



# **Cuts to Welfare Payments for School Non-Attendance**

**Requested or Imposed?**

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# Cuts to Welfare Payments for School Non-Attendance

## Requested or Imposed?

This paper raises a number of questions about the interpretation of consultations with Aboriginal communities across the Northern Territory concerning the link between cuts to welfare payments and school non-attendance. The Federal Government's recent report, *Stronger Futures Report on Consultations*<sup>1</sup>, is based on the belief that Aboriginal people support the proposal to remove welfare payments in cases where children do not attend school. The report itself declares that, "*suggestions included withholding part of welfare income or fining parents if they do not send their children to school on a regular basis*" and the official media release states that Aboriginal people are "*clear about their priorities for building stronger futures in the Northern Territory... These were strong voices for change.*"<sup>2</sup>

This paper suggests that there is considerable doubt that the views of Aboriginal people are as clear as suggested by the Government report, and presents analysis which suggests considerable disquiet about the proposal to cut welfare payments and other aspects of education that are being provided to Aboriginal communities.

The paper draws on transcripts of Government community consultations and public meetings that took place in the Northern Territory between June and August 2011 to see what was said about the problems of non-attendance.

Ten of the consultations held were recorded and transcribed and this sample is broadly representative of the types of communities with which the government consulted. It includes public meetings in the large urban towns of Alice Springs and Darwin, proposed hub towns, and town camps, as well as one conducted on a homeland. The transcripts represent communities from across the Northern Territory. It is believed that apart from these ten centres in which recordings were made via 'concerned Australians', none of the other consultations were recorded and that all conclusions have been drawn mainly from single quotes without context and summaries of the comments.

The transcripts of consultations used are from the communities of

Maningrida 12 July

Yuendumu 5 July

Bagot Community 15 July

Alice Springs Town Camps 14 July

Yirrkala 3 August

Kintore 21 July

Mutitjulu 16 August

Galiwin'ku 18 August

Alice Springs Public Meeting 2 August

Darwin Public Meeting 28 July

*Communities/community* in this paper refers to the communities named above.

Some quotes from the public meetings held in Darwin and Alice Springs may be assigned to non-Aboriginal people as their attendance at these meetings was far greater than that of Aboriginal people.

## Priority Concerns from the Consultations

Across the communities mentioned above, there were a number of major concerns that were prioritised by Aboriginal people across all the prescribed community meetings. Among these concerns education was given high priority. Most prominent amongst those concerns was the re-introduction of bilingual learning, access to full-time education in homelands, support for Aboriginal teachers and the need to distribute funding more equitably. There was considerable anger and frustration but there was not a single request for welfare cuts or fines to those parents with children who were not attending school.

Participants also focused on the need to re-empower communities and allow for self-determination, as well as the undermining of community cohesion through the transfer of management from community councils to shire management. These issues, though not falling directly under the education umbrella, if addressed, would certainly improve the capacity of communities to work more effectively towards improved attendance. Unfortunately, in the Government report these particular concerns appear to have fallen into the category of “*Other issues raised by participants*” and that “*there will be a separate process and follow up to these issues.*”<sup>3</sup> The nature of that process is not explained.

In the Government report overview there is a section that sets out the key themes and messages for each Individual Measure. The school attendance and educational achievement section is a good summary except for two glaring differences with the transcribed consultations. There is a complete absence of any mention of ‘*bilingual learning*’, and there is the inclusion of suggestions by respondents for withholding part of welfare income or fining parents if they do not send their children to school on a regular basis.

The consultant used by the Government is the Cultural and Indigenous Research Centre Australia (CIRCA). The consultant's report makes the point that, in all but four cases, weighting of the consultation responses did not happen.

*There were only a few reports where more detailed commentary was provided on the nature of the discussions, the priority of the topics discussed, the level of participation, and the extent to which comments reflected a commonly held view.*<sup>4</sup>

## Re-introduction of Bilingual Learning in Schools

Re-introduction of the bilingual learning programme was of high priority at the prescribed community consultations and at the public meetings. It is interesting that although in the body of the Government report gives major focus to education, it mentions only very briefly Bilingual Learning. No doubt this is a further problem as cited by CIRCA, where the level of participation and the extent, to which comments reflected a community held view, are unrecorded.

The Government report states,

*There were mixed views about bilingual education. Some respondents wanted to see more teaching in Aboriginal languages in the classroom, while others wanted to see a stronger emphasis on English language at school.*<sup>5</sup>

Followed by uncited quotes of which only one supports bilingual learning.

This is interesting as when one community enquired as to why the bilingual learning programme had been removed and indicated that it should be returned, the facilitator, Richard responded:

*Um, that is a message I've got in every single community I've gone to. Ah, that bilingual education is really important to support families in getting kids to school and kids learning properly about culture and about language. It's a strong message and we'll send it back from this community as well. Thank you.<sup>6</sup>*

The consultation in Galiwin'ku was held on 18 August by which time more than 70 prescribed community consultations had already taken place and Richard, FaHCSIA facilitator, had been involved in a large number of them. If he has received a request for the return of the bilingual programme in every single community he facilitated, it is hard to understand that it has not been given due attention in the final Government report.

This raises genuine concern as to the Department's ability to interpret correctly the messages from the community consultations particularly as there was a strong, and expressed, belief that the removal of the bilingual learning programmes from schools was one of the reasons for the drop in school attendance.

### **The Urgent Need for Improvements to Education Systems, Homeland Education and Support for Aboriginal Teachers**

*It's not the Yolngu people failing education, it's the system that is failing Yolngu.<sup>7</sup> Galiwin'ku*

Certainly Aboriginal people attending the consultations were passionate about the importance of education for their children. It was mentioned over and over again. Its importance is recognised as the essential basis for the future and for being able to acquire work.

Unfortunately there was also a feeling of being talked down to by non-Aboriginal people about their not recognising the value of education.

*That third one there [on the white board], "how can we get parents to understand how important education is?" I find that very offensive because most parents do, Aboriginal parents, do know that education is important but all these barriers that people are bringing up is what they're probably thinking in the back of their minds about the support for their kids to actually go to school.<sup>8</sup> Alice Springs Town Camps*

Concern was expressed about children who were no longer attending school and people tried hard to explain to the Government visitors some of the reasons why there were barriers to school attendance.

*... more so the education department's not interested about what happens outside of the school that impacts on kids getting to school.<sup>9</sup> Alice Springs Town Camps*

Far from suggesting punitive intervention by government through the welfare system, people made numerous suggestions as to how the current system could be improved as a means of increasing rates of attendance. Let us look at the barriers to attendance that were described, the inequities they identified and solutions offered during the consultations.

## **Some Barriers to School Attendance**

### **1. No Full-time Qualified Teachers**

One issue that was brought to attention regarding school attendance was that schools in homelands do not have full-time qualified teachers.

The Minister was told by one woman that,

*... we got only visiting teacher who comes only once a week and like maybe we need more funding for the school.*<sup>10</sup> Maningrida

*We been asking education, government, to give us a teacher for school so all our kids can go to school to learn to read and write English. And that's what we been asking for a long time and government came and said "you only living here temporarily" and we said "no we not living here temporarily, this is our home, home sweet home."*<sup>11</sup> Kintore

In the Northern Territory, there are 45 homeland schools, called Homeland Learning Centres (HLC), that have never had full-time qualified teachers and have few resources. No mention of these Homeland Learning Centres or the absence of qualified teachers is made in the Government report. Attendance at these HLC's is relatively high but would no doubt increase if they were offered full-time education to which every child has a right.

### **2. Transport**

Transport can be a major problem in towns where Aboriginal people often live in town camp areas without public transport. It is equally a problem for those living in homelands outside towns where there is no public transport to town schools.

*When you living 70 kms out of town and kids need to go to school, where's the transport? Because the mother and father got no transport then the mother and father gets blamed for not sending that child to school. So if my brother wants to give up his outstation and move into town where there's more trouble then, and where out bush it's safer for him, but then again he has to bring his children in every day for school and work and he can't do that unless he's got transport. There's no public transport.*<sup>12</sup> Alice Springs Town Camps

*We need school bus for school. We ask intervention to give us bus for school, to run around pick up the kids. Police here run around taking the kids, lock them up, wea [no] we need our bus and someone that has license to drive the bus.*<sup>13</sup> Kintore

*And you know we don't have transport and we try to get our kids to school. And the kids that go to Ludmilla, the Red Cross take them to the, but then they have to walk back from Ludmilla, come back to Bagot... Sometimes we have problems with the main bus service. I've reported three times to three different drivers because they wouldn't pick up the kids from the high school and they come home crying because they want to go to school.*<sup>14 Bagot Community</sup>

### **3. Isolation of Homeland Children who attend Mainstream Town Schools**

Children from Homelands who live within proximity of town schools have difficulty as any English they do speak is likely to be their third or fourth language. These children tend to become isolated within the system.

*When it comes to children living in remote communities and they're coming into town, it actually causes more problems and the mainstream schools in this town aren't equipped for children who speak English as a third or fourth language and there's nothing in the curriculum in the schools especially mainstream schools where bilingual languages are involved.*<sup>15 Alice Springs Town Camps</sup>

*... where they're put into a mainstream school where they've got no language-speaking at all, so how is the teacher supposed to communicate to the child that's come in off a community? There's nothing at all when it comes to schooling for Aboriginal kids coming in from communities.*<sup>16 Alice Springs Town Camps</sup>

*So might be a communication problem. ...No [Aboriginal workers in the school] ... it wouldn't hurt if they'd be an interpreter working there along with the kids, because there are a lot of kids that go to school that I know for sure, because I'm from a local community, and I tell you if there are visitors coming in from community, and they tend to stay for a very long time, and when they have to enrol, the communication is very bad for sure. So before when I heard that some visitors [from homelands] don't get their kids going to school that might be part of the problem.*<sup>17 Bagot Community</sup>

### **4. More Aboriginal Teachers and Assistant Teachers, more Support in School:**

Children can see schools as places that are culturally alienating. For many it is 'a whiteman's world'. More Aboriginal teachers and assistant teachers are needed. Some people asked for programmes where more parents and grandparents could be actively engaged in schools. This was seen as one way of improving attendance and helping to make the school environment less threatening for young children.

*... I went through with my education and I have all my certificates. Then how come I was not accepted for that work? That has happened to most of us, the teachers that went through and hasn't been accepted to go back and teach our children.*<sup>18 Maningrida</sup>

*I got my qualifications to become a qualified teacher and stuff like that, but the education system couldn't retain me and couldn't keep me in there. The reason? I didn't get no support, that's why I'd rather go somewhere else.*<sup>19 Alice Springs Town Camps</sup>

*We need to retain our educators and put them up to be the strong person for our young people.*<sup>20 Alice Springs Town Camps</sup>

*Many of those children are staying away for their own survival. School is a very threatening and emotionally unsafe place for a lot of children the way it is operating at the moment. We are also often attracting many of the wrong kind of teachers. There has been some changes made in attempts made to change the way they are recruiting attract the right sort of people but quite frankly the recruiting methods has been insane. And you are getting young teachers straight from college dumped in an environment that they know nothing about. Some kids were having six teachers in one term.*<sup>21 Alice Springs Public Meeting</sup>

*Undoubtedly there are kids who can be traumatised by having to go to school and their circumstances that pertain there, but fundamentally there is a real shortage of special needs teachers and psychologists available to those schools.*<sup>22 Alice Springs Public Meeting</sup>

*Some people talk about mentor for kids, you know, that advocate for kids and to both inspire them and be a bridge between them and the teachers and others. Is that what you are talking about?*<sup>23 Bagot Community</sup>

## **5. Greater Involvement of Family Members and Community in Schools**

*I think it just gets back to the parents going into the school you know, looking themselves. They are the ones to be identifying the problems their children are having ... that's right and the PaCE programme used to take parents into the school ... more parents need to be involved.*<sup>24 Bagot Community</sup>

*We want to see young mothers, parents get involved in those kind of programme [Indigenous reading and writing] at the same time.*<sup>25 Maningrida</sup>

*So if you've got conflict in your community you often get bullying in the school between kids. ... So the solution might be to have elderly [community] people there to do the discipline side.*<sup>26 Yirrkala</sup>

*So it needs to be a whole of community approach in getting kids back in school and recognising that chronic trauma is an issue.*<sup>27 Alice Springs Public Meeting</sup>

*So the conversation isn't happening between the community and the school by the sounds.*<sup>28 Bagot Community</sup>

*But end of the day you got control. We want Yolngu control school. Where Yolngu are being part of the problem, ah part of the answers, problem solving. Yolngu*

*working together not just balanda making the decisions all the time, you know, these are the concerns that really stir up many of our people you know?*<sup>29</sup> Galiwin'ku

*I think before we start punishing parents we need to look at schools and why the children don't go to school. There are a lot of reasons for that. But one of them is that the programmes that are offered at schools are not appropriate for children. We have very well meaning teachers that are trained to teach children who are well fed, who sleep well, who lead pretty good live, but the children we have out bush are often highly stressed, they are sleep deprived, their parents are highly stressed.*<sup>30</sup> Alice Springs Public Meeting

*Engage. First, engage. Properly engage - not information sessions, not going out there already having the decisions already made, but truly engaging people to be part of the decision-making. If they're part of the decision-making, and they make the decisions about their kids, then you're going to have more buy-in, a lot more buy-in.*<sup>31</sup> Darwin Public Meeting

## **6. Acknowledging Culture in the Curriculum**

Numerous suggestions were made regarding the need for schools to become more relevant to Aboriginal culture and of the importance of having more input into the curriculum in such a way as to make it more attractive to Aboriginal children. Some expressed concern regarding the low levels of funding for Aboriginal children to be used on support activities. Clearly if the NT Education budget is based on an attendance rate of over 80% attendance, it is very small – 34%, and if all children were to attend school this would have to be tripled.

*And I think culture is relevant in every aspect of life so it's not separate to the school*<sup>32</sup> Yirrkala

*You are looking at this education is western side but why not accepting our education model, our culture, our stories, our knowledge, our future for our future children to pass our knowledge as one? Why has that not been recognised?*<sup>33</sup> Maningrida

*So it's like when you have Cinderella and Snow White and all them sort of stories, we need our stories put into them books so our children can learn that as well. And we need that in the library.*<sup>34</sup> Kintore

*To help us with our children we have to make an environment where our children wish to learn and when we are teaching our children we should be able to help shape the curriculum that is relevant to our children.*<sup>35</sup> Kintore

*... empowering the people by giving the curriculum to have some say by the Elders, because they know best the way their people actually learn best and being able to connect mainstream culture to their traditional culture...*<sup>36</sup> Darwin Public Meeting

*And so in terms of in education, in the schools we virtually have no real respect for Aboriginal culture or heritage being taught in the schools. So the children, the Aboriginal children, if that is not taught, then they do not see that as necessarily important and it is those values are not seen as important. It is those values is what sustains a culture.*<sup>37 Alice Springs Public Meeting</sup>

*Curriculum has to be engaging young people and adolescents have to feel a need to be and learn.*<sup>38 Alice Springs Public Meeting</sup>

*And they should have more better understanding for Aboriginal culture too. ... They teach Thai, Spanish, Chinese ... they don't teach Aboriginal studies in high school ... basically everything ... Australian. Everything in curriculum... there are probably 25 or more 30, 50 tribes in different cultural backgrounds that they need to know.*<sup>39 Bagot Community</sup>

*What really happened there, like, we done some sort of work with the school kids and QANTAS Foundation and ..., and they picked out ten kids that went to school every day. We took them, the old guys showed them around, after that when they came back they got in their friends ears and that's why everyone went to school, after, when they came back. And now we got the second highest rate [of attendance] of in the Territory... attendance for our kids. But some sort of stuff used to be like funding vocational education.... That way that used to work well, because they used to go and tell the other kids to come to school. And it gives them some kind of reward at the end of the year, school trip, you know. That sort of funding has been lacking and that's where our educational programmes and our attendance has been falling apart, on other communities, so you really need to look at that.*<sup>40 Mutitjulu</sup>

*We need funding, we don't have music classes here. Many studies have shown that children learn better, become emotionally better, become socially better if they have music in their lives and so we need funding here at Kintore to have a music programme in our schools.*<sup>41 Kintore</sup>

*The government needs to put aside money for things like, to run those programmes.*<sup>42 Kintore</sup>

*... the main concerns is where the government spends a dollar for each child in the urban area, a concern there is raised. I mean one of the things that came out of Wadeye, that um when every child went to school there wasn't enough chairs and desks for the children to sit on so it's like the children in remote areas getting 50c to the dollar, and that needs to be at the same level as well, so that is another concern. Resources at the school to support the children and the parents and make sure that the children are attending school. [Facilitator] "So are you saying the funding on remote schools is less than urban schools?" [Many voices] "Yes! Absolutely! Much less."*<sup>43 Darwin Public Meeting</sup>

*Our high school has got no internet connection and that is like, they don't get as much funding. We need to provide, government needs to provide the funding for the*

*remote areas so that they can connect to the outside world. Instead of keeping us isolated all the time...*<sup>44 Kintore</sup>

## **Cultural Responsibilities**

*Do you think that the government would be able to, when they write their education policy to put allowances in there for our cultural responsibilities that we follow?*<sup>45</sup>  
Kintore

*... so for instance if your child goes to a funeral, you get marked x from the school roll for three days if you don't notify the teachers that you know, three days away for a funeral ... that funeral gets tagged you know. That means people stay at home ... nowhere to go, you know.*<sup>46 Bagot Community</sup>

*They gotta put it in their education policy that when we have sorry business on, when we have funerals on, the Australian government mainstream [muffled]. We are trying to follow both laws so we shouldn't get in trouble and have our money cut off when we take our children for sorry business for funeral.*<sup>47 Kintore</sup>

## **7. Bilingual Learning**

In every community people expressed their sense of anger, shame and disappointment that the full bilingual programme had been removed from schools and been replaced by a four-hour English requirement in the mornings. Many blamed the removal of the programme for the lower attendance rates in some schools. Even communities that were not engaged in the programme expressed their concern about its removal as an option for Aboriginal schools. A current draft proposal for individual schools to apply to have a form of bilingual learning reintroduced into their communities has received a very poor response.

*... and a lot of them will say that they are more keen to go to school when they are learning their own languages.*<sup>48 Maningrida</sup>

*A bit of feedback is that kids really do want to learn languages and I think that was one big mistake that made to take away language.*<sup>49 Maningrida</sup>

*The NT department has stolen away our bilingual school. We want our bilingual school back. [clapping]*<sup>50 Maningrida</sup>

*I think it would be a really good initiative to bring back bilingual education...*<sup>51 Darwin</sup>  
Public Meeting

*And they got to lift the ban on bilingual education. [Language] kamiku, kamiku wangka for education, bilingual education, bilingual education at school. It's got to be put back into that school and the kindergarten and the high school – bilingual education, because we have a Board of Management - Tjukurrpa on top. The only way we can look after Tjukurrpa is by having kindergarten teaches the bilingual*

*education over there, and bilingual education at school, and bilingual education at high school.*<sup>52 Mutitjulu</sup>

*We don't want lose our language. We still got our language past from generation to generation. ... But English is very important, very important.*<sup>53 Maningrida</sup>

*... provide funding for bilingual programme to put it back to school. ...they have taken most of that away. That why we find a lot of fault now on the Education Department side.*<sup>54 Bagot Community</sup>

*Richard, why did the government stop bilingual education? What you're getting to work for the area, a child needs to be bilingual. To learn to read both in yolngu matha and balanda matha. [clapping]*<sup>55 Galiwin'ku</sup>

*... but I'm speaking here as a First Nations person. What you've done is, the Northern Territory government has taken away bilingual education. Education identifies a person. You take it away from the Chinese and see what happens to you. You are taking away their birthright of education, of their language, which identifies you.*<sup>56 Darwin Public Meeting</sup>

*Language is important for Aboriginal people and especially with teaching. It needs to be learned. So it actually needs to be put into our curriculum and our mainstream schools in the major townships need to be equipped...*<sup>57 Alice Springs Town Camps</sup>

## **Whole of Community Changes**

At the current time there are many difficult hurdles to be overcome before there will be a dramatic change in attendance rates, but Aboriginal people have presented to Government details of the problems as they see them. They have brought to attention areas where changes could be made rather easily and other areas where changes will take a very long time. One attendee pointed out that whole of community changes may be required to assist children with their school attendance, and another pointed out,

*We've got a funny situation here where most employment is in Nhulunbuy and starts 7.30 or 8 and the school starts at 9. So who gets the kids to school?*<sup>58 Yirrkala</sup>

In the current situation, young children must get themselves ready for school and the Government has taken over the responsibility for providing breakfasts. Yirrkala is very close geographically to South East Asian countries, where schools start early in the morning so that children are not expected to study throughout the worst heat of the day. Surely some kind of flexibility can be negotiated that would allow parents to continue in their care-giving role before they leave for work and their children leave for school.

More difficult situations arise where children's health makes it difficult for their regular attendance at school. This year Red Cross produced information that compared child malnourishment in some pockets of the Northern Territory with that of Ethiopia. Children have multiple health problems,

many of which are the result of overcrowding and poor water supply.

*... we've got 80% hearing impairment in our classrooms...*<sup>59 Mutitjulu</sup>

## Night Patrols

Many community members are clearly very worried about children who are on the streets late at night playing cards and smoking gunja. They spoke about the importance of the night patrols and the curfews that in the past were central to community approaches to control unacceptable behaviours. There seemed, however, to be considerable funding problems with night patrols in some communities. Also expressed was the disadvantage of losing control over services that have been transferred from communities to other entities under Shire management.

*They've taken the night patrol away from here... Night patrol back! Our night patrol was working really well. Never working outside and helping the community outside. ... They took it away. The government took it away.*<sup>60 Bagot Community</sup>

*I think, well, this community in particular, Jacki and some of the ladies who historically ran the night patrol here. Their model was acknowledged by government as being one of the best models, but ... Well now, because it is being fed from federal to state to local, then auspiced and sub-contracted out so that by the time the money hits there is lot less, a lot less money so it's actually devalued. ... It is question of funding and logistics. ... Others adding red tape...*<sup>61 Maningrida</sup>

*... concerned women, who were actually established a community night patrol, after handing it to Shire, the women themselves felt powerless and from the experience of, and the previous experience, of the women themselves, being concerned people, did a lot for this community and one of those things was the curfew. It was representative by the 14 different clan groups of the women who ran the night patrol. We seen a good result of the work of the women under ... Dhanbul Community Night patrol, but now I see it, I myself one of the founders of the community night patrol, is that it is falling apart and there is not enough of that continuous communication connecting between the community and the Shire.*<sup>62 Yirrkala</sup>

*Community has got night patrol staff, but they haven't got a vehicle, like everyone else they got vehicles...*<sup>63 Kintore</sup>

*Layers and layers of red tape so that by the time it's been handled at four levels and the auspicing organisation gets the funds, they've got less positions, less logistics, less of everything. And the upper tier of that is non existent ... after 5 o'clock there's nothing these guys can do no matter what the situation.*<sup>64 Maningrida</sup>

*We have no night patrol also. Night patrol's supposed to be coming but that's Blue Hills episode weekly by Gwen Meredith – hundreds and thousands of times – that sort of, that sort of syndrome.*<sup>65 Mutitjulu</sup>

The tenor of the comments made regarding night patrols was in most respects quite different to those expressed in the FaHCSIA report. The only common ground was found in the expressed wish to extend the provision of night patrol services later into the evenings.

The Government report states,

*The most frequent comments were that people wanted more night patrols, night patrols should have more powers, and they needed to do more. The next most frequent comment was that people were satisfied with their night patrol's service.*<sup>66</sup>

However, the reality for some communities is that they would simply like to have their night patrol programme restored and they would like its control restored to communities. It is the red tape and the four levels of authority that are undermining programmes and wasting money. There were no comments of satisfaction in consultations from any of the ten communities that this paper is based on. Once again the interpretation of the community comments as expressed in the Government report are consistently different to those of these transcripts.

### **Low Attendance Rates and the Cutting of Welfare Payments**

Any real discussion that took place on cutting welfare benefits was at the public meetings in Darwin and Alice Springs. Facilitators brought the issue before their audiences and in most instances there was strong opposition to such a development. The suggestion was referred to as 'punitive measures' and 'taking the stick'. There was not a single person at the meeting who stated they believed that welfare cuts would be beneficial. In Darwin there was no support for the introduction of such a measure. There was, however, in Alice Springs a single individual who expressed her concern rather strongly, but even she did not directly mention the issue of welfare cuts.

*We need to tell these parents to get these kids to school. That is the only way for our people to go forward and be educated so they can speak to the world and sit here amongst everybody and talk speak in English, a language everybody in the world speaks and talks. ... their children who should be getting educated, kicked up their arses and told to get to school and their parents to support them.*<sup>67</sup> Alice Springs Public Meeting

The only real discussion that took place on cutting welfare benefits was at the public meetings in Darwin and Alice Springs. On a few occasions in other communities the issue was brought up by people who were not supportive of the initiative, but concerned about falling foul of another new imposition.

*My little bit nervous. ... We are trying to follow both laws so we shouldn't get in trouble and have our money cut off when we take our children for sorry business for funeral.*<sup>68</sup> Kintore

*So I think you have to look at it from a totally different angle to just blame the parents and trying to get them to force their children to school as the kids feel threatened and the parents feel threatened and many of the teachers also feel extremely threatened.*<sup>69</sup> Alice Springs Public Meeting

There would appear to be virtually no evidence of community support for legislation in these transcripts that would introduce welfare cuts for parents where children were not attending school.

On 18 October Minister Macklin was interviewed during a visit to Alice Springs. This followed the release of the Government report. During the interview she was asked,

*REPORTER: On school attendance, what specific evidence is there that tying school attendance to welfare payments works?*

*JENNY MACKLIN: Well, the message loud and clear from Aboriginal people, from parents and grandparents is that they want this. If you ask the people here who run this school, they think it's a good idea. They think it's a good idea because they want to see children go to school every single day and their responsibility as parents is getting to school. We spoke to many, many Aboriginal communities who want to make sure that they get their kids to school every day.<sup>70</sup>*

Earlier Minister Macklin had said,

*We certainly support that approach and that did come through to us very clearly in the consultations. The reason that we support this is because we know that parents understand how important it is to get a decent education...<sup>71</sup>*

It seems quite remarkable that such a conclusion could have been drawn. It is even more amazing that no immediate plans have been announced to improve areas identified by the people that might assist in increasing the attendance rates. One would have thought that through co-operation with Elders some of these initiatives would have been given a try long before deciding to implement a piece of legislation that was barely mentioned by the people.

If all that was said about education during the consultations has been interpreted simply as a desire to cut welfare payments to parents of non-school attendees, then the disillusionment expressed by Aboriginal people is highly understandable.

Many of those who spoke during the consultations did so reluctantly. They stated that there was no real capacity within government to listen and the consultations were a waste of time. There was also much criticism of the Intervention as a whole. In some communities attendance was very low.

*My point at the beginning, when you guys started with the Intervention, the same things that we heard: "You are going to be heard." That never, never, never happened. It just went in here [pointing to the right ear] here [pointing to the left ear] and blew it out, the wind blew it out.<sup>72</sup> Yuendumu*

*The symbolic gestures of the Intervention starting here, starting here. It's been a total failure, the Intervention. Rather than Closing the Gap, the Government's own statistics show the Indigenous imprisonment rates have increased by 35% - putting more people in jail. That's number 1 statistic. A lot of other communities in the Northern Territory the attendance rates at schools has dropped. And in many places suicide and self-harm has increased because of the Intervention. And there's a growing crisis in urban areas like Alice Springs. People from out, from other*

*communities going into Alice Springs. It must've worked by oppressing people. That's all the Intervention has done, it has oppressed us. They've taken away all our capital assets.*<sup>73</sup> Mutitjulu

It is quite true that parents and grandparents are very eager to see improvements to the education system in the Territory. They gave their time and energy to inform consultation facilitators of their concerns and their hopes for the future, but they certainly did not give messages 'loud and clear' that they wanted absenteeism solved by welfare cuts and fines. Instead those who attended shared the problems they were having in getting their children to school and they asked for help.

### **SEAM and Every Child, Every Day**

In 2009 the SEAM (Improving School Enrolment and Attendance through Welfare Reform Measure) programme commenced as a trial in six communities of the Northern Territory.

Territorian and former school principal, Bob Gosford, wrote,

*Critics of SEAM and similar programs have argued that they are often based on questionable assumptions rather than quantifiable evidence, that there is an unwarranted focus on student and parental negligence, and are often characterised by punitive and simplistic - rather than inclusive and comprehensive - approaches to the complex suite of issues associated with truancy and poor attendance.*<sup>74</sup>

The trial has not yet been evaluated, but comments from people engaged in the programme have not been overly encouraging.

Recently the NT Government introduced an Action Plan 2010 – 2012 entitled *Every Child, Every Day* which aims at improving attendance. Again this programme attempts to improve conditions in schools in many instances incorporating suggestions made in the transcripts by respondents of the transcripts. When children are not attending school, home liaison workers, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education workers and cultural advisers are all mobilised to assist. There is no mention of new funding or of the current difficulties in retaining staff. However, the end result is one where parents may ultimately face prosecution and fines of up to \$2,000 for a first offence. The rise of fines from \$200 have only recently been increased ten fold.

*Every Child, Every Day* and SEAM are very similar to the programme that Jenny Macklin is now proposing to use across the Territory. It is hard not to be cynical and to ask the question as to why the Government bothered to hold consultations regarding issues of such importance with communities, but once they did go to the trouble of having consultations, why they haven't placed more weight on what the people have been telling them?

There were many strong messages and ideas presented by those attending the consultations that need to be given due consideration and further discussion with community leaders will prove valuable. It can only be hoped that this will happen.

## Some Ideas and Suggestions from the Consultations that Require Further Consideration

- Return the bilingual learning programmes to schools
- Recognise that most Aboriginal children are second, third and fourth language children and alter the teacher-student ratio accordingly as happens within other parts of Australia
- Engage with Elders to ensure culturally relevant curriculum planning
- Provide school transport
- Improve incentives to attract and support Aboriginal teachers and encourage others to train for a career in teaching.
- Remove the 'over 80%' attendance criteria for calculation of educational budgets so that all children are considered equally
- Provide funding for basic services like internet connections, music classes, school trips etc.
- Provide additional services as found in other Australian schools like special needs teachers

## Links between Welfare Cuts and School Non-Attendance

While there are many strong and valuable messages from Aboriginal people of the Northern Territory as to how to improve levels of school attendance, there seems to have been no evidence that one of those messages was about cutting welfare benefits or fines.

What is the use of consulting if the messages are misinterpreted? What message does that give? One frustrated community member said during a consultation,

*They didn't even sit down with us. Nothing. You call that a consultation? No, no, no. I'm saying they called it a consultation because they put it. They had their thing in their heads. In our minds we always say: "Come down from your bloody throne! And sit down and talk with us! Come down from your cloud number nine and sit down with us." And, you know, in here [picking up pamphlet from the ground where he'd thrown it and waving it] there's nothing about culture, nothing about Law, no land, nothing! In here, there's no Law, no Law, no Law, no language and respect of the Indigenous people! ... You gotta realize their ideas ... [language] Hear our lips: NO! This is not a proper consultation [language]. This consultation is [language 'lowa'?] nothing.<sup>75</sup> Yuendumu*

'They had their thing in their heads' and maybe that is what has happened in this instance. Much advice by respected Australian leaders prior to commencement of the consultations suggested they should be conducted independent of Government, that they were recorded and placed on public record and that there were no pre-determined outcomes. That advice should have been taken.

It is our belief that legislation to link welfare cuts to the parents of non-attending school children will be a pre-determined outcome which will ignore almost totally the suggestions of community residents. If these suggestions were to be addressed this will simply be in addition to the planned legislation to which there is evidence to believe that this is closer to having been imposed than asked for by Aboriginal people.

The Government has spent considerable amounts of tax payer money on a very large number of consultations in the Northern Territory. It appears that virtually no weight has been placed on the information provided by the people through this process with regards to the problems of absenteeism. Within weeks of ending the process the Department has decided to legislate what it sees as a solution to the problem. This is based on a programme that was implemented as a trial some two years ago and which has not yet been evaluated. It is not based on what has been heard from Aboriginal people. There is no evidence from these transcripts that a request for welfare cuts has been made.

Given that this is a very representative sample of the consultations, doubt is cast over Minister Macklin's belief that Aboriginal people themselves have requested the implementation of welfare cuts to parents of non-attending children.

That doubt is of grave concern. It would not be there if, as requested, there had been a more transparent process and transcripts of all consultations had been made public. One has to ask the question, why did the Minister refuse to make recordings of the consultations?

## Wherever possible the context to the quotes is provided

- 1 Australian Government. 2011. *Stronger Futures in the Northern Territory Report on Consultations*.
- 2 The Hon Jenny Macklin MP. Joint Media Release with: Warren Snowdon MP. 18 October 2011. *Aboriginal people clear about their priorities for building stronger futures in the Northern Territory*
- 3 Australian Government. 2011. *Stronger Futures in the Northern Territory Report on Consultations*. Page 18
- 4 Cultural and Indigenous Research Centre Australia (CIRCA). 2011. *Report on Stronger Futures Consultation 2011*. Page 24. [http://www.fahcsia.gov.au/sa/indigenous/pubs/nter\\_reports/Pages/circa\\_oct11.aspx](http://www.fahcsia.gov.au/sa/indigenous/pubs/nter_reports/Pages/circa_oct11.aspx).
- 5 Australian Government. 2011. *Stronger Futures in the Northern Territory Report on Consultations*. Page 29
- 6 Richard, why did the government stop bilingual education? What you're getting to work for the area, a child needs to be bilingual. To learn to read both in Yolngu matha and balanda matha. [Clapping] **Um, that is a message I've got in every single community I've gone to. Ah, that bilingual education is really important to support families in getting kids to school and kids learning properly about culture and about language. It's a strong message and we'll send it back from this community as well. Thank you.** – Galiwin'ku
- 7 And we told him, you know we want we want the Christian school to come back here to the main communities, you know, because this is the educations, **it's not the Yolngu people failing education, it's the system that is failing Yolngu**. You know we can, some of the people even in their department is, they point the finger at those people out, over there and you know there's so many things you have to look at the dynamics of the community. Just seeing the, it's really dysfunctional happening in the every, no matter where you go to left right and centre, it's not happening. But then it was working. We want that mob the missionary mob to come back and run this school for us because there was at least there was real negotiating consultation taking place assistant teachers would be, you know there was orientations taking place. The community, and were informed about the culture about the Yolngu the structures you know and things were happening. And he said we have to, Yolngu people we have to stand up and say we want this because it worked. – Galiwin'ku
- 8 That third one there, [on the white board] "how can we get parents to understand how important education is?" I find that very offensive because most parents do, Aboriginal parents, do know that education is important but all these barriers that people are bringing up is what they're probably thinking in the back of their minds about the support for their kids to actually go to school. – Alice Springs Town Camps
- 9 And also like with schooling and whatever else that takes place, a lot of people - the government's not interested like - **more so the education department's not interested about what happens outside of the school that impacts on kids getting to school**, so are you gonna go back and do a lot of – you will have to go back to, whether you want to or not - it's then go back **and consult, really consult, about having really an Indigenous perspective on their lives and where they wanna live.** – Alice Springs Town Camps
- 10 Yeah, **we got only visiting teacher who comes only once a week and like maybe we need more funding for the school**. I've been teaching long time and like what we need teaching smaller kids and they go up to 14, when they go up to 14 then they come back to the hub school. Like we are allowed to teach them out there. Yeah, but they come back to Maningrida hub school. They don't go to school, you know, they just run around. Yeah, but we need help. How we gonna teach our eldest kids, you know 16, 15 and 14, you know, like we don't want them to come here. We want to teach them out there [homelands], yeah. - Maningrida
- 11 I worked at the school for a long time and I worked at the Pre-School up [muffled]. And we brought all these people to here with no help from [muffled] and Canberra. [language]. And we been bringing all these Pintibi [Pintupi] tribe here. And we been started and we leave [muffled]. [language]. And we worked really hard [muffled] incinerator. [language]. **We been asking education, government, to give us a teacher for school so all our kids can go to school to learn to read and write English. And that's what we been asking for a long time and government came and said "you only living here temporarily" and we said "no we not living here temporarily, this is our home, home sweet home"**. [language]. That's for all the kids to learn to read and write

English. We want our kids to learn read and write English. I get nervous, I get worry all the time about my thing to lose my culture. I get really nervous. If I learn to read and write English I might lose it and lose my [language]. My mother had. - Kintore

12 I've heard people talk about getting kids to school, kids, getting kids to school. **When you living 70 kms out of town and kids need to go to school, where's the transport? Because the mother and father got no transport then the mother and father gets blamed for not sending that child to school. So if my brother wants to give up his outstation and move into town where there's more trouble then, and where out bush it's safer for him, but then again he has to bring his children in every day for school and work and he can't do that unless he's got transport. There's no public transport.** - Alice Springs Town Camps

13 **We need school bus for school. We ask intervention to give us bus for school, to run around pick up the kids. Police here run around taking the kids, lock them up, wea [no] we need our bus and someone that has license to drive the bus.** We need tjilpi [old man] to drive the bus, drive around the young people. We need education, proper education for young people. And adults, too. I went to Batchelor College learning reading and writing. We can't listen people talking to us you know what I mean. We gotta talk straight, we gotta talk not too shame. Don't get shame - Kintore

14 There is a big problem because most of the people who come in don't decide to go back home, because they don't know that they're causing problem within the community. And another thing I'd like to raise about the children is our children who are going through the high school. It's coming towards the wet season now and they don't have any transport to be taken to school especially in this type of weather. Most of our kids wet half way ... So how far is the high school from here? Nightcliff and maybe Darwin High I suppose when they get off. ... So that's quite a long way. **And you know we don't have transport and we try to get our kids to school. And the kids that go to Ludmilla, the Red Cross take them to the, but then they have to walk back from Ludmilla, come back to Bagot... Sometimes we have problems with the main bus service. I've reported three times to three different drivers because they wouldn't pick up the kids from the high school and they come home crying because they want to go to school.** What am I supposed to do? – Bagot Community

15 & 16 **When it comes to children living in remote communities and they're coming into town, it actually causes more problems and the mainstream schools in this town aren't equipped for children who speak English as a third or fourth language and there's nothing in the curriculum in the schools especially mainstream schools where bilingual languages are involved.** Kids that live in remote community and on our town camps learn better by speaking reading and writing both their language as well as English so when a little child comes in from a remote community, for example my nephew or my niece, they come in from out bush, they've got English, you know, low numeracy and literacy skills **where they're put into a mainstream school where they've got no language-speaking at all, so how is the teacher supposed to communicate to the child that's come in off a community? There's nothing at all when it comes to schooling for Aboriginal kids coming in from communities.** – Alice Springs Town Camps

17 **So might be a communication problem...** I try to see, barrier there. Maybe communication problem specially when it is something to do with Aboriginal kids. Are there Aboriginal workers in the school at all or none? No, but **it wouldn't hurt if they'd be an interpreter working there along with the kids, because there are a lot of kids that go to school that I know for sure, because I'm from a local community, and I tell you if there are visitors coming in from community, and they tend to stay for a very long time, and when they have to enrol, the communication is very bad for sure. So before when I heard that some visitors [from homelands] don't get their kids going to school that might be part of the problem.** Maybe or might be some other reason, but it's something to look at ... yeah... so just coming back to kids and your sons are obviously not having a great time. There's something failing in the Middle School system, because that where our kids are not . It's Middle School – Bagot Community

18 What I was going to say is, who will be the teachers? Which side will you accept the western side to come in and teach the children or the Aboriginal people here? But some of us ... **I went through with my education and I have all my certificates. Then how come I was not accepted for that work? That has happened to most of us, the teachers that went through and hasn't been accepted to go back and teach our children.** So what you are really saying is you need support for Aboriginal people to get your proper qualifications to be accepted? - Maningrida

19 No, I was just going to say something about like our educators, specially myself I've come through that education system, on and off, like a lot of Indigenous kids do. I've managed to somehow just keep on going. Yeah I just somehow just kept on going, kept on fighting hard. **I got my qualifications to become a qualified teacher and stuff like that, but the education system couldn't retain me and couldn't keep me in there. The reason? I didn't get no support, that's why I'd rather go somewhere else.** – Alice Springs Town Camps

20 **We need to retain our educators and put them up to be the strong person for our young people.** And yeah, that's just what I wanted to say, there's nothing - there is places where you can go to for support and that's just only talking you know. Like there's a lot of issues that we as educators, Indigenous educators, have to deal with in some of the schools and outside and there is not enough support for us to continue our job as being educators for our young people to grow up. – Alice Springs Town Camps

21 It is about the way you teach. At the moment in what I saw at a lot of schools it does vary a great deal, but there is a general theme. **Many of those children are staying away for their own survival. School is a very threatening and emotionally unsafe place for a lot of children the way it is operating at the moment. We are also often attracting many of the wrong kind of teachers. There has been some changes made in attempts made to change the way they are recruiting attract the right sort of people but quite frankly the recruiting methods has been insane. And you are getting young teachers straight from college dumped in an environment that they know nothing about. Some kids were having six teachers in one term.** There is no way children will learn in those sort of conditions. Now 25 to 39 years ago before teacher was allowed to teach in a remote school they spent 2 to 3 months teaching alongside another teacher learning how to team teach with the Aboriginal teachers. That does not happen now and it is a skill how to be able to team teach appropriately. – Alice Springs Public Meeting

22 I think it is probably underestimating the work of a lot of teachers in the schools and the schools themselves to be blaming them for this situation. **Undoubtedly there are kids who can be traumatised by having to go to school and their circumstances that pertain there, but fundamentally there is a real shortage of special needs teachers and psychologists available to those schools.** Recently I have worked with four community where the schools are working excellently in other ways, but the staff aren't coping with the extra demands on them and the lack of special needs teachers that are supplied to them and psychologists supplied to them. I don't think you can say that the schools are not providing a good environment for the kids; it's the fact that so many kids going with a lot of needs and the schools are under resourced to actually deliver on what they are trying to do. – Alice Springs Public Meeting

23 So is the issue now that you have to get on with the headmaster or the teacher before you have that yarn ... *discussion inaudible* So who else can inspire those kids in Middle Schools so they'll keep learning? So parents you can do your bit, but if you think about the system we get it right parents can do your bit and get kids to school, what else will inspire those kids to learn and go forward? **Some people talk about mentor for kids, you know, that advocate for kids and to both inspire them and be a bridge between them and the teachers and others. Is that what you are talking about?** – Bagot Community

24 **I think it just gets back to the parents going into the school you know, looking themselves. They are the ones to be identifying the problems their children are having ... that's right and the PaCE programme used to take parents into the school ... more parents need to be involved ...** Yeah, but if you have more of the group going, parents able ... *inaudible*. Is that easy for parents to go individually to talk to the school and I'm hearing probably it isn't easy. But in a group? That's right. – Bagot Community

25 **We want to see young mothers, parents get involved in those kind of programme [Indigenous reading and writing] at the same time.** But how do we make that children are learning their reading and writing better at school? What do we need to change? - Maningrida

26 **So if you've got conflict in your community you often get bullying in the school between kids ...** so that happens here little bit? Yo. **So the solution might be to have elderly [community] people there to do the discipline side.** Not only in school, but also in the community. So that was the curfew idea and making sure the kids are behaving themselves. Good. I thought raypirri rom was already ... *inaudible... Language* ... It started here in the community, raypirri work ... means within the community eh? Eh? Before they go to school. So. Sometimes

bullying and teasing and all this behaviour in the classroom, we do have some raypirri representative from the community that comes up to the school. It happens to all our schools and we go through the rules, the different rules within the community and the school. So that always happens within the school. There's raypirri. - Yirrkala

27 There are a lot of young people growing up in families with chronic trauma that does effects the way young children grow up and the ways in which the brain develops and their capacity to engage in a formal learning situation when they are more concerned about what is going on at home with food and bits and pieces like that. **So it needs to be a whole of community approach in getting kids back in school and recognising that chronic trauma is an issue.** – Alice Springs Public Meeting

28 So I think asked the question before about the relationship with the school. It sounds like since the PaCE programme, the relationship is generally a negative one. You only go when your kid's in trouble or you're paying money. So that a hard relationship.... So with sorry business the school doesn't understand or.... [Lots of voices] ... it's the school system. **So the conversation isn't happening between the community and the school by the sounds.** – Bagot Community

29 We can make mistakes. Everybody makes mistakes. Go through the teething problems you make mistakes. **But end of the day you got control. We want Yolngu control school. Where Yolngu are being part of the problem, ah part of the answers, problem solving. Yolngu working together not just balanda making the decisions all the time, you know, these are the concerns that really stir up many of our people you know?** Some of us gonna end up in hospital. Too many stress too many worries. We don't know where to go. We want to work together. What is the best way we can work together? – Galiwin'ku

30 **I think before we start punishing parents we need to look at schools and why the children don't go to school. There are a lot of reasons for that. But one of them is that the programmes that are offered at schools are not appropriate for children. We have very well meaning teachers that are trained to teach children who are well fed, who sleep well, who lead pretty good live, but the children we have out bush are often highly stressed, they are sleep deprived, their parents are highly stressed.** And that has been going on for generations. Now that affects the way they learn. - Alice Springs Public Meeting.

31 What are some of your views, if we don't approach it from a punitive side, what's some of your views about how we approach it from the other way? **Engage. First, engage. Properly engage - not information sessions, not going out there already having the decisions already made, but truly engaging people to be part of the decision-making. If they're part of the decision-making, and they make the decisions about their kids, then you're going to have more buy-in, a lot more buy-in.** - Darwin Public Meeting

32 **And I think culture is relevant in every aspect of life so it's not separate to the school.** ... I don't think the Shire wants that responsibility, but what happened was the whole structures of decision-making and discussion, the resources to actually do anything and a lot of the key individuals transferred to the Shire so people who were previously the Council chairperson or the liaison became the Shire liaison or so there's been this real blurring. - Yirrkala

33 I am an educated person. I have been educating kids from preschool, but I was living in another community. My life-style has been forgotten, but every education I went through from step by step and I keep turning back and looking at it, what was happening. This is my big question. Why we coming to put the children in one education? **You are looking at this education is western side, but why not accepting our education model, our culture, our stories, our knowledge, our future for our future children to pass our knowledge as one? Why has that not been recognised?** - Maningrida

34 When my mum was working at Papunya school she used to go around and record Pintibi [Pintupi] stories. Pintibi [Pintupi] stories from the old people. We need access to those stories and we want those stories put into books and that so they can be in our schools so the children can take them. **So it's like when you have Cinderella and Snow White and all them sort of stories, we need our stories put into them books so our children can learn that as well. And we need that in the library.** – Kintore

35 & 41

**To help us with our children we have to make an environment where our children wish to learn and when we are teaching our children we should be able to help shape the curriculum that is relevant to our children. ... so our children. We need funding, we don't have music classes here. Many studies have shown that children learn better, become emotionally better, become socially better if they have music in their lives and so we need funding here at Kintore to have a music programme in our schools.** We need that. Now I would also like to see Aboriginal studies being taught here at school because they have scrapped the bilingual programme and so the Aboriginal studies could be teaching the history of Indigenous Australia and the colonisation as well as the [language]. You know when you go to schools in town and you have maths, science, you have music you have those things. Well, we should be able to have those kinds of things as well. So the government needs to be putting aside money to fund the music programmes in schools in remote areas. They need to start funding Aboriginal studies. They need to start putting in curriculum, which is relevant to us. - Kintore

36

Absolutely, I think, yeah, **empowering the people by giving the curriculum to have some say by the Elders, because they know best the way their people actually learn best and being able to connect mainstream culture to their traditional culture** in a way that they can actually understand the importance of certain things by making that correlation I think is just invaluable. And once they have that power to be able to have some sort of say over what their children are actually learning and the method in which it's being delivered ... it would just make leaps and bounds, I believe. – Darwin Public Meeting

37

And the school and the idea of having rehab out in the communities that is absolutely critical in terms of people helping really finding themselves and find who they are because when you know who you are is like an internal guide book that tells you what sort of choices you make. It is all very well to say you have individual choices, but you have got to know what your options are and you have got to have some kind of guidance to that. **And so in terms of in education, in the schools we virtually have no real respect for Aboriginal culture or heritage being taught in the schools. So the children, the Aboriginal children if that is not taught then they do not see that as necessarily important and it is those values are not seen as important. It is those values is what sustains a culture.** – Alice Springs Public Meeting

38

**Curriculum has to be engaging young people and adolescents have to feel a need to be and learn.** There is also an issue around chronic trauma that is intergenerational. There are a lot of young people growing up in families with chronic trauma that does affects the way young children grow up and the ways in which the brain develops and their capacity to engage in a formal learning situation when they are more concerned about what is going on at home with food and bits and pieces like that. – Alice Springs Public Meeting

39

**And they should have more better understanding for Aboriginal culture too. ... They teach Thai, Spanish, Chinese ... they don't teach Aboriginal studies in high school ... basically everything ... Australian. Everything in curriculum... there are probably 25 or more 30, 50 tribes in different cultural backgrounds that they need to know.** – Bagot Community

40

**What really happened there, like, we done some sort of work with the school kids and QANTAS Foundation and ... Foundation, and they picked out ten kids that went to school every day. We took them, the old guys showed them around, after that when they came back they got in their friends ears and that's why everyone went to school, after, when they came back. And now we got the second highest rate [of attendance] of in the Territory of you know, attendance for our kids. But some sort of stuff used to be like funding vocational education or VEGAS funding they used to call it and we used to utilise that to take our kids away and show them the city and show them other places. That way that used to work well, because they used to go and tell the other kids to come to school. And it gives them some kind of reward at the end of the year, school trip, you know. That sort of funding has been lacking and that's where our educational programmes and our attendance has been falling apart, on other communities, so you really need to look at that.** - Mutitjulu

41

see 35

42

**The government needs to put aside money for things like, to run those programmes.** And to run that curriculum it should be in the schools so we bring out kids up with a strong identity and a strong way to learn both ways so they don't feel shame. When you are told that you're not allowed to learn in your own [language] you're not allowed to learn this, you're not allowed to learn that, you feel shame, people start to feel to shame. It happened

in the missionary days. People started to feel shame inside themselves, [muffled] all around. Well, I don't want that shame being burnt into our kid's future here, so I would like to see the curriculum [muffled] here as well as music as well as other things. - Kintore

43 My name is Natalie, I'm in the child protection area, but one of **the main concerns is where the government spends a dollar for each child in the urban area, a concern there is raised. I mean one of the things that came out of Wadeye, that um when every child went to school there wasn't enough chairs and desks for the children to sit on so it's like the children in remote areas getting 50c to the dollar, and that needs to be at the same level as well, so that is another concern. Resources at the school to support the children and the parents and make sure that the children are attending school. [Facilitator] "So are you saying the funding on remote schools is less than urban schools?" [Many voices] "Yes! Absolutely! Much less."** – Darwin Public Meeting

44 They need help for funding for internet connection. **Our high school has got no internet connection and that is like, they don't get as much funding. We need to provide, government needs to provide the funding for the remote areas so that they can connect to the outside world. Instead of keeping us isolated all the time** they need to provide a helping hand [kids] to be able to come out and have the confidence to come out when we wish to come out. - Kintore

45 **Do you think that the government would be able to, when they write their education policy to put allowances in there for our cultural responsibilities that we follow?** Or is it going to be like how the government has said that they won't take customary law into consideration when they [muffled] the justice system? ... [Facilitator] My honest answer is, look I'm taking these messages back. I don't speak on behalf of education, but you know they are strong questions that need to be answered and we are going to take them back and we are going to try and get answers for you. - Kintore

46 ... so they sit for weeks **so for instance if your child goes to a funeral, you get marked x from the school roll for three days if you don't notify the teachers that you know, three days away for a funeral ... that funeral gets tagged you know. That means people stay at home ... nowhere to go, you know. [Facilitator]** I understand that, but it sounds like there are two things going on here. There's, there's, I was trying to use a simple word and I don't know that there is a simple word 'disengagement' between community and the schools so the conversation is not happening and on top of that there seems to be a hard rule around sorry business that disadvantages kids. – Bagot Community

47 **They gotta put it in their education policy that when we have sorry business on, when we have funerals on, the Australian government mainstream [muffled]. We are trying to follow both laws so we shouldn't get in trouble and have our money cut off when we take our children for sorry business for funeral.** We shouldn't have our money cut off and marked as absent for our children for no attendance when we take them for lore or something. They have to write it in there that children are allowed to go off for sorry or they are allowed to go off for lore. They gotta put those things in there. [muffled] got to recognize here that there are two culture - Kintore

48 & 49 ... I think that maybe a lot of us forgetting to ask our children what they want, because we have been with them in school, engaging with them through the youth centre, engaging with them through other services and programme we have in community **and a lot of them will say that they are more keen to go to school when they are learning their own languages.** For me, for instance, I learnt, I lived in Brisbane, but I learnt my language through books that were sent and made here in Maningrida into Brisbane that was the only real connection that saved me from learning a little bit of my own language and still knowing it. So I think a lot of us are talking about it, but we forget to ask kids what they really want. **A bit of feedback is that kids really do want to learn languages and I think that was one big mistake that made to take away language.** – Maningrida

50 Honourable Minister for men's conclusion here I just want to follow up on education department. **The NT department has stolen away our bilingual school. We want our bilingual school back [clapping]** That is a a a a. one of the most ... scenario when they took bilingual our students can meet NTCF [Northern Territory Curriculum Framework] in terms of certificate grades right up to unqualified teachers for 25 years. Our children can do better with bilingual teacher being there being bilingual, too. - Maningrida

51 Also, when they were speaking language, at that early level, it was the teacher's aides that did a lot of the teaching work and the white teachers were doing a lot of the helping. And since we've brought in this compulsory speaking in English for the first four hours, those teacher aides have gone back to doing menial tasks. **I think it would be a really good initiative to bring back bilingual education** and train those teacher aides to actually be real teachers and pay them as teachers, because they're doing a teacher's job and they should be paid like teachers. So more employment of local people to teach in the communities. - Darwin Public Meeting

52 **And they got to lift the ban on bilingual education. [Language] kamiku, kamiku wangka for education, bilingual education, bilingual education at school. It's got to be put back into that school and the kindergarten and the high school – bilingual education, because we have a Board of Management - Tjukurrpa on top. The only way we can look after Tjukurrpa is by having kindergarten teaches the bilingual education over there, and bilingual education at school, and bilingual education at high school.** All the policies that the government develop now must reflect the um, the er, the Indigenous Rights Declaration by the UN. You know you must reflect that. - Mutitjulu

53 When ... school English. They gotta learn English, ... if all the kids you know when they took English out, learn English, you know, and the language that they were using at home or maybe elsewhere after lunch maybe ... hard to follow English, English you Barada, and then go home. English we're gonna lose our language, you know mine ... Important that they go home and they can talk their language. **We don't want lose our language. We still got our language past from generation to generation. ... But English is very important, very important.** - Maningrida

54 Excuse me I just want to take my interpreter hat off and use the community hat. I used to, with the various schools, I used to ASPA after school programmes and government provide funding to employ to that job for after hours programme for Indigenous kids at Bagot, but not just here, but kids attending and also to recognise a bilingual programme for Indigenous kids through that they'll be able to learn both languages and both cultures like English and language and culture is very important to future children and we are talking about the future. So should it be funding provided by the government for ASPA to employ someone for after hours ... and also to **provide funding for bilingual programme to put it back to school.** So that very important issues. So bilinguals gone from schools now? Yes, **they have taken most of that away. That why we find a lot of fault now on the Education Department side.** – Bagot Community

55 **Richard, why did the government stop bilingual education? What you're getting to work for the area, a child needs to be bilingual. To learn to read both in yolngu matha and balanda matha [clapping].** Um, that is a message I've got in every single community I've gone to. Ah that bilingual education is really important to support families in getting kids to school and kids learning properly about culture and about language. It's a strong message and we'll send it back from this community as well. Thank you – Galiwin'ku

56 Right, picture this. What you haven't done - I'm a school teacher, right? I'm a school teacher, I come from Wave Hill, Gurindji. What's happened here - I'm also on the Central Land Council, **but I'm speaking here as a First Nations person. What you've done is, the Northern Territory government has taken away bilingual education. Education identifies a person. You take it away from the Chinese and see what happens to you. You are taking away their birthright of education, of their language, which identifies you.** And then they want us to join some committees about education. You got it all wrong, you idiots. You have been doing it for 40 years and more. When are you going to wake up and start doing that word up on the board there called "consultation"? What he should have done, that moron, John Howard should have gone to the police stations, should have gone to the schools, and the clinics, and see who creates domestic violence, who bring in the grog, who brings in the the ganja. Yep, it was made easy by putting 10,000 of us through Centrelink payments. That's the truth. – Darwin Public Meeting

57 Northern Territory Government where they were sacking bilingual languages in the communities. **Language is important for Aboriginal people and especially with teaching. It needs to be learned. So it actually needs to be put into our curriculum and our mainstream schools in the major townships need to be equipped** with the teachers and especially when teachers that are coming straight out of university going into remote communities as well as remote schools do not know how to communicate properly with our children. - Alice Springs Town Camps

58 **We've got a funny situation here where most employment is in Nhulunbuy and starts 7.30 or 8 and the school starts at 9. So who gets the kids to school?** The other issue is that in the last few years there's been a complete collapse of work activities in the Shire, CDEP collapsed so the basically there are very few adults here who have a structured day and... - Yirrkala

59 Before the Intervention we had doctors here, we had male health workers, health workers - now there's no primary health. Land Council, early on this year they said "Oh we got money for swimming pool" – where's that swimming pool, yaaltji that swimming pool? [Voice: Wiya, Wiya] When **we've got 80% hearing impairment in our classrooms**, obviously a swimming pool will help with ears, eyes and nose and skin conditions. We got, hey we got swimming pool, where that swimming pool? The kids are going to swimming in the shit farm again this year when we've had money for twelve months. How come the contracts hasn't been let? Are they gonna open the swimming pool next winter? The swimming pool should be building now, not next winter. We got to give the kids something. The whole Intervention is about looking after children. I think the Commonwealth Government and Territory governments done a dismal failure here. - Mutitjulu

60 **They've taken the night patrol away from here... Night patrol back! Our night patrol was working really well. Never working outside and helping the community outside.** So what happened to night patrol? **They took it away. The government took it away.** [Laughs]. So they stopped the money and ... Because it was working so well that they had to take it away. It took away all the rest of the money the other things from outside. – Bagot Community

61 **I think, well, this community in particular, Jacki and some of the ladies who historically ran the night patrol here. Their model was acknowledged by government as being one of the best models, but ...** And why isn't that working now? **Well now, because it is being fed from federal to state to local, then auspiced and sub-contracted out so that by the time the money hits there is lot less, a lot less money so it's actually devalued. ... It is question of funding and logistics. ... Others adding red tape...** - Maningrida

62 Just follow up, like my son is saying is, before, night patrol was handed over to Shire there were a lot of those women, **concerned women, who were actually established a community night patrol after handing it to Shire, the women themselves felt powerless and from the experience of, and the previous experience, of the women themselves, being concerned people, did a lot for this community and one of those things was the curfew. It was representative by the 14 different clan groups of the women who ran the night patrol. We seen a good result of the work of the women under the new fella Dhanbul Community Night patrol, but now I see it, I myself one of the founders of the community night patrol, is that it is falling apart and there is not enough of that continuous communication connecting between the community and the Shire.** - Yirrkala

63 Sam, Kerry you need to write this down. **Community has got night patrol staff, but they haven't got a vehicle, like everyone else they got vehicles,** Toyota [muffled] haven't got one. That's why [muffled] community wants to act quick to bring back vehicles for the night patrol staff so they can do their programme so they can help the kids and other adults. If there is a problem there is night patrol vehicle there, sort things out, but they haven't got a vehicle. All they want is the vehicle to support them to get around. - Kintore

64 **Layers and layers of red tape so that by the time it's been handled at four levels and the auspicing organisation gets the funds, they've got less positions, less logistics, less of everything. And the upper tier of that is non-existent ... after 5 o'clock there's nothing these guys can do no matter what the situation.** So the priority for you is really addressing the red tape that's around night patrol, but you all think night patrols work that's a priority ... People agree with that? You agree that the night patrol is very important? Yes, Yes [Loud agreement] - Maningrida

65 We've brought them in here and shown them that they've had a contract for 18 months, but they've done no work, nothing. Youth worker not working with our mob here, hey? With our kids and there's a contract. **We have no night patrol also. Night patrol's supposed to be coming but that's Blue Hills episode weekly by Gwen Meredith – hundreds and thousands of times – that sort of, that sort of syndrome.** - Mutitjulu

66 Australian Government. 2011. *Stronger Futures in the Northern Territory Report on Consultations*. Page 47 – 48.

67 Here we are talking about education of Aboriginal kids and to be honest with all of you and a whole lot of things, issues and mental capabilities of communities... A person talked about how traumatised kids are and are too scared to go to school. I disagree with you. **We need to tell these parents to get these kids to school. That is the only way for our people to go forward and be educated so they can speak to the world and sit here amongst everybody and talk speak in English, a language everybody in the world speaks and talks.** There is just a few of us Aboriginal, black fellas here in this room and here we are talking about Aboriginal education and it embarrasses me to listen to somebody like yourself who is a professional who studies our people and **their children who should be getting educated, kicked up their arses and told to get to school and their parents to support them.** If that does not happen we are diminished and I think we have to stop making excuse for our people, get our people educated, that's the only way for us forward and it is sad to sit here and listen to all that. – Alice Springs Public Meeting

68 **My little bit nervous.** [language]. Sorry business. [language]. They gotta make allowance for us. They gotta put it in their education policy that when we have sorry business on, when we have funerals on, the Australian government mainstream [muffled]. **We are trying to follow both laws so we shouldn't get in trouble and have our money cut off when we take our children for sorry business for funeral.** We shouldn't have our money cut off and marked as absent for our children for no attendance when we take them for lore or something. They have to write it in there that children are allowed to go off for sorry or they are allowed to go off for lore. They gotta put those things in there, got to recognize here that there are two culture. - Kintore

69 Because the most effective teachers in the school will be the Aboriginal staff who are committed to the children, will stay in the school for a long time. **So I think you have to look at it from a totally different angle to just blame the parents and trying to get them to force their children to school as the kids feel threatened and the parents feel threatened and many of the teachers also feel extremely threatened.** - Alice Springs Public Meeting

70 & 71 The Hon Jenny Macklin MP. 18 October 2011. *Stronger Futures in the Northern Territory, Alice Springs doorstep.*

72 [Facilitator] You are going to be heard. And we are more than happy when we write it down to bring it back to Yuendumu to make sure that we got it right. So that you fellas actually can say, yes, eh, you listened to us and we understand. [Response] **My point at the beginning, when you guys started with the Intervention, the same things that we heard: "You are going to be heard." That never, never, never happened. It just went in here [pointing to the right ear] here [pointing to the left ear] and blew it out, the wind blew it out.** – Yuendumu

73 [Facilitator] This is not a consultation where we come and tell you what we are going to do. This is about talking to communities, working with communities and working out how we can do business better together. [Response] With the consultations coming to here, to Uluru, we'd much rather, sorry mate, we'd much rather see Jenny Macklin here, or the Prime Minister. **The symbolic gestures of the Intervention starting here, starting here. It's been a total failure, the Intervention. Rather than Closing the Gap, the Government's own statistics show the Indigenous imprisonment rates have increased by 35% - putting more people in jail. That's number 1 statistic. A lot of other communities in the Northern Territory the attendance rates at schools has dropped. And in many places suicide and self-harm has increased because of the Intervention. And there's a growing crisis in urban areas like Alice Springs. People from out, from other communities going into Alice Springs. It must've worked by oppressing people. That's all the Intervention has done, it has oppressed us. They've taken away all our capital assets.** – Mutitjulu

74 Gosford, B. 2011. *'Wag school, die young' — beyond carrots and sticks in remote NT education.*  
<http://www.crikey.com.au/2011/01/11/wag-school-die-young-beyond-carrots-and-sticks-in-remote-nt-education/>.

75 Those people never, never ever, ever came to sit down with us and write this paper. All the information that we want all the things that they had in their minds that Aboriginal people they pointed out some points, eight of them, I think it's eight [confirmed by another voice] eight of them. And that eight never once that government ever spoke and came here. Never, never here - everywhere else! **They didn't even sit down with us. Nothing. You call that a consultation? No, no, no. I'm saying they called it a consultation because they put it. They had their thing in their heads. In our minds we always say: "Come down from your bloody throne! And sit down**

and talk with us! Come down from your cloud number nine and sit down with us.” And, you know, in here [picking up pamphlet from the ground where he’d thrown it and waving it] there’s nothing about culture, nothing about Law, no land, nothing! In here, there’s no Law, no Law, no Law, no language and respect of the Indigenous people! It’s all what they figured, they figured [language] and what they’re doing, what they’re doing is they...this is what I’m going to do [tearing the pamphlet] I should have brought a match and bloody burned the bloody thing [throwing it away, standing up and shouting] That’s what I...it’s nothing! [language] it’s stolen from them! You gotta realize their ideas ... [language] Hear our lips: NO! This is not a proper consultation [language]. This consultation is [language ‘lowa’?] nothing. - Yuendumu