



**JOURNEY
of
HEALING**

WAYS FORWARD

Report of a Workshop of Indigenous Workers

held 13 April 1999

at Boomanulla Oval, Narrabundah, ACT

Implementation Task Force

Canberra Journey of Healing Network

17 May 1999

Foreword

This report has been prepared by the Implementation Task Force of the Canberra Journey of Healing Network. The Implementation Task Force consists of volunteers working towards justice for Indigenous Australians. Beth Basnett has a background in counselling, community development and overseas aid. Ricki Dargavel has a background in social research, needs assessment, social planning and consultation, and is involved in community reconciliation. We are now being joined by Nicky Coles, who has a community counselling background and also is involved in reconciliation. This background is included because feedback from participants in the workshop indicated that the Indigenous community needs more information about us and what we are trying to do.

We acknowledge and appreciate financial assistance from the Chief Minister of the ACT, Ms Kate Carnell, to cover expenses of the workshop of Indigenous workers held on 13 April 1999. Ms Yodi Batzke assisted us by facilitating the workshop.

Contacts

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1. BACKGROUND

1.1 Sorry Day origins

A National Sorry Day Committee was formed to respond to a *Bringing them home* recommendation that a national sorry day be held. Community-based State and Territory committees were also formed.

The Canberra Sorry Day Network was formed in late 1997 as a coalition of community, church and Indigenous organisations and individuals. The Network organised a series of events for Sorry Day on 26 May 1998 - exactly a year after the *Bringing them home* report was tabled in Parliament.

The Network meets informally and is open to any interested person. It has continued to meet since Sorry Day, to try and progress implementation of the report's recommendations. Several sub-groups were formed, including an Implementation Task Force.

1.2 Journey of Healing

The National Sorry Day Committee will launch a Journey of Healing on 26 May 1999, the first anniversary of Sorry Day, to invite commitment to the long healing process.

The Canberra Network - now the Canberra Journey of Healing Network - has been meeting weekly to plan local events for the launch, which will include a ceremony in the Great Hall at Parliament House, a National Press Club lunch, and several other events.

A Community Progress Report is being prepared by the Canberra Journey of Healing Network's Implementation Task Force, to demonstrate actions taken to implement the recommendations since release of the *Bringing them home* report, and to identify what is yet to be done.

1.3 This report

The Canberra Network's Implementation Task Force has been meeting with Indigenous workers to talk about how services are working 'on the ground', and what the issues are. Since November 1998, we have met with about 25 Indigenous individuals and groups, as well as some relevant non-Indigenous people.

We have taken a broad approach to the *Bringing them home* recommendations in order to address the long term effects of child removal policies. This is consistent with Recommendation 42 which proposes '... a social justice package for Indigenous families and children' as well as '... implementation of the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody which address underlying issues of social disadvantage'.

On 13 April 1999 we convened a workshop of those Indigenous workers we had talked with and invited local elders. An Indigenous facilitator assisted the process. We have kept names confidential, while reporting on the issues raised.

This report outlines the issues raised by Indigenous workers during discussions (Part 2) and the various suggestions they made to address the issues (Part 3). It then documents the priorities for action that were established at the workshop (Part 4).

1.4 What happens next

This report of the Workshop of Indigenous Workers has been commented on by the participants before being provided to the Canberra Journey of Healing Network. It will form part of the Community Progress Report being prepared by the Implementation Task Force. This will be a community and Indigenous perspective of progress in implementing the *Bringing them home* recommendations. Letters inviting input to the Progress Report were sent to the Chief Minister and other Members of the ACT Legislative Assembly, ACT Federal representatives, some key community organisations and churches, and some local Indigenous organisations. Many of the letters were followed up and discussions held with relevant people.

Based on input from the above sources, a draft Community Progress Report is being released before the launch of the Journey of Healing on 26 May 1999. This will be closely followed on 28 May 1999 by a wider workshop of service providers, policy makers, members of the Journey of Healing Network and other interested people. The workshop will present the issues raised by Indigenous workers and presented here, and issues from the draft Community Progress Report. We want to discuss how service providers, the Journey of Healing Network and Indigenous communities can work together to further address the *Bringing them home* recommendations and associated issues.

The results of the workshop will be used to complete the Community Progress Report, and this will be released during NAIDOC week, 4-12 July 1999.

A summary of this process is:

Release of draft Community Progress Report	Week of 17 May 1999
Conference of service providers, policy makers, JoH Network	Friday 28 May 1999 (Reconciliation Week)
Follow-up meeting of the Indigenous Network	(date to be determined)
Release of completed Community Progress Report for 1999	NAIDOC Week 4-12 July 1999

2. REPORT BACK

How are services working on the ground?

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The principles used in collecting information from Indigenous workers were:

- Indigenous perspectives were sought about how services were working;
- sources and our records were kept confidential, with reporting on the issues only;
- process is as important as the content of what we are doing; and
- action has been minor so far, pending priorities set by the Indigenous Workers Workshop.

The focus of this work has been on the next generations, and services for Indigenous people in this area - primarily in juvenile justice, youth, adult corrections, support services and health. However we acknowledge that there are other vital issues such as land issues and sovereignty, employment and economic opportunities, housing, Indigenous heritage, and political issues especially at the Federal level.

We have not been able to talk to all Indigenous workers, due to limited time and resources; we started with several key workers and were referred to others throughout the process. Hopefully, as an Indigenous Unit and the Indigenous Network become more of a reality, this will increase discussion and activity, and the momentum of consultation and support will grow.

We have not presented any statistics as this work is primarily reporting back on Indigenous perspectives of services. However statistical information is being compiled separately.

2.2 THE BIGGER PICTURE

Broad context

The issues to be reported in relation to services emerged from a larger context that was sometimes implicit rather than stated in the discussions with Indigenous workers:

- land rights and ideas of sovereignty;
- traditional ways, values, identity;
- capitalism/democracy/socialism, with all their varying economic, cultural and social differences;
- acknowledgement of the past history of occupation and lack of it in terms of the present political climate;
- gender, class, as other interactive components along side the racial issues;
- where to place the mirror, or focus energy when tackling the issues of disadvantage:
 - ◇ **white society?** with its racism, inability to say ' sorry ', its history and injustices, its inability to see itself, its guilt, ways of doing things; or
 - ◇ **service needs?** or
 - ◇ more particularly to focus upon **both**. The Journey of Healing Network is attempting to do this by planning a Journey of Healing ceremony while at the same time reviewing services to Indigenous peoples in the ACT.

Mainstream vs Indigenous services

Themes that arose during discussions with Indigenous workers covered the following headings.

Mainstreaming can:

- hide actual cut-back of services (11 workers to 1/2 worker in one agency; the subtle but apparent dismantling of ATSIC);
- lead to denial - a gap between what is said and what is being done;
- deny the past history of services and the mistrust resulting from that past such as the 'stolen generations' ;
- in crisis, accentuate this consequence of the past in the need to feel safe (particularly for older generations and young people), and to feel safe among their own people - either with an Indigenous worker or organisation;
- ignore difference - lack of cultural sensitivity, awareness and training in Indigenous issues and culture: in workers, policy makers and the community at large; and/or
- lead to racism, prejudice and stereotypes resulting in unjust or biased laws;
- accentuate domination - the mores of the dominant culture predominates in policy making;
- alienate, through lack of self determination and cultural loss.

Yet resources are greater in the mainstream. Aboriginal Liaison Officer (ALO) positions are to help access, but can create some difficulties for workers (see below).

Indigenous organisations

The funding source and control is a vital issue here. Government funding can:

- subject organisations to the push and pull of public feeling and politics, currently seen in a backlash against positive discrimination based on ignorance and fear;
- involve a diminishing cake, where Indigenous organisations are at the bottom of the sharing and competing with other disadvantaged groups;
- have 'divide and rule' effects, separating and alienating shares of the diminishing cake;
- involve lip service to self determination by limited workers and resources, and control measures which hamstring initiative, and sideline issues;
- result (as in the community sector generally) in reductions, under resourcing, disillusionment, confusion, wasted experience and training as programs stop and start and workers get 'burnt out'. A Queanbeyan resident observed that programs in the wider community may be stopped but others take their place - but for Aboriginal services nothing is taking their place; and
- result in extra unfunded roles being taken on by workers in the organisations, such as information and referral, crisis work, being the only source of Indigenous feedback, or one-way assistance sought by mainstream organisations without associated resources in return.

Indigenous services are appreciated by mainstream organisations which often wish to be aligned with them and to access their knowledge and understanding. Workers in Indigenous services, being from the same background, create a more supportive group environment with a much greater sense of identity and control than is experienced in mainstream services.

There is a lack of information between services, and about current services available. Even when a service becomes known, it can be abolished suddenly (eg Gugan Gulwan hostel) or restricted by insufficient workers and resources.

Cross-border services

Difficulties were reported in accessing services across ACT borders. In some cases, such as schools and prisons, there are cross-border funding arrangements between the ACT and NSW governments. These do not seem to exist for Indigenous services.

2.3 ISSUES FOR WORKERS

In Indigenous organisations the issues are usually inadequate resources and staffing.

In mainstream organisations, Indigenous workers may:

- have divided roles and loyalties - to the service versus to the community;
- have wider and more conflicting roles than other workers - eg custodian as well as advocacy/liaison; or assessment as well as support;
- need the equal importance of a strong Aboriginal identity alongside adequate and appropriate training in the content of their positions;
- be chosen for their Aboriginal identity and background, yet are often sidelined from useful activity by job descriptions demanding massive paper work;
- need to be more numerous, of both genders for cultural reasons, and not isolated as the only Indigenous worker in an organisation;
- be the organisation' s source of all that is Indigenous (plus all that is mainstream), and are constantly called upon by the mainstream;
- be always on call, with after-hours demands from their community and others;
- need to take off ' the hat' sometimes, and be human;
- be sometimes torn between the differing worlds and value systems of a professional path and community/family life;
- have no back-up staff - if the sole worker is away there is no service;
- often bear the burden of lip service and tokenism by organisations, resulting in self-questioning (am I the problem/not trained enough/trapped/caught/exhausted? - or is it the system?);
- constantly experience racism - no non-Indigenous worker has to so constantly deal with its blatant expression and, more exhaustingly, its subtlety, day in and day out; and
- request cultural supervision and support.

2.4 SERVICE ISSUES RAISED

A number of service issues were raised during consultation with Indigenous workers:

Youth

Lack of engagement at school was noted as related to:

- low achievement (46% of Indigenous students cited as behind in literacy and numeracy);
- often low self-esteem;
- racism, especially in high schools; and
- sometimes difficulties and turbulence at home.

A common pattern emerged, where a young person may progress from:

- can' t keep up at school;
- plays up or behaves disruptively at school;
- truants, or is suspended or expelled;
- seeks activity on the streets, and is exposed to drugs/alcohol/crime; and
- is sent to Quamby, then Belconnen Remand Centre, then Goulburn jail. Sometimes this is an expected progression or 'culture', but there is often the shock of moving from the ' soft' approaches of Quamby to the ' hard' approaches in remand and prison centres.

Police treatment was reported as sometimes an issue, with 'interview friends' not always notified.

Accommodation problems: general refuges are culturally unsuitable for Indigenous kids (Gugan Gulwan hostel closed).

Corrections

Arrest and custody rates of Indigenous people are still very high. It was reported that Deaths in Custody recommendations are often not observed. The main problem is getting out of the system.

Quamby

It was noted that:

- Programs for 10-14 year olds would avoid half the detentions in Quamby;
- detainees need more access to regular services/discussion/support/recreation;
- locking up and enclosing kids in trouble makes them worse; and
- on release, bail conditions are often breached as there is no supervision.

Remand Centre

A specific Aboriginal Liaison Officer is needed, to avoid conflict between a custodial role and an advocacy/liaison role. (The Minister's January response to our letter was that this was 'being considered'). Matters discussed included:

- Most remandees are on drug related charges;
- there is a lack of preventive programs and follow-up;
- activities are limited and:
 - ◊ depend on 1 of 2 officers being on duty and free of other duties;
 - ◊ use of workshop equipment depends on skilled instructors; and
 - ◊ users must pay for art/craft supplies.

Support and Health

There is an extensive legacy of past history - the removal of children, displacement and genocide. There are huge mental health needs as part of this legacy. Psychiatry tends not to accommodate cultural differences.

Drug and alcohol dependence is high - detoxification treatment is hard to access, then people won't stay because of cultural issues. Domestic violence is often related.

There is a need for parent support and education that is culturally appropriate. There are cultural differences in approaches to parenting and 'care' of children. For example, mainstream expectations are based on the nuclear family with parents having sole responsibility for children, whereas Indigenous cultures are based on extended family responsibilities for the care of children which is often shared or rotated. Indigenous services feel safer for those in crisis, and for elderly people who may be more traditional.

There is a lack of follow-up, half-way/transitional services and respite care, and a lack of affordable and timely dental services.

3. SUGGESTIONS GATHERED

A range of positive suggestions that would address some of the issues raised were made by the Indigenous workers consulted.

3.1 General suggestions

Tackle non-Indigenous ignorance and racism:

- cross-cultural awareness training about Aboriginal culture and differences for ALL non-Indigenous services and institutions (and both ways);
- challenge stereotypes and assumed homogeneity amongst Indigenous people;
- need to accommodate gender and cultural issues, especially in health services; and
- services (government and non-government) should be held accountable for meeting cultural needs.

Set up:

- Centralised information and advocacy unit regarding services, with Indigenous workers and 24-hour phone line.
- Indigenous Unit with Aboriginal Liaison Officer/s for agencies and departments.
- An Aboriginal Education Council (as in NSW).

There could be a possible background/supporting role for non-Indigenous people with skills/contacts/ experience in policy/programs/evaluation/research/lobbying; and in what works/what doesn' t, etc.

3.2 Prevention

Culturally appropriate prevention programs for kids were suggested as being:

- foster care and safe house for Indigenous children;
- culturally appropriate schooling (consider Aboriginal schools/classes?);
- Indigenous homework/learning centres for coaching/encouragement - incentive to stay at school (education equals power);
- culturally appropriate hostel with day program and therapy for kids;
- re-culturation camps and activities - remove kids from current environment to rural setting/contact with animals. Raise self-esteem - opportunities to succeed - living skills - role models - learning to take responsibility; and a
- Drug and Alcohol youth worker (Gugan Gulwan has now been funded for this).

3.3 Inmates at Quamby and the Remand Centre

Supports needed for inmates included:

- mentor system and support groups;
- visits from elders/community (an "elders' bus" operates elsewhere);
- a community/cultural centre at Quamby;
- a second Outreach worker at Quamby as existing case worker spends all time on reports) [mentioned by 3 workers]; and
- Indigenous court workers.

3.4 Follow-up for offenders

Follow-up needs were:

- a bail hostel for Indigenous kids (regional);
- a transitional centre/half-way house after release from Quamby, Remand Centre; and
- rehabilitation as in Queensland/Northern Territory, where elders remove offenders to the bush to offer culture/law and life skills.

3.5 Good interstate approaches

Interstate approaches which should be considered included:

- NSW Young Offender' s Program, and
- Wagga Indigenous Training Program.

3.6 Culturally appropriate health and support services

Service needs discussed at the workshop included:

- Parenting support/courses/camps;
- Pre/post-natal classes/support for young mothers (many come from the coast);
- Healing centre - counselling/support/healing programs/traditional healing;
- Drug and alcohol healing centre (out of town, including follow-up after detention);
- Drug and alcohol workers (both male and female vital);
- AIDS workers;
- more Indigenous hospital staff:
 - ◊ Mental Health ALO at hospital;
 - ◊ ALO on both Drug and Alcohol and Mental Health Assessment Teams; and
 - ◊ More Indigenous medical staff (note high Indigenous use of hospital);
- cultural support camps for people dealing with domestic violence (help needed to organise them);
- Indigenous workers at child care centres, in addition to Indigenous advisers; and
- culturally appropriate aged care:
 - ◊ cottage accommodation and home care for elderly Indigenous people;
 - ◊ trained Indigenous aged care workers.

3.7 Support for Indigenous workers

Support network for workers (exists for support services, not corrections) was discussed in relation to:

- training for content of position;
- cultural supervision;
- more Indigenous staff;
- manual or directory of Indigenous services and workers; and
- use the Journey of Healing Network for lobbying.

4. STRATEGIES

In the context of the issues raised by Indigenous workers, and suggestions gathered for making improvements, discussion at the workshop sought priorities and directions for further action by the Journey of Healing Network. Participants pointed out the need to be positive about what can be done and that, in focusing on services, there is still the need to remember the importance of land rights, self-determination and sovereignty.

4.1 Compulsory cross-cultural awareness training (CCT) throughout government and non-government institutions

This was seen as a major issue, as all Indigenous people have to deal with mainstream institutions at some time. Discussion noted that in 1996 the ACT Government signed an agreement to implement the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, 1992.

Strategies:

1. Lobby for compulsory quality CCT: priorities are education (all teachers, principals and students) and the corrections & juvenile justice systems (all staff and inmates).
2. Benchmark the quality of CCT, with substantial content, regular delivery, Indigenous trainers, and Indigenous input to curriculum, especially for health and justice areas. Content must be tailored to the work area (eg how law enforcement agencies can question young people in a culturally sensitive way).
3. Promote the experience of some agencies that better understanding and cooperation produces returns and reduces costs, especially in the legal and corrections systems.
4. Publicise tax deductibility for training costs in private organisations.
5. Ensure CCT is in strategic plans, corporate plans, executive performance agreements.
6. Fund CCT training (including back-filling for staff absences for training) from general training budgets, not Indigenous service budgets.
7. Require agencies to report annually on the proportion of staff undertaking CCT, when it was last offered, how many times during the year, how regularly it is undertaken, and the extent of Indigenous involvement in the content and delivery of training.

Recommended that the Journey of healing Network make representations to the Chief Minister and relevant Committees and agencies for more serious attention to cross-cultural awareness training of all staff and students in all government and community agencies.

4.2 Indigenous Network

1. Workshop participants will continue to meet as an Indigenous Network to share information. Discussion noted a need for contact with Link-up. Coverage will be ACT, Queanbeyan, Yass, Goulburn, Cooma, Wreck Bay (which is the area covered by the Reconciliation Council for the Australian Capital Region). Chairing and organisation will rotate among participants.
2. A strategy for consultation with Indigenous communities will be developed by the Indigenous Network.
3. The Indigenous Network could develop MOU' s (Memoranda of Understanding)with community organisations such as the Journey of Healing Network. This would be an agreement about respective roles and undertakings.

4.3 Follow-up and monitoring

A role for the Canberra JoH Network was identified in monitoring progress towards justice for Indigenous people:

1. Follow up what has not been done to implement Deaths in Custody and Bringing Them Home recommendations. Identify gaps between what is said to be done and what is actually happening.
2. Identify where Deaths in Custody and Bringing Them Home funds have gone or are going.
3. Benchmarking - gather information on what is happening interstate, including funding sources and spending, and compare with the local area. Start with juvenile justice and work from there.
4. Collect information about useful approaches interstate (especially Victoria - note nine Aboriginal schools and a reduction in juvenile crime rates). Note also the Jabiya bail hostel in Blacktown/St Mary' s area of Sydney, and the new youth hostel in Katoomba.
5. Monitor the progress of projects such as the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultural Centre, where the original concept of a local cultural base with organisations based there appears to have changed to a tourist centre.

***Recommended** that the Journey of Healing Network, in conjunction with the Indigenous Network, undertake to follow up and monitor Deaths in Custody and Bringing Them Home recommendations.*

4.4 Support existing training institutions

More Indigenous workers are required, especially in mainstream organisations.

Strategies

1. Encourage more Indigenous people to train and work in services, to avoid worker isolation and also help make services more culturally appropriate for users.
2. Promote information about training opportunities, and the entry preparation offered by Yurauna (eg at the Boomanulla Oval Centre).
3. Increase awareness of the specific needs of Indigenous students and the detrimental effects of funding requirements (eg a minimum of 15 students needed for a CIT course, withdrawal of Abstudy).
4. Follow-up on the problem of preparation courses (eg literacy, English, study skills) being counted towards the limit of 2 courses for Austudy assistance.

***Recommended** that the Journey of Healing Network make representations to expand access to training opportunities for Indigenous people.*

4.5 Prevention and follow-up

Preventive and follow-up programs were seen as a vital strategy in diverting children, young people and adults from the criminal system.

Strategies

1. **Set up Indigenous residential units** (as in NSW), with the involvement of police, courts, Corrective Services, Juvenile Justice and Family Services:
 - an Indigenous bail house with supervision and cultural programs; and
 - an Indigenous foster care house to provide care, support and cultural programs for children unable to live with their families for a period.

These units would:

- complement and assist Indigenous workers in the justice systems;
 - link with workers and with agencies; and
 - coordinate information about Indigenous services and workers.
2. **Set up an Indigenous Unit within ACT Corrective Services** as a core agency for all Indigenous people in the corrections and juvenile justice systems. Its role would be liaison (including Aboriginal Liaison Officer functions centrally located), policy and program development, strategies to implement Deaths in Custody recommendations, and monitoring the entry and exit points of detainees to devise preventive and follow-up programs. This unit was considered to be vital in view of a likely rise in detention of Indigenous people when the new prison is operating.
 3. Aim for an identified ALO position in the Belconnen Remand Centre to assist in clarifying specific worker roles and responsibilities and to act as an information point about services.
 4. Aim for an identified position in Quamby' s Community Unit for a Field Officer to do outreach work.

Recommended that the JoH Network support moves for Indigenous Accommodation Units in the ACT, after consultation by and with the Indigenous Network.

Recommended that the JoH Network, in consultation with the Indigenous Network, make representations for an Indigenous Unit in ACT Corrections in the context of planning for the new ACT prison and remand centre.

Recommended that the JoH Network make representations for an identified ALO position at the Belconnen Remand Centre, and an identified Field Officer at Quamby.

Further issues

The strategies reported above emerged from the workshop with Indigenous workers. These are initial priorities set by the workshop and leave some issues yet to be considered, including:

- an expressed need for a central point of information about Indigenous services and Indigenous workers in mainstream services; and
- the principle of employing a minimum of two Indigenous workers (a male and a female) where needed in mainstream organisations, for mutual support and to accommodate cultural gender issues.