

Submission to Outstations Inquiry

Preliminary

This contribution to the outstations discussion paper:

- Is based on over 30 years direct experience across Arnhemland, and in homelands.
- Provides evidence that homeland centres are more functional and efficient than the big settlements in terms of educational participation, safety and wellbeing, and economic sustainability.
- Contends that equitable treatment of homeland centre residents would improve this functionality, and that equitable educational treatment can be partly achieved through the use of new technologies now available.
- Presents the fundamental and urgent need for a proper economic analysis of all the costs and benefits of homeland centre living, rather than a knee-jerk reaction to cursory and unexamined assertions of 'high' service delivery costs.

Definition

Names and their meanings are fundamental in Aboriginal knowledge systems. The term 'outstation' is derogatory and misrepresents the Yolŋu concept *Yirralka*, which some Yolŋu refer to as 'heaven'. The Yolŋu term *wäŋa* refers to both Land and Home. A more appropriate and respectful term is home-land, where land is home, and home is land.

A Way Forward: Distance Learning at Homeland Centres

As an ex-teacher with the Northern Territory Department of Education (DET) I am particularly concerned with the level of schooling available to home-land students. Deliberate discrimination is taking place. Yet technology can allow effective schooling to be put in place at low cost. The following points need to be made:

- Homeland residents have demonstrated their determination to engage with the outside world.
In the home-lands surrounding Galiwin'ku, there are approximately 70 times (and increasing) the number of personally

owned computers than in the township of Galiwin'ku, per head of population.

- There is greater internet usage in homelands.
There is far greater access to computers and the internet in homelands than is currently available in townships like Galiwin'ku. Anecdotally homeland residents use the internet more often than township residents. For example, Ramingining currently has no public internet access. The initiative shown by homeland residents needs to be recognized and supported by governments. For more information see: <http://www.cdu.edu.au/centres/aflf/>
- Past efforts to improve this type of learning have wasted resources.
In 2001, the Federal Government provided computers, printers, satellite connections and Interactive Digital Learning (IDL) to over 150 remote sites, including stations and remote schools. Homelands were deliberately excluded from the formula. From personal experience at Shepherdson College, the provision of IDL to remote Aboriginal schools enabled only children of white staff to access distant learning through IDL.
- Discrimination and waste continues in current government initiatives in IT and education. In 2008, over 250 remote sites will receive two way satellite connections as part of the Sky Connect program. This list includes less than five homelands. This must not become an issue for homeland policy, but of equity, access to educational services. Distant learning must be provided on a non-racial and non-language basis. There is no longer a reason why digital learning technologies cannot be provided to all homeland students and their families. Cheap permanent power sources are available to power internet access and laptop computers. See: <http://www.cdu.edu.au/centres/inc/pdf/saspwis.pdf>
- New technologies and distance education English literacy tools now available can greatly reduce the costs of educational service delivery to homelands. Governments, both federal and territory spend tens of millions of dollars on distance learning for English speaking children. It is time to develop web-based English literacy and numeracy materials for students for whom English is a second language. Bachelor Institute Indigenous Tertiary Education (BIITE) and Charles Darwin University (CDU) have developed a tool for homeland and other very remote students to develop English literacy. See: <http://www.cdu.edu.au/reow>. Such software

reduces the need for extended face to face contact hours, while at the same time developing much needed English language skills.

Build on Enthusiasm Which is Already There: Data on Educational Participation, Enrolment and Attendance at Homelands

- More homeland students participate in school.
DET enrolment and attendance figures do not include student participation rates. This is the number of students enrolled at the school, divided by the number of students of school age present in the community. From personal experience as a teacher in Arnhemland for almost thirty years participation rates at the Galiwin'ku school over the past decade have rarely, if ever exceeded 60%. While homeland school participation rates are rarely less than 100%.
- More homeland students attend school.
Usually every student present in a homeland attends school. Over an 18 months period ending in June 2004, 80% of homeland children attended school more than 85 % of the time, while at the Galiwin'ku school only 8% of the students attended more than 85% of the time.

In 2004 the average attendance for Homeland secondary students was 98%.

- When homelands children do not attend school it is invariably because young students and their mothers are forced to travel for shopping or medical assistance.
In one particular homeland, Mäpuru, the NTER through income management (IM) has forced mothers and their young children and to charter planes to do their shopping, because the local food co-op cannot be registered to receive IM funds.

Economic sustainability: homelands as centres of entrepreneurship

- There is greater self-generated income in homelands.
The non-government related income generated by Galiwin'ku residents is estimated to be about \$60 per adult per year, compared with \$950 per adult per year at Mäpuru. These figures include only income generated from non-government related sources. This is a significant fact that is overlooked by governments when looking at

homeland sustainability. These figures do not include estimates on the value of food collected and hunted, which if added into the calculation would double the homeland figure.

- There are greater business opportunities in homelands.
Arnhem Weavers, an ecotourism business has been successfully operating since 2003. This business has never sought nor received government assistance. There are no in equivalent examples of small businesses operating at Galiwin'ku. See the website for this business: <http://www.arnhemweavers.com.au/> It would be impossible for the Arnhem Weavers to operate their business at Galiwin'ku, as Roslyn Malngumba says, "that (Galiwin'ku) is not my land, I cannot do anything there."
- The Mapuru co-op is another example of a small business at a homeland which could never have been set up in a major community like Galiwin'ku.
This co-op is a successful food shop that operates on a trust basis. Mapuru have never asked for, or expected funding from external sources. See: <http://www.arnhemweavers.com.au/mapuru.htm>
The co-op and food shop is located in the Homeland Learning Centre building so that student learning is contextualised. Jackie Nguluwidi said, "the children are learning to do this shop business for their future. Later they will takeover." In 2005 this small co-op won the National Heart Foundation Award for Small Community Initiative. Jackie continued, "Galiwin'ku isn't our country, we can't make a shop there. This is our country so we can make a shop here. It's for the future of our kids." It is imperative that governments recognise the important role which place and traditional connections to land have in determining land use in Indigenous societies today, and that homelands represent a means of using this role and connection in a positive way.

Safety and Place

- Children aren't safe at Galiwin'ku.
Over the 30 years that I have interacted and listened to home-land residents, there has been one consistent message, home-land do not want their children living or visiting the larger towns like Galiwin'ku. They say there is too much: drug taking, youth suicide, wrong way marriages, teenage pregnancy, no discipline, petrol sniffing, violence, friction between clans and *galka*. (*galka* are agents which can cause stress, anxiety, sickness and death. *Galka*

now prevent main town residents from walking around towns at night, going hunting, visiting family, even going to the shop.)

- Place is pre-eminent and is an essential aspect of cultural safety. Governments fail to recognize the complexity of Indigenous societies. By forcing each First Nation (or clan) and their extended families from their ancestral estates, governments are compounding the dysfunction that they, and the missions created in the first place. The funding that governments may save in the short term by spending big on the centralised townships, and less on the self-sufficient, self-governing homelands can only compound into greater social and financial cost in the future. It is a short-sighted approach which goes directly against the evidence of how to improve social outcomes for Indigenous peoples.

Research: a thorough economic study of all the costs and benefits of homeland centre living.

Proper economic research into the range of homeland sustainabilities is urgently needed to ascertain the true financial costs and savings of homeland centre life.

It is not acceptable for governments to assert the 'high cost' of service delivery as the reason to cease supporting homelands, when no government has done the work to develop a proper economic assessment of all costs and benefits, including the education and health costs and benefits. For example, what is the economic benefit to society of higher levels of school attendance, compared to the cost of truants and the perpetrators of juvenile crime in the big communities? What is the cost of providing health care to Aboriginal peoples with morbidity levels as found in the residents of Utopia, compared to the cost of providing health services to people with the average NT Indigenous morbidity level? This is urgent and much-needed research. It is a pity the government has spent excess of \$1.5B on micro-managing people's social benefit payments. And yet is unwilling to spend a fraction of that money undertaking qualitative and quantitative research into homeland and regional centre service delivery and sustainability costs.

12th December 2008