

**Submission
No 54**

INQUIRY INTO OVERCOMING INDIGENOUS DISADVANTAGE

Organisation: Redfern Residents for Reconciliation

Name: Ms Gai Smith

INQUIRY INTO CLOSING THE GAP – OVERCOMING INDIGENOUS DISADVANTAGE

REDFERN RESIDENTS FOR RECONCILIATION

There is a feeling that outback and rural areas, including remote communities, are given a lot of attention, and that areas like Redfern are forgotten about and/or neglected. Redfern, with or despite its recently escalating problems, is a vibrant, dynamic, highly significant community. [see Appendix 1]

Communication and negotiation are the essential first steps, supported by adequate funding for services, infrastructure, personnel and healing processes. Of course it is tricky.

'Collective trauma has resulted in passive resistance. It is inherited, so deeply ingrained and inbred that people are not even conscious of it any more. They just do it, it is just passed on. Foolhardy actions in the past such as removal resulted in disempowerment.'

People in the community want Redfern Waterloo and the bigger scene cleaned up, they are heartbroken at the ravages that have been allowed to occur.

Closing the gap covers everything, and communication is essential to every aspect.

These suggestions for opening up and facilitating effective communication have been offered. This is in addition to having Aboriginal organisations represented on formal committees etc.

Community forums

- Open space / Open dialogue / Informal
- Put on a feed, have a barbecue
- Allow time. If it takes a few days, so be it.
- Offer the opportunity, then put it in the hands of the community
- A couple of people from the community to lead, people who are respected, known and trusted.
- Allow for the full diversity of people to be included, no matter how marginalised.
- People would need to talk among themselves to work things out, then move towards putting ideas and strategies forward
- More than just consultation, make the commitment of a contract when relevant
- Whitefellas come to forums and take over. Offer options, whitefellas sitting at back and listening, whitefellas speak when all blackfellas have spoken etc.

It is as simple as asking people what they want:-

- What do you want?
- What do you want to see in your future. 50 years from now? etc

Michael Gravener is an Irish-English Australian who works full time as the Coordinator of the Settlement Neighbourhood Centre. He has firsthand experience of working with young people and families. He can give concrete examples of government interaction that has not worked, specific examples as to why there are problems, and he can flesh out the issues we can only allude to on paper. We recommend that you call Michael Gravener as a witness. He will be able to verbally provide material and case studies that cannot be committed to paper.

Aletha Penrith, an Aboriginal woman of Yuin and Yorta Yorta heritage, would be prepared to speak at a hearing. She has come back and forth to the Redfern community from the age of 16 to 32.

Joe Correy is a Lebanese Australian man who was born and raised in Redfern, and has lived here all his life. He has close connections with the Aboriginal community and would be prepared to give input.

Terms of reference

1(b) the impact of the following factors on the current lifetime expectancy

ii) health and wellbeing

The Aboriginal Medical Service should be consulted on this aspect.

People need more access to counselling and healing modalities, to help shift the states they find themselves in. There needs to be more access to wholistic health care, and more Aboriginal health workers trained.

The Aboriginal Children's Service appears to have been stripped of its funding to carry out its foster care work last year. We would like information about this, and if verified, to have DoCS justification for doing so, questioned and this funding decision re-examined. There is also a question about funding for the Mac Silva Men's Hostel in Waterloo,

Diet remains a problem for some despite initiatives over the years. Some younger children like good food but they do not get enough exposure to it. Young men and women who attend Eora College enjoy eating at Yaama Dhiyaan, but there is nothing providing healthy food at night and people are forced to choose the MacDonaldis option. This is a broader health issue that some would like addressed.

Incentives to attend school such as breakfast & lunch would help in some areas. Darlington Public School has sometimes had a limited program that could be extended.

Mechanisms are needed whereby abuse perpetrators are not enabled to return to the community, with something like a five year ban, enacted by the community.

Recreation for young people

There are some wonderful community spaces and activities for young people. The Settlement Neighbourhood Centre, the Redfern Community Centre on the western side of Redfern and PCYC in its present location in east Redfern near the park offer indoors youth activity centre much needed in those parts of the suburb.

We have requested that Michael Gravener, Coordinator of the Settlement Neighbourhood Centre be called as a witness, and he will be able to give information about the programs.

However community spaces which are open until late in the evening, especially during the weekend, where kids can go but also where families could go, are limited. Existing places like the community centre could provide alcohol & drug free entertainment and possibly some sort of food

and beverage service. For instance a regular movie night, or dances such as they used to hold at Redfern Town Hall or at the Black Theatre in the seventies. It would also be a way of providing intergenerational exchanges and community building experiences.

More cultural activities are needed as they seem to work in building esteem and diverting attention from drugs and alcohol.

Lots of sport, sport and more sport

Programs such as Midnight Basketball in 2007, Muralappi programs and trips, Sunset surfing in 2005 have demonstrated their usefulness in developing resilience with physical and emotional benefits.

http://www.midnightbasketball.org.au/index_files/Page602.htm <http://www.niceshorts.com.au/watch.asp?video=1635>

<http://www.abc.net.au/message/tv/ms/s1381165.htm>

There is a widespread need for facilities for sport, swimming and recreation halls and spaces.

iii) education

Montessori child care and preschooling

The Gamarada Montessori Learning Centre has been voluntarily offering a playgroup and early childhood program for children aged from birth to six years of age in Redfern since 1998, supplementing the longstanding and successful Murawina Children's Service. It offers an example of how the Montessori method is effective for Aboriginal families. It has received minimal support, runs on a shoestring, and is reliant on goodwill for space. In 2006 it was offered space in Surry Hills, making it unavailable to the Redfern population it targets, allowing a different population to benefit from its low charges. Since preschool education has become a focused priority, it would make sense for initiatives such as this to be strengthened, and learnt from.

This centre operates with parents present, so is effective on that level as well. Parents say that the style is important for their children – learning by watching and listening with modelling is consistent with traditional learning styles, and the hands-on, non-competitive approach instils confidence. Children are not afraid to try things.

The Montessori Foundation would support further exploration of this. See Appendix 2

<http://www.gamarada.net.au/>

A lot of students attend Waratah Learning Centre for a year or two then go back to mainstream schools. However there are reports that some young people have records that discourage schools from wanting to allow them back, so some stay at Waratah but some get stuck in limbo, too young to go to Eora, and fall into the syndrome of having nothing to do. One community member's suggestion is to recognise that some young people, having had a bad experience at the end of primary and the beginning of high school, begin to mature and see the merits of school. They need a way back in, occasions where they are asked what they want to do, and the way back made easy.

Redfern Public School was closed in 2002. This is still worthy of comment for a number of reasons. With population projections indicating the need for more school facilities in this area in the future, longer term planning is needed. Despite the reduction in student numbers **at that time**, the school was an important community focus. Selling the site to the federal based ILC means it will be used for a targeted national program i.e. catering for the elite, not based on community needs. To do this in Redfern was a blatant disregard for the needs of the local Aboriginal community who were not even invited to the announcement of the project.

Learning outcomes in schools

Recently the essential direction of improving educational outcomes for Aboriginal students has been strengthened, as it must. It is to be expected that this will continue to be a high priority, and efforts will be made to increase effectiveness.

Alternative options

Other forms of education could be explored. Aletha Penrith tells how her life was turned around because her mother was able to take her to conferences. The inspiration of being exposed to that

calibre of speakers and participants was life changing. She suggests grants to send young people to a variety of conferences.

Other forms of access to good speakers and role models could easily be set up, such as the Koorie Toastmasters programme that operated from Redfern Community Centre a couple of years ago.

Technology

The have and have-not divide of Internet access is seen as being at the luxury end of needs, but is relevant to the literacy of students whom school has not reached. Young people are using social networking a lot, for instance Bebo, which offers a practical reason for developing reading competence, however they are limited to internet cafes and community centre lab hours. Connections and computers in homes might be something to consider down the track, but this also begs the question of access to recreational centres, local library branches etc in the evening and on weekends.

Professional development of all teachers

The shift from general Aboriginal perspectives to learning outcomes had to occur. However there has been left a void in developing teachers' understanding about incorporating Aboriginal perspectives into the curriculum, and updating the very poor understanding of history and society, carried over from the curriculum they were delivered [from the 50s on]

There was a brief spurt in the late 80s, when the implementation of, and professional development about, the Aboriginal Education Policy was mandatory. There has been minimal professional development of teachers for more than a decade, due to changes in the model favouring in-house, do-it-yourself activity, and a reduction in consultancy. The state government has slashed statewide services and consultancy, such as the 1990 cuts to the Aboriginal Education Unit. The only professional learning opportunity visibly offered for a long time in Aboriginal curriculum and learning has been a Commonwealth funded program.

To put it simply, there are some very gifted and committed teachers who get it right, but many, even those wanting to teach Aboriginal studies, can only deliver dot art and Dreaming stories. The appropriateness of that is questionable on a number of counts. Secondary education makes up the shortfall for many students, but those foundation years have an important role to play. History and inclusion across the curriculum are important, but also the understanding of why some people are in the state they are in must go a long way to relieving racist and blaming attitudes.

Why is this significant? First of all, Aboriginal students need their perspective, identity and culture represented in all curriculum. **All** students move from school into society, delivering essential services, establishing and maintaining infrastructure and providing human resources. They either deliver it, manage it or go into positions which establish policy.

The question here is, how can our educational system interrupt the perpetuation of racism in this country at so many levels, AND equip future workers to deal effectively with the challenges of disadvantage that are being addressed in this inquiry?

i.e. education **OF** Aboriginal students is beginning to be addressed, and must be strengthened, but education **ABOUT** Aboriginal peoples needs to resume. It should be mandatory for all teachers.

The question remains of how people whose education had this shortfall can be educated later in life. Even if that is not solved, there should be an attempt at generational change, and that can't happen while teachers are not developed.

iv) employment

It was inappropriate to remove the CDEP from Redfern Aboriginal Corporation (RAC) and we request that you discuss with someone from RAC the needs of the community.

Focusing narrowly on employment outcomes fails to meet all the needs and some of the unique circumstances of people. As Tanya Plibersek, the federal Member for Sydney said when DEWR made the cuts *'Regardless of our best efforts ... despite their desire and efforts to work, these groups find it hard'* Some job seekers have considerable barriers, and community service provided meaningful work while developing skills and job readiness. Forcing people into the job market too soon cuts off their access to training and so forces them to the bottom of the job pile.

We understand CDEP had its flaws, but it met some of the challenges of providing meaningful employment, and has value as a transitional step. In terms of both employment and self esteem, flexible, appropriate options need to be available. For most extending employer incentives for a longer fixed term transition period would provide valuable job experience and customised, hands on training.

But for some people other factors, including substance abuse or chronic illness, mean that it is unlikely that they will ever be able to join the mainstream job market. The CDEP funded RAC employment opportunities should be reinstated for them so they can have the self esteem that comes from making a valued and positive contribution to the local community.

There have been complaints about Centrelink. Their main interest is to place people, and little attention is paid to what people want to do. Young people want job satisfaction these days, something suitable, different to the 'old days' when people knew they had to just go out and work.

v) housing

The Pemulwuy Project plans of the Aboriginal Housing Company to redevelop the Block are being impeded by the state government. Redevelopment of the Block is central to revitalising a place of Aboriginal significance to the Redfern and wider community.

It is understood that the government is weighing up the financial value of nearby land and resources, wishing to move 'black' people away from this central and visible piece of real estate. There are class issues here as well as race.

It is time this is turned on its head. Redfern is hugely significant to Aboriginal people. There is a vibrant community and many vital services operating, despite recent problems with the intrusion of the drug trade since the nineties, and despite the fact that many non-Aboriginal people still do not wish to look beyond stereotypes.

The only interest evidenced and expressed by the RWA appears to be rezoning to stop the housing component of the plan, in an attempt to recoup maximum dollars from nearby land along the railway corridor, which is owned by the government and about to be sold with a concept plan

for its development with residential and commercial components. The RWA appears to think that it is compensating the AHC by increasing the land value by giving it the opportunity to use it for commercial purposes by changing the zoning, but by reducing residential floor space, it is stopping the Aboriginal Housing Company from fulfilling the purpose it was set up for in 1972, to accommodate the homeless, many of whom assisted in early renovations. That group of people has passed on, contributing to the early death rate. Does this not make poignant, at the least, the fact that innovative plans for housing in 2008 are being blocked by the state government?

As well as much needed housing, the plans incorporate a hostel which is aimed to fulfil the need for short term accommodation both for people accessing medical treatment and for distance education students attending block lectures. Provision of this service would directly address the issue of closing the gap in health and education outcomes.

People need to see practical things dealt with, basic human needs catered for. As well as addressing issues of housing, the Pemulwuuy Project envisioned by the AHC would be a source of pride, illustrating initiative and inspiration. It could be a source of pride for the city of Sydney itself, if the people were valued, and supported in their own wish to have a thriving, healthy community. Having a flourishing Aboriginal community so central and visible should be a GOOD thing, for ALL.

This is an instance where New South Wales' and Sydney's notorious interest in property and development should be suspended. Far more important is a visible interest in and support for the Aboriginal community. In terms of identity and faith in government process, redevelopment of the Block, as AHC and the community wants it, would have a far greater impact on closing the gap and reducing disadvantage than the actual housing and facilities on the block itself.

We request that

- AHC's redevelopment of the Block be supported
- The Department of Planning waive fees for assessment of the Concept Plan, as was done in the first instance. This process should be prioritised.

vi) incarceration and the criminal justice system

Police community relations

Policing relations in Redfern still need to be addressed. Much appears to have been done as described by Clover Moore, then Member for Bligh, now Sydney, in the NSW Legislative Assembly in March 2006.

<http://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/prod/parliament/HansArt.nsf/V3Key/LA20060329041>

The situation is still delicate and difficult. There is a legacy of distrust, as explained in the submission by REDWatch. It is understood that police staff face a difficult job, and some have worked hard to improve relationships with the community, however there are two issues of huge concern.

1. There are reports of incidents, as recent as the week of writing this. People observe that some police don't understand how psychologically damaged and mixed up some young people are, having suffered not just physical violence but mental and verbal abuse in their lives. Police are reported swearing obscenely, making threats, and talking violently to young children in situations, seemingly not realising that it is not going to get the response they want, and is not what the young people need. The cycle needs to be broken. A tough line is needed, but a different type of behaviour needs to be modelled, and employed.

There are also reports of physical violence. Lack of respect, 'us vs. them' mentality, lack of consideration of issues of poverty, and outright racism are examples of concerns people have.

2. There are also reports of incidents where people who have caused no problems, are treated a certain way, which is not warranted. Aggravation such as this is uncalled for, and seriously inappropriate. It is indicative of the racism which still appears to exist in this state.

See articles in Appendix 3.

Drug dealing continues, but people still feel, and are, harassed.

The role of Aboriginal Community Liaison Officers is vital, but they are between a rock and a hard place. This is exacerbated while policing is so problematic. The implementation of the Police Strategic Direction Policy in Redfern, and other urban centres, faces extra problems as often the people who fulfil the roles outlined in the document don't have the same relationship to an often transient population who have moved from elsewhere, as would exist in a country town.

Some things people suggest are

- More training / more effective training in anti-racism and cross-cultural communication
- More education / more effective education in Aboriginal studies - culture and history
- More stable staff, especially the person at the helm, who can lead by example - relevant to places like Redfern, and smaller regional places. Why would it not be a priority to improve the situation with a more stable, more educated and developed, more interested, more strategic police staff?

- A strong unit, in the police building, where people can make complaints, with immediate follow-up
- An independent, separate body to carry out investigations. It is understood that the police culture is not going to change overnight, but they need to be made accountable.
- Monitoring of activity
- Consequences for breaches of behaviour
- Consideration of circle sentencing
- Different strategies for young people e.g. three cautions for under 18 year olds.

In *Redfern-Waterloo: a Report on Progress*, February 2005 the following was one of a number of strategies.

14. Local police will undergo additional Aboriginal cultural awareness training to increase their understanding of such issues and positively impact on relations between police and the Aboriginal community.

We would welcome feedback on how this is going, the challenges that still need addressing and why negative reports are still occurring.

Justice

In order to re-engage the Redfern-Waterloo community, many believe the TJ Hickey inquiry needs to be re-opened, with people seeing some justice happening. People are concerned that there wasn't a proper inquiry; as much wasn't addressed. This has continued ramifications for the ACLOs at Redfern station.

b) Incarceration

'Men are going in and out and nothing changes. If they have exposure to the prison system, they are more likely to go downhill.' *'People who are continually re-offending are coming out junkies.'* *'No one is coming out of gaol improved.'*

Suggestions from people include:

- More organisations are needed to do outreach into prisons.
- Alternatives are needed e.g. cultural camps to develop pride, respect and culture, in a way people can identify with. Land could be made available to do that.

People's lives sometimes fall apart when they are released. A half-way house, with supported accommodation is needed, to stop people becoming homeless, and support them to stay off the substances, which some have relished the opportunity dry out from. They need exposure to healthy social patterns, with a wholistic approach that would support them to get housing, eat better, get further education, set up informal mentors etc. This could be discussed with Babana Men's Group as their proposal for a day centre would meet some of these needs.

Another strategy offered by a community member is to get people working in the community. With criminal records, people often can't get work. If they are able to contribute something positive, they are less likely to look to want to do the other stuff. A drug habit is sometimes resumed after gaol simply to give to order and structure to empty boring meaningless days – something to do. Without opportunities, nothing changes. (See also Employment)

We reiterate our request for Michael Gravener to be called as a witness, as he works with young people and visits them in prison, and verbal testimony will be useful.

1(c) previous Social Issues committee reports containing reference to Aboriginal people – and assess the progress of government in implementing adopted report recommendations.

We refer the Committee to

- The Redfern and Waterloo Inquiry Interim and Final Report – Inquiry into issues relating to Redfern and Waterloo 2004
<http://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/prod/parlment/committee.nsf/0/77220A893AEA0E16CA256F6C00098A80>

According to *Two ways together* the Redfern Waterloo Authority is Redfern's partner organisation. Establishment of the RWA was announced in 2004 '*to shake-up the area and renew the last part of the city fringe*', superseding the Redfern Waterloo Partnership Project (RWPP). One of its briefs was to redevelop Redfern Railway Station. [Standing Committee on social issues. p 127]

Not only have structures, processes and plans neglected important areas, but consultation by the RWA has been **glaringly absent**. There is no partnership, no community participation. There is no accountability, including no clear criteria for assessing whether or not a particular government institution is meeting its statutory requirements. There need to be mechanisms set up so that Aboriginal organisations can provide input and feedback, e.g. reference groups. Work needs to be done setting up a structure for this that will work. It is essential to find out what Aboriginal organisations want, and that will take time.

The constant refrain from the RWA is '*There is no funding*'.

It needs to be noted that the past record of inadequate funding means people are naturally suspicious. Fundamental communication and negotiation need to change, and funding priorities need to change. Adequate service provision is needed, and the cost for that needs to be fully covered, adequately, not half-heartedly, for a group of people who have grounds for suspicion.

The actions of the RWA have worked directly against Aboriginal people, adding to the dispossession. This is the very opposite of the empowering, strengthening identity, and increasing self esteem and pride that is needed.

1(d) the Federal Government intervention in the Northern Territory – potential programs / initiatives that may or may not have relevance in terms of their application in New South Wales

There is a groundswell of concern about many aspects of the NT intervention, such as

- overturning the Racial Discrimination Act
- the racism implicit in quarantining welfare payments for all
- human rights issues, for example inefficient implementation of storecards, removal of rights
- under-servicing that still hasn't been addressed
- the overlooking of pre-existing programs needing support e.g. women's night patrols, safe houses

- the lack of focus on children's needs, and complete disregard for the recommendations of the *Little children are sacred* report
- entrenched paternalism underlying the way decisions are made, further breaking down trust and agreement.
- bureaucratic powers and management being put in place rather than empowering self-determination
- the folly of not liaising sufficiently with the people. If there is no inclusion of Aboriginal people in the "ownership" of the project, it is destined to fail.
- the demonisation of Aboriginal men, and racist stereotyping, by the sensationalising political and media introduction, and the style of the intervention.

It serves to demonstrate how easy it still is for governments to make decisions on Aboriginal people's behalf, with no understanding of, or connection to, the realities of their lives. In spite of state and federal government apologies for policies of the past based on a "Whitefellas know what is best for Blackfellas" mentality, that mentality STILL underlies current policy.

What is needed is **funding** for the recommendations of the report *Breaking the Silence: Creating the Future. Addressing child sexual assault in Aboriginal communities in NSW* released in 2006 by the Aboriginal Sexual Assault Taskforce.

Any improvements to living conditions and support services must begin with appropriate consultation and negotiation, with a wide range of different and diverse people and groups, according respect to all, and recognising varying preferences for style of communication. [Case in point being the lack of access many people have to this very inquiry.]

What is also needed is strengthening and support for existing and proposed services. e.g. Redfern's Mudgin-Gal Women's Centre, underfunded to date, The Settlement and the Men's Centre proposed by Babana Men's Group. A top down approach is a poor alternative to supporting and resourcing services 'of the people, by the people.'

One of the problems appears to be the imposition of a bureaucratic plan over the top of existing Aboriginal-run or partnered services, neglecting to adequately fund and strengthen those very services, and not tapping into the experience, knowledge and wisdom that exists in communities.

1(e) opportunities for strengthening cultural resilience within Aboriginal communities in New South Wales with a focus on language, cultural identity, economic development and self determination.

Healing. The first step has been taken with the NSW government apology to the stolen generations in 1997 and the Federal parliament apology to the Stolen Generations in 2008. That needs to be followed through with processes that will continue the healing that has been enabled. Some of these will be directly related to cultural identity, and some will incorporate suggestions made for stolen generations such as 'belonging places' and accessible records.

This needs to be culturally significant, and sustained.

Implementation of recommendations in the *Bringing them home* report need to be evaluated, continued, and moved along. This will include things of value to the whole community.

For example:

- Funding is needed for recording of stories of stolen generations members who wish to do so.
- Research grants and support is needed for individuals who wish to research their family lineage and histories. This needs to be done as soon as possible, while people are still alive to pass on their knowledge. It is essential that people have the opportunity to research their identity and culture. Many wish to lay (rebuild) stable foundations to make sure there is knowledge to pass on to the children and future generations. Reconnecting is the first step, but recovering lost family history and heritage is also important.

One local woman's father was removed at two years old, and her mother at four. She has not had access to her family history and stories. She says she feels the need to do this so strongly, there is a danger that she may be impelled to do it anyway without support. That raises implications of being out of touch with Centrelink, not having resources and being driven to thieving. Cut off from welfare, DoCS could intervene with the children, and the recurring cycle would continue. All to illustrate the complexity of people's lives, and how many decision makers without community connections can't begin to imagine the needs.

Compensation could cover aspects such as this, rebuilding and restructuring family foundations, ensuring social inheritance as well as practical reparations.

On a secondary, supportive level, there needs to be recognition, celebration, commemoration and education throughout the wider community. Kaye Mundine, the previous Aboriginal Cultural Officer with City of Sydney has a favourite saying; '*We need to colour in the city.*' We request that Redfern-Waterloo and wider Sydney does colour in the city. Examples are

- The diggers monument that Babana proposes
- An Aboriginal Cultural Centre in Sydney for visitors and international tourists
- Plaques throughout the city on places and sites of significance to Aboriginal peoples.
- More use of Aboriginal words in naming places
- More inclusion in public art
- A historical walking tour to add to the TEN existing ones for City of Sydney
<http://www.cityofsydney.nsw.gov.au/AboutSydney/VisitorGuidesInformation/HistoricalWalkingTours.asp>

On a more subtle level, continuous exposure to the versions of history that celebrate Cook as the discoverer, and everything that goes with that approach, creates resistance in people. It is vital that Aboriginal history is recognised. Similarly, the patriotic nationalistic Howard-fostered ethnocentricism, that tries to "own" Australian identity, leaves Aboriginal people with no room to move but squirm. Still, despite growing awareness, media coverage has a long way to go to be inclusive. Not black skinned people who behave like the dominant group but blackfellas in all their diversity. The general public needs to get used to seeing a wider variety of people and personality types, because young people growing up need to see themselves represented. There also needs to be more publishing for children.

Access to culture and identity

Inclusion in education and learning about culture in a variety of ways is all the more important for city children who don't have access and exposure to their families' ancestral country. e.g. City kids out going bush – fishing / experiencing a non urban Aboriginal lifestyle. Parents are happy that it starts small e.g. with song and dance, then moves towards teaching languages and more complex aspects of culture.

Self-determination

Aboriginal run organisations are essential, but it needs to be said that they also need

- to be adequately funded
- to be transparent and accountable, with community access to constitution, laws etc., with funding for governance training
- to have full community representation
- to be more community driven

Aboriginal organisations are suffering. They also need their culture revived. With people coming to urban areas from a range of different nations, clans, language groups, and then being subjected to the pressures of city life and all of the unresolved tensions and social issues, they have coped as best they could. If sometimes that has resulted in nepotism and families looking out for their own needs above the larger community, one can understand. However there is a generation now talking about regaining unity, and becoming more community oriented.

CONCLUSION

Unfortunately anyone who has broad connections in their life must come to the conclusion that racism is rampant in Australia, and that includes New South Wales. That racism is both deliberate and unaware - from the constitution, through some government departments, to individuals.

What would it be like if the first peoples were actually put first? Damage to self esteem, and recurrent encounters with less than adequate social structures, play a role in leading to, and perpetuating, a cycle of disadvantage, where despair is a logical outcome.

There are many areas where the state government could better support Aboriginal communities.

Here is a preliminary list of pointers

- Reverse the trend towards mainstreaming and assimilation, and cater for difference !
- Strengthen and support Aboriginal-run programs.
- Listen and consult, widely and appropriately. Negotiate with all sections of the community, and allow time.
- Make long term commitments to working in partnership with communities, as well as supporting their moving towards independence and autonomy
- Provide or support adequate services, and provide adequate, recurrent funding
- Address the underlying issues.
- Break the cycle
- Make sure Healing programs etc. are ongoing, with adequate follow up
- Understand that people's wariness is justified, given the poor track record.
- Give people the freedom to be who they are, and they will grow with that.
- Face the racism in Australia, including New South Wales, and begin addressing it.

We haven't canvassed a lot of people, but have thrown in a few comments from different people to illustrate the major points, and to illustrate that it is not hard to consult. People want change,

development and growth, they want to be respected, they want their children to live. They know what they need. With sustained, genuine support from the wider population and government agencies, they want to be enabled, empowered, encouraged, and enlivened to create change in their communities instead of feeling powerless and helpless.

Appendix 2 Education

Montessori in Indigenous Communities

Montessori

Montessori Children's Foundation
<http://montessorifoundation.org/>

The Montessori approach is particularly well received within Aboriginal communities for the following reasons:

- Indigenous culture is respected and reflected in custom-made teaching resources
- All children in Montessori classrooms progress at their own speed
- There is no emphasis on competition
- Montessori recognises the crucial importance of the first years of life and offers practical means to support the optimal development of infants and young children
- Montessori is a consistent and long-term approach
- Montessori has shown a long-term commitment to specific indigenous communities and trust has been built with elders, community members and parents
- Bilingual programs are easily implemented in the Montessori environments
- Montessori has a strong emphasis on parent involvement and parent education

- Children become actively and productively engaged in the learning activities due to the combination of movement, sensorial learning and the ability to freely choose an activity of work

- The importance of observation and modelling positive behaviours and activities is a learning style appreciated by indigenous communities

Montessori programs have led to positive learning outcomes as well as increased self-esteem and contentment amongst the children. This has a beneficial effect on the communities as parents feel more encouraged and become more actively involved in their children's education.

Appendix 3

Police activities must be monitored

Joseph Correy *South Sydney Herald* February 2008

The relationship between the police and many Aboriginal people in Redfern-Waterloo is pitiful. The Aboriginal community faces the humiliation of searches that rarely result in an arrest, and have no effective means of redress. The process whereby police investigate complaints made against other police officers defies logic. It discourages people from reporting harassment. This situation creates mistrust and suspicion towards the law, blurring the line between right and wrong in a community that is susceptible to crime. Furthermore, it drives a wedge between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people because the law is applied differently to different sections of the community.

Police deny that their relationship with the Indigenous community is damaged. But ask an Aboriginal person about how officers behave on the beat and a different story is told. In December I stopped at the Block to say Merry Christmas to an Aboriginal woman I'd known since I was five years old. When I left, the police threw her into a paddy-wagon, searched her and accused her of selling drugs to white people.

A similar incident occurred a few days earlier when a white person visited a friend on the Block. Police searched him as he walked home and accused him of buying drugs.

Is it inconceivable to police that people from different backgrounds in Redfern could have a relationship that doesn't involve the sale of narcotics?

Complaints weren't made about any of these occurrences because the complaints system is flawed. I experienced its failures when I lodged a complaint with the Ombudsman after a teenager was dragged out of my car near Leichhardt Pool. He was searched in front of his little brother and the detective accused us – we were shirtless, dripping water and in board shorts – of acting suspiciously and told us to “stay in Redfern”.

When I complained, the Ombudsman reported that the police officers involved had refuted my account and the car was pulled over because of a crooked P-Plate. Investigation closed.

Experiences like this stop people from reporting injustices. I've seen teenagers covered in bruises and scrapes after encounters with police but they think it futile to lodge a complaint. A man I know was capsicum-sprayed when he opened his door because he heard a noise outside his Surry Hills home. The police did not apologise. Rather they handcuffed him before letting him go without charge or explanation.

Where is the accountability? Incidents like these will continue to occur every day until fairness is restored to the justice system and the activities of police are monitored

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Questions for Redfern police

Joseph Correy *South Sydney Herald* February 2008

The relationship between some of the Aboriginal community and Redfern Police has become so dysfunctional that complaints against officers are rarely made despite claims of rampant harassment circulating in Redfern and Waterloo.

Aboriginal activist Lyall Munro said the police practice of constantly strip-searching Aboriginals, and rarely making arrests, had a devastating effect on the Indigenous community.

"Every day police pull our young people up on the street and strip search them, there are white police men searching young black women," he said. "It's inhuman. How many arrests come from the strip searches? The police won't answer that because the answer is hardly any."

Mr Munro said police had a free reign to harass Aboriginal people because of a flawed complaints process whereby police investigate allegations made against other police officers even if they're made to the Ombudsman.

"Aboriginal people can't get redress through this system no matter how many times we make complaints against police," he said. "I've been involved in major complaints that have been made to the Ombudsman and they go nowhere, so what hope does a black teenager have?"

"It devastates the community when Aboriginal people can't get redress. Young people don't forget how they've been treated, and parents feel disempowered because they can't do anything about police intimidating their children."

Redfern Police local area commander, superintendent Mark Walton, said the relationship between police and the Aboriginal community had improved and complaints about police conduct were rare.

"Reasonable grounds to search somebody is established in the mind of an officer before they activate those powers," he said. "They may have made observations in regard to a person or that person might have a history [that makes his/her actions suspicious]."

"The police's job is a very difficult one. Are we going to get it right all the time? Probably not. Is every contact with police going to be a positive one? Probably not. But we do aim to train police so they properly apply their powers."

Superintendent Walton said he was confident that complaints against police officers were thoroughly investigated. "If people are concerned about particular incidents and how they are treated by Redfern Police then I encourage them to discuss them with the duty officer at Redfern police station," he said. "The complaints are investigated and determined by the evidence, the same as any other allegation."

NSW Council of Civil Liberties vice president Pauline Wright said the lack of police accountability led to systematic harassment of communities. "The complaint process where police investigate police is far from ideal," she said. "In most cases the only evidence is the account of the police officer and account of the alleged victim."

"It's unrealistic to think that police will take the word of an Aboriginal person over the word of a fellow police officer whom they have a personal relationship with. Until the system changes I don't think we'll see the relationship between the police and Aboriginal communities improve."

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Are some Redfern Police officers failing Aboriginal citizens?

Joseph Correy *South Sydney Herald* August 2006

Aboriginal man David Beaumont, 37, was fostered into a white family when he was a child. Two months ago he returned to Redfern as a coordinator for the community centre on The Block. Redfern was the place where his mother died and he wanted to learn more about himself from its residents. He also learned of the racism they sometimes face from local police.

Beaumont told the *South Sydney Herald* that his involvement in an incident attended by Redfern Police has led him to conclude that local officers are failing to serve and protect the Aboriginal community of South Sydney. In late June, a work colleague of Beaumont's had her bag stolen from Redfern RSL. He saw a man and woman with his friend's belongings outside Redfern Police Station and confronted the pair to ask for her belongings back. Beaumont said, "I got everything back after 20 minutes but during that time I was scratched, verbally abused and spat on. I can't believe how long the police took to respond to an incident right outside their door."

When the police arrived at the scene, Beaumont said he was treated the same way as the people who had stolen his work colleague's bag. "I stepped forward to the police, with my hand full of cards that had been stolen from my colleague. I told the police what happened, and that I'd been harassed and spat upon to get them back."

"After that, all the police did was move us on. They paid no respect to the actual situation that had occurred. They didn't pursue the matter. The police have a duty of care and are being paid to serve and protect the community. What did they do? Nothing."

"We were stereotyped and stigmatised. Despite me declaring my case, still nothing has been done," he said. Beaumont has made a complaint to the commander of Redfern Police Station and has declared his intention to pursue the matter until a formal apology is issued.

Lawyers from the Public Interest Advocacy Centre (PIAC), however, claim that the complaints system is flawed because it relies on self-regulation. The PIAC told a parliamentary hearing in July that the vast majority of complaints against police officers in NSW were investigated by other police officers. According to PIAC, the NSW Ombudsman does not investigate complaints but rather reviews the police response to them.

Findings by PIAC are supported by the NSW Ombudsman's response to an accusation of harassment previously reported in the *South Sydney Herald*. According to the complaint, in January 2005, a car containing three Aboriginal children was stopped while returning from Leichhardt Park Aquatic Centre. The children, aged between nine and fourteen, were ordered out of a car, searched and questioned. The group were detained for half an hour and when allowed to leave were told: "Stay in Redfern" and "if you come back you'll be pulled over every time." The NSW Ombudsman responded that no adverse finding had been made in relation to the police concerned.

Another Redfern resident who has experienced racism from local police is Elliott Yancey, 49. He declared that changes should be made not just to the complaints system but also to how policing is conducted in Redfern. Yancey, who is of African-American background, works as a consultant for companies at the Australian Technology Park. In 2005, he walked past two police officers that were standing in front of Redfern Station while on his way to work. Yancey alleges that he overheard one of the police officers say, "That's a well-dressed boong."

Yancey said the incident was an example of the inflammatory treatment of Aboriginal residents by police. He said such treatment fuelled bad attitudes and tension within Redfern. "The cultural training, for being aware of Koori people, isn't good enough. Police are not well equipped. They come with preconceived notions, and ideas, they have quick tongues and are bitter. Police are not all bad guys. They're trying to pull things together and create some harmony, but they themselves don't know how to because they haven't been trained adequately."

A black and white perspective on life in the Block

Joel Gibson *Sydney Morning Herald* April 18, 2007

"I GUESS I'd like to experience being white for a while and walk amongst the white people without anyone flinching," says Sonya Brindle, 40.

A first-year film student at Eora TAFE and the daughter of the Aboriginal activist Ken Brindle, she was escorting a visiting Hong Kong filmmaker around the Block in Redfern last week when she says they were pulled over by police in an unmarked car.

"He was carrying camera gear and everything. They thought I was taking him down there to rob him and wanted to know if he was safe. It was sort of embarrassing." ...

<http://www.smh.com.au/news/arts/a-black-and-white-perspective-on-life-in-the-block/2007/04/17/1176696838322.html>

Promises! Promises! We've heard it all before

South Sydney Herald September 2007

I'm sure many people remember the 1992 ABC documentary Cop it Sweet. The docco followed Redfern police on the daily rounds. It showed the racism that seems to be part of police culture. The camera s caught it all with some of the Redfern Police making some incredibly racist comments, reports Trevor Davies Have you heard Column in the South Sydney Herald of September 2007.

There was an outcry at the time and promises of reform. Lots of good things started to happen. Then came the tragedy of TJ Hickey's death, the subsequent riots and again promises that Redfern Police would do better.

Last month a Sydney paper reported that South's CEO Peter Holmes a Court had made a complaint to the police. The complaint came after police stopped Souths players Dean Widders and Jeremy Smith for no reason.

"They were pulled over by the police outside Erskineville Oval – our training ground – for no real reason," Rabbitohs' co-owner Peter Holmes a Court was quoted as saying. "They were asked to get out of the car. They asked why... The players were understandably upset at their treatment – pulled up only for their skin colour and for where they were." Peter sought and received assurances that police would stop intimidating dealings with members of the Aboriginal community. Peter shouldn't get too hopeful. I'm sure the inner city Aboriginal community has heard all the promises before.

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