

Dear Members of the Board of Inquiry

***RE: Personal submission to the Board of Inquiry into the Northern Territory Child Protection System.***

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the Inquiry. I want to make a few comments only related to the notions of Community Safety and Wellbeing, Integrated Service Delivery and the importance of a Community Development in working with communities.

In my opinion **community safety** is the single biggest issue in the NT.

What I am proposing is a framework for **integrated service delivery** based on the concept of community safety and wellbeing plans (or a similar construct) and based on the assertion as stated in the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children that child protection/wellbeing is everyone's business. NT and all other jurisdictions are signatories to the National Framework.

In my opinion all of the child protection/ family support/parenting services etc in the world will not make a difference if individuals, families and communities are subject to alcohol and drug driven violence and abuse.

Safety is a prerequisite for all else. It provides the platform for service delivery (integrated service delivery). Services will vary according to needs and availability and according to the wishes of the community.

Communities, as part of a **community development strategy** should have a significant role in determining which services are required based on local knowledge and experience.

In addition communities should have a formal role in monitoring service provision by government (and contracted non government service providers) as part of a community safety and wellbeing plan. Community Safety and Wellbeing plans must have a budget attached so that communities can address local priorities.

The Government should aim to guarantee community safety and a level of services available to communities. Individual agencies should be responsible for their own service provision and also for cooperation and collaboration with other services and with the communities.

Government agencies should be directed/obliged to cooperate in the child protection/wellbeing area and their performance in so doing should be part of performance agreements for individuals and the agency (and as noted above the agencies should have to report to the community/parliament).

In summary the plan/strategy that I propose is about safety and services, goals and roles.

In order for an approach like this to succeed it would have to be endorsed at the most senior level and monitored by very senior public servants (and by the community with reports made public).

An appropriate senior bureaucrat/official/community leader in a designated geographic/community area should be responsible for development and implementation of the Community Safety and Wellbeing Integrated Services Delivery Plan. The Plan whilst based on certain principles should be quite specific in terms of goals and roles which can vary according to the community.

The central questions to be addressed by signatories to/owners of the community/safety/wellbeing plan are what do we have to do to make our/the community safe, to protect (our) children from abuse and neglect and to promote the wellbeing of children, families and communities.

In some locations there may already be Community Safety Plans/arrangements/structures which could be adapted/incorporated and there may be existing groups which would be well placed to become involved in the Community Safety and Wellbeing Integrated Service Delivery Plan. Wherever possible existing structures and arrangements should be enhanced. The Plan could be based around local government arrangements and/or recognised groups with local authority eg a Council of Elders.

At the local level a community development approach is essential. If an approach superior to community development exists I have yet to discover it. Community development practice is part of social work theory and a very powerful tool/ change agent.

Community development is a process which aims to transfer power to the local community (however defined). It takes time and effort and particular skills. It is much more than visiting a community, having a meeting writing up a plan and having it signed off.

Considerable work must occur in order to gain the support of the local community. If plans are developed without the support of the local community they will not be successful. There must be an appropriate engagement process.

This approach could/would involve a range of agencies in developing community safety and wellbeing plans in conjunction with the community and could/would involve the allocation of specific and general roles and responsibilities to agencies related to child protection/wellbeing.

The approach is applicable throughout the Northern Territory. It is not limited to a particular type or size of community.

These roles of agencies could/would be above and beyond and different to current roles and responsibilities and they would be proscribed and therefore not an option.

The approach may require legislative and policy changes affecting a range of agencies including all parts of Health and Families, Housing, Police, Education and Local Government and other agencies.

The Community Safety and Wellbeing Plan could/would include roles and goals, key performance indicators or measures and reporting arrangements. If the community is a participant in the development of the plan and has a role in implementation and monitoring of the plan the chances of success are increased.

Roles could include Police in Community Education, Education in home visiting to check on kids, Health in home visiting and community representatives in monitoring the plan.

Goals could include community safety, improved school attendance, keeping of appointments at clinics, reduction of offences, better health outcomes. Different communities may well have different priorities and requirements in terms of service delivery and goals.

The (community development) theory is that individuals/families/communities are committed to decisions that they have had a role in developing.

Putting together a community safety and wellbeing plan allowing for integrated service delivery is not a simple exercise. To begin with it involves identifying appropriate stakeholders including agencies at the appropriate level (noting that there will be differences at different locations/communities)

Resources would be required to assist communities to develop safety and wellbeing integrated service delivery plans. Some of these resources may already exist within government. Within government resources would also need to be allocated to this task. This really is a specialised area.

Agencies should be assigned tasks as part of an integrated strategy. Eg if a child is not at school the school/police will visit eg if a child misses a clinic appointment the clinic/police will visit eg if NTFC requires that a child be sighted and an assessment made an authorised officer ?police ?health person ?RAFC worker will visit.

A range of professional and other occupations should be authorised to perform certain functions under the Care and Protection of Children Act eg police principals doctors community health nurses teachers and housing officials

The more that the child protection/wellbeing agenda is linked with other government agreements and objectives the better. Doing that increases the potential buy in of other players by focussing government activity rather than duplicating effort.

The approach I support is consistent with national priorities of the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children.

**1 Closing the Gap** is a National Priority of the first three-year action plan under the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children.

The **Supporting Outcome** is Indigenous children are supported and safe in their families and communities and the **Action** is support indigenous community building activities in such areas as culture and connectedness, strengthening families and communities in targeted areas that put children at risk and speaking up about abuse.

**2 Building Capacity and Expertise** is also a National Priority.

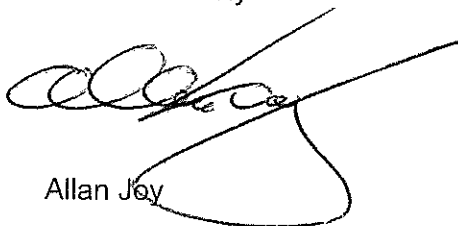
The **Supporting Outcomes** are risk factors for child abuse and neglect are addressed and Indigenous children are supported and safe in their families and communities.

I do not want my submission to be treated as confidential and not for publication.

Whilst I do not wish to remain anonymous I must emphasize that the views expressed in my submission are personal .

May I take this opportunity to wish you well in your important and demanding work.

Yours sincerely



Allan Joy