

## **Tangentyere Council Inc.**

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### **SUBMISSION FROM TANGENTYERE COUNCIL, ALICE SPRINGS TO THE INQUIRY INTO PROVISIONS OF THE FAMILIES, HOUSING, COMMUNITY SERVICES AND INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (EMERGENCY RESPONSE CONSOLIDATION) BILL 2008**

#### **ADDITIONAL INFORMATION AS REQUESTED AT HEARING ON 30 APRIL 2008**

##### **1. How does Tangentyere Safe Families Program work?**

The Tangentyere Safe Families Program focuses on an Aboriginal, family inclusive, community centred approach in relation to child protection issues in order to keep Aboriginal young people safe and with family.

Safe Families has a 6 bed residential house for kids to stay in up to six weeks. These kids come from vulnerable families, some are under child protection orders and some are there through agreements with family.

Safe families works with vulnerable families to making sure kids are safe. They also help the Department of Family and children Services in finding safe family placements. They do this with non-indigenous and aboriginal Family Workers.

Two transitional houses have also been set up by this program to help families learn how to manage their own homes in a safe and healthy way.

##### ***The Safe Families Vision Statement includes:***

- Kinship care is crucial to the physical, emotional and spiritual wellbeing of all young people
- Support of families to preserve their traditional obligations to nurture and provide care to young people
- Fostering and preserving community connectedness and the cultural integrity of Aboriginal families
- Ensuring young people grow up strong, safe, resilient and healthy in their transition to adulthood

### ***Safe Families Target Group***

- Children and young people aged up to 14 yrs
- Young people presenting as “at risk”
- Young people subject to child protection intervention
- Young people who present with multiple and complex issues

### ***How does it Work***

- Employment of local Aboriginal staff members
- Family mapping
- Family meetings
- Language speakers
- Informal and formal networks
- Collaboration with other organisations and agencies

Safe Families acknowledges that some Aboriginal children need residential options outside of their immediate family for periods of time to keep them safe. This shows that these children don't need to leave the care of their community. The same community that is invested in keeping them safe is also the one working with families or finding long term safe care elsewhere.

## **2. What is the Status of the Safe Families Funding**

Safe Families is funded from FACSIA, NT Department of Families and Children and Aboriginal Hostels.

The funding from FACSIA and the Northern Territory Government ceases on the 30<sup>th</sup> of June and negotiations are underway to see if it continues. Aboriginal Hostels has committed \$128,000 for the 2008 calendar year.

## **3. How is child abuse and family violence tackled on town camps overall?**

Tangentyere Council provides a range of services that address issues of child abuse and family violence on town camps. In actual fact most of Tangentyere's services provision is about making the lives of town camp residents safer. Outlined below are just some of our areas of service provision.

### ***Early Childhood Services***

Tangentyere delivers playgroups on 5 of the 18 town camps as this is the maximum we can deliver with funds available. With these services we have access to children who are not yet part of the education system. If the Playgroup identifies children that need extra support they refer them to the Tangentyere 0-7 program. This helps us identify children

that need assistance from an early intervention program. If more serious concerns come to the attention of staff from either program referrals are made to relevant statutory bodies. At the same time these cases would become active to Tangentyere to ensure follow up from relevant agencies.

### ***Community Centres at Larapinta camp and Hidden Valley camps.***

These community centers are points of contact for services delivering into town camps. Organisations like Alice Springs Women's Shelter, Sexual Assault Referral Centre and Northern Territory Department of Families and Children attend regularly at these centres developing relationships and engaging with town camp residents. These centre also case manage individuals with drug and alcohol problems, monitor the situations that arise on the camps, they advocate for families and attempt with community to address issues of child safety.

### ***The Safe Families Program***

This program has been outlined previously. The program does play an important part in Tangentyere's overall response to child safety concerns by filling gaps between other service providers and interventions from statutory services. On several occasions statutory services have not acted as quickly as Tangentyere would have liked and safe families has stepped in with safe plans to ensure children are safe until statutory services respond.

### ***Tangentyere Youth Activity Services (YAS)***

Tangentyere Council's YAS operates a wide range of structured activities for 400-600 young people aged 6-18 years living in the eighteen town camps in Alice Springs. These activities include sport, music, circus and social activities and are run after school, during evenings, on weekends and during vacation times up to six days per week throughout the year. Most of these activities run out of the YAS premises at 3 Brown Street in Alice Springs.

Tangentyere YAS program is a service that highlights strengths, abilities, and positive relationships between participants. These positive experiences build skills, self esteem, access to mainstream services, familiarity with practicing constructive relationships and a platform for learning that is positive and successful. Young people participating in YAS activities are expected to attend school and this has been a successful outcome for the service.

It should be noted that the majority of services that Tangentyere provides have a role in injury reduction and town camper's safety. Night Patrols, Family Well Being Programs, Youth Link Up Services and Sport and Recreation for young people all have a role to play in child safety.

#### **4. Has there been an increase or decrease in problems?**

The roll out of the intervention has had some negative effects on town camps, mostly related to the increase in urban drift. It should be noted however that urban drift is not solely the result of the intervention. People come to Alice Spring for many reasons including medical services, sporting events, education services, shopping and recreation.

It has been the Council's experience of recent months that levels of drinking have increased near town camps and this has led to an increase in intoxicated people on the camps. With the intervention, the number of drinking spots around Alice Springs has spiraled. These places typically are locations that are inaccessible or hidden from view. Town campers complain now about intoxicated people coming on to camps and they worry for family drinking where they cannot be looked after. The intervention appears to have just moved the problem rather than addressed problem drinkers' alcohol addiction.

It has always perplexed Tangentyere Council how pushing problem drinkers into Territory Housing and secluded locations keeps children safe from child abuse. This is magnified by the hidden nature of child abuse. Pushing drinking behind closed doors also brings intoxicated people and vulnerable individuals into close proximity.

In relation to child abuse the accepted figure across western populations is a figure of 1 in 5 children will have some involvement in the Child Protection system. If this is true for the population of Melbourne and Canberra there is no reason to think the figure is going to be any less in Aboriginal communities. It should be noted that this number includes child protection issues such as neglect and emotional abuse.

This leads us to ask the question of how we identify increases and decreases of actual abuse if we accept that high levels of abuse go unreported. The accepted wisdom around abuse numbers is that an increased notification is an indicator of a functioning system. We do know that the notifications received in the Northern Territory jurisdiction is 38.9 per 1000 children this lines up to the national average of 34.7 per 1000. (AIHW 2008)

A more measurable aspect than actual child abuse is increases in notifications and we know that child health checks have not led to increased notifications. But we do know that programs based in communities that are based on relationships do increase the levels of notifications. The Alice Spring Child Welfare Coalition made up of Tangentyere Council, Congress, ASYASS, NPY Women's Council and other NGOS has been campaigning for improved child protection services for several years. These organizations make many notifications and have even negotiated a protocol with the NT Department of Families and Children to make the process more accountable.

Through this protocol Tangentyere send staff to Mandatory Notification Workshops regularly. The different departments of Tangentyere make notifications directly and in some cases are supported Divisional Managers. The total numbers are not collated and

only those directly involved in particular cases are involved or informed about child protection notifications to ensure Tangentyere is not in breach of the confidentiality clauses of the Child Welfare Act. This confidentiality component is to ensure that notifiers are protected and the information going to NT FACS is not impeded. Some Departments within the Tangentyere Family and Youth Services Division are in daily and weekly contact with the Department of family and Children Services.