



**Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara  
Women's Council (Aboriginal Corporation)**

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10 November 2011

Secretary  
Select Committee on Youth Suicides in the NT  
GPO Box 3721  
Darwin NT 0801  
Australia

Dear Secretary,

**Re: Inquiry into youth suicide in the NT**

In August 2011, the Legislative Assembly established a Select Committee on Youth Suicides in the NT and requested a report by the first sitting date after February 2012.

Attached is a submission from the Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Women's Council (NPYWC) outlining our concerns in relation to suicide on the Ngaanyatjarra, Pitjantjatjara and Yankunytjatjara Lands (NPY) Lands, with particular reference to the four southern communities in the Northern Territory. We also propose key approaches to the Committee that could empower individuals, families and communities to prefer and pursue healthier and better life choices.

Up until 1996 there were very limited mainstream mental health services available to Aboriginal people or Anangu in the NPY region<sup>1</sup>. All services were based in Alice Springs, Perth or Adelaide, and generally these services were delivered by the relevant State or Territory health department. The NPY region covers 350,000 square kilometres of the remote tri-State cross-border area of Western Australia, South Australia and the Northern Territory and there are 25 Aboriginal communities spread across this region. Anangu and Yarnangu (Aboriginal people) living on the NPY Lands share strong cultural and family affiliations. Issues raised across the NPY Lands are similar to those experienced in the Northern Territory Communities serviced by NPYWC. **(See Attachment A Map of Region)**

While there was a lack of mainstream services on offer prior to 1996, traditional explanations and healing practices in relation to mental health were strong. These practices continue to be powerful in remote communities. The Executive Members (now Directors) of NPY Women's Council were adamant at the time that more needed to be done to provide an increased level of service to Anangu through traditional healing practices. The lobbying and advocacy for funding for this service lead to the employment of two ngangkari or traditional healers in NPY Women's Council. The hurdles that exist in the delivery of main stream mental health services are not limitations in the delivery of traditional practices by ngangkari, as ngangkari understand the building blocks of Anangu society; they can communicate in the languages of the region; they can respond to requests quickly and expeditiously, not being limited by borders; and they can conduct their business through relationships because of the respect that ngangkari are afforded by Anangu. **See Attachment B for more information.**

However ngangkari also accept that there are issues in modern society which they cannot treat, including individuals who have been affected by substances such as petrol or cannabis. In these cases, they recommend to clients and health services that western medicine and services must be accessed.

It was for these reasons that NPY Women's Council applied for funding to provide to the region an Emotional and Social Wellbeing Project (ESWB). The ESWB staff work to; assist women and their

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<sup>1</sup> The NPY Lands includes the Ngaanyatjarra Lands in WA, the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Lands in SA and the four southern Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory, Docker River, Mutitjula, Imanpa and Aputula

families with emotional and social well-being issues, and to promote and support traditional healing methods where appropriate; identify broader issues from casework and raise these with relevant service providers and Government Departments; and link with NPYWC services and other organisations to co-ordinate and improve services to people with emotional and social well-being needs and mental health problems. Unfortunately despite the outcomes that have been achieved through delivery of this project, NPYWC has been unsuccessful in securing ongoing funding for this project in 2011/2012 from the Office for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health (OATSIH). This continues to be the situation. **See Attachment C for more information.**

Because of concern for young people in relation to engagement and support, NPY Women's Council applied for and was offered funding from FaHCSIA through the Youth in Communities Program (NT) to deliver youth services in the four southern communities in the Northern Territory- Finke, Imanpa, Mututjulu and Docker River. This program employs community-based indigenous and non-indigenous workers to encourage and support all young people, especially those who are at risk.

NPYWC's Youth Program runs healthy, active diversionary programs for young people, provides case support, and works closely with a variety of stakeholders to improve services and facilities for all young people and their families in communities. It is delivery of such programs and working with other stakeholders that hold the key to reducing the impact of substance misuse and its impact on the well-being of young people from the NPY Lands. Certainly the impact of petrol sniffing on young people across the NPY Lands is well documented including acquired brain injury that results in long term disability and sadly for some individuals a loss of life. **See Submission for more information**

NPY Women's Council looks forward to speaking further with the Committee concerning the information provided in this submission.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Andrea J. Mason".

**Andrea Mason**  
**Co-ordinator**  
**NPY Women's Council**