

## **INQUIRY INTO OVERCOMING INDIGENOUS DISADVANTAGE**

**Organisation:** BABANA Aboriginal Mens' Group  
**Name:** Mr Mark Spinks  
**Position:** Chairman

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**BABANA**



**Redfern**



**ABN 27 157 748 337**

30 January 2008

The Chairperson  
NSW Legislative Council  
Standing Committee on Social Issues  
Inquiry Into Closing the Gap – Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage

**Submission to the NSW Legislative Council Inquiry Into Closing the Gap –  
Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage**

A submission addressing the need for improved support for Aboriginal men in inner-metropolitan Sydney is attached for the committee's consideration.

In this submission *BABANA* urges all levels of Government to work together to establish an Aboriginal mens multi-purpose community facility in Redfern and to assist it to move to financial viability, independence and sustainability.

This centre should be a focal point for cultural, commercial and other activities – a place where Aboriginal men can access information and training opportunities, business advice, activities for male Elders, an Aboriginal business incubator, and a source of information and activities related to mens health and wellbeing. It should also be a place to engage with Aboriginal men in a culturally appropriate manner around alcohol overuse, street drinking, illicit drug use, and other issues related to personal, family and community wellbeing.

The committee is also urged to consider the current lack in the City of Sydney LGA of even one major sculpture or other public art piece referencing Sydney's Aboriginal people and celebrating their many ongoing and diverse contributions to the wider Sydney community. There are also no major permanent memorials in Sydney recognising, honouring and paying respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander military personnel.

*BABANA* is available to brief this Standing Committee on the matters raised in this submission at a public hearing should an opportunity arise.

Yours sincerely

Mark Spinks  
Chairman  
(for the Babana mgt ctee)

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# **SUBMISSION**

to

**NSW Legislative Council  
Standing Committee on Social Issues**

**Inquiry Into Closing the Gap: Overcoming Indigenous  
Disadvantage**

DRAFT

Babana Aboriginal Mens Group Inc  
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NSW 2016

# SUBMISSION

to

**NSW Legislative Council  
Standing Committee on Social Issues  
Inquiry Into Closing the Gap – Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage**

## **Introduction**

The Standing Committee on Social Issues is to be congratulated for embarking on this very important examination of factors impacting on the well-being of Aboriginal people and communities.

The social, material, cultural and spiritual well-being of the broader NSW community will be enriched if practical solutions to the issues impacting adversely on Aboriginal people in NSW are identified and fully implemented.

With this in mind, the *BABANA* Aboriginal Mens Group would like to draw the Committee's attention to three matters.

These are:

1. The lack of a multi-purpose community facility for Aboriginal men in inner metropolitan Sydney.
2. The lack in the City of Sydney LGA of even one major sculpture or other public art piece referencing Sydney's Aboriginal peoples and celebrating their many ongoing and diverse contributions to the wider Sydney community.
3. The lack of permanent memorials in Sydney recognising, honouring and paying respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander military personnel.

## **Babana Aboriginal Mens Group**

The *BABANA* Aboriginal Mens Group Vision is:

*"To support, enable and empower Aboriginal men and families in our community."*

In the Dharuk language "Babana" means 'brother'. Babana is a common term of greeting among Aboriginal men that also conveys a sense of cooperative effort and community.

Since its formation in early 2006 the *BABANA* Aboriginal Mens Group has experienced significant growth in membership. Members are motivated by the opportunity to be part of a group that aims to achieve positive outcomes for Aboriginal men and the wider community. Many of the one hundred or so *BABANA* members regularly attend meetings and other events.

Since its formation *BABANA* has also worked to develop positive community partnerships which benefit local Aboriginal men, their families and the wider community. *BABANA* projects have included:

- NAIDOC Week cultural cruises on Sydney Harbour in 2006 and 2007 to celebrate survival of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and its ongoing contribution to modern Australia. Other Aboriginal mens groups from across greater Sydney and the Illawarra attended these gatherings.
- Representations to City of Sydney and Leichhardt Councils, including representation to the City of Sydney in support of the incorporation of an appropriate acknowledgement to Aboriginal people in the Hyde Park upgrade.
- Volunteering at major community events.
- Running a 'No Drugs on the Block' campaign to discourage illicit drug use and talking about the highly negative impacts of the visible use of drugs in the community.
- Sending delegations to Aboriginal men's health/healing meetings.
- Liaising with Redfern Police to improve relations between the police and the Aboriginal community.
- Hosting 'International Day of World's Indigenous People' celebrations at Sydney Town Hall in 2006 and 2007.
- Convening a two-day Aboriginal mens family violence forum in February 2008.
- Working with others in the community to address the glaring lack of public art celebrating Sydney's and likewise the lack of pieces commemorating our fallen diggers.

In 2007, in its second year of operation, *BABANA* began taking steps to become properly equipped to be sustainable in the long term. This included becoming a legally incorporated entity.

*BABANA* is currently organising a two-day Aboriginal Mens Family Violence Forum involving Aboriginal men from across greater Sydney, to be held on 12-13 February 2008.

*BABANA* has achieved all this and more without any recurrent funding. Babana also currently meets in borrowed meeting spaces. Meetings are currently held at the Crossroads Aboriginal Ministry meeting place in George Street, Redfern.

For more information about Babana go to [www.treocom.net/babana](http://www.treocom.net/babana).

### **Community facilities for Aboriginal men**

There is no space in Redfern-Waterloo dedicated solely to the use of Aboriginal men.

*BABANA* submits that a multi-purpose Aboriginal mens community centre is necessary (to use the wording of this Committee of Inquiry) to "*overcome indigenous disadvantage*" among Aboriginal people living in and visiting Redfern and nearby areas.

By default, in practical terms, the alternative meeting places for Aboriginal men are

usually pubs, clubs and public open spaces.

Aboriginal men in Redfern-Waterloo therefore urgently need a culturally appropriate alcohol-free multi-purpose community facility in which they can network with each other and which can also be a focal point for cultural, commercial, recreational and other activities.

This facility also needs to be able to facilitate access to information and training opportunities, business advice, activities for male Elders, to be an incubator for new Aboriginal businesses, and provide information and activities linked to mens spiritual, cultural and physical health and wellbeing.

However, reflecting the adverse impacts of intergenerational disadvantage and discrimination and cultural and spiritual loss this community facility also needs to be equipped to engage with Aboriginal men in a culturally specific manner around such issues as alcohol overuse, street drinking, illicit drug use, and other issues related to personal and family wellbeing.

It should therefore also offer on-site access to outreach services and facilitated access to specialist support which addresses identified gaps in the mainstream human services system, gaps which largely reflect an incapacity on the part of these mainstream services to engage effectively with Aboriginal men. Additional to its cultural, training, recreational and other uses this Aboriginal mens community facility should therefore include:

1. A dry (alcohol free) day centre offering alcohol and other drug support services with a clearly defined focus on encouraging a reduction in levels of alcohol consumed and eventual abstinence among Aboriginal men and abstinence from illicit drugs.

On-site support provided by this service should include food, showers and laundry; and other supports including referral to detoxification and other specialist services. Culturally-based recreational activities and training opportunities, living skills information and supports and related diversionary activities should also be available to clients of the service.

Through service level agreements with other agencies to:

- a primary health clinic,
- counselling,
- case management which assists clients to develop a plan to address issues compounding alcohol and other drug dependence.
- referrals to specialist drug and alcohol services, health and mental health services and other social supports such as Centrelink, employment and other support services as appropriate.<sup>1</sup>
- referrals to long-term, sustainable accommodation options with support attached if necessary.

<sup>1</sup> It is envisaged that some of these services will be provided on site through links established with relevant service providers.

This service should be implemented within a framework of acceptance whilst encouraging recovery and abstinence. This should be achieved through the direct provision of services which address client needs and other services which can work toward strengthening community relationships and linkages to cultural heritage. Services it should provide in addition to supporting an Aboriginal mens cultural activities should include:

2. Links to supported short to medium term accommodation. Ideally some of this accommodation would be located in the same facility and available to clients of the alcohol support service entering and leaving detoxification and related therapies and to other Aboriginal men visiting metro Sydney to access specialist medical support.

As well as strengthening cultural linkages and improving social connection a community space for Aboriginal men will also address major service gaps through services which fill existing support gaps and by linking of clients to employment, training and business opportunities.

It also offers improved opportunity for mainstream services to engage with Aboriginal men more successfully through cost-effective programs which enhance, rather than duplicate or compete, with specialist medical and therapeutic services.

### **Demonstrated need for an Aboriginal mens multi-purpose community facility**

The lack of culturally-specific services which address the needs of Aboriginal people is well-documented. For example, the 2005 Inner City Homeless Research Project<sup>2</sup> prepared for the NSW Government Partnership Against Homelessness initiative reported on the capacity of inner-Sydney alcohol and other drug and alcohol services to support Aboriginal people effectively. This report noted:

- a strategy for establishing a sobering up facility is needed (rec 2.1);
- all existing Aboriginal drug and alcohol residential rehabilitation services are located outside the metropolitan area. An inner Sydney Aboriginal service that can act as a 'halfway house' for people moving into residential drug and alcohol rehabilitation services must be investigated (rec 3.1);
- short-term drug and alcohol facilities in operation in the relevant area of Sydney, do not appear to have strategies for dealing with Aboriginal clients or encouraging them to utilise their services. (rec 3.2);
- the urgent need for culturally appropriate crisis accommodation facilities for all types of homeless people. (rec. 4.1);
- solid links for people moving between crisis accommodation and successful medium and long-term accommodation options. (rec 4.2);
- Two Aboriginal drop-in centres, one specifically for women, are required as a high priority (rec 5.1);
- the need for additional trained, supervised, counsellors or outreach workers who can maintain contact with the homeless, advise them and accompany

<sup>2</sup> *Inner City Homeless Research Project* March 2005. Paul Memmott and Assoc. This report was commissioned by the NSW Aboriginal Housing Office as part of the NSW Government's Partnership Against Homelessness initiative.

them to service providers (rec 1.1) and

- the need for a lead indigenous agency or body that might drive holistic approaches to the issue of homelessness (rec 9.1)
- little use of existing crisis, medium and long-term accommodation facilities by Aboriginal people (page 39)

Similar supports are also called for in the City of Sydney Street Drinking Strategy.<sup>3</sup>

Drug and alcohol services accessible to inner-city residents also report problems in attracting Aboriginal clients. Despite these factors Redfern, Waterloo and adjoining suburbs contain few culturally-specific services to assist people to abstain and recover from substance abuse. The result of this for Aboriginal people in the target area is often ongoing level of alcohol abuse that is having a devastating impact on individuals, their families and the wider community.

Initiatives addressing family violence and other outcomes of alcohol abuse in Aboriginal families are being implemented in Redfern and Waterloo. However these responses need to be underpinned by an effective, culturally appropriate, point of contact between drinkers and diversionary and other support programs with linkages to specialist alcohol detoxification and rehabilitation programs.

The need for an Aboriginal mens community facility in Redfern is also reflected in 2001 Census data, which indicate that Aboriginal people make up at least 3% of the Redfern and 8% of the Waterloo population and 4.4% of the total population of both suburbs. The equivalent figure for Sydney as a whole is 1%. This estimate almost certainly fails to adequately reflect the underlying population of transient homeless and/or marginally homeless Aboriginal people in the area.

And, even though fewer Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people drink alcohol relative to the non-Indigenous population, and drink less frequently, the high incidence of substance abuse in Aboriginal communities is also reflected in the fact that Indigenous people account for almost one in 10 Australians seeking treatment for drug and alcohol abuse, even though they make up only about two per cent of the Australian population. This figure is likely to under-represent actual treatment cases as most dedicated substance treatment services for Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders were not included in the figures. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, are also seven times more likely to be hospitalised for acute intoxication than the rest of the Australian population.<sup>4</sup>

Also, hospital separation rates attributed to alcohol amongst Aboriginal people in the region, increased by 10% between 1993 and 2005 and trauma injuries attributed to alcohol increased by 13%.<sup>5</sup> This suggests that alcohol-related health problems appear to be on the increase amongst coastal Sydney Aboriginal people.

<sup>3</sup> City of Sydney, Street Drinking Strategy 2006 – 2011, page 14

<sup>4</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *Alcohol and other drug treatment services in Australia 2004-05*.

<sup>5</sup> Two Ways Together Regional Report: Public report for coastal Sydney, NSW Department of Aboriginal Affairs, November 2006.



The average life expectancy of Aboriginal people is also almost 20 years lower than for the wider Australian community<sup>6</sup>. Substance abuse is increasingly recognised (alongside loss of cultural identity, poor health, housing and education outcomes) as a major precursor to many of the problems affecting the well being of Aboriginal people and Aboriginal communities.

*BABANA* respectfully suggests therefore that, rather than embarking on ineffective, policing responses and the creation of Alcohol Free Zones, the Australian and NSW Governments and the City of Sydney should establish a multi-purpose Aboriginal mens community facility in Redfern and assist it to move to financial viability and sustainability and independence.

The proposed service would also meet service needs in a manner consistent with COAG principles and related Australian, NSW and Local Government policies and strategies addressing family violence, child abuse and other alcohol-related social problems in indigenous communities.

Commonwealth and NSW Government funding support for such a facility would also be a tangible, practical, expression of the principles underlying the *Redfern-Waterloo Partnership Agreement between the Commonwealth of Australia and the State of New South Wales*, June 2006, through which the Australian and New South Wales Governments agreed to cooperate on enhancing the economic and social revitalisation of Redfern-Waterloo in relation to the indigenous community.

Babana estimates that the recurrent cost (shared by all levels of government) of establishing this type of facility would be approximately \$500,000.00 per annum for approximately five years.

### **Public art celebrating Aboriginal culture and heritage**

Babana is working with others in the community to address the glaring lack of public art celebrating Sydney's Aboriginal heritage and the lack of public memorials to Aboriginal ex-service men and women.

As a first step, the Project Committee is seeking permission from the City of Sydney to display a bronze maquette (model sculpture) in the Customs House entry foyer in the lead up to ANZAC Day 2008. The maquette has been prepared for the Committee by internationally recognised bronze sculptor Antony Symons. Antony is also well known for his Marjorie Jackson bronze sculpture set in Lithgow's main street.

The main purpose of displaying the maquette is to raise public awareness about the lack of such commemorative works and to kick start a discussion about the most appropriate form of a work or works of this nature.

Thank you for the opportunity to make this submission.

### ***BABANA* Aboriginal Mens Group**

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<sup>6</sup> National Alcohol Strategy 2006-2009: Towards safer drinking cultures, Department of Health and Ageing, May 2006.