



SELECT COMMITTEE ON SUBSTANCE ABUSE  
IN THE COMMUNITY

SUBMISSION NUMBER 0002

*DATE: 22 April 2002*

*RECEIVED FROM: Mr Mike Popple  
Council Clerk  
Wugularr Community*

The Secretariat,  
Select Conunittee on Substance Abuse in the Community.  
GPO Box 3721.  
Darwin... N.T.

22nd April 2002.

TO Whom It May Concern:

I have attached a submission in regard to Alcohol and Drug abuse in  
Beswick community.

I am presently employed at Council Clerk for Wugularr Community  
Govt. Council and have live here for four and a half years.

I previously worked at Numbulwar community for six years and Santa  
Teresa for Three years.

Yours Sincerely,

Mike Popple

## SUBSTANCE ABUSE IN BESWICK COMMUNITY.

My name is Mike Popple I have been living in Beswick community for four years and previously lived at Numbulwar for 6 years.

In both communities I held the position of Town Clerk.

I arrived in Beswick at the time of the 1998 flood when the community had been totally flooded and all the staff had quit and moved on.

Wugularr Council since that time has been very active in its approach to Law and Order and Youth problems.

### Environment Of Abuse.

At the end of 1997 Beswick had staff members who were known paedophiles and one who was a heroin addict.

There was poor council management and the council was under an administrator.

No work on community housing was being done and there was an average of 18 people per house.

A number of men and boys were living with staff members.

There were only half the number of primary children going to school that lived in the community.

There were no teenagers going to high school.

Community Liquor outlet at store had no restrictions on sales.

There was no communication between council, school and clinic.

No communication between council and police at Maranboy Station.

No control on input of cannabis or other drugs.

### **Result of this Environment.**

Alcohol and Drugs being mixed in heavy doses.

Poor Health statistics for community.

Numerous suicide attempts. ( 29 Attempted in Dec 98 four young man die). Major criminal offences all through the year.

Damage to Council Property.

No support for Nursing Staff.

Lack of self-esteem and numerous accounts of youths fighting.

Numerous break-ins in community store.

Store goes bankrupt.

Local individuals selling drugs to own community members.

Only a small percentage of children going to school.

## **ACTION.**

All these results left the community in a state of despair and in January 1999 the council set about, to improve the state of the community.

The first step was to get the council to budget funds for use in areas that are not normally Local Govt Issues.

### **Education and Law and Order.**

We had to make the youth in the community feel that they were important so we had to get them active and educated and feeling good about themselves. We got the parents to agree to send their children to Katherine High School, the council paid for the Bus Hire from Katherine, paid for new shoes and supplied breakfast and lunch for thirty students.

We woke them up at 6am and put them on the bus and when they started to have problems at the high school we employed two parents to go on the bus with them.

After 6 month's the NT Govt paid the bus contract for us.

This activity worked for over two years before the numbers got to small and we started to have classes at Beswick, most of these young adults are still attending classes at Beswick.

The Education Department now is- providing two teachers for two classes at Beswick and we have a submission under way for a regional High School. The Council employed a community person to get primary school children to school and started a feeding program for all kids at school. This required us to have deductions from Benefits approved by Centrelink as they only allow Rent Deductions normally, we went to Canberra for this approval.

There have also been many meetings about Education in the community and a good relationship between council and the school,

### **Law and Order.**

The other area that has reduced substance abuse in this community is Law and order.

The council has supported two local people to be trained as Aboriginal Police Officers which means the Council had to make available housing, vehicle, fuel, office space and badges and equipment.

The council also employed and trained local community members as Wardens to do night patrol and check on young people at night to stop any petrol sniffing.

The other major effect that changed attitudes was that when ever there was a break in or bad behaviour the next day the President closed the shop and Office and called a community meeting to resolve who was offending and why,'

Of course there was still some young people offending and as long as there is a response from the President and Police these are becoming less and less.

## **Alcohol Abuse.**

Alcohol is sold at Beswick from the community store where they have a restricted licence of 6 cans a day and it has to be drunk on the premises. All other Alcohol is brought to the 4 K'lometre signboard and must be consumed there.

Once the community started to be active and community meetings held for all major issues they where empowered to make decisions and the majority wanted restrictions on Alcohol enforced. Taxi's are only allowed on the Beswick Land Trust on the weekends and have to have the Presidents permission. Police started to charge anyone walking around with beer or wine and the club started to sell only Mid Strength Beer.

Though Alcohol is still a problem the allowing of the community to set rules for alcohol consumption is a good one as the majority of people at these meetings are non-drinkers and very vocal.

If store managers and a few male councillors are given free power to set alcohol prices and liquor laws so as to make more profits and easier availability of Alcohol the abuse will never stop.

Recently the community decided to allow for three full strength and three mid strength as a compromise after a heated discussion with the drinkers.

## **Drugs.**

This is the area that is the hardest for the Council and community to deal with, there are at least two local families that provide drugs to the community 1 supplied by other families in Katherine.

Because most young' people are using cannabis and profits are shared by those extended families involved the councillors and general community are not pressured to act against this practice indeed some parents buy dope for their children to stop them stealing money to buy dope.

Our only response is to get the police involved and try to catch people bringing dope into the community hopefully the new laws about drug houses will lessen the amount of drugs available.

## **Conclusions.**

1. The Community Council has to see these conununity issues as a priority and budget for them. Eg. Wardens, ACPO., Education Support, Feeding Program, Sport and Recreation.
2. Essential to have community meetings to empower the parents and young **people** in decision-making.
3. Council has to employ a good town clerk or community manager and make sure they understand the necessity for these activities to succeed.
4. Communication between Council, Education, Health and Police is

essential on a monthly basis.

5. Liquor Licences for community stores or clubs must be discussed by the whole community and the liquor commissioner. Health issues must be more important than profits from grog sales or the availability of full strength beer.
6. Department of Local Govt. must recognise the need for law and order issues to be funded for and budgeted as part of local government functions. NT Safe funds should be evenly distributed to communities that are actioning these processes.
7. NT Police must train more ACPO, s to work in their communities.
8. Territory Health Services should have discussions with each community in regards to Warden Support for all callouts of nurses at night.
9. Powers for police to enter drug houses are essential.
10. Domestic Violence laws need to be changed so that Police can charge repeat offenders as victims in most cases wont due to culture and family reasons.

Yours Sincere

**Mike Popple.**