



ARDS

Aboriginal Resource and Development Services Inc.

Submission to the Inquiry into the Child Protection System in the Northern Territory 2010

About ARDS

ARDS is an Indigenous, non-government, charitable organization that has 30 years experience in delivering a community development/capacity building service in north-east Arnhem Land.

The members of ARDS are the Indigenous or Yolŋu people of north-east Arnhem Land, an area of land covering some 37,000 square kilometres. Approximately 8,000 Yolŋu live in this region with a further 1,000 living in major urban centres. This language group is known as Yolŋu Matha.

ARDS has a long history of working successfully with Yolŋu people to:

- regain mastery over their lives and living environment
- retain cultural uniqueness
- overcome social, academic and economic exclusion and disadvantage
- restore life expectancy to equal that of the wider Australian community
- rebuild hope, pride and purpose

With proven positive outcomes relating to capacity building in Yolŋu health and education issues, ARDS is widely recognised by its stakeholders for its expertise in language, communication, service delivery and resource development.

Purpose and Scope of this submission

This submission will specifically address the Inquiry's term of reference relating to:

Supporting systems and operational procedures for all workers engaged in child protection, in particular staff retention and training.

The purpose in doing so will be to highlight issues specifically related to working with Indigenous clients and families whose first language is not English.

Communication

One of the most serious blockages to effective service provision, education and development in Indigenous communities is the communication and cross- cultural skills of English speaking personnel. This applies to institutions in all areas including health, law and governance. (Sharing the true stories http://www.cdu.edu.au/centres/stts/miscomm_about.html).

A recent experience of ARDS educators illustrates this point.

It is the experience of ARDS educators that this type of scenario is not uncommon. Yolŋu have often expressed confusion resulting in fear, about the powers of child protection workers and other law enforcement agencies. This is not surprising given the amount of information available to them in the language that they think and operate in.

Recommendations

Both institutional and individual capacity to meet the communication needs of Indigenous clients interacting with child protection systems must be examined.

Recommendations:

- 1) Cultural competence as a concept and practice be integrated into induction and ongoing training policies and procedures for child protection staff working with Indigenous clients whose first language is not English.

See Sharing the true stories for more information on cultural competence
(http://www.cdu.edu.au/centres/stts/guidlines_strategies_competence.html)

- 2) Use of interpreters be made mandatory. Funding be directed to training of appropriately qualified interpreters for this purpose.
- 3) Indigenous communities where English is a second language be given access to accurate, in depth educational resources in their own language about child protection services and how they operate. Such education would be most effective if targeted at clan leaders using a whole of community approach, as well as making available this information to specific clients of child protection agencies. An educative approach such as this would go a long way toward beginning to address anxieties and misunderstanding about the legalities embedded in child protection system and would likely result in increased compliance of clients and their families.

We would like to request that no part of the incident (italicized in the text of the submission) involving ARDS educators and child protection workers be published.

For further information regarding this submission, please contact:

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Additional information about ARDS is available at
www.ards.com.au