



Australian  
Council of  
Social Service

**Submission to the Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs  
Committee on:**

**Social Security and Other legislation (Welfare Payment Reform) Bill;  
Northern Territory National Emergency Response Bill 2007; and  
Family and Community Services and Indigenous Affairs and Other legislation  
(Northern Territory National Emergency Response and Other Measures) Bill 2007.**

We thank the Committee for the opportunity to speak to the Senate Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs. We refer to Committee to the Combined Aboriginal Organisations of the Northern Territories request that there be a delay in the legislation's passage so that it can be properly assessed by the Australian community via the Parliament and to urgently begin negotiations and consultations with the Aboriginal people of the Northern Territory.

In this submission we deal with:

- The emergency response in Northern Territory Indigenous communities
- The proposed system of Income Management in those communities and in Queensland
- The proposed system of Income Management across Australia in respect of children at risk and children not enrolled in or regularly attending school.

We are very concerned about the very short time available to this Committee and to the Parliament to consider legislation that has far reaching implications for Indigenous and other communities across Australia.

We submit that these Bills should not be passed in their present form, and that more time should be given for community organisations to prepare submissions and for the Parliament to properly consider them.

## Emergency Response in Northern Territory Indigenous communities

The Federal Government can take action today to fund effective and proven programs to ensure that children and families are safe and to ensure that investigations are begun to bring perpetrators to justice. The Parliament can then take the time to ensure that the Legislation which is eventually passes focussed on effective and proven way to protect children and improve the living standards and conditions for Aboriginal Australians.

ACOSS, like other Australians, is deeply concerned about the long standing issues of child abuse of Aboriginal children in the Northern Territory. We refer to the Combined Aboriginal Organisation Report entitled "*A proposed Emergency Response and Development Plan to protect Aboriginal children in the Northern Territory*" which outlines that a comprehensive approach to child protection in an emergency context gives priority to protection from immediate physical or emotional harm, but must go further. It should also address community safety and access to essential services including housing, health care and education. A failure to also commit to addressing these underlying issues will ensure the current risk factors contributing to existing child abuse and neglect will remain

We also refer the Committee to the many reports and recommendations that have been made to Government about the need to take appropriate action to protect children: HREOC (1997), National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from their Families '**The Bringing Them Home Report**', Robertson, B (2000), **The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women's Taskforce on Violence Report**; Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy and Development, Queensland; Memmott et al (2001) **Violence in Indigenous communities**, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra ; Gordon, Hallahan, Henry (2002) **Putting the Picture Together: Inquiry into Response by Government Agencies to Complaints of Family Violence and Child Abuse in Aboriginal Communities**, WA Department of Premier and Cabinet ; **NSW Aboriginal Child Sexual Assault Taskforce (Ella-Duncan 2006)** **Breaking the Silence: Creating the Future, Addressing child sexual assault in Aboriginal Communities in NSW**, NSW Attorney General's Department .

We ask that you ensure that the Government consults and negotiates with Aboriginal communities and develops plans for working together. We also ask that you support the expansion of programs that have already been proven to work, and ensure that the hard fought land rights of Indigenous people remain in place.

We hope that the unprecedented attention to the protection of Aboriginal children and disadvantage faced by Aboriginal Peoples will lead to interventions that are implemented to effectively protect children through strengthening communities, funding services like housing, child protection, schools, family services, health services and alcohol and drug rehabilitation programs and that the deplorable living conditions of Aboriginal people are finally tackled in an urgent and comprehensive manner, without the arbitrary removal of cash payments.

#### **Changes to land tenure**

We refer the Committee to the submission by the Combined Aboriginal Organisation. We also see no evidence of any direct link between the compulsory acquisition of five year leases over prescribed townships and the problems of child abuse in Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory. Furthermore the Government has provided no evidence that this measure will assist in addressing overcrowding and other housing problems that have been associated with child abuse.

#### **Suspension of the Racial Discrimination Act**

The Legislation exempts the three Bills from part II of the Racial Discrimination Act. This is no justification for the suspension of the RDA. The Government also makes argument that these measures as outlined in the Bill are special measures under the act. In our understanding to be defined as special measures it needs to be demonstrated that these measures will clearly benefit Aboriginal people by materially tackling the problem of child abuse, that their sole purpose is for the advancement of Aboriginal people and the tackling of child abuse, that these measures are absolutely necessary to ensure the advancement of Aboriginal people and to protect Aboriginal children, and that these discriminatory measures will cease once their purpose has been achieved and the inequality in health, housing, education and child protection has been dealt with. If these conditions are met, we see no reason to over-ride the Racial Discrimination Act.

## **Income Management Regime and new activity requirements**

This part of the submission addresses four matters dealt with in the Social Security and Other legislation (Welfare Payment Reform) Bill:

- Application of Income Management to parents of children not regularly attending school
- Application of Income Management to parents of children considered to be at risk
- Application of Income Management to Indigenous communities in the NT and Queensland
- New activity requirements for residents of remote Indigenous communities in the Northern Territory

The Bill implements an apparently simple solution to a complex set of problems - attaching new conditions to social security payments and taking over family budgets to combat child abuse and truancy generally, and prolonged joblessness and social breakdown in remote communities. In practice, the income Management system outlined in the Bill is very complicated. It is of concern that despite the complexity of this legislation, there is still a lack of precision as to who will be subject to income Management, under what circumstances and for how long.

The causes of these social problems are complex.

The causes of truancy include weak reading skills, family poverty, overcrowding at home, the cost to families of attending school, lack of engagement between schools and parents, fear of bullying, conflicts with particular teachers, perceived irrelevance of the curriculum, family conflicts, cultural values, excessive home responsibilities, and peer pressures.

Child abuse and neglect are related to a parental history of abuse, overcrowding, addictions, mental health problems and chronic joblessness and poverty. However, child abuse and neglect are not confined to Indigenous people or social security recipients.

The problems in remote Indigenous communities relate to a lack of mainstream jobs, poverty, overcrowding, poor or non-existent education and health services, ready access to alcohol and other drugs, and weakening of the authority of parents and elders.

The proposed system of Income Management is unlikely to contribute to the solutions and would in a number of ways contribute to the underlying problems.

There is no evidence to suggest that making school attendance a condition of receipt of income support would actually improve attendance. Parents want their children to attend school but in cases of truancy they are often unable to enforce this without intensive and consistent support from the school, their families, and other services.

For example, in the Halls Creek Trial (evaluated by DEWR in 2006) parents participated voluntarily in a scheme to improve school attendance but this was reportedly thwarted

by inadequate engagement with parents by the school, problems of bullying and teasing at school, and resistance from the children themselves. School attendance did not improve despite considerable efforts from Centrelink and the local employment service provider.

There is a risk that Income Management (or the threat of it) could exacerbate tensions between parents and children, or between parents, instead of helping resolve truancy problems.

Similarly, Income Management is unlikely to prevent child abuse or neglect. The Government acknowledges that only 'a few thousand' families across Australia would be affected by Income Management as a result of notifications by State Welfare Authorities. Since the causes of child abuse and neglect are complex and multi-dimensional, single interventions will be ineffective and interventions such as quarantining welfare payments, which do not address causal factors, are the wrong place to start.

Income Management is unlikely to assist in preventing child abuse. In cases of child neglect where parents fail to meet essential expenses (for example due to an addiction) taking control of the family budget will not necessarily resolve these problems. For example, vouchers or cards may be traded for cash or alcohol, as is the case with Food Stamps in the United States. Where parental responsibility has broken down to the extent that Income Management is considered, State Welfare Authorities are likely to be close to placing the child away from the family in any event.

Further, Income Management could undermine the efforts of State Welfare Authorities and community agencies to encourage greater parental responsibility and better management of family budgets, for example using the voluntary Centrepay system. It could also exacerbate tensions between parents and children, or between parents, contributing to child abuse.

More broadly, compulsory Income Management has the following drawbacks:

- It undermines the in-alienability of social security payments
- It reduces recipient's flexibility in budgeting on low levels of income - although income support is not reduced, there is a substantial loss of control over income
- It may lead to greater dependency on others to manage budgets
- It will divert resources and energy (especially in remote areas where such resources are limited) from programs that would be more effective in reducing child abuse, truancy and other social problems.

#### **School attendance**

The Bill requires the Secretary (in practice, Centrelink) to apply Income Management to parents on income support whose children are identified by Centrelink, State Education Authorities or schools as not appropriately enrolled in school or attending regularly.

This potentially applies to all recipients of adult income support payments who have dependent children required to attend school, including parents sharing the care of a

child where the parent provides care for at least 14% of the time. It does not apply to parents on higher incomes who receive Family Tax Benefits only, and not adult income support payments. This is anomalous.

Nevertheless, the potential scope of this provision is very broad. Income Management will apply to the above parents where either:

- a child is not appropriately enrolled in school, or
- the parent fails to provide adequate evidence of enrolment when requested to do so, or
- a child's school attendance is considered unsatisfactory.

Satisfactory school attendance is not defined in the Bill though the Explanatory Memorandum does refer to five absences in the last school term in an example. This, and the reasons for non attendance that are considered acceptable, are left to be resolved by a legislative instrument.

A formal warning must first be given to the parent in cases of non attendance. However only one formal warning is required, not a warning in each case that attendance during a school term is considered unsatisfactory.

Decisions regarding Income Management in these cases will be made by Centrelink, with or without the advice of schools or State Education Authorities. The Bill purports to give the Secretary powers to obtain school attendance records and other information required for this purpose.

Specific concerns about the imposition of Income Management in these cases include:

1. A lack of evidence connecting school enrolment and attendance and the imposition of parental requirements attached to receipt of income support.
2. Parents and foster carers being penalised for events beyond their control (for example, where they have just taken custody of a child who has long standing problems with school attendance).
3. Conflicts between separated parents who share the care of a child where Income Management is imposed on both parents.
4. Privacy implications, for example schools may become aware of which families receive income support.
5. The inaccuracy and lack of timeliness of school enrolment and attendance records, which would be compounded by any attempt by Centrelink to replicate them on a national scale.
6. Centrelink's lack of resources and expertise to assess the reasons for non-attendance at school and to work with parents and schools to resolve problems such as bullying or the quality of schooling.

7. The lack of clarity in the Bill regarding the circumstances in which attendance will be considered 'unsatisfactory'.
8. A likely shift of resources (including school and community agency resources) away from effective measures that support parents to get their children to school, towards administration of referrals to the Income Management system.
9. The lack of a requirement for a written warning to be given immediately before the imposition of Income Management.
10. It will be particularly difficult to administer these provisions fairly and in a timely manner in cases where families move frequently, or parents have limited literacy skills.

#### **Child abuse and neglect**

State Child Protection Authorities will determine when and to whom Income Management applies in cases where children are considered at risk. They will do so by sending a written notice to Centrelink. Income Management will continue until the state Authority indicates that it is no longer required.

Specific concerns about the imposition of Income Management in these cases include:

1. The Bill does not appear to require State Authorities or Centrelink to provide affected parents with reasons for notifications to Centrelink for Income Management.
2. The Bill does not appear to limit the duration of Income Management, or to require State Authorities to justify extensions beyond a fixed period.
3. The effectiveness of voluntary programs to assist parents to deal with problems such as addictions and financial management could be undermined by referrals to compulsory Income Management.
4. Relationships between parents and child protection workers could be weakened by a notification to Centrelink to impose Income Management.
5. A likely shift of resources (including State Child Protection Authority resources) away from effective measures that prevent and respond to child abuse and neglect, towards administration of referrals to the Income Management Regime.

#### **Operation of the Income Management Regime**

The proposed Income Management Regime would reduce cash income support payments by up to 100%, and substitute a system of payment in kind of this portion of the benefit. Payment in kind is defined broadly, and could include stored value cards, vouchers, and payment of debts and bills by Centrelink or a contractor acting on its behalf. The portion of a benefit that is managed in this way on the recipient's behalf

must be devoted to expenditure on one or more of a list of priority items that are regarded as essentials. The list is extensive, though it does not cover all essential expenses - for example there is no reference to mobile phone accounts where the person has no access to a fixed line phone.

The duration of Income Management depends on the events that trigger it. It applies for up to five years in the declared Northern Territory Indigenous communities, for the period requested by the 'Queensland Commission' in the case of those affected by the relevant State Government legislation in that State, for the period requested by State Child Protection Authorities, or for any period in which a child is not enrolled at school or their attendance is not considered satisfactory.

A basic premise of Income Management is that income support payments are sufficient to meet non essential costs as well as essential costs. This is unlikely to be the case for the majority of recipients who receive the maximum rates of payment (those with minimal earnings and assets).

Recently released ABS data indicates that households in the bottom 30% of the income distribution who have limited assets (over 75% of whom mainly rely on income support for their income) spend more than 78% of their income on the following goods and services: housing costs, domestic fuel and power, food, clothing, household furnishings and equipment, household services and operation, health expenses, transport, and personal care.<sup>1</sup>

This list of goods and services is similar to the list of 'priority needs' detailed in the Bill. Given the levels of income support payments (for example, around \$450 per week for a sole parent family with two school age children), most these households are unlikely to spend money on luxury items.

Families on income support are around three times more likely than other families to experience financial stress, and to have difficulty budgeting on their level of income. Data from the same ABS publication indicates that of the bottom 30% of households, 52% could not raise \$2,000 in a week for something important, 38% could not pay utility bills on time, and 12% went without meals.

For these reasons, income support recipients need the ability to exercise flexible control over their household budgets. It is common, for example, for these households to cut food expenses during a week in which the rent is due, or to defer payment of one bill in order to give priority to another. Most have debts to Centrelink, family members, or financial institutions.

Income Management would limit their flexibility to budget in this way. It would limit the scope for families and communities where a number of members receive income support to financially support each other in the event of severe hardship. It would also

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<sup>1</sup> ABS Social Trends 2007, *Low income low wealth households*.



weaken the budgeting skills of recipients by taking responsibility for family budgets away from them for a period of time.

If properly carried out, Income Management would be a very labour intensive exercise. It would require Centrelink or its contractors, in effect, to regularly draft and frequently amend household budgets for each family affected. These resources would be better utilised in other ways that assist needy and vulnerable families.

Given the labour intensive nature of this exercise, the low level of income support entitlements, the wide range of goods and services to be purchased, and the complexity of the information requirements (for example regarding bills and debts) the administrators of Income Management would not be able to cover every contingency. It is very likely that the efficiency of family budgeting would be reduced, not improved.

Specific concerns about the proposed operation of Income Management include:

1. A major concern about the operation of the proposed scheme is that the normal appeal rights (to the Social Security Appeals Tribunal and Administrative Appeals Tribunal) are denied Indigenous people in the Northern Territory.

These free, accessible and timely appeal mechanisms are essential for people on very low incomes (especially those whose cash incomes are being reduced by Income Management).

2. There is too much discretion in the hands of the Minister to determine the proportion of various payments that can be withheld.
3. A range of supplementary payments for specific purposes by people in vulnerable situations is included, such as Bereavement Payment, Mobility Allowance and Carer Allowance.
4. Amounts withheld from payments are not kept in trust for the recipients and can be withheld for up to 12 months after the cessation of Income Management.
5. Income Management could be conducted by private contractors rather than Centrelink, raising issues of accountability to Parliament for the exercise of the considerable discretion over the use of income support payments that will apply.
6. There are inadequate protections in the Bill to ensure that recipients are assisted to meet essential expenditures, that they are consulted about expenditures, and that they are kept informed about expenditures and account balances.

### **Application of Income Management to Indigenous communities in the NT and Queensland**

The Bill provides that Income Management will apply automatically to the vast majority of income support recipients (including Age Pensioners) in Northern Territory Indigenous communities declared by the Minister. Although the Minister's Reading Speech suggests that it will generally apply for in a community for 'an initial period of 12 months', the Bill allows for the continuous application of Income Management in the affected communities for up to five years. Generally, 50% of recurrent payments will be set aside for Income Management.

It also provides that residents of certain Indigenous communities in Queensland who under prospective State Government legislation are identified by a 'Queensland Commission' as requiring Income Management, and who receive adult income support payments (including pensions other than age and veteran's pensions, and allowances for unemployed people, parents or students), may be subject to income management for up to the next five years.

Although the Minister's Speech indicates that this is directed towards four Indigenous communities in Cape York, the Bill does not restrict this provision to those communities. The trigger for application on Income Management in these cases is that a body to be established under Queensland Government law entitled the 'Queensland Commission' may notify Centrelink that a person should be subject to Income Management for a period of time to be determined by the Commission. Appeal rights against decisions of the Commission and Centrelink in these cases are unclear.

Specific concerns about Income Management in these communities include:

1. The unfair and discriminatory character of the application of Income Management to entire Indigenous communities.
2. The lack of clear time limits in the Bill for Income Management in the Northern Territory or Queensland in these cases.
3. The lack of accessible and timely appeal rights in the case of Northern Territory Indigenous communities, and lack of clarity over appeal rights in the Queensland case.
4. That the Australian Parliament is asked to approve the effective referral of powers over the management of income support payments to a body not yet established pursuant to State Government legislation, the details of which are not yet known.

## **New activity requirements for residents of remote Indigenous communities in the Northern Territory**

The proposed removal of remote area exemptions and CDEP programs from Indigenous communities in the Northern Territory will be accelerated, to apply to all of the communities as soon as possible after the Bill is passed.

In a major departure from the usual arrangements in other parts of the country, most recipients of activity tested income support payments will be required to participate continuously in Work for the Dole schemes and in addition to meet other standard activity requirements (such as registering with Job Network providers). Most Newstart and Youth Allowance recipients will be required to participate on a 'fulltime' basis. It appears that the focus of Work for the Dole will be on 'community clean-up' activities. The CDEP program, which is more likely to pay participants above income support levels, and is generally controlled by local Indigenous community organisations, will no longer be available. Some recipients will be referred to the expanded STEP program which seeks to place recipients with mainstream employers.

In other parts of the country, Work for the Dole requirements only normally apply for six months of a given year, and are organized on a part time basis. Further, income support recipients may instead opt to participate in other Mutual Obligation activities such as training or voluntary work. The Bill deems this departure from the national norm for residents in Northern Territory Indigenous communities as a 'special measure' under the Racial Discrimination Act.

The standard penalties for non compliance with activity requirements (including failing to attend interviews with service providers) will apply, including the maximum penalty of 8 weeks without any income support payment.

Former CDEP participants in the NT who received 'top up payments' in addition to the standard benefit rate, will receive less money if they have to leave CDEP and apply for income support. They will be entitled to a 'NT CDEP Transitional payment' which is generally equal to the difference between their current benefits and previous pay on CDEP, up to a maximum of \$794.80 per fortnight. This payment will cease on 30 June 2008.

Since most former CDEP participants will receive income support payments instead (including when participating in Work for the Dole), they will generally be subject to Income Management.

Specific concerns about the proposed operation of activity requirements include:

1. The requirement for the majority of activity tested income support recipients to participate continuously in Work for the Dole (including fulltime Work for the Dole in many cases) is discriminatory and unreasonable, and unlikely to improve their employment prospects. Compared with the CDEP which this in effect replaces, Work for the Dole is likely to offer less income for many people, and to be less responsive to the needs and priorities of the local communities.
2. Given the long term operation of Remote Area Exemptions, the rapid implementation of the above changes, the lack of proper consultation with local communities, and the circumstances of most income support recipients in Indigenous communities, there is a very strong likelihood that many Indigenous income support recipients will face penalties for non compliance with rules such as attendance at Job Network and Work for the Dole interviews.

For example, recipients may be required to provide medical certificates in order to obtain temporary exemptions from activity requirements when ill, yet doctors are not readily available in many communities.

3. More attention should be paid to the development of properly paid employment opportunities in or near the communities, and employment preparation programs, before the Remote Area Exemptions are lifted.

### Unresolved questions

It is of great concern that this legislation is to be considered by the Parliament when the key details of how the quarantining provisions will be initiated, determined and made operational are not established in the legislation. The provisions in this Bill only really set out the broad circumstances where the Income Management provisions are to be applied. The specific details of where an individual person can be subjected to the IMR provisions, and how they will operate in practice, are yet to be seen as in many cases they are subject to principles to be set out in Legislative Instruments made by the Minister.

We ask the Committee to seek clarification of the following matters before voting on the Legislation:

- Firstly, how will Income Management be administered? For example, is the government considering a card or voucher model such as the US Food Stamps system, a compulsory version of the Centrepay system operated through Centrelink, or the tendering out of financial management services to private or community organisations?
- Secondly, on what basis will those administering the scheme decide how income 'should' be spent and what proportions of the quarantined benefits should be accorded to housing, nutrition, clothing, education, health and other expenses deemed as important to children's well-being? What evidence basis will be used to make these determinations? To what extent will the recipients be consulted?
- Thirdly, what will be the process to ensure flexibility in the Income Management Regime arrangements to account for marked variations in cost of living in different cities and regions particularly with respect for housing?
- Fourthly, has the Australian Government reached agreement, in principle or in detail, with any State Governments over the application of Income Management in cases of child neglect or truancy? Is there agreement regarding the respective roles of Centrelink and school authorities in monitoring and enforcing attendance?
- Fifthly, what will be the reporting relationships between State Government departments (principally the Child Protection and Education authorities) and the Australian Government and what privacy provisions, if any, will apply? What changes to state legislation will be required to facilitate information exchange across levels of government?
- Finally, we seek clarification of the reasons that unlike non-Indigenous persons, residents of many Indigenous communities who have welfare payments quarantined will not have the right of appeal to the Social Security Appeals Tribunal or Administrative Appeals Tribunal. What is the reason for denying appeal rights to Aboriginal Australians?

## What works?

We point the Committee to the paper produced by the Combined Aboriginal Organisations of the Northern Territory and the approach set out therein .

We agree with the Combined Organisations that :

“A comprehensive approach to child protection in an emergency context gives priority to protection from immediate physical or emotional harm, but must go further. It should also address community safety and access to essential services including housing, health care and education. A failure to also commit to addressing these underlying issues will ensure the current risk factors contributing to existing child abuse and neglect will remain.”

Immediately the Federal Government could deploy trained, experienced and culturally appropriate child protection and child and family support workers to address the immediate needs of children experiencing the impact of abuse and neglect; establish safe houses for children and women and for young people; and consult and negotiate with Aboriginal communities.

The key elements of an effective response include:

1. The use of trained, experienced and culturally appropriate counsellors and child and family support workers to address the immediate and long term needs of those children experiencing the impact of abuse and neglect.
2. Involving local communities, Aboriginal communities and experienced service providers in the design, development and implementation of a broad intervention and support strategy.
3. Increased resources for effective long term, sustainable programs and services that are proven to reduce child abuse and neglect with a particular emphasis on the provision of more child protection and early intervention services. Parenting and family support programs including intensive home visiting can reduce the incidence of child abuse and neglect. For example, research shows that up to 60 per cent of cases of child abuse and neglect can be prevented through home visiting services. Integrated children and family centres will provide an entry point for families to access specialized services, crisis intervention and maintenance support.
4. Any long term success must focus on the early years, specifically child development. Early childhood education increases protective factors for children, decreases the likelihood of child abuse, but also juvenile crime, reliance on government support and substance abuse later in life.
5. Culturally specific whole of community education programs
6. Supporting the voluntary and individually tailored use of Centrepay.

Specific approaches and programs recommended in the paper by the Combined Aboriginal Organisations of the Northern Territory are as follows.

#### **Policing and protection**

Night Patrols and Safe Houses. For example, the Law and Justice Committees in Walpiri communities were instrumental in establishing night patrols and safe houses in those communities.

#### **Housing and family support for victims of violence**

The Safe Families Program run by Tangentyere Council in Alice Springs provides accommodation and emotional support to homeless children and families affected by violence.

#### **Child protection**

The Victorian Lakidjeka program established teams of Aboriginal workers across the state to provide specialist advice and support on the protective needs of children who have been notified to the Department. ACSASS caseworkers attend investigations and work in partnership along side Department child protection workers. Their role is to assess the family's capacity to address the protective concerns, coordinate assistance to the family in this regard and provide advice on the best options to remove risk from children - not children from risk.

#### **Drug and alcohol rehabilitation and support**

The Mooditj program is one model of a program that provides culturally appropriate and comprehensive youth programs which offer young people active and healthy alternatives to drug and alcohol abuse. The program has been successful and is the result of an extensive consultation and development process. It is a grass roots program that's been built on solid consultation with a wide range of Aboriginal communities. To ensure the program is sustainable, training workshops are held and participants have included social workers, police officers, teachers, Aboriginal Elders, health workers and community members. Training local community members to deliver the program helps build community capacity.

Another program is UnitingCare Burnside's Moving Forward service in Cabramatta which provides counselling, especially drug/alcohol counselling, and intensive support to drug affected people and their families. It assists drug/alcohol users to get into treatments and/or to achieve a drug-free lifestyle while supporting non-using family members to cope with the problems flowing from drug abuse. A key emphasis of the program is on improving the safety and general welfare of children living with drug-affected parents. An evaluation of Moving Forward (2004) found that it had many unique features which made it a valuable and highly esteemed service to people who use the service, their families and other agencies. These unique features were identified as: intensive family home-based support, work with the whole family, the provision of a culturally specific service and the provision of support across key interventions ranging from early intervention to crisis intervention to maintenance support. The specific interventions and approach to

work by the Moving Forward team resulted in positive gains for people who use the service. Fifty-five percent of Moving Forward's service users achieved stability in their lives within 9 months of commencing the program.

#### **Rehabilitation and healing programs**

One such model for trauma and grief treatment, the We Al-li program, utilises the concept of a healing circle. Another model is provided by the Sacred Site Within Healing Centre in Adelaide, based on the belief that Aboriginal peoples' unresolved grief is a major contributing factor to the range of social and health issues which exist in Aboriginal communities today.

Another example is the Hollow Water program, which is used with sexual abuse cases in Manitoba Aboriginal communities in Canada, works with the victim, the perpetrator, and their families over a number of years. It is widely viewed as a successful example of an Aboriginal-controlled sexual abuse treatment program, with only two clients re-offending over a 10 year period.

#### **Financial management**

Tangentyere Council encourages and supports people to use the existing Centrepay system to pay rent and bills. Over 800 people voluntarily use the Centrepay system to have part of their payments each week in the form of food vouchers.

#### **Supporting school attendance**

Many Aboriginal children find the school environment unsupportive or uninspiring. Some programs that focus on these problems, such as the Clontarf Program, have been extraordinarily successful. When this program was implemented with Aboriginal boys in Alice Springs, it raised attendance rates to 92%. The program used participation in sport and behaviour modification techniques to motivate boys to stay at school. Other success stories, based on effective school leadership and close cooperation with communities, include Cherbourg in Queensland, and Yirkala and Yipirinya and Barunga in the Territory.

#### **Children's services**

Multi-functional Aboriginal Children's Services (MACS) should be considered as a model for a range of Aboriginal managed programs for Aboriginal children including long day care, occasional care, play groups, after school care, vacation care, transport and support and information for parents, and as a hub for other family services.

#### **Integrated services**

Community hubs, such as the Yarrenyty-Arltere Learning Centre at Larapinta Town Camp in Alice Springs have been successful in facilitating the delivery of health, education and social programs.

#### **Housing services**

Most effective Indigenous Community Housing Organisations focus their limited resources on improvements to the Critical Healthy Living Practises (CHLP's),



adopted by FACSIA through their 'National Indigenous Housing Guide' including: electrical safety, ensuring people can have a shower, they can wash their clothes and bedding, and that all waste water is removed safely. More broadly, there is an urgent need for governments to invest in new housing on the communities to reduce overcrowding, which is a trigger for conflict and violence within families.

#### **Health services**

Primary Health Care Access Program which allows program funding to be adapted to local health needs.

#### **Truancy generally**

Without being exhaustive, the following factors support young people at risk of truancy in both Indigenous and other communities:

- whole school commitment to effort in reducing absenteeism and suspensions,
- involving not only the whole school community, but also its surrounding community;
- provision of options for any suspended students, allowing their learning to proceed;
- changing a school climate to emphasise cooperation and to encourage active learning, to take place in and out of the classroom;
- cultural inclusiveness and sensitivity to learning styles, languages and traditions amongst minority ethnic groups;
- smaller schools where values and expectations are shared and clear, both in policies and their enactment;
- a thorough system of pastoral care and counselling, which reaches parents as well as students;
- dynamic classrooms led rather than ruled by teachers;
- classrooms which respond flexibly to students' stated or perceived needs, rather than a rigid, qualifications-driven process;
- strengthening teachers' skills with in-service education to enable them to respond to a wider range of student abilities and interests.

