



The Committee Manager
Committee on Children and Young People
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
SYDNEY NSW 2000

27 May 2009

Dear Ms Keenan,

RE: Inquiry into Children and Young People 9-14 Years in NSW

Thank you for your correspondences dated 14 May 2009, seeking the views of Murdi Paaki Regional Enterprise Corporation Ltd (MPREC) in relation to your Inquiry.

Background Information

Established in 2003 MPREC is a government funded not-for-profit organization with a primary objective of providing Indigenous communities within its ambit of responsibility relevant and effective services with best practice.

The corporation has five primary objectives (driven by its constitution). These include:

- Development and implementation of effective employment strategies
- Enterprise projects and business development and associated consultancy services
- Delivery of accredited training
- Development and implementation of community programs and services
- Provision of CDEP and similar services

The term 'Murdi Paaki' was first used by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) referring to the region in western NSW encompassing 16 communities, including: Gulargambone, Coonamble, Collarenebri, Walgett, Lightning Ridge, Goodooga, Brewarrina, Bourke, Weilmoringle, Enngonia, Cobar, Ivanhoe, Wilcannia, Menindee, Broken Hill and Dareton / Wentworth.

Currently MPREC delivers the Community Development and Employment Program in 8 of these 16 recognised Murdi Paaki communities. During its history, MPREC has managed up to ten CDEP's in one financial year but changes in government policies has reduced this number over time.

For the purposes of other programs and services, MPREC primarily delivers to the Murdi Paaki region however it is not limited to this region alone. For example, MPREC auspices the Western Aboriginal Tenants Advice and Advocacy Service (WATAAS) which services a region from Lithgow to Broken Hill including the bordering townships of Mudgee and Parkes.

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Responses to Questions:

Education

1. What are some of the strengths of the Links to Learning Program for students at risk and how could it be improved? Would you recommend extending this program to more disadvantaged areas? How appropriate is it for Aboriginal students?

The strength of the Links to Learning program is that it offers an alternate learning environment with the flexibility to customize programs to suit young people who for whatever reason are not engaging in the traditional education model.

The Links to Learning program provides an excellent opportunity for community based organisations, who most likely already have many of the participants as clients in their own services, to work with the schools and training providers to support the re-engagement of young people into education or acquire employability skills.

This program would be useful in more disadvantaged areas provided there was an appropriate community organisation to deliver. In many communities in far west NSW no youth service exists and community support programs are generally delivered through outreach service models. The key to our success in delivering this program is that relationships between the supervisors and the participants can be established and maintained not only within class time but through the participants accessing additional services that we are contracted to deliver.

Additional key factors to our success have included:

- The Links to Learning staff are often younger staff who have completed their education at the local high school that is referring students to the program and therefore are known to the students and may also be seen as a role model.
- The Links to Learning staff have completed their High School Certificate with some having experienced University or have completed Certificate III accreditation in various studies.
- Established links with the school provide numerous opportunities for Links to Learning staff to interact with students, teachers and parents. Given that our Links to Learning staff are also our Youth Centre staff contact with these groups occurs on a regular basis. This is due to the Youth Centre staff delivering school sport options for the school on a weekly basis; conduct of a distance education learning centre at the youth centre for students not able to complete their studies at school; and the monitoring of Juvenile Justice clients as part of their ongoing rehabilitation.

MPREC feels that the Links to Learning program is appropriate for Aboriginal students and has ensured Aboriginal staff are involved in its delivery.

2. Would it be appropriate to provide Links to Learning programs for students in late primary school or would other types of programs be more appropriate?



Given the expected outcomes of the program are to keep the child in traditional educational programs or the acquisition of employability skills, the guidelines may need amending in order to lower the age range. Certainly there is a need to address the disengagement of children at an earlier age but would I be concerned that the underlining factors as to why this would be occurring may not be addressed through a Links to Learning Program.

The most likely reasons that a child was not engaging at school would include family breakdown issues; a learning disability; or behavioral problems. All of these issues are the responsibility of either DOCS or DET who have the expertise to support the young person or the family rather than utilizing a community organisation to “babysit” the problem rather than resolving it.

3. What further links could be developed between youth services and schools?

This is the most critical and often the most difficult component of the program. Without the schools support the program can be difficult to manage. In our experience, the local school’s perspective on the way the program is delivered has greatly influenced the outcomes achieved. When the school firstly understands the program’s objectives and secondly support its implementation into the overall school plan to address truancy, suspensions, learning difficulties and program options then progress can be made. Unfortunately, when the school does not value the program then it becomes exceeding difficult to manage.

Issues that would require further consideration:

- As the funding for this program is held by the Community organisation as are the reporting requirements, limited input or buy-in by the school results. Schools in Western NSW are often under-staffed given dropping enrollments and individual teachers have several hats to wear such as Head teacher roles, Year advisors, extra-curricula commitments, national testing requirements as well as the preparation and delivery of the specific teaching roles. To ask them to take on another program that they are not specifically responsible for, with no financial benefit to the school leads to the program being prioritized after these other responsibilities.
- The management of the program is done centrally through a team in Sydney and I would question how much understanding both regional and local DET representatives have about the program. Without support at a regional level it is again difficult to mediate a resolution to a local issue without a support person close by who can facilitate or provide direction.
- The overwhelming compliance requirements for this program results in a significant amount of time spent entering data and providing reporting that could be better spent planning and delivering the actual program. The case management model utilized requires the tracking, recording and on-line logging of face to face teaching for each referral. Although I appreciate the need to provide evidence of program delivery I am not sure how this information if utilized to track the actual performance or improvement of the student other than that they attended which could be shown by a simple attendance register. A report that provides subjective rather than objective data may be more useful to both the community organisation and the school in mapping pathways for the young person.



Activities

4. To what extent do primary and high schools in your area run activities after school on school sites for 9-14 year olds? Who funds and supervises these activities?

After school activities are predominantly delivered by DOCS funded services. In Western NSW these services are located in Gulargambone, Coonamble, Walgett, Lightning Ridge, Collarenebri, Goodooga, Brewarrina, Bourke, Wilcannia and Broken Hill. The services usually cater for 12 -17 year old with some allowances made for younger children on a service by service basis, but mostly targeting high school aged children. Community organisations are provided recurrent funding to deliver these services generally between \$80,000 - \$120,000 per annum.

The Australian Attorney-General's Department also funds diversionary programs for youth on an annual basis through the E-submission process. The funding is generally a lot less than DOCS funding being between \$13,000 - \$40,000 targeting specific issues. MPREC currently holds contracts with the Department for services in Collarenebri, Goodooga and Menindee.

The Australian Sports Commission also delivers an Active After-school Communities program which is a national initiative that provides primary school-aged children with access to free, structured physical activity programs in the after-school timeslot of 3.00pm to 5.30pm.

The program aims to engage traditionally non-active children in structured physical activities and to build pathways with local community organisations, including sporting clubs. Regional staff are based in Broken Hill and Dubbo who coordinate this delivery of this program in Western NSW.

Western communities also have a range of sporting clubs that play on a seasonal basis that conduct after school training sessions. Similarly, School sport opportunities would provide a small number of after-school training sessions.

5. What capacity exists within youth and other community organisations to run more activities/programs for this age group after school?

Capacity currently exists within organisations and communities to deliver increased services however lack of funding prevents this from occurring.

6. What infrastructure is available for arts based projects for 9-14 year olds at a regional level? How could the provision of arts based projects for this age group be strengthened?

Currently there is a Regional Arts Officer employed through Outback Arts. Although I do not have specific data to base an opinion on, my general perception is that the Arts Officer has an enormous role and regional to service with limited resources.



Other

7. What funding sources are there available to non-government organisations and councils to run school holiday programs for 9-14 year olds? What sorts of costs are involved with running school holiday programs?

DOCS funds Vacation care activities targeting this age group in school holiday periods. Funding is generally of a much smaller amount in the vicinity of a few thousand dollars. MPREC currently receives approximate \$6,000 to auspice the Gulargambone Vacation Care.

Cost involved include: Wages of staff; insurance; venue hire or overheads; cost for excursions; cost of materials (arts / crafts) and activity costs.

8. What co-coordinating mechanisms are there at a state level for youth services and how could these be strengthened?

YAPA is the peak body for youth services. Apart from access via a website I am not aware of regional visits of consultation in regional NSW although some may have occurred.

There is currently no state or federal government department with the specific responsibility of addressing youth services / needs. DOCS sub-contracts the delivery of youth services to community organisations and focuses more of its attention on child protections and family support issues. NSW Sport and Recreation's purpose is to support the infrastructure of club sport with opportunities to participate in activities provided through the numerous camps across the state.

9. Are there any other comments that you would like to make?

I would like to thank the committee for the opportunity to make a response to your inquiry into Children and Young People 9-14 years in NSW.

Yours faithfully,

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