



# Northern Territory Council of Social Service Inc.

Newsletter-July 2010

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## Budget Blues

On Tuesday May 4, Treasurer Delia Lawrie handed down the 2010-11 NT budget, which charted the direction of the Territory into the new financial year. While the government has earmarked much-needed funding for child protection and for housing, NTCOSS feels that opportunities have been missed to provide assistance to those in our community who are really struggling.

In recent years it has become an article of faith for treasurers around the country to either deliver a surplus budget, or promise that they will be very soon in a position to deliver a surplus budget. While it makes obvious good sense for the government to be prudent in spending taxpayer's money, the conversation needs to be about more than the size of the deficit.

The Northern Territory is in the midst of a housing crisis, with rents in Darwin among the highest in the country. Those who suffer most in the overheated market are vulnerable Territorians on limited incomes who are seeking affordable accommodation. Nowhere is the housing situation more desperate than for Aboriginal people living in the bush. The SIHIP program has been beset with troubles since its inception, and has failed to make a real impact on the acute housing shortages which so diminish quality of life on remote communities.

In Darwin we have become used to the term 'long-grasser'. We are no longer appalled by the fact that in our prosperous northern capital, hundreds of people sleep rough every night, and are denied access to basic services. It would be comforting to believe that our political leaders were working on a long term plan to address this sad situation.

Chief Minister Paul Henderson was brave 18 months ago to identify alcohol as the greatest social problem facing the Northern Territory. It is mystifying then, that the government he leads continues to cast alcohol misuse as a 'law and order' issue and deals with it by passing legislation with ever greater sanctions against those who offend the criminal law when inebriated. Where is the extra funding for detoxification and rehabilitation? Why do we wait until Territorians come into contact with the criminal justice system before we offer them assistance to tackle their alcohol problems?

The government has negotiated reasonable pay rises with public sector workers. But it has failed to provide community sector organisations with sufficient funding to allow them to attract and retain the quality staff they need to provide the highest levels of service to Territorians. Our sector has a key role to play in critical areas such as child protection, family support, and accommodation assistance, but we can't do this work effectively without adequate funding.

Governments in Australia these days seem more managerial than visionary, and this is reflected in the kind of budgets that they deliver. Perhaps what we need more than a balanced budget is a vision for a better society.

**Wendy Morton**  
Executive Director

## Political polls and unfortunate souls

COSS directors from around the country met in Darwin recently and identified some key priorities for the upcoming election. Housing is a critical issue, with one million Australians – mostly low income renters - experiencing housing stress. Tax reform, climate change, and better assistance for the long term unemployed are also important policy areas which governments must address.

A recent opinion poll in Fairfax newspapers suggested that the federal opposition now enjoys a 6 per cent two-party preferred lead over the government. This will probably dampen speculation about an early election, since governments do not rush to the polls when they are behind.

The last legal date for the upcoming federal election is 16 April 2011, though most political pundits agree that it is more likely to be called much earlier than that - possibly during September or October of this year. (During this period the government can opt to call a 'double dissolution' election, which would see all senate seats up for re-election, as well as all House of Representative seats.)

Victoria has a state election on 27 November. It is very unlikely that the federal government would wish to campaign for re-election whilst a state election campaign is also underway. Accordingly it would appear that the window for a federal election closes at the end of October, and probably does not reopen again until late February, since political considerations make an election campaign during the January holiday season most unlikely.

Sadly, it appears that some of our politicians won't be able to resist the populist tactic of demonizing asylum seekers who arrive on our shore after dangerous journeys in craft that are often unseaworthy. Opposition leader Tony Abbott has spoken of 'turning back the boats', and the government has toughened its policy in respect to refugees from Afghanistan and Sri Lanka.

In mid 2009, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees ranked Australia as being in 69th place on a per capita basis for hosting refugees. The truth is that the number of asylum seekers reaching our country is very small in global terms. Nevertheless Australia has an impressive record in resettling refugees, and at NTCOSS we hope this compassionate approach will continue.

Many refugees have suffered horrors beyond the understanding of Australians like myself who had the good fortune to be born in a country of peace and prosperity. People who are fleeing for their lives deserve better than to be reduced to the status of political pawns in a chess game not of their making.

**Graham Ring**  
Communications Officer  
NTCOSS



This service is free, independent and confidential

### **AGED & DISABILITY RIGHTS TEAM**

#### **Our Advocates can help**

- Older people receiving Commonwealth Funded Services at home or in a facility, and their representative.
- Anyone with a disability, and their representatives.
- People who want to know about their rights and how to obtain them.

#### **We can provide assistance about**

- Where you live.
- Care and services you are receiving.
- Activities in your community.
- Support, representation and referral.
- People not respecting your culture.
- Problems where you work.
- Access to an interpreter.

We also provide education and community awareness, activities, fact sheets and if we can't help we can refer you to other appropriate services.

**Freecall 1800 812 953 or  
Ph 8982 1111**

## Public Transport on the move in Central Australia

*“Sometimes we struggle with the motor car running out of fuel, flat battery or flat tyres. If we had a bus here in the town camp, we could still go to important meetings and to town much better than walking everywhere. It’s a long way for the old people and the people with little ones. School is really important for the kids nowadays. If they miss the school bus, parents can take the little ones to school on the town bus. And we can save more money with the bus so the kids can go to school with plenty of tucker to feed them.” Alice Springs Town Camper*

Last year’s NTCOSS Pre-Budget submission again highlighted the inadequacy of transport systems across the NT. These issues have been on the public radar for years, but many people continue to miss out on transport services in the regional towns and remote communities. In Central Australia, many town camp residents in Alice Springs have long been denied access to public buses because of the distance from Town Camps to the bus stops. In Tennant Creek there is no regional public transport at all. Travelling by public transport between Tennant Creek and other main centres entails catching a bus in the early hours of the morning.

The lack of availability of public and community transport options forces low income people to rely on other more expensive forms of transport such as taxis and minibuses to meet their everyday needs. It can be particularly hard for mothers and their babies to get into town for shopping and accessing services when they do not have access to public transport. There are also significant issues for people with limited mobility getting home from hospital, particularly late at night.

Access to transport was identified as a critical issue across regional towns in the NT, when NTCOSS conducted consultations in 2009. Affordable and accessible bus services were seen as essential for disadvantaged Territorians to access services, seek and maintain employment, and do their weekly shopping.

In Tennant Creek, there was a call for the provision of a local public bus service, or funding for the non-Government sector to run a transport service in the town. Agencies in Alice Springs identified that more bus routes and a greater frequency of services are needed for the public bus system to be fully effective.

NTCOSS was very pleased to see the announcement in the May 2010 NT Budget of a significant allocation towards public transport – with

an additional \$650,000 for bus services in Alice Springs (\$200,000 for the Jay Creek School Bus run, \$127,000 for transport for special needs students and \$323,000 for public bus service). In addition, \$800,000 was allocated in the budget to construct bus turnaround areas at town camps in Alice Springs. These announcements will go some way towards making public transport more affordable and accessible for more people in Alice Springs.

However much more needs to be done. Transport for remote community residents between communities and to major centres remains a prime concern, as well as transport within towns like Tennant Creek. The population of remote Indigenous townships is increasing at a much greater rate than the larger regional centres, making it imperative that planning for transport infrastructure be afforded the highest priority.

Towards the end of last year, the NT Government conducted a consultation process in relation to the development of a regional transport strategy. It is critical that we see some concrete solutions to further improve regional and remote transport system through this strategy.

In the context of the national and NT Social Inclusion agenda, if we are serious about ensuring access in relation to mainstream services like health, education, shopping and other critical services, this must include an efficient and affordable and accessible public transport system, and more affordable regional transport options.

**Jonathan Pilbrow**  
Central Australia Policy Officer  
NTCOSS

# NT Mental Health Coalition update



## Mental Health Coalition goes it alone

The deed is finally done. The Northern Territory Mental Health Coalition is now officially an incorporated body, independent of NTCOSS.

I would like to say a very big thank you to NTCOSS for the invaluable support that Wendy Morton and her team have provided throughout the first few years of our existence. We could not have survived without this assistance.

I must also acknowledge the Department of Health and Families for their ongoing support and for their agreement to continue to fund us as an independent entity. They have been particularly helpful in supporting our promotional activities.

I would also like to thank our members who got us 'over the line' in so many of our endeavours. Things will change from this point - but they will change for the better, so please bear with us.

One of our immediate tasks for the year is to organise our planning day, which had to be postponed due to personal circumstances. I will let you all know in the very near future of the new date for our AGM and planning day, which together will set the stage for our independence and future endeavours.

### Board Members

I would like to introduce you to the members of our interim board, and to thank them for offering their time and expertise to get us up and running. Our board comprises

President – Lorraine Gibbs  
Vice President – Claudia Manu-Preston  
Secretary – Dawn Brown  
Treasurer – Wendy Morton  
Anthony Smith  
Lorraine Davies  
Mike Byrne

One of the first things we will need to examine in planning for the future is our corporate identity. I think we need to get away from the current logo and look, so if you have any ideas for a new logo or corporate look to please feel free to send them to us at [phil@ntcoss.org.au](mailto:phil@ntcoss.org.au)

**Phil Dempster**  
Program Coordinator  
NT Mental Health Coalition

## *Central Australia continued*

### More views form Alice Springs Town Campers

"We have waited a long time for bus service. It would be good for us to help a lot of people there do everything like taking them to do shopping and go to important meetings."

"Some people miss court because there is no lift and then they get warrant because it was hard to get there, because no bus people sometimes get in cars with people who got no licence and they get caught by police and they get worries and they get fine. It's a bit dangerous when no licence and lots of people in car and others no licence and kids don't have seatbelt to do important stuff around town."

"The first time I got a bus was in Adelaide. I paid \$1 and that bus went everywhere. Instead of wasting money on the mini bus, we can catch the bus to town and use the money we save to buy tucker for our families. Sometimes visitors come to town and they struggle for money and for food too."

"Also if the bus comes to town camps, we don't need to humbug workers for lifts, we can catch the bus at the right time to do things for ourselves, and let the workers finish their work. You could put up a notice telling people the bus times, so we know when we can catch the bus to the hospital, or Congress and town for meetings and shopping."

"Maybe the bus could go to the Gap and all around the town camps to help people with no motor car and some people really need to go to the bank and to meetings and shopping for tucker. Then the bus could go around and take those people back home again... and it's really hard for sick and old people to wait."

"The mini bus and taxi takes too much money out of our pockets. Money we could be spending on tucker for our families. It would be so good if we could catch a bus, it would be so good. We would really like that."

## Organising to meet the needs

### Formation of a training group working party

In March 2010, a training group working party was formed to develop options for providing training to up skill workers in AOD agencies, with some competencies in mental health. The purpose of the group was:

- . To look at AOD, Mental Health and co-morbidity training needs of individual AOD agencies.
- . Compare, synthesize, and develop core training needs that are suitable for each agency.
- . To develop a benchmark of core competencies for AOD workers
- . Investigate options of forming alliances between NGO organizations, Uni's Tafe, government, and peak bodies to develop courses, trainers, and pathways, which leads to a cost effective sustainable training model that is built into the policy and procedures of each agency.

### National CSSSP meeting held in Hobart April 2010

NTCOSS was represented at this meeting which had a particular focus on the sustainability of the Improved Services past the project life, and also how the project may be evaluated on a national level.

The evaluation of the project will have two parts. The first part will focus on the activities and project sustainability of individual grant recipients and include the development of a standard evaluation tool to be used by all grant recipients nationally. The second part will evaluate the impact of the project nationally, with a focus on the role, activities and support provided by the AOD Peaks.

It is anticipated that the evaluation process will inform issues of sustainability.

### AOD and Mental Health Network meeting

Top End Mental Health Services, Banyan House and NTCOSS facilitated a cross sector workshop for the purpose of exploring the establishment of an "integrated service approach" in the management of many shared clients. The intention was to bring together the Alcohol and Other Drugs sector with Mental Health, both government and non

government staff, to discuss and progress this initiative. The workshop provided an excellent opportunity for AOD and Mental Health agencies to build relationships which can only be a benefit to all our clients.

The NT AOD and Mental Health Network Group was formed at this workshop, and has agreed to continue with further workshops in the future.

### Cross Sectoral Support and Strategic Partnerships Project Network meeting.

This group had its second meeting with representatives attending from Darwin and Alice Springs. The group focussed on developing action item priorities for the next six months.

**Barry White**  
Project Coordinator  
Co-morbidity Project



### NT Mental Health, TAODS and NTCOSS

Mental Health and AOD Inter-Sectoral  
Network Day at Alice Springs  
Wednesday 21<sup>st</sup> July 2010  
9.00 am to 4.00 pm.  
Casa Central Australia Inc.  
6/5 Hartley Street Alice Springs

To register your interest phone Barry White on  
08 8948 2665 or email [admin@ntcoss.org.au](mailto:admin@ntcoss.org.au)

*Mental Health and AOD agencies working together, to  
improve capacity for the management of co-occurring  
alcohol and other drug and mental health conditions.*

## Customised Training for Opportunities for the Community Sector

It's been a very busy three months rolling out Stage 3 of the Community Sector Workforce Planning and Development Strategy. We have focused on bringing four distinct customised workforce training opportunities to the NT Community Sector.

NTCOSS joined forces with the NT Working Women's Centre to develop and deliver 'Anti Bullying in the Workplace' workshops in Darwin, Alice Springs, Katherine, Nhulunbuy and Tennant Creek. These workshops were full of amazing and dedicated community sector employees who will go back to their organisations and work to establish bully free environments. Debbie Wilson delivered targeted and well received 'Workforce Financials' workshops in Darwin, Alice Springs and Katherine.

Meanwhile, NTCOSS along with National Disability Services engaged NT Chamber of Commerce to produce workshops in Darwin and Alice Springs to explain the implications of the 'Award Modernization' for community organisations.

The NTCOSS balcony at our new office in Malak was put to good use to host two 'Managers Workforce Skill Swap' breakfasts. A similar event was also held at Somerville Community Services. These gatherings provided a great opportunity for managers of community organisations, large and small, to share eggs and bacon and information around workforce strategies. It has been a wonderful experience for NTCOSS to work in close partnership with these different organisations and we look forward to developing these relationships into the future.

The range of training provided under the Community Sector Workforce Planning and Development Strategy is due to wind up in about a month. Our final contribution in this phase will be the establishment of an online workforce weblink attached to the soon to be revamped NTCOSS website.

**Janine Sims**  
Project Officer  
Community Sector Workforce  
Planning & Development Strategy

### Alice Springs Interagency Meeting

The next Alice Springs Interagency Meeting, on Wednesday 18 August, 2010, to be hosted by Fiona Betteridge from Carers NT. In addition, Nathan Morsillo from CPA NT Branch will attend to speak about the role of the Certified Practising Accountants (CPA) Australia, NT Branch, and ways they can assist the NGO Sector.

### Certified Practising Accountants (CPA) Australia, NT Branch

CPA Australia is one of the world's largest accounting bodies with a membership of more than 129,000 finance, accounting and business professionals across the globe. Core services to members include education, training, technical support and advocacy. Staff and members work together with local and international bodies to represent the views and concerns of the profession to governments, regulators, industries, academia and the general public.

CPA NT Branch Council is a representative body for members in the Northern Territory. The CPA NT Branch Council has the responsibility for being the conduit for information to/from regional members.

In Alice Springs/regional areas (basically anywhere outside Darwin) the group maintains an email distribution list for training and networking events. There are two non-Darwin people on the NT Branch Council - Randle Walker and Nathan Morsillo - based in Alice Springs.

The council also maintains representatives for the Public Sector & NGO's. If there are particular accounting, finance or training issues which you see needing to be addressed in these sectors - or you'd like to join a mailing list for events - please feel free to contact Nathan or Randle.

Contact Details: Nathan Morsillo,  
Finance Manager, Central Land Council,  
Email: [Nathan.Morsillo@clc.org.au](mailto:Nathan.Morsillo@clc.org.au)

## NT Alcohol and drug peak a step closer

It's not hard to make the argument that the Northern Territory is in the grip of the grog. In the NT we drink half as much again as the national average. Our consumption levels are three times higher than global consumption levels. Each year alcohol misuse costs NT taxpayers hundreds of millions of dollars, and does incalculable damage in terms of human misery.

NTCOSS and its members have long supported the creation of an alcohol and other drugs peak body to bring the NT into line with all other Australian jurisdictions. Properly resourced, a representative body could provide a single, co-ordinated response from across the AOD sector. Such a body would offer NT-wide policy advice, analysis, prevention and treatment research as well as sector development, which will assist the NT Government and the sector in developing a sustainable and co-ordinated approach to reducing alcohol-related harm in the NT.

The good news is that NTCOSS recently received seed funding of \$50,000 from the NT Government to employ a project co-ordinator to develop a model for a representative body. We are pleased to welcome Christine Barry to this challenging position. Christine's role will be to establish the governance structure and key corporate documents, source sustainable funding options and develop transitional work plans and resources to enable the representative body to operate independently.

Christine has over twenty years experience in the not for profit sector, working for industry and peak associations in South Australia, Victoria and New South Wales. During this time she has had extensive experience developing new organisations and projects at both a Territory and National level. Christine is committed to collaboration, consultation and communication to ensure that the new representative body provides benefits to all members and stakeholders and that input into its development is received from all areas of the Territory.

Initial consultation has already commenced with Christine meeting as many people as possible in Darwin, and travelling to a wide range of locations across the Territory including Katherine, Alice Springs and Tennant Creek. If you wish to discuss any topics about the AOD representative body, or wish to be placed on an email list for updates on the progress please contact Christine during office hours on 89482665 or email: [chris@ntcoss.aorg.au](mailto:chris@ntcoss.aorg.au)

**Christine Barry**  
Project Officer  
AOD Peak

## NT Council of Social Service Inc

*Working for a fair and  
sustainable  
Northern Territory*

## Taking care of business

*On a recent visit to Nhulunbuy, Graham Ring caught up with Jodi Walker, co-ordinator of Crisis Accommodation Gove, one of more than 100 member organisations of NTCOSS scattered across the NT.*

Crisis Accommodation Gove provides women and children of East Arnhem with a safe and supportive refuge from family violence. The service has an enormous catchment area extending to Maningrida in the east, and to Numbulwar and Groote Island to the south.

Jodi Walker has been at Crisis Accommodation Gove for four and a half years and has been co-ordinator for the last three and a half years. She hails from Bunbury in the south of WA, but has taken quite a liking to the Territory. 'I'll never go back to a cold climate – ever!'

The service has been operating for almost 25 years, operating initially as a booked hotel room at the Walkabout Hotel in Nhulunbuy. Today the residential shelter offers emergency short-term accommodation in a secure location where staff can provide families with information and emotional support.

At any one time there can be up to 18 women and children living in the service, with clients often contributing to cooking and cleaning duties.

Funded by the federal and NT governments, the service has staff onsite 24 hours a day, and a full-time children's worker is available to help children to cope with the trauma of living with family violence. Crisis Accommodation Gove also has two off-site locations that can accommodate families experiencing homelessness.

The service works with clients who are going through some pretty difficult circumstances. Jodi points out that over-crowding is a real problem in Indigenous communities, and can be a contributor to high levels of tension and then to domestic violence, which can range from emotional abuse to quite serious physical attacks.

It's necessary to cultivate a degree of professional detachment to do the job successfully, Jodi explains. "You can't save the world, but you may be able to

make a small difference in people's lives by making sure that supports are in place for them in the community." Jodi describes herself as pragmatic. "I have four kids at home aged from six to fifteen, so sometimes it's quite nice to go to work" she jokes. She says the real plaudits should go to people who work in community services as volunteers.

Jodi's main source of relaxation is reading. "I read anything I can get my hands on. I probably read about five books a week. And I watch Dr Who with my children on the couch, with the dog and the cat."

If Jodi has a tough job to do, she remains very positive about the service and about the wider community. "It's a good place to work. We are fortunate to live in such a beautiful town and to be part of the community of Nhulunbuy and the surrounding area. It's the opportunity of a lifetime."



**Jodi Walker (right) and Karen Keeley from Crisis Accommodation Gove**

**CRISIS ACCOMMODATION GOVE**

**PO Box 1007, Nhulunbuy, NT, 0880**