



NTCOSS NEWS SHEET – May 2011

NT Budget a mixed bag for the community sector

The NT budget handed down on Tuesday 3 May was something of a mixed bag for the community sector. On the upside, significant amounts of money were earmarked for spending on child protection and on alcohol rehabilitation. However critical policy areas such as social housing, and community sector sustainability were once again overlooked.

No provision was made to fund the establishment of an Alcohol and other Drugs peak body for the NT, despite repeated calls from the sector for the formation of such a body. It is worrying that the NT – with our well documented alcohol problem - remains the only jurisdiction in the country without such a peak.

A number of new income management sites across the country were also announced. However, they will all operate only on a ‘child protection’ trigger and will affect only a relatively small number of people. The NT continues to be the only location where a substantial proportion of the population is caught in the IM net because of the heavy-handed arrangements which operate here.

Good news on the ‘Equal Pay’ case

The Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS) has welcomed the Fair Work Australia (FWA) decision that community sector workers do not receive equal remuneration for work in comparison with state and local government employees. FWA have called for further evidence on the extent to which wages in the sector are lower than they would otherwise be because of gender considerations. This evidence will determine the extent of any pay rise which will flow from the decision. Unfortunately the NT government did not see fit to make any provision for community sector wage supplementation in the recent budget, so the battle over funding for any pay increase remains to be fought.

Media

NTCOSS attracted considerable post-budget media coverage as we sought to provide a community sector perspective on its contents. An *NT News* report focused on director Wendy Morton’s view that it was critical for the government to engage closely with the community sector to ensure that the additional funding for child protection was used to best effect. Wendy also did a range of interviews on both ABC and commercial radio in Darwin and Alice Springs noting that many Australians on income support are struggling to make ends meet, and questioning the increasingly punitive direction of government policy in this area.

On the media front, NTCOSS Communications Officer Graham Ring will be running Media Training (Introductory) to NTCOSS members free of charge in July and August. Phone Graham at the office on 8948 2665 for more information.

Finally, best wishes to Jenny McFarland, who is leaving NTCOSS in Alice Springs to pursue other endeavours.

Regards from the NTCOSS crew.