

Submission
No 88

INQUIRY INTO OVERCOMING INDIGENOUS DISADVANTAGE

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To: Hon. Greg Donnelly
From: Assoc. Prof. Lyn Henderson-Yates
Subject: Comments on the NSW Inquiry into Indigenous Disadvantage Report
Date: 15 September 2008

Dear Greg

Please accept my apologies for the delay in responding to the Interim Report on Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage in New South Wales. As you are aware, we are a small Centre for Indigenous Studies and are currently fully engaged with research and teaching projects. Our senior researcher and the Indigenous Community Liaison Officer are currently away undertaking two main research projects and I am on study leave. This has impacted on our ability to provide you with more comprehensive comments.

I have included below some initiatives that I am aware of that is happening in the West Kimberley. Unfortunately, it is not possible for us to assist in exploring other new ideas and initiatives in the Kimberley due to time constraints. I hope the comments provided below, will assist in exploring new ways of addressing Indigenous disadvantage in the state of New South Wales.

Kind regards

Lyn

Assoc. Prof. Lyn Henderson-Yates
Assistant Dean, School of Arts & Sciences and Director, Centre for Indigenous Studies
The University of Notre Dame Australia (Broome Campus)

1. Measuring Outcomes

Mechanisms for improving the reporting and accountability processes for community organisations

Sound reporting and accountability processes are vital in measuring outcomes. Not only are these important when reporting to governments but also in reporting back to Indigenous communities. One such example of reporting back to government and Indigenous communities is that of a committee comprised of representatives from various government and community organisations located in the town of Fitzroy Crossing in the Kimberley.

This Committee is comprised of members from the Drug and Alcohol Office of W.A., and key health, education and community organisations. A senior staff member from the Drug and Alcohol Office of W.A. , who chairs the committee, travels from Perth to Fitzroy Crossing for each meeting. The Committee focuses on providing a coordinated approach in addressing alcohol and other drug use issues. This is a good example of government departments and Indigenous organisations meeting and working together to address key issues within Aboriginal communities.

Ability to address family violence and child sexual abuse issues is impeded by the high level of underreporting of these incidents by Aboriginal communities.

Many Aboriginal families do not wish to see their family members enter into the prison system, so are often reluctant to report incidents to relevant authorities. Often the level of Aboriginal people reporting incidents is impacted upon by the circumstances in which they live. According to an evaluation conducted by The University of Notre Dame Broome, on behalf of the Drug and Alcohol Office of WA into take-away alcohol restriction in place in Fitzroy Crossing, women self-referring domestic violence increased once the problem of excessive alcohol consumption had been reduced. Women felt more confident in reporting domestic violence. Intake figures at the Fitzroy Women's Refuge were reduced as a result of the restriction. According to quantitative data gathered during the evaluation period, domestic violence reported to the police at Fitzroy Crossing was down 28% between October 2007 and February 2008 (the period from when the restriction commenced to when the evaluation was being conducted). The report can be downloaded from the Drug and Alcohol Office, Western Australia website.

2. Coordinated Service Delivery

Successful initiatives undertaken by government to improve educational outcomes for small numbers of Indigenous students.

Whilst this section refers to successful government initiatives, there is one project that is being conducted by an Indigenous media organisation. This organisation, based in Broome, has received private funding to provide literacy classes for young Aboriginal children who have withdrawn from school. This program employs a teacher and classes are held on the organisations premises. The children are not only learning to read and write but they are also exposed to positive role models and projects on the organisations premises. Engaging in education in an organisation, owned and directed by Aboriginal people, on premises comprising of numerous Aboriginal people working in the media field, can be seen as a positive initiative to bring about some change for Aboriginal children in education.

One other government initiative is that of the Broome Academic Extension Programme. This programme is designed to extend the academic abilities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students who are high achievers in Broome's two upper secondary schools (one state school and one Catholic school). Specialist teachers are periodically flown from Perth to Broome to conduct lessons with the students. These lessons are designed to extend the student's knowledge and understandings in particular subject areas such as Science and Mathematics.

3. Employment, mentoring and training of Indigenous people

Support for mentoring programmes and their effectiveness in gaining and retaining Indigenous employees; ways mentoring can be incorporated into a variety of programmes aimed at addressing Indigenous disadvantage.

The University of Notre Dame Australia Broome (UNDA Broome) have established a mentoring and training programme for Indigenous staff in the area of research. Within the Centre for Indigenous Studies (CIS) two positions have been created; that of an Administration Officer and Indigenous Community Liaison Officer (ICLO).

Both these positions have attached to them research engagement roles. For example, the Administration Officer position is part funded by the UNDA Fremantle School of Medicine to train the Administration Officer in research, particularly as it relates to Aboriginal people and communities. Both this staff member and the ICLO receive on the job research training from the Director and the senior researcher within the CIS. Both the Administration Officer and the ICLO are developing their own research projects under the guidance of the senior researcher and are now looking at undertaking more formal research studies.

The Administration Officer is a female with qualifications and background in land conservation and management and climate change, while the ICLO is a young Aboriginal man with a degree in Business from the Broome Campus. Both staff members are from the Kimberley area with strong community and family links. As young Aboriginal people, they are also role models for young Aboriginal men and women. This mentoring programme is ensuring that senior, qualified staff in leadership roles in the University, are providing mentoring and training for younger Aboriginal people.

Mr Patrick Dodson is Adjunct Professor in the School of Arts & Sciences where the CIS is located. Professor Dodson is a positive role model for many Aboriginal staff, students and community members who are involved in UNDA Broome.

4. Specific Strategies

Improvement in the literacy and numeracy levels of Aboriginal students

The UNDA Broome Campus delivers the Course in Applied Vocational Study Skills (CAVSS) to VET students enrolled on the campus. As you may be aware, CAVSS is a programme that provides literacy and numeracy support to students by providing an academic staff member to assist the lecturer delivering the unit of study to students. This programme is another strategy the Campus is employing in an attempt to support students with their literacy and numeracy requirements necessary for successful completion of their course.

The Broome Campus is also exploring the establishment of study centres in a number of locations in the Kimberley. These study centres will be set up primarily to assist Indigenous UNDA students with their literacy, numeracy and study skills, required for successful completion of their tertiary studies.

Many of these Aboriginal students are studying externally and require further support and assistance. A number of support options are being considered, for example, the use of technology to provide a direct link between lecturers and students and the delivery of unit content. This innovative, but simple and practical strategy will have an impact on attracting and retaining Indigenous students until the completion of their studies.

An additional purpose of this strategy is to take education out to the communities, rather than always having the expectation that Indigenous students must come to the Campus; many do not wish to or cannot attend on Campus because of family and community responsibilities. It is a strategy that will have a flow on effect on the community in terms of strengthening its overall education attainment and providing role models for others, especially young Aboriginal men and women and children.