and law and order but also limited access to basic resources and opportunities that urban communities take for granted. These are generally resources that provide for opportunities to undertake meaningful activities and have productive lives. Community-based programs and initiatives in Indigenous communities have proven to be one effective strategy in reducing the prevalence of petrol sniffing by addressing issues of boredom, reduced social engagement, low self esteem and feelings of hopelessness. In Yuendumu:

The Yuendumu Youth Program provides young people with diverse and vibrant alternatives to petrol sniffing and other substance misuse. Activities this year have included mural painting, pool, swimming, roller-skating, basketball, softball, concerts, discos, football, video games, film nights and cultural excursions.²

5.3 Essential elements when developing community-based programs include community consultation and the involvement of Indigenous people combined with continued support from 'outsiders'. These elements need to be a balanced and are dependent on community requirements. Dr Maggie Brady stated:

I think it is very much up to outsiders to provide the structures and support that can back up Aboriginal people in their attempts to feel that they can have legitimate interventions with younger people and that enable them to intervene in ways they want to do but feel restrained from doing...outside

1 MacLean S & d'Abbs P, 'Petrol Sniffing in Aboriginal Communities: A review of interventions', *Drug and Alcohol Review*, 2002, 21, p.70.

2 Additional information, Yuendumu Mt Theo Youth Program, Information on the Program, p.14 Mt Theo Management Committee.

authority figures like the police, the school and the clinic...Mt Theo is a good example of that. When Mt Theo started, Andrew, the non-Aboriginal youth worker who was instrumental in getting it off the ground, was attached to the school...Because Andrew was part of the school, that initially gave him the outside structure to work from and he was able to negotiate with the people at the outstation and help to get Mt Theo started. I think that supporting non-Aboriginal workers – youth workers, for example – and Aboriginal workers, if they are attached to another structure, helps to negotiate those difficult pressures,³ intrigues and kinship difficulties that can often sabotage the best programs.³

5.4 The Committee heard many accounts from communities who have utilised various funding sources to implement a range of successful programs. However, it was made clear that the success of these community-based programs and initiatives is dependent on a number of factors, including:

- engagement and commitment of the community;
- adequate and consistent funding; and
- community capacity to effectively run programs.

Community engagement

5.5 Many Indigenous communities have experienced great success with community-based programs which have contributed towards reducing the number of children and young adults that are sniffing petrol. The active engagement of the community is an integral factor to the success of any community-based program:

One of the key features that has made Mt Theo successful is the fact that it is community controlled and community operated. From the start, it was totally independent from external sources of funding or resources.⁴

It gets back to how we [Yarrenyty-Arltere Learning Centre] started and the way it was set up, and that was that it was a community driven program. It was basically driven by the core group of people who were affected by the sniffing, and it involved all the families of the young people and the young people themselves.⁵

In communities where the parents have allowed the community to operate the night patrol there has been much more success than in communities where the parents would step in between the kids and the night patrol. Where you have communities united in a particular approach and that carry it out, you have a better chance of success.⁶

3 *Committee Hansard* 27.4.06, pp.13, 18 (Dr M Brady).

4 *Committee Hansard* 22.2.06, p.6 (Dr R Thompson).

5 *Committee Hansard* 22.2.06, p.19 (YALC).

6 *Committee Hansard* 8.3.06, p.18 (Alcohol Tobacco and other Drug Services Qld).

5.6 The Alice Springs Town Council commented on the positive outcomes of having the support of the parents and the community for diversionary programs, and stated that they favour the delivery of programs associated with assistance to the elderly/infirm, sporting group involvement, community projects, job/skills training, lifestyle skills (for example typing, cooking), life skills (for example conflict resolution, anger management), leadership, drug/alcohol/substance abuse education, culture or education development.⁷

5.7 The Queensland Police Service (QPS) has worked cooperatively with local communities to develop activity centres which have proven to be effective in engaging community members. The QPS commented that:

Activity centres have engaged community members and provided opportunities to participate in worthwhile activities. Those activities have resulted in increased self-esteem and encouraged positive behaviour. The effectiveness of those initiatives lies in recognising the need to address many of the environmental and social conditions that give rise to volatile substance misuse, alcohol and drug abuse.⁸

5.8 The involvement of the entire community in the development of community-based solutions will produce supported programs and create a sense of belonging, ownership and understanding in the community. Families and young people affected by petrol sniffing as well as ex-sniffers can provide valuable insight into initiatives to combat sniffing. The Committee heard from members of communities that young mothers are struggling and need parenting support and young children do not receive clear messages regarding petrol sniffing as there are little or no culturally-appropriate educational resources.⁹

5.9 The Drug and Alcohol Office in Western Australia stated that one of the more important factors in preventing sniffing is 'strong community engagement and the community actually getting involved'. In Balgo, a cultural health committee called Palyalatju Mapampa was 'engaging, particularly the women in the community, in activities like bush medicine and so on. That provided some community strength for the community that in turn supported the community engagement.'¹⁰

5.10 The establishment of an outstation in Mt Theo has proved successful in rehabilitating young petrol sniffers and this success has been attributed to the dedication of the traditional owners at the outstation and the involvement of the home community.¹¹ The Committee visited Yuendumu and Mt Theo and these successful initiatives are described in more detail in the case study.

7 *Submission 19*, p.5 (Alice Springs Town Council).

8 *Submission 38*, p.13 (Queensland Government).

9 Evidence taken from informal Committee discussion.

10 *Committee Hansard 20.2.06*, pp.3-4 (Drug and Alcohol Office WA).

11 *Submission 25*, p.13 (DoHA & DIMIA).

Case Study – Yuendumu and Mt Theo Program

Yuendumu is a community of about 1,150 people located 290 km northwest of Alice Springs and Mt Theo is an outstation 160 km north-west of Yuendumu. The Mt Theo outstation is funded by the Commonwealth. Mt Theo is the most well known successful program.

From the 1970s to 1994, the Yuendumu community experienced increasingly serious problems with petrol sniffing among its young people. By 1993, there were up to 70 sniffers in a population of about 400. The community was plagued with problems caused by the petrol sniffers, including violence and damage to property. The Yuendumu Warlpiri elders decided to send young petrol sniffers to the Mt Theo outstation. At the same time, a program of activities was started in Yuendumu to ensure that young people had access to activities and opportunities when they returned from Mt Theo to the community

Traditional owners at Mt Theo provide guidance to the young people and teach them traditional culture. This has been a true partnership of Indigenous and non-Indigenous skills, drawing strength and experience from both cultures. In addition to the outstation, the Mt Theo program now includes the Jaru Pirrjirdi Youth Development Program, the Yuendumu and Willowra Youth Programs and outreach and education services. The outstation now focuses on preventing petrol sniffing throughout the entire Warlpiri region, taking in sniffers from Yuendumu, Willowra, Nyrripi and Alice Springs. Mt Theo outstation has also taken young people from the justice system.

The Jaru Pirrjirdi (Strong Voices) project engages youth as leaders, working on community development projects. Night School provides youth development and educational activities. Many of the past clients of the outstation are engaged in Night School as part of the Mt Theo follow-up and after care program. The Mt Theo program continues to case manage each former petrol sniffer who has resided at Mt Theo. However, lack of resources limits follow-up of clients who return to Alice Springs.

Today petrol sniffing is a rare occurrence in Yuendumu and the zero tolerance approach of the community ensures early intervention if any one is found sniffing

The success of the Mt Theo/Yuendumu Substance Misuse Program lies in giving young people traditional culture and respite from sniffing at Mt Theo, with diversion through education and recreation activities in the home community of Yuendumu. At Mt Theo, young people are geographically isolated and have no access to petrol, so they have a chance to recover from the effects of sniffing, while people in the communities have some respite from the destructive behaviour of the sniffers. The Mt Theo outstation acts as an important deterrent against sniffing petrol in Warlpiri communities.

Other attributes of its success are the need for continuity in the availability of services and funding for a comprehensive holistic approach including prevention, diversion, intervention, immediate response, treatment and rehabilitation as well as opportunities for education, employment, sport and other recreational activities

Source: Mt Theo-Yuendumu Substance Misuse Program – Information provided at Yuendumu and accessible at http://www.mttheo.org/pdf/report_low_res.pdf and Submission 25 (DoHA & DIMIA)

5.11 Outstations require the commitment of the family group and at times this may place enormous strain on individuals. The DoHA and OIPC stated that 'outstations are an Aboriginal initiative and the needs and wishes of Aboriginal staff working at outstations must be respected. Although governments can support them, outstations must be initiated, controlled and maintained by Aboriginal people.'¹²

5.12 Dr Russell Thompson remarked on the success of the Mt Theo Program:

It is a credit to Mt Theo and the youth diversionary petrol-sniffing program that they have managed to do what no-one else has been able to do. The key to this is that the problem of petrol misuse has been owned by the local community and the response has been grassroots – it has come from the local community – and it has worked. It is very difficult to address a dysfunctional youth culture. Five years ago in the Warlpiri Homelands, petrol sniffing was the dominant youth culture. The dominant youth culture now revolves around multimedia, music and sports, and it is very vibrant and very healthy.¹³

5.13 More successful programs with higher participation in activities are generally those where there is local ownership and support. CAYLUS pointed to the Docker River Youth Program which it considered 'would give the best opportunity to break the cycle of substance abuse in remote communities'. CAYLUS also noted that the investment required to bring other communities up to the standard of Docker River 'would pay dividends in a number of areas beyond petrol sniffing'.¹⁴ The Docker River Program is explained further in the case study below.

Case Study - Docker River Youth Program

Ms Pauline Fietz, who undertook a study of the program and described it in detail in her submission, concluded that:

The Docker River Youth Program can claim to have been instrumental in eliminating experimental petrol sniffing (typically 10-15 age group) in the community. It has also decreased the rate of chronic sniffing, by making the environment much less favourable to senior sniffers and diverting younger sniffers away from the sniffing recruitment process.

The Docker River Program serves to illustrate the conditions that must be met for a programme to be successful. The program provides activities on a regular and consistent basis for people aged from three to 30. The activities are meaningful to the participants, culturally sensitive and appropriate for the age and gender of the participants.

12 *Submission 25*, p.28 (DoHA & DIMIA).

13 *Committee Hansard 22.2.06*, p.2 (Dr R Thompson).

14 *Submission 20*, p.10 (CAYLUS).

It provides links to the community through the use of an Indigenous Youth Team, intergenerational activities such as traditional hunting and gathering and communication and collaboration with local councils, senior administrative officers, Aboriginal leaders, and family members.

The guidance and support of the Youth Team provides the capacity to ensure that the activities are relevant and stimulating. The team is also a crucial role model for the younger members.

The quality of the staff has been critical. Docker River has been able to recruit and retain skilled and committed male and female youth workers. The workers are multi-skilled. They hunt and butcher camels, cook, coach and umpire sports, cut hair, paint murals, build waterslides, choreograph dance routines, DJ, drive 4WDs across long and rugged distances, maintain and repair equipment and infrastructure, administer, plan, report and apply for funding, provide crisis support and care, mentoring, referrals, health treatments and counselling and support to young people and their families.

The workers have the enthusiasm, commitment and energy to work from eight am until the closure of the Recreation Hall between 9.30 am and 12.00 noon. Weekends involve organising and running day and overnight trips. Interest is maintained over the summer holiday break with externally supplied workshops. Evening and holiday periods tend to be peak times for petrol sniffing so providing diversionary activities at these times is critical to reducing the incidence.

The program has sufficient infrastructure, although the standard is generally not that expected in mainstream recreational programs. The infrastructure includes a recreation hall, a pool room, computer room and broadcasting room, a store room, stage and kitchen. They are also being funded to operate two troop carrier vehicles, allowing separation of the sexes and access to bush activities.

Submission 37, pp.4–7 (Ms P. Fietz).

5.14 Tangentyere Council have noted that while the most effective initiatives have been community directed, support for local members provided from external bodies assisted with achieving success in most community support programs:

In the central Australian region, the most effective initiatives have been those directed and initiated by Indigenous people. In many cases the success has required support from external bodies or people working in partnership with local people to achieve this success. The most successful initiatives are Mt Theo and Yarrenyty Arltere Learning Centre (YALC). Both programs are driven by community expertise and vision and supported through a partnership with non-indigenous people and in the case of YALC, Tangentyere Council, an indigenous organisation with the infrastructure and expertise to assist.

In addition there are successful outstations including Ipolera and Ilpurla, run by local people and only recently receiving support through

Government funding and programs such as Tangentyere's CAYLUS initiative.¹⁵

5.15 The Central Australian Youth Link Up Service (CAYLUS), although recognising the importance of local community involvement, emphasised the need to ensure a range of skills were available to support programs:

Mt. Theo is an example of strong partnership between indigenous and non-indigenous people, combining both systems of intelligence and expertise. Whilst its routes were firmly in a community movement, a core feature of the movement at Yuendumu was that Non Indigenous Community Staff with a range of skills helped on the program. By the time sniffing was clearly beaten, the Mt Theo Yuendumu Substance Misuse Aboriginal Corporation was one of the best resourced youth initiatives in the region.¹⁶

Programs and funding

Youth programs

5.16 The NPY Women's Council emphasised the importance of adequate funding and commented that 'where there exist diversionary activities and 'community level activities' that are reasonably well funded and properly run, they work well'. However, the Council stated that 'unfortunately these are few and far between in our region, particularly in the NT and SA communities'.¹⁷

5.17 The Waltja Tjutanku Palyapayi Aboriginal Corporation (Waltja) commented that 'all the community-based youth services we are aware of are fragile at best and often rely upon a variety of factors to support their continuance (eg, staffing, budget, sound governance within the community, accommodation for workers from outside the community, etc)'.¹⁸

5.18 Waltja also described limitations in funding available through existing Commonwealth sources for infrastructure such as staff accommodation or major equipment such as transport for youth programs:

Waltja would also argue strongly that the amount of funding required to support youth services, especially fledgling ones, needs to be increased to a sustainable level. We recommend streamlining various funding opportunities available to remote communities for youth services to make a viable service possible in each community and to ensure that it not only had the staffing positions but also the infrastructure and equipment to operate well.¹⁹

15 *Submission 21*, pp.4-5 (Tangentyere Council).

16 *Submission 20*, p.4 (CAYLUS).

17 *Submission 15*, p.5 (NPYWC).

18 *Submission 27*, p.17 (Waltja Tjutanku Palyapayi Aboriginal Corporation).

19 *Submission 27*, p.19 (Waltja Tjutanku Palyapayi Aboriginal Corporation).

5.19 The Committee visited Mornington Island, a community which has implemented successful community-based programs. However, the community commented that the support of diversionary activities has not been very strong and this combined with a lack of resources and social capital has proved problematic. The case study below describes some Mornington Island initiatives.

Case Study – Mornington Island

Petrol sniffing has been a problem for Mornington Island, on and off, in annual cycles with the wet for many years, but since the introduction of alcohol management plans petrol sniffing has tended to linger. The community of Mornington Island have been searching for a long-term solution. The community as a whole, including indigenous organisations, and health services, came together to develop strategies to stop petrol sniffing.

Camps were set up with Oxfam's assistance to provide alternatives to sniffing in a supportive environment of family and community. The camps run during the school holidays and aim to build skills to make the kids more independent. The young people make their own campsites, go fishing and hunting and work as a team. The camps operate during school holidays. The aim is to break the cycle of sniffing and relieve the daily stresses and pressures in the community. They have had some success. However, this is undermined when people return to the community where sniffable fuel is available and diversionary activities are not as well supported as is required. This last wet season has seen a return to sniffing in the community.

Members of the Petrol Sniffing Steering Committee described the community plan to the Committee as an integration of all services to address not just petrol sniffing but also the related issues of domestic violence, child neglect and youth suicide.

Mornington Island has access to sport and recreation facilities including discos and dance groups and has a recently constructed Police Citizens Youth Club. However, the programs require more resources and social capital to allow them to operate during the evening and on weekends when petrol sniffing is most likely to occur.

The Community was looking forward to Opal fuel being made available as an adjunct to the programs running.

Source: Living Black, 31.10.05; and *Submission* 38, p.15 (Queensland Government).

5.20 The Yarrenyty Arltere Learning Centre (YALC) in Alice Springs was established to address serious levels of petrol sniffing and other inhalant abuse in a Town Camp community. Since its opening the YALC, which is described in the case study, has been successful in getting young people back into school, and in many cases attending school for the first time. The Tangentyere Council attributed some of the success of YALC to 'long term resourcing and support from government agencies and the strong support from the Council, who manage the program and provide additional services to assist programs and participants.'²⁰

20 *Submission* 21, pp.8-9 (Tangentyere Council).

Case Study – Yarrenyty Arltere Learning Centre

At the Yarrenyty Arltere Learning Centre (YALC) adults are learning alongside their children, acting as positive role models and having ownership for what happens and for determining solutions for their own problems. The community has reported a decrease in violence, petrol sniffing and involvement in the criminal justice system. The school based nurse also reports an improvement in health status. People are rebuilding their lives.

Operating at the centre is a:

- Northern Territory Dept. of Education primary school;
- Accredited art program for adults;
- Building training course for 'at risk' young men;
- A nutrition program;
- Alcohol and other drug outreach program;
- Additional programs in social and emotional well being to support learning; and
- Regular health clinics, counselling services, financial management and on-going community development programs.

The centre is an example of a successful whole of government initiative. The Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services Local Answers to Local Problems Initiative has funded the Coordinator. The NT Department of Health and Community Services funds the operational expenses, the nutrition position and the community worker position who are both local indigenous people.

The NT Education Department, through the Gillen Primary School, funds a teacher and assistant to operate from a school annex for children aged 4-15 years. There is a classroom and a full time teacher based at YALC.

Accredited adult education programs are delivered by various Aboriginal Registered Training bodies. Currently Batchelor Institute for Indigenous Tertiary Education provides training to the centre. The centre must apply for funding for each training course to NT Department of Employment Education and Training. The Batchelor College currently provides certificate courses in Art and Craft and Community maintenance.

In the past year, funding from the Department of Health and Ageing has allowed the establishment of an Alcohol and other Drug outreach position. Factors of success include:

- The process that YALC undertakes of empowering people and including them in the process.
- Long term resourcing and support from government agencies.
- Strong ownership by the community for the project, who through the YALC Community Committee provide planning, goal setting and decision making.
- Being able to respond flexibly to situations and find solutions from within the community.
- Strong partnerships with other agencies/services, in particular the NT Department of Education, Employment and Training, Family & Childrens Services, case management services.
- Dedicated and stable YALC staff. The program has had a stable staff over the last reporting period who are committed and are flexible to deal with children and adults who have suffered serious abuse over a long period of time. Children in the school program have very poor attention spans and serious behaviour problems; most had foetal alcohol syndrome or parents who were chronic inhalant substance abusers. It takes great perserverence to work full time with this group.
- Strong support from the Yarrenyty Arltere Housing Association to support YALC initiatives and provide further governance and management.

- Strong support from Tangentyere Council, who manage the program and provide additional services to assist programs and participants.

Source: Submission 21, pp.2-17 (Tangentyere Council).

Outstations

5.21 Outstations, like the one operating in Mt Theo, are community-based initiatives that provide diversion and deter young people from sniffing. They also deliver a range of treatment services such as detoxification and rehabilitation. The Commonwealth funds three central Australian outstations: Intjartnama (130 km west of Alice Springs), Ilpurla (220 km southwest of Alice Springs) and Mt Theo (450 km northwest of Alice Springs).

5.22 The success of the Mt Theo program has resonated loudly in other communities. The Australians for Native Title and Reconciliation, South Australia (ANTaR SA), in their submission, commented on the belief Anangu traditional owners expressed that they are under resourced and unable to effectively address petrol sniffing in their community:

One matter in particular, is an apparent lack of financing for a community programme similar to that at Mt Theo in the NT, where community elders are able to take sniffers away from sources of petrol, and work with sniffers to re-integrate them into their communities.²¹

5.23 Outstations require a great commitment of funding and resources to ensure they operate effectively. DoHA and DIMIA commented on the funding of outstations:

This arrangement is difficult to manage and sustain, but does provide an opportunity for families and elders to re-connect with their young people and to pass on their cultural knowledge and skills. Young people are more likely to heed their elders in this less stressful and complex environment. In terms of treatment, however, it is important that these centres have access to competent staff, medical support, first-aid training and telecommunication facilities. Sniffers should also be carefully assessed before being sent to outstations, as it is not appropriate for those who are disabled or unstable to be sent to such remote locations.²²

5.24 The Alcohol and other Drugs Council of Australia (ADCA) recognised that outstations play an important role in the treatment of petrol sniffing. However, they commented:

Although outstations do have a role in treatment of petrol sniffing, it is unlikely that removing sniffers to outstations will provide the community with a long term solution. It is essential outstations are complemented by

21 *Submission 42, p.1 (ANTaR SA).*

22 *Submission 25, pp.12-13 (DoHA & DIMIA).*

prevention and treatment strategies which address social and environmental factors in the community that may contribute to petrol sniffing.

It is also important to remember that outstations are not available to all Aboriginal communities in remote Australia. Outstations are often a community response to petrol sniffing, and specific to the cultural needs of a specific tribal group. For this reason, there is a need for more Government support to assist individual communities to develop their own individual response to the petrol sniffing in their own community.²³

5.25 The Committee heard much evidence that Indigenous communities have very different characteristics and a 'one size fits all model' will not work in all communities. Mr Blair Mr McFarland, the Coordinator of CAYLUS, emphasised that while one model may not suit all communities, core components of that model can be applied. He considers that communities should be able to develop their own 'outstation' model and need the resources and capacity to allow them to do this:

[Kintore] community is looking at out-stations and not at a Mt Theo model. That community wants support for taking kids to family out-stations – so a family has an out-station and with a bit of support they can take their kids to that out-station but not anybody else's kids. From that similar base of support in the community another family can take their kids to their out-station...[Kintore's] solution is not a Mt Theo; it is a more versatile base from which to fund smaller family based Mt Theos. The point is that you cannot export a model, but you can export the core components of what made that model work. In Yuendumu, it is that the community wanted to do something. Each and every community wants to do something. Sometimes people talk about them as if they are dysfunctional communities, but often they have a strong desire to deal with the kids and stop the sniffing. Often they have never had any help or the help they have had has been patchy – they have had a bit of help from this agency and a bit from that and nothing consistent and nothing that really looks at what they want.²⁴

5.26 The success of the Mt Theo outstation is highly commendable and the role of outstations in preventing petrol sniffing and improving the lives of young Indigenous people makes outstations a positive community initiative. Adequate funding and resources need to be made available to communities so that they can develop the capacity of community elders and members who can then create outstations that will meet the needs of their communities.

5.27 The Committee heard of successful initiatives that engage troubled children, not only those children at risk of sniffing, and enable them to develop practical skills such as horse and cattle care and management as well as learning about the pastoral industry. Mr Barry Abbott for the past forty years has run a very successful treatment

23 *Submission 17*, p.7 (ADCA).

24 *Committee Hansard 22.2.06*, pp.16-17 (CAYLUS).

program for petrol sniffers at the Ilpurla Outstation west of Alice Springs where young people work as station hands and gain practical skills. Mr Abbott advised:

I have people from the age of 21 right down to 15 at the moment. When some of the kids that we have are finished with us, I talk to the community about getting a job for them when they are old enough. If they are under age, I talk to people about getting them back in school. Quite a few of them have gone back to school and are doing pretty well. Before they got to me, they would just run away from school and get into petrol, drugs and whatever.²⁵

5.28 Professor Hunter from the Remote Area Mental Health Service in Queensland also referred to a program in Far North Queensland, which taught a range of skills including working with horses:

In terms of out-of-community solutions, there is only one place that I have seen up here that really made an impact and that is a place called Petford, run by a charismatic and extraordinary person who, with young people at risk, focused activities on working with horses and preparing people for the pastoral industry...By getting them to learn how to break horses, track horses and do trick riding, he was doing something which was about dealing with their own self-control but with an organism that they could relate to. I think that that was very important.²⁶

Rehabilitation facilities

5.29 The aim of rehabilitation and respite facilities is to provide a place where sniffers, either chronic or intermittent, can undertake programs to stop sniffing and receive health care and treatment. The level of care required and the provision of other diversionary activities and programs will depend on whether the community is concentrating on youth prevention programs or if the community needs facilities to provide care for chronic users with acquired brain injury. It is possible to provide rehabilitation services at outstations. However, the level of rehabilitation services needed in each community will determine the type of rehabilitation facility required to meet the needs of the sniffers in the community.

5.30 The lack of regional respite centres and rehabilitation facilities located in towns accessible to chronic sniffers was reiterated by witnesses. Many family members provided evidence that their sons and daughters have to move from the local community area to access these facilities. The ability to provide high level care and early rehabilitation intervention is imperative for communities suffering from the effects of petrol sniffing.

5.31 DoHA and DIMIA are exploring the extent to which residential models, developed primarily to address adult substance misuse in urban societies, will meet

25 *Committee Hansard* 22.2.06, p.13 (Mr B Abbott, Ilpurla Aboriginal Corporation).

26 *Committee Hansard* 8.3.06, pp.32-33 (Remote Area Mental Health Service Qld).

the needs of young Aboriginal people with substance abuse problems. An assessment will be undertaken in 2006 that will consider the most feasible options and compare these with outcomes that can be obtained from alternative arrangements such as respite, dry out services and outstation programs. Also, as part of the Eight Point Plan, the Commonwealth will undertake a scoping exercise into the need for rehabilitation and treatment facilities for petrol sniffers, including respite and support services.²⁷

5.32 In response to Indigenous community concerns regarding the need for rehabilitation facilities in regional areas, the Commonwealth committed \$2.2 million to South Australia for a facility on the APY Lands. The SA Government has agreed to provide additional recurrent funding of around \$1 million per year. The Northern Territory Government continues to fund a rehabilitation facility in Darwin and plans to establish a new rehabilitation facility in Alice Springs.²⁸

5.33 The NPY Women's Council expressed concerns about the adequacy of the number of detoxification and rehabilitation facilities and commented on the lack of progress with the proposed AP Lands rehabilitation facility:

The SA Government...acquired a commitment of funds, around \$2M, from the Commonwealth to build a rehabilitation centre for those who misuse substances (inhalant, alcohol, illicit drugs) on or near the AP Lands, as per the SA Coroner's 2002 and 2005 recommendations, but a suitable site has yet to be chosen and accurate costing determined. No date is set for the commencement of for construction.²⁹

5.34 Once the AP Lands facility is built and in operation, evidence suggests that the rehabilitation facility will not be made available to chronic sniffers with serious brain damage who often exhibit high levels of anti-social, violent and or uncontrollable behaviour.³⁰ The NPY Women's Council commented 'such persons [chronic and violent sniffers], when they come to the attention of mental health services, are in my experience deemed not to have a mental illness as defined under Mental Health legislation, but rather an "acquired" or "organic" brain injury, for the sufferers of which there are no services'.³¹

5.35 Ms Rosalie Nethercott, mother of Desmond a sniffer with acquired brain injury, provided further comment on the provision of health and rehabilitation services:

Desmond, as a young man now with organic brain injury, is kind of blamed by every health sector that I take him to for help. He does not fit into the mental health system because they say: 'He is not a schizophrenic or

27 *Submission 25*, p.29 (DoHA & DIMIA).

28 *Submission 25*, p.29 (DoHA & DIMIA).

29 *Submission 15d*, p.6 (NPYWC).

30 *Submission 15d*, p.6 (NPYWC).

31 *Submission 15d*, p.6 (NPYWC).

bipolar. He does not have a mental illness. He has acquired brain injury or an organic brain injury.' So I take him to the acquired brain injury disability mob and they say, 'He was not hit by an axe or he was not born like that.' So he does not fit into their little box either.³²

5.36 The NPY Women's Council also commented that the rehabilitation facility in South Australia will operate on a system of voluntary admittance which defeats the purpose, as they are 'constantly asked to have sniffers taken into treatment whether they wish to go or not, and the likelihood in my view that some families will feel sorry for their relative and simply collect them, an involuntary regime should be considered.' The problem with this voluntary regime is made clear by a statement made by an NPYWC Executive member during a presentation about this proposed facility in June 2005:

They'll want to go home because they'll miss their family and they'll ask their family to ask for them to go home and that's what will happen. We have a huge problem...Just say, if my child sniffs petrol, I will want to bring him home if he asks me. We have got plenty of family and the community constables are our family as well, so they'll just get asked to bring them home. And now of course because hanging themselves is such entrenched behaviour they'll just go and hang themselves.³³

5.37 The South Australian Government stated that the construction of the AP Lands rehabilitation facility is anticipated to start in 2006. This will be complemented by the mobile outreach service which is planned to commence in the first half of 2006. This service will provide assessment, counselling and drug education in communities and has a role in assisting the reintegration of rehabilitated clients back into communities.³⁴

5.38 The delay in the establishment of the rehabilitation facility was discussed at length during the South Australian public hearing. Ms Rosalie Nethercott provided comment on this delay:

I had heard that the government was going to build a petrol sniffer's rehab centre at Amata. I did not know that they had promised it two years ago, and I did not know that they had promised it in 1986, but I want it done.

He [my Son] is planning in his mind to commit crimes of increasing severity so that he can get longer periods in jail, because the safest place for a young Aboriginal man – where he gets service delivery, where he gets three meals a day, where he sleeps safe and sleeps warm, where he watches videos, where he has a job making furniture and where he does art – is in jail. That is the only place he can get all of those things together.³⁵

32 *Committee Hansard* 16.5.06, p.84 (Ms R Nethercott).

33 *Submission* 15d, p.6 (NPYWC).

34 *Submission* 29a, p.8 (South Australia Government).

35 *Committee Hansard* 16.5.06, p.86 (Ms Rosalie Nethercott).

5.39 The problems that result from a lack of rehabilitation and respite facilities were also stated by Ms Vicki Gillick from the NPY Women's Council:

We have another disability client who is disabled from chronic petrol sniffing. There is no permanent place in Alice Springs for him. We cannot find family carers; there is no-one... We have to get contract carers at \$400 a day in Alice Springs in a self-contained motel room because there is no other accommodation in Alice.³⁶

5.40 With rehabilitation facilities providing services for sniffers in some Indigenous communities, DoHA and DIMIA commented:

On return to the community following a period of rehabilitation, it is critical that follow-up interventions, preferably community-based, are available to ensure the ongoing rehabilitation and reintegration of the person into their home community.³⁷

Community capacity

5.41 The NPY Women's Council emphasised the importance of the community having both the ability and capacity to successfully deliver programs and initiatives:

The practice, as has occurred on the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Lands, of giving over the employment of youth workers to often dysfunctional community councils, or simply to community councils without any capacity to support and supervise staff, is a model destined to fail. Similarly, the practice of employing local Aboriginal workers who lack skills or qualification and expecting them, without a solid, qualified co-worker, to carry out difficult work for which they are untrained (consider the level of education in the region) is misguided at best, and stupid and potentially dangerous at worst.³⁸

5.42 Ms Pauline Fietz also cautioned against expecting communities to take on too much responsibility, especially in the delivery of youth programs:

Policies directed at petrol sniffing and youth diversion have typically emphasised the need for 'community responsibility'. This assumes a high degree of community capacity, when communities are frequently fractured, driven by internal family politics and by dysfunctional administration. In addition, community administrative systems are usually overburdened and unable to provide youth workers with the requisite support they need in order to maintain the delivery of youth services. This places the sustainability of youth programmes at risk.³⁹

36 *Committee Hansard* 22.2.06, p.59 (Ms Vicki Gillick, NPYWC).

37 *Submission* 25, p.28 (DoHA & DIMIA).

38 *Submission* 15, p.5 (NPYWC).

39 *Submission* 37, pp.7-8 (Ms P Fietz).

5.43 The Alcohol and Other Drugs Council of Australia (ADCA) commented on an alternative solution to the problem of recruiting staff in remote Aboriginal communities:

...to invest resources in the up-skilling of local community members to take on needed paid positions. This will help increase the likelihood that youth workers remain in the community for extended periods of time, and would also contribute to the development of the community.⁴⁰

5.44 Indigenous community organisations are funded by the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations and the Torres Strait Regional Authority to run Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP) in urban, rural and remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. CDEPs provide a source of support for communities wishing to establish activities to develop work and employment skills.⁴¹

5.45 Mr Bill Edwards commented on the impact of unemployment benefits in Aboriginal communities and gave his observations of CDEP:

Pukatja community was one of the first to experiment with a Community Development Employment Project (CDEP). By agreement of community members, the benefits were paid to the Community Council, which then paid them out in return for work on community projects. However, the scheme has had varied results.⁴²

5.46 The Commonwealth's Eight Point Regional Strategy for Central Australia⁴³ will provide the following benefits to communities developing community-based programs:

It will support the lifting of Remote Area Exemptions [for activity based testing] by providing access to a range of services such as CDEP, improve educational outcomes through alternative learning environments, and provide alternative activities such as land management and recreational activities...specific interventions for any community will be designed and implemented in conjunction with the local people, building on the existing investment and infrastructure, taking account of local circumstances and addressing any identified needs.⁴⁴

5.47 DoHA has engaged the Council for Aboriginal Alcohol Program Services to deliver the Youth Wellbeing Project in the top end region of the Northern Territory. This project aims to:

40 *Submission* 17, p.5 (ADCA).

41 Centrelink, retrieved 19.5.06, www.centrelink.gov.au/internet/internet.nsf/indigenous/cdep.htm.

42 *Submission* 11a, p.3 (Mr B Edwards).

43 The Eight Point Plan is discussed in chapter 3.

44 *Submission* 25, p.11 (DoHA & DIMIA).

Increase the capacity of Indigenous communities affected by petrol sniffing...the Project will support and train members of Indigenous communities to improve their understanding of petrol sniffing issues and a "two-way learning" cultural exchange format will be developed between young people and people with specific expertise in the required area.⁴⁵

5.48 The Commonwealth has also provided funding for CAYLUS to assist communities in the area of Alice Springs in developing responses to petrol sniffing at a community and regional level. The CAYLUS initiative is described in the case study:

Case Study – Central Australian Youth Link-Up Service (CAYLUS)

The Central Australian Youth Link Up Service (CAYLUS) is a consortium of organisations in Central Australia which was formed and supported in 2002 by Tangentyere Council to develop specific youth programs, link existing programs and services and develop a holistic and coordinated approach to address youth health issues across the region. Funding is provided by the Commonwealth to provide these services.

CAYLUS implements a broad promotion, prevention and early intervention strategy for increasing health and wellbeing of all young people in communities affected by petrol sniffing. It provides regional coordination of youth and inhalant substance misuse issues; works collaboratively with communities and agencies to develop, fund and implement strategies and projects for addressing youth issues; increases positive activities for young people; and manages a flexible need-based brokerage fund that is used to assist remote Indigenous communities with short term or start-up funding of projects.

Tangentyere, through CAYLUS is currently negotiating with the NT Police for funding for a position to improve the human resource capacity of remote communities they service in order to prevent these sort of problems. The position is titled "Youth Workforce Development worker" and the role is to assist remote communities recruit, interview, employ and supervise youth worker positions. The position would also provide orientation, training and logistical and administrative support to the workers, as well as liaising with Universities regarding appropriate youth worker course development that would equip workers for work in the region, and arrange student and volunteer placements, especially over the summer holidays when schools are closed and young people are bored and hot.

CAYLUS assists communities in the areas of Alice Springs, Pintubi/Luritja, Walpiri and Western Arrente Pitjantjatjara in developing responses to petrol sniffing at a community and regional level. The CAYLUS project has been successful in gaining a second round of funding of \$1 million to 30 June 2007.

Source: Submission 20, p.7 (CAYLUS); Submission 25, pp.12, 27 (DoHA and DIMIA).

45 *Submission 25, p.26 (DoHA & DIMIA).*

5.49 The need for a long term commitment to capacity building was illustrated by the example of Mt Theo:

With capacity building and community empowerment – owning problems and solutions – it is very difficult to measure outcomes and glean evidence to support what you are doing. Taking Mt Theo as an example, they were working for five years before any changes started to become apparent. It takes time and patience.⁴⁶

Community governance

5.50 The Committee heard evidence from many witnesses that the consistency of external support offered to Indigenous communities varies, as does the level and extent of support available and the awareness within the communities that support is available.

5.51 Indigenous communities require skills in governance and management if they are to have oversight responsibilities of diversionary programs. The Office of the Registrar of Aboriginal Corporations (ORAC) supports and regulates Aboriginal corporations that are incorporated under the *Aboriginal Councils and Associations Act 1976*. The ORAC provides training for board members and key staff in good corporate governance.⁴⁷

5.52 The Waltja Tjutanku Palyapayi Aboriginal Corporation provided the Committee with evidence that 'Waltja communities appreciate the efforts being made to improve leadership, governance and management at local and regional levels, with several of our own Executive members having benefited from governance training provided through ORAC'.⁴⁸

5.53 The Western Australian Government suggested that a major reason for 11 communities in the Ngaanyatjarra Lands having significantly lower levels of petrol sniffing, when compared with the central desert communities, is the strong community governance arrangements.⁴⁹

Support for the community

5.54 DoHA and DIMIA stated that a key element of the Eight Point Plan is to strengthen and support communities' capacities for dealing with petrol sniffing and its effects:

Strategies might include recruiting and training people to work with key communities to assist in developing their capacity to deal with the issue, implementing parenting and family well being projects and getting local

46 *Committee Hansard* 22.2.06, p8 (Dr R Thompson).

47 Registrar of Aboriginal Corporations, retrieved 22.5.06, www.orac.gov.au.

48 *Submission* 27, p.12 (Waltja Tjutanku Palyapayi Aboriginal Corporation).

49 *Submission* 24, p.2 (Western Australia Government).

people into leadership/capacity building programs. Again, the specific strategy implemented in any community will be designed and implemented in conjunction with the local people building on the existing investment and infrastructure, taking account of local circumstances and addressing any identified needs.⁵⁰

5.55 The Central Australian Cross Border Reference Group on Volatile Substance Use provides advice on developing a whole of government, community engaged approach to addressing volatile substance misuse in the cross border region. This group provides support for local community strategies to reduce petrol sniffing. It also acts as a clearing house of community and regional ideas, and facilitates the sharing of information between members and other stakeholders. The group contains representatives of Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments, Aboriginal Health Forums, and service providers such as Nganampa Health Council, NPY Women's Council, APY Council, and Ngaanyatjarra Health Service and Ngaanyatjarra Council.⁵¹

5.56 The Central Australian Cross Border Reference Group on Volatile Substance Use has commissioned some much needed research on interventions and rehabilitation for petrol sniffers and other volatile substance users. This evaluation will assist in determining positive achievements and identify successful areas of intervention. However, the lack of evidence provided to the Committee suggests that little work has been done to date on evaluating government-funded interventions.

Conclusion

5.57 The extent and success of diversionary community-based activities in Indigenous communities who struggle with young people sniffing petrol is largely dependent on the strength of the community, the involvement and engagement of key community members, the provision of adequate funding and the capacity of the community as a whole, including both Indigenous people and people outside of the community.

5.58 The Committee notes the success of community-based programs in Mt Theo and Docker River as well as the success of the Yarrenyty Arltere Learning Centre and the CAYLUS service delivery model. All of these community initiatives possessed the following critical elements:

- the programs were community driven and operated by the community;
- involvement of families and young people affected by sniffing; and
- support provided by agencies in partnership with local people to provide essential infrastructure and expertise.

50 *Submission 25*, p.12 (DoHA & DIMIA).

51 *Submission 25*, p.6 (DoHA & DIMIA).

5.59 The strength of a community and the determination of key members can produce highly effective community-based programs. Indigenous communities are independent, have varying levels of cohesiveness and stability and a 'one-size-fits-all' approach can not be applied across all communities. However, the success in some communities provides valuable information on critical elements for communities embarking on community-based programs to prevent petrol sniffing. The Committee considers that one key problem in the past has been the loss of such information and the lack of a coordinated program to ensure successful information sharing.

5.60 The Committee heard from many Indigenous communities that have achieved great success with community-based activities that have reduced the number of young people sniffing in their communities. However, many complaints were heard by community members all over Australia on the absence of continual funding, the lack of support and governance provided to build capacity in the community and the continued lack of essential facilities to support community intervention into petrol sniffing. The Committee heard from many Indigenous communities where one person, normally the youth worker, had achieved excellent results in preventing young people from sniffing and how this person had left the community due to a lack of training, support or funding.

Recommendation 14

5.61 The Committee strongly supports the development of community-based programs and recommends that State, Territory and Commonwealth Governments provide long-term funding for community-based programs and when providing funding ensure that:

- **strong agency support is provided;**
- **programs are established which build the capacity of community members such as training in youth work and training that builds skills of program management and governance;**
- **appropriate levels of funding are made available to ensure the operation of youth programs during times of need, for example into the evenings and during school breaks when petrol sniffing is more prevalent; and**
- **adequate resources are provided for trained, skilled and committed staff to be retained in communities on a permanent basis rather than a fly-in-fly-out roster system.**

Recommendation 15

5.62 The Committee recognises that there are some elements that are critical to the success of community programs and recommends that:

- **government funded programs must provide for these critical elements including community ownership, the involvement of families and youth in their development and combined with the provision of essential support and expertise;**

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- the Commonwealth identify, evaluate and provide ongoing support to allow the continuation and further development of those community-based programs that have proven particularly successful; and
 - the Commonwealth develop and implement a communication strategy that facilitates information sharing and the development of such programs in other communities.

Recommendation 16

5.63 The Committee acknowledges the success of Yuendumu programs including the Mt Theo outstation and while recognising that this model will not fit for all communities, recommends that the Commonwealth provide long term funding and support to assist other interested communities to develop similar programs.

Recommendation 17

5.64 The Committee notes that as part of the Eight Point Regional Strategy for Central Australia, the Commonwealth is undertaking an assessment of the most feasible options for rehabilitation facilities for petrol sniffers. The Committee considers the provision of rehabilitation facilities for petrol sniffers a priority and recommends that Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments urgently provide adequate levels of additional funding for new and existing rehabilitation facilities.

