

# Chapter 3

## Remote Indigenous education

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### Part 1: Introduction

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...education is the engine room of prosperity and helps create a fairer, more productive society. It is the most effective way we know, to build prosperity and spread opportunity...<sup>1</sup>

In recent decades, academics, policy makers and education experts have debated the pros and cons of various education approaches aimed at improving educational outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples (or indigenous peoples). For the most part, the debates have focussed on Indigenous education in remote Australia. This is where Indigenous students make up the majority of the school populations, and the schools they attend are not considered, (and often not funded) in the same way as 'mainstream' schools. The Indigenous students in these remote schools often experience significant educational disadvantage, and as a consequence, their English literacy and numeracy skills are at lower levels than other Australian students.

With few exceptions, the debates about Indigenous education focus on whether it is better to educate Indigenous children in their own communities or whether it is better to remove Indigenous children to boarding schools where they can access western style education and be saturated in the English language. The debates contest strategies that, on the one hand, seek to 'normalise' Indigenous students through assimilation and integration with mainstream society, and on the other, seek to preserve Indigenous languages and culture within Indigenous communities. The proponents of both sides of the argument are keen for the same outcomes – the best possible education and the best possible life opportunities for remote students.

During 2007 and 2008 the Australian media reflected these polarising themes. We saw articles on subjects such as: 'boarding school education versus education in the home community'; 'bilingual education versus English literacy saturation'; 'education partnerships with Indigenous communities versus education dictated by the mainstream'; and the 'regionalisation of education resources versus education in the homelands.'<sup>2</sup>

It is my contention that these debates are a distraction from the fundamental requirements for good Indigenous education policy and services. The focus on education approaches is a distraction from a simple truth; that there

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1 Canberra, *Tax Laws Amendment (Education Refund) Bill 2008*, Second Reading Speech, 25 September 2008 (The Hon Wayne Swan MP, Treasurer).

2 Reconciliation Australia, *Week in Review – ending 4 April 2008*. At <http://www.reconciliation.org.au/i-cms.isp?page=679> (viewed 28 January 2009).

## Social Justice Report 2008

are some very large gaps in the provision of education services in remote Australia. Debates about approaches draw attention away from the fact that many remote Indigenous students receive a part-time education in sub-standard school facilities – if they receive a service at all.

If students across the country are assessed using the same tests and deemed to be educationally competent or otherwise using the same measures, then governments must provide consistent levels of education resources across the country. It is not possible, practical or desirable to move all remote students into urban centres, so quality education must move to them. Governments must also prepare for ongoing growth in Indigenous populations. For example, it is estimated that the total population of the Northern Territory will increase by 87 percent by 2056.<sup>3</sup> Across Australia the 2006 census tells us that the median age of the Indigenous population was 21 years, compared to 37 years for the non-Indigenous population.<sup>4</sup> In all we are a young and growing demographic.

It is time for governments to assess the availability of education services in remote Australia and ensure that quality education is available when populations warrant them. This is the right of all Australian children, and in a country as wealthy as ours, remote Indigenous students should receive no less.

The human right to education is characterised by four features. Education must be available, accessible, acceptable and adaptable.<sup>5</sup>

National Benchmark test results show a significant gap in the educational performance of remote Indigenous students compared with students in all other locations.<sup>6</sup> These results have not changed over time. In fact, there have been negligible improvements in English literacy and numeracy outcomes along with a simultaneous erosion of Indigenous languages and culture.

This chapter will not reproduce statistics that point to student failure, nor will it debate pedagogical approaches. My aim is to shine the spotlight on the systems that provide and deliver education services. The issue I am interested in interrogating here, is whether governments have fulfilled their obligation to provide quality education services in remote Australia.

The Australian Government has indicated its willingness to improve the life chances of Indigenous Australians through education. The *Apology* to the Stolen Generations in 2008 contained strong commitments to early childhood education.<sup>7</sup> The *Close the Gap Statement of Intent* committed the Government to work with Indigenous people to achieve equality in health status and life expectancy, comparable with non-Indigenous

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3 Australian Bureau of Statistics, *3222.0 – Population Projections, Australia, 2006 to 2101*, At <http://www.abs.gov.au/Ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/3222.0> (viewed 29 January 2009).

4 Australian Bureau of Statistics, *3238.0.55.001 – Experimental Estimates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, Jun 2006*, At <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Latestproducts/3238.0.55.001Main%20Features1Jun%202006?opendocument&tabname=Summary&prodno=3238.0.55.001&issue=Jun%202006&num=&view=> (viewed 29 January 2009).

5 Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, *General Comment No. 13 – the Right to Education*, UN Doc E/C.12/1999/10 (1999), paragraph 6–7.

6 Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision, *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage: Key Indicators 2007 Report* (2007), Section 6. At <http://www.pc.gov.au/gsp/reports/indigenous/keyindicators2007/keyindicators2007.pdf> (viewed 14 January 2009).

7 Commonwealth, *Parliamentary Debates*, House of Representatives, 13 February 2008, (The Hon Kevin Rudd MP, Prime Minister) at [http://www.aph.gov.au/house/Rudd\\_Speech.pdf](http://www.aph.gov.au/house/Rudd_Speech.pdf) (viewed 13 January 2009).

Australians by 2030.<sup>8</sup> The Prime Minister recognises the importance of education in achieving equal life chances. In the *Apology* he stated:

Our challenge for the future is to embrace a new partnership between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. The core of this partnership for the future is closing the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians on life expectancy, educational achievement and employment opportunities.<sup>9</sup>

I acknowledge that in population terms, the majority of Australian Indigenous students are in urban and regional locations. I have chosen to dedicate this chapter to discussion of remote Indigenous education because this is where the greatest educational challenges exist. It is where we see the greatest disadvantage and it is where we see the poorest educational outcomes.

This chapter contains specific measures focussed on the considerable challenges of providing preschool, primary school and secondary school education in remote Australia. It provides examples of initiatives which demonstrate good practice and it concludes with recommendations for government action. The chapter is structured in seven parts:

1. Introduction
2. Setting the scene – the challenge of delivering a quality educational service in remote Australia
3. School and community partnerships
4. The best and brightest teachers and leaders
5. Early childhood education
6. Education as the key to other life chances
7. Conclusion and recommendations.

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8 Representative of the Australian Government, National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation, Congress of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Nurses, Australian Indigenous Doctors Association, Indigenous Dentists Association of Australia, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner, Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, Close the Gap, Indigenous Health Equality Summit Statement of Intent, Canberra, March 20, 2008. At [http://www.humanrights.gov.au/social\\_justice/health/statement\\_intent.html](http://www.humanrights.gov.au/social_justice/health/statement_intent.html), (viewed 28 January 2009)

9 Commonwealth, *Parliamentary Debates*, House of Representatives, 13 February 2008, (The Hon Kevin Rudd MP, Prime Minister) at [http://www.aph.gov.au/house/Rudd\\_Speech.pdf](http://www.aph.gov.au/house/Rudd_Speech.pdf) (viewed 13 January 2009).

## Part 2: Setting the scene – the challenge of delivering a quality educational service in remote Australia

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### 1. Remote Australia

The vast majority of the Australian continent is sparsely inhabited. In 2006 there were 1,187 discrete Indigenous communities in Australia with 1,008 of these communities in very remote areas. Of the very remote communities, 767 had population sizes of less than 50 persons. In 2006 there were 69,253 Indigenous people living in very remote Australia.<sup>10</sup>

31 percent of Indigenous Australians live in major cities and 24 percent live in remote and very remote Australia.<sup>11</sup> The remainder of the Indigenous population lives in regional centres. In contrast, non-Indigenous Australians are much more likely to live in major cities with less than 2 percent living in remote and very remote areas.<sup>12</sup> The Accessibility/Remoteness Index of Australia describes remote and very remote locations as having very little accessibility of goods, services and opportunities for social interaction.<sup>13</sup> For ease of expression from hereon, I will use the term 'remote' to include both remote and very remote regions.

Remoteness has obvious implications for school education, limiting access to educational services as well as other resources such as libraries and information technology. Road access may be limited during times of the year and during wet season periods there may be no access for months on end. If internet access is available in remote Australia, it is usually via satellite, offering a dial-up service with limited and slow internet speeds.

Map 1 shows the distribution of population across Australia varying from Major Cities through to Very Remote Australia. Map 2 shows the distribution of Australia's total population across Australia with each dot representing 1,000 people and Map 3 shows the distribution of the Indigenous population across Australia with each dot representing 100 people. Table 1 shows the population of Indigenous and non-Indigenous people by remoteness category.

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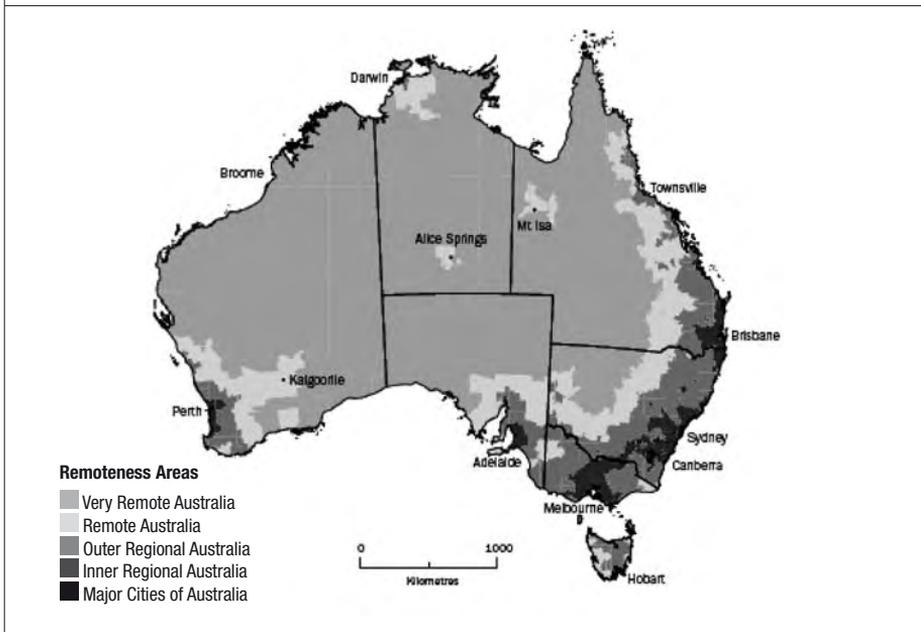
10 A Fordham, R Schwab, *Summarising: Fordham, Preliminary analyses of access to education and discrete Indigenous communities in Australia, Reference No. 48*, Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research (2006). At <http://www.anu.edu.au/caepr/educationfutures/ref048.pdf> (viewed 18 September 2008). Data Source: ABS 2006 Community Housing and Infrastructure Needs Survey (CHINS) of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities

11 Australian Bureau of Statistics, *4705.0 – Population Distribution, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, 2006*. At <http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/Lookup/4705.0Main+Features12006?OpenDocument> (viewed 19 January 2009).

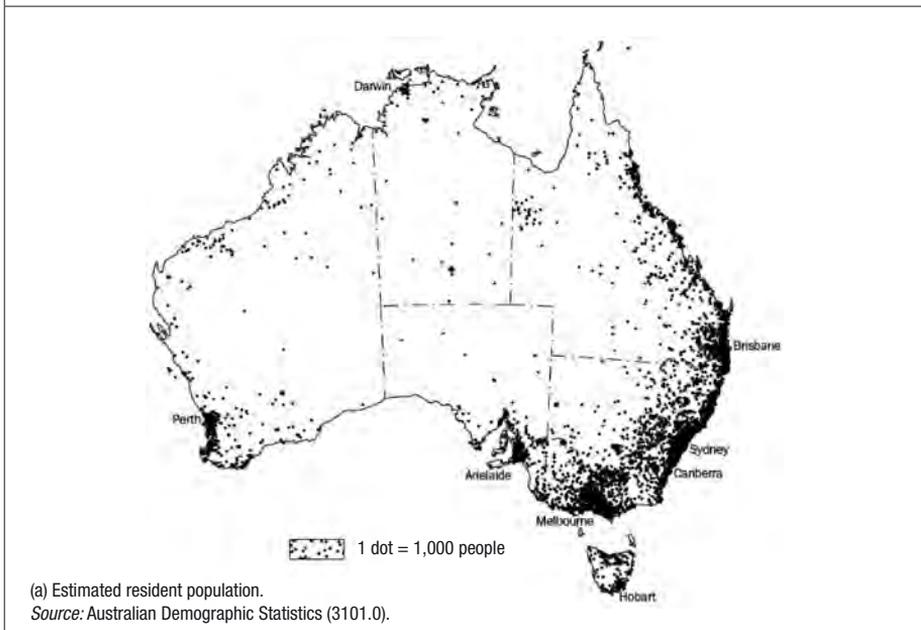
12 Australian Bureau of Statistics, *4705.0 – Population Distribution, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, 2006*, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra. At <http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/Lookup/4705.0Main+Features12006?OpenDocument> (viewed 19 January 2009).

13 Measuring Remoteness: Accessibility/Remoteness Index of Australia (ARIA), Revised Edition, Occasional Papers: New Series Number 14, (2001), p. 19 At [http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/7B1A5FA525DD0D39CA25748200048131/\\$File/ocpanew14.pdf](http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/7B1A5FA525DD0D39CA25748200048131/$File/ocpanew14.pdf) (viewed 21 September 2008).

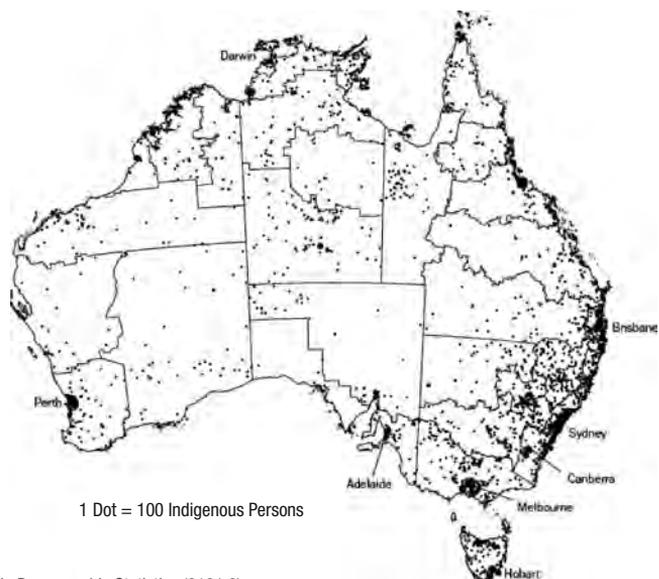
**Map 1: Remoteness categories of the Australian continent – June 2006, 1301.0 – Year Book Australia, 2008, Australian Bureau of Statistics**



**Map 2: Australian population distribution – June 2006, 1301.0 – Year Book Australia, 2008, Australian Bureau of Statistics**



**Map 3: Indigenous population distribution – June 2006, 1301.0 – Year Book Australia, 2008, Australian Bureau of Statistics**



Source: Australia Demographic Statistics (3101.0).

**Table 1: Estimate of Indigenous and non-Indigenous population in Regions according to 2006 Census data<sup>14</sup>**

Region	Pop.	Est. non-Indigenous pop.	Est. Indigenous pop.
Major cities of Australia		13,996,450	165,804
Inner Regional Australia		3,975,154	110,643
Outer Regional Australia		1,854,026	113,280
Remote Australia		267,199	47,852
Very Remote Australia		88,008	79,464
<b>Total</b>		<b>20,180,837</b>	<b>517,043</b>

<sup>14</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, 3238.0.55.001 – *Experimental Estimates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, Jun 2006*, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra. At <http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/DetailsPage/3238.0.55.001Jun%202006?OpenDocument> (viewed 19 January 2009).

## 2. Are education services available and accessible in remote Australia?

We don't have accurate information to assess whether remote Indigenous students have access to education in their region. There is no data which matches populations of school-aged students against preschool, primary and secondary school services in Australia. This lack of data is a serious omission. It is essential information for government's to plan their expenditure in education. This kind of data tells us whether Australia is meeting its obligations under the *Convention of the Rights of the Child* to:

... recognize the right of the child to education, and with a view to achieving this right progressively and on the basis of equal opportunity, they shall, in particular:

- a) Make primary education compulsory and available free to all;
- b) Encourage the development of different forms of secondary education, including general and vocational education, make them available and accessible to every child, and take appropriate measures such as the introduction of free education and offering financial assistance in case of need:<sup>15</sup>

In 1999 the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission conducted an Inquiry into rural and remote education. The Inquiry found that there were over 950 young people of secondary school age in East Arnhem Land without access to secondary education.<sup>16</sup> While some work has been done to provide limited secondary options in East Arnhem Land since 1999, we simply don't have accurate data telling us who is missing out. We don't know how many remote Indigenous students are being educated in makeshift facilities with part-time visiting teachers. We don't know how many students live in communities across Australia with no electricity and no educational facility.

Australia has not been a big spender on educational institutions compared with other countries. In its 2007 publication, *Education at a Glance 2007* the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) identified that Australia has proportionally lower spending on education as a percentage of GDP compared with New Zealand, Iceland, South Korea, Chile, and a number of European countries.<sup>17</sup>

There is work ahead for governments to chart the populations of actual and projected school-aged children by Australian statistical subdivision, and match these populations to school and preschool infrastructure. The relative underspending of Australian governments on education is likely to have had impacts in remote Australia. Without data, we cannot assess these impacts.

## 3. Are Indigenous students in remote Australia receiving quality education?

Article 29 of the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* states that:

... the education of the child shall be directed to (a) the development of the child's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential ...<sup>18</sup>

15 *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, art 28.1. Opened for signature 20 November 1989, 1577 UNTS 3 (entered into force 2 September 1990). At <http://www.unhchr.ch/html/menu3/b/k2crc.htm> (viewed 15 December 2008).

16 Australian Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, *Education Access, National Inquiry into Rural and Remote Education*, (August 2000). p 50. At [http://humanrights.gov.au/pdf/human\\_rights/rural\\_remote/Access\\_final.pdf](http://humanrights.gov.au/pdf/human_rights/rural_remote/Access_final.pdf) (viewed 17 January 2009)

17 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, *Education at a Glance 2007* (2007), Chart B2. At <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/27/52/39254884.xls> (viewed 13 December 2008).

18 *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, art 29.1. Opened for signature 20 November 1989, 1577 UNTS 3 (entered into force 2 September 1990). At <http://www.unhchr.ch/html/menu3/b/k2crc.htm> (viewed 15 December 2008).

## Social Justice Report 2008

Article 2 of the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* states that:

States Parties shall respect and ensure the rights set forth in the present Convention to each child within their jurisdiction without discrimination of any kind, irrespective of the child's or his or her parent's or legal guardian's race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, property, disability, birth or other status.<sup>19</sup>

Despite decades of educational debate and fluctuating attention on Indigenous education, there appear to be no definitive approaches, no givens, and no fundamental positions that bureaucracies adhere to and categorically apply when delivering education to remote Indigenous students.

This is borne out by two facts. Firstly, new approaches are being continuously trialled in an effort to improve the less than acceptable national literacy and numeracy test results and secondly the various approaches have **not** significantly improved the academic achievements of Indigenous students over time. Let me re-iterate that point – the evidence of the past decades shows us that there is no one literacy approach that provides a 'quick fix' for remote Indigenous education.

Those people who have followed Indigenous education policy in past decades will have witnessed a cyclic and repetitive process of 'new' and favoured educational initiatives and approaches. People who have been teaching for long enough will have noted how some approaches are promoted, then demoted, only to re-emerge a decade later. New attendance schemes, new literacy approaches and new curriculum frameworks are worked and reworked. Some are funded for a short time and enthusiastically embraced by schools, only to be de-funded at the end of a three or four year funding cycle.

Schools continue to be the experimental grounds. School personnel have had little choice except to be compliant in the face of an ever shifting procession of policies and an increase in compliance activity and data collection demands. With no authoritative guide to Indigenous education and no real 'science' or empiricism to guide the decision-makers, at any given time, the newly funded and favoured policy approaches are those that have been promoted by the most powerful policy advocates. And any new Indigenous initiative is invariably a pilot project, usually on a short Commonwealth funding cycle with high reporting responsibilities.

There are good reasons to explain why a single, sustainable and transferable Indigenous education approach is elusive. Education approaches are highly influenced by the environmental context. The outcome of any approach is affected by the quality of the school leaders and educators; the resources available to the students; the environment in which the students are learning; and the general health and well-being of the student.

In remote areas, the school environment is often less predictable than in urban settings. At the school level there are the following variables:

- How well funded is the school? Do the student numbers attract at least one full-time teacher?
- What kind of books and learning materials are available? Is there internet access?
- How good is the school leadership? Are there Indigenous leaders and teachers at the school?

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<sup>19</sup> *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, art 2.1. Opened for signature 20 November 1989, 1577 UNTS 3 (entered into force 2 September 1990). At <http://www.unhcr.ch/html/menu3/b/k2crc.htm> (viewed 15 December 2008).

- Have the best and brightest teachers been recruited to the school? To what extent are the educators competent communicators in a cross cultural environment?
- How well trained are the teachers in literacy and numeracy approaches? Are the teachers experts in their fields? Are they even trained in the subjects that they teach?
- What is the teacher turnover? If the turnover is high, is the school curriculum structured in a way to avoid repetition and ensure continuity of content and complexity?

The outcome of any educational approach can also be influenced by resources in the local community:

- What level of preschooling or early childhood learning is available and accessible to the children in the community?
- How well resourced is the community in terms of healthcare services, housing, policing and access to affordable, nutritious food?
- Is this influencing the health and the learning abilities of the children? For example, how prevalent is hearing impairment?

The governance and leadership within the community and the region can also have a large impact on educational outcomes for students:

- Are there regional plans or community plans that tie together preschooling, primary and secondary education and post school options like further study or employment pathways?
- Are there leaders in the community to provide role models for the students?
- To what extent is the community involved in the school and supportive of its aims?
- Is there employment or employment plans for the community and beyond so that students can see the relevance of learning and a life after school?

The many and complex variables that impact on school education mean that it is quite difficult to assess educational approaches. Each school and each community is unique with its own strengths and challenges. Therefore, while we can look at a whole school approach to literacy for example, and know that it may have some impact on the students' learning of literacy, we know also that there are numerous other variables at work. We know that the approach will be influenced by the expertise of the teacher and the functioning of the community. We know that just getting the child to school is a factor.

All of this gives us some important information. It tells us that any educational approach is only part of the equation. There are numerous variables and a one-size-fits-all approach will not achieve the same results in different environments.

Yet there is a problem here. Departments of education do not operate in a way which provides a school-by-school approach to resource allocation. While there may be some provision for local requirements, departments are usually reliant on formulas that drive staffing allocations and school resource allocations.

Some supplementary Commonwealth Indigenous Education Program (IEP) funding is available for schools through an application process. For example, the Indigenous Education Projects – Capital and Non-Capital Project funding is available to schools that can demonstrate projects which advance the objectives of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy (AEP). Schools must present their case to

be eligible for these funds. However, small remote schools are often under-resourced in terms of people and expertise and therefore can be limited in their ability to advocate for these funds. In fact the remote schools with the greatest infrastructure needs are often least able to access capital funds.

A remote school with two to three teachers will be pressed to deliver the curriculum program alone, and unable to dedicate resources for local advocacy. In fact it is usually the successful schools and the loud advocates that attract government funds and resources.

Success can often bring additional resources and disadvantage can often breed further disadvantage.

Schools perform poorly because they may be under-resourced and remote from support services. In turn, education departments question the performance and the viability of underperforming schools. Departments may be under pressure for results from Commonwealth funders and state or territory Ministers and underperforming schools become a problem to be solved rather than a problem to be resourced.

Underperforming schools are usually the small remote schools with high proportions of Indigenous students who do not speak English as their first language. It is these schools and these students who become the subjects of the 'mainstream education' versus 'education in the community' debates.

While I have said that there are no agreed givens governing Indigenous education *approaches*, implicit in the questions I ask in this introduction are assumptions about the fundamentals that are required for a sound educational environment and service.

## 4. Indigenous education policy

There are some consistent themes in national Indigenous education policies. One theme that has been given considerable emphasis is the requirement for schools to form partnerships for decision-making with Indigenous communities. The first goal of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy (AEP) provides clear direction for Indigenous involvement in education decision-making.

Major Goal 1 – Involvement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People in Educational Decision-Making

Major Goal 2 – Equality of Access to Education Services

Major Goal 3 – Equity of Educational Participation

Major Goal 4 – Equitable and Appropriate Educational Outcomes.<sup>20</sup>

The Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) policy *Australian Directions in Indigenous Education 2005 – 2008* also provides logical direction for Indigenous education including partnerships in decision-making. It outlines five policy domains for Indigenous education:

1. Early childhood education
2. School and community educational partnerships
3. School leadership
4. Quality teaching
5. Pathways to training, employment and higher education<sup>21</sup>

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20 Australian Government Department of Education Science and Training, *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy (AEP)*. At <http://www.dest.gov.au/archive/schools/indigenous/aep.htm> (viewed 17 January 2009). (The 21 Goals of the AEP are reproduced at Appendix 3 of this report).

21 Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, *Australian Directions in Indigenous Education 2005 – 2008*, At [http://www.curriculum.edu.au/verve/\\_resources/Australian\\_Directions\\_in\\_Indigenous\\_Education\\_2005-2008.pdf](http://www.curriculum.edu.au/verve/_resources/Australian_Directions_in_Indigenous_Education_2005-2008.pdf) (viewed 1 October 2008).

What strikes me immediately about the five MCEETYA domains is that they are no different to educational priorities for mainstream education. The domains outline the fundamental requirements for a coherent education service, no matter what the skin colour of the child. However, these five domains are especially critical for remote Indigenous education because they describe areas of provision that are absent in most remote and some regional locations.

The difficulty with the national policies is that while some Indigenous specific funding is tied to them, it is the states and territories that have responsibility for implementing education policy at the school level. The Commonwealth and state divide is a large obstacle to the implementation of coherent education policy. It is here that we hope to see cooperative federalism at its best, but unfortunately the Indigenous education systems have become complex, overly bureaucratic and unfocussed.

The unfortunate outcome of the federal, state systems is that good policy goes unimplemented. In the case of the MCEETYA recommendations there is an *Enabling process* to give effect to the five domains. However the *Enabling process* is a reporting and monitoring mechanism and not an implementation guide. Because the Commonwealth Parliament does not have legislative powers over state school education systems, there are limits on its ability to enact its policies. A body like MCEETYA can mandate reporting obligations to COAG, but it cannot hammer out an implementation strategy that ensures its five domains are implemented at the school level.

While this chapter is not structured around the MCEETYA domains or the goals of the AEP, my aim is to provide some recommendations for their implementation. The first part of this chapter focuses on *School and community educational partnerships*, as this is the most critical domain, and its success can lead to the realisation of all other domains.

I support the direction of the MCEETYA policy and the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy. With a new federal government and new opportunities for Commonwealth and state collaboration, much can be achieved if remote communities are resourced to develop:

- Local education forums which promote a shared understanding between students, their guardians and school staff about what education seeks to achieve;
- Functioning community governance structures to advocate and coordinate education resources at the local level;
- Indigenous school leadership and Indigenous educators;
- Top quality teachers and school leaders;
- Excellent preschool, primary and secondary school infrastructure; and
- Pre and post school options.

## Part 3: School and community partnerships

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To a large extent, school and community education partnerships are a 'given' in urban settings. Parents and communities make relatively well informed assumptions that schools reflect their values and aspirations. In fact parents often select a school based on their value systems, religion or philosophies. For the most part, education in urban environments is tailored to the kinds of outcomes that parents know and expect. For example, urban parents know that school is partly a preparation and a pathway to tertiary education or employment. For this reason, urban parents make a relatively well informed assumption that the school operates in partnership with them, reflecting their expectations and their values.

In remote communities many of the resources and options we take for granted in urban communities simply don't exist. Pre and post-school options are often limited or non-existent and there is likely to be limited employment in the region. Parents may have different views about what they want their children to achieve from education, and some may question the point of formal education if there are limited employment choices in the region. The non-Indigenous school staff and community members most probably have different cultural values, aspirations and life experiences. In fact, the points of difference may be greater than the similarities.

Despite these significant differences, the remote school model is likely to resemble its urban school counterparts and share a similar program and curriculum. With different languages, religions, philosophies and value systems, it is easy to see why some remote Indigenous parents and carers stay away from the school and do not feel part of its culture.

Yet it is these very differences that make school and community partnerships a necessity for successful schooling in remote regions. Evidence tells us that education is most likely to be successful when there are congruent messages being delivered by parents and by the school. A disjunction between the two groups only creates confusion and mixed messages for learners.<sup>22</sup>

Parents, carers, students and education providers must have a shared understanding about the purpose of school – what it provides, and what all parties can reasonably expect. The aspirations of parents and teachers must be discussed so that there is common understanding about the focus of the school program.

School staff need to explain the curriculum requirements, including any constraints on the ways in which they provide an educational service. Pre and post schooling provide the context and the bigger picture for education over the life cycle and should be part of local discussions. Post school options are an especially critical part of any discussion between parents and schools because they shape some of the purpose of schooling.

The education debates should occur in these forums – not at a distance. It is the parents, the elders, the students and the wider community who should decide the education approach. Do parents want their children in boarding schools for senior

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22 S Christenson & C Peterson, *Parenting for School Success*, Review Research, Department of Educational Psychology, College of Education and Human Development, University of Minnesota (2006). At: <http://www.extension.umn.edu/family/00079.html> (viewed 5 January 2008).

secondary education? Does the community want the school to provide Bilingual education? What is the best approach to suit the local needs?

Local negotiations and agreements are the only way to shape the provision of education in remote communities because of the inherent complexity and diversity of each community. In addition, we know that it is not possible for education bureaucracies to be education providers at a distance. They simply can't do it in a way which is responsive to local needs and aspirations. The tiers of state and federal government further complicate education provision and coherence.

The funding and administration of Indigenous education is particularly complex and there is a good deal of duplication of effort.

The Commonwealth and the states both develop education policies and initiatives to support the coordination and implementation of Indigenous education. The Commonwealth provides significant supplementary funding for Indigenous education in primary and secondary schools and financial support for Indigenous families of primary and secondary students.<sup>23</sup> The Commonwealth does not have direct control of education provision to Indigenous education however, unless its funding arrangements are through *Tied Grants*.<sup>24</sup>

It is the state and territory departments that recruit and employ teachers, fund and maintain school infrastructure and develop the curriculum frameworks which drive the classroom content. Australia's states and territories have their own legislations governing primary and secondary education and they also regulate and administer financial support to the non-government school sector.

As well as the government and non-government education providers, there are philanthropic organisations and others who add a further layer of complexity to the administrative arrangements for school education. This means that Indigenous education funding and policies are not always coherent. It also means that we cannot assign responsibility for Indigenous education to one tier of government nor can we assign the implementation of Indigenous education to a single provider group. We must therefore consider the process of delivering remote Indigenous education as a coalition effort with numerous forces and interests.

## 1. The state cannot do it on its own and neither can remote communities

Decisions about educational approaches and resources must be made at the community level and bureaucracies must be in a position to respond to requirements on a community-by-community basis. The capabilities of centralised bureaucracies to design and deliver services to remote regions are approximate at best.

The Council of Australian Governments (COAG) trials of 2003 to 2005 were an attempt to coordinate services to Indigenous communities from the different tiers and departments of Australian governments. The COAG trial outcomes and evaluation at Wadeye in the Northern Territory should be instructive for policy-makers attempting to coordinate services for remote Indigenous communities.

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23 Advisory Council of Jurists & Asia Pacific Forum of National Human Rights Institutions, *Terms of Reference on the legal obligations of States for the implementation of economic, social and cultural rights, with respect to the right to education: Questionnaire for the Background Paper on the right to education*, Response of the Australian Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (12 May 2006), p 4–5.

24 *Australian Constitution*, s 96 (Financial assistance to States). At <http://australianpolitics.com/articles/constitution> (viewed 1 October 2008).

The trial failed due to the intractability of government departments. The whole-of-government approach relied on coordination from centralised bureaucracies rather than from the community. According to an independent evaluation of the Wadeye trial, bureaucracies were primarily interested in defining their turf and their responsibilities and neither the Commonwealth nor the Northern Territory governments acted upon community requests.<sup>25</sup>

Community proposals for action were considered to be draft documents with an unclear status. Even though the Wadeye community had developed a representative governance model to give voice to the 20 clans in the Thamarrurr region, the representative voices of the local people were not heeded.

Ultimately the trial demonstrated the inability of governments and their departments and agencies to participate in cooperative federalism when they must share responsibility for service delivery. It demonstrated that governments lack the capacity to be responsive to decentralised communities with diverse needs. Over the three year period of the trial four new houses were built. This occurred at a time when 15 houses became uninhabitable and 200 babies were born into the community – a community which already had overcrowding. While some additional funds were provided as part of the Wadeye trial, the reporting responsibilities increased exponentially.<sup>26</sup>

Most government services are designed for urban requirements and adapted for remote and regional contexts. Such a limited model cannot meet the needs of communities that are different in composition, demography and resources from urban communities. The administration of services must be driven from the community so that there is a direct connection between what is required and what is delivered.

The findings of the Wadeye evaluation support MCEETYA's *School and community educational partnerships* model. They are:

- Expectations of the partners need to be clarified and mutually understood at the outset and reviewed periodically throughout the process.
- The identification of priorities needs to be specific, mutually understood and limited to an achievable level.
- Shared Responsibility Agreements should encourage the development of achievable deliverables that result in visible outcomes on the ground.
- The processes require a discipline on the part of the partners if they are to be effectively implemented.
- There is a need for an 'authorised' person (or group) to manage the process on behalf of the partnership. Someone (or some body) needs to be in charge of the trial.
- There is a need to work within the capacity of the Council and the community when developing strategies for delivering services.
- Developing effective communication links between the partners and within agencies is essential for the whole-of-government approach to succeed.<sup>27</sup>

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25 B Gray, *Council of Australian Governments (COAG) Trial Evaluation: Wadeye, Northern Territory*, Commonwealth of Australia, WJG & Associates Pty Ltd, (2006), p 6. At [http://www.facsia.gov.au/internet/facsinternet.nsf/via/indigenous/\\$file/COAG\\_NT.pdf](http://www.facsia.gov.au/internet/facsinternet.nsf/via/indigenous/$file/COAG_NT.pdf) (viewed 7 October 2008).

26 B Gray, *Council of Australian Governments (COAG) Trial Evaluation: Wadeye, Northern Territory*, Commonwealth of Australia, WJG & Associates Pty Ltd, (2006), p 9–12. At: [http://www.facsia.gov.au/internet/facsinternet.nsf/via/indigenous/\\$file/COAG\\_NT.pdf](http://www.facsia.gov.au/internet/facsinternet.nsf/via/indigenous/$file/COAG_NT.pdf) (viewed 7 October 2008).

27 B Gray, *Council of Australian Governments (COAG) Trial Evaluation: Wadeye, Northern Territory*, Commonwealth of Australia, WJG & Associates Pty Ltd, (2006), p 6. At [http://www.facsia.gov.au/internet/facsinternet.nsf/via/indigenous/\\$file/COAG\\_NT.pdf](http://www.facsia.gov.au/internet/facsinternet.nsf/via/indigenous/$file/COAG_NT.pdf) (viewed 7 October 2008).

Establishing the need for partnerships is something that is relatively easy to come to in principle. It is considerably more difficult to develop the structures which make partnerships functional and self sustaining. An effective vehicle to do this might be through local education forums. However, if local education forums are to be established in future, they will require funds to pay a secretariat to communicate and record their recommendations and agreements. Local forums may also require funding for associated services such as translator/ interpreter services where required. Each local forum must be able to communicate with relevant education providers, government departments, industry groups, philanthropic groups and non-government organisations.

Funding arrangements for parental involvement in school decision-making have changed in the past decade and there is evidence that funds for this purpose have diminished. The Aboriginal Student Support and Parent Awareness (ASSPA) program operated until 2004. The ASSPA programs were developed to:

- increase the participation in education and attendance of Indigenous youth of compulsory school age;
- encourage the establishment of effective arrangements at the local level for the participation of Indigenous parents and community members in decisions regarding the delivery of preschool, primary and secondary educational services to their children;
- promote increased awareness and involvement of Indigenous parents in the education of their children;
- develop the responsiveness of schools and their staff to the educational needs and aspirations of Indigenous students;
- encourage the participation and attendance of Indigenous children in preschool education programmes; and
- achieve the adequate preparation of Indigenous children through preschool education for their future education.

The ASSPA funding was allocated to each school committee based on a per capita formula taking into account the number of Indigenous students enrolled at the school and whether the students are preschool/ primary or secondary, weighted for remoteness. The per capita rates were:

Primary/preschool remote	\$215
Primary/preschool non-remote	\$110
Secondary remote	\$315
Secondary non-remote	\$160 <sup>28</sup>

ASSPA was replaced in 2005 by the Parent School Partnership Initiative (PSPI) program.

The new PSPI funding is obtained through a submission process which puts the onus on the school to apply for funds. The Australian Education Union conducted a survey in 2005 to determine the impact of the changes. Of the 561 responses, 116 replies indicated 'that the submission writing process [was] too difficult.... Many schools have determined that the small amount of funding [was] not worth the effort and have not applied.' In 2004, 430 of the 561 respondent schools (77 percent) had ASSPA committees receiving a total of \$2,529,325. In 2005, 53 of the 561 schools (9 percent)

28 Australian Government Department of Employment and Workplace Relations, *Indigenous Education Direct Assistance (IEDA) Programme Review – Ch.3 Aboriginal Student Support and Parent Awareness (ASSPA)*. At [http://www.dest.gov.au/sectors/indigenous\\_education/publications\\_resources/indigenous\\_education\\_direct\\_assistance\\_programme\\_review/chapter\\_3.htm](http://www.dest.gov.au/sectors/indigenous_education/publications_resources/indigenous_education_direct_assistance_programme_review/chapter_3.htm) (viewed 17 January 2009).

## Social Justice Report 2008

received funding for the Parent School Partnership Initiative (PSPI) at a total amount of \$600,431.<sup>29</sup> While the AEU survey was limited to respondent schools, there is evidence that the PSPI funding is not meeting its targets Australia-wide.

The PSPI is part of the Government's Whole of School Intervention Strategy which aims to involve communities and parents in schools. The Whole of School Intervention Strategy comprises two elements:

- the Parent School Partnerships Initiative which aims to improve attendance, literacy and numeracy skills and Year 12 educational outcomes; and
- Homework Centres (HWCs) which provide a supervised after school hours environment for Indigenous students to complete their homework and to study.

In 2006 more than \$32 million was approved for distribution for the Whole of School Intervention Strategy. However the expenditure was less than the amount approved and only \$26,451,270 was distributed.<sup>30</sup> The underspend may have occurred because small, remote schools had difficulty with the submission process. Given that 50 percent of PSPI funding is targeted to remote schools, it would be useful to see a disaggregation of these funds to see whether remote schools were able to take up their 50 percent allocation.<sup>31</sup>

Making partnerships work in future will require the development of capacity at the local or regional levels. Rather than putting the onus on schools to develop submissions as is the case for PSPI funding, governments should ensure that communities or regions are resourced to create capacity for these forums. This may mean providing additional resources in places where there are limited governance structures or where the capacity of the local community is limited. The Australian Government along with state and territory governments will need to make a commitment to education partnerships if these bodies are to be established in future.

The commitment must be more than Commonwealth policy. The commitment in policy must be accompanied by a facilitating process and funding which enables implementation. At this stage the Parent School Partnership Initiative program is not adequately targeted for its purposes. This program is not going to assist small remote schools because of the onus it puts on schools to apply for funds and report the expenditure. The application and reporting obligations put small remote schools at a disproportionate disadvantage. Therefore governments must develop new funding and resourcing arrangements to realise this policy objective.

The *Close the Gap* coalition has developed agreement models with targets and benchmarks which hold the tiers of government accountable for implementation actions as well as health equality outcomes. The *National Indigenous Reform Agreement* is the overarching framework for the *Close the Gap* agreements. It captures the objectives, outcomes, outputs, performance measures and benchmarks that all governments

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29 D Moyle, *Report on a Survey of Schools on the Changes in Commonwealth Indigenous Education Funding* (2005), p 4. At <http://www.aeufederal.org.au/Publications/Indsurvey2005.pdf> (viewed 14 January 2009).

30 Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, *National Report to Parliament on Indigenous Education and Training, 2006*, (2008) p 151. At <http://10.1.1.248:8080/ProgressMessages/NationalReporttoParliamentonIndigenousPublications.rtf?proxy=10.1.1.248&action=complete&index=16&id=105287796&filename=NationalReporttoParliamentonIndigenousPublications.rtf> (viewed 28 January 2009).

31 Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, *National Report to Parliament on Indigenous Education and Training, 2006*, (2008) p. 127. At <http://10.1.1.248:8080/ProgressMessages/NationalReporttoParliamentonIndigenousPublications.rtf?proxy=10.1.1.248&action=complete&index=16&id=105287796&filename=NationalReporttoParliamentonIndigenousPublications.rtf> (viewed 28 January 2009).

have committed to in order to close the gap in Indigenous health disadvantage. It is a guiding, monitoring and evaluation framework which could be replicated for the purposes of monitoring and evaluating government action on remote Indigenous education.

Performance against the measures of the *National Indigenous Reform Agreement* will be reported by the Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision in the report to COAG, *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage*. Similar reporting could be made on remote education. It is essential that we see national reporting to assess action against targets and consistency across jurisdictions.

## 2. How do we form education partnerships?

The Deputy Chief Minister of the Northern Territory recognises the importance of remote education partnerships and is in the process of developing *Community Partnership Education Boards*.<sup>32</sup> The Minister said the following about the role of the Community Partnership Education Boards:

These structures must allow communities to assume more responsibility and accountability for the delivery of quality education and training services by empowering them to coordinate the effective use of resources and expertise. The new approaches to partnerships must allow groups of Indigenous communities to form regional governance structures that can act as consumer representative fund holders with responsibility for purchasing education and training services for their communities.<sup>33</sup>

Numerous players can be a positive force in any collaboration. The challenge is to gather them together so that there is meaningful discussion, collaboration, information-sharing and decision-making.

There are existing models of educational collaboration that provide some instructive frameworks for partnership approaches. In 1997 a group of people inspired by Graham (Polly) Farmer set up a Foundation to establish and manage after-school education support projects for Indigenous students who want to complete their secondary education.<sup>34</sup> The Foundation now coordinates a number of projects, each tailored to suit a remote Indigenous community. The community members and the local context are essential drivers of each project.

The work of the Graham (Polly) Farmer Foundation is based on a coordinated model of community development. The Foundation coordinates the actions of all other parties and provides a central point for funding from private donors, governments, community interests and other stakeholders. The Foundation has developed a model for managing the projects which includes a steering committee of project partners who have responsibility to set the strategic direction.

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32 Minister Scrymgeour, Northern Territory Minister for Education and Training, 'Transforming Indigenous Education', (media release, 30 April 2008). At <http://newsroom.nt.gov.au/index.cfm?fuseaction=viewRelease&id=3989&d=5> (viewed 7 October 2008).

33 Northern Territory Department of Employment, Education and Training, *Research Priorities 2008 – 2012*, p 9. At [http://www.det.nt.gov.au/corporate/research/docs/research\\_priorities.pdf](http://www.det.nt.gov.au/corporate/research/docs/research_priorities.pdf) (viewed 7 October 2008).

34 Graham 'Polly' Farmer rose to become one of Australian Rules Football's greatest players. His early life was at Sister Kate's Home – an orphanage for children of Aboriginal descent. He went on to play 392 league games from 1952 to 1971 and win two Sandover Medals. He was 10 times his club's fairest and best player. He was the first footballer to be named as a Member of the British Empire (MBE).

### **Case Study 1: Graham (Polly) Farmer Foundation – A partnership model for remote communities**

The aim of the Graham (Polly) Farmer Foundation is:

- To provide support to Indigenous youth to achieve their potential.
- To enhance the skills and potential of young Indigenous people.
- To generate positive aspirations in young Indigenous people.
- To assist Indigenous youth to relate to the community in general, particularly to other young Australians.

The Foundation establishes and manages after school educational support projects for Indigenous students who have the capacity, interest and potential to go on and complete their secondary education. The expectation of the Foundation is that the students will go on to tertiary studies – university, TAFE, apprenticeships and traineeships and employment. The projects are individually funded through private industry, federal and state Government support.

The ‘Partnership for Success’ projects are the central element of The Graham (Polly) Farmer Foundation. Each Foundation project involves local Indigenous communities, private and government partners and the Foundation working together in partnership to introduce and manage projects to improve the educational outcomes of Indigenous students. The partnerships aims are to enable students to compete effectively for employment, apprenticeships, traineeships and/ or tertiary entrance when they leave school.

Whilst each project is tailored to meet its community’s particular needs, there are some key elements of all projects:

- Each project is a partnership between the Aboriginal community, private industry, state and federal governments, and local schools.
- The governing body for each project is a Steering Committee which is made up of each of the project partners. The Steering Committee oversees the project and provides strategic level management.
- The Graham (Polly) Farmer Foundation establishes, facilitates and manages the projects on behalf of the local Steering Committee.
- A project leader undertakes the day-to-day organisation of the project under the guidance of a local operations committee. He/ she is directly responsible to the Steering Committee.
- Each project develops its own vision and objectives and establishes a process for selecting students for the project. Students are selected on the basis of their interest, capacity and potential to succeed and complete their secondary education.
- Each project has an enrichment centre that is available to students four afternoons a week and is used for visiting speakers and family events. The project provides an after school environment where students receive tutoring and support.
- Each participating student and his/ her parent/ guardian sign a compact which sets out the student’s responsibilities in areas such as school and enrichment centre attendance, commitment to achieve and participation in project activities.

- Each project involves students being provided with intensive and targeted support through:
  - tutorial and vocational education assistance;
  - access to tertiary motivational programs; and
  - a progressive and comprehensive leadership and study skill program from Year 8 to Year 12.

The Graham (Polly) Farmer Foundation 'Partnership for Success' Projects are being offered in: Alice Springs; Carnarvon; Kalgoorlie; Karratha / Roebourne; Kununurra; Mandurah; Newman; Port Augusta; Port Hedland; and Tom Price.

### 3. What is success in remote education?

Essential to the success of any education system is dialogue between the education providers (the school staff), and education consumers (the students, parents and carers), about what education seeks to achieve. Local education stakeholders should be in a position to discuss and consider the following:

What is school success and how does the education system give students optimum opportunities to achieve success?

The answers to this question should form the basis of local education priorities and plans. While not an exact paraphrase, the question is a variation of this one – education for what? Students, parents, carers, school staff, communities and governments need to know about the options for students both in their region and in the wider Australian society.

In Australia, English literacy and numeracy are non-negotiable components of education curricula. There is general agreement amongst Indigenous and non-Indigenous education stakeholders that English literacy and numeracy outcomes are fundamental for Indigenous and non-Indigenous students alike. Along with other Australian students, Indigenous students sit national (English) literacy and numeracy tests and their results are compared against benchmark standards.

It is the other aspects of education, outside of the compulsory curricula offerings, that should form the basis of local discussions about the shape of local education. If education stakeholders begin by describing what success looks like for local students, and describe success for school graduates, they are in a position to design an appropriate education service.

At a certain point, school education becomes closely linked to post school options. Students and their families begin to consider further training, education or employment. Schools have a role to play in making the links to the post school phase. The following case study shows what is possible in linking school education to employment options in the local area.

## Case Study 2: Maningrida School – Education and training with a focus on achieving success in the region

Maningrida is a remote coastal community in Arnhem Land, 350kms from Darwin. It is situated on the East Bank of the Liverpool River Estuary at one of the northern-most points of Australia. Maningrida is home to the Gunibidji people and has a population of approximately 2,600 people; the majority of whom are Indigenous. There are 10 Indigenous languages spoken in the region and most residents are able to speak three or four dialects.

The local Maningrida Community Education Centre (CEC) offers primary and secondary education to the township and the outstation communities. The CEC provides out-reach education services and wet season education programs for the 35 Maningrida outstation communities. The CEC is a Bilingual school, meaning that primary students learn in their own language before English is gradually introduced during the primary years. The two languages that form the two Bilingual programs are Ndjebbana and Burarra.

In 2003 the Maningrida (CEC) was accredited to offer secondary schooling to Year 12. This means that students are now able to complete their senior years of school without having to relocate to finish school.

Despite setbacks such as a damaging cyclone in 2006, the CEC has developed a reputation for providing successful secondary school programs. Two standout programs are the *Contemporary Issues and Sciences course* and the *Junior Rangers course*.

The *Contemporary Issues and Sciences course* is a formal education program based on science, culture and caring for country. The program had its beginnings in 2005 when local teachers and students took to the outdoors because they did not have a science laboratory. They hoped to be able to identify spiders and other insects in the bush environment. Since the program began in 2005, the students at Maningrida CEC have identified 45 new insect species. This program is an excellent example of curricula which engages students by providing an intersection between Indigenous and non-Indigenous systems of knowledge and culture. The students use their local knowledge of flora and fauna to support their technical learning in the classroom.

Courses such as this one are innovative in their methodology because they engage Indigenous students in learning that is 'hands on' rather than strictly classroom-based. Linking life in the Maningrida community to the broader scientific community is an important way of recognising the value of Indigenous knowledge and a means of creating connections outside the community.

The Junior Rangers program is integrated into the curriculum of Year 11 at the school, offering a pathway to employment in a growth industry in the Arnhem region. The course links to the *Djelk Rangers Program* which includes a Men's and Women's Program as well as the Junior Ranger Program. The Djelk Rangers Program operates under the auspice of the Bawinanga Aboriginal Council; the entity with responsibility to manage both the land and sea country of the Maningrida area.

Since the introduction of the science and ranger courses there have been improvements in school attendance and academic performance. The benefits of the programs are also being felt beyond the school gates with a number of students accessing local employment and some going on to university education.

Since the secondary program commenced in 2003, the school has ranked highly amongst Northern Territory schools. The number of students completing the Northern Territory Certificate of Education has been increasing every year. There were four Year 12 graduates in 2004, eight in 2005 and eleven in 2006, with three students gaining entrance into tertiary institutions. Much of this success is attributed to the fact that the local curriculum is relevant and interesting and it reflects local requirements and opportunities in the region.

Like the Maningrida Community Education Centre, another remote Northern Territory community has defined its measure of education success and has worked consistently to achieve a remarkable outcome.

The remote Indigenous community at Garrthalala in Arnhem Land decided that they wanted the local young people to access senior secondary education in their Homeland communities of Arnhem Land. Over a period of years, they collaborated to develop a successful secondary education program which ultimately enabled seven students to graduate in 2008. This is the first time that students in very remote Homelands have been able to complete Year 12 in their communities. The following case study tells the story of the way in which this school established itself with very little government support. It underscores the commitment of some very motivated people in this very remote part of Australia. It also reminds us that there is much work ahead to provide school education to remote Indigenous students. It tells us that when the school service is available, incredible things can happen.

### **Case study 3: Garrthalala – Success in a remote school**

In 2008 the remote Arnhem Land community of Garrthalala had mains electricity connected for the first time. In the same year the community celebrated the secondary school graduation of seven local students. The students did not go to boarding school far away from home; they were educated in their small home communities in Arnhem Land.

It's hard to describe the extent of this achievement. Garrthalala is situated on Calendon Bay, one and a half hours drive over rough roads from Yirrkala the larger Aboriginal community of the Yolngu people. To say these homeland communities are remote is an understatement. The homeland communities are tiny outstations, comprising a few houses that accommodate clan families living on their ancestral lands. Some of the outstations are accessible by car, though during the wet season they are inaccessible by road and by air.

Up until 2006 the secondary students had no classroom and had to share space with primary school students. Power was provided by a generator. A satellite dish provides internet access for five computers on slow dial-up access. Students travel to the school from surrounding Homeland communities to receive instruction at Garrthalala for three days per fortnight.

They travel by plane to this tiny school which acts as a boarding facility. Up until 2008, those who were not from Garrthalala had to sleep on the school floors during the night and cook their meals with assistance from teachers. In the day time the students had to move their swags to make room for desks and learning resources. In 2008 a small dormitory was built for cooking and sleeping.

The secondary school building and dormitory were not provided by government departments. They were built by volunteers from the Geelong Rotary Club of Victoria with assistance from parents and community members of Garrthalala and some dedicated teachers. Funds for the buildings came from the Yirrkala Homelands School.

The school manages with no secure operational funding. The secondary program has received some one-off funding from Commonwealth discretionary funds and otherwise it manages with very little funding. The school receives a staffing allocation of one lead teacher, an additional teacher and two assistant teachers. One of the assistant teachers is a former student. There are still not enough facilities for all of the students who want to attend the secondary program from surrounding homelands. There will be additional challenges ahead for this growing school.

Establishing the school and teaching the school program under these conditions has not been an easy road. When the teachers were asked about the difficulties of the work they said the following:

Camping out in the homelands and the heat...

At times inadequate facilities such as no air-conditioning and one shower to share...

No water at times when the solar powered pump is not working at Garrthalala...

A lack of (specialist) staffing, and staffing in general, and limited VET courses accessible to remote students...

Limited access to careers counselling for students graduating...<sup>35</sup>

One can only begin to imagine the educational challenges of this student group and its teachers. What did it need to get this school to a position where it was able to offer Year 12? What were the resources – both material and human? What were the preconditions and the process?

According to the school teachers, the driving force of the project was:

the community support and support of Garrthalala elders... [It was] a desire by Homeland communities to see secondary students access accredited secondary education in the Homelands, away from the temptations and problems facing Indigenous students in the hub community of Yirrkala or the mining town Nhulunbuy.<sup>36</sup>

The measure of success for parents and elders was for students to complete secondary education without having to leave their home communities. They wanted the young people of the region to achieve the same level of education attainment as students in urban areas. The parents, community members and students were prepared to work hard to achieve this goal, and they did it in conjunction with a responsive teacher workforce.

## 4. Developing local forums

A well functioning education system in remote locations requires a forum or a medium through which local education stakeholders can negotiate and develop agreements about local education priorities. Parents and education staff are critical members of any education forum and so are councils, industry, philanthropic groups and health providers.

Education does not exist in isolation; it is a pathway from early childhood to employment incorporating many facets of local life such as culture, health, safety and nutrition. Each community must be in a position to configure its own structure which will bring together other partners at the Commonwealth and state or territory levels.

In a Western Australian report into family violence and child abuse, Sue Gordon and her co-authors developed a model for developing and delivering services and channelling funding to Indigenous communities.<sup>37</sup> Entitled, *Planning, resource allocation and*

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35 Garrthalala Teachers, *Email correspondence with the Australian Human Rights Commission*, 11 December 2008.

36 Garrthalala Teachers, *Email correspondence with the Australian Human Rights Commission*, 11 December 2008.

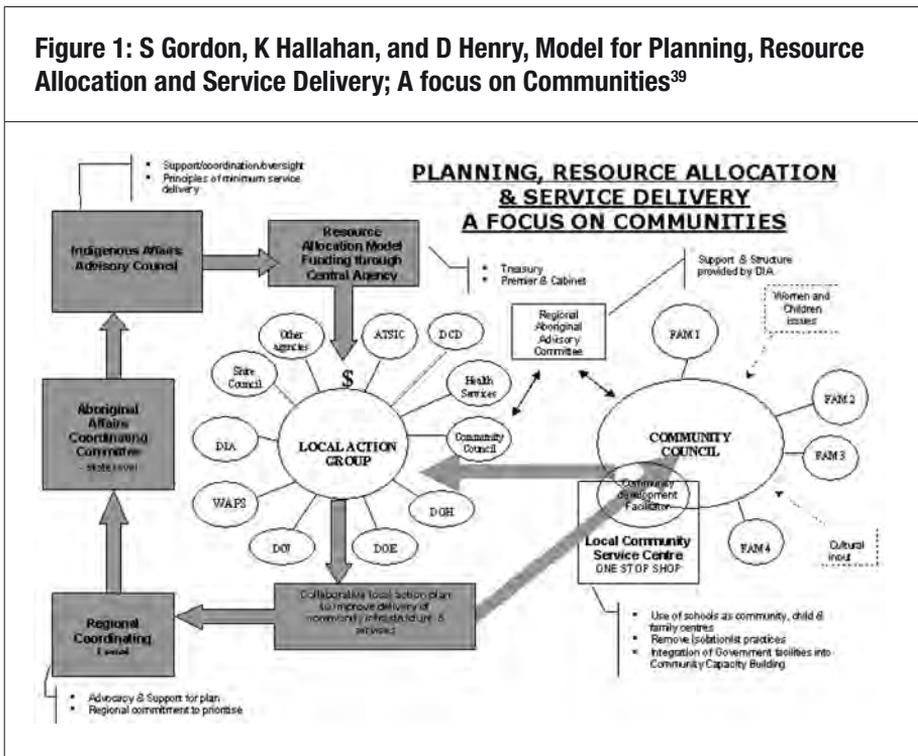
37 S Gordon, K Hallahan & D Henry, *Putting the picture together, Inquiry into Response by Government Agencies to Complaints of Family Violence and Child Abuse in Aboriginal Communities*, Department of Premier and Cabinet, Western Australia (2002). At <http://www.dia.wa.gov.au/Documents/Policies/GordonInquiryReport.pdf> (viewed 7 October 2008).

service delivery – A focus on communities, the model provides a structure which puts local stakeholders at the centre of decision making. The model is set out in Figure 1 below. The benefit of this model is that it is an authoritative framework through which bureaucracies can support and resource local plans.

While the Gordon model was developed to address family violence, the processes for coordinated and coherent service delivery are transferrable to other areas, including Indigenous education. Gordon argues:

There is not one piece of research that suggests that government agencies or other service providers can deal with this [family violence] problem on their own. It is clear from the research, consultations with Aboriginal communities, submissions provided by government agencies and others, that Aboriginal people and Aboriginal communities must be involved in shaping the solutions...<sup>38</sup>

**Figure 1: S Gordon, K Hallahan, and D Henry, Model for Planning, Resource Allocation and Service Delivery; A focus on Communities<sup>39</sup>**



38 S Gordon, K Hallahan & D Henry, *Putting the picture together, Inquiry into Response by Government Agencies to Complaints of Family Violence and Child Abuse in Aboriginal Communities*, Department of Premier and Cabinet, Western Australia (2002). At <http://www.dia.wa.gov.au/Documents/Policies/GordonInquiryReport.pdf> (viewed 7 October 2008).

39 S Gordon, K Hallahan & D Henry, *Putting the picture together, Inquiry into Response by Government Agencies to Complaints of Family Violence and Child Abuse in Aboriginal Communities*, Department of Premier and Cabinet, Western Australia (2002), p 248. At <http://www.dia.wa.gov.au/Documents/Policies/GordonInquiryReport.pdf> (viewed 7 October 2008).

## 5. Integrating industry and philanthropic groups in education programs

There are government service providers and departments in most remote Indigenous communities and regions. Increasingly too there are non-government organisations or philanthropic groups delivering education programs and facilitating community development.

Education is much more than learning in a school classroom. Learning begins from the moment a child enters the world and continues throughout his or her lifetime. Education occurs in the home, in the workplace, in all social settings and during leisure time. A community and a culture that supports learning and develops its own learning is a community that is primed for educational success. A good education environment does not cordon off separate areas of learning; rather it sees the different learning environments, both formal and informal, as part of an organic whole; a whole of life education journey.

Numerous philanthropic groups, local councils and industry groups support Indigenous community members to develop and deliver learning projects which may be tied in with school curricula or complimentary to school programs.

In the Kimberley region of Western Australia, elders and community members have developed projects to connect young people to country. These projects, which sit outside of the formal education system, provide an example of the ways in which culture, learning and employment can be driven by the community. This form of learning should be considered in any local or regional education plan. While the school is not always the site for learning projects, connections should be made through local or regional plans to create potential for collaboration and integration of the widest range of learning resources and pathways.

The Yiriman Youth Project in the Kimberley, Western Australia is a development and coordination point for cultural education and training projects for young people in the region. Projects such as this one reinforce the various ways in which education has direct meaning to the lives of young people.

### **Case Study 4: Yiriman back to country project – Community education delivered by elders and community members**

The Yiriman Youth Project is an Aboriginal young men's and young women's project in the Nyikina, Mangala, Walmajarri and Karajarri language regions. This country extends from Bidyadanga in the West Kimberley to Balgo in the Southern Kimberley.

Yiriman activities incorporate back to country trips and projects that focus on youth at risk. The Yiriman Youth Project's main focus is building confidence through culture, working alongside young men and women aged between 14 – 30 years.

The project was initiated by Aboriginal elders who were concerned that some of their young people had no jobs and no future. Elders from the four language groups developed ideas over many years about ways they could stop substance misuse, self-harm and suicide in their communities.

Their ideas provided the foundation for the Yiriman Youth Project which promotes life skills and sustainable livelihoods through youth leadership, land management and community development. All Yiriman projects have a cultural focus aimed at developing opportunities for young Aboriginal people. The various Yiriman activities have been successful in getting youth out of urban areas and away from substance abuse and back onto traditional country.

Yiriman works in partnership with Indigenous organisations in the Kimberley area. The partner organisations are many and varied. The Land and Sea Unit of the Kimberley Land Council provides opportunities for young people to participate in land and sea management. Mangkaja Arts and Derby Aboriginal Health Service provide community driven bush medicine trips. The Departments of Justice and Community Development offer diversionary programs which include camel walks and cultural youth exchanges with the Shire of Derby West Kimberley.

Other partner organisations involved in cultural land management, performing arts and cultural workshops include the Kimberley Language Resource Centre, NAILSMA, the Kimberley Regional Fire Management Project, the Natural Heritage Fund, the Australian Quarantine Inspection Service, Macquarie and Murdoch Universities.

Passing on cultural knowledge from generation to generation has been essential for Kimberley clans in proving their Native Title claims to traditional lands.

Mervyn Mulardy, the Karajarri Chairperson and Yiriman Cultural Advisor described the importance of the Yiriman Youth Project to Native Title in these terms:

Karajarri people had to show the Federal Court their relationship to country. Well...we gotta show our young people our connection. Take them out, show them country and get them to look after country.

The 'Yiriman' tower (Mesa – a small flattop hill) is one of many very important cultural landmarks in the region.

John Watson, a Nyikina/ Mangala Elder and Yiriman Founding Director said:

We want to show them their base (homelands). If we don't show them country and identity...you're nothing! A lot of people travelled through this countryside, it was a sign for helping people find jila (waterholes).Yiriman is a place that a lot of people got taken away from.....we gotta take these kids back.

Anthony Watson, a Nyikina/ Mangala Cultural Advisor and Yiriman Director said:

We want to make it known to young people that this is where their family lived and hunted around that country. Show them where their grandfather and grandmother were born, what they ate and how to look after country and animals.

## 6. Summary of issues: School and community partnerships

- Parents, carers, students and education providers must have a shared understanding about the purpose of school and what constitutes educational success;
- Local negotiations and agreements are the only way to shape the provision of education in remote communities because of the inherent complexity and diversity of each community;
- A well functioning education system in remote locations requires a forum or a medium through which local education stakeholders can negotiate and develop agreements about local education priorities
- Remote education forums will require ongoing capacity-building, resources and funding;
- The *National Indigenous Reform Agreement* provides a model for assessing government action on remote education; and
- Government performance on remote education should be reported by jurisdiction to COAG.

## Part 4: The best and brightest teachers and leaders

.....

We recognize that no education system can rise above the quality of its teachers, as they are key to improving the quality of education as well as to expanding access and equity.<sup>40</sup>

In 2007, an international study of student performance from 57 countries found that the *quality* of school teachers is the most important factor impacting on student learning outcomes. The report based its findings on data from the OECD's *Programme for International Student Assessment* finding that the world's best performing school systems require three attributes:

1. Getting the right people to become teachers;
2. Developing them into effective instructors; and
3. Ensuring that the system is able to deliver the best possible instruction for every child.<sup>41</sup>

Closer to home, a 2006 trial conducted in the remote Western Australian community of Halls Creek demonstrated the importance of teachers in student school attendance.<sup>42</sup> The project trialled a number of strategies to increase student attendance. A significant finding of the trial was that student attendance rates varied between classes. One teacher had 20 percent greater attendance than other teachers who were participating in the trial. The report found that: 'Variations in teacher quality could well be an issue affecting school attendance rates.'<sup>43</sup>

The evidence of recent decades is unequivocal; teachers play a crucial role in the learning environment, affecting both student attendance and student academic performance. It therefore follows that the recruitment and retention of the best quality teachers must be of the highest priority for education providers.

Teacher recruitment in Australia is carried out by state and territory government and non-government education departments. Departments make varying efforts to provide appropriately qualified people to schools within their jurisdiction. All departments have provisions to enhance teacher recruitment to regional and remote locations and the majority of departments have some form of provision to encourage the recruitment of Indigenous teachers. However, the forms of the incentives vary from provider to provider as does the quality and focus of the various provisions.

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40 United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation, *Bali Declaration*, Seventh E-9 Ministerial Review Meeting, ED/EFA/2008/ME/1 REV (2008). At <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0015/001584/158455E.pdf> (viewed 14 October 2008).

41 Western Australia Education Taskforce Report, *Public Access – Twomey Report*, Chapter 4, *Leadership and Mentoring* (June 2008). At [http://sstuwa.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=754&Itemid=566](http://sstuwa.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=754&Itemid=566) (viewed 19 November 2008).

42 Australian Government Department of Employment and Workplace Relations, *Halls Creek Engaging Families Trial, February–July 2006*, Evaluation Report (2006).

43 Australian Government Department of Employment and Workplace Relations, *Halls Creek Engaging Families Trial, February–July 2006*, Evaluation Report (2006).

## 1. Indigenous leaders and educators

The recruitment and retention of Indigenous teachers is a necessary challenge for education systems because they show Indigenous students that school is relevant and reflective of their world.

For the most part, our education system does not reflect Indigenous culture. Its values and knowledge systems predominantly reinforce western cultural perspectives and western methods of learning. Australian schools follow a Christian calendar year and English is almost exclusively the language of instruction in classrooms. When these value systems are foreign to the beginning student, they can have a negative impact on the ways in which Indigenous students see themselves as learners.

...western cultural signs have both a subtle and profound impact on students. They help to shape each student's view of the world, and his or her place in it.<sup>44</sup>

When students are able to make associations between the information they receive at school and at home they are able to integrate and scaffold new learning. An Australian research project involving over 80 school sites found that there are certain influences that improve learning outcomes for Indigenous students. The first finding of the study is '...the recognition, acknowledgement and support of culture.'<sup>45</sup>

While Indigenous culture can be supported through appropriate curricula and the placement of Indigenous art, images and symbols in the school environment, Indigenous staff are the most important component.

International human rights standards support the right of the child to culture.

Article 29, the Convention on the Rights of the Child states:

... the education of the child shall be directed to (c) the development of respect for the child's parents, his or her own cultural identity, language and values, for the national values of the country in which the child is living, the country from which he or she may originate and for civilizations different from his or her own ...<sup>46</sup>

Article 14 of the *UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* states that:

1. Indigenous peoples have the right to establish and control their educational systems and institutions providing education in their own languages, in a manner appropriate to their cultural methods of teaching and learning.
2. Indigenous individuals, particularly children, have the right to all levels and forms of education of the State without discrimination.
3. States shall, in conjunction with indigenous peoples, take effective measures, in order for indigenous individuals, particularly children, including those living outside their communities, to have access, when possible, to an education in their own culture and provided in their own language.<sup>47</sup>

44 Department of Employment, Education And Training Northern Territory, *Indigenous Languages and Culture in Northern Territory Schools* (2005), p 1. At [http://www.det.nt.gov.au/education/indigenous\\_education/previous\\_publications/indigenous\\_languages\\_culture\\_report/indigenous\\_languages\\_culture\\_report.pdf](http://www.det.nt.gov.au/education/indigenous_education/previous_publications/indigenous_languages_culture_report/indigenous_languages_culture_report.pdf) (viewed 12 January 2009).

45 Commonwealth Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs, *What Works? Explorations in Improving Outcomes for Indigenous Students* (2000).

46 *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, art 29.1. Opened for signature 20 November 1989, 1577 UNTS 3 (entered into force 2 September 1990). At <http://www.unhchr.ch/html/menu3/b/k2crc.htm> (viewed 15 December 2008).

47 *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, GA Resolution 61/295, UN Doc A/61L.67 (2007), art 14. At [http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/DRIPS\\_en.pdf](http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/DRIPS_en.pdf) (viewed 13 September 2008).

## Social Justice Report 2008

Indigenous leaders, teachers and role models are in short supply in schools across Australia.<sup>48</sup> In 2006, Indigenous teachers with qualifications constituted only 1 percent of teaching staff in all government schools. In Catholic schools they were 0.2 percent.<sup>49</sup> This is not representative of Indigenous people as we are now 2.5 percent of the Australian population.

The state and territory ratios tell a more compelling story. In the Northern Territory, Indigenous people make up over 30 percent of the population while Indigenous teachers represent 3.6 percent of the registered teacher workforce.<sup>50</sup>

The continuing supply of Indigenous teachers is dependent on education graduates. In the period from 2001 to 2006, the number of Indigenous students commencing tertiary study declined.<sup>51</sup> We now have a current problem of short supply and a future problem with fewer Indigenous graduates moving into schools.

As a field of study, education rates second in the choices made by enrolled Indigenous students. For example, in 2006 the top three fields of study for Indigenous students were as follows: 3,028 enrolments in society and culture courses, 1,887 in education courses and 1,430 in health courses.<sup>52</sup> Despite its relative popularity, more needs to be done to increase the supply of teacher graduates to keep pace with the growing Indigenous population.

There are systemic impediments at the national level which have impacted on Indigenous enrolments in higher education. According to the Indigenous Higher Education Advisory Council, the changes to income support (ABSTUDY) in 2000 had a negative impact on Indigenous commencements:

Changes to ABSTUDY with the aim of aligning the means tests and payment rates with those of Youth Allowance and Newstart took effect from 1 January 2000.

There was a sharp decline in higher education Indigenous enrolments in 2000 and ABSTUDY recipient numbers in higher education declined significantly in 2002 and 2003 (DEST, 2004). It is likely that both the means test and the payment rates need urgent reconsideration.<sup>53</sup>

Income support has an impact at the point of entry at the university door. Once enrolled, there are other challenges. Indigenous students' course completion rates fall below those of non-Indigenous students.<sup>54</sup> In order to provide support to Indigenous students, the Australian Government offers grants to higher education institutions to set up Indigenous Higher Education Centres. The Indigenous Higher Education

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48 A Fordham & R Schwab, *Education, Training and Indigenous Futures*, CAEPR Policy Research: 1900–2007, Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, The Australian National University (2007), p 51–52.

49 Australian Government, *National report to Parliament on Indigenous Education and Training, 2006*, (2008), p 72.

50 Commonwealth, *Parliamentary Debates*, Senate, 12 March 2008, p 636 (Senator Allison, Leader of the Australian Democrats).

51 Indigenous Higher Education Advisory Council, *Ngapartji Ngapartji – Yerra: Stronger Futures, Report of the 3rd Annual IHEAC Conference November 2007* (2008), Appendix C, Figure 2.1.

52 Indigenous Higher Education Advisory Council, *Ngapartji Ngapartji – Yerra: Stronger Futures, Report of the 3rd Annual IHEAC Conference November 2007* (2008), Appendix C, Figure 2.6.

53 Indigenous Higher Education Advisory Council, *Improving Indigenous Outcomes and Enhancing Indigenous Culture and Knowledge in Australian Higher Education*, Report to the Minister for Education, Science and Training (2006), p 16. At: [http://www.dest.gov.au/NR/rdonlyres/10D89BBD-5DB7-4E1D-B634-0F3F2C57DB47/12984/IHEAC\\_Report\\_003\\_WEB\\_wCover\\_pf\\_FINAL.pdf](http://www.dest.gov.au/NR/rdonlyres/10D89BBD-5DB7-4E1D-B634-0F3F2C57DB47/12984/IHEAC_Report_003_WEB_wCover_pf_FINAL.pdf) (viewed 9 December 2009).

54 Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, *National Report to Parliament on Indigenous Education and Training, 2006*, at p. 96

Centres offer student services in areas such as study skills, personal counselling and cultural awareness.<sup>55</sup>

The University of New South Wales, Monash University and James Cook University have developed a strategy to recruit and retain Indigenous medical students. While its focus is medical students, the strategy has relevance for other fields of study, including education. *Barawul Yana: Better strategies for the recruitment, retention and support of Indigenous medical students in Australia*, has the following nine goals:

1. To make sure that students who wish to aim for university study make it through to actual university enrolment;
2. To expose Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to a variety of role models or 'heroes' and to inspire them for success;
3. To show students, family members and communities that you can link success at school and university to 'walking in an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander world';
4. To show Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students that supportive programs at university, Indigenous entry schemes and financial support make studying at university a very real and achievable goal for those students who are ready to make a big commitment to their studies;
5. To work towards family and community understanding and support for kids who want to go to university. To let them know about the range of supports, both financial and cultural, for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students at university;
6. For university programs to work with schools' staff and to plan and train for the development of learning environments that encourage success for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students; to cooperate in providing information about what core skills are needed for students to develop an achievable academic/science language base so that they can move into degrees in higher education, and in particular, in the health sciences;
7. To support the encouragement of students to identify with their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander heritage – at a level with which they are comfortable and allow for expression of this identity within a culture of success and achievement;
8. To use appropriate peer and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health professional input as part of the raft of measures used to inform high school students about health professional careers; and
9. To maintain and extend financial and other support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander specific residential programs and workshops.<sup>56</sup>

A particular strength of *Barawul Yana* is that it focuses on inspiring and supporting students at the school level, the community level and the university level. It is a multi-pronged approach. While it provides educational, cultural and financial support to students once they are at university, it also seeks to inspire school students to enter the medical profession as it provides information to their families and communities.

55 Australian Government Department of Employment and Workplace Relations, *Indigenous Support Program (ISP)*. At [http://www.dest.gov.au/sectors/indigenous\\_education/programmes\\_funding/programme\\_categories/support\\_for\\_education\\_providers\\_staff/indigenous\\_support\\_programme\\_isp.htm](http://www.dest.gov.au/sectors/indigenous_education/programmes_funding/programme_categories/support_for_education_providers_staff/indigenous_support_programme_isp.htm) (viewed 9 January 2009).

56 Muru Marri Indigenous Health Unit, Nura Gili, & Rural Clinical School of University of New South Wales, *Barawul Yana: Better strategies for the recruitment, retention and support of Indigenous medical students in Australia* (2007). At [http://www.sphcm.med.unsw.edu.au/sphcmweb.nsf/resources/MMIHU\\_Barawul\\_Yana\\_Com\\_Rep.pdf/\\$file/MMIHU\\_Barawul\\_Yana\\_Com\\_Rep.pdf](http://www.sphcm.med.unsw.edu.au/sphcmweb.nsf/resources/MMIHU_Barawul_Yana_Com_Rep.pdf/$file/MMIHU_Barawul_Yana_Com_Rep.pdf) (viewed 7 January 2009).

## Social Justice Report 2008

The Australian Indigenous Mentoring Experience (AIME) offers mentors to Indigenous high school students. University students volunteer to do one-on-one mentoring to assist high school students with their school studies.<sup>57</sup> While the mentors are not necessarily Indigenous, the program has the capacity to increase the number of Indigenous school graduates and thereby assist in increasing university admissions. Indigenous and non-Indigenous mentors can be positive role models for high school students, and potentially increase recruitment into the education profession.

Teacher supply is also reliant on measures such as targeted positions for Indigenous applicants. In 2007 the changes to the Community Development Employment Project (CDEP) reduced the number of Indigenous people employed in schools. To mitigate some of the impact, the Australian Government's 2007 Budget provided \$15.1 million over four years for the conversion of up to 200 CDEP positions to education jobs. The changes to CDEP currently affect urban and major regional CDEP positions and we are yet to see whether these measures will be extended to remote regions. The Australian Government is funding each CDEP conversion into part-time employment at \$218.60 per week with up to an additional 30 percent of this wage for on-costs to cover superannuation, long-service leave, payroll processing and the costs associated with creating and filling the new position.<sup>58</sup>

This strategy needs to be closely monitored to see whether it meets this target. At this stage there is limited funding to support training of CDEP workers to upgrade their qualifications. The Australian Government has provided a one-off payment of \$6,000 per position to the host employer to assist with necessary professional development of former CDEP participants. Employers have a fixed time period to the end of 2008 to expend the funds.<sup>59</sup> In principle, the conversion of CDEP positions to fully funded jobs has benefits, but not if the net effect is to reduce the numbers of Indigenous people in the education service industry.

Ideally governments should be supporting Aboriginal and Islander Education Workers (AIEW) to upgrade their qualifications to become fully qualified teachers if this is their goal. This requires resources and targeted programs such as the AIEW mentoring programs which were abolished in the 1990s.

## 2. Employment mentors

Mentors can be beneficial at all levels of the life cycle, particularly at times when people are adjusting to new employment or are in the process of developing new skills. In professional environments, mentor programs work well when they are designed as reciprocal practices whereby the transfer of skills and knowledges occurs in parallel between colleagues. This model assumes that there is something to be learned through collaboration and collective thinking, rather than the formulation of a hierarchical teacher-learner environment.

The *Building Leaders, Building Community* project of *Dare to Lead* is a good example of a collaborative approach to developing leadership in schools. The program's aim is to promote Indigenous school leaders and to support Indigenous parents and carers

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57 Australian Indigenous Mentoring Experience (AIME) website. At <http://www.aimementoring.com/about.htm> (viewed 29 January 2009)

58 Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, *Building an Indigenous Workforce in Government Service Delivery (Education) – Program Guidelines*. At [http://www.dest.gov.au/sectors/indigenous\\_education/programmes\\_funding/programme\\_categories/baiw/default.htm](http://www.dest.gov.au/sectors/indigenous_education/programmes_funding/programme_categories/baiw/default.htm) (viewed 9 January 2009).

59 Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, *Building an Indigenous Workforce in Government Service Delivery (Education) – Program Guidelines*, at: [http://www.dest.gov.au/sectors/indigenous\\_education/programmes\\_funding/programme\\_categories/baiw/default.htm](http://www.dest.gov.au/sectors/indigenous_education/programmes_funding/programme_categories/baiw/default.htm) (viewed 9 January 2009).

of school students. The project develops alliances between Indigenous Education Workers and school principals with the intention of forging new leadership models and developing connections with the Indigenous families of each school community.<sup>60</sup>

Other mentor programs in the field of education tend to focus on supporting newly employed teachers. The NSW Department of Education and Training has a *Newly Appointed Aboriginal Teacher's Support Program*. As part of the orientation, the new teacher and the school principal attend teaching and learning sessions together and participate in a cultural awareness workshop. At these forums the new teacher has the opportunity to meet other Aboriginal teachers and a support network is encouraged.<sup>61</sup>

The mentor programs for qualified teachers are a teacher retention strategy. The aim is to assist new teachers to take on the considerable responsibilities associated with classroom management and curriculum development.

The mentor role offers benefits for experienced teachers and principals in addition to the benefits offered to the new teacher. Working with colleagues is an opportunity for professional learning. Skills in management, problem-solving and reciprocal learning are all parts of the mentor process. As the Western Australia Education Taskforce found in 2008:

There is a strong case for principals to play a mentoring role. ... all principals have a teaching background and many, in the interests of upholding both their teaching integrity and credibility in the community, would like to play a more active role in classrooms. This should be encouraged. Provided that the supports the Taskforce has recommended to relieve teachers and principals in other areas of their workload are introduced, such mentoring needs to be more systemically applied in schools. Raising the bar in relation to mentoring, and developing the skills and competencies of all educators (especially beginning teachers) in addition to providing opportunities for developing distributed leadership within schools, will enhance succession planning in the education workforce.<sup>62</sup>

The recruitment and retention of Indigenous people in school education is an important priority for current and future generations of Indigenous young people. As future contributors to the social, cultural and economic future of Australia, Indigenous students need every opportunity to maximise their learning and to integrate their knowledge systems. By supporting the employment of Indigenous staff, education employers are fulfilling an obligation to enhance and encourage mutual cultural understandings between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.

Strategies for recruiting Indigenous teachers must begin at the school level. School students will not make career choices unless they are informed about their options. Role models in the form of Indigenous teachers are an essential part of this recruitment strategy as they demonstrate what is possible for aspiring young teachers. This is a first step to encouraging Indigenous young people into the profession. The next step is the support and development of Indigenous teacher trainees at higher education institutions. Finally there is a need to retain and develop Indigenous teachers into school leaders in the workplace.

Making Indigenous education a priority throughout the life-cycle is not something that can be accomplished at the national level. In fact it is not something that can be

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60 Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, *Dare to Lead, July 2008 Update*, (2008), p. 6.

61 New South Wales Government, Department of Education and Training, *DET Employment and Support Programs*, <https://www.det.nsw.edu.au/employment/teachnsw/employment.htm> (viewed 6 January 2009).

62 Western Australia Education Taskforce Report, *Public Access – Twomey Report*, Chapter 4, *Leadership and Mentoring* (June 2008). At: [http://sstuwa.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=754&Itemid=566](http://sstuwa.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=754&Itemid=566) (viewed 19 November 2008).

put into effect at the state or territory levels either. Action must happen at all levels of government and include effort and coordination at the local and regional levels. Schools themselves are crucial to teacher recruitment and retention, though they need the support of governments and non-government bodies.

The school and community partnership models which take up a large part of this chapter, provides the foundation for driving Indigenous recruitment and retention in the field of education. The local or regional groups must be in a position to access the services and funds available to them to enhance Indigenous teacher numbers in all school staffrooms.

### 3. Teacher recruitment strategies

The recruitment of the best and brightest school teachers to schools with large numbers of Indigenous students is a challenge for school principals. One of the main impediments to recruitment is that rural and remote locations are generally not favoured destinations for trained Australian school teachers.

The recruitment difficulties in remote regions are exacerbated by the shortage of teachers world-wide. UNESCO estimates that 18 million new teachers are required if universal primary education is to be achieved by 2015 – achieving one of the *Millennium Development Goals*.<sup>63</sup>

In Australia the teacher workforce is aging and there are not sufficient teacher graduates who are registering to make up for the current and projected teacher retirements. The median age of teachers in Australia has been increasing significantly since the 1980s:

In the 15 years to 2001, the age profile of teachers became older, with the median age of the teacher population rising from 34 years to 43 years over the period. In 2001, around one-quarter (28%) of all teachers were aged less than 35 years, a decrease from around half (51%) in 1986. Over the same period, the number of teachers aged 45 years and over increased from 17% to 44%.<sup>64</sup>

In Australia the teacher shortages have been impacting on regional and remote schools for decades.<sup>65</sup> This has had a disproportionately negative impact on Indigenous students because they are more likely to be in remote locations.

A 2001 Auditor-General's report from Victoria found that over 30 percent of schools that reported teacher shortages were restructuring existing teacher allotments to cover the teacher vacancies. The Victorian study found that over 25 percent of these schools were using teachers without the required subject training or expertise to fill vacancies. This means, for example, that trained English teachers may be filling vacancies in technology or science classes, or teaching remote Indigenous students who actually require teachers qualified with the English as a Second Language (ESL) methodology. The Victorian audit report also found that 15 percent of schools dropped subjects and changed the curriculum to deal with staff shortages.

Teacher recruitment is an essential component of any strategy to improve Indigenous education outcomes. Makeshift strategies to fill teacher vacancies are not acceptable

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63 United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation, *Bali Declaration*, Seventh E-9 Ministerial Review Meeting, ED/EFA/2008/ME/1 REV (2008). At <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0015/001584/158455E.pdf> (viewed 14 October 2008).

64 Australian Bureau of Statistics, *4102.0 – Australian Social Trends* (2003). Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra. At <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/2f762f95845417aeca25706c00834efa/459c3882fad473a2ca2570eb0083be84!OpenDocument> (viewed 18 November 2008).

65 P Hudson & S Hudson, 'Changing Pre-service Teachers' Attitudes For Teaching In Rural Schools' (August 2008) Vol 33(4) *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, Queensland University of Technology p 67. At <http://ajte.education.ecu.edu.au/issues/PDF/334/Hudson.pdf> (viewed 18 November 2008).

in a country that has the resources and the commitment to provide quality education to the next generations.

Effective recruitment to rural and remote locations requires strategic system-wide approaches. The approaches need to make teaching in these locations attractive in terms of conditions and salaries, but they also need to focus on increasing information about remote Australia. Remote Australia is largely unknown by the majority of Australians and this lack of knowledge or experience is a factor which prevents teacher graduates from considering a remote posting. It stands to reason that teacher graduates would be unwilling to commit themselves to an unknown destination.

There is much that can be done to improve teacher recruitment. One first step is the development of strong and continuous relationships between teacher training institutions and education employers.

#### 4. Placement of trainee teachers in remote schools

There is real benefit in giving trainee teachers the opportunity to hear first-hand stories from remote teachers during their teacher training. Those teachers who have worked in remote schools can provide a unique insight into life and learning in the outback and alert students about teaching opportunities outside of their current realm of experience.

Government and non-government education providers are best positioned to coordinate the flow of information from schools to trainee teachers through teacher training institutions. It is in the interests of education providers to be constantly updating training institutions about positions as they become available in hard-to-fill locations or hard to fill subject areas. Providers and training institutions can work collaboratively to match final year graduates with teacher vacancies. Leaders in Indigenous Medical Education (LIME) is an example of a network that provides input into medical education and curricula, and assists in developing best practice in the recruitment and retention of Indigenous medical students. LIME assists in building multi-disciplinary and multi-sectoral linkages for the benefit of Indigenous health as well as providing review, advocacy and professional development functions in the health industry.<sup>66</sup> There is scope to develop a similar network for Indigenous education that acts on recruitment, retention and professional development between the training institutions and the education industry.

Information alone is not enough to improve teacher recruitment. There is considerable anecdotal evidence of teachers leaving remote schools after a matter of days or weeks after experiencing culture shock or a mismatch between their expectations and reality of a remote posting. It is difficult to know the extent of this problem because education departments do not make this information public. One way to avoid this situation is to give trainee teachers opportunities to experience remote schools through their teaching placements.

Teacher placements or practicums provide opportunities for assessing workplace environments before making a commitment to employment. It is a daunting process for a first-year graduate teacher to agree to a remote teaching position if they have had no prior experience in these locations. It does a disservice to the school to send an ill-prepared neophyte teacher to a school where the culture and the environment are completely unknown. Coordination and collaboration between education employers and training institutions is essential to ensure that interested trainee teachers have opportunities for remote teaching placements before they graduate.

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66 Leaders in Indigenous Medical Education (LIME) website. At <http://www.limenetwork.net.au/> (viewed 29 January 2009).

The practicum allows the school and the teacher to decide whether they are well suited. Those providers who have managed teacher recruitment in this way have found that this strategy has a high success rate of teacher employment at the completion of the trainee teacher's studies. The tried-and-tested approach is beneficial to the teachers and the school as it ensures there is a match between mutual expectations.

While there are a number of good projects that provide trainee teachers with teaching experiences in remote locations, there is no consistency across jurisdictions and education providers.

The Western Australian Department of Education and Training and the WA Chamber of Minerals and Energy have developed the Student Teacher Rural Experience Program (STREP) which provides financial support to student teachers undertaking their final practicum in remote or rural schools.

STREP assists with return travel costs and a weekly stipend for the duration of the practicum. Certain schools and areas are specified and STREP applicants need to satisfy a number of selection criteria, including an intention to work at a rural or remote school after graduation.<sup>67</sup>

A review of the STREP program found that three-quarters of participants were willing to take regional or remote teaching appointments as a result of the program. The review found that:

Participation in STREP, according to the responses to this particular survey, seems to be providing pre-service teachers with authentic regional experiences, thereby ensuring the development of realistic expectations of living and working in country towns.<sup>68</sup>

## 5. Teacher scholarship schemes

Most states and territories provide scholarships for teachers in subject areas or locations where the demand is high. For example, the Queensland Department of Education, Training and the Arts provides scholarships to meet the labour market demands of the teacher workforce through the following:

- professional development scholarships for registered teachers wanting to upgrade qualifications through Graduate Certificate courses; and
- employment scholarships for registered teachers to complete a Graduate Certificate courses in specialised areas in which they have not worked previously.<sup>69</sup>

Victoria provides competitive scholarship programs for trainee teachers for the following:

- schools with recruitment difficulties; and
- subjects specialties where there is high demand and few teachers.

In NSW, the Department of Education and Training has an *Aboriginal Teacher Education Scholarship Mentor Program*. It aims to provide opportunities for Aboriginal people to train as teachers. In 2008, up to 60 scholarships were on offer for Aboriginal people undertaking primary or secondary teacher education programs in New South Wales.

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67 G Lock, 'Preparing Teachers for Rural Appointments: Lessons from Australia', (Winter 2008), *The Rural Educator*. At [http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\\_qa4126/is\\_200801/ai\\_n25139914](http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qa4126/is_200801/ai_n25139914) (viewed 7 January 2009).

68 G Lock, 'Preparing Teachers for Rural Appointments: Lessons from Australia', (Winter 2008), *The Rural Educator*. At [http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\\_qa4126/is\\_200801/ai\\_n25139914](http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qa4126/is_200801/ai_n25139914) (viewed 7 January 2009).

69 Queensland Department of Education, Training and the Arts (DETA), *Scholarships for Teachers*, [http://education.qld.gov.au/staff/development/scholarships/teachers/docs/scholarships\\_for\\_teachers.html](http://education.qld.gov.au/staff/development/scholarships/teachers/docs/scholarships_for_teachers.html) (viewed 12 November 2008).

The NSW Scholarship holders are supported through a range of strategies including:

- being supported by a mentor throughout the period of teacher training. Relief funding is provided for mentors to support scholarship holders. Advisory guidelines are provided to scholarship holders and mentors which set out their roles and responsibilities;
- publication of a quarterly newsletter providing updates on key events;
- personalised support through regular telephone and email contact and regular on-campus university visits by Aboriginal Policy Officers.<sup>70</sup>

## 6. Professional development and industry release

Like other professionals, teachers benefit from opportunities to extend their knowledge through training, development and new workplace experiences. Teachers who undertake targeted, high quality professional development are in a position to provide benefit to their students and their schools. Industry release and professional development programs enable teachers to keep pace with rapidly changing technological workplaces and can have the added value of being retention strategies.

In recent years however, the number of teacher industry release programs have decreased. For example, the Victorian *Teacher Release to Industry Program* (TRIP) was discontinued in 2003, after operating since 1991. The TRIP program offered teachers full-time, forty week positions within selected enterprises. These placements exposed teachers to new workplace environments, giving them experiences which would enable them to link their students to structured workplace learning opportunities in future.

The industry release programs that currently exist for Australian teachers are usually short-term, and often limited to placements for Career Teachers. For example, the Northern Territory offers places for secondary teachers to be involved in a ten day Teacher Release Program through the *Group Training Northern Territory Foundation*. Programs like this one assist in developing links between school and industry and vocational education and training.<sup>71</sup>

While industry release programs are expensive, they are also highly valued by teachers. The Victorian TRIP program provided 50 places annually at a cost of \$1 million to the Department and it had many more applicants than it had places. It also maintained high retention of teachers after the placements. For example, in 2000, only 2 percent of teachers relocated to industry positions after undertaking TRIP placements.<sup>72</sup>

Given the cost and the value of these programs, it may be possible to limit these programs so that they are exclusively available to regional and remote teachers who have spent a period of time in these schools. In this way it becomes both an incentive to teach in these locations and a potential retention strategy.

One way to provide industry release for Indigenous teachers could be through utilising the Australian Employment Covenant (AEC). The AEC involves the placement and long term retention of 50,000 Indigenous people into 'Covenant Jobs'. It is a three way commitment that involves:

70 New South Wales Government, Department of Education and Training, *DET Employment and Support Programs*, <https://www.det.nsw.edu.au/employment/teachnsw/employment.htm> (viewed 6 January 2009).

71 Group Training Northern Territory, *Teacher Release Program*, <http://www.gtn.t.com.au/pages/Teacher-Release-Program.html> (viewed 18 November 2008).

72 Victorian Auditor-General's Office, *Teacher Work Force Planning*, Performance Audit (2001), p 103–104. At [http://archive.audit.vic.gov.au/reports\\_par/agp73cv.html](http://archive.audit.vic.gov.au/reports_par/agp73cv.html) (viewed 18 November 2008).

## Social Justice Report 2008

- Employers formally guaranteeing job-ready and training-ready Indigenous Australians employment, job specific training, post-placement and individualised mentor support;
- The Australian Government facilitating the identification, recruitment and preparation of Indigenous job seekers for successful placement in the workforce; and
- Indigenous Australians committing to appropriate employment preparation and training and remaining in employment once placed.

Connection to the AEC may provide a sustainable industry release option for Indigenous teachers as a minimum.

## 7. Remote allowances

All Australian jurisdictions provide some form of allowance for teachers who are appointed to regional and remote schools. The allowances are usually calibrated by remoteness or isolation category and other subsidies are also provided such as relocation reimbursement or reimbursement for the costs of travel to home for holiday periods. In some instances, teachers are provided with reduced rent or rent-free housing and subsidised utilities.

In Western Australia public sector teachers are paid an allowance loading on their base salary as well as free rent, subsidised utilities, travel reimbursement and additional leave after a number of years of service. Remote teachers are also granted permanency after a two year remote posting.<sup>73</sup> However, a 2008 evaluation of the incentives found that remote teacher allowance loadings are comparatively lower than those paid to other WA Government sector employees.<sup>74</sup>

Teacher salaries and allowances are a reflection on the esteem in which the profession is held. This in turn impacts on the view of the profession from potential recruits and from those within the workforce. A Western Australian Taskforce into public education found:

It is the perception of the education sector and the broader community that remuneration for all professionals in education, but particularly teachers, is low. It is this perception which consequently impacts on the status of teaching as a profession and the supply (in numbers and quality) of the workforce.

Submissions received by the Taskforce raised the following concerns relating to salaries and allowances:

- relative salary is not on par with other professions;
- allowances do not cover the cost of living, particularly in regional areas;
- relatively poor salary and allowances lower the status of the profession;
- lack of equity in allowances and conditions for staff across the education sector; and
- lack of equity in allowances, incentives and conditions, particularly in regional areas, when compared to other Government sector employees.<sup>75</sup>

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73 Western Australia Department of Education and Training, *Remote Teaching Service*, <http://www.det.wa.edu.au/teachingwa/detcms/teachingwa/teaching-wa/shared-content/remote-teaching-service/remote-teaching-service.en?oid=MultiPartArticle-id-1399156&> (viewed 19 November 2008).

74 Western Australia Education Taskforce Report, *Public Access – Twomey Report*, Chapter 1, *Remuneration*, (June 2008). At [http://sstuwa.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=754&Itemid=566](http://sstuwa.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=754&Itemid=566) (viewed 19 November 2008).

75 Western Australia Education Taskforce Report, *Public Access – Twomey Report*, Chapter 1, *Remuneration*, (June 2008). At [http://sstuwa.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=754&Itemid=566](http://sstuwa.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=754&Itemid=566) (viewed 19 November 2008).

## 8. Teacher retention and living conditions

... Research indicates that, of those variables potentially open to policy influence, factors involving teachers and teaching are the most important factors in student learning...<sup>76</sup>

In order to retain good teachers in remote schools, we have to ensure that they are appropriately housed and supported in what can be challenging environments. Poor infrastructure such as poor teacher houses and poor school facilities can have a negative impact on teacher retention. Overcrowding of existing teacher houses can lead to tension in small school environments. Small communities can be hothouse environments so it is important that teachers are not forced to share with each other.

The cost of maintaining and building infrastructure in non-urban regions can be considerable for governments. If additional houses are not budgeted for by governments, schools can be understaffed because governments cannot fund additional teacher houses within required timeframes. This in turn puts pressure on existing staff in small schools.

Many of the services we take for granted in urban areas are not available in remote communities. Access to professional development is restricted in remote locations and internet connections and speed may also impede access to online resources.

The logistics of infrastructure maintenance can also mean long waiting periods to fix faulty plumbing or to mend wear and tear. If air-conditioning or heating breaks down in remote communities it can be weeks and sometimes months before service personnel visit the community to carry out maintenance. In extreme weather conditions this can place strain on teaching staff.

The Commonwealth, state and territory governments must make teacher housing a funding priority, starting with jurisdictions where there is a large backlog of communities waiting for teacher houses to be built or upgraded.

## 9. Discriminatory housing policy for Indigenous teachers

In Queensland and the Northern Territory, Indigenous Assistant Teachers and qualified Indigenous teachers living and teaching in their home communities are not eligible for subsidised teacher housing.<sup>77</sup> In order to be eligible for housing a teacher has to be transferred to a community that is not their home community.

All non-Indigenous teachers who relocate to take up teaching positions are eligible for houses. However, Indigenous employees who choose to work in their home communities are not. In practice, this policy discriminates against Indigenous teachers and acts as a disincentive for qualified Indigenous teachers to work in their home communities.

Remote Assistant Teachers generally have no choice except to work in their home communities because their role is to teach and interpret in the local language and build

76 P McKenzie & P Santiago, *Teachers Matter, Attracting, Developing and Retaining Effective Teachers*, Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, (2005), p 26. At [http://books.google.com/books?id=6A7cM-fsA7QC&pg=PA26&lpg=PA26&dq=of+those+variables+potentially+open+to+policy+influence,+teachers+and+teaching+are+the+most+important+factors+in+student+learning&source=web&ots=XbJum2RaK6&sig=C7Q3yclVpZMbLcJ9UY3ebFZPIF0&hl=en&sa=X&oi=book\\_result&resnum=1&ct=result#PPA28,M1](http://books.google.com/books?id=6A7cM-fsA7QC&pg=PA26&lpg=PA26&dq=of+those+variables+potentially+open+to+policy+influence,+teachers+and+teaching+are+the+most+important+factors+in+student+learning&source=web&ots=XbJum2RaK6&sig=C7Q3yclVpZMbLcJ9UY3ebFZPIF0&hl=en&sa=X&oi=book_result&resnum=1&ct=result#PPA28,M1) (viewed 7 January 2009).

77 Australian Education Union, 'Teacher Housing for Indigenous Teachers in Discrete Indigenous Communities', (Winter 2008), Issue 4 *Our Voices Our Vision – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Workers in Public Education*, p 1. At <http://www.aeufederal.org.au/Publications/ATSI/News/Winter2008.pdf> (viewed 19 November 2008).

the language bridge to English. Assistant Teachers hold the corporate knowledge and provide a vital link to families in each community. As residents of the community they are the consistent influence in the school environment. Many Assistant Teachers have been in the same school for decades, sharing the corporate knowledge as the non-Indigenous teachers come and go.

The effect of the government housing policies is to financially disadvantage Indigenous teachers. Given that remote housing is usually offered to non-Indigenous teachers free of rent and with subsidised utilities, the financial disadvantage for Indigenous teachers can be significant. In addition, many Indigenous communities have problems with over-crowded housing and so Indigenous teachers are further disadvantaged by having to live in circumstances which may not be conducive to healthy living.

For many years Indigenous teachers in Queensland and the Northern Territory have asked government departments to provide them with houses. In situations where there is limited teacher housing, a potential solution is for education departments to lease houses from Shire Councils or other housing authorities. The houses can then be provided to Indigenous Teachers (both fully qualified teachers and Assistant Teachers) rent free or rent subsidised and the lease can revert to the Shire when local teachers retire or leave the teaching service.

Maintaining qualified Indigenous teachers and Assistant Teachers in remote schools is vital for the successful operation of remote schools. They provide a language link for children in the early years of schooling so that the school is not a totally foreign environment. They also provide a role model for the Indigenous students; demonstrating the purpose of education and a potential employment pathway for aspiring Indigenous youth.

## 10. Marketing incentives

Remote teaching must become an attractive option for Australian teachers if we are to improve outcomes for these students. The marketing of remote teaching, including the details of allowances and subsidies is a way to increase competition for these places – with the ultimate goal of providing school principals with a pool of well qualified and appropriate applicants.

There are many actions that can be taken to increase the profile of remote teaching and publicise the benefits of remote education contexts. Information about incentives, scholarships and other strategies should be widely available and teacher institutions and governments can do more to counteract the negative profile that remote Australia has been given by some media. Consideration should be given to promoting remote teaching along the lines of the campaign run by the Australian Defence Force. Television and print media advertising reaches a wide audience and has the potential to suggest and promote vocations and locations which may have been hitherto unknown by potential recruits.

The McKinsey report shows that the quality of a school cannot exceed the quality of its teachers, so it is important to begin by attracting and employing the best. In countries such as Finland and Singapore, teaching is a high-status profession and generous funds have been made available for pre-service teacher training to provide an incentive to attract the best.<sup>78</sup>

There is a definite imperative for government and non-government education providers to act on remote recruitment and retention strategies for Indigenous and non-Indigenous

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78 Western Australia Education Taskforce Report, *Public Access – Twomey Report*, Chapter 4, *Leadership and Mentoring* (June 2008). At [http://sstuwa.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=754&Itemid=566](http://sstuwa.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=754&Itemid=566) (viewed 19 November 2008).

teachers. As the most important asset to the school environment, education providers should ensure they attract the best, brightest and most appropriate teachers to remote schools where the education challenges are greatest.

### Case Study 5: Minyerri Community School – Good teachers and school leaders

The numbers of students enrolling at Minyerri Community School is growing every year and most of the students are attending school every day. Minyerri wasn't always such a thriving school community, but things have changed in recent years. The school principal said this about the school:

When our family first arrived in 2001 we lived in the staff room. We had 80 students enrolled and a 55 percent attendance rate. We now have 165 enrolled and over 85 percent attendance.<sup>79</sup>

Good student attendance and growth in school enrolments are indications of a successful school. Much of the success of this school has been attributed to good relationships with the community; good Indigenous and non-Indigenous leadership; and the longevity of employment of some key school staff:

The trick is relationships, a cultural understanding – developed over many years. I got to know a lot of the men through the footy, and the women through the school.<sup>80</sup>

The Minyerri community is located approximately 270 Km southeast of Katherine. It has a population of approximately 500 people. It is accessible by road from Katherine and the trip takes about three hours. A permit is required for non-Aboriginal people to enter the community.

The school is staffed by a principal, nine qualified teachers and four assistant teachers. A number of tutors also work at the school and two Inclusion Support Officers work with children with disabilities. Early in 2003 the school opened four new classrooms to cater for increased enrolments and secondary school students:

At first the secondary kids were on the school balcony. Last January our new \$1.5 million secondary complex opened and our school now includes science, IT and home economics rooms and three classrooms.<sup>81</sup>

The school principal is well known in the region, he has been there for 20 years. In the late 1980s and 1990s he was principal of schools in the nearby communities of Hodson River and Ngukurr. He taught several of the parents of the children currently at Minyerri. The principal is married to a Ngandi woman whose sisters are married to Alawa men – she has strong family ties to Minyerri. She is also a teacher at the school. They have been at Minyerri for more than seven years. As school leaders they have the benefit of speaking the local language. There are other teachers who have been at the school for a number of years:

79 Principal Minyerri School, Northern Territory Department of Community Services, *Kids Tracks, A newsletter about Territory Aboriginal child and family wellbeing services*, (2006), p. 32. At [http://www.nt.gov.au/health/docs/newsletter/KidsTracks\\_2006Feb.pdf](http://www.nt.gov.au/health/docs/newsletter/KidsTracks_2006Feb.pdf) (viewed 21 January 2009).

80 Principal Minyerri School, Northern Territory Department of Community Services, *Kids Tracks, A newsletter about Territory Aboriginal child and family wellbeing services*, (2006), p. 32. At [http://www.nt.gov.au/health/docs/newsletter/KidsTracks\\_2006Feb.pdf](http://www.nt.gov.au/health/docs/newsletter/KidsTracks_2006Feb.pdf) (viewed 21 January 2009).

81 Principal Minyerri School, Northern Territory Department of Community Services, *Kids Tracks, A newsletter about Territory Aboriginal child and family wellbeing services*, (2006), p. 32. At [http://www.nt.gov.au/health/docs/newsletter/KidsTracks\\_2006Feb.pdf](http://www.nt.gov.au/health/docs/newsletter/KidsTracks_2006Feb.pdf) (viewed 21 January 2009).

We have a core of teachers that have been here two, three, four years. My wife and I have been here nearly eight years. I think that continuity sort of helps too as they get to know you as a person and as a teacher.

That continuity is basically the pulse of a good remote school. I mean given the average rate in a remote school is seven months, we do very, very well in keeping our teachers here.<sup>82</sup>

The deputy principal reinforced the views of the principal saying: [We are the] 'only school in remote with long staying teachers'.<sup>83</sup> She described the principal's leadership as being very important to the success of the school:

The principal Neil has a good attitude to the students and staff – [he has] charisma [he likes] joking and having fun yet is firm when discipline is required. Attendance fell to low when he went away on holidays and the parents, community and students were happy when he returned. Family, kids feel safe at the school – parents support kids to go to school, kids are disciplined but still shown that the school supports them at all times – kids don't get away with bad behaviour – Neil has a good relationship with the families – he knows and understands the culture and the family connections and everyone likes him.<sup>84</sup>

An Indigenous teacher at the school described the importance of having secondary education at Minyerri so the students are able to stay in the home community if they prefer:

Quite often the kids are in boarding schools and most of them last one term. They miss home and family support and suffer the loneliness and being away from their home and school.<sup>85</sup>

The strong school team at Minyerri support students to take up boarding opportunities, they also offer students the opportunity to study in their home communities.

## 11. Summary of issues: The best and brightest teachers

- The *quality* of school teachers is the most important factor impacting on student learning outcomes;
- Indigenous teachers and leaders show Indigenous students that school is relevant and reflective of their world;
- Changes to income support (ABSTUDY) in 2000 have had a negative impact on Indigenous enrolments in higher education which in turn has the potential to impact on the number of qualified Indigenous teachers and future school leaders;
- Mentors assist in facilitating educational and professional achievement and can be role models for Indigenous students and teachers;

82 C. Curtain, , *Rural Report for Outback NT*: (ABC Rural Report, 2 April 2008). At: <http://www.abc.net.au/rural/regions/content/2007/s2205994.htm> (viewed 21 January 2009).

83 Deputy Principal Minyerri School, *Email correspondence with the Australian Human Rights Commission*, 20 November 2008.

84 Deputy Principal Minyerri School, *Email correspondence with the Australian Human Rights Commission*, 20 November 2008.

85 Teacher Minyerri School, *Email correspondence with the Australian Human Rights Commission*, 20 November 2008.

- Teacher shortages have a disproportionately negative impact on remote schools. The shortages mean that teachers are teaching outside of their subject expertise. Teachers who are qualified in English as a Second Language methodology are required for many remote schools;
- Placing trainee teachers in remote schools can assist with appropriate recruitment of graduates. Subsidised remote placements should be available for (suitably assessed) trainee teachers in all states and territories;
- Teacher release programs can improve teacher retention because they give teachers opportunities to enhance and refresh their skills outside the classroom;
- Industry release for Indigenous teachers could be linked to the Australian Employment Covenant;
- The quality and availability of teacher housing impacts on teacher retention;
- Teacher housing policy in Queensland and the Northern Territory discriminates against Indigenous teachers. A potential solution to housing shortages is for governments to lease houses from housing authorities for the duration of the teachers' tenure at the remote school; and
- There is potential for governments to undertake marketing activity to promote and emphasise the important status of remote teaching.

## Part 5: Early childhood education

.....

Let us resolve today to begin with the little children, a fitting place to start on this day of apology for the stolen generations.

Let us resolve over the next five years to have every indigenous four-year-old in a remote Aboriginal community enrolled in and attending a proper early childhood education centre or opportunity and engaged in proper pre-literacy and pre-numeracy programs.<sup>86</sup>

The above extract from Prime Minister Rudd's Apology to the Stolen Generations makes unequivocal the Government's commitment to early childhood education for remote Indigenous children.

The Australian Government's Office of Early Childhood Education and Child Care further commits the Government to a standard of early childhood education and child care by declaring an intention to 'work towards providing the leadership to achieve a nationally-consistent system of quality, accessible and affordable early childhood education and child care for all Australian families.'<sup>87</sup>

I welcome the Government's commitment to remote Indigenous children. Australia has not been a big spender on early childhood education compared with other OECD countries.<sup>88</sup> Remote Indigenous children have been disproportionately affected by this under-expenditure. Preschool attendance data confirms that children living in very remote areas are less likely to attend preschool than children in other locations and Indigenous children in these areas have lower participation rates than non-Indigenous children.<sup>89</sup>

If we are to close the gap between the learning outcomes of Indigenous and non-Indigenous young people, we must provide quality learning options for Indigenous preschool aged children in all locations.

In December 2007, the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) agreed to a partnership between the Commonwealth, state and territory governments to pursue substantial reform in the areas of education, skills and early childhood development.

To this end, the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations is overseeing the development of the National Quality Framework for Early Education and Care. Key areas of development for the Framework are quality standards and an enhanced regulatory framework, an Early Years Learning Framework and the development of a capable and responsive workforce.<sup>90</sup>

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86 Commonwealth, *Parliamentary Debates*, House of Representatives, 13 February 2008, (The Hon Kevin Rudd MP, Prime Minister) at [http://www.aph.gov.au/house/Rudd\\_Speech.pdf](http://www.aph.gov.au/house/Rudd_Speech.pdf) (viewed 13 January 2009).

87 Australian Government, Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, *Office of Early Childhood Education and Child Care*, <http://www.deewr.gov.au/EarlyChildhood/OfficeOfEarlyChildhood/Pages/default.aspx> (viewed 13 January 2009).

88 M Harrington, 'Preschool education in Australia', (2008), *Background Note*, Australian Government Parliamentary Library. At [http://www.aph.gov.au/library/pubs/BN/2007-08/PreschoolEdAustralia.htm#\\_Toc198010805](http://www.aph.gov.au/library/pubs/BN/2007-08/PreschoolEdAustralia.htm#_Toc198010805) (viewed 15 January 2009).

89 N Biddle, 'Indigenous Australians and preschool education: Who is attending?' in M. Fordham and R.G. Schwab (eds), *Education, Training and Indigenous Futures*, *CAEPR Policy Research: 1990-2007, Research Summaries* (2006), Reference No. 26 p. 2. At <http://www.anu.edu.au/caepr/educationfutures/ref026.pdf> (viewed 9 December 2008).

90 Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, *National Quality Framework for Early Education and Care* [http://www.dest.gov.au/sectors/early\\_childhood/policy\\_initiatives\\_reviews/coag/The\\_Early\\_Years\\_Learning\\_Framework.htm](http://www.dest.gov.au/sectors/early_childhood/policy_initiatives_reviews/coag/The_Early_Years_Learning_Framework.htm) (viewed 13 January 2009).

The increased involvement of the Australian Government in early childhood provision will provide much needed assistance; especially in terms of remote services though I would like to see a specific focus on remote infrastructure.

Since 1986 preschool education has been the sole responsibility of the states and territories. Up until 2007, the Australian Government has not had a role in early childhood education, except to provide supplementary funding for Indigenous preschool services. To date the supplementary funding has supported programs rather than infrastructure. The supplementary funding for preschool education was estimated at \$13.8 million for 2008. To receive Supplementary Recurrent Assistance (SRA) a preschool must have five or more Indigenous students or have formed a cluster with other preschools to meet the enrolment eligibility requirements. Funding is only provided to licensed or registered preschools with accredited programs.<sup>91</sup>

Providing universal early childhood learning services in remote communities will require large infrastructure investments in future. I am pleased to see that the Prime Minister favours integrated models for early childhood services which include services for parents as well as for children.<sup>92</sup>

## 1. Multi-purpose early childhood centres

There is work in progress to build multi-purpose early-childhood infrastructure in Australia. In 2006, the Queensland Government committed \$32 million over four years to develop integrated Early Years Centres where parents can access early education services, child care, child health services, parenting programs and other family support at one location. Two centres are now operating in Queensland with planning underway for further centres.<sup>93</sup>

There is international evidence that supports the benefits of integrated models. Similar multi-purpose facilities have been developed by First Nations groups in Canada. First Nation organisations describe the facilities as a ‘hook for mobilising community commitment and... a hub for the gradual introduction of inter-relating, inter-sectoral programs.’<sup>94</sup>

The development of facilities that allow for the co-location of mothers or carers (who are participating in training) with their children (who are participating in early childhood learning) assists in the broader purpose of community development. Again, international studies demonstrate that integrated mother and child activity has the benefit of promoting maternal and child health and development.<sup>95</sup>

Multi-purpose early childhood facilities can include combinations of the following features. Two classroom sized spaces, a withdrawal area for childcare, industrial-sized kitchen facilities, bathroom and toilet amenities, spaces for staff, storage spaces for equipment and an outdoor play area. The classrooms can be used for different

91 M Harrington, ‘Preschool education in Australia’, (2008), *Background Note*, Australian Government Parliamentary Library. At [http://www.aph.gov.au/library/pubs/BN/2007-08/PreschoolEdAustralia.htm#\\_Toc198010805](http://www.aph.gov.au/library/pubs/BN/2007-08/PreschoolEdAustralia.htm#_Toc198010805) (viewed 15 January 2009).

92 K. Rudd, *Press conference with Maxine McKew*, Sydney Day Nursery, Sydney, (Press conference, 17 April 2008). At [http://www.pm.gov.au/media/Interview/2008/interview\\_0204.cfm](http://www.pm.gov.au/media/Interview/2008/interview_0204.cfm) (viewed 15 December 2008).

93 Queensland Government, *Queensland Closing the Gap Report: 2007/08, Indicators and Initiatives for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples* (2008), p. 22. At <http://www.atsip.qld.gov.au/partnerships/partnership-qld/documents/closing-the-gap-report.pdf> (viewed 15 January 2009).

94 J Ball, *Indigenous early childhood development programs as ‘hook’ and ‘hub’ for inter-sectoral service delivery*, School of Child and Youth Care, University of Victoria, Canada (2004), p 4–5. At <http://www.ecdip.org/docs/pdf/conf/hookhubintersector.pdf> (viewed 6 August 2008).

95 M Lyytikäinen, N Jones, S Huttly & T Abramsky, *Childhood poverty, basic services and cumulative disadvantage: An international comparative analysis*, Young Lives, Save the Children UK (2006), p 24–27. At [http://www.younglives.org.uk/pdf/publication-section-pdfs/working-paper-pdfs/wp33\\_poverty-services.pdf](http://www.younglives.org.uk/pdf/publication-section-pdfs/working-paper-pdfs/wp33_poverty-services.pdf) (accessed 14 January 2009).

preschool age levels as well as for vocational education for adult members of the community. The industrial kitchen area provides opportunities for small enterprises as well as being a site for vocational training programs in hospitality.

Many remote communities have no purpose-built early childhood facility. Early childhood learning happens in existing buildings such as storage areas, school classrooms, school verandas and council spaces. In some instances there is no facility and no place for the storage of learning materials, so activity boxes are brought out periodically by visiting teachers. This is not ideal, and where populations warrant facilities, governments should be working towards addressing the infrastructure shortages.

## 2. Mobile preschools

Mobile preschools programs are a method for delivering early childhood learning opportunities to remote children where there is no facility or educator in the community or the region. Mobile preschools are currently operating in a number of states and territories. They provide specialist teachers who operate across numerous sites, primarily to supplement existing local early childhood services through the provision of educational resources such as learning programs, books, toys and other equipment.

A 'hub and spoke' model is the most common form of mobile preschool service delivery. A qualified preschool teacher takes trips from a larger remote 'hub' community to the smaller satellite Homelands in the vicinity of the main community. At the beginning of the school term the teacher draws up a travel schedule outlining the timetable of community visits. Teacher Assistants in the communities know when the visiting teacher will arrive.

Teachers travel between sites in off-road vehicles or light aircraft. Communities that are closer to the hub can be visited within a day and are visited more frequently than outlying communities. Some places are as far away as a six hour drive and these visits require a four day trip. The teacher is only able to visit distant communities about once every two to three weeks. There is rarely any accommodation in outlying communities and the visiting teacher will often camp in a swag. These places rarely have permanent equipment so the learning resources are brought out with the visiting teacher. This is problematic for the Teacher Assistant who may have very limited materials in between visits from the mobile teacher.

Mobile services are expanding. In 2008 the Northern Territory Minister for Employment, Education and Training announced six new services. Under the Northern Territory model, teachers make regular visits to up to five remote community sites to provide support to local Indigenous Teacher Assistants who deliver the daily preschool activities.<sup>96</sup> The Teacher Assistants provide the foundation for the program because they are the constant influence in the lives of the students. The visiting teacher designs the program while the Teacher Assistant provides the hand-on management of the children as well as interpreting from the local Indigenous language into English when required.

A particular problem with the model as it operates in the Northern Territory is that up until recently there has been no training or formal mentoring for Teacher Assistants. While some training was provided in 2008, not all Teacher Assistants were able to take part. Training and professional learning is an essential for all educators. It ensures quality control of service delivery. Given the high importance of early childhood learning

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96 Marion Scrymgour, Northern Territory Minister for Employment, Education and Training, 'Mobile Preschools Closing the Gap', (Media release, Thursday 8 May, 2008).

to a child's development, it is imperative that government departments make Teacher Assistant training a priority.

The importance of the Teacher Assistant cannot be underestimated. Visiting qualified preschool teachers have reported that if the Teacher Assistant is sick or does not attend the scheduled session, the students will not attend, even if the visiting teacher is present.<sup>97</sup>

There are some advantages to the mobile model. Some families in Homeland communities travel frequently and therefore the numbers of preschool-aged children can vary from time to time. The mobile model has flexibility and it can be responsive to movements in populations. In some instances a service may not be necessary for a period of time because Homeland residents periodically leave their communities to access services or participate in ceremony.

The other main advantage of the mobile model is that it provides a preschool service to very small groups of children where the population sizes are so small that that they do not warrant a full-time teacher. Many of these children would have no other exposure to pre-literacy and numeracy activities in English without a mobile service. However mobile preschools are not a substitute for permanent services and should not be used as an alternative where there are sufficient numbers to necessitate a permanent preschool service.

### 3. Intensive support playgroups

Another flexible early childhood service is the Commonwealth Government's Intensive Support Playgroup. This initiative is designed to engage vulnerable families with young children in children playgroup situations. The program employs two early childhood workers to run playgroups and a family support worker to provide intensive support to families experiencing significant disadvantage or crisis. The playgroup is able to move to locations within a defined area to support children and communities on a needs basis. Workers will usually visit each location for two to three hours, once or twice a week. The workers use a vehicle stocked with play and craft equipment to bring playgroups to where parents or caregivers and their children live, as lack of transport is often a barrier to participation.<sup>98</sup>

Funding is available through a tender process. Each Intensive Support Playgroup receives up to \$200,000 a year as well as up to \$100,000 in start-up funding. This provides funds for community consultations and the purchase of playgroup equipment and a vehicle. Mobile Intensive Support Playgroups have recently been set up in the town camps of Katherine and Tennant Creek.<sup>99</sup>

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97 Preschool Teacher Katherine Region, Northern Territory, Telephone interview, (3 November 2008)

98 Australian Government, Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, *Information about Intensive Support Playgroups*. At [http://www.fahcsia.gov.au/indigenous/epif/model\\_information\\_intensive/Model\\_Information\\_Intensive\\_Support\\_Playgroups.rtf](http://www.fahcsia.gov.au/indigenous/epif/model_information_intensive/Model_Information_Intensive_Support_Playgroups.rtf) (viewed 15 January 2009).

99 Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs and Minister for Defence Science and Personnel, 'New playgroups to benefit Indigenous families' (joint media release, 2 May 2008). At [http://www.jennymacklin.fahcsia.gov.au/internet/jennymacklin.nsf/content/newplaygrps\\_indigfam\\_2may08.htm](http://www.jennymacklin.fahcsia.gov.au/internet/jennymacklin.nsf/content/newplaygrps_indigfam_2may08.htm) (viewed 15 January 2009).

## 4. Indigenous staff

Evidence demonstrates that employing an Indigenous preschool worker has a positive effect on the participation rates of Indigenous children in early childhood education.<sup>100</sup> It is essential therefore, that the Australian Government's early childhood workforce framework includes plans to recruit and retain Indigenous preschool workers. Currently the Australian Government has committed to increasing the Australian childcare workforce by:

- additional early childhood education university places each year from 2009, increasing to 1,500 places by 2011;
- removing TAFE fees for Diplomas and Advanced Diplomas of Children's Services; and
- a 50 percent HECS-HELP remission for early childhood education teachers who are willing to work in rural and regional areas, Indigenous communities and areas of socio-economic disadvantage.<sup>101</sup>

At this stage the Government Framework does not incorporate targeted strategies for recruiting or training remote Indigenous workers.

This issue must be addressed as Indigenous people in remote regions have less access to training resources within travelling distance. Many people are unable to access training in larger regional centres because they have family obligations in their remote communities. On-the-job development and training is the only way that some remote Indigenous childcare workers can upgrade qualifications.

Ideally Indigenous childcare workers would be supported by a mentor in the workplace while accessing Distance Education services. To this end I support the recommendations made by the Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care Inc. (SNAICC) in its submission to the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care:

Workforce planning needs to drop down to the local community level with disaggregated data that can inform funding decisions on the investment in the establishment of additional services or expansion of existing services. Under such a plan all existing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children's services should be assisted by:

- Providing on-the-job training opportunities to the existing Indigenous staff to train from Certificate 11 level through to degree level teaching qualifications;
- Assessing the skills and knowledge of existing staff that have been working for many years in the children's services and have significant unrecognised qualifications;
- Training options should include training on the job within the local service with services funded to provide back fill staff when other staff are participating in training;
- Learning resources for students should be developed that reflect the cultural frameworks and local contexts within which services operate.<sup>102</sup>

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100 N Biddle, 'Indigenous Australians and preschool education: Who is attending?' in M. Fordham and R.G. Schwab (eds), *Education, Training and Indigenous Futures, CAEPR Policy Research: 1990-2007, Research Summaries* (2006), Reference No. 26 p. 2. At <http://www.anu.edu.au/caepr/educationfutures/ref026.pdf> (viewed 9 December 2008).

101 M Harrington, 'Preschool education in Australia', (2008) *Background Note*, Australian Government Parliamentary Library. At [http://www.aph.gov.au/library/pubs/BN/2007-08/PreschoolEdAustralia.htm#\\_Toc198010805](http://www.aph.gov.au/library/pubs/BN/2007-08/PreschoolEdAustralia.htm#_Toc198010805) (viewed 15 January 2009).

102 Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care Inc., *Submission to the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care*, (September 2008), Commonwealth Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations. At [http://www.snaicc.asn.au/\\_uploads/rsfil/00210.pdf](http://www.snaicc.asn.au/_uploads/rsfil/00210.pdf) (viewed 13 January 2009).

## 5. The imperative to act now

There is hardly a better-researched and documented aspect of education than these significant early childhood years, including the long-term cost-benefits of quality childcare/preschool programs and the long-term disadvantage for children without access to quality early childhood programs ... investment in children at this level will pay off in myriad ways, helping to prevent child abuse, lack of thriving, ill-health, school failure, early dropout, poor job chances, delinquency and crime in later life ...<sup>103</sup>

The timeframe for preschool learning is relatively short. A child's chance at preschool education flashes past in a matter of years. I would like to be assured that government funding for early childhood education is targeted to remote locations where no services exist. This should be an absolute priority for governments as it is not acceptable for governments to consign these children to waiting lists.

There is urgent work ahead to assess the provision of preschool services as well as the school readiness of remote Indigenous children. The Australian Government's Indigenous Australian Early Development Index (I-AEDI) project will assist in this endeavour. Its aim is to develop trial and evaluate a culturally-appropriate measure of Indigenous children's early development. The I-AEDI will serve as a tool for communities and policy makers to identify the specific challenges for children in individual Indigenous communities.<sup>104</sup> The I-AEDI must include measures of current and projected Indigenous populations and stipulate threshold levels of staffing and services based on populations.

Early childhood education paves the way for school engagement and sets up life learning at a crucial stage in a child's development. Again I point to the lower educational outcomes for remote Indigenous students across all measured indicators. I have no doubt that these poorer outcomes correlate with poorer levels of government service provision. We must redress the imbalance of early childhood services and support in remote locations through:

- Targeted actions to recruit and retain a qualified Indigenous workforce;
- Opportunities for skill development for Teacher Assistants;
- The provision of services that are equitable across Australia based on current and projected populations; and
- Improvements in early childhood infrastructure.

## 6. Summary of issues: Early childhood education

- Indigenous children living in very remote areas are less likely to attend preschool than children in other locations;
- There is international evidence that supports the benefits of multi-purpose early childhood facilities;
- Indigenous preschool workers (qualified teachers and Teacher Assistants) have a positive effect on the participation rates of Indigenous children; and
- Early childhood Teacher Assistants are the backbone preschool services in remote communities and should receive quality professional development and training. Where possible, on-the-job training should be available so that remote Indigenous Teacher Assistants can upgrade qualifications.

<sup>103</sup> D Edgar, *The Patchwork Nation: Re-thinking Government – Re-building Community*, (2001), p 174.

<sup>104</sup> Minister for Education, Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations and Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, 'Investing In The Early Development Needs Of Our Indigenous Children', (Joint Media Release, 20 January 2008). At <http://mediacentre.dewr.gov.au/mediacentre/AllReleases/2008/January/InvestingInTheEarlyDevelopmentNeedsOfOurIndigenousChildren.htm> (viewed 15 January 2009).

## Part 6: Education as the key to other life chances

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Let us resolve to use this systematic approach to build future educational opportunities for Indigenous children...

None of this will be easy. Most of it will be hard, very hard. But none of it is impossible, and all of it is achievable with clear goals, clear thinking, and by placing an absolute premium on respect, cooperation and mutual responsibility as the guiding principles of this new partnership on closing the gap.<sup>105</sup>

A large part of the core business of governments is to make policy decisions about the distribution of resources. Resource allocations are usually modelled on formulae which stipulate the greatest good for the greatest number. Governments will target disadvantage, but there is often a quantum aspect to their decision-making.

Unfortunately remote communities with small populations often miss out on infrastructure and services. Governments set policies to ensure that their investments are viable in the long-term and this means that they are concerned with servicing permanent populations that reach a particular threshold.

The policies affecting remote Indigenous education provision are no exception. In terms of government agendas, Indigenous education is a subject that is high on rhetoric and low on funding.

We don't have good estimates on the numbers of school-aged children and young people who have no access to school education. We know however that if all school-aged students were to attend, the education system in remote Australia would collapse. There are simply not the facilities and infrastructure to meet the demand.

The Australian Education Union argues that if provision was made for all Indigenous children to attend school in the Northern Territory, the cost of building more classrooms and teacher housing would be in the vicinity of \$375 to \$440 million.<sup>106</sup> It is time for governments to do this audit and to assess the shortfall in education resources across the country.

Remote schools must be an option for remote students. Governments must consider this in their future planning. It is neither possible nor practical for all remote Indigenous young people to leave their communities for schooling. Primary school-aged children are too young to be separated from families for boarding school and while some secondary students may want to take up a boarding school opportunity, there are others who will prefer to stay with their families. It goes without saying that in the unlikely event that **all** remote Indigenous secondary students chose to go to boarding school, there are not sufficient places to accommodate them. While the boarding option is one which should definitely be available to remote Indigenous students, it is not the only answer to remote education. This simple truth makes it incumbent on governments and others to provide a range of educational options, including high quality remote education.

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105 Commonwealth, *Parliamentary Debates*, House of Representatives, 13 February 2008, (The Hon Kevin Rudd MP, Prime Minister) at [http://www.aph.gov.au/house/Rudd\\_Speech.pdf](http://www.aph.gov.au/house/Rudd_Speech.pdf) (viewed 13 January 2009).

106 M. Kronemann, *Education is the Key, An education future for Indigenous communities in the Northern Territory*, Australian Education Union (2007), at p. 35.

Efforts by governments to address the considerable challenges of remote Indigenous education have been inconsistent since education first became available in remote regions of Australia.

We know for example that it is only in recent years that some secondary education is being provided in remote locations with high populations of Indigenous students. We know too that there are many remote communities across Australia with no reasonable access to secondary education. It was only a decade ago when we could plot secondary schools on a map of Australia based on concentrations of non-Indigenous students. While the situation is improving, there is still work to be done.

With few exceptions, the poor provision of school education has resulted in poor academic achievement in remote Australia.

### 1. Time to act

There is an imperative to act. There is an economic cost to the poor educational performance of remote Indigenous students. When a Year 5 student fails to reach the literacy and numeracy benchmarks, more often than not, there begins a slow progression to educational underachievement. Governments should start to see the bill rising. A lifetime dependent on social security benefits in conjunction with poorer life chances in health and housing is costly. In economic terms this is concerning and potentially avoidable; in human terms it is disastrous.

The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy (AEP) and the MCEETYA policy provides good future direction for Indigenous education because they underscore the basic requirements for a good educational service.

It is time to dispense with the debates about boarding schools versus education in remote Australia. We need to focus on providing good infrastructure and appropriately qualified teachers to remote Indigenous preschools and schools.

If we are going to assess remote Indigenous students against all other Australian students then we have to do better than part-time education services of three days a fortnight delivered in a tin shed with a dirt floor. We have to do better in our commitment to working with local communities to decide the appropriate education services for the region. **It is time to start looking closely at the inputs as well as the outcomes.**

## Part 7: Conclusion and recommendations

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The case studies of this chapter show that remarkable things can happen. In all of the case studies, Indigenous people actively participate at the local level in designing, developing and delivering the successful program or process. National and international research corroborates the case study findings, that Indigenous people are best placed to be the architects of our own policies and services. This is in keeping with human rights principles which emphasise the right of Indigenous people to full and effective participation in decisions which directly or indirectly affect us.<sup>107</sup> But we can't do this alone and we can't do this without the infrastructure and the services which will give our children access to the best possible education. We need support and resources from governments and others.

A partnership between Indigenous people, governments and others must be driven by local priorities if it is to be successful in improving education in remote Australia. Any partnership must establish common understandings of the roles and responsibilities of all members as well as clear direction about the objectives and anticipated outcomes. The partnership must also be measured and monitored by assessing inputs and outcomes.

The following recommendations aim to assist governments in making education 'available and accessible' to remote Indigenous students in line with their right to enjoy the full entitlements of Australian citizenship.<sup>108</sup> Appendix 4 of this report sets out definitions of 'available' and 'accessible' as defined by United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

I urge governments to implement the following recommendations by undertaking audits of remote school-aged populations, and where populations reach a threshold; providing education services of a quality commensurate with urban schools and services.

<b>Recommendations</b>
<p><b><i>Recommendation 11</i></b></p> <p>That all Australian governments, through the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) commit to providing education services in remote communities that are comparable in quality and availability to those in all other Australian communities.</p>

107 United Nations Workshop, *Engaging the marginalized: Partnerships between indigenous peoples, governments and civil society, Guidelines for engagement with indigenous peoples*, United Nations Workshop Report (2005). At [http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/engagement\\_en.pdf](http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/engagement_en.pdf), (viewed 30 January 2001).

108 Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, *General Comment No. 13 – the Right to Education*, UN Doc E/C.12/1999/10 (1999), paras 6–14. At <http://www.unhcr.ch/tbs/doc.nsf/MasterFrameView/ae1a0b126d068e868025683c003c8b3b?Opendocument> (viewed 14 January 2009).

**Recommendation 12**

That the Australian Government, through COAG, develop a remote education strategy and accountability framework to be embedded in the National Indigenous Reform Agreement and in the relevant National Partnership Agreements.

**Recommendation 13**

That COAG initiate an audit of populations and projected populations of remote preschool and school-aged children by statistical sub-division to be measured against the relevant education infrastructure and services. That this audit form the basis of a national, funded plan to upgrade or build quality preschool, primary and secondary school infrastructure where populations warrant them.

**Recommendation 14**

That the strategy and accountability framework include monitoring and assessment processes with performance measures, targets and timeframes. Key areas for reporting include:

- Provision of education infrastructure at the preschool, primary and secondary school levels to meet population requirements by statistical subdivision;
- The establishment of remote education regional partnerships between Indigenous stakeholders and service deliverers;
- Assessments of the remote teacher workforce and its capacity to meet the specific requirements of the students cohort; and
- Recruitment and retention actions to maintain appropriately qualified (Indigenous and non-Indigenous) teachers and leaders.