

Centacare Northern Territory Newsletter – November 2007

We live and work in interesting and challenging times. As an agency we are trying to come to terms with how we ethically and practically work in this particular political environment. Many of the communities where we currently work are key focus areas of the Australian Government Intervention (AGI). We have seen the AGI divide the leadership of Indigenous Australians. As we seek to understand the diversity of views and opinions of Indigenous Australian leaders both in support and critical of the intervention, we continue to work with and support people affected both by the intervention itself and the issues of poverty and abuse.

While on the one hand we are pleased with the focus and recognition of Indigenous disadvantage, we have real concerns about what it really means for the people who use our services in remote communities. Communities that we have current operations in include Wadeye, Tiwi Islands, Daly River, Amoonguna and Harts Range. The gulf between local communities and urban areas is so wide that policy feels fragmented and disconnected to the realities of Indigenous people. Decisions are made which make sense to us in the cities and towns but only serve to further marginalize people. Examples of this include the removal of CDEP without adequately reforming and providing real options for people on communities to engage in the workforce. The lack of connection to the local communities means that the Government has to invest in expensive fact finding and short term measures without really talking to people about what has been working and without knowing who does what or finding out what people find really useful. For instance, Centrelink has said they will start doing AOD counselling in Wadeye without talking to the AOD service provider or finding out what already happens on the community and what would work best for the community. The short term high energy solutions hide the real issues of investing in existing services and infrastructure. Many of the people we work with have expressed their confusion about what is happening in their communities. One of our Indigenous workers from Wadeye summed it up well when he explained it being ***'like looking through a glass window, where you see all the activity going on but you don't know what it is about and you can't be a part of it'***.

As an organization that works in this environment and has a commitment to work with and for the communities we serve, I believe our role is to stay focused on delivering services, continuing to be a consistent and predictable presence and to listen carefully to and support our local staff and clients. We are called to work with people in ways that build hope not despair and to build on people's strengths not exploit their vulnerability and confusion and to build on and use existing skills and knowledge not to force our own ways of doing things on people. As individual workers we constantly need to reflect on what is happening on our communities, to be objective and to look at how our clients are impacted on by policy and public opinion. We also need to look inwardly and be thinking how I in my role and in my program can contribute to improving the lives of individuals and communities. We need to be constantly asking ourselves – how can I best use my time? How do I make people feel valued and worthy? Am I making a difference? What can I change?

**My hope is,
as we journey with our clients and communities during this time,
that rather than be consumed by what we can't do,
that we continue to strive to make a difference,
strive to listen and communicate clearly and
that we always walk in a spirit of partnership with
those we seek to serve.**

Jayne Lloyd, Director