



**Marninwarntikura Fitzroy  
Women's Resource & Legal  
Centre**



**Marra Worra Worra Aboriginal Corporation**



**Nindilingarri Cultural Health  
Services**

## **CREATING A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE TOGETHER**

“We are standing for the rights of the unborn child to have a future, a future which includes story, song, law; a future of a good life well lived.”

**JOINT SUBMISSION TO THE SENATE INQUIRY ON REMOTE AND  
REGIONAL COMMUNITIES, FITZROY CROSSING 24 AUGUST 2009**

**This submission is tabled by the three following Fitzroy Valley third sector organisations:**

- **Marninwarntikura Fitzroy Women’s Resource Centre**
- **Marra Worra Worra Aboriginal Corporation**
- **Nindilingarri Cultural Health Services**

## **Index**

	<b>PAGE</b>
Introduction	2
Current situation in the Valley	3
New locally driven terms of engagement required	4
Closing the Gap	6
Strengthening the Third Sector	7
Interconnected Issues requiring Integrated Solutions:	9
1. Housing	9
2. Co-ordination of Services	9
3. Environmental Health Support to small communities	9
4. Mental Health and Suicide Prevention	10
5. Safety and Protection of Women and Children	11
6. Provision of Men’s Outreach and Support Services	11
7. Remote Clinics	12
8. Community Adult Education and Health Promotion	12
9. Funded Positions in Communities	12
10. Need for locally based services	13
11. Youth	13
12. Education	13
13. Community Transport	13
14. Hostel Accommodation	13
15. Disability	13
16. Training and Employment	14
17. Enterprise and Economic Development	14
18. Remote Telecentre Provision	15
19. Paralegal Service Provision	15
Conclusion	15

## **Introduction:**

The current population of the Fitzroy Valley is estimated to be around 3,500. A high percentage of the individual residents in the region are of Aboriginal heritage and are members of the four language groups spread across the 40 communities and outstations in the Fitzroy Valley. The Fitzroy Valley Service area has the highest population of Aboriginal people in its operational area out of the whole of the Kimberley Region. The following organisations have serviced these communities for many years.

Marninwarntikura Women's Resource Centre (MWRC) is the lead agency in the Valley for women's interests and concerns. It has four core focus areas that direct the activities of the centre. They are: Safety; Well Being; Leadership; Economic Independence. In order to realise these outcomes it provides a range of services. It runs the Women's Shelter and the Family Violence Prevention and Legal Unit, among other services for women and children.

Marra Worra Worra Aboriginal Corporation (MWW) provides a voice and avenue to Government for Aboriginal people who choose to return to live in autonomous communities and at the same time a means of mutual support for those individual communities. The services currently provided by the arrangements developed over the years by MWW include the following: Building repairs and maintenance; Housing repairs and maintenance; Landscaping and dust abatement; Assistance with the management of housing stock; CDEP Services and Administration and financial management support to community councils.

Nindilingarri Cultural Health Services (NCHS) is the Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation based in Fitzroy Crossing. NCHS currently provides programs and services in Health Promotion, Environmental Health, Aged Care, Home and Community Care, Unassisted dialysis, Alcohol Drug and Mental Health. NCHS has a formal partnership with Western Australia Country Health Services and Kimberley Population Health Unit for the provision of health services in the Fitzroy Valley.

Marninwarntikura, with support from Kimberley Aboriginal Law and Culture Centre, Marra Worra Worra and Nindilingarri, is perhaps better known for its lead role in the story of gaining effective alcohol restrictions in Fitzroy Crossing. This was achieved by women and men working together in order to bring peace and harmony to our community so that we, as a community, can plan our social recovery and build a sustainable society in which our cultural richness is paramount.

What we have achieved so far could never have been done by government acting alone. The leadership had to come from the community. We had to own our problems and create the pathway for recovery.

The achievements of the last eighteen months have demonstrated the truth of this. They have also shown the strength of our community in the Fitzroy Valley, and our capacity for wise decisions and tough action. These are the qualities that must be cultivated and enhanced, not stifled, if we are to build a sustainable future.

The key issue for us now is how to build a sustainable future from the fragile social order that we have achieved over the past eighteen months.

Alcohol restrictions are just a small toe hold into the enormous challenges we face. They are not the answer to our problems and were never intended to be. Their purpose was always to give us a breathing space from the trauma and chaos of death, violence and fear; a breathing space in which to think and plan strategically.

If we are going to win the peace we have created, we need an absolute overhaul of the existing relationship between Fitzroy Crossing Aboriginal communities and government.

The last thing we want on the back of the positive profile that Fitzroy Crossing has achieved is additional investment by governments in the things they have always done. More programs, more bureaucrats and more coordination to manage additional funding. That would be disastrous because it would simply create confusion and undermine the authority of the Aboriginal community leaders who have achieved so much in the last eighteen months.

### **Current situation in the Fitzroy Valley:**

The current level of chaos that Aboriginal people in the Valley have to deal with in their relationship with governments is disastrous: and it is a state of dysfunction that Indigenous people struggle with throughout Australia at one level or another.

In simple terms there are two broad forces at work in the valley.

On the Indigenous side there are four language groups – Bunuba who are the traditional owners of country around Fitzroy Crossing, the Gooniyandi whose country lies to the east and have a close traditional relationship with Bunuba, and then there are two desert peoples, the Walmajarri and Wangkatjunga who have moved to the Valley over the past few decades.

Together we number approximately 3, 500 and every day we deal with issues and rules that define our co-existence. We deal with customary law, the complex relationships of family and community and our religion and beliefs. Within this complex social and cultural reality we deal with the extraordinary array of our community organisations that receive public funding and deliver services. We also deal with our land holdings – a number of Aboriginal owned pastoral stations, outstations and communities as well as native title claims and determinations within the context of a land management regime that has been imposed on us.

Against this reality is the work of government which has legal obligations to provide services on the basis that the people of the Valley are Western Australian and Australian citizens. There is a hospital, public housing, schools, essential services and local government services.

Government responsibility - to provide good government in the form of skill development, employment, health services, education and child protection - does not at present interface or connect in a formal sense with the cultural and social reality of the Valley.

In essence government approach to service delivery is fundamentally assimilationist and a recipe for continued disaster.

*“There’s a real sense of frustration and despair – once the women despair, what chance has the community got? It will really fall apart then.”*

### **New Locally Driven Terms of Engagement Required:**

What is required is a new relationship that structurally connects the Aboriginal cultural, economic and social domains with government’s responsibility to provide good government. In Fitzroy Crossing there is already the beginnings of an Indigenous governance structure called the **Fitzroy Futures Forum**, made up of the four language groups together with the three layers of government and other community-chosen representatives.

Instead of the many individual State and Commonwealth agencies providing services and making decisions without real accountability or benefit to the community, here is potential for a regional body – a partnership of community and government – to collaborate on locally determined sustainable development.

A sustainable development approach needs to contain the following elements:

**1. Empower individuals & families to respond to the challenges that are being thrown up to them.**

For example community needs to understand the disastrous impacts of alcohol such as Foetal alcohol Spectrum Disorder and the impact of Early Life Trauma and work together to develop ways of managing this serious problem in our community. We need to invest urgently in a process of dialogue and negotiation to build a bold and determined partnership so that fundamental issues of community and family functioning can be confronted. We need to build on our capacity for personal engagement and conflict resolution

We need to understand the critical importance of economic development and livelihoods and work together and with government to ensure our education and training system is capable of educating and training our young people.

**2. Clarify the institutional structures to be built upon the cultural, economic and social value-systems of the local regional Aboriginal peoples.**

In this we need to develop new systems of funding and accountability so that decision making is effective and resources properly invested for sustainable development. We need to ensure that there are direct links between training and employment; that there are innovative social enterprises and other services which include people who may have alcohol-related disabilities and/or be at risk of incarceration; that the many Kimberley strategic plans become actualities in creating sustainable communities in which our families can live and thrive.

**3. Adapt existing deliverable programmes to the emerging paradigm in order that the public sector manner of doing business is effective.**

For instance why should it be necessary for an independent Aboriginal cultural health organisation to operate independently of the State Government Hospital and community health system? They should be enmeshed as one seamless health service that is fully accountable to the Fitzroy Valley community. The present system allows for repeated 'buck passing' and needs fundamental structural changes.

In Fitzroy we have an opportunity to do something innovative and to build on the foundations for sustainable development that we, the community, have already created. We have already started the journey of partnership with police, liquor licensing and the Drug and Alcohol Office. Let's now build from that and bring government together to support us.

**4. Allow indigenous models and paradigms to develop the necessary pathways through a process of dialogue & negotiation.**

This is the critical element that will enable us to move to the paradigm change that supports sustainable development. We must agree on a process that builds a partnership between government and Aboriginal people of the Fitzroy Valley.

It will be difficult for both Aboriginal people and government because genuine partnership that is based on cultural recognition, real Aboriginal decision making and mutual accountability has never been tried before within Australia. It will challenge existing ways of 'doing business' to the core.

And because it is new and overwhelmingly challenging to the existing order of government, we will need to look to international experience to crack through the paternalistic, assimilation approach to complex cross cultural issues that are destroying Aboriginal peoples. We will need to see the methodologies of the Paris Declaration on International Development (2005) – to which Australia is a signatory – applied nationally.

For too long Australian Indigenous development has invested in pedestrian and ill-equipped practices of development. The problems facing places like the Fitzroy Valley are too severe and deep rooted for us to be considering mediocre process of mediation and development: We have to demand that we employ world best practice.

This, we argue, is where urgent public investment should be considered.

## **Closing the Gap:**

We fear that the COAG Closing the Gap strategy is a complex set of National Partnership Agreements that seems overwhelmingly confusing even to politicians and public servants. For Aboriginal people who are now hearing a whole new language of bureaucratic jargon and programme acronyms it all seems like Groundhog Day.

We have seen it all before and heard the same old nonsensical government policy speak; community engagement, community participation, cultural appropriateness, consultation, government coordination – the list goes on. But in reality what it has always meant is that policies and programs are decided by governments and imposed on us without our consent.

This time we can't afford to fail. Beyond the policy jargon of mutual responsibility, welfare reform, and economic empowerment there lies an uncomplicated ingredient for success which governments have never been able to manage – it's about genuine partnership.

The national profile we have gained from our campaign is no doubt a factor in the government selecting the Fitzroy Valley as a priority location under the COAG Closing the Gap strategy. We see this as an opportunity to advance our vision of reconstruction and community development. But we are also nervous, because we know from experience that government in its eagerness to impose its own solutions can undermine community authority and derail our attempts to achieve our vision.

What we have now is chaos and dysfunction at every level – within government and within the community. Schools, training centres, the health system, child protection, the range of community services and the courts are basically operating as silos with different policies and funding systems. The left hand has no idea what the right hand is doing and government attempts to coordinate this madness in various guises over the past few years have failed miserably.

What we want is for our children to go to school and learn the fundamental skills of life of which literacy and numeracy are core elements; is a sustainable economy so people can have meaningful employment; is for our families' capacity to care and nurture each other and deal with the problems of social disintegration - the legacy of the past. We want to be able to wake up in the morning feeling good about the community we live in, and not wake up in a community which is judged by the dominant society as being fraught with social problems that need to be managed by constant government interventions.

We know it can be achieved because we know our community. We know its capacity and its potential. We know its depth of leadership and social capital. And we know what our people are capable of achieving when they are entrusted with responsibility and given the support through resources and authority to act.

*“We need to bring back the pride we had for what a beautiful community we used to have – before the alcohol started to tear us apart.”*

**We urgently recommend:** that the Australian government, having signed the Paris Declaration on International development (2005), subscribe to the same standards of engagement for state and national development projects.

These standards in a national context are as follows:

Ownership - *Developing regions set their own strategies for poverty reduction, governance and programme development.*

Alignment - *Donor agencies align behind these objectives and use local (third sector) systems.*

Harmonisation - *Donor agencies coordinate and simplify their procedures and share information to avoid duplication.*

Results - *Developing regions and donors shift focus to development results and results get measured.*

Mutual Accountability - *Donors and partners are accountable for development results.*

### **Strengthening the third sector:**

Under the Paris Declaration for International Development, the key vehicle for community owned and directed change is the third sector, otherwise known as not-for-profit or community-directed organisations. Therefore, for locally directed change to be effective in the Fitzroy Valley, government strategies need above all to seek to develop and support a viable third sector as the preferred vehicle for service delivery.

Failure to do so would continue the present situation where mismatched 'one size ought to fit all' programmes, based on culturally inappropriate research, continue to deliver the current appalling results which have given rise to the Closing the Gap initiative.

Unacceptably high levels of Indigenous incarceration, a gap in life expectancy of 17 years, poor educational and health outcomes, serious environmental health and infrastructure gaps: the list goes on. At a service delivery level, these continuing failures include restricted economic opportunities and restricted opportunities for skills development for local populations.

The current situation results in services that all too often are neither locally owned nor appropriate, delivered by personnel with no local status. We need locally designed service models for locally owned and delivered services, which draw on local cultural knowledge and which use with discernment evidence-based interventions. Above all, we need to build on our capacity for personal engagement and conflict resolution.

Another major impediment is the short and prescriptive funding cycle for government-funded programmes delivered by the third sector – too often, the funding has to be re-applied for at annual intervals. This has a number of adverse consequences: few capable



Indigenous people are prepared to risk the uncertainty of working in this sector, further undermining its potential to deliver very real social, cultural and economic benefits to communities; agency resources are tied up in repetitive annual funding rounds to a plethora of government funding bodies, each with their separate criteria, and each determined to fund no more than core delivery.

Service contracts fail to adequately fund agency infrastructure costs, skills development, or governance training. Talented people often look for career paths elsewhere, and there appears to be no wish to increase the administrative and governance capacity or support those dedicated people prepared to work in these organisations.

It has to be said that all of the above contributes to extensive experiences by local populations of continuing lack of substantive equality and continuing systemic racism.

**Accountability:** Repeated research shows that autonomy in the sense of having some control over both the direction and pace of change occurring in communities is crucial for sound governance. In order to achieve acceptable accountability, third sector agencies' needs include:

- proper resourcing of administrations
- proper training of administrators to enable clarification of roles and responsibilities on the ground
- more co-ordinated funding and reporting processes across all levels of government
- devolution of real responsibility for decisions to community level
- any discussion about governance 'capacity' should start by identifying strengths already present, and account for organisational history
- a regional representative body to manage increasing demands for consultation

The current emphasis on compliance in the absence of parallel administrative resourcing, coupled with the lack of co-ordination amongst government agencies, is doing real damage 'on the ground'. It is not only undermining good governance practices already in place, but is manifest in growing disillusionment and disengagement.

We need government, state and federal, to move on from past mistakes, failures and problems and be prepared to dialogue and negotiate with us on new forms of cooperation and ownership: it's the future that's at stake, not the past.

**We urgently request you to:**

- involve, respect and take guidance from our community elders and leaders
- be prepared to consider and implement overseas examples of best practice
- plan big and plan bold – we are looking for a sea change, not more incremental change vulnerable to political and funding whims

## **Interconnected Issues requiring Integrated Solutions:**

- 1. Housing** – housing issues continue to compound in the valley for community members and for service providers. Any new housing stock that has been introduced has generally only replaced existing obsolete buildings. Communities are not consulted on culturally appropriate designs, resulting in new buildings which are not built to meet local climate requirements, nor are they designed with cultural mores governing men and women and skin relationships in mind. Instead, they are built to obtain the maximum number at the lowest cost, often without adequate food storage or sanitary provision. Ongoing maintenance is seriously lacking, leading to more rapid deterioration. The result is that community members continue to live in poorly designed overcrowded substandard housing, and service providers cannot expand services as they are not able to accommodate staff.

Many basic health needs are impacted on by this housing shortage: for instance there is a fully equipped dental surgery at the hospital, Andrew Forrest through the Australian Children's Trust has offered to top-up a dentist's salary, but the Fitzroy Valley Health Service is short of 9 houses necessary for a fully-staffed hospital. This has direct consequences for poor Indigenous health.

Another very strong argument for strengthening the third sector and supporting programmes that use local delivery is this housing shortage. The above model for strengthening the third sector and increasing the skills development and economic opportunities for people already resident in the Valley, supported by key externally-recruited staff, will put much less pressure on housing stock.

- 2. Co-ordination of services** – there are numerous service providers located locally and regionally. Many service providers have no clear information regarding who receives funding to do what. There have been a number of changes in recent times to the allocation of funding and this information is rarely communicated to the other service providers who link with those services. This results in inefficient allocation and use of scarce resources, and leaves other service providers with no clear pathway for referrals.

In an environment that struggles for adequate human, financial and other resources, it makes sense for organisations to combine what they have and work together on issues. In this way, each organisation can work within its capacity and build on its strengths to augment the work of the other. As evidenced by this joint submission, the third sector in Fitzroy Crossing is well used to working together. It currently has partnerships to address Alcohol Management issues and Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder/Early Life Trauma prevention which include relevant statutory agencies and other key organisations and individuals.

- 3. Environmental Health Support for small communities** –the poor quality of water in local communities is not addressed. It contributes directly to many of the adverse physical health outcomes of Aboriginal people in the Fitzroy Valley. Small communities receive very little support for their infrastructure, despite evidence to prove that the overall health and wellbeing of indigenous people living in small remote communities is

much better than those forced to live in larger centers. Support to maintain the environment of small communities is also lacking. Consequently rubbish tips, sewage ponds, roads, airstrips and general infrastructure continue to deteriorate, presenting unsanitary conditions which threaten further deterioration in physical health.

*The OAH's Environmental Health Program concludes:*

*"There are serious and widespread environmental health problems facing the Aboriginal population in Western Australia. These include inadequate and poorly maintained housing, lack of suitable sewerage facilities, inadequate and poor quality water supplies and a lack of other basic services such as power, drainage, roads and airstrips. Until these conditions are rectified Aboriginal health standards will remain poor and the rates of infectious diseases including gastroenteritis, skin diseases, chronic ear infections, trachoma and chest infections will remain high."*

**4. Mental health and Suicide Prevention** - Mental Health problems are tragically obvious in the Fitzroy Valley. In 2006 there were 11 male and 1 female completed suicides and many more people exhibiting suicidal thoughts and actions within the community. People across the community continue to experience chronic and acute mental distress, putting themselves and others at risk of serious harm. The impact of these incidents on the community in terms of 'sorry business', funerals and people trying to make sense of the wasted loss of life is profound and in turn adds to the level of despair for the whole community. The subsequent impacts felt by health professionals, police and service providers is considerable as the deceased or their family is often known to them. While the frequency of completed suicides has diminished since the alcohol restrictions came into force, many of the underlying social determinants of health remain unchanged.

Please note that we have only one mental health practitioner based in FX. The Valley relies on additional ad hoc services from a number of external service providers, and when a crisis occurs, for instance out on a community, the relevant clients are often forced to travel some distance for care, or wait until the service provider comes

<b>Local Risk Factors for suicide</b>	<b>Protective Factors</b>
Alcohol, drugs, overcrowding, lack of belonging	Strong Family Support from particularly Grandmothers.
Lack of hope, goals etc for the future.	School initiated programs – ☐Paths, ☐Protective Behaviours
Stuck in a rut and pressure to stay there. A cycle which needs to be broken.	Traditional culture
Lack of services	Meaningful Employment
Disintegration of cultural responsibility (Due to lack of support) lack of recognition.	
Unresolved Trauma. Grief and Loss	
Those that are successful or achieving are at risk of being expected to	

support everyone.	
Male-male identify being lost (family Esp.).	
Snowballing effect – copycat It's a threat or cry out for attention.	

Table contents taken from Fitzroy Crossing Consultation on Suicide Prevention, held on 22 August 2007 by the Ministerial Council on Suicide Prevention

**5. Safety and Protection for women and children**

*“As women we have the right to fight for a life free of fear, free of abuse for ourselves and our children. Too many of us are suffering in silence; we need to fight for those people.”*

While the liquor restrictions have done a great deal to reduce levels of violence against women and children, the fire which destroyed the local shopping complex including the supermarket has led many local people to buy groceries (and alcohol) in Derby or Broome. Since it is likely to be two years before the supermarket is rebuilt, this is of serious concern. Levels of alcohol-related family violence are currently increasing, there are more presentations for alcohol-related assault at the hospital and more women and children are seeking shelter at Marninwarntikura Women’s Shelter.

At the same time, the activities of both Police in removing violent spouses and DCP in removing children at risk causes immense further distress to the men themselves (including risk of suicide) and to their wider families on seeing these families torn apart by stop-gap solutions. The Police holding cells are of such a poor standard that they are not able to detain people for more than 24 hours.

Family violence needs to be understood and addressed within the context of the cultural trauma in which it occurs. More community- and culture-based women’s support groups are urgently needed across the Valley, in tandem with dedicated service provision and support for men who, often due to other severe stressors in their lives, resort to violence.

Child Apprehension: While local statistics are not available, across Australia Aboriginal children are being taken into custody at approximately 9 times the rate of non-Aboriginal children. For many people, this is a continuation of Stolen Generation policies and practices. In the Fitzroy Valley we have the unfortunate situation in which the Department for Child Protection has both the statutory duty of apprehending children at risk and has taken responsibility for delivering strengthening family programmes. We regard this as a worrying conflict of interest within the department, and strongly recommend that strengthening families’ programmes are delivered through the third sector.

**6. Provision of Men’s Outreach and Support Programmes** - This issue continues to receive far less attention and support than it warrants. Men need support and services not only in connection with family violence (see above, point 5) but also in terms of their physical health (and see below, point 7). Men’s health checks have recently been carried out

across the Valley, identifying approximately 140 men who urgently need following up. However there is limited or no service provision for such a follow-up. It would need to be carried out by the Remote Community Clinics, which lack both the basic infrastructure and staffing to do so. In terms of mental health, again, men's needs are significantly under-addressed. The one resident mental health worker in the Valley is female, and while she does work with men, it is clear that this situation is far from ideal.

However, the Men's Shed has recently opened in Fitzroy Crossing through the generosity of the Australian Children's Trust and there are hopes that it will develop wide-ranging support groups and services for men, addressing issues such as substance abuse, anger management and mental well-being. It is hoped the service will be able to contribute towards reducing the current unacceptably high level of Indigenous incarceration.

7. **Remote clinics** – remote clinics on communities are not designed for cultural appropriateness to enable the separation of male and female clients. Men will not attend a clinic where there is no segregation. Furthermore, there is no provision for staff accommodation in most communities which means that staff have to travel every day. When staff leave the community, often there is no access to urgent medical attention until the next time the nurse visits.
8. **Community Adult Education and Health Promotion** – funding for more health promotion, locally determined home maker programs, healthy living programmes, maternal health and Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder prevention programmes, support for families with complex needs from a culturally determined perspective and income management skills are all essential needs. Such programmes, when well designed and supported, can develop layers of community leadership and engage community members in activities well beyond the immediate scope of funding.
9. **Funded positions in communities** – in order to support communities to be sustainable it is essential to fund essential service positions such as environmental health workers. There are a large number of trained workers in communities, but no funding to employ them. Funding needs to include resources to support these workers in terms of mentoring, equipment and the provision of status within the community structure.

Support for families with complex needs including family members who may have alcohol-related developmental disabilities and/or early life trauma needs to occur at community level in order to be effective. Mediation services such as the programme run by MWRC at Wangkatjunka are also needed across the Valley, not least for building the basis for stable and viable community life.

Currently there is great anxiety across the Valley at the forthcoming demise of CDEP. Many community positions are funded jointly through CDEP and community resources. When CDEP ceases, this will necessarily result in a halving of community employment opportunities – and a severe reduction in community services.

- 10. Need for locally based Services** – frequently funding is allocated to service providers who are not based locally and have little understanding of local conditions. This increases the cost of service provision as non-local staff have to travel considerable distances, wasting time and money, but more importantly, often the funded services are not delivered on the ground in ways which give meaningful or intended benefit to the communities concerned.
- 11. Youth** – currently there is no organisation in the Fitzroy Valley that has a mandate or priority for youth services; nor are there enough services in town to support local youth. A dedicated recreation service to engage young people, could assist in court diversionary programmes as well as avoiding unlawful behavior in the first instance, in some cases.
- 12. Education** – In recent state-wide tests, Fitzroy Crossing students were placed at the bottom of the list. There are many reasons why the national curriculum is failing our children. We note that the Barnett WA government is allowing 30 select state schools to offer the International Baccalaureate. Principals of those schools will be able to cut red tape and allow parents more say in their children's education. Principals would have to negotiate a five-year delivery and performance agreement and have total budgetary control and select their own staff.

We would like to see a similar agreement negotiated with our community which also took into account the many special education needs of those of our children affected by Early Life Trauma and/or Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders.

- 13. Community Transport Services** – there is no provision for public transport within the valley apart from the local taxi service which is very expensive. People living in remote communities are limited in their ability to access town-based essential services when they have no means of transport. We would like to see the existing School Bus Service extended to meet community transport needs.
- 14. Hostel accommodation** – is urgently needed for people coming in to access town-based services including specialist medical appointments, to access town-based training courses and for legal matters.

## **15. Disability**

*“Someone has said that children of this nature [with FASD] will not be able to capture nor store stories as told by their elders for its intended use of passing it down to the next generations. Their mental capabilities will be such that the culture of their forefathers will be lost forever never to be regained: my plea is, please understand my story, save at least one half of my generation from total physical and mental annihilation.”*

There are currently no reliable indicators of the level of alcohol-related brain-based disability in the Valley. This disability can be seen to be a direct consequence of the many-years' unregulated over-supply of alcohol, acquired both through personal excessive use of alcohol and through foetal exposure.

At present, Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) is not yet a recognised Australian classification, although Kimberley paediatricians have suggested that its incidence could be between 25% and 40% of all live births in the Valley. Early Life Trauma is also deemed to be present. Both these conditions are emerging as significant factors in the poor childhood health and educational outcomes, the significant mental distress and social and economic exclusion outcomes in later life, which are witnessed across the Valley. As a consequence of lack of classification, specialized services are not yet available.

This whole issue is a matter of considerable distress to the community and we recommend that governments seek to join with us to address it as a matter of urgency.

- 16. Training to Employment** – Too often, training programmes are offered with no link into employment. For instance, as stated above (see point 9), there are a number of people who are accredited Environmental Health workers living on communities where their skills are needed, yet there is no provision for using those skills. Training needs to be linked into wider economic and (small) business development, including social enterprise, and including those opportunities that arise through Native Title claims and as laid out in the many Kimberley strategic plans waiting to be implemented.

We are very concerned by the high levels of Indigenous youth incarceration. We have local diversionary programmes, such as those run by Yiraman, and urgently request that such programmes receive adequate support and funding as designated 'Alternatives to Custody' programmes which are linked to skills development. Since it costs somewhere in the order of \$250,00 per annum to keep one youth in Juvenile Detention, this could usefully be funded through redistributing these monies.

As stated above in point 9, there is considerable anxiety and confusion over what opportunities will be available once CDEP finishes.

- 17. Enterprise and Economic Development opportunities** – one major consequence of so many years of unregulated supply of alcohol is that there are people of all ages in our communities who may have an alcohol-related brain-based disability. Such people need whole of life service provision that is inclusive. We look to build this provision in innovative ways: we want our members who may have this disability to be able to lead purposeful and rewarding lives.

We are looking to 'create with' these people. We are not looking for a service modality based on 'care for'. Therefore we need to overcome silo thinking of either Disability Services or Economic Development. We need to support and develop social enterprise and sheltered workshop facilities which build a culturally-based economy (targeting the many tourists who visit the Kimberley) that can be both economically viable and inclusive of people who may have an alcohol-related disability, a history of mental illness, a history of incarceration, etc. as one alternative to the post-CDEP era.

People with alcohol-related brain-based disability can be helped to limit the effects through 'rewiring the brain'. This, put very simply, requires people to repeat the stages of brain development through developing first gross motor skills, then fine motor skills and then those of conceptual thinking. Gross motor skills can be very usefully acquired and developed through Caring for Country activities; fine motor skills require craft activities; and conceptual skills require artistic activities. There is an obvious synergy between these needs, a cultural tourism industry and current Kimberley regional strategic plans.

Such service provision needs to implement current regional strategic plans for enterprise development and to support the emerging access of traditional owners to their lands with opportunities for entrepreneurial development which acknowledges cultural practices. This, together with attracting businesses to further develop the local economy, will in time bring improved wealth creation and economic sustainability for individuals, families and communities. It is envisaged that it will also engage youth and develop opportunities for youth training and employment.

Business support services, including a business incubator, are necessary. So is a reformulated New Enterprise Initiative Scheme (NEIS). Currently NEIS is available for one year, but given the need for extensive support in the region, small business owners are likely to need income support for a significantly longer period of 3-5 years.

**18. Remote Telecentre Provision** - Telecentre provision to Remote Communities would address a range of factors contributing to current poor health, wealth and educational outcomes. It would enable community members and service providers to link up, and it would enable community residents to create and conduct business and educational activities without the need to travel. Such telecentres would enable local communities to engage with Web 2.0 and 3.0 technologies as they emerge.

**19. Paralegal Service Provision** - Paralegal support programmes delivered by local residents at community level could significantly increase local knowledge and compliance with State and Federal laws. Such paralegal support staff could reduce the number of people experiencing legal difficulties - often resulting in incarceration - on drivers licence irregularities and fines; they could also provide local support to overcome the need for child apprehension; they could increase local understanding and compliance regarding tenancy issues. Above all, they would instrumentally increase layers of leadership within communities.

## **Conclusion**

We join with you in wanting a new partnership between Government and Indigenous people. Like you, we want safe, healthy and supportive family environments in which our children can thrive. We too want to build and participate in a sustainable economic future. We want to create a future relationship – and a future - that is very different from our recent past experience. However, we are understandably nervous about how you may go about implementing these shared visions.



For us, the single most pertinent benchmark of success or failure will be the reduction in Indigenous incarceration.

To us, the most salient feature and consequence of Indigenous disadvantage across Australia is the unacceptably high numbers of Aboriginal people in incarceration. Neither Reconciliation nor Closing the Gap can be said to be underway when, in WA, approximately 40% of the prison population is drawn from some 3% of the population.

Were federal and state governments to address the drivers of this disaster, they would find that all of the Closing the Gap objectives would inevitably be addressed: high rates of incarceration are driven, among other things, by substantive inequality, by chronic poverty, by poor educational and health outcomes, by excessive use of alcohol and other drugs, and by intergenerational despair.

We want our children to grow up in stable families in which all family members are present and active; we want our children to go to school and learn the fundamental skills of life of which literacy and numeracy are core elements, so that they can take part in a future in which our people have meaningful employment; we want our children to look forward to a future where our families' capacity to care and nurture each other and overcome the problems of social disintegration includes all of us.

However, the current reality is that too many of our family members, men and women – mothers and fathers - and youth, are incarcerated: often for 'victimless crimes' such as non-payment of fines. Others are incarcerated on remand for long periods. Recommendations of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody and other findings on bail, diversionary programmes, and alternatives to custody which provide training and employment opportunities are yet to be realised.

The present unacceptably high rate of Indigenous incarceration has significant adverse impacts on our children and families, on our health, our living standards and our wealth.

We ask you to share this journey of change with us in a genuine spirit of partnership. If you do this we will close that elusive gap and build a sustainable community that can be a national if not international model of inspiration for Indigenous development and social inclusion.