

# Imanpa

Northern Territory



**The Intervention and beyond:  
A submission to the Minister for Families, Housing, Community  
Services and Indigenous Affairs, The Hon. Jenny Macklin MP**



**December 2007**

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## Executive Summary

Imanpa has suffered years of neglect and the community has had little opportunity to be heard or seen. When the intervention was announced, Imanpa was one of the first of four communities to 'get the intervention' because of its proximity to Mutitjulu.

The term 'intervention' connotes a subtle blame or shame on those who require the intervening. Hopefully the new Government will find a more inclusive and less offensive term for the current, belated and often frustratingly disorganised attempt to right the wrongs of decades.

Over the past six months the people of Imanpa have been cooperative and patient while their lives were disrupted by a government experimenting with ideas and policies formulated a long way from Imanpa.

A long term sustainable plan needs to be negotiated before any more decisions are made. To date no plan has been offered or discussed with the community.

This submission deals with the urgent issues currently facing Imanpa and asks that consideration be given to supporting and resourcing the following:

- **Housing**

Housing remains the first priority. Some people have nowhere to live and emergency accommodation is needed immediately. A comprehensive building program is required that ensures construction begins in April 2008 and is carried out during the cooler months. Sufficient resources need to be made available to build suitable housing that includes employment opportunities for local people.

At the moment we have two families and an elderly man with nowhere to live. Mavis Staines has three of her four children living with her with a fourth child taken from her by community services. She needs accommodation urgently if she is to keep the rest of her family together. Xavier Kitson and Pollyanne Mumu are living in a car and a tent and Toby Ginger is living in a tent.

- **Education**

Two educational centres need to be constructed: a Workshop Training Centre and an Arts, Childcare and Learning Centre.

- **Police Station**

A highly visible and centrally located police station and police house need to be constructed so that the police can deliver a service that is much more effective.

- **Crisis Accommodation**

Accommodation is urgently required for women and children who have nowhere to go in a crisis. Young men also need accommodation.

- **Dogs and fencing**

Many of the houses and buildings are unfenced and dog numbers are high. Fences need to be erected around houses to keep unwanted dogs out and a culturally sensitive plan be implemented that looks at helping people care for their dogs and controls fertility.

The Community Manager, Council Chairperson, Councillors and community all support this submission and look forward to working with the new government towards a better future.



Deirdre Finter  
Community Manager  
Imanapa Community Council



Tanya Luckey  
Chairperson  
Imanapa Community Council

13 December 2007

# 1. Background

Imanpa community was originally established on a 1.6 ha excision from Mount Ebenezer Station in 1978. The community is predominantly Pitjantjatjara and Yunkunytjara, though Arrernte, Luritja and Warlpiri are also represented. Imanpa Development Association owns a station house at Angus Downs and owns the Mount Ebenezer Road House which is licensed to sell alcohol. Community members have permitted themselves 4 cans of beer a day from the Roadhouse.

Population:       Approximately 140  
                          59 children under the age of 15

## 1.1 Imanpa Community Council

The Imanpa Community Council Incorporated is made up of the following members:

Tanya Luckey (Chairperson)  
David Wongway (Vice Chairperson)  
Margaret Smith  
Jeffrey Mumu  
Michael Bulla  
Sheila Bulla  
Lesley Luckey  
Kathy Luckey  
Elsie Luckey

The Council employs a Community Manager, Deirdre Finter, Administrative Assistant, Bridget Coombes and a Housing Manager, Bruce Finter, who is also the Essential Services Officer, maintaining power, water and sewerage facilities. The Chairperson also works full time in the office as CEA supervisor and undertakes many administrative tasks. Health and Community Care (HACC) Co-ordinator, Elsie Luckey assists in the office with Centrelink rules and forms.

The Council looks after all housing maintenance and repairs, funding applications, manages the council's budget, income and expenses, community banking enquiries (including transfer of funds into people's accounts when keycards are lost, broken or stolen – averaging 5 transfers per day), Centrelink issues, Centrepay deductions, vehicle maintenance and refuse management. The Council runs a variety of programs, including Aged Care, health promotions, dog control and welfare issues. Council staff regularly meet, advise and liaise with many government departments that visit the community.

The Council also assists people with life's paperwork, reading and explaining or translating mail.

The Community Manager records all minutes of the Council and other committees and undertakes advising and training Council members and the community about the roles and responsibilities of elected members and the various spheres of government in Australia.



The small Council office is the hub of the community, offering an airconditioned respite for the elderly, young mothers with babies and those who simply have nowhere else to go in the heat of the day.

There is a public phone in the foyer of the office, however it often breaks down. It was made in Germany and apparently cannot cope with Australian 50 cent pieces. As soon

as funding permits, the Council will purchase a more Australian coin friendly machine.

## 1.2 Mission Australia – Youth work

The recreation shed is well used by youth workers from Mission Australia but is inadequate. There is no sound proof room for the band to practice and the shed is very hot in the summer and very cold in the winter. It was originally the CDEP workshop, which was handed over to youth workers 18 months ago because there was nowhere else to go. There are plans to renovate the shed, however, this has not started and the shed is becoming very uncomfortable with the temperatures rising above 40 degrees. It is also a well known refuge for snakes in the summer months.



Mission Australia took over the youth program about 6 months ago, employing two non Aboriginal staff and four local people (including Robbie Coombes and Leslie Luckey (pictured) and Kathleen Pumpjack and Marressha Luckey). They work with young people up to the age of 25. Mission staff run after school activities for primary and secondary students as well as many other programs involving young parents and the broader community.

We have a football oval and a basketball court and our young people are avid and accomplished footballers and soft ball players, who regularly compete in games with neighbouring communities. This year the Imanpa football team won the grand final and the softball team was second in its competition. We would like to improve our facilities so that we can invite teams to compete in Imanpa.



### 1.3 Health

The health clinic is run by a registered nurse, Carmel Morsi and is well attended by the community and well organised. Our clinic nurse also attends vehicle accidents on the busy Lasseter Highway and beyond. She organises the ambulance service driving people to Alice Springs or to the nearest airstrip at Erldunda for medical evacuation to Alice Springs. Erldunda is about 70 kms from Imanpa.

As part of the intervention a team of nurses and a doctor came to the community and surveyed the health of children. Only one child was found to be underweight and one was anemic. Of more concern was the percentage of young people who had sexually transmitted infections: one in 5 under the age of 35 and one in 3 under the age of 25.

We have had many visits from various health professionals and allied health professionals. Over the past six months the community has been visited by no less than 6 dietitians, nutritionists and well being managers. They are from different organisations and do not appear to cross each other's paths. Given the state of nutritional problems that still exist in the community, particularly diabetes, kidney disease and obesity; it seems that the programs and information they bring are having little impact.

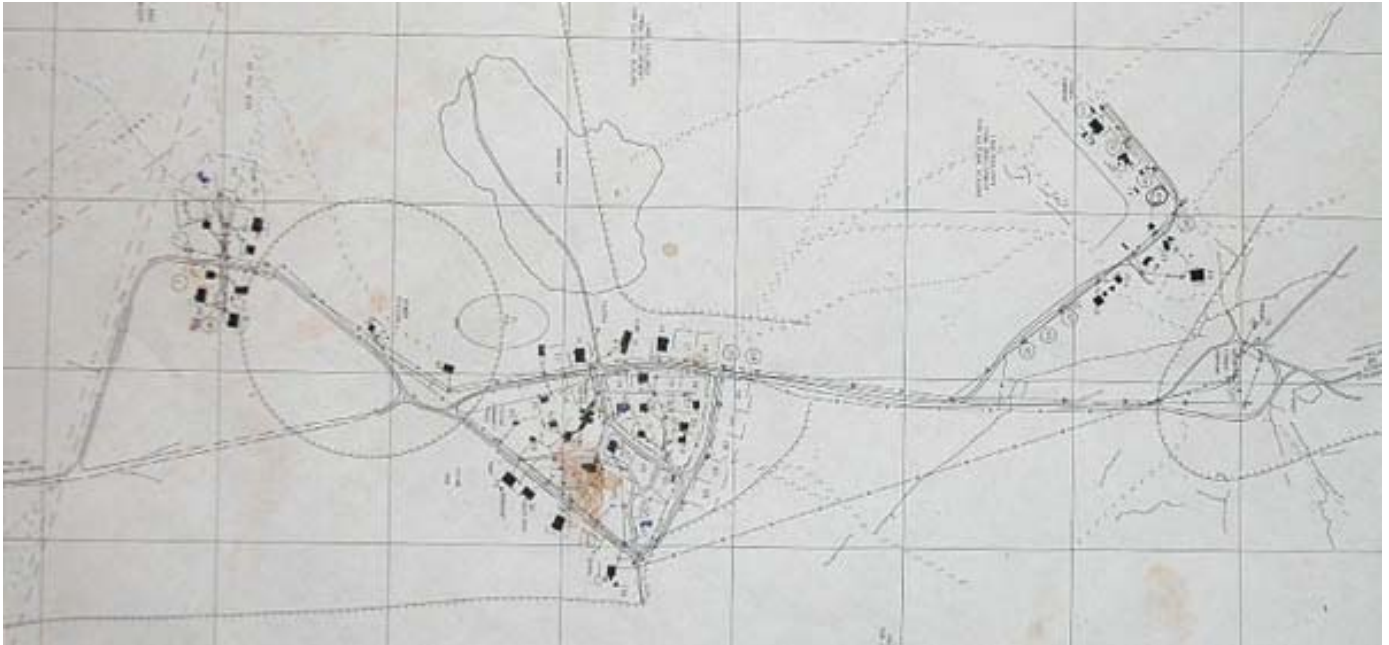
### 1.4 Community Centre

The Imanpa Community Centre is open to the elements and is a difficult space to deliver programs and services. At the moment the centre houses Night Patrol, the Women's Centre, Aged Care Program, Anangu Jobs, the secondary college, community computer room, showers, toilets and laundry.



## 1.5 HACCs program (aged care)

Just prior to the intervention the Council successfully applied for funding to assist the aged and disability pensioners receive a daily meal, as well as assistance with bathing and washing through the Health and Community Care (HACC) program. The program was run from the Community Centre by Elsie Luckey and four CDEP workers. Since the intervention 4 positions were funded in the program co-ordinated by Elsie with Sonia Wongway, Dixon Mumu and Roslyn Wongway currently assisting. A fourth person left recently and we are seeking a replacement.



*Imanpa Community, Northern Territory*



## 2. The Intervention

At the beginning of the intervention a small village was built some distance away from the community to house the workers who would soon be coming to the community. This has worked well for Centrelink staff, builders, plumbers, electricians and other workers. The village comprising of 7 demountables was erected, plumbed, furnished and wired in 10 days. Unfortunately those in charge did not consult with the Council or community about where the village should be situated. As a result the village was built alongside a creek and is in a flood area. Recent rain had inhabitants spending a day digging their vehicles out of the resulting bog.

While the community understands that people need somewhere to stay when they come to work here, they are angry that such a village can be built and furnished (including the installation of Austar) in such a short time when urgent housing assistance in the community is taking so long.

The intervention began with a 'survey team' coming to the community with one day's notice. As a result the Community Manager and Chairperson were unavailable as they were attending a meeting in Alice Springs dealing with another major change – the consolidation of councils into Shires which will see community councils abolished by 30 June 2008. The survey team arrived with many members of the press and people were very confused and frightened by what looked like an invasion. A week later the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, Mal Brough, his wife and Sue Gordon arrived with yet another large contingent of journalists.



The Army arrived for a few hours, took many pictures and threw out of date ration packs to the children.

We took the Minister on a brief tour of the community, showing him three houses, the recreation hall, shop, community centre and office. He remarked that the community was showing him only the worst houses. The Community Manager presented the minister with a photographic report of every house in the community (Attachment 1).

On that day the community was promised many things, including assistance with repairing important infrastructure, including the dump which has since been cleaned up and fenced. It was agreed that the community's heavy equipment, which included three tractors, a grader, backhoe and workshop equipment needing repairing before any other work could commence. It was also agreed that the Government would pay for this work, however to date we are still awaiting reimbursement. (See Attachment 2)



The Minister agreed that some people required emergency housing, with a suggestion that given the urgency of the situation perhaps even army tents might be used if nothing else could be sourced in the short term.

Since this time houses have become so overcrowded that Xavier Kitson, Pollyanne Mumu and their family are living in a car with a small tent alongside and Toby Ginger, an elder, is living in another small tent. The tents were purchased out of the Council's emergency fund.



*Toby Ginger's camp*



*Pollyanne & Xavier*



*Pollyanne & Xavier's camp*

During the early days of the intervention we were kept up to date with Government policy by reading press releases from Mal Brough's office or by listening to ABC radio. Unfortunately our ABC broadcasts (both TV and radio) ceased about a month ago and we are still waiting for necessary repairs to be made.

When Government Business Manager, Richard Trevena was appointed and came to a Council meeting on 16 July 2007. The following is an extract from those minutes:

Richard said that the government has a view about Aboriginal affairs. It abolished ATSIC and mainstreamed all of the programs. Richard said he will deal with the communities honestly and fairly. While he cannot change government policy he will do his best to listen and talk to the government about concerns that communities may have.

Richard Trevena shares his time with the Mutitjulu community and so spends, on average, one night a week in Imanpa. The community would like to see the reports that are written about Imanpa. To date we have not seen any and the Council and the community believe they have a right to see what is being written about Imanpa and what discussions are taking place about the community's future. The *Roles and Responsibilities of Government Business Managers in the Northern Territory Emergency Response* part 4, states:

GBMs are key sources of information and intelligence to the Taskforce Operations Centre and Australian Government agencies about progress of the emergency measures government-funded service delivery and issues impacting on the community. Their feedback should be superior to what can be achieved with fly in/fly out visits alone and will assist to prevent uncoordinated government action and ensure that decisions taken are cognisant of the facts.

It is difficult to see how our GBM can be offering 'superior' feedback when he spends so little time here and does not engage with community members.

Two Department of Education and Workplace Relations Community Brokers were sent to the community, both of whom have had difficulty explaining their roles probably because their roles have not been fully explained to them. Like many of our visitors, the brokers required extensive briefing and Council staff have become overwhelmed with the work and time needed to do this.

In the first three months of the intervention we were visited by over 100 public servants from around the country. We are 170 kms east of Ayers Rock and just 8 kms off the main highway. We are seen by people on their way to Ayers Rock, which offers five star accommodation, restaurants and, of course, the Rock.

The meetings with bureaucrats have been tense affairs where visitors have simply told people what will happen. There has been no consultation. Imanpa was the first intervention community and many of the visiting public servants said at the Council meetings that Imanpa residents were 'guinea pigs'. This was very insulting and insensitive. When the Council and Community Manager pointed out the problems that some of the policies would bring about, the community was ignored. Consequently the community has had to suffer the stress of changes that have lead to hardship and broken promises at the hands of inept and inexperienced public servants. The following is an extract from Council Minutes taken on 1 August 2007 when IBA representatives, Trudi Ridge and Bernie Johnson addressed the meeting:

Trudi Ridge and Bernie Johnson joined the meeting to talk about the housing survey next week. As part of the emergency response the Federal Government are sending a team next week to Imanpa to look at every house to find out what needs to be done to fix them so that they are liveable and safe. Trudi and Bernie will come back next week with a plumber and an electrician and they will get a list of the things they will need to bring back to start the work in two or three weeks.

Richard Trevena joined the meeting.

Trudi said there would be a couple of positions for local people to work with IBA and the construction/repair teams. She also said that other people from IBA would be visiting the community (Cheryl Ross) to talk about business opportunities.

Council was concerned that simply fixing the houses was not a good solution to the problem. The houses would still be overcrowded and would fall into disrepair quickly. Trudi talked about people being able to design their own places in the future and Tanya said that such promises had been made before and it was irresponsible to make such statements and build people's hopes up only for policies to change. Deirdre suggested that Trudi and others should simply keep to what is being done and not talk about any other plans that may or may not be implemented. People in the community were putting up with a lot of change at the moment and visitors and the community need to stay focused on what is actually happening rather than just talking about good ideas.

Deirdre pointed out that the level of drinking and violence had increased over the past few weeks and this was confirmed by Peter the police officer from Kulgera. Deirdre said that this could be because of all the Centrelink/CDEP changes, the number of visitors the community was seeing, the media attention, the new ATCO village that had been built while people were still waiting for housing and the fact that the overcrowding had got to such a stage that people were moving into small tents, with some even living in cars. Richard said they could not stop the intervention and Deirdre said she was not suggesting this happen but that visitors and government officials should be mindful of the effect their visits and the changes were having on the community.

Trudi said that temporary accommodation would need to be found for people while houses were being repaired. These may be tents. Richard will look into this.

Since that time, no emergency accommodation has been made available for people and there have been no jobs for local people to work with the construction teams that arrived in mid September.

More positively, Centrelink have responded well to the problems that the new system has thrown up. They have responded quickly to issues and have sent many of their staff to sort out the myriad problems associated with the Work for the Dole program, income management and other issues.

Hopefully the stress this community has been subjected to and our experience will make the intervention a smoother, slower and more measured affair in other communities. It is also hoped that the government will start seriously consulting with communities before any more changes are made.

Sustainable improvements can only be made when Aboriginal people are involved in the formulation of policies. In May 1991 Commissioner Elliot Johnston pointed this out in the *National Report of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody*,

Government can transform the picture of Aboriginal affairs. But not so much by 'doing' things--more by letting go of the controls; letting Aboriginal people make the decisions which government now pretends they do make. Government would be doing non-Aboriginal society a service; the resolution of the 'Aboriginal problem' has been beyond the capacity of non-Aboriginal policy makers and bureaucrats. It is about time they left the stage to those who collectively know the problems at national and local levels; they know the solutions because they live with the problems. (27.9.2)

Dr Joseph Reser told the Royal Commission that “policies of assimilation denied Aboriginal people legitimate control over their lives and communities” and “. . . how a European-style house can itself deny Aboriginal people control over various domestic, social and economic aspects of their lives” and “. . . this loss of control over one's immediate environment elicits anxiety and stress, and detrimentally affects a person's competence to deal with other problems associated with a changing situation.” (18.3.7)

In the section of the *Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody* report that deals with “assumptions about the need for houses and facilities”, Commissioner Johnston reported:

Government policy and practice have been largely shaped by non-Aboriginal assumptions about the role of living spaces. The assumption behind most programs related to Aboriginal housing is that the built structure of a house, and its social location, are unproblematic. Almost all ignore Aboriginal people's own uses and cultural understandings of space. (18.4.1)

Many extended Aboriginal families have been fitted into houses intended for one nuclear family. The problem is not so much the number of bedrooms but rather the way houses are used. Often far more people than intended share a house. In addition to the burden of an extended family regularly in residence, visitors can also dramatically boost resident numbers for short or prolonged periods. As Katherine Winsley, Executive Director of the Kalano Association in Katherine told me:

*It's what happens when people are in town that puts a lot of strain on Kalano resources... relations will come in, they haven't got anywhere to stay in town, so they'll go and stay with relations that are in one of the Kalano houses. That causes overcrowding in the house, it causes a lot of wear and tear to the house. The house gets smashed up much faster than what it would normally be if there was just, say, that one family in there. (18.4.2)*

### 3. Housing

Housing is the number one issue in Imanpa as it is with many other communities. Over ten years of neglect, mismanagement and invisibility have meant that children are living in overcrowded, rundown houses with dysfunctional, poor and under-educated and uneducated households. The houses have no security or fences and until recently, major plumbing, sewerage and electrical deficiencies.

The following is a housing report put together one week before the intervention was announced (see Attachment 1).

#### Inhabited housing summary – July 2007

House Number	No. of bedrooms	No. of occupants	State of repair
7	3	11	Very poor
8	3	15	Very poor
10	3	8	Very poor
13	2	3+ (?)	Unknown
14	3	6	Fair
16	3	9	Fair
35	3	14	Poor
39	2	12	Uninhabitable
46	4	7	Very poor
49	3	4	Uninhabitable
50	3	4	Uninhabitable
55	3	8	Very poor
57	3	8	Uninhabitable
58	4	14	Fair but overcrowded
82	3	2	Very good
83	4	6	Very good
88	3	3	Very good
87	3	8	Poor
90	3	5	Very good
TOTAL (19)	58	135*	

This information was gathered over three separate days in late June 2007. The information received was about the number of people in the houses at the time and given the mobility of the population and the information collector's relative newness to the community and unfamiliarity with many of Imanpa's residents, the actual population figure may vary considerably.

Out of the 19 inhabited houses in the community:

- 4 were uninhabitable and the occupants needed to be relocated immediately due to the threat to safety and of disease.

- 5 were in very poor condition, meaning they have serious plumbing deficiencies, require extensive repairs and maintenance and are overcrowded.
- 2 were in a poor condition requiring extensive repairs and maintenance.
- 3 were in a fair condition requiring some repairs and maintenance.
- 4 were in very good condition.
- 1 is unknown.

Other housing issues:

- While the year of construction is known for some of the buildings, many are thought to have been erected during the mid to late 1970s.
- 15 houses require fencing.
- None of the houses have floor coverings, all are concrete slabs.
- The sewerage and septic systems were in urgent need of repair. When the mains sewerage was connected contractors joined the mains to the existing septic pipes on the incoming side of the septic tanks, instead of renewing the entire system from the house resulting in raw sewage backing up, blocking and creating serious health risks.
- Guttering was put onto three houses without downpipes causing extensive damage to gutters and causing flooding inside homes.
- The electric hot water systems are small and inadequate, particularly given the overcrowding in most houses.
- Most plumbing fittings in houses cannot cope with the hard water and many leak causing a large waste of water.

Indigenous Business Australia (IBA) was given the task of organising much needed repairs to houses.

In December the houses are still overcrowded and run down. Many still do not have front and back doors, or internal doors and many windows are missing on every house. People have little or no security in their homes. Dogs roam the community without the constraint of fencing or doors. While some houses have received an exterior coat of paint and plumbing and electrical problems have been addressed, the state of repair as listed in the table above remains the same for all houses.



*Pauline Smith's house # 57 – outside was painted but the house is still uninhabitable*

Imanpa needs houses. It needs places people can go, call home and feel safe. Women and children need safe shelter in crisis situations. Simply fixing the existing housing does not fix the problem. Once the work is complete the houses will be filled again to the brim and the cycle of damage will recur.



*House # 39 – painted on the outside. A family of four moved in since the intervention and so there are now 14 people living in this two bedroom house*

Children are not getting enough rest, care or protection in these overcrowded situations that often erupt into violence. Until permanent housing can be built emergency accommodation must be provided.

Among the recommendations in *The Little Children are Sacred: A Report of the Northern Territory Board of Inquiry into the Protection of Aboriginal Children from Sexual Abuse 2007* (page 31) provides:

Given the extent of overcrowding in houses in Aboriginal communities and the fact this has a direct impact on family and sexual violence, the Inquiry strongly endorses the government's reform strategy of critical mass construction in targeted communities, and recommends the government take steps to expand the number of communities on the target list for both new housing and essential repairs and maintenance in light of the fact that every community needs better housing urgently.

The report of the *National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families: Bringing Them Home* (April 1997) also talks about the importance of housing to the wellbeing of communities:

The Inquiry was told that 'without housing, an individual's education, economic and socio-cultural developments are severely curtailed. Without adequate housing, family cohesion and ability to care for children is severely inhibited' (ALSWA submission 127 page x).

In the *National Report of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody*, Commissioner Johnston heard:



. . . . how low achievement can be linked to a student's home environment. An Aboriginal speaker at an Underlying Issues hearing commented on problems of overcrowding, when two or three families may be living in the one house: 'Kiddies can't get down and learn to read and write while you've got a great mob of people in the house'. Similarly, in Perth the Commission heard how Aboriginal students couldn't do their homework because of 'overcrowding, lack of furniture and suitable lighting'. (16.5.3)



*Michael Bulla and Nellie Mick's house # 35 – leaks fill the kitchen with water and windows and doors are not secure*

Commissioner Johnston reported that housing is an underlying issue that affects so many aspects of the lives of Aboriginal people:

Living conditions continue to affect both custodial rates and the health status of many Aboriginal people for a number of reasons. (18.1.1)

Welfare presumptions of what constitutes a good home served to undermine family structures and identity. A recurring theme in the individual case reports that have been published by the Royal Commission is childhood separation of the deceased, largely as a result of 'care and protection' orders made in response to housing conditions. (18.1.2)

Grossly overcrowded housing--particularly when associated with excessive drinking--creates a context for domestic violence. Women and children are primarily the subjects of this violence, and men are arrested. Other consequences that may follow include children being unable to sleep or eat properly. This situation in turn contributes to child malnutrition and high truancy rates . . . . (18.1.4)

Forms of Aboriginal social organisation find frequent expression in the apportioning and use of space--the association of people with 'country', the siting of dwellings and shelters, patterns of visiting and gathering for religious, ceremonial, social and recreational purposes are all fundamental aspects of Aboriginal sociability. Mobility and avoidance have great significance as a means of coping with adverse circumstances. The close settlement of different groups of Aboriginal people in 'communities' may lead to conflict not contemplated by those outsiders funding and planning new housing and infrastructure development. (18.1.5)

These concerns are not new and the Commissioner quotes a report commissioned by the Commonwealth Department of Housing and Construction in 1985.<sup>1</sup> They included:

· *Insufficient consultation*

There has been insufficient consultation, misunderstanding and limited involvement of tenants and local Aboriginal communities in providing housing. Lack of communication has led to housing which many communities consider unsuitable because of design, location or materials used. Aboriginal communities may not learn about options until after standard houses have been built.

· *Insufficient housing stock*

Insufficient permanent housing in areas preferred by Aboriginal people can lead to town camping and associated problems of inadequate facilities.

· *Bureaucratic control*

Aboriginal housing programs in cities, in town camps and on reserves have all been subject to a large component of bureaucratic control because funds have generally been provided from outside. As a result, the programming of consultations and design have frequently got out of step with the annual budget cycles of government, or else poorly designed projects have been pushed through to completion to conform with these cycles.

· *Changing expectations and needs*

The expectations and needs of various urban, rural and remote Aboriginal communities are diverse and rapidly changing. Some find standard architecture and services suitable, while others require specially designed structures. Some change their preferences after experiencing living in a new type of space or environment. Similarly, some Aboriginal communities have all the skills necessary to obtain and manage their own housing and simply need a secure title and income; others need more intensive support.

Commissioner Johnston concluded that “the provision of housing and infrastructural support services to Aboriginal people has been identified as a major underlying cause of diminished opportunity and well-being, particularly in rural and remote communities.”



*Lisa Armstrong and Sharon Doolan play cards at Sheila Bulla and Gary Mumu's house # 46 – the house was painted on the outside but the inside still needs painting, doors repaired and the verandah was blown off in a storm a year ago*

The Inquiry also noted that the “Aboriginal extended family is often exploited by being used as an excuse for inaction on the part of governments” and the following evidence is quoted in the Inquiry’s report.

I think it is fair to say that State and Federal Governments have been hiding behind the, 'Oh, it's all right. The extended family will look after Aboriginal people; they'll look after themselves.' But it comes to a stage when ... your house is crowded, and you just cannot feed another six kids. I think the government has been hiding behind this for too long. (18.6.20)

In its 1993 publication *Housing for Health: Towards a Healthy Living Environment for Aboriginal Australia*, Pholeros, Rainow and Torzilla provide a practical and sound basis that offers Aboriginal communities the means to improve their living conditions and gain the direct health benefits which would follow. In the final chapter, *Current Knowledge, Recommendations and Future Work*, they point out

The provision of houses for Aboriginal communities is relatively simple. It requires a budget, site and time.

The provision of housing on the other hand is extremely difficult. Housing, the action, involves the ongoing provision of useful services to those using the house. While houses are useless, the services they provide are extremely useful, particularly to health. It is only through ongoing provision of useful services that the house remains housing.

All too often the shibboleth of culturally appropriate housing in fact provides a mechanism for service agencies to avoid their responsibility to ensure that housing programs provide functioning and maintained health hardware.

The authors point out that “to improve environmental health for Aboriginal people, the principles are no longer enough. It is attention to the detail which is necessary to delivery the final health outcomes.”

## 4. Employment

### 4.1 CDEP/Work for the Dole

After a year without any work programs the Community Development Employment Program (CDEP) was restarted in May 2007. The program was very well attended and proved to be a positive project in the community. With CDEP the community was cleaner and people were busy and positive. The CDEP program employed 2 supervisors, Tanya Luckey and Phillip Coombes, who are currently supervising the new Work for the Dole program. (See Attachment 3 for the minutes of a special meeting held to discuss the end of CDEP and the introduction of Work for the Dole).

The Work for the Dole program has not been as well attended. CDEP participants were paid weekly for the work they did at the end of every week. There was a strong correlation between work and payment. Now, with income management and Work for the Dole, payments are made fortnightly and reflect the hours two to three weeks ago, with payments into bank accounts and by cheque halved through the income management scheme. The scheme has proved to be very complex and is taking some time for people to understand. At the moment many in the community are still struggling with income management and have little understanding of the way it works.

At a Council meeting in August Margaret Smith raised the subject of cultural business. She said that during the months of October and November many men and women would be sent away to attend important cultural business. DEWR representatives said that cultural business would not be recognised as a Work for the Dole project and that people should now be undertaking 'overtime' to bank hours so that they could go away. This is particularly important for young men who must continue this lifelong learning that should be recognized by the Australian government as an activity that is at least supported by Work for the Dole.

Given that people had only been working in CDEP for a few weeks and that cultural business was imminent, Margaret asked how people would be able to bank as many hours as required. DEWR representatives simply stated that anyone not undertaking their Work for the Dole commitments would not be paid. Margaret pointed out that this policy directly undermined Aboriginal culture – if the men and women went away they would be penalised financially, if they did not go away they would be forced to abandon important cultural obligations. It is not a personal choice; people are obliged by their culture to undertake ceremonies, just as conscientious objectors are obliged by their culture, beliefs or religion not to go to war.

This exacerbates the dilemma reported by Commissioner Johnston in the Inquiry into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody:

. . . . the effect of non-Aboriginal domination of Aboriginal life has been to destroy many of the bases upon which men hitherto relied for achievement of status within their own society. At the same time, activities and involvement with non-Aboriginal

society, which had provided an alternative or supplementary means of achieving status both in Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal society, have also largely disappeared. The most important of these activities was involvement in primary industry in the cattle industry for some, in the cotton industry for others. The folklore, mythology and prestige which was associated with this work has gone as the jobs have disappeared. In their place are the dole or possibly CDEP work. CDEP will not necessarily meet this need for many good working men. They will adapt to it to survive, but sometimes without pride coming with it. (11.9.39)

## **4.2 Job Network providers**

Since the intervention three job network providers service the community, they are ITEC (through CEA), Jobfind (based at Yulara) and Anangu Jobs.

Anangu Jobs have worked closely with the community for many years and are sensitive to the people and their culture. Currently Anangu Jobs is running the Greencorps Program which is well attended by 9 young men, who also undertake other training programs; last week all attended a first aid training course. The Anangu Jobs agent lives in the community and is well respected.

A few community members were transferred to Jobfind and this has caused many problems. They do not have an agent in the community and visit irregularly. Many of their clients seek assistance from the Anangu Jobs agent.

CEA (ITEC) helped set up the CDEP program and now supervise the Work for the Dole program. While they have regularly visited the community and consult with the Council, the local supervisors have received very little training. This week they are attending their first training session in Alice Springs. There have been unacceptable delays with the delivery of equipment. We have waited months for a trailer to use for rubbish collection and a computer and internet connection for use by the supervisors. Despite these setbacks CEA have worked well with the Council and are helping to restore the Workshop, which will provide jobs and a much needed service to the Council and community.

## **4.3 Income management**

Since the introduction of income management at the beginning of September there has been much confusion and anxiety in the community. The change was rushed and, as with most of the changes brought about through the intervention, there was no community consultation so people felt they were being bullied into accepting a system they did not understand or want.

While there is some acceptance that a few people in the community have benefited from the introduction of income management, many still feel they have been unfairly grouped with people who did not care properly for their children simply because they are

Aboriginal and living in a remote community. This has caused feelings of shame, anger and despair, particularly among older members of the community.

Some senior members of the community are very concerned about the system and have likened it to the days when station managers distributed food and tobacco to people instead of wages. Elders, such as Margaret Smith, have pointed out that when she was growing up Aboriginal people had no rights to vote or any choice about where they lived. She said that when money was introduced to people there was no education about how to manage this new way of life. These senior people are unhappy that decision making has been taken out of the hands of people who desperately need to be educated about personal responsibility.

## 5. Education

### 5.1 Primary Education

The primary school is well attended; however when our teacher is called away to conferences or takes sick leave, the Education Department does not provide a relief teacher. Children suffer from the lack of continuity and in the past eight months the school has been open for five days in a row just three or four times. Current attendance is around 17 children.

*On the Imanpa Bus to see the Football Grand Final at Yulara which was won by Imanpa*



Last week the school teacher took 6 students on an excursion to Alice Springs, leaving 11 primary school aged children behind without a relief teacher. The children live in difficult crowded conditions and the school should offer stability and continuity of education if the cycle of poverty and despair is to be broken. The Community Manager



*Johnno Bulla*

wrote to the Northern Territory Government regarding her concerns about the lack of teaching staff and inconsistencies (Attachment 4).

The Imanpa primary school had a lunch program in place that has continued through the intervention. A morning breakfast program is currently being run by Mission Australia with the food being supplied by the Red Cross.

## 5.2 Secondary Education

Secondary education is delivered in the community by a teacher from Nyangatjatjara College, Yalara. The secondary school is not well attended with many young men missing out altogether. The building and facilities are small and run down. The college at Yalara has been unable to accept boarders for the past year because the new residential college does not meet fire standards.

Commissioner Johnston reported on the importance of employment and educational opportunities, particularly for young men:

While more research needs to be done on the process whereby young Aboriginal men achieve status and affirm their entry to adulthood, there is evidence to show that these desires tend more and more to be expressed through activities which bring them to the attention of police and the criminal justice system. These activities also bring these young men into disrepute amongst their own kin and fellow residents. The experiences of these young men occur in the absence of employment and education opportunities, and, crucially, in the absence of traditional means of shaping their transition to adulthood. These activities include drinking grog, going to gaol, targeting and destroying of European or public property, and assertions of power (and masculinity) through aggression and violence over women and, increasingly, over children. (11.9.42)



*Imanpa lads – Paul Pumpjack, Adrian Pumpjack, Xavier Riley, Elma Kitson and Andrew Smith*

In 1995 the General Assembly of the United Nations proclaimed the following ten year period the *United Nations Decade for Human Rights Education* and in its resolution “appealed to all governments to intensify their efforts to eradicate illiteracy and to direct education towards the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for all human rights and fundamental freedoms.” The resolution further stated that

.... Member States resolved to ensure that, by the year 2015, children everywhere, boys and girls alike, would be able to complete a full course of primary schooling and that girls and boys would have equal access to all levels of education, which requires a renewed commitment to promote literacy for all,

[The General Assembly was] *Convinced* that literacy is crucial to the acquisition, by every child, youth and adult, of essential life skills that enable them to address the challenges they can face in life, and represents an essential step in basic education, which is an indispensable means for effective participation in the societies and economies of the twenty-first century.

The General Assembly’s resolution appealed to

. . . . all Governments to reinforce political will and develop more inclusive policy-making environments and devise innovative strategies for reaching the poorest and most marginalized groups and for seeking alternative formal and non-formal approaches to learning with a view to achieving the goals of the Decade

and reaffirmed that literacy for all

. . . . is at the heart of basic education for all and that creating literate environments and societies is essential for achieving the goals of eradicating poverty, reducing child mortality, curbing population growth, achieving gender equality and ensuring sustainable development, peace and democracy;

The 1997 Report of *The National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families: Bringing them Home* noted, “. . . . successful Indigenous secondary students share a strong and growing sense of identity. In these cases Indigenous identity was a source of strength to achieve.”



*Imanpa Community Chairperson, Tanya Luckey with her daughter Laylani and husband Ashley Wiseman.*



## 6. Education in Imanpa – the future

The following plans are put forward after many months of discussions between the Community, the Council and the Community Manager. These plans attempt to be a starting point for addressing the many issues facing the people of Imanpa and perhaps other remote desert communities.

### 6.1 Workshop and Workshop Training Centre

Over the past few weeks the Essential Services Officer/Housing Manager, Bruce Finter has been working with local men to clean up the Imanpa Workshop. One local man, Max Tucker who is a diesel fitter mechanic has been working with Bruce to repair and maintain council vehicles and assist community members with minor repairs to their vehicles.

CEA are assisting with the construction of a fence around the Workshop that will provide a secure area for vehicles and dog proof the shed. In September Ray Barry from Queensland came to the community and fixed the 3 tractors, backhoe and grader in the workshop and repaired much of the workshop equipment.

With the help of BP, Council has been able to pay for some of the repairs and to employ Max in the workshop for the past few weeks.

Getting the workshop up and running offers an important training and business opportunity for the community.

The community would like a Workshop Training Centre built alongside the workshop that would offer basic education to secondary school age boys and to adult men. The Centre could be run by an experienced secondary/adult educator and incorporate access to computers and the internet and opportunities for improving literacy and numeracy.



*Workshop training sessions are very popular with Imanpa's young men are always well attended*

At the moment young men are not attending high school and many have difficulty with English and are unable to read and write. By building a Workshop Training Centre that offers programs such as carpentry, mechanics, welding and other trades, young men would be improving their literacy and numeracy skills while undertaking the type of activity that interests them. The Centre could also be used as a gathering place for men and be a space where the older men in the community can come and talk and work with young men and be involved in an important way with the education of the next generation.

Health promotion programs designed specifically for men could be undertaken at the centre as well as counseling and other activities that promote general well being.

The Workshop Training Centre could offer a service to surrounding communities through repairing and maintaining heavy equipment and other vehicles. Imanpa is central to many communities and easy to access. A well staffed and resourced Workshop Centre would be well placed in Imanpa offering training as well as service to other communities and the many young people in the area who would appreciate the skills and opportunities such a Centre would offer.

## **6.2 Arts, Childcare and Learning Centre**

Women in the community also need a place to gather, learn and be comfortable. In the past six months five babies have been born in the community and there are now more than 20 children under the age of five. During the day young women with their children have very few options. They come to the Council building where it is cool and where they can get together in comfort to talk, or they sit outside the shop chatting and sharing food and stories with each other and the little ones.



*Sonia Wongaway with her niece, Rochelle Mumu*

It is generally accepted that the most important phase in a person's life is the first few years and that these early years lay the groundwork for what is hoped to be a long, healthy and fulfilling life. It is essential that young women with their new babies get the assistance they need to ensure this happens. Unfortunately the young mothers of Imanpa are getting little support. While we could get the services of a Child Care Co-ordinator we have nowhere suitable to run a Child Care/Education Centre. There is also nowhere for women to gather, talk and learn. There is a strong will in the community to help young families and strong support for a place for women and children to share and learn.

A combined Arts, Child Care and Learning Centre could incorporate a meeting place for women, a place to learn about looking after children, housekeeping and maintaining good

health. The many health specialists that visit the community could work with a Centre Co-ordinator to ensure that programs are relevant, regular and consistent. As with the Workshop Centre a secondary/adult educator could teach literacy and numeracy through many programs including art. Older women could sit alongside the young and paint and share stories. The Centre should also offer a place where women can learn to use computers and have access to the internet. Artists could set up an Ebay store and be part of the growing success story of Aboriginal people and the internet.



## 7. Violence, Alcohol and Policing

### 7.1 Violence, alcohol, housing and safety

Many of the young families in Imanpa are dealing with the serious issues of domestic abuse, child neglect, substance abuse, overcrowded housing and depression. Over the past five weeks four women were assaulted by their partners and one young woman was assaulted by her grandfather and mother.

The community urgently needs emergency accommodation for women and children in crisis as well as accommodation for young men.

In the Inquiry into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, Commissioner Johnston reports:

*The crisis accommodation needs of women and children escaping intolerable domestic situations are not seen by Aboriginal women as separate to the other needs of women in the community. Women have generally described the need for a 'safe place' which serves a variety of purposes and which enables emergency shelter and crisis support to be integrated with other strategies that address the problems being experienced by women. (18.7.180)*

The Queensland Aboriginal Co-ordinating Council, in its submission to the Commission, also stresses the link between overcrowding, domestic violence and inadequate emergency accommodation. I note the sad irony that for some women, police watchhouses form the only secure shelter in the absence of alternative accommodation:

*Prisons can exist in the mind. When an Aboriginal woman finds her home is not a safe place from assault and psychological violence, where does she go? Womens' Shelters do not exist on most of the communities. In fact, communities are so isolated, there's nowhere to go except to hide in the bush overnight, seek refuge with friends or relatives where she is sure to be found [because] the community is so small, or spend the night in watch-houses or hospital. Women and their babies sleep in watch-houses regularly to escape further abuse. Women are caught in a bind because they love their men and they'll usually return. With small isolated communities, with overcrowded houses, where else can they go? If they leave the community, they then are isolated from family and kin support networks and become lonely. Life is also difficult financially in the city for single mothers. In a sense, women are 'imprisoned' in their own communities in their own homes. (18.7.19)*

While there is nowhere for women to come together in safety and nowhere for men to get together, these problems will continue to



destroy the fabric of this community. People fill their days with gambling and grog and for years petrol sniffers held the community under a kind of siege. The ravages of that time can be seen in the many houses, vehicles and equipment that have been destroyed during this terrifying period, leaving a war zone-like landscape.

The introduction of Opal fuel last year has almost eliminated petrol sniffing in the area and the community now has a chance to restore itself after such a long period of violence and self destruction.

Many former petrol sniffers suffer long term serious effects, including brain damage and physical weakness. The introduction of the Work for the Dole program and other compulsory work programs do not take into account the damage caused by petrol and alcohol abuse. Those members of our community who suffer the ongoing effects of alcohol abuse are in their forties and fifties and most have never had a job and have had no opportunity of an education.

The constant demands on supervisors who are trying to get these people motivated to undertake manual labour is stressful and takes up most of their time. Those people with alcohol related problems and those who suffer the effects of past petrol sniffing should be given opportunities to work and contribute on a voluntary basis. Importantly those with alcohol addictions require professional care and rehabilitation. Simply making them sign an activity agreement and threatening to stop Centrelink payments does nothing except increase the level of anxiety people suffer and push them further into dangerous behaviours.

Commissioner Johnston emphasised in his report:

. . . . that poverty, oppression and relative powerlessness provide an environment within which harmful patterns of alcohol and other drug use can readily develop and, indeed, flourish. When people are poor their opportunities are limited. Their power to shape the forces that determine how they live is limited. Real alternatives are not available to them. Social development, by which I mean here Aboriginal people's being meaningfully involved in daily activities--and I do not mean paid employment alone--that enhance their feelings of self-worth, along with better physical living conditions, will contribute substantially to the obtaining of a lower level of harmful alcohol and other drug use among Aboriginal people. The extent of harmful alcohol and other drug use among wealthy people reminds us that affluence, alone, does not eliminate these problems. (32.5.3)

## 7.2 Night Patrol and Police

Night Patrol was started a month before the intervention and was run by four CDEP participants. As a result of the intervention four positions have been funded for the program and David Wongway supervises the Patrol and he currently has Ashley Wiseman, Robert Mumu and Xavier Kitson working with him. (Attachment 5 – roles and responsibilities of Night Patrol.)



*Ashley Wiseman, Senior Constable  
Karen Hill & David Wongaway*

The intervention has brought the community two police officers who have worked well with Night Patrol and with the community. The introduction of a police presence has been beneficial to the community. However, the police are not properly resourced. There is no police station or permanent police accommodation. One police officer is living in the community's visitor accommodation and the other in the village built for intervention staff. Both of these buildings are 1.5 kilometres from the community.

At the beginning of the intervention a police station in the form of a demountable building was promised. It was to be situated in the centre of the community providing high visibility and accessibility. The police are currently situated in an area that has historically been designated 'whitefellas only' and so is not accessible to community members.

Without a police station and a lock-up police are required to drive to Kulgera a hundred and forty kilometres away, stay with the offender for some hours, before returning to the community. This has meant that the police are spending a lot of time travelling and away from the community.

## 8. Dogs and fencing

Imanpa has a dog problem. There are no fences and pups are being produced at an alarming rate. The vet has visited a couple of times in the last six months, but it seems there is little he can do to stem the tide of dogs.

Often the reaction of non-Aboriginal people is to go on a killing spree, indiscriminately shooting or delivering poison to large numbers of dogs. The dogs pose a health and safety hazard but controlling them requires a better understanding of the community and environment in which they live.

Local people are always reluctant to be involved in culling dogs and there is always resistance and sadness when a culling takes place. The only way to control the number of dogs is to work with the community on a long term sustainable plan that has been put together in consultation with community members.

First, all houses need to be securely fenced so that unwanted dogs can be kept from yards and houses need to be dog-proofed.

A dog pound needs to be erected where stray or sick dogs can be taken for treatment and where other dogs can be brought along for treatment for mange, worms and other parasites and for de-sexing. This could serve as another educational opportunity for community members and would improve the health and wellbeing for everyone in the community.

Such a program may be an opportunity for graduate and post graduate veterinary students to come and learn and study this dog phenomenon and spend 2 to 3 months in the community. They could help the community take better care of the dogs and also learn about Aboriginal people's relationship with man's best friend.



## 9. Conclusion

Imanpa community members are ready to make changes that build on their strengths. People are keen to talk to a government that will listen and respect their experience and knowledge.

In this submission we have dealt with the most urgent matters. There are other issues that require attention and funding including improving recreational facilities and the community store. The community needs a laundry, library and keeping place for sacred items and our communications systems are unreliable and expensive.

First, the community desperately needs houses and places where people can get together to learn, socialise and be safe.

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