

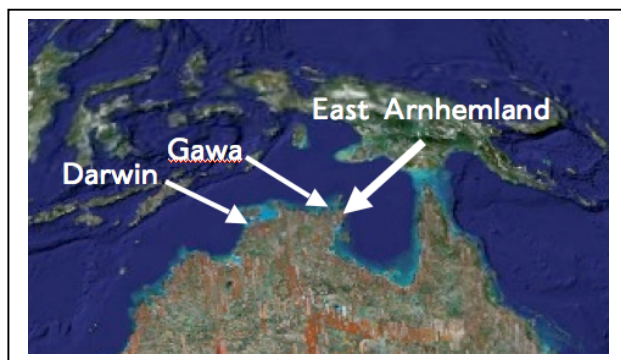
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Build a Future for Our Children

A case study of institutional discrimination in the Northern Territory of Australia.

The allocation of educational funding in the Northern Territory actively discriminates against Black students. The NT Department of Education and Training (NT DET)'s discriminatory policy is based on the development of a 'special class' of service delivery to Black-only schools, referred to by government as Homeland Learning Centres (HLCs). HLCs receive only a fraction of the resources and services available to other NT schools.

This story is not just about inequality in schooling opportunity based on race. It is about governments actively and deliberately further marginalising the most alienated pupils in the Northern Territory. This policy conflicts with the governments' 'Closing the Gap' commitments and dismisses the Australian idea of an 'equal go for all'.



Gawa is small township (or 'homeland' as they are called by governments) in east Arnhemland, Northern Territory, Australia. East Arnhemland is the ancestral home for about 40 Yolngu nations. Each nation has its own estate, language and history. This part of Arnhemland is rather like Europe, and the European Union, composed of multiple sovereign

nations. The Warramiri people are one of these nations, and Gawa is their estate.

The regional town closest to Gawa is Galiwin'ku, where there are residents from 20 or so nations. Galiwin'ku is one of the Australian and Northern Territory Governments' 'priority communities' or 'growth towns'. Towns maintained by governments for the bureaucratic convenience of servicing and further centralising the inhabitants of homelands. For the vast majority of residents, including the Warramiri, Galiwin'ku is not their 'home-land' or 'yirralka'. In a way it is not a place where people feel 'at home' or make their future.

In Galiwin'ku things were going from bad to worse in the mid-1980s. Petrol sniffing, marijuana, youth suicide, teenage pregnancy, disrespect for elders were on the increase. So the Warramiri held family meetings and under the guidance of an elder planned to relocate to their land at Gawa. In 1986 families chopped and shovelled a road through to Gawa by hand. They were desperate because they needed to "get away from the bad influences in the own and begin to build a future for our children at Gawa" said Kathy Guthadjaka, a teacher for most of 40 years and the daughter of a

Gawa elder. Later she was to remark, *"there was wisdom in the direction my father had set us, to return to our country, I couldn't see it at the time, but followed his wishes."*

Kathy wanted to establish a school at Gawa. However, government pre-conditions make it very difficult to establish a school in a homeland. Before they can apply to NT DET to begin a 'trial' to establish a Homeland Learning Centre, residents need to, with their own funds and effort, provide a shelter for the operation of the school. They must also find their own teacher and operate the school with minimal assistance for a minimum of six months. During this period the teacher will not be paid by the NT Education Department. If the enrolment, and attendance figures are maintained throughout the six-month period, and if the hub school completes the necessary paperwork, the Homeland Learning Centre may get the go-ahead as a formally recognised Homeland Learning Centre.

In the case of Gawa, the trial ran for one year. Gotha, the qualified teacher, was required to take leave-without-pay during this period. The school operated for a year under a tarpaulin, with only exercise books and pencils provided by the Education Department. At the end of 1991, following the year-long trial, the NT Education Department provided \$1500 for the new 'school' tarp. Then, at the beginning of 1992, Gotha resumed her teaching job at the 'hub' school, Shepherdson College, the government school at Galiwin'ku. She became a homeland Visiting Teacher but was refused permission to stay at Gawa as the permanent teacher.

Meanwhile the residents found their own funding to construct a new school building with the NT government making a small contribution of \$15,000. With assistance from the local resource Centre they purchased a very small, very basic kit home which provided two classrooms.

Over the next 10 years the Gawa Homeland Learning Centre (HLC) received no additional funds for infrastructure. They were sent discarded desks and chairs from the NT DET, but there were never enough for all the students, so many had to study on the floor.

Meanwhile, Gawa and other HLCs were denied access to funds allocated to other schools. In 2001 the Australian Government allocated close to \$19M for distance learning. Computers, satellite connections, printers and access to distance learning were provided to every remote school and 66 cattle stations in the NT. All homeland schools were deliberately excluded from this program. In 2002 the education department admitted that all submissions for infrastructure improvements to homeland schools had been kept 'on-hold' for five years, and requests for students in homelands to have access to computers and the internet continued to be ignored.

In 2002, after a decade of neglect from the NT DET, the Gawa HLC still had no toilet, running water, or power supply, there was no fax machine, computer, photocopier or any of the other equipment usually found in a school. In desperation for better schooling facilities, Gawa residents petitioned the government to become a non-government, private school. In 2003 Gawa was granted independent school status,

The impact of the changed status was immediate and profound. The infrastructure statistics speak for themselves. Over the ten years that Gawa was a Homeland Learning Centre, the government provided a total of \$16.5K, an average of \$1,650 per year.

In the six years since becoming a non-government, private school, Gawa school has received infrastructure funds of \$3,158M, and average of \$538,000 per year.

By becoming an independent school, Gawa has accessed over 320 times the level of funding for infrastructure that it received as a government remote school. This is not special funding, but funding that is available through normal grant processes to all 'normal' Australian schools.

Things have not improved under the Rudd Labour government. Remote schools under the Homeland Learning Centres service model are under greater threat from the Australian and Northern Territory Governments¹.

In 2008, the Henderson NT Government spent over \$20M and provided new distance learning infrastructure to 250 sites across the territory, including cattle stations and 'normal' schools. It is estimated that only two of the 45 homeland schools were included in this provision.

Why is it that cattle stations with as few as one child were included, while homelands, some with well over 40 students were not?

The discriminatory treatment of homelands schools continues. In 2009, the Rudd federal government provided \$11.4 billion for educational infrastructure as part of its Economic Stimulus Package. While every 'normal' school across Australia received a minimum of \$200K from this program, homeland schools were unable to access these funds.

Call this a fair go?? We shouldn't because it's unfair and un-Australian.

¹ The Memorandum Of Understanding between the Australian Government and the Northern Territory Government Indigenous Housing, Accommodation and Related Services, September 2007 is the arrangement states "*This offer of \$793 is made on the basis that the Northern Territory Government will:*

- *take over responsibility for the delivery of services to outstations; and ..."*

The funding commitments detailed in this MUO do not include provision of any funds for education infrastructure or services.