

**Submission
No 60**

INQUIRY INTO OVERCOMING INDIGENOUS DISADVANTAGE

Organisation: City of Sydney Council



**Submission by the City of Sydney to the Legislative
Council Standing Committee On Social Issues**

**Inquiry into Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage in
New South Wales**

February 2008

Introduction

The City of Sydney is committed to a culturally diverse, liveable and sustainable Sydney and is active in working in partnership with our Aboriginal communities. The City acknowledges and recognises the heritage of the Aboriginal struggle and achievements, the right of Indigenous Australians to live according to their own beliefs, values and customs and we celebrate Aboriginal people's contribution to strengthening and enriching the heritage of all Australians. The City recognises the loss and grief by Aboriginal people caused by alienation from traditional lands and welcomes the opportunity to provide comment to this inquiry in that context.

The City has been an active partner with our Aboriginal community for many years and plays a key role in building the capacity of Indigenous organisations, building partnerships with Indigenous communities and facilitating Indigenous decision-making powers through the provision of resources. Many of the issues relating to overcoming Aboriginal disadvantage such as education, health, housing, crime, training and employment are well documented and as a consequence seeks to emphasise its capacity building initiatives in this submission.

The City values reinforcing the positive initiatives that are currently occurring across the Local Government Area and seeks to take a community centred approach to planning and services by creating experiences of success.

The City seeks to achieve this by building the capacities of:

- Aboriginal community members to better support families, community organisations and representative bodies so as to deliver the best outcomes for individuals, families and communities:
- Indigenous organisations to better deliver and influence the delivery of services in the most effective, efficient and accountable way and
- Agency partners so that policy direction and management structures will improve individual and community outcomes for Indigenous people.

Addressing the complex and entrenched nature of Indigenous disadvantage will take time. The challenges faced by governments are multifaceted, and organisational structures and operations are similarly entrenched. Capacity building for governments is not an easy task. Strong leadership and a genuine commitment to change can speed up the process considerably.

The following submission seeks to add to the current debate around the best way forward in overcoming Aboriginal disadvantage and aims to build on much of the information covered in the City's submission to the 2004 Inquiry Into Issues Relating to Redfern-Waterloo.

Protocols and Agreements

The City has displayed its commitment toward Aboriginal people by actively seeking to gain a better understanding of Indigenous culture through the development of appropriate protocols and drawing up agreements with representative bodies of traditional land owners. It is this information, provided to all staff, which informs much of the work the City is undertaking in its local Indigenous communities.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Protocols

An important part of showing respect for different cultures is acknowledging and accepting that we all have different codes of behaviour and ways of interacting. To consult and work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people effectively requires sensitivity to, and respect for, the cultural protocols of these communities.

The City has worked closely with its Aboriginal population in developing cultural protocols which refer to the customs, lores and codes of behaviour of Indigenous people. Observing these cultural protocols demonstrates respect for the cultural traditions, history and diversity of our Aboriginal communities. The protocols also demonstrate the City's willingness to acknowledge that the processes and procedures of one cultural community are equally valid and worthy of the same respect as one's own cultural protocols.

Principles of Co-operation with Metropolitan Local Aboriginal Land Council

The City recognises that within its area of jurisdiction the NSW Metropolitan Land Council is the recognised custodian of Aboriginal land, cultural sites and landscapes. The City has signed a Principles of Co-operation agreement with the Land Council aimed at developing a framework for the discussion and implementation of development proposals affecting Aboriginal interests, fostering reconciliation between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people and promoting an understanding of the custodial obligations and the spiritual and cultural ties of the Land Council.

The City believes these agreements are about more than just symbolism and can lead to enhanced environmental and social outcomes for the Local Government Area and for improving relations with Aboriginal communities.

Community Capacity Building

The City has reviewed much of the recent literature in compiling this submission and is aware of the many inquiries other committees have undertaken including The Collins Review (1999), The A Change for the Future Report (1999), The Dillon Review (2000), "We Can Do It" Report (2001),

Inquiry into Indigenous Funding (2001), The Gordon Inquiry (2002), Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage (2003), Social Justice Report (2003) and the Inquiry into Social Issues relating to Redfern-Waterloo (2004) amongst others.

As these inquiries have consistently revealed, community capacity building is a critical priority that many agencies and organisations identify as being at the forefront of any attempts aimed at closing the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. The City, as the level of government closest to its constituents, has a proven record in taking the lead agency role on community capacity building projects with local communities in recent times.

The City defines community capacity building as empowering individuals and whole communities while building the operational and management capacity of both organisations and governments to better deliver services. In this sense the issue of capacity development must be a vital component of a broader community strategy addressing issues such as education, health, housing, training and employment all of which are well documented with regard to Aboriginal disadvantage across the country.

However, none of this can be achieved without some level of trust between all stakeholders. All framework agreements and partnerships rely simply on goodwill and goodwill is based on an openness and mutual respect.

Some examples of the City's commitment to increasing the capacity of Indigenous communities include:

- Employment of a full time Aboriginal Community Development Worker to deliver community development initiatives to the Aboriginal community
- Employment of a part-time Aboriginal Sports Skills Development Officer to co-ordinate sporting activities as a pathway to training and employment for Aboriginal people
- Developed an Aboriginal Employment Strategy which provides for 5 traineeship positions
- The Lights Camera Action Program which provides young Indigenous people living in the City of Sydney with the chance to gain new skills and explore employment possibilities in theatre, film and television
- A mentoring program for Aboriginal young people at Woolloomooloo on Friday and Saturday nights
- The Short Black Films Project which provides opportunities for local Aboriginal people to learn about all aspects of short film making including script writing, editing, acting, sound and camera work, and
- Establishment of the Barani "Yesterday" website which contains the history, life stories and images of Indigenous men and women who have made significant contributions to their people and country.

The City's approach to community capacity building which underpins much of the work we undertake with our Aboriginal communities can be summarised under the following guiding principles:

1. Acting from within the Community
2. Respecting Community Knowledge
3. Forming Partnerships and Facilitating Participation
4. A Commitment to Early intervention
5. Flexible and Effective Service Delivery

1. Acting from Within the Community

The City has deliberately positioned itself with the community, that is adopting an approach that emphasises acting from within the community. The City believes that the key elements that distinguish a partnership from other kinds of relationships include shared goals, shared risk, shared power, shared work and contributions and a belief that all parties will benefit. This applies not only to the local Aboriginal community but to all other sections of the community as well.

Sorry Day at Redfern Community Centre

An example of acting within the community is the recent apology to the Stolen Generations made by the Prime Minister on 13th February 2008. At very short notice City staff at Redfern Community Centre worked with the local Aboriginal community on an event to broadcast the Prime Minister's apology. This included the involvement of Aboriginal Elders and the Governor of NSW. City staff (guided by our Aboriginal staff) worked with local Aboriginal residents and Indigenous service providers in cooking a free barbeque, running children's activities and sports programs, oral history collection, a photography competition and arranging transport for interested community members.

The day was attended by about a thousand people and City staff and the local Aboriginal community were seen to be active and proud participants at the event.

Each year Redfern Community Centre provides programs in art, culture, sports, employment and training initiatives as well as community events such as NAIDOC Week, Harmony Day and Reconciliation Day. The centre also provides a well-used Elder's Lounge.

The Redfern-Waterloo Partnership Project and the Redfern-Waterloo Authority

In 2002 a location-specific Redfern-Waterloo Partnership Project (RWPP) was announced by the NSW Government with a mandate to address the range of complex social issues affecting the area. The City and the broader community

supported the initiative believing it would lead to more effective, co-ordinated service delivery in response to the specific needs of the area rather than in response to centrally developed generic policy. This development was particularly significant given the iconic status of the Redfern area as a traditional meeting place for the Aboriginal community.

The City supports location-specific initiatives aimed at overcoming Aboriginal and other areas of disadvantage. The aim of a place-based approach is that agencies and services tailor their service to meet the real needs on the ground in a way that accommodates the cultural, social, physical and economic realities of a specific location.

Specifically, the City calls upon the Committee to recommend the NSW Government restore access to legal advice for Indigenous communities in the Redfern area, following the closure of the Redfern Courthouse. The City further calls for the creation of a specific Aboriginal service to assist local Indigenous people to successfully re-integrate back in to the community to assist in preventing continued Indigenous over-representation in the criminal justice system.

2. Respecting Community Knowledge

Most people know what works for their community and what does not. It understands that communities solve problems every day without the help or intervention of Government.

The City places great value in consulting with its residents, local businesses, other organisations and staff in ensuring that the many voices in our community share the same aspirations. The process provides people with a stake in their community to identify issues of concern and strength, provide advice on how issues can be resolved and how the City's processes, plans and policies can be improved.

Respecting community knowledge does not mean everyone gets what they want. It simply means believing what people say, acting on this knowledge where possible and explaining why, when it is not.

Local Action Plans

An example of the City's respect for community knowledge has been in the development of Local Action Plans (LAPs). The LAPs signal a commitment to a new kind of planning and delivery of services with a close, ongoing involvement with the community.

Consultations involved a household survey, community meetings, workshops, focus group discussions, group and one-on-one briefings and interviews recognising that different groups in our community, including Aboriginal people, communicate and can provide input in different ways.

The ideas contained in the LAPs have set the course for what the City, working in partnership with communities and organisations across the local government area, is doing and will continue to upgrade, revitalise, accentuate, plan, develop and advocate for better neighbourhoods.

The City's Local Action Plan team this year won the coveted R.H. Dougherty Reporting To Your Community Award for its Local Action Plan Strategy 2007-2010 for the originality and scale of the project and its comprehensive community engagement.

Sustainable Sydney 2030

The City's commitment to working with Aboriginal communities and respecting community knowledge was recently evident in its series of consultations for the Sustainable Sydney strategy 2030. Approximately 300 Indigenous people were asked a series of questions relating to their vision for the City through surveys, interviews, open forums and a round table convened by the Lord Mayor.

The City has been provided with a wealth of information which we will use to guide future planning projects around Aboriginal culture, history, signposting etc. The City will also form an Aboriginal Advisory Committee in response to implementing some of these suggestions.

The City has also commenced preliminary research regarding the creation of an Indigenous Cultural Centre. The community has suggested that such a Centre might incorporate a museum, conference centre, interactive displays, archives, education and training etc in response to discussions with the local Indigenous community. The centre will enhance tourism and provide economic development opportunities for local Aboriginal communities.

It is worth highlighting the fact that the City's community consultations for the LAPs and Sustainable Sydney 2030 specifically with the Aboriginal community as well as with the broader community have identified similar issues with regard to meeting the needs of local Indigenous people. Fostering Aboriginal arts and culture, celebrating Aboriginal heritage, and undertaking more creative projects with an Indigenous focus were recurring issues identified.

Other examples of the City's consultations with Indigenous communities and actions in response are reflected in many of our plans and strategies including:

- Social Plan 2006-2016
- Safe City Strategy 2007-2012
- Homelessness Strategy
- Drug and Alcohol Strategy
- Youth Strategy
- Street Drinking Strategy and
- Draft Cultural Diversity Strategy.

3. Forming Partnerships and Enabling Participation

The City understands that not only does it need partnerships with Aboriginal people but that different levels of Government also need similar partnership arrangements with each other if they are going to be most effective. Communication and co-operation within and between governments and taking a capacity building approach to the delivery of services lie at the heart of working together more effectively.

This approach acknowledges that each community is different and there is no single model for building community capacity. The City supports building on community strengths, understanding local conditions and valuing cultural strengths. In this way approaches to service delivery are tailored to meet the needs of specific localities, are based on community development principles of empowerment, are linked to other initiatives, and focus on partnerships between agencies and community groups.

As a result of working in partnership, building capacity means that the City and the community emerge from the process with greater knowledge, more opportunities and new and improved skills.

Almost every community capacity building initiative the City undertakes involves some form of partnership, with specific Indigenous initiatives including:

- Supporting ICAMPA and Wallamulla with NAIDOC Week celebrations
- Supporting the Babana Aboriginal Men's Group through Community and Quick Response Grant programs
- Supporting the Community Restorative Centre to deliver the Aboriginal Transition Program to assist ex-offenders with their reintegration into society
- Hosting and supporting Aboriginal sporting organisations through the annual Koori Knockout rugby league tournament
- Hosting and supporting a number of Aboriginal organisations at the annual Yabun Australia Day event
- Hosting and developing programs for seniors and people with disabilities with Aleena Aboriginal Home Care Service
- Developing Research methodology with Aboriginal organisations for Street-based Sex Work and Violence Against Transgender Street-based Sex Workers research projects
- Providing subsidised community transport to the Aboriginal community to access rural areas for family gatherings
- Hosting and support Aboriginal organisations in annual Sorry Day events
- Hosting and supporting Aboriginal organisations at the Gathering Ground event

- Supporting 5 Indigenous organisations through the Accommodation Grants Program
- Providing 2 community services grants to Aboriginal organisations and groups
- Providing 7 Local Community Grants to Aboriginal organisations and groups
- Providing 5 Cultural Grants and sponsorships to Aboriginal organisations and groups
- Providing 9 Quick Response Grants to Aboriginal organisations and groups
- Providing reduced rates to Aboriginal services accessing Council facilities and
- City representation on the Eastern Region Local Government Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Forum and Koori South Eastern Region Interagency.

The City understands that a community cannot grow or flourish unless it is built on a solid foundation. In any community that foundation must be built on trust, ethics, respectful relationships, shared responsibility and reciprocity. The City acknowledges that only a community that has these attributes and some level of skills can be a true and active partner. The City believes that there is room for governments at all levels to address issues of integration and to build a culture of action based upon positive outcomes.

4. A Commitment to Early Intervention

The City acknowledges that there is an increasing body of evidence that suggests that interventions early in life can have long term impacts in terms of community well-being. Primary interventions aimed at better health, improved education and better employment opportunities particularly at key transition points in life may mean that for every dollar invested today several dollars may be saved later. Results point to the importance of developing responses that are not just aimed at children and their parents, but responses that support the community to develop and become a better environment to raise children.

The City is involved in a number of initiatives aimed at working with Aboriginal children and their families including:

- Co-ordinating the successful Midnight Basketball Project with support from other Government and non-Government agencies on Saturday nights for 10-18 year olds which attracts up to 75 young people many of whom are non-school attending Aboriginal young people – parents are also encouraged to attend
- Operating the Redfern Occasional Care Centre, a 36 place centre that provides respite / short term care for families with priority given to non-working families with additional support needs

- Co-ordinating the Indigenous Support Program where significantly reduced fees and additional support are offered to Indigenous children and families
- Running the Redfern Children's Program which provides free after school and holiday activities for primary school aged children many of whom are Indigenous
- Conducting an after school program for mainly Aboriginal children in Ultimo including school pick up, afternoon tea, sport and arts programs and excursions
- Conducting an after school program at Surry Hills for primary school aged children including sport and arts programs, school holiday programs and a Saturday program
- Conducting the Sorry Day photography competition and exhibition at Pine Street Creative Arts Centre
- Conducting the "Connections" Aboriginal women's painting classes at Pine Street Creative Arts Centre
- Supporting the Kidspeak program for families on Waterloo Green.

The City is aware that for people in the 10-18 age group it is a time of great change as young people are increasingly influenced by their peers, begin to participate in risk taking behaviour and begin to assert their own sense of identity. The City acknowledges that for young people life is changing rapidly and much of this change is good for this group as it provides new opportunities.

Most young people manage to find the right pathway for themselves but for those who are vulnerable, the City believes that the key is to provide better support for young people in danger of falling through the gaps in existing support services and ensure that they can relate to the type of help that is being offered. Even more challenging is the need to provide ways to help young people who, for whatever reason, are already adrift from their families, their schools and other support systems, and for whom there is no obvious way forward.

The City provides a number of services to young people many of which involve local Aboriginal people including:

- Youth services operating at Miller's Point, Pyrmont, Woollahooloo, Redfern and Erskineville
- After school programs across the Local Government Area including sports and team building skills, art and craft programs, music, dance classes and cooking
- Up to 12 free driving lessons and workshops for Aboriginal young people in partnership with NRMA
- Engaging outreach staff to provide homework support and education with regard to numeracy, literacy and sexual health
- On The Move which assists students to make a smooth transition from primary to high school

- Drivin' for Employment the award winning program which assists unemployed young people to gain their learner's and provisional driver's licenses
- Friday and Saturday night recreation programs at Woolloomooloo
- Working with training providers to assist young people in gaining their forklift licence and skills in maritime services and construction
- Provision of courses to eligible young people in responsible service of alcohol and responsible conduct of gaming
- Job readiness assistance with resumes and interview skills
- School holiday programs across the Local Government Area
- Free computer and internet access at each centre
- A Koori Toastmasters course at Redfern Community Centre
- Referral, advocacy and support to counselling, health services, legal services, employment, education and other youth specific services.

The City of Sydney experiences high rates of truancy in the area and would like to highlight to the committee the gap in service provision particularly for young people in the 9-12 age group who have not made the successful transition from primary to high school. Many of these young people access the City's youth services on a regular basis.

There is scope for the NSW Department of Education to fund teachers to work in local youth centres to support the educational needs of young people who no longer access mainstream education options. Incentives for young people to attend school would also be useful. The City further suggests that improving links between schools, youth workers and parents will assist some families in breaking out of the welfare cycle.

Many of the initiatives the City is undertaking fall outside the scope of conventional local government core business and expose a service delivery gap which would normally fall under the responsibility of State or Federal Government.

The House of Representatives Standing Committee on Economics, Finance and Public Administration cost-shifting and local government report (2003) found an increase in cost shifting and a significant growth in the functions of local government. The report found that local governments were not funded to meet growing service provision demands.

5. Flexible and Co-ordinated Service Delivery

The City runs a number of direct services for its community many of whom are Aboriginal clients. Services for seniors including Meals on Wheels, podiatry and social work complement our child care, youth, homelessness, multicultural and gay, lesbian and transgender services.

Few Indigenous people can exercise any substantive jurisdictional responsibilities over matters of the most direct concern to them. They are

almost totally dependent on Government funding arrangements designed to deliver programs and services based on non-Indigenous models of governance.

Discussion of accountability of Indigenous organisations to Government must also take into consideration the accountability of Government to Indigenous organisations and the broader community.

There is a need for a whole of Government, integrated approach to service delivery in order to address the acute socioeconomic disadvantage faced by Aboriginal people..

The diversity and complexity of contemporary Indigenous societies and cultures point to the need for location specific responses by service delivery agencies in all jurisdictions. Such location specific responses should be driven by local and regional perspectives, through community and regional plans, and by formalising a shared partnership arrangement through agreements based on those plans.

Public Domain

The City is involved in a number of public domain projects which are designed to enhance the living environment of its community including the large numbers of Indigenous people residing in Redfern, Waterloo and the City South area. The projects aim to activate streetscapes, broaden access and use of public amenities, generate community pride and enhance appreciation of the character of our villages and neighbourhoods.

Major projects include:

\$19 million upgrade of Redfern Park for recreational and sporting uses

\$11 million dollar upgrade of Prince Alfred Park

\$20 million dollar upgrades to Redfern and Regent Streets

\$500,000 upgrade of the skate park at Waterloo

\$1 million upgrade to three parks in the Eveleigh precinct Yellowmunde, Hugo Street Reserves and Pemulwuy Park and three parks in east Redfern, James Street Reserve, Marriot Street Reserve and Hansom Cab Place

500 new trees in addition to the 2,000 trees already planted across the area over the last 12 months.

Conclusion

In a country which enjoys one of the highest standards of living and, with the exception of its Indigenous population, one of the highest life expectancies in the world, the harsh reality for most Indigenous communities is one of very poor health, short life expectancy, low education standards, poverty and poor living standards. Unless basic issues of dysfunction and disadvantage in Aboriginal communities are addressed, greater capacity building efforts will remain largely ineffective.

Key elements of the way ahead involve major challenges to Governments, Indigenous organisations and to communities and individuals. It involves a revision of approaches by Governments and a move away from conventional methods of service delivery which reinforce dependency to the pursuit of real partnerships with Indigenous organisations and communities.

The challenge is to move away from the rhetoric of partnerships to a genuine commitment to incorporating capacity building into the design and implementation of partnerships for service delivery. Not only do Governments need to take steps to change the outlook and direction of their own agencies and to provide an integrated approach and lift the capacity of their own officers, steps also need to be taken towards enhancing the capacity of Indigenous organisations.

Clearly, the first priority is to alleviate the chronic state of Aboriginal disadvantage, an intermediate step involves the development of Indigenous organisations delivering services to their own people, and the final goal, is a reduction in the need for Government service delivery. The City acknowledges that while much of the challenge may lie ahead it hopes that a promising start has been made.

Recommendations:

- 1: That the Commonwealth and NSW Governments should provide services to Aboriginal communities on a regional or locational specific basis.**
- 2: That the Commonwealth and NSW Governments create whole of Government frameworks for service delivery that are culturally appropriate to Indigenous people.**
- 3: That the Commonwealth and NSW Governments conduct research into governance in Indigenous communities with a view to developing a body of knowledge that can be used in the development of effective institutional governance in Indigenous communities.**
- 4: That the Commonwealth and NSW Governments invest in and further develop appropriate training and mentoring programs in Indigenous communities.**
- 5: That the NSW Government restore chamber magistrate services to the Redfern area.**
- 6: That the NSW Government establish an Aboriginal specific service which provides support for ex-offenders to successfully reintegrate into the community in Redfern.**
- 7: That the Commonwealth and/or NSW Governments fund after school, weekend and school holiday programs in areas of Indigenous disadvantage.**

8: That the Commonwealth and / or NSW Governments provide outreach education services to children and young people who no longer access mainstream education options.

9: That the Commonwealth and NSW Government provide culturally appropriate integrated health facilities, services and outreach, such as drug and alcohol detox and rehabilitation facilities.