



BoysTown

14 July 2009

Committee Secretary
Senate Select Committee on
Regional and Remote Indigenous Communities
PO BOX 6100
PARLIAMENT HOUSE
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Committee Secretary,

RE: Regional and Remote Indigenous Communities

Please find attached our submission to the Select Committee on Regional and Remote Indigenous Communities.

I would be happy to provide any further information should it be required. Please contact me on 07 38671231, tadams@boystown.com.au, or alternatively Mr John Dalglish on 07 3867 1216.

Yours sincerely

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BoysTown

Fresh start.
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Submission to the Select Committee on Regional and Remote Indigenous Communities

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Executive Summary

This submission responds to three (3) of the four (4) Terms of Reference for the Select Committee on Regional and Remote Indigenous Communities.

The submission is informed by BoysTown's work with indigenous communities particularly in the Tjurabalan-Kutjungka region of the East Kimberley. Furthermore insights into the needs of indigenous young people are offered based on the 1,874 counselling contacts provided since 2004 by Kids Helpline, a service of BoysTown, to indigenous youth from remote communities across Australia.

BoysTown believes that service accountability to remote indigenous communities can be enhanced by the development of Service Alliance Agreements between service providers within the community which are underpinned by joint planning and the development of performance standards. An overview of BoysTown's partnerships within the Balgo community is provided to illustrate how such a community governance process can work.

Indigenous children and young people are experiencing a range of serious social issues that impact on their well-being. From analysis of counselling contacts with Kids Helpline from indigenous children from remote communities, it is found that these young people are more likely to be seeking assistance with family relationships, mental health, emotional and behavioral issues, child abuse and homelessness matters than other Australian children. This supports the need for high quality mental health services, child protection and other support services to be accessible to young people in these communities. However it is also our belief that these support services will be ineffective unless urgent action is also taken to improve the quality of housing in these communities. In this submission BoysTown outlines an innovative housing project currently being developed with the Balgo community as an example as to how this issue can be addressed.

In relation to employment within remote communities, BoysTown believes that this can be assisted by the development of social enterprises based on work that is currently being undertaken by external contractors. These social enterprises need to incorporate culturally appropriate vocational training and further education strategies so that local people can be empowered to manage these enterprises in the future and also to provide accredited qualifications to participants that will enhance their employment prospects in other open employment endeavors.

Based on this evidence BoysTown makes five recommendations to the Select Committee which we believe will make a difference in regard to improving the living conditions of remote indigenous communities. These recommendations are:

Recommendation 1:

That the Select Committee examines the possible implementation of Service Alliance Agreements within remote communities to enhance local accountability of services.

Recommendation 2:

That the Senate Committee review the adequacy of current coordinating mechanisms between the Commonwealth and State Governments in relation to services to regional and remote indigenous communities.

Recommendation 3:

That the Select Committee notes the need for the provision of quality professional supervision for workers delivering health and social services in remote communities.

Recommendation 4:

That all Government and community organisations providing services to regional and remote indigenous communities implement organisational development strategies designed to enhance their cultural competence in working with indigenous communities.

Recommendation 5:

That the procurement policy of the Commonwealth Government be reviewed and amended to allow for the awarding of tenders to be made not only on price but also on the basis of the tenders' capacity to achieve social and community benefits consistent with overall government social policy objectives in relation to remote indigenous communities.

Introduction

BoysTown is a youth specialist agency, our mission is *'to enable young people, especially those who are marginalised and without voice, to improve their quality of life'*.

BoysTown has delivered services to disadvantaged and 'at risk' young people, children and families for more than 48 years. We work with people who have been excluded from full participation in family life, community activity and the labor market due to family conflict, trauma, mental health and substance misuse issues, intergenerational unemployment and disrupted education.

BoysTown currently provides a range of services to young people and families seeking one-off and more intensive support including:

- Kids Helpline which provides a national 24/7 telephone and on-line counselling service for five to 25 year olds with special capacity for young people with mental health issues
- Accommodation responses to homeless families and women and children seeking refuge from Domestic/Family Violence
- Parenting Programs offering case work, individual and group work support and child development programs for young mothers and their children
- Parentline, a telephone and on-line counselling service for parents and carers in Queensland and the Northern Territory
- Paid employment to more than 300 young people each year in supported enterprises to prepare them for transition to the mainstream workforce
- Training, education and employment programs that skill young people allowing them to re-engage with education and obtain employment

BoysTown works in close partnership with remote indigenous communities. Since 2004 Kids Helpline has provided over 3,524 counselling sessions to indigenous children. Of these counselling sessions, 1,874 were with indigenous children living in regional and remote communities.

In 2007 BoysTown entered a partnership with remote indigenous communities in the Tjurabalan–Kutjungka area in Western Australia to implement a holistic community development strategy. The key objectives are to improve community housing standards, increase employment opportunities through the establishment of social enterprises and skill development and reduce indigenous people's level of disadvantage.

In 2008 work commenced in Queensland to promote Parentline services within four remote indigenous communities. Subsequently BoysTown's experience in partnering with remote communities and indirectly delivering services to indigenous young people informs this submission to the Select Committee on Regional and Remote Indigenous Communities.

This submission provides responses to the Committee's Terms of Reference, in particular b, c, and d.

Terms of Reference b:

The impact of state and territory government policies on the wellbeing of Regional and Remote Indigenous communities.

Recent changes in relation to the administration of social security and employment services have been generally positive in the East Kimberley area. As stated, BoysTown is currently implementing a community development strategy with communities within the Tjurabalan–Kutjungka region in East Kimberley. Feedback from staff on the ground in these communities indicates that:

- a) The introduction of the debit card for social security payments has allowed women to gain some control over these funds. It is reported by staff working in this community, that women feel more empowered to ensure that household income is used to meet the day to day living needs of their children. The installation in the community of phones that have direct lines to information databases where debit card balances can be checked in an ongoing way has lessened some of the early problems with the debit card e.g. not knowing the balance on the card prior to shopping.
- b) The introduction of employment brokers into the community has been positive as they commit time and effort into locating other contracts and jobs for the community instead of simply 'piggy backing' on CDEP for employment options.

BoysTown's experience in working with remote indigenous communities also supports the preliminary analysis of the Select Committee that the complexity of Government arrangements has a negative impact on service delivery to remote communities.

For example in the Tjurabalan–Kutjungka region of the East Kimberley, BoysTown is partnering with local communities to implement a holistic community development strategy with the objective of improving community housing standards, increasing employment and reducing indigenous people's level of disadvantage. This strategy involves a range of different interventions including strategies to encourage school retention, vocational training, social enterprise development as well as family support initiatives. In view of this holistic focus, negotiations concerning the funding and delivery of this strategy were protracted as it required the involvement of various Departments at both State and Commonwealth levels. Initial agreements with the Commonwealth and Western Australian Governments concerning the project were only finalised after two years of negotiation.

Since the signing of the contract, BoysTown has experienced ongoing delays in implementing elements of the project. For example the renovation of community housing at Balgo is a key component of the strategy. Despite Ministerial and executive level discussions, timelines in relation to the preparation of contracts for housing renovations by the Western Australian Department of Housing are regularly delayed due to internal Government processes. This leads not only to project delays but also compounds the sense of hopelessness and cynicism felt by the community.

This situation is far from ideal as it adds unnecessary administrative costs to both Government and community organisations, causes delays in service delivery and stress and frustration to indigenous communities who want initiatives implemented expeditiously to improve the well being of their children and young people.

This complexity in the governance of services also reduces accountability to service users as there is confusion regarding portfolio responsibilities. As noted in other evaluations of services delivered in remote communities, indigenous people in dealing with community issues are expected to liaise with three tiers of Government, each with their own policy

silos.¹

At a local level this issue is being addressed by service providers and the community in Balgo through the development of a Service Alliance Agreement. BoysTown in partnership with other service providers and the Community Council are developing a community governance model for local services. This community governance model involves:

1. The development of a Service Alliance Agreement between local services and the Community Council specifying expected outcomes and performance standards. Local services are accountable to the local community through the Community Council for meeting these performance standards.
2. Joint local planning and the delivery of services to respond to 'joined-up' complex community issues.
3. Review and evaluation of the Service Alliance Agreement against performance standards on a yearly basis by all signatories.

The Service Alliance Agreement is a mechanism to ensure the direct accountability of services to the local community. The Select Committee may wish to consider the applicability of this community governance model for other localities.

Furthermore BoysTown's direct experiences in being a service provider to remote indigenous communities as outlined in this section supports the need for Commonwealth and State Governments to focus greater effort towards coordinating their policy and service delivery functions with each other.

Recommendation 1:

That the Select Committee examines the possible implementation of Service Alliance Agreements across remote communities to enhance the local accountability of services.

Recommendation 2:

That the Senate Committee review the adequacy of current coordinating mechanisms between the Commonwealth and State Governments in relation to services to regional and remote indigenous communities.

¹ East Kimberley COAG Trial Formative Evaluation. 14 September 2006. Final. 2

Terms of Reference No 1.4 c:

The health, welfare, education and security of children in regional and remote Indigenous communities.

Kids Helpline collects and evaluates information on a range of issues presented by children and young people to the service. Counsellors record demographic data as well as classifying contacts according to a defined set of problem types. In some instances, counsellors may also gather qualitative information from the child or young person in order to provide further assistance to the young person and to give voice to their concerns within the Australian community. This information is unique in that it provides an understanding as to how young people label the issues impacting on them. To inform the Select Committee on the needs of remote indigenous children and young people an analysis has been undertaken of information recorded in this database concerning counselling sessions provided by Kids Helpline to indigenous young people since 2004.

In the five calendar years since 2004, Kids Helpline has provided 3,524 counselling contacts to indigenous young people aged 5 to 25 years. In relation to these counselling contacts 1650 (47%) have been from indigenous young people living in cities and 1,874 (53%) with young people from rural and remote areas. These figures may be an underestimation of contacts from indigenous young people. Kids Helpline is an anonymous and confidential service, subsequently service users may not always identify themselves, their cultural background or community. These 3,524 contacts have been counted when children have identified themselves to counsellors as being of indigenous origin.

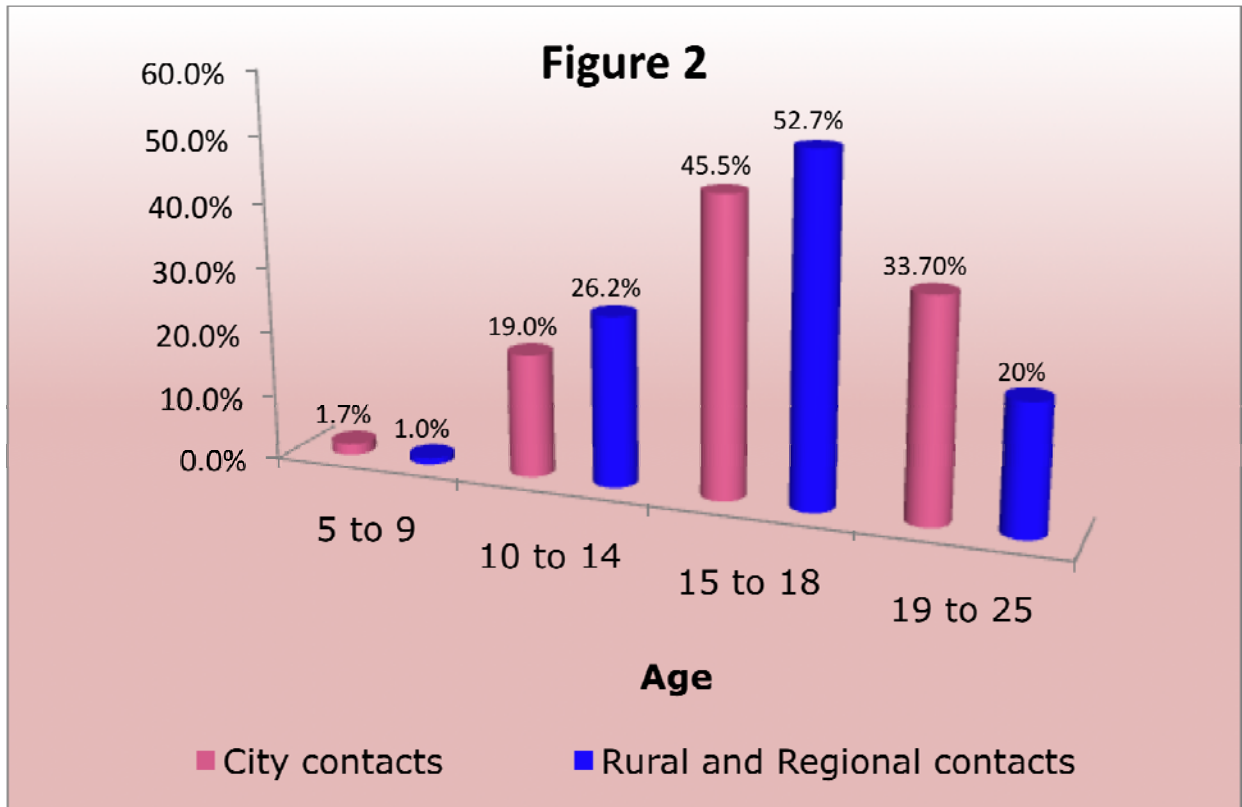
Figure 1: Proportional Representation of Indigenous Counselling Contacts by Location



The gender breakdown of indigenous contacts to Kids Helpline is similar between city and rural/remote areas with about 82% of contacts being from young women and 18% being male. This gender profile of indigenous young people who contact Kids Helpline is similar to that for all counselling contacts. For instance in 2008, 78% or nearly 40,000 (N=39,395) of all counselling sessions provided by Kids Helpline involved young women. This gender imbalance in counselling contacts reflects the difficulty in promoting help seeking behavior in young men regardless of their cultural background.

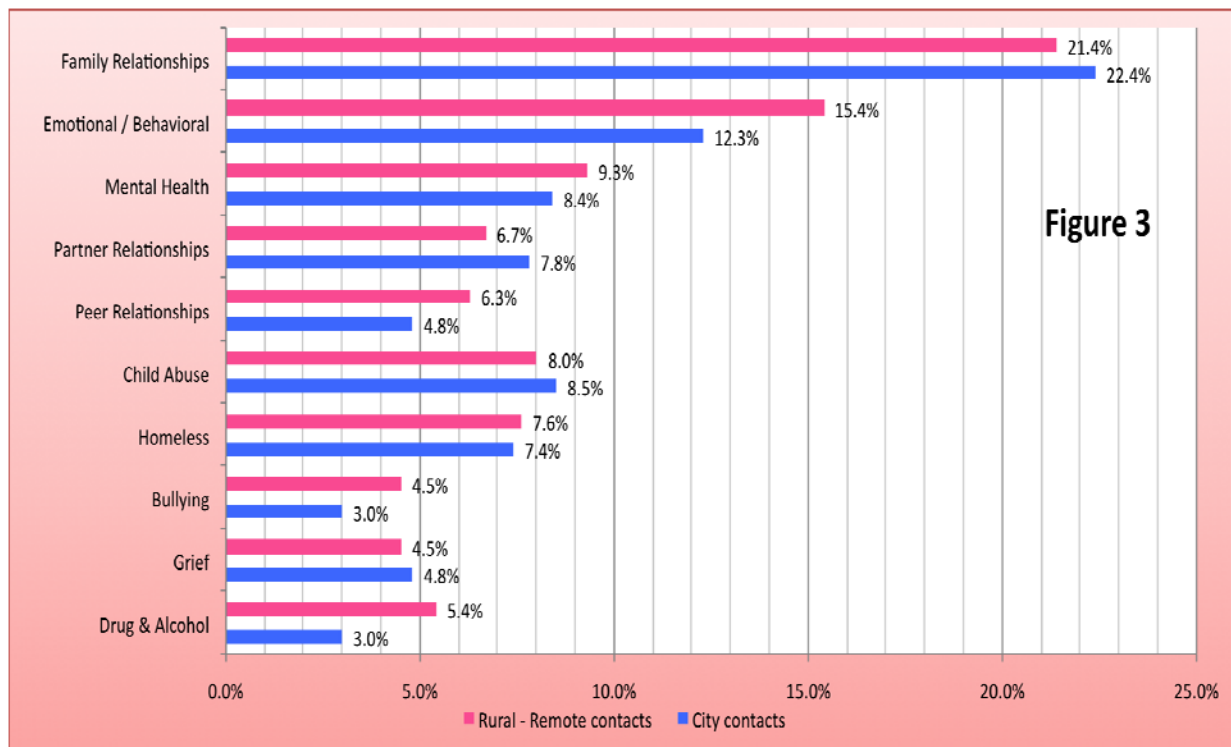
Interestingly there is a slight age difference in indigenous contacts from city and rural/remote locations. The indigenous young people who contacted Kids Helpline from rural and remote areas tended to be slightly older in age. Figure 2 graphically demonstrates this age difference.

Figure 2: Age of City and Rural/Remote Indigenous Contacts: 2004-2008



A comparison of the top ten problem types presented to Kids Helpline counsellors from indigenous youth living in cities and remote locations is outlined in Figure 3.

Figure 3: The top ten problem types among indigenous contacts to KHL: by rural-remote and city status: 2004 - 2008.



There is no statistically significant difference in the type of presenting problem types between indigenous young people living in city or remote regions. Subsequently a further analysis of the problems of remote indigenous youth was undertaken by comparing their presenting problem with that for all young people contacting Kids Helpline. This analysis is outlined in Table 1.

Table 1: An Analysis of All Counselling Contacts and Rural and Remote Indigenous Counselling Contacts

NO.	ALL CONTACTS (n = 309,816)	INDIGENOUS RURAL-REMOTE CONTACTS (n = 1467)
1	Family Relationships (17.9%)	Family Relationships (21.4%)
2	Peer relationship (11.6%)	Emotional/ Behavioral (15.4%)
3	Emotional/ Behavioral (9.2%)	Mental Health (9.3%)
4	Mental Health (8.9%)	Child Abuse (8.0%)
5	Partner Relationship (8.7%)	Homeless (7.6%)
6	Child Abuse (5.1%)	Partner Relationship (6.7%)
7	Bullying (4.9%)	Peer relationship (6.3%)
8	Homeless (3.3%)	Alcohol and Drugs (5.4%)
9	Suicide (2.9%)	Bullying (4.5%)
10	Grief (2.6%)	Grief (4.5%)

A statistical analysis has been undertaken of the above Table to determine whether any of the differences are significant. The results of this analysis are summarised in Table 2.

Table 2: The top five* problem types of rural-remote Indigenous contacts that were significantly proportionally higher than all contacts to KHL: 2004 – 2008

No	Problem type	All contacts (%)	Indigenous R&R contacts (%)
1	Family Relationships	17.9%	21.4%
2	Emotional/ Behavioural	10.9%	16.1%
3	Homelessness	3.3%	7.6%
4	Child Abuse	5.1%	8.0%
5	Mental Health	8.9%	9.3%

* in order of statistical significance (using Chi-square value)

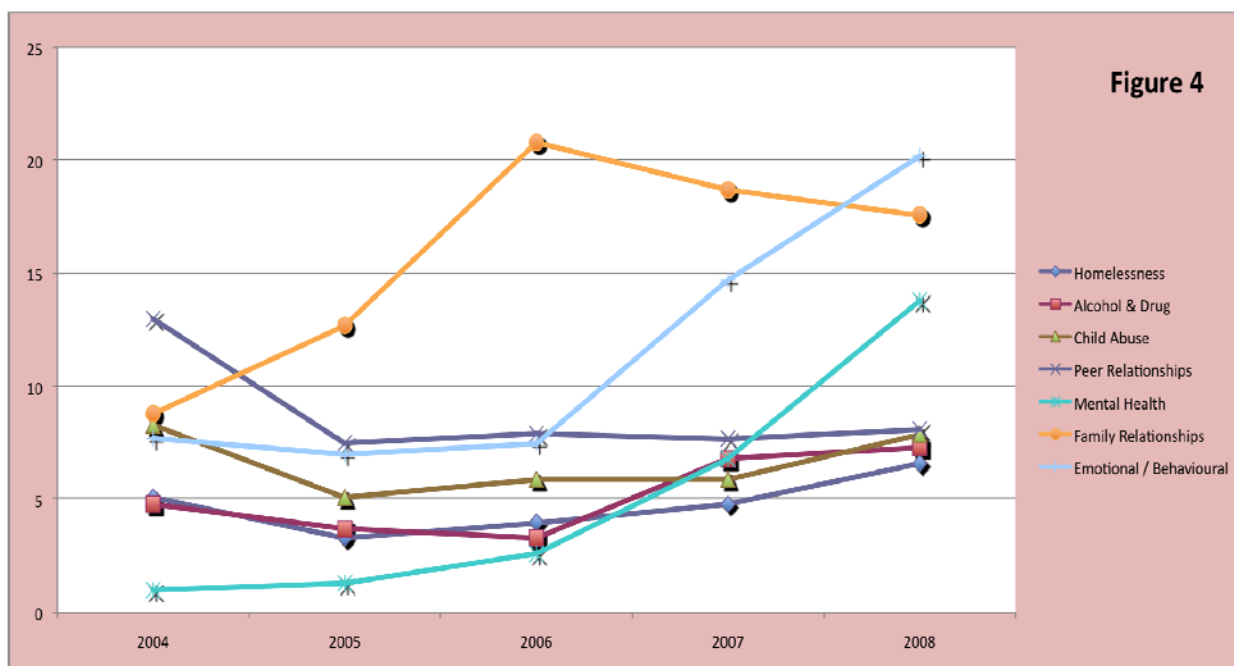
This analysis supports the assessment of the Select Committee in relation to the range of issues impacting on the well being of indigenous children in remote communities.

Indigenous young people in remote communities are more likely than other young people to be contacting Kids Helpline in relation to family relationships which include relationships with parents and siblings, emotional / behavioral issues which includes anger management,

self-injurious behavior and coping with traumatic experiences, homelessness issues, mental health and child abuse. This supports the need for the provision of culturally competent mental health and child protection services across these communities.

An examination of the trends in counselling sessions from indigenous children residing in remote communities to Kids Helpline provides further grounds for concern. It appears from the data that mental health, emotional and behavior issues and homelessness issues have increased markedly over the past few years. This may be partially explained by the Kids Helpline's strategy, funded by the Commonwealth Government, to increase the help seeking behavior of indigenous children to the service. However environmental factors may also be a reason that is driving this increase. This analysis is presented in Figure 4.

Figure 4: Trends in % proportion of the top eight problem types among Indigenous contacts from rural and remote areas to KHL: 2004 - 2008



This overview indicates that indigenous children and families in remote indigenous communities are significantly stressed. The challenge for all organisations partnering and working with remote indigenous communities is to ensure that their strategies will strengthen and not further fragment the relationships within and between indigenous families and communities. One approach to this challenge is the recognition that the issues impacting on individual children and their families cannot be addressed without reference to their cultural and community context. Indigenous people have a network of interactive and reciprocal relationships across family, the broader kinship group and their identified community. Interventions within indigenous families need to take into account the systemic impact of these intercessions across the relationship system. An ecological orientation to intervention is required where intervention strategies need to be developed, implemented and evaluated at an individual, family and community level.

For example the community development model that has been formulated in partnership with the Balgo community by BoysTown is a multi-focused strategy that involves:

- Individual case management for each young person through professionally accredited youth workers, in conjunction with elders, mentors, trainers and health professionals
- Workshop programs targeting the prevention of offending, alcohol and substance abuse and mental health
- Programs that further develop parenting skills, personal health and hygiene, nutrition, grooming

- Personal support and leadership development activities for young people, including mentoring by appropriately skilled adults in the local and regional community
- Intergenerational activities focused on clothing production, screen printing, jewelry making and artifacts
- Off-community activities for young people, including industry visits and sporting excursions
- Structured sports & recreation activities for young people, including personal coaching and training and team development
- Working with the Magistrate's Court to provide learning and work focused sentencing options that are educative

It is also our assessment based on BoysTown's work with the Balgo community that responding to the health, welfare, education and security needs of indigenous children living in remote communities can not be effectively undertaken without a focus being placed on improving housing standards. BoysTown has negotiated with the Western Australian Government on a new approach to community housing. Due to the severe overcrowding of houses many have become uninhabitable and require urgent renovation. Consequently it has been agreed that the renovation work be undertaken by local youth living in the community under the mentorship and supervision of professionally qualified trades people employed by BoysTown.

The work undertaken by indigenous young people will also be accredited by a Registered Training Organisation. This will provide these young people with nationally recognised qualifications. As part of the renovation work it is also planned to fence the houses to enable the community to improve their control of dogs and other environmental health issues. Furthermore during the renovation work the family formerly living in the house will be offered transitional housing. During their stay in transitional housing a training program will be offered in relation to general housing maintenance and the management of environmental health issues which impacts the Balgo community. Participation in this program will empower indigenous families to maintain a safe standard of housing in the future.

The analysis of the complex issues impacting on indigenous children in remote communities also emphasises the need for quality human service provision. The Select Committee has already identified the need for salary packaging and housing incentives to encourage the recruitment and retention of mental health workers in these communities.

BoysTown's direct experience in Balgo supports the Select Committee's view that housing is a critical factor that can impede service development. Our project in Balgo has been delayed due to the need to acquire adequate accommodation for staff.

However a further strategy the Select Committee may wish to consider to improve the quality of service delivery and to assist in staff retention is the provision of professional supervision to front line staff. Professional supervision within the disciplines of social work and psychology is an accepted strategy to support the knowledge and skill development as well as the effective use of these skills in the duties performed by front line staff.² Workers in remote indigenous communities are on a daily basis confronted with complex issues at both an individual, family and community level. The nature of these issues over time usually causes significant stress for both indigenous and non-indigenous workers. The ability of these workers to effectively intervene in these situations will be severely restricted if they are working in isolation without professional mentoring and support. Professional supervision can also relieve premature worker burnout. For these reasons, BoysTown ensures that all staff in contact with young people receive professional supervision. Our staff located at the Balgo community have an allocated Clinical Supervisor who delivers professional supervision via phone and video link.

² Smith, M. K. (1996, 2005) 'The functions of supervision', *the encyclopedia of informal education*, Last update: February 05, 2009. http://www.infed.org/biblio/functions_of_supervision.htm

The other critical factor in providing quality responses consistent with the needs of regional and remote indigenous communities is enhancing the cultural competence of service providers. In 2006 BoysTown initiated a strategy to increase help seeking behaviour by indigenous youth with Kids Helpline. This strategy entailed:

- a) The training of counsellors to raise their awareness of indigenous culture and appropriate communication strategies with indigenous people
- b) The development of culturally appropriate marketing collateral with indigenous people and communities and
- c) The strengthening of relationships with indigenous communities through the employment of indigenous staff, community visits and the establishment of an Indigenous Reference Group to inform the engagement strategies with indigenous youth

This strategy has seen a 46% increase since 2005 in contacts by indigenous youth with the Kids Helpline service.

Recommendation 3:

That the Select Committee notes the need for the provision of quality professional supervision for workers delivering health and social services in remote communities.

Recommendation 4:

That all Government and community organisations providing services to regional and remote indigenous communities implement organisational development strategies designed to enhance their cultural competence in working with indigenous communities.

Terms of Reference No 1.4 d:

Employment and enterprise opportunities in regional and remote Indigenous communities

There are considerable work opportunities for local indigenous peoples' within remote indigenous communities. Our experience with the Balgo community has shown that due to the limited skill base in this locality considerable construction and community services are being undertaken by external contractors. It is our belief that local indigenous people can be empowered to undertake this work if culturally appropriate vocational training and further education programs are delivered on the ground.

As previously noted, in Balgo with the support of the Community Council, BoysTown has secured contracts with the Department of Housing (WA) for housing upgrades and construction and housing maintenance. Negotiations are also occurring in regard to environmental health and produce supply services. These contracted activities will be undertaken by indigenous young people with mentoring and supervision provided by qualified trades people and other staff.

These contracts will provide local young people with the opportunity to learn and earn. Vocational and non-vocational training will be provided to increase their work skills and to provide accreditation. Some young people in these communities feel an overwhelming sense of hopelessness about the future. Consequently, indigenous young people participating in these programs will also be supported through the provision of case management, counselling and personal development programs that focus on key issues currently impacting on the quality of their lives such as anger, drugs and alcohol and relationships. A literacy and numeracy program will also be embedded into this social enterprise program as it has been found that the lack of these skills are a major barrier confronted by these young people in securing employment. This is also an empowerment strategy as indigenous young people are open to exploitation in the wider community due to their lack of numeracy skills in regard to financial matters.

The outcome of these social enterprises will be young people with accredited qualifications who will then be able to either continue this work within their community on an independent basis or enter other open employment. It is our view that the development of social enterprises around real work opportunities in communities, linked to vocational training and further education can make a positive difference to the sustainability of indigenous communities and employment opportunities.

At present, a major obstacle to the development of social enterprises in remote communities is Commonwealth, State and Local Government procurement policies. Social enterprises are often excluded from tendering for government contracts to deliver services to remote communities because of the focus on price. There needs to be a much broader approach to public procurement that includes the use of clauses focused on the achievement of social and community benefits.

Recommendation 5:

That the procurement policy of the Commonwealth Government be reviewed and amended to allow for the awarding of tenders to be made not only on price but also on the basis of the tenders' capacity to achieve social and community benefits consistent with overall government social policy objectives in relation to remote indigenous communities.

References

- 1 East Kimberley COAG Trial Formative Evaluation. 14 September 2006. Final. Page 2
- 2 Smith, M. K. (1996, 2005) 'The functions of supervision', *the encyclopedia of informal education*, Last updates: February 05, 2009.
http://www.infed.org/biblio/functions_of_supervision.htm