

To
Community Development and Justice Standing Committee

Submission to the
INQUIRY INTO PROVISION OF SERVICES TO CHILDREN

From

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INQUIRY INTO PROVISION OF SERVICES TO CHILDREN

We think healthy Development needs:

Good health, good food, strong families, people who care and support

Housing that is not crowded, access to services that treat families respectfully and meet their needs, access to transport, not under too much stress.

In answering your questions we thought about what gets in the way of many of our children growing up healthy happy and developing their brains and learning?

- Too much anger and need for healing in the community. Not being able to get back to country to heal or to think
- Adults who don't know how to parent because they were taken away or their parents or grandparents were taken away. You don't learn to parent in institutions.
- Adults who don't know how to parent even though their parents knew. Those parents drank too much to use their good parenting skills with their own children so that generation did not have good role models.
- Mums drinking while they are pregnant
- Families drinking after the children are born not looking after the kids enough
- Not looking after children properly because of drink, gunja or playing cards late into the night or all night
- Adults shouting, harsh, angry at their kids instead of talking to them and helping them.
- Family violence.
- Kids are traumatised when there is shouting and violence around them all the time. Its even worse if they cant get away because there are too many people around.
- Overcrowding: Housing where there are others who move in to share..too many people. Kids are more at risk, especially when there is drinking going on.
- Or housing with insufficient space for the allocated family
- Some people don't put their names down for housing, but move in with others when they get houses so there is overcrowding again.

It's no good just thinking about the children. If families and parents aren't supported and involved in the solutions the children will lose out.

ADDRESSING THE INQUIRY QUESTIONS:

A) ARE EXISTING PROGRAMS ADDRESSING THE SOCIAL AND COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENTAL NEEDS OF CHILDREN, WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO PRENATAL TO 3 YEARS?

General: This applies to all agencies, government and non government who work with families

Its no good looking at the needs of children if you don't look at the big picture of the needs of families and community.

What do good programs look like?

- They are holistic, they consider the body the mind and the spirit of children and families.
- They support the family so that the family can grow up strong healthy children.
- Good support helps Families to support each other.
- Agencies work to build families and to build community (they use these words but we haven't seen it happening too much)
- Everything Agencies do and the way they work should always be working to help the community stand on their own two feet.
- Agencies should be run to fit with the community. Looking through community eyes.
- When people have problems those problems affect other parts of peoples and families lives. Agencies need to work together so there are no gaps, and no big overlaps.
- Agencies Govt and Non-Govt need to advertise what they can do. Say it concrete, not airy fairy/lots of words.
- Every agency needs local Aboriginal staff to take people out to houses and to find families, and to know who is connected to who. Some agencies have these staff but they don't seem to be very valued.
- People in agencies need to step outside their comfort zone. Be prepared to learn and look at things differently.
- Train for continuity. Always thinking about continuity.
- When people come in from outside they need to have people 'alongside' who are learning about the job and are being trained.
- Follow up, follow up, follow up!!! When people have bad problems, don't wait for them to fall in a hole again. Check up on them every now and then. Have support groups for them. Make sure someone is watching out for them.

All agencies could improve their services. Some are better than others (depending on who is in charge) but they could all follow up more. They could work together more. They could work with the community more.

DCP/DFC

DCP especially **needs to work differently**. When families are having difficulty they should be supported and helped and trained so that they don't lose their children.

If children have to be taken from their parents the department needs to plan with the parents and then support them so that children can be returned to their families and the family is better able to manage. They shouldn't just say "this is what you need to do" .and then leave them. Sometimes what they need to do isn't even available!

Working in an ongoing way, not just a once off or a few meetings, and follow up is very important. Like even if things have settled, check again in a month. And then again a few more months. Is it still OK? Have a way that is comfortable for people to check in themselves too.

They need to be able to give more time to supporting families, to keeping families together. To developing strong families. Not to trying to prove that families are no good and children need to be removed and spending all their time collecting 'evidence'. (This could be the fault of the law. Not their fault. Is this what they have to do?)

Sometimes there are good programs but they stop and start because there is no planning for continuity.

Best Start is a good program, for young children and their Mums, but it hasn't been going in Roebourne since the last worker (white) left over 12 months ago. We know someone has been appointed but they haven't started.

Best Start needs a training part in it, so there are always people who can take over when a worker leaves. The women who work with the Coordinator should also learn about planning for young children's fun and learning so if they wanted to they could take over when the co-ordinator is away or leaves the job.

When the leader is going to leave the job should be advertised straight away. Local people could do the job if they were given more support.

It would be good if Best Start and Kindy were all in one area so that the little ones get to learn about school. And the parents come into school.

HEALTH

Mawrankarra (Aboriginal Medical Service)

The St John of God funded program Strong Babies Strong families Strong Culture.) is very good. It works to help Mums, especially young mothers, about what happens when you drink while pregnant. It makes sure that Mums get their checkups and have specialist appointments. It uses community grandmothers in the program

This program could be even better if:

- It had more workers so that Mothers can be followed up more often and Mothers could be on the program for longer
- Had a male worker to support the Dads.

When parents have taken children to the Doctor at AMS they get sent onto a specialist so hearing problems are treated early. This is good

We think the

Outreach Health workers: (AMS) could do more follow up work so that families are healthier

- Medication follow up
- Appointments
- They would need a vehicle and equipment to do this.

We think it would be good for AMS to set aside a day as a Whole Family Day. On that day whole families could go for check ups. A check is made on the health and development of everyone in the family. There is an environmental health check on that day too, with the AMS Environmental health people. Families could take themselves, or the Doctors and nurses could suggest that other family members are brought in for checks.

We think this would help prevent some problems and make the community healthier

Alcohol:

Alcohol affects children from the beginning of their life. It affects their brain and development even before they are born. It then affects them for the rest of their life, and when they are parents it will affect their children, because it will be harder for them to be good parents. Every agency needs to be thinking about this.

Dry out places, places where you can stay until you are really off the grog. Have trained people there to work with the anger and the alcohol and the healing.

Spend enough time there so they don't go back into the same old circle. Have follow up afterwards

Drug and Alcohol Counsellor.

Make sure there is one. The last one left and there has not been a replacement:

Get out of the office, meet people. Tell them you're there.

Run groups for people who want to change. Have support groups for follow up. When some people stop drinking have them be mentors for other people who want to stop.

Health Dept and AMS

Communication: When people go to hospital after hours, if follow up is needed the hospital should inform AMS, who should then follow up.

Rules and boundaries around the health services need to be thought about:

When someone goes to the Roebourne hospital (which has been downgraded so tis really only a first aid post) after hours and a doctor is called in, (It can't be an AMS doctor. That's against the rules!) if that private Doctor gives you or your child a script it can't be filled at AMS so you have to go to Karratha. That's more time and what happens if you don't have transport??? The script doesn't get filled!

There should be a better link between services. The people not the rules matter!

Transfer of information hospital to hospital: If a person goes to Perth, the information about their condition and medication is passed back to Nickol Bay hospital (Karratha) when they return from Perth. **But** it's not sent onto AMS in Roebourne or to the local Roebourne hospital when the person returns home.

Its not sent to Mawrankarra Medical Service either, even though this is where the person will go for ongoing checks. The people could be asked where they go for ongoing checks and sign a form for the information to come from Perth to Mawrankarra, or from Nichol Bay to their Doctor at AMS in Roebourne

Health/Education

Foetal Alcohol Effects

Education needs to start at High School on the effects of alcohol on the unborn baby and then on that baby as it grows up..

Support for mothers with Foetal Alcohol Effects or difficult children. Support for Foetal Alcohol effects mothers and mothers who don't have good parenting skills because their parents didn't have good parenting skills (they might have been taken away)

Planning for children living with Foetal Alcohol effects, especially when they get to school and even more as they enter High School. teachers learn about Foetal Alcohol effects

Healthy nutrition: Diabetes is bad in our community. Children as well as adults need to be educated about diabetes prevention. The **School Canteen program** is a good way to make sure that children get healthy lunches. The food is all healthy and parents can have payments taken from their Family Payments.

The health of parents affects children. If parents have diabetes, they are more tired. They have to go away for medical treatment. We have lots of deaths because of diabetes.

School:

Attendance. Sometimes mothers think the kids are at school. No one tells them if they are not. Work out a way to communicate. They say "we phoned but your phone isn't working." but lots of people don't have a phone, or the whole family shares a mobile. If kids haven't been going to school they need to be followed up.

Work out a better way to communicate with the community. We need to know more about how kids are going. Just because were Aboriginal doesn't mean we don't care. Parents need to take responsibility. But sometimes schools need to think "what could we do differently?"

ALL AGENCIES:

Supporting the mothers building up the fathers:

Even when there is a Mum or grandmother to tell the very young Mums what to do, they sometimes say "Dont tell me what to do...."

Need support groups where Mums can meet to talk and learn. Not the workers telling. Its for sharing and supporting.

Everyone, community and agencies learn more about the effects of alcohol on people, from before they are born to old age. Support and plan for children with Foetal Alcohol Effects in the community and in school. Support mothers and fathers who are Foetal Alcohol Effects because they will find it hard to be good parents. Provide ongoing help for parents who are themselves Foetal Alcohol Effects. They need ongoing support, meeting in support groups (eg around parenting) As these children can be very difficult to parent and likely to be more often in trouble with the law, prevention and intervention would save a lot of money and heartache further down the track

Training of people to make sure there is continuity needs to be in all budgets.

Children need male role models. We need to have more support for fathers. Before their children are born and afterwards. Every agency needs to think about how they can help fathers. Agencies need to work hard to employ more men.

Male workers trained for jobs supporting Dads, boys and Families. The jobs need to be seen as important by the agencies and by the community

Male workers planning with families to take families bush for healing/talking/learning.

Adult and children Education. The effects of Gunja and Alcohol on body mind and spirit.

Parenting programs. Programs like Triple P might be good for white middle class parents. But they don't quite fit for us, so its good that we are developing our own program through Yaandina. There should be more programs designed for Aboriginal people, not just using white programs.

Violence:

Violence is hurting our people. When children are living with violence around them it affects their development.

We need Anger Management with Healing. Anger comes from the past as well as the present. History and loss of country leaves people feeling empty and angry and frustrated. They need to get back their pride.

Courses need to fit the people. Courses designed for white people do not always fit with Aboriginal people.

At school children need to start learning other ways to manage anger and solve problems and issues. Teachers and AIEO's also need to model other ways. Not just tell kids off or punish them

New people coming to town need to learn about the community. They need to learn of the good things, as well as to understand the environment and difficulties, do field visits. Do more prevention. Then there would be less need for intervention

Rights/Things we should know/Things we have a right to know.

People need to know their responsibilities, but they also need to know their rights and lots of people don't know their rights. They are not given important information.

Agencies should have a checklist of things they should tell clients. Things they might not know about what they can or cant do. The Aboriginal workers in the agency could help think of things that need to be known for their agency.

Writing letters. Sometimes people are told they have to put complaints in writing, they don't feel comfortable doing this, so the complaint doesn't get made.

1. Agencies need to record verbal complaints...SOCIAL JUSTICE. (like when you tell police evidence, they don't send you away to write it yourself.)
2. If people don't feel heard, they might want to send something in writing. Needs someone in town who could help with this.

b) HOW TO APPROPRIATELY IDENTIFY CHILDREN WHO MIGHT BE AT RISK, WHO ARE DEVELOPMENTALLY VULNERABLE?

All agencies working with children should be watching out for children who are at risk. They should be talking to families and supporting families to get help and follow up. Telling people how they can do this and supporting them to do it.

When the risk is children affected by the mother drinking alcohol when she was pregnant, the doctors and nurses need to know a lot more about Foetal Alcohol effects. They also need to be able to identify children who are Foetal Alcohol effects because these children will be at risk all their lives. Doctors and agencies need to also think about the parents who themselves might have been affected by alcohol before they were born. These mothers will need extra support.

'Strong Families Strong babies' staff, Doctors at AMS, nurses at Population Health, should all be watching out for younger children who are vulnerable and not developing into strong healthy happy children. When they get to school teachers should be watching for hearing and eye problems, and any other signs of the children not developing. All of them should be listening to what mothers and nannas are saying about their children.

Families need to be identifying children who might be at risk. To do this they need to know that when they are worried and go for help they will get help. Sometimes when mothers have gone for help because their children were hard for them to manage, they have ended up having their children taken from them.

The Health Department (Population Health) does a good job keeping lists of children who need immunisation and following up with families about this. Could they have a high risk list too? We have heard they are going to have a New Mothers program, for children with Special Needs.. This sounds good especially if doctors and nurses are picking up all of the 'At Risk' children, including those from families having trouble, not just medical problems.

Having an Aboriginal person work with the Population Health for a long time means that all the families are known to her and can be followed up when little ones are due for checks.

C) WHICH GOVERNMENT AGENCY OR AGENCIES SHOULD HAVE COORDINATING AND RESOURCING RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE IDENTIFICATION AND DELIVERY OF ASSISTANCE TO 0-3 YEAR OLD CHILDREN?

If we had a One Stop Shop model, then the agency overseeing that could handle the funding?

At a local level, we don't care who has responsibility for the money as long as they talk with community members. The community needs to be consulted. We could be asked to think about what is needed. And every year to do a rethink about how it is going and what needs to change and what else is needed.

At a local level, which agency would be best could often depends on the staff that are there! Some people talk to the community and others think they know best.

However it is done all agencies and the community need to work together.

When there are gaps in government services, THAT THE COMMUNITY IDENTIFIES or AGREES with or when ongoing follow up to a government service is needed, other agencies and local people could apply for funding to fill these gaps

D) WHAT IS THE BEST MODEL TO ENSURE INTERAGENCY AND INTERGOVERNMENTAL INTEGRATION OF DEVELOPMENTAL PROGRAMS DELIVERED TO 0-3 CHILDREN?

Once the money is available at a local level, a working party of agencies involved with young children that includes Aboriginal people from this community. Not just agencies working together, which is good, but not enough. They need to be listening to the community.

People in this community have often talked about a '**One Stop Shop**'. Somewhere where you can go, and talk and get help. The person you talk to would link you up with the other people so you are helped 'holistically'. All departments working together,

Resource Centre: Hub for Agencies? Drop in Centre? Telecentre (People pay for some services, others provided as a community service, which is funded?) Somewhere central where people can get information about what is available and about their rights. Help with writing or other tasks

Somewhere they can go for a cuppa, a yarn about their kids and get help and information

E) HOW TO BEST PRIORITISE THE RESOURCES THAT ARE AVAILABLE FOR MEETING THE IDENTIFIED NEEDS?

What is needed in an Aboriginal community could be a lot different to what is needed in another town.

For us, if children are going to grow up strong and healthy, then looking at parenting is a big big need. Supporting fathers as well as mothers, and linking in the grandparents. Alcohol affects everyone so that could be the main focus of support to the parents.

Before girls have babies:

- Information about Foetal Alcohol effects

During pregnancy

- Information on Foetal Alcohol effects and support to stay off alcohol. Individual support and support groups. Mentoring from other Mums

When the baby is born

- If there has been drinking of alcohol. Monitor the baby closely. Bring in early intervention and early parenting courses.
- Support mothers with babies who do not thrive or are very difficult.
- Monitor babies development (AMS Health Dept)

Young children

- Support parents of Foetal Alcohol effects children with parenting programs and support groups (others mums can come too. Don't discriminate).
- If mothers are Foetal Alcohol effects themselves, they need even more support

School age.

- Support children with Foetal Alcohol effects. Teach them a bit differently. They don't have good concentration. They forget.
- School and family and other agencies work together
- Start working to give them skills to say NO to their friends. Skills to stop violence in their lives.
- Indigenous parenting programs and support groups for the parents

High School.

- Use programs kids that fit for these kids
- Start educating them about Foetal Alcohol effects (Those with Foetal Alcohol effects and those without.) so the cycle isn't repeated.
- These kids are likely to be in trouble because they don't think first. They need extra support, training and mentoring,

This problem is over a person's whole life. Programs to prevent and to help, need to be aimed at every age group. Its all circular. And other people can be joined in to the programs, if they think it will also help them. Everyone can support each other

Other THINGS THAT AFFECT PARENTING and therefore the development of children
Some of these are very little things, but even little things can make a difference.

Transport: This is a BIG issue. The Shire runs a bus service to Karratha 2 times a week, This is good but you have to be ready and be at the bus stop at each end, at the time the bus runs.

If you want to go at other times or on other days, then there is nothing.

When there is a meeting or training or a group is run, lots of people from Roebourne and Wickham have to be picked up. Or sometimes they are not picked up because there is no transport. Agencies have to think about vehicles and driving /collecting time.

Licenses: The courts are full of people driving without their licenses!! SO many people that finding someone with a licensed car and a drivers license to help you get a license is very very hard.

Taking licenses from people was meant to stop so many people going to gaol for not paying fines, but now they lose their license and often still end up in gaol.

You go to Perth for medical reasons, don't reply to a letter because you don't get it until you get home...get a fine... Interest is added to fines so it gets bigger. More community work orders and more people to get them to happen.

Jobs:

People need jobs so they something to do and so that they have some dignity and self respect.

Don't just train people for jobs, help them to get into jobs and support them until they feel comfortable. Some people come from families where there have been no jobs since people were moved from stations

Don't just train people in gaol, help them get jobs and follow up. Some people haven't had people in their families going to work all the time so they don't know how it all works.

Train more Aboriginal people to work in their own communities. Not just give them jobs. Train them and keep on training them.

New white people coming into town work with an Aboriginal person until trust is built up. WE talked about this a lot and think its REALY IMPORTANT

Court:

No one explains the rules about paying fines:

They say things like "Its not Rocket science" (to get a license or pay a fine) but some people don't know, or don't have the money.

One simple example: a person got a fine. When they came out of the Court Office a community person said "Did you make arrangements for Time Payment? They hadn't because they didn't know. The community person sent them back in, because they couldn't pay it all in one hit. They can have their fines taken from Centrelink but they may not know this

Agencies should not assume that people know what it is possible to do. What they have a right to ask for. Information should not be secret.

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Gaol

Follow up after goal. Come out dry and off gunja, but with no help or support groups or follow up the old circle comes back again. People can help themselves, but without support and with nothing to do, the old circle is soon back again.

Troubled Kids:

Facing the people you have caused hurt to is a good thing.

Cultural 'boot camp'. Involve elders in a working party. trained staff, majority Aboriginal. Follow up support and planning for young people coming out of prison.

Help for Boys and Girls coming out of Prison:

Have a planning meeting with families and all involved agencies (school, DCP, Youth Centre, Justice/ other involved agencies and with input from the young person, either through the detention centre before they leave, or when they arrive home.

Plan so reoffending is less likely. Think about Mentors.

Respite:**Safe house/Safe Places**

For Mums/Grans/Dads/

Can be for a few hours, babies go to a crèche, or for Grand parents/Great grandparents a days out or somewhere to stay overnight.

Men need somewhere to get out to before they hurt someone with violence. Somewhere they can also get some help.

Safe House for kids when they want to get away from drinking/fighting/

The Womens Safe House works very well when there is violence. And the clients are followed up afterwards.

Creche/Day Care when you don't need it for full time. Available while you do a short course or part time employment.

TAFE Short Courses. With Creche operating so that mothers can attend courses that help with parenting, give them something interesting to do and/or help them to get a job later. But some people especially if they are living in Wickham would need transport help.

Keep a list of names of people who have done courses with TAFE (or people who have done courses put their names down., eg gardening, childcare, practical things...so when people are looking for people for jobs there is a sort of register, or if someone wants a little bit of work done, there might be someone on the list who can help. If there was a resource centre, this could be kept there???)

Someone in town with an Instructors license for motor vehicles and MR/HR to help with getting jobs. Not someone who says “your lesson was at 9,00 o’clock. You’re late. No lesson. People don’t have watches and clocks and other things get in the way of being exactly on time.

Housing.

Housing is behind lots of problems. There always seem to be meetings about housing but not much changes. We need houses big enough for big families.