

INQUIRY INTO OVERCOMING INDIGENOUS DISADVANTAGE

Organisation: Blue Mountains People for Reconciliation

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This submission is from Blue Mountains People for Reconciliation. Members have long-term commitment to working with Aboriginal people and extensive experience of local initiatives. Many of the projects discussed here have been developed in the Blue Mountains on very little money.

BM people for Reconciliation make the following recommendations:

- Fund the recommendations in the 'Breaking the Silence' Report
- Increase funding resources for community agencies run by local Indigenous people such as the BM Aboriginal Culture and Resource Centre and Link-up NSW Aboriginal Corporation
- Improving access to housing, education and employment.
- Increase support for Aboriginal language and cultural programs

We see that improvement in health outcomes will come with improvement in a range of housing, educational, cultural and employment options.

- Housing is fundamental – people cannot continue to live in over-crowded conditions or in expensive rentals and achieve educational and health successes. Increasing housing options is expensive but vital to any improvements.
- Educational support, especially through increasing Indigenous identity and pride make a big difference to individual children succeeding in school. Transition to school and transition to high school projects have had significant success in our local area. Koori clubs in schools also. It is essential to have an Aboriginal Liaison officer at each High school as a point of support for Indigenous students and to liaise between students and teachers. Support for the revival of local Aboriginal languages and then the teaching of these languages in schools and preschools is an important part of cultural identity and pride for Aboriginal children. It also demonstrates a valuing of Aboriginal culture by the whole community when culture and language are part of the school curriculum. We received a small grant from NSW Reconciliation Council to create a resource book and CD teaching two children's songs in Gundungurra language. It has been very well received by schools and it would be very valuable to be able to expand on this plus develop a similar resource in the other local language, Darug. Also, there have been a number of cultural initiatives in local primary and high schools which have involved Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students working together to learn about Aboriginal culture and then, with the support of Aboriginal artists/dancers creating artworks or dance items or dramatic pieces depicting this learning. From a recent experience at Katoomba High school this was shown to increase the self-esteem of Aboriginal students as well as increasing their school attendance and giving the teachers an insight into the reality of these students' experiences and culture. These initiatives funded at a local level have a definite impact on educational outcomes.
- BM Aboriginal Culture and Resource Centre is a significant local organisation which is working to address Indigenous disadvantage by providing cultural, employment and educational programs for local Aboriginal people. The work of this organisation could be greatly expanded and enhanced if they had adequate premises located centrally. This would require capital works funding to build a purpose built building in Katoomba.
- Access to quality childcare at least two days per week for two years prior to attending school will make a big difference. This childcare must demonstrate quality by being culturally appropriate, sensitive to the families needs and involve the employment of Aboriginal people. It must be affordable.
- Health: Many more Indigenous staff are needed – eg Aboriginal Liaison workers cover huge areas and cannot possibly resource small communities. We have an Aboriginal Mental Health worker covering Blacktown to Mt Victoria, an impossible situation.
- Child Protection: Implementing the recommendations of the 'Breaking the Silence' Report. This report was extensive in its research and widely supported. The NSW Government has a responsibility to allocate the resources to put its recommendations into practice.
- Government focus on broader values than economic development will have an impact on Indigenous health and disadvantage. While our society and government are fixated with growth and prosperity of the middle class rather than a fair go for everyone, Indigenous and other poor

people will be stigmatised, de-valued and not seen as important and contributing citizens. This is not good for anyone.