



**Submission to the
Indigenous Education Review - Draft Report**

**Prepared by the
Northern Territory Council of Social Service Inc.
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**For further information please contact:
Wendy Morton
Executive Director
Northern Territory Council of Social Service
Ph. (08) 8948 2665
Email: wendy.morton@ntcoss.org.au**

The Northern Territory Council of Social Service Inc. (NTCOSS) welcomes this opportunity to contribute to the NT Government's Indigenous Education Review – Draft Report.

NTCOSS is a peak body of the Not for Profit sector in the NT and an advocate for those who are most vulnerable in the NT. Our membership consists primarily of non government organisations from across the NT including small, medium and large organisations. Member organisations work across areas such as youth, alcohol, housing, justice, mental health, disability, refugees, indigenous, children and families.

Education is a key factor in children and families being able to move out of poverty in our community. There are also strong links between poor school attendance and factors related to disadvantage such as homelessness, sub standard housing, poor nutrition, alcohol abuse and child protection. Any solutions proposed in this review must also consider these other factors if we are to truly address poor attendance and achievement levels amongst Indigenous children in the NT.

Indigenous Education in the Northern Territory has been heavily discussed and resulted in numerous past reports. Kronemann(2007) was very clear in the report, Education is the Key, when referring to the *Little Children are Sacred* report, the challenges (to education) are complex and cannot be dealt with in isolation. Successful education requires good health and the opportunities to build enterprises and employment, family and community support services and the other basic infrastructure of community life that many people in the metropolitan area take for granted.

Kronemann (2007) also states that perhaps more than anything, success will require the rebuilding of hope and trust and engagement through the development of real partnerships between communities, service providers and governments. Therefore, community engagement needs be at the heart of any strategy. This must be done at a local level and lead to place based solutions. Indigenous people, particularly parents and carers, need to be consulted and listened to. Commitment to moving forward must come from all stakeholders if there is to be genuine change.

Other points to consider are:

- There must be adequate and sustainable investment in all levels of Indigenous education.
- Increasing attendance levels is indeed a pathway to education but it is not in itself a measure of successful educational outcomes.
- The recommendation to only offer secondary education in the larger towns raises significant concerns about government meeting its responsibilities, equity and human rights.
- There are a range of programs that are already working well but are not recognised in the review. The Clontarf model should not be the only one considered as a way forward.
- ESL teaching is not being delivered to the extent it is required. It may be argued that it has changed into cultural awareness training in some instances.

- There seems to be no consistent approach to early literacy in primary schools.
- It appears no genuine consultation has occurred with Indigenous people/parents in remote communities – parents need to be involved.
- Capacity building for non- Indigenous and Indigenous staff members needs to be embedded in a cultural framework. The numbers of Indigenous teaching staff has been reduced due to government decision making processes in relation to expectations/ qualifications
- The NT's young indigenous population experience more issues with their sexual and reproductive health due to poor education, information and services. These impacts on poor attendance at school, teenage pregnancies and often resulting in ceasing education.
- Teenage pregnancy can be a problem for young women and their babies. There are higher risks to babies born to young mums and social and financial burdens are often carried by the families and the state and education does not continue. The teenage pregnancy rate for girls aged 15 to 19 years has been consistently falling for decades in Australia however; the Northern Territory has a rate of 48 per 1000 compared to 9 per 1000 which is the average for the whole of Australia.
- Mental health programs/awareness need to be accessible and appropriate for young people
- The quality of secondary schooling is poor and needs to be addressed as young people are leaving school with few options for work or further study
- Assessments re hearing loss, behavioural issues FASD need to be done early to be able to provide respective support early – programs need to be resourced to do this
- Schools and communities should not co- exist in silos-improved and strengthened engagement between schools and communities is to be aimed for
- Consult and develop partnerships with communities about the sharing of responsibilities so the best education structures and supporting services are in place.
- More resources directed toward programs which assist in getting children to school
- Third parties to be resourced to provide support to families for accessing boarding schools
- Early childhood – pre schooling be offered to all communities as per previous recommendations
- Adequate resourcing is provided to accommodate primary and secondary as this has been a problem
- Abstudy and scholarships be more user friendly and that third parties supported to assist families to access these systems and options

Kronemann. M. (2007) Education is the Key. An education future for Indigenous communities in the Northern Territory. .Australian Education Union. Southbank Vic.