

**A National Analysis of Strategies Used to  
Respond to Indigenous Itinerants and  
Public Place Dwellers**

**Prepared for the Commonwealth National Homelessness Strategy**

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## List of Contents

Introduction .....	4
Combined Legislative and Police Approaches .....	8
Patrols and Outreach Services .....	14
Diversionary Strategies.....	19
Addressing Anti-Social Behaviour .....	21
Philosophies and Methods of Client Interaction and Social Development .....	25
Alcohol Strategies .....	29
Regional Strategies .....	33
Accommodation Options .....	36
Dedicated Service Centres and Gathering Places .....	45
The Physical Design of Public Spaces .....	51
Education Strategies.....	52
Phone-in Services.....	54
Skills and Training for those Working with Indigenous Public Place Dwellers .....	55
Partnerships.....	58
Holistic Approaches .....	61
Conclusion .....	66
Figure 1 – Healing Framework .....	72
Acronyms.....	73
Bibliography .....	74

## Acknowledgements

- This research was carried out with a National Homelessness Strategy grant from the Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services (FaCS). Our appreciation goes to Fiona Tulloh and Stephen Smythe of FaCS for assistance with this project.
  - The research findings incorporate aspects of some earlier work carried out by Paul Memmott and Shaneen Fantin for Territory Housing (and others) in the Northern Territory (see Memmott & Fantin 2001).
  - Fred Spring (of Relspree Pty Ltd) in Perth and Elizabeth Grant (of University of South Australia) in Adelaide provided some local information and advice regarding their respective States.
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# INTRODUCTION

## Background to the Research

“Ensuring and developing pathways out of homelessness is unfortunately not simple, as history has demonstrated it is actually much easier to create homelessness. Pathways out of homelessness inevitably require a continuum of responses and opportunities for individuals and families to access, in order to move onto that pathway. Some people may not be ready to take that pathway then either fall off it or decide to jump off it. However, many individuals and families will successfully move out of homelessness if access is available in a continuum of responses. These include adequate length of support, opportunity to try again and access to appropriate housing options.” (Durkay et al 2001:14.)

This research monograph provides a national overview of local strategies being used to address the needs and problems of homeless and itinerant Indigenous Australians who are living in public places. It has been prepared by personnel from the Aboriginal Environments Research Centre (AERC), who have maintained a commitment to understanding this problem over the last 15 years.

A preliminary overview of such strategies was prepared during 2000 and 2001 as part of an Indigenous Itinerant Study of the Darwin and Palmerston areas (Memmott & Fantin 2001: Ch4). Material was collected and analysed from Darwin, Katherine, Alice Springs, Cairns, Rockhampton, Townsville, Brisbane, Redfern, Ceduna, Halls Creek (Western Australia), and Port Hedland. A grant was then received from the Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services (FaCS) to expand upon the work of the earlier report using additional materials that have been collected from Perth, Port Hedland and South Hedland, Adelaide, Port Augusta, Whyalla, Coober Pedy, Melbourne, Bairnsdale, Sydney and Mt Isa. Where possible, materials gathered regarding the first locations listed have been updated for this monograph.

Stakeholders who might benefit from this study include local authorities, State and Territory Housing Departments, charitable organisations, Indigenous organisations, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission Councils, and Indigenous homeless people themselves. In fact, all those concerned with the circumstances of Indigenous people living in public places should stand to benefit from the survey compiled herein.

At the outset, it is important to more precisely describe the people who are the subjects of this study. The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) has employed a three-tier categorisation of ‘homelessness’<sup>1</sup> for both its 1996 and 2001 Census:

*“Primary homelessness* – people without conventional accommodation, such as those living on the streets, sleeping in parks, squatting in derelict buildings, or using cars or railway carriages for temporary shelter.

*Secondary homelessness* – people who move frequently from one form of temporary shelter to another. It covers: people using emergency accommodation (such as hostels for the homeless or night shelters); teenagers staying in youth refuges; women and children escaping domestic violence (staying in women’s refuges); people residing temporarily with other families (because they have no accommodation of their own) and those using boarding houses on an occasional or intermittent basis.

*Tertiary Homelessness* – people who live in boarding houses on a medium to long-term basis.

This analysis focuses primarily on people in the first category, that of primary homelessness. Previously, Memmott has referred to these people as ‘itinerants’ (see Memmott & Fantin 2001), but we are coming to prefer ‘public place dwellers’, as the former term carries connotations of people in transit, which our research has shown us is not always the case. Within homeless groups there are often to be found a significant proportion of people who can be categorised as chronically homeless, and who have annexed a territorial niche within public and semi-public spaces that they regard as their permanent home. These individuals often form the nucleus of a wider group of public place dwelling people; a group whose numbers can swell or decrease by day or season, as other individuals attach themselves briefly or indefinitely, joining in a carefree lifestyle of outdoor socialising usually accompanied by heavy alcohol consumption.

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<sup>1</sup> It is believed that this classification was originally proposed by the authors Chamberlain and MacKenzie in 1992

A more detailed analysis of the character and nature of these groups will form the basis of a second research study to be completed (funded by the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute). The current work examines response strategies to the phenomenon of Indigenous people dwelling in public spaces. Its aim is to canvas a wide repertoire of techniques and approaches in order to raise awareness levels amongst service providers and to provoke debate about contrasting philosophies of how public policy makers should utilise, design or position their service bureaucracies in relation to these people.

The strategies and responses collected for this report have been organised under the following headings:

- Combined Legislative and Police Approaches.
- Patrols and Outreach Services.
- Diversionary Strategies.
- Addressing Anti-Social Behaviour.
- Philosophies and Methods of Client Interaction and Social Development.
- Alcohol Strategies.
- Regional Strategies.
- Accommodation Options.
- Dedicated Service Centres and Gathering Places.
- The Physical Design of Public Spaces.
- Education Strategies.
- Phone-in Services.
- Skills and Training for those Working with Indigenous Public Place Dwellers.
- Partnerships.
- Holistic Approaches.

In general, the services or facilities that we have included as case studies in this analysis are targeted specifically at Indigenous people. We have not attempted to survey all mainstream services for homeless people. Nevertheless we have encountered a number of programs that, although having been established for all homeless people, serve predominantly Indigenous clients in their day-to-day operation. Also, we have included profiles of a small number of mainstream services for homeless people that, while only impacting on a small (or perhaps negligible) number of Indigenous homeless people, have been brought to our attention because of their interesting potential for possible application to Indigenous groups. The converse of the previous category are a number of programs that, although run by Indigenous organisations to target Indigenous homeless people, have also been found to be accessible to non-Indigenous people.

The principal criteria for the inclusion of case studies in the pursuant analysis are as follows:

- (i) The case studies are responses that address Indigenous public space dwellers, or in a small number of cases, a mix of Indigenous and non-Indigenous public space dwellers. In general this excludes a sizeable amount of literature on homelessness in general that is not culturally specific.
- (ii) The case studies are based on available published literature and/or unpublished documents that have been collected by the authors.

The body of collected literature is referenced in the bibliography and has been compiled over several years. It is not a large corpus, and reflects the paucity of freely available information on this subject.

## **Multiple Perspectives on what the Indigenous Itinerant Problem might be**

Invariably emphasis on what the particular problems are concerning Aboriginal itinerants, informal campers or public place dwellers has varied. There has been debate about the relative importance of these problems, depending on the perspective taken, either Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal, camper or non-camper, Aboriginal

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agency or government department. In terms of offering a strategy or response, one has to bear in mind these multiple perspectives. What may be a legitimate response by one stakeholder may be entirely unacceptable to another.

In all cases there are at least two broad sets of perspectives, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal. Cross-culturally, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal groups are likely to see one another's position quite differently, when interpreting the meaning of their transactions. Any problem definition, if it is to be complete, must incorporate all perspectives. To understand the dynamics of any discrimination, it is essential to have the capacity to adopt bi-cultural views and empathy. Similarly, if there is to be a solution to the problem, it must be articulated from both sides using methods that are mutually acceptable or at least tolerable to both. Not to take such a cross-cultural position in approaching social problems is likely to fuel already existing racial tension.

In addition there are likely to be differing Aboriginal views, especially between local Traditional Owners and immigrant public place dwellers, and possibly between Indigenous public servants and those in local Aboriginal controlled agencies. There are likely to be further differences between government and the private sector, including charitable organisations.

To exemplify the multiple perspectives surrounding the 'itinerant problem', we can examine some of the findings of the Alice Springs River Campers Study. In 1990 Tangentyere Council implemented a survey of river campers in the Todd and Charles Rivers. 180 campers were encountered and their leaders interviewed. They occupied 19 informal camps whose populations included representatives from various tribal groups throughout Central Australia. The following perspectives were recorded by the study's researcher (Mommott 1990).

(i) The river campers' own definition of their problems: Most were generally quite happy with their lifestyle, although various groups requested specific services from Tangentyere Council to enhance their camp environments. Most campers recorded that they did not have a problem, including with police. Being apprehended when drunk and fighting was accepted as part of their lifestyle. Some stress was created by other Aboriginal people, such as those visitors who imposed on campers to obtain free liquor and food.

(ii) The local Traditional Owner Elders' perceptions of the river campers: Any alternative views on whether the campers should go or stay were quickly resolved when it was found that campers' fires had inadvertently spread to a number of ancient hollow gum trees growing in the bed of the Todd River, causing their ultimate destruction. These were sacred sites and their destruction was sacrilege under Aboriginal Law. The Elders, led by Wenten Rubuntja, then took a fixed view that the campers had to move. Litter around these sacred sites was another issue contributing to the Elders' desire to see the campers relocate. (Also see Hale 1996:31.)

(iii) The problem of the river campers in relation to the formal Town Camps: As mentioned earlier, most river camping groups had established some sort of relationship with a town camp. Some groups were in the river partly because of conflicts in town camps, often conflicts they had been at the centre of. Many groups indicated they would take advantage of town camps for shelter if prolonged rain occurred. Many of the campers maintained their territorial rights over tin sheds or community facilities in particular town camps. It could be argued by some that the river campers were in the river because of the failure of town camps to provide for their needs. This was only partly true. If their needs could be quantified as placing a high priority on ready access to alcohol and a relatively private setting at minimal rent, then the riverbed was superior to the Town Camps. However the campers did have other needs such as social interaction, health, and ultimate care of family, which could be achieved more satisfactorily in Town Camps.

(iv) The river campers and their drinking problems: Although most campers approved of their own drinking style, for many, it was clearly at odds with their health. The idea of having de-centralised Aboriginal-controlled transient camps integrated with de-centralised social clubs was mooted by Tangentyere as potentially the most workable way of institutionalising drinking behaviour in the long-term and breaking the existing behavioural pattern of river drinking. But the chances for this succeeding depended on coordinated implementation, which in turn depended on funding and licence approvals that were not readily available.

(v) The problem of the campers' infringement of the law and their relations with the police: Most campers did not perceive themselves to be breaking the law, except when they were excessively drunk, unruly and violent. However, this perception was not shared by others, including various sections of the police force.

(vi) The problem of vandalism and crime in town: In a period of two or three weeks from about late March 1990, the Northern Territory (NT) press reported on a 'law-and-order crisis' in Alice Springs. These claims seemed

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initially to stem from an outbreak of vandalism centred on the town mall, where shop windows were regularly broken. Statistics on the numbers of Aboriginal people placed in overnight protective custody and prison justified the idea that a 'law-and-order' crisis existed and that the vandalism was largely a problem caused by Aboriginal people. The Alice Springs Mayor attributed the "upsurge in drink-related crime" to "itinerant Aborigines and the number of dry [Aboriginal] communities" in the surrounding region. A consequence of this was that various citizens and politicians, through their press coverage, tended to direct the blame for the 'law-and-order crisis' at the Aboriginal river campers, even though there was no direct evidence to support this claim, and some evidence to the contrary. For example, the NT Liquor Commissioner was quoted as saying "that a lot of problems could be prevented if the Alice Springs Town Council controlled camping in the Todd riverbed," and "called for police to enforce the two kilometre drinking law."

(vii) The problem of the river campers as perceived by various town citizens: In the various press items published in the *Centralian Advocate* and other media through March 1990, it was apparent that a significant proportion of non-Aboriginal citizens were stressed in various ways by the presence of the river campers. The perceived problems were vandalism and crime, and lawlessness and disorder. Complaints were also made about the adverse ecological impact on riverbed flora and the allegedly 'explosive' health problem that the campers presented. The words 'eyesore' and 'squalor' were used in the press and very probably referred to refuse in the form of beer cans and wine casks, as well as to the sight of dishevelled, unkempt and intoxicated individuals staggering, shouting and sometimes threatening one another. However there were only four consistently 'visible' camps in existence at the time of the study. In contrast, the other twelve or so camps in the riverbeds were virtually invisible due to a combination of visual screening, early dispersal of occupants, and the absence of offensive behaviour being displayed by their occupants.

The variant views on the problem definition pertaining to the phenomenon of Indigenous public place dwelling, gives rise to a broad range of diverse responses.

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# COMBINED LEGISLATIVE AND POLICE APPROACHES

## The Law-And-Order Approach

The 'law-and-order' approach generally involves its instigators acting with the support of government legislation (usually State and/or Local Council in origin) that empowers the Police to remove itinerant people from public places for a range of offences. These include: sleeping and drinking alcohol in a public place, drunkenness, noise nuisance, vagrancy, loitering, fighting, and assault. Such efforts usually result in repeated arrests and detention for individuals. One common cycle may be comprised of the following components: apprehension by Police; being locked up overnight; being charged; being fined by the magistrate; failure to pay that fine; being jailed; release from jail; and repetition of the process.

This approach can be termed 'reactive policing'. It often relies on local citizens making complaints and a police patrol being called to the scene of the incident. Alternatively, police may patrol places that they know are frequented by itinerants. The long-term failure of reactive policing, as a method used on its own to make itinerants go away, has been reported for a number of centres. For example, Coleman (2001) reports on the situation in Fortitude Valley in Brisbane, after her lengthy doctoral research there.

"Many of the findings of this research challenge the way in which homelessness is constructed and defined, and consequently the way homelessness is responded to as an issue in the public sphere and the policy arena. The historical tendency to construct homelessness as a dangerous state threatening to the social order, and homeless people as outsiders...is evident in institutional discourses about Fortitude Valley, and in the regulation of its public spaces. Such constructions justify traditional responses to homelessness, which have taken one of the two forms. The first is containment in asylums, and more recently in emergency shelters...The second form of response has been removal from a particular area (a literal enactment of the symbolic exclusion of homeless people). The findings of this research, however, challenge the validity of this construction, and the effectiveness of traditional responses."

"The case of people experiencing long-term homelessness in Fortitude Valley also indicates removal is realistically unachievable, given the strength of attachment displayed by long-term homeless people and public spaces, and relies on using police to resolve contests (beyond strictly law enforcement issues) over the use of public space. Reactive policing focusing on removal responses frequently does little else than move a perceived problem to another area, where the same issues persist. In place of reasoned and articulated policy regarding the use of public space, police must accept the role of de facto negotiators of public space issues." (Coleman 2001:176,177.)

Another example, taken from Melbourne during the mid-1990s, involved Council Commissioners authorising the demolition of public toilets in Cleve Gardens, a park in the suburb of St Kilda. A spokesman for the park group stated that the Commissioners were trying to push people out of the Gardens by removing the toilets and letting the gardens deteriorate "hoping...we will go, but we won't...It has been a central meeting place for years." (Hale 1996:25-27.) The Cairns Police also came to the conclusion that reactive policing did not yield long-term results. Itinerants neither disappeared nor were they displaced in the long-term. Only short-term displacement occurred whereby itinerants gathered in another locale or served a jail sentence, before resuming their lifestyle. (McDonald 1996:4.)

An extreme form of the 'law-and-order' or 'reactive policing' approach involves not only the removal of itinerants from public places and their placement in custody, but also their being discouraged and prevented from returning to an original gathering locale entirely. This method was attempted in Townsville at Hanran Park and is worth recounting in some detail, using two reports accessible to the current authors (Hale 1996, Clendinnen 2000).

Hanran Park, on the edge of Townsville's inner city area, had been used for gathering and alcohol consumption by Indigenous park dwellers since at least the early 1970s. In about August 1995, just before the hosting of the 'Victory in the Pacific (VP50)' celebrations, the Townsville City Council declared that eleven inner city parks would be closed from 10pm to 5am each night. This order was enforced by specially contracted security personnel with dogs, as well as patrols by Council staff. The purpose was to enforce Council by-laws that prohibited overnight camping, alcohol consumption, possession of unrestrained dogs, and washing and bathing in public places. The police also began patrols and made some arrests to enforce liquor laws that made it illegal to consume alcohol in a public place. Then the timing of security patrols was extended to include daylight hours and the Council decided to introduce an interim by-law banning all alcohol in parks.

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The park dwellers moved onto the footpath and into the vacant allotment adjacent to the park to avoid the patrols on their rounds. They then moved back into the park when the patrols left. In response, the Council arranged a \$1 'peppercorn lease' of the vacant allotment so they could assert their authority to remove the park dwellers from there also. In November 1995 the Council closed the only public toilet in the park and continued the removal of belongings and bedding. They conducted between five and seven park inspections per day, which resulted in the park dwellers frequently moving themselves from the park and onto the footpath opposite. The Council also put forward a proposal to erect tower lighting at one end of the park to deter people from sleeping there at night. By December the embattled park dwellers had accumulated supporters of their own. The numbers of people in the park and on the footpath had increased as relatives and friends were drawn into the area in support of the park dwellers. A rubbish bin was taken from the park to 'discourage social drinking' and another bin was 'relocated'. The Council's final move came in 1997 when the toilet block was demolished and the park fenced off.

Fences have also been used to deal with itinerants in Port Hedland and Newman (Hale 1996:21,22) but there are few details at hand about these West Australian case studies.

The Darwin Indigenous itinerants study (Memmott and Fantin 2001:41) found that a 'law-and-order' approach was being undertaken by certain agencies in Darwin, but to a lesser extent than it was in the Townsville example described above. It was most actively utilised in response to 'indigenous public place dwellers' frequently seeking shelter in parks and shop-fronts during the wet season. For occupying these locations, they were often fined and moved on by the Darwin City Council's Public Places Patrol. During the study's interviews with Indigenous itinerants, the question of whether or not they had experienced problems with either the Police, Night Patrol or DCC staff received the most detailed and extensive set of responses. Some respondents reported such incidents as their being moved on from public locations at odd hours, being taken to a watch-house from which they had a long walk back to town at the end of their detention, and being fined. They also reported having some problems with private security guards.

So, while the various methods comprising Darwin's 'law-and-order' approach were found to move people away from particular locations, they were only successful in the short-term and locally. Itinerants would simply be redistributed to other areas of the city or housed temporarily in the watch-house, before returning to the spaces from which they were originally removed. It could be argued that the cycle set in motion by this approach only succeeds in causing stress to the Indigenous public place dwellers. Also, it would be incorrect to assume that maintaining this pressure on people will deter them from their occupation of public spaces, particularly with those for whom itinerancy is a long-term lifestyle choice.

The Darwin study also conducted interviews with the N.T. Police responsible for Darwin. This research revealed that they recognised the difficulty of striking "a balance between lifestyle choices and personal freedom, and the type and extent of policing practices necessary to draw the itinerant group toward reasonable standards and conduct in public places" (Memmott & Fantin 2001:App 2:140). A Public Place Patrol was operating and included three Aboriginal Community Police Officers. It had been restructured in early 2001 to tackle public drunkenness and anti-social behaviour. [Refer section headed 'Patrolling Strategy' below.]

## **Targeted Legislation and Anti-Discrimination Law**

The introduction of legislation to target a specific racial group such as Aboriginal itinerants or public place dwellers is another common type of law-and-order strategy, but one that often violates anti-discrimination law. Despite this, there have been relatively few concerted legal challenges to such legislative strategies. The laws may be introduced without any mention of the targeted group and accompanied by a public defence that the laws are for all people irrespective of racial background. In some cases this may be true, but in others discriminatory intent is clear. An exception may well be found in the context of Darwin. Here, in the past, there has been a large Indigenous itinerant population, as well as a winter influx of non-Aboriginal travellers in campervans and other vehicles who dwell at beachside parks in contravention of local Council by-laws. In 2001 both groups could be instructed to move on if deemed (by an authorised person) to be camping or sleeping in a public place. This Darwin City Council by-law (No.103) also made it an offence for any group or person to obstruct general access to public facilities such as toilets and barbecues.

One legal challenge occurred during the Hanran Park conflict in Townsville during late 1995. The Townsville City Council decided to introduce an interim by-law banning alcohol in parks (Local Law 51). It was stated by Senator Reynolds that this could breach anti-discrimination laws if it was enforced only against park dwellers and not against other members of the public. The 'parkies' surprised many in Townsville, by appealing to the Human Rights Commission and claiming that Local Law 51 discriminated against Indigenous, alcoholic and disabled

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people. (Clendinnen 2000:11.) [Unfortunately the result of this appeal is not documented in the available literature.]

In November 1990, the NSW Parliament introduced the *Local Government (Street Drinking) Amendment Act 1990*. This legislation enabled local councils to zone certain roads and footpaths as alcohol-free zones wherein the consumption of alcohol was prohibited. The legislation was introduced because of problems encountered in a variety of areas where people were consuming alcohol on footpaths or in the street. During 1991 and 1992 the South Sydney Council was petitioned by (non-Aboriginal) members of the Redfern community for the introduction of an Alcohol-Free Zone in the Cope Street (Redfern) precinct. This was done in response to a group of Aboriginal drinkers who frequented a vacant lot (the old Black Theatre site) and, when intoxicated, sometimes harassed and annoyed passers-by. Under this legislation, police had to initially warn offenders drinking in the alcohol-free zone and, if the drinking persisted, they could confiscate the alcohol and fine the transgressor \$20. No one could be jailed for drinking in alcohol-free zones. The following excerpt from the 'second reading' speech in the Legislative Council made by the Minister for Local Government indicates one of the Act's key aims (20/11/90:4):

"This Bill embodies the most practical and the most reasonable approach to the control of street drinking. It provides for precise targeting of unacceptable situations for the length of time that is necessary to resolve those situations. It will restore the roads and footpaths to their rightful purpose and will attend to the amenity of those properties that adjoin a troubled area. That is, looking to the interests of commercial properties, and particularly to provide for the peace and enjoyment of residences and the amenity of the individual." (quoted in Memmott 1994:44.)

The NSW Anti-Discrimination Board (ADB) became concerned that the legislation not be used to target a minority ethnic group. In a 1991 pamphlet it issued, the ADB said, "certain proposed zones may have particular impact on an identifiable Aboriginal or ethnic group. In these cases, council must consult with those groups before making a decision ... (quoted in Memmott 1994:44)." ADB staff predicted that the prohibition of drinking in certain areas would only result in Aboriginal groups moving to alternate areas, but that the available places were restricted because:

- (i) "very often Aboriginal people do not have access to private property near liquor outlets because they live out of town";
- (ii) "some Aboriginal people do not meet the standard of dress required to enter public bars, because of poverty and cultural norms about dress";
- (iii) "many Aboriginal people are "barred" from hotels and refused admission to clubs." (Mark & Hennessy 1991: 16, 17.)

Such circumstances could result in a type of discrimination known in legal terms as 'indirect discrimination'. Indirect discrimination could occur where the declaration of a zone had a greater impact on Aboriginal people than on other racial groups. In these cases, councils had to be convinced that the declaration was reasonable despite this disproportionate impact. The South Sydney Council eventually rejected the proposal by local residents for an Alcohol-Free Zone because it "was not an appropriate way of dealing with the social and community issues; was discriminatory and targeted towards one group; and [because] the 'law-and-order' problems of the area should be addressed in other existing legislation." (Mayor of South Sydney, Vic Smith quoted in Memmott 1994:56.)

The N.T. Police were found to readily operate within the confines of by-laws, such as those enacted by the Darwin City Council. This would normally occur in conjunction with a primary statutory authority representative, like a Council Inspector.

'Indirect discrimination' may be an issue that the Darwin City Council (DCC) consider before proceeding with any changes to its 'drinking in public places and sleeping out' by-laws. For example, the 2km rule about alcohol consumption in exempt public places has been under review. That by-law made it an offence to drink in public within 2km of a liquor outlet. The aim of the by-law revision would be to restrict drinking hours in the places where drinking is currently allowed, or in what are called 'exempt areas'. As at late 2001, this decision was to go to a number of DCC meetings, firstly to propose the changes and recommendations, secondly for review by the 12 aldermen and the Lord Mayor, and thirdly into a process of public consultation on the proposed changes. If compared to the Redfern situation described above, the concerns voiced by the NSW Discrimination Board about the petition put by residents to the South Sydney Council regarding 'alcohol-free zones' in their area might be said to have implications for the DCC. It could be argued that the DCC's by-law, and any expansion of it, discriminates

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unfairly against Aboriginal itinerants who do not have ready access to private property and whose appearance disqualifies them from attending authorised liquor outlets.

## **Removal of Public Space Dwellers**

Another 'reactive' response to Aboriginal people camping in public places is to fund their return to their own communities, even if they do not express a desire to return.

"This idea has been proposed in Townsville (12-point plan, 1996), in Cairns (Strategies for Displaced and Other Homeless ATSI People in Cairns, 1995) and in Alice Springs (Centralian Advocate, 19/1/96). Considered [with regard to] the historical shifting of Aboriginal people for the convenience of others, it is interesting that this theme has re-emerged in a different guise and is an option that would not be considered for other Australians who do not conform to society's norms and expectations" (Hale 1996:5).

Removal of people against their will would be a violation of their civil rights and would generate an enormous public reaction.

"Policy relating to public space needs to find new ways of facilitating the sharing of public space, rather than relying primarily on the removal of particular groups as a strategy...The removal of homeless people from public space where they are visible has a long history...At times, these approaches appeared successful in removing the potential threat posed by the homeless, but removal has never resulted in the demise of homelessness or of homeless people." (Coleman 2001:176.)

## **Katherine Case Study: 'Law-and-Order' Approach versus Community Planning Approach**

A reactive policing strategy was trialed in Katherine during the 1990s. A case study and critique prepared by Thompson (2001) highlights two opposite approaches to the 'itinerant problem'. The Northern Territory government established the Katherine Aboriginal Living Areas Working Party to investigate camp living conditions and to develop responses to the issues uncovered. These camps represented an extension of long established Aboriginal camping patterns in and around Katherine (see Loveday & Lea 1985, Wigley 1985). The facilities were viewed as an interim measure until sufficient accommodation could be produced for the growing and diverse Aboriginal population, and strategic responses to behavioural issues could be developed (Thompson 2001:1-3).

The Northern Territory government later determined that the establishment of the living areas at Wallaby and Red Gum Camps had encouraged Aboriginal migration to Katherine from surrounding communities and, as a result, had led to an increase in illegal camping around Katherine. The Katherine Town Council saw the camps as drinking venues. They perceived certain behaviour amongst the campers to be offensive, including public drunkenness. The Council believed the living areas would entrench these behavioural problems. In 1998 the campers were evicted from Wallaby and Red Gum because of supposedly persistent behaviour problems and because the living areas were deemed to be health risks. The ground was graded and furrowed (preventing occupation) and signs prohibiting camping were posted. A new drinking area was established elsewhere. (Thompson 2001:1-3.)

Those evicted from Wallaby and Red Gum Camps continued to live in and around Katherine. Negligible use was made of the new drinking area. The government response had not altered the types of public behaviour that were perceived to be problematic (Thompson 2001:1-3). Thompson identified two types of government responses in the case study. The first "sought to help Aboriginal people deal with perceived living condition problems through consultative interventions". The second "sought to control Aboriginal people and eliminate the perceived problems that they create." Thompson argued that the core difference between government and Aboriginal responses to the problem centred on the issue of control. The Aboriginal response was to develop Aboriginal-determined strategies that responded creatively to accommodation and social needs. Behavioural problems were seen as separate issues requiring different responses. Initially the government responded to these strategies, but later its approach was to attempt to control 'offensive' Aboriginal behaviour in Katherine. The government came to believe that by controlling living environments they would control behaviour, however this proved unsuccessful. (Thompson 2001:5-6.)

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## **Further Findings on 'Law-and-Order' Crisis**

The findings of Memmott in the Todd River (1990) concerning blame for the 'law-and-order crisis' being misdirected to informal campers (as described earlier) parallel those made in other locales. When people are leading a culturally different lifestyle, enacting some visible anti-social behaviour, they are readily made the scapegoats for crime.

For example, this was found with respect to a group of informal drinkers occupying a vacant block on Cope Street in Redfern, Sydney. The kinds of complaints from local residents and business-people about the drinkers' group, made during the period from 1989 to 1994, included the following: theft, car break-ins, knife slashings and stabbings, muggings, purse snatching, threats, begging, swearing, harassment, footpath obstruction, littering, urination and defecation in public, graffiti, smashing windows, occasional murder, malicious damage, drug consumption, and loss of income, business and access to the area by non-Aboriginal people due to fear. However, Memmott found that whilst some of these complaints were accurate responses to the anti-social behaviour enacted by members of the drinkers' group, much of the street crime had been perpetrated by other Aboriginal people in Redfern. (Memmott 1994.)

Coleman (2001:166) came to the same conclusion in her doctoral study of homeless individuals living around Fortitude Valley in Brisbane:

“Contrary to many of the continuing constructions of homeless people as different, deviant and dangerous, patterns of use by long-term homeless people correspond closely with that of other local groups. There is nothing intrinsically discrepant about the behaviour of long-term homeless people in Fortitude Valley public spaces, yet they are repeatedly accused of behaviours which supposedly justify their removal from public spaces.”

Speaking of the mainstream homeless population in Brisbane, Eastgate (2001) stated that there were predominantly two categories of violence experienced by them: (i) homeless people acting violently towards other homeless people, and (ii) non-homeless people acting violently towards homeless people. Thus, a situation where a homeless person is violent towards a non-homeless person is the least likely scenario.

In 2001 the N.T. Police, in research conducted as a part of the Darwin Indigenous itinerants study (2001), were shown to be making every effort to divert members of the large itinerant community from involvement in serious crime. These situations were seen to be ones where the itinerants themselves were most at risk from harm. The study's police interviewees were eager to see sobering-up shelter and night patrol services in the Darwin region expanded, partly because of the leading role they saw alcohol playing in criminal behaviour. It had a major role in causing friction between itinerants and other members of the public, and resultant complaints became their (the police's) jurisdiction. It was far preferable to have intoxicated individuals diverted into shelters and away from the criminal justice system. While the Police were loath to detain Indigenous public space dwellers in the watch-house, in recognition of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody's (RCIADIC) recommendations, they were sometimes left with no alternative when Darwin shelters were full. (Memmott & Fantin 2001:143-145.) [Refer to the Diversionary Strategy discussion following.]

## **Dry Zone in Adelaide City**

A dry zone was trialed in Adelaide City over the twelve months beginning October 2001, with the city council proposing to extend the trial at the time of writing. Prior to the commencement of the trial, a public survey (of 500 people) was conducted regarding the proposal. Those surveyed expressed three reasons why such a trial should proceed: (i) the abusiveness and violence of drunk people, (ii) the threat of drunk people to public safety, and (iii) “the Aborigines in Victoria Square” (McGregor Tan 2000:3). This last point presumably means that those surveyed did not approve of the occupation of this public space by Aboriginal people. The majority of people surveyed believed that the trial would primarily affect Indigenous people. Those who did not support the trial perceived that the dry zone was targeted at Aboriginal people and as such was discriminatory; while those who supported it cited public safety concerns. (Adelaide Capital City Committee 2002; McGregor Tan 2000:3; The Koori Mail 16/10/02, 30/10/02.)

Prior to implementation of the trial there was concern amongst Aboriginal organisations that the dry zone was an attempt to drive Aboriginal people out of public places (Beechey 2000). Ashbourne (The Age 2000) claimed that

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the implementation of the dry zone was the second attempt by the Adelaide City Council to move Aboriginal people out of Victoria Square. It had been preceded by the demolition of a 90-year-old public toilet that was heavily used by Aboriginal people in this square. There was also concern that services for homeless people in the inner city were insufficient and that appropriate ones should be put in place prior to tackling the issue of alcohol consumption in public places (SACOSS 2001).

Various organisations including the Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission have opposed the extension of the dry zone trial (Kanck 2002; National Indigenous Times 9/10/02:8; The Koori Mail 16/10/02:11). The following criticisms have been made of the trial: As the dry-zone laws are targeted at people who drink in public spaces, and it is mostly Aboriginal people who drink in public spaces it can be argued that the aim of the law is to discourage the use of the city's public spaces by Aboriginal people (Jonas in 'The Koori Mail' 30/10/02). As pointed out previously, this may well constitute a form of indirect discrimination. The South Australian State Government is committed to the implementation of sobering-up centres and programs in conjunction with the trial, but these facilities had not been established at the time of writing this report. The Aboriginal Legal Rights Movement maintained that the police should be diverting people to services such as these rather than enforcing a dry zone law (ABC 8/10/02; Kanck 2002; The Koori Mail 16/10/02:11).

Rather than addressing the needs of some of the Aboriginal people who use Adelaide's public spaces, the dry zone laws displaced people out of the Central Business District (CBD) to other public spaces, in particular the city's parklands that were excluded from the dry zone (Adelaide Capital City Committee 2002; ABC 8/10/02; Kanck 2002; The Koori Mail 16/10/02:11). The movement of people away from the CBD reduced their access to support services, and also made it difficult for support service personnel to maintain contact with their clients. (National Indigenous Times 9/10/02:8; The Koori Mail 16/10/02:11.)

The effectiveness of dry zone laws in improving public safety in Adelaide was also questioned by the Aboriginal Drug and Alcohol Council, which observed that the dry zone operating in Hindley Street in the CBD for twelve years had no impact on violent assaults and public drinking (ADAC 2001:2).

## **Endnote on Law-and-Order Approaches**

The law-and-order approach, using reactive policing and supported by various forms of legislation, may be only partly successful, and even totally unsuccessful, in deterring Indigenous public place dwellers. It is likely to only result in temporary and/or local displacement, whilst overall cycles of incarceration, alcohol treatment and public place dwelling continue. In preparing legislation that is motivated by a need to move Indigenous public place dwellers, authorities may also run the risk of breaching anti-discrimination legislation. Forced physical removal to distant remote settlements is equally repugnant and a violation of civil liberties.

As a general principle any movement of Indigenous people from their occupied public spaces due to conflicting public needs should be carried out through a process of negotiation, no matter how protracted, and be accompanied by a considered set of alternate accommodation and servicing options.

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## **PATROLS AND OUTREACH SERVICES**

A variety of services are provided by individuals, and pairs or small groups of workers, who seek out Indigenous itinerants or public place dwellers in the places that they frequent. Within this broad category come Aboriginal Night Patrols, Wardens and Outreach Workers, although the precise nature of their services varies.

### **The Julalikari Council Night Patrol**

The Julalikari Council Night Patrol started in 1989 in Tennant Creek and was the first Night Patrol to operate in Aboriginal Australia. It has become something of a model and benchmark for Night Patrols throughout the country. The goals of the program were as follows: (i) to assist in the resolution of behavioural problems such as fighting, pay-back, bashing, anger and guilt through the use of culturally appropriate procedures; (ii) to assert a community-based authority, not one that was the product of an external agenda; and (iii) to maintain cooperative communication between the community and the police, and provide the latter with assistance and support when required.

In Tennant Creek, Night Patrol vehicles picked up people who were intoxicated and causing a disturbance, those involved in disputes or incapacitated by alcohol, and others requesting a lift to the 'sobering-up' shelter. At the shelter their specific needs were catered for. A community meeting was called the next day to mediate any disputes and admonish the offenders. All patrol work was voluntary and organised by the Julalikari Council. After the project had been in operation for three years, the police in Tennant Creek reported that levels of alcohol-related crime had decreased significantly. The Night Patrol was found to have had two more indirect consequences. The first had come about as a result of 'trouble meetings' being held. These boosted people's confidence by revealing a previously unrecognised and unexercised community capacity to deal with problems. The serious effects of 'welfarism' were thus put into sharp relief. Secondly, a Community Development and Employment Program (CDEP) was established in the community using skills developed through the administration of the Night Patrol. (Mugford & Nelson 1996:24, d'Abbs et al 1994:119-120.)

From Tennant Creek, the night patrol concept has spread and been adapted throughout the Northern Territory and Western Australian, and into parts of New South Wales and Queensland.<sup>1</sup> Its effectiveness as a self-controlled volunteer community intervention program with a relatively low budget has great utility and potential for many more centres. Properly managed, such programs also have great potential to build cooperation and mutual respect and support with local police. Night patrols are a tried and proven program type.

Whereas the emphasis in Tennant Creek can be seen to be on strengthening community processes and facilitating community dispute resolution, this is not necessarily the case in some other centres where Night Patrols operate. For example, in Darwin in 2000, it was found that neither of these goals were being meaningfully pursued. The Patrol's role in this setting was confined to being largely a reactive one, whereby people were transported to the Sobering-Up Shelter at times of crisis or complaint from the wider community. It is believed that reforms have since been implemented to broaden the goals of this service (Memmott & Fantin 2001:45, App2: 141).

### **The Todd River Campers and the Tangentyere Council Wardens**

This case study not only provides an example of the role of Aboriginal Wardens but also introduces issues of Aboriginal law and custom that may form parts of strategic responses to Indigenous public place dwellers.

In 1990 Tangentyere Council suggested that several of its Elders attempt to move some of the Todd River campers. This proposal stemmed from the fact that the Elders had always attempted to allocate camping places along fairly strict territorial lines based on actual or adapted socio-geographic rules of a traditional nature. It was argued that the most effective method for encouraging these people to move would be to approach them through a more formal body of Elders. This would take the form of a representative assembly of Arrernte traditional owners, whose membership would also include other Elders related to, or belonging to, the same language groups as the campers in question. (Memmott 1990:31-33.)

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<sup>1</sup> Memmott et al (2001:68) cited 38 Night Patrols operating in NT, NSW, Qld and WA in 1998. A more recent national survey of Night Patrols by Harry Blagg (W.A.) has not yet been made available to the authors.

This was only partially successful during 1991-92. A few groups were moved. Persistent efforts were made to explain to the remaining groups how they were contravening Aboriginal Law and why they would eventually have to move. Some campers however had arguments based on Aboriginal Law as to why they should stay. For example, some argued that they were connected by Dreaming lines to sites in the Todd River.

In 1990, Memmott's report proposed the appointment of an officer to provide a Liaison Service for river campers and other informal campers. This person would liaise between the campers, various government departments, and other formal organisations. Such an officer could also provide advice to campers on their legal rights and obligations, the power of the police to assist them, the likely outcomes of arrest, and options for legal response. Ways could be explored to arrange transport back to home communities for stranded campers. Arrangements could be negotiated for home community councils and banks, and/or the Department of Social Security to access an individual's welfare payments to obtain reimbursement for fares.

Starting with this concept, but only after much debate, an Aboriginal Wardens' Program was implemented that did have substantial success in moving the campers. The Tangentyere Council's Warden Program started in 1995 with funding from the 'Northern Territory Living with Alcohol' program, and targeted itinerant river campers. The warden scheme aimed to relocate river campers, but at the same time provided assistance to these campers. Wardens commenced work at 5am to locate campers. Resources used by the agency to deliver the program, included vehicles, radios, and first aid. (Memmott et al 1999A.)

The two Wardens were Aboriginal men with traditional affiliations who were employed by Tangentyere Council using a grant from the wine cask levy imposed by the N.T. Government. The Wardens were responsible for the important task of liaising with the people camping in the river to find out exactly why they were there, and suggesting ways in which assistance could be provided to return them to their country. As well, Tangentyere Council's Night Patrol was able to assist campers to live in one of the town camps under its management, or assist visitors to return to their home country if that was requested. (Hale 1996:31.) The river campers were also discreetly encouraged to 'move on' by town Aboriginal people, particularly Central Arrernte people, the Traditional Owners of Mparntwe (or Alice Springs).

By 2002, the issue of Aboriginal campers occupying public spaces in Alice Springs, including the riverbeds, had also fallen within the operational brief of the 'Alice-in-Ten Quality of Life Project Group'. It was proposed that this group examine alternative accommodation options. Interestingly, the current authors were informed that the Lhere Artepe Aboriginal Corporation, the recently formed Prescribed Body Corporate (PBC) for Central Arrernte people who hold Native Title for Alice Springs, had, through their representative, informed the Alice-in-Ten Group that they opposed proposals seeking any alternate accommodation or camps for these campers, and that these people should return to their home countries. Here we see an example of local Traditional Owners asserting their authority in Aboriginal Law to deny access to a particular category of visitors. (p.c. Jill Totham, Alice in Ten Project Group 25/10/02.)

## **Kununurra Outreach Service**

A type of Night Patrol or outreach service featuring a strong community capacity building approach, targeted at youth and operated in conjunction with the police, has been reported as operating in Kununurra (Innifer 2001:20,21). In May 2001 this service was collecting ten or more children per night and taking them to alcohol-free houses whose residents were registered volunteers. In addition, one of the local businesses had donated some dongas to accommodate such children, whilst another donated breakfasts at the school for them. A second program (for which few details are available) involved some of these young offenders and at-risk youths attending occasional overnight bush camps with a range of activities emphasising cultural values, developing respect and good role models.

## **Ngwala Willumbong, Outreach Program, St Kilda, Victoria**

Ngwala Willumbong is a Koorie (Aboriginal) outreach program operating in St Kilda, Melbourne. In 2001 it was considered to be the only Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) funded outreach program in Melbourne that had been specifically set up for homeless Koories. At this time it had been operating for three years. Clients learnt of the program by referral from other agencies, word of mouth on the street, or through street contact with the workers. There was a high demand for accommodation but the program had very limited resources. There was a budget of \$10,000 per annum for accommodating homeless Aboriginal people, which was equivalent to accommodation for two clients per week. (Hamann 2001:14.)

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The program relied on private hotels to accommodate those in need, however the options were limited as only two hotels permitted stays of longer than one or two nights and others would only permit stays after 'approving' the client. Many St Kilda hotels and motels were not prepared to participate in the outreach program at all. (Hamann 2001:14.)

Hamann (2001:14) argued that there was a strong need for an emergency or crisis accommodation centre in the St Kilda area, one that was specifically for homeless Koories and run by Koories. Such a service needed to be flexible so as to cater for a range of clients including families, men, women, and the young and old. It also needed on-site specialist services to address drug and alcohol problems, and to provide counselling and health advice.

The idea of combining an outreach service with an Aboriginal-managed crisis accommodation and service centre is still to be explored elsewhere in Aboriginal Australia.

[See later for Ngwala's staff training initiatives.]

### **Bedford Street Outreach Services, Melbourne, Victoria**

In the late 1990s Bedford Street Outreach Services assisted those in need in the inner Melbourne suburbs of Collingwood, Fitzroy and Richmond. One third of the service's clients were Koories. (Kenny 1998:17.) A number of reasons why Aboriginal people used the Bedford Street services in preference to other mainstream homelessness services were as follows:

- (i) Aboriginal people could come to the service in a group;
- (ii) people were assisted quickly and without prying;
- (iii) the service was flexible and provided the assistance that people need (for example, people can get access to phones, the service drives people to appointments and assists people with priority housing and court issues);
- (iv) the assessment process was informal and information from clients is only requested as it is required;
- (v) the office had a relaxed atmosphere, it was open planned and clients were offered drinks and a seat at a table; and
- (vi) efforts were made to ensure that people did not have to wait long for service. (Kenny 1998:17.)

Whereas a number of clients of the service were sleeping in public spaces or living in cheap hotels there had been an increase in the number who stayed with relatives in "severely overcrowded public housing". Kenny observed that few of their clients were literally without shelter. Many were living in overcrowded situations that placed stress on families and could, in turn, lead to tenancy problems. These could place a whole family at risk of becoming homeless. (Kenny 1998:17.) In order to access priority housing, people were required to pass the 'private rental test'. This placed an onus on applicants to provide evidence that they had looked for private rentals prior to applying for priority housing. Kenny reported that people without a vehicle, with a disability, or with an addiction faced immense difficulties in meeting these requirements. Consequently, the Bedford Street service spent a large amount of time driving their clients around applying for private rentals so that they could apply for priority housing. Kenny argued that "the private rental test seems to work against those people the priority housing system is wishing to target most, including Koories." (Kenny 1998:17.) The Bedford Street Service was ongoing at the time of writing.

### **Street Outreach Service in Inner Sydney**

At Sydney's Kings Cross during 2002, there was a high profile Indigenous street group in residence. This Fitzroy Gardens group of Koories varied in size, at times their numbers swelled to about 20. It was reported to the current authors that the Fitzroy Gardens group was at times problematic, often displaying anti-social behaviour. There were three or four in the group with alcohol-related brain damage. An older woman, from Darwin, 'slept rough' and acted as the leader and Elder of the group. (p.c. F.R. 26/9/02, 1/10/02.)

Prior to the introduction of the Street Outreach Service in July 2000, only a limited range of face-to-face services existed for homeless people in Central Sydney. Aside from ad hoc mobile transport and/or food services, there was no targeted service provision for people sleeping on city streets or in public spaces. At the time of writing, the Street Outreach Service operated in the City of Sydney (CoS – a local government area), and was provided by the Independent Community Living Association (ICLA), a non-government organization (NGO) under contract to the

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City of Sydney. In 2000/2001, the Australian Hotel Association donated additional funding to augment the service at weekends (CoS, n.d.). The Outreach Service had also operated in Woolloomooloo (which is outside the CoS local government area), at the request of the State Government's Partnership Against Homelessness strategy. This part of the service has been overseen by the NSW Department of Housing, and funded by both the Department of Community Services and South Sydney Council. (p.c. F.R. 26/9/02, 1/10/02.)

The Service involves a Team Leader and eight workers who are all professionals (eg youth workers, nurses, drug and alcohol response personnel, or social workers). It provides daily foot patrols of the local government area by teams of two or three trained staff who work from 9am to 9pm weekdays and 1.30pm to 9pm weekends. The teams directly contact homeless people, assess their needs and negotiate an assistance package with them, using a case management approach. During 2000/2001, services provided by the Street Outreach Service included counselling, information and advice, referrals, advocacy with other agencies, and first aid. Teams also arranged for other agencies to provide long-term services such as accommodation. (CoS, n.d.) There was access to Indigenous mental health workers through the Darlinghurst Community Health Centre (p.c., ICLA, 11/11/02).

In 2000/2001, the Service established case management plans with 213 clients. The Service obtained accommodation outcomes for 68 individuals, or 30 per cent of their clients, which exceeded their service goal of 20 per cent. (CoS, n.d.) It is estimated that about 5 to 10 per cent of the clients were Indigenous. Unfortunately at the time of writing, case-managed Indigenous clients had not achieved outcomes. In the few cases where accommodation had been arranged, systemic failure has resulted (p.c., ICLA, 5/11/02, 11/11/01).

Nevertheless, in working with Indigenous street dwellers in Sydney, the ICLA coordinator stressed the powerful problem-solving advantages of the partnerships approach employed by his group through the simultaneous opening of 'gates' between and into government departments and the Aboriginal community organisation network, comprising a much expanded support system than his group had formerly experienced in this field of work (p.c. to PM 11/11/02).

## **Outreach Services for Women in Brisbane**

Community Access and Support Service (CASS) is an after hours outreach-focussed service working on the north and south side of Brisbane with Indigenous women.

"CASS provides an outreach and support service to people in parks and public spaces which provides immediate response as well as on-going support, focussed mainly on the south side of the river. The majority of CASS service users are Indigenous women, who experience significant problems in accessing accommodation and a range of other services...CASS demonstrates the effectiveness of outreach as a service model in working with Indigenous women in the inner city, and the importance of relationship based work." (Coleman 2000:15.)

In 2002, CASS outreach workers regularly visited parks and public spaces that were frequently used by homeless people in the inner Brisbane area. The workers checked on the safety of homeless people, provided information and referral services and transported people home, to hostels or to Murri Watch (a diversionary centre). This outreach service is attached to a centre based service, Micah Inner City Services. Micah Inner City Services is a cross-cultural drop-in information and referral service situated in South Brisbane. In partnership with the Department of Families, the Queensland Department of Housing and the Brisbane City Council, Micah assisted people who experienced difficulties with mainstream services and people who were excluded from mainstream services due to their behaviour or lifestyle. Such people were assisted in the move from living in public places to more secure accommodation by placement in boarding houses or hotels (p.c Jim Decoouto 4/12/02, Micah 2002; CASS/BCC nd.)

Coleman (2002:28) has outlined a short proposal for a more intense outreach service for homeless women in Brisbane, one that can respond to various social groups who have their respective connections to different parts of the city.

"A possible response to immediate needs, which would be framed in a broader healing framework, would be a mobile crisis response team using an outreach model of work. This type of service would overcome the difficulties presented by area affiliation and allow the response to be taken to the women rather than requiring [that] they access the needed service. To be truly responsive, such a service would need to be proactive, and to operate and be funded on a 24-hour basis. A van and mobile phone attached to workers means that a variety of 'on the spot' responses would be available. It would also mean some

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continuity of support for these women who can be mobile, particularly in times of crisis.” (Coleman 2002:28.)

## **City Homeless Assessment Support Team, Adelaide, South Australia**

The City Homeless Assessment Support Team (CHAST), is a unique multi-agency and multi-disciplinary team that provides a range of assertive outreach services to homeless adults who live, or use spaces, in the Adelaide inner city. The multi-disciplinary team includes staff with expertise in Aboriginal culture and heritage, drugs and alcohol, mental health, and homelessness. (Twardowski 2002.)

In 2002, the functions of CHAST were ‘assertive’ outreach, assessment, referrals, and advocacy. Assertive outreach involved CHAST staff visiting clients in their usual environments, developing a rapport with them, and bringing services to them in flexible and creative ways that met their needs. Working with clients in their usual environments helped the CHAST team to assess their specific needs, to develop responses to those needs and refer them to appropriate services. The CHAST Aboriginal Outreach Team worked in four key locations that were used or visited by vulnerable/homeless Aboriginal adults: (i) non-government homeless organisations; (ii) Adelaide’s squares and parklands; (iii) select acute care facilities (emergency departments of hospitals); and (iv) the streets. (Twardowski 2002.)

The Aboriginal Outreach Program employed a number of Aboriginal outreach workers who monitored the health progress of Aboriginal clients. The team made regular visits to parks, squares, day centres and facilities that their clients were known to visit. Once a week the workers, together with those from Nunkin Warrin Yunti, visited clients to deliver fruit, and to provide health checks and injections such as the hepatitis immunisation and the flu vaccine. A large proportion of the people visited by this team had significant alcohol and drug issues. During the period from January to June 2001, six Aboriginal people died in the Adelaide inner city area from drug and alcohol abuse and mental health problems. (Taylor & Graham 2001, Twardowski 2002.)

The Aboriginal outreach Team also worked with NGO outreach teams such as the Salvation Army Outreach Service. An objective of the team has been to develop the capacity of NGOs and government agencies to respond to the needs of Aboriginal people in the inner city in culturally appropriate ways. This has involved raising awareness of the negative social and cultural impacts experienced by Aboriginal people. (Taylor & Graham 2001: Twardowski 2002.)

CHAST worked with acute-care facilities to establish discharge plans, to raise awareness of homeless issues, to offer outreach services, to provide advice to staff, to develop services, and offer intervention after discharge to reduce re-admission rates. In its street work, CHAST aimed to locate clients with high priority needs who did not, or rarely, accessed support services. (Twardowski 2002.)

## **Endnote on Patrols and Outreach Services**

The functions of Night patrols and warden schemes include intervention in situations of substance abuse (especially in relation to alcohol and violence), mediation and dispute resolution between people in conflict, and the removal of disruptive or potentially violent persons from public or private social environments. These programs are accessed at the time of anti-social behaviour and provide an immediate and short term response to it. Often night patrols and warden schemes rely on the successful establishment of a good working relationship with the local police. The benefits gained from this sort of collaboration are shared by the wider community.

Outreach Workers tend to take a stronger case file approach, attempting over a period of time to assess clients’ needs and establish linkages to relevant wider service agencies in response to those needs eg accommodation, health, employment, transport. This work can be potentially enhanced through the establishment of viable partnerships between the outreach agency and various government departments and NGO service providers (eg charitable organisations).

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## **DIVERSIONARY STRATEGIES**

This approach normally involves taking people who are intoxicated, and possibly aggressive or otherwise at risk from their own actions or those of others, and placing them in managed accommodation until they can become sober, sleep and have a meal. The approach can be regarded as a short-term proactive strategy. It is 'diversionary' because it aims to keep at-risk, intoxicated individuals out of the watch-house in line with the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (RCIADIC). The collection of such people is usually performed by either the Police, an Aboriginal Patrol, or both. The 'managed accommodation' to which they are taken may be the house of a relative, a Sobering-Up Shelter, a refuge or other such facility. The utilisation of the diversionary approach is now widespread in many parts of Australia.

### **Darwin Diversionary Options**

The Darwin 'Long Grassers' study found that in Darwin there was both a Detox Centre and Sobering-Up Shelter and that the 'diversionary approach' was well understood and supported by the NT Police (Memmott & Fantin 2001: App2:141-143). The authors asserted that it should be regarded as a fundamental building block upon which to found the overarching Indigenous itinerant strategy being implemented in that city. The Shelter facility, which was at the time run by the Christian organisation Mission Australia, aimed to minimise harm to individuals found intoxicated in public places. Attendance was voluntary, as staff members did not have legislative authority to detain clients. It operated six days a week and provided 32 beds. Clients could only be admitted after referral from either the Police, the Night Patrol or another approved agency, and were provided with a shower, clean bed, clean clothes and a nutritious snack. They were encouraged to remain after their night's stay and participate in the Day Program, which operated five days per week. This program's emphasis was on supporting people in their efforts to break the pattern of alcohol dependence and providing them with a venue removed from the damaging aspects of their lives. Clients were encouraged to attend with their family and friends. Recreational facilities were also available, such as TV, videos, and music. Pursuits such as reading, painting, singing and crafts were promoted. Unfortunately the space being used for daytime activities was deemed unsuitable and the program needed to be relocated and upgraded to improve its effectiveness. (Memmott & Fantin 2001:143.)

### **The Arthur Peterson Special Care Centre, Mt Isa, Queensland**

An example of a 'diversionary centre' catering largely for Indigenous people is the Arthur Peterson Special Care Centre (APSCC) in Mt Isa which was profiled by Durnan (2001). In March 2001, Bob Durnan was engaged by the Riverbed Action Group to establish the parameters for a community development and planning process aimed at meeting some of the needs of homeless and itinerant Indigenous people camping and around Mt Isa. These people were most visible when socialising and consuming alcohol in the bed of the Leichhardt River by day. At night, they numbered between 20 and 40, depending on a range of factors. (Durnan 2001:3,6.)

Most of the Queensland homeless people interviewed by Durnan in Mt Isa made regular use of the APSCC, which catered for the "needs of people whom the police and others judge to be so intoxicated that they require care in non-custodial facilities." Some river dwellers regularly referred themselves to the APSCC. (Durnan 2001:10,36.)

The goals of the APSCC were as follows:

- to provide a service for people whose alcohol-related behaviours may result in police custody;
- to provide an alternative to police custody for those whose offences are minor;
- to offer a 'safe place' for people transferred by Corrective Services;
- to educate those admitted to the APSCC on options available to assist in addressing their problem with alcohol;
- to offer counselling services; and
- To assist and encourage clients to return to living as normal citizens in the community. (Durnan 2001:36.)

The Centre is located opposite the Mt Isa Base hospital and close to the 'Dinner Camp' area of the river. It is also close to the city's CBD. The Centre, which caters for 36 clients per night, is used by the river dwellers to obtain temporary shelter from inclement weather, and is relied upon for showers, clothes washing, food and a safe night's sleep. The interviewees identified some problems with the centre, including that they had to leave early in

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the morning, that the centre was often full, and that some people were banned because of their extreme behaviour. (Durnan 2001:10,36.)

### **Endnote on Diversionary Strategies**

A variety of additional strategies can be incorporated into the basic diversionary model in an effort to expand its short-term and proactive qualities into the medium or long-term. Examples of these include:

- (1) The follow-up 'shaming' and 'square-up' sessions held, for example, by the Julalikari Night Patrol in Tennant Creek, between offenders and aggrieved members of the community.
  - (2) The presence of a 'detox' centre in proximity to the Sobering-Up Shelter, so that those who wish may avail themselves of this service. And further, the opportunity to then move directly to a residential facility in an alcohol treatment centre.
  - (3) The presence of a Day Centre adjacent to the Sobering-Up Shelter so that individuals, upon recovering in the morning, can avail themselves of recreational or entertainment facilities and be encouraged to return on a regular basis.
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## ADDRESSING ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR

Only in a few of the case studies analysed by the current authors was there any emphasis given to the role of Aboriginal Traditional Owners in response strategies dealing with public place dwellers. These were found in Alice Springs and Darwin. They both involved Traditional Owners taking exception at the anti-social behaviour of certain public place dwellers, particularly those involved in intoxication, begging, alcohol violence, and enacting sexual and excretory functions in public places. Traditional Owners saw these behaviours as 'shaming' local Traditional Owners and their law and custom, and they were adamant about asserting their authority in an effort to prevent such behaviour.

### Tackling Anti-Social Behaviour: Tangentyere Council's Four Corners Council

Tangentyere Council's 'Four Corners Council' project was a most comprehensive strategy aimed at tackling the anti-social behaviour of Indigenous people in an urban regional setting that has been well covered in research studies and published literature. A recommendation of the 1990 Todd River Campers Report was the need for support for Tangentyere's 'Social Behaviour Project'. This project involved (i) the development of Town Camp rules and norms concerning preferred camping and residential styles; (ii) sustained communication (education) to town and bush communities about such; and (iii) leadership development and support within town camps and the strengthening of extended family bonding. (Memmott 1990:31-33, 1993A&B.)

The formal name of this program was 'Mwerre Anetyeke Mparntwele', or 'Sitting Down Good in Alice Springs' (also known as the 'Social Behaviour Project', the 'Anti-Social Behaviour Project' and 'Town Camp Law'). The program formally started in 1992 but intermittently operated prior to this date. The funding sources were Tangentyere Council and the National Campaign Against Drug Abuse (NCADA). Professional links were established with the Central Australian Aboriginal Alcohol Planning Unit (CAAAPU), the target groups included: (i) the residents of the 19 established town camps of Alice Springs; (ii) both the permanent and itinerant residents of small informal camps established in public places, including on the Todd River and Charles Creek in central Alice Springs; and (iii) Aboriginal visitors to these camps from the outlying communities in central Australia. The types of violence targeted were: alcohol-related, inappropriate sexual behaviour between 'skin' groups, sexual assault, damage to personal and public property, and inappropriate behaviour toward host families by bush visitors.

The program sought to address 'problem' behaviours by encouraging an understanding and acceptance of 'preferred' and 'non-preferred' styles of behaviour. Part of this task was seen to involve the promotion of a better 'style of drinking', as alcohol consumption was consistently found to be a factor in acts of violence. The Program aimed to socialise Aboriginal people into agreed-upon styles of preferred healthy social behaviour, over a long period of time, or several generations. To achieve these aims the Project's facilitators implemented strategies that were considered culturally appropriate. In particular, they were devised and/or agreed upon by members of the Four Corners Elders Council. Such an approach would give Aboriginal people effective self-help strategies and problem-solving skills to employ in all kinds of situations. The Project was to consist of a series of integrated sub-programs, founded on a process of research design, trial implementation and evaluation. These sub-programs included:

- Preferred and non-preferred behaviour;
- Conflict Management and Mediation;
- Leadership and Social Cohesion;
- Educational Strategy;
- Participation in the Government's Judicial and Corrective Services Systems;
- River Campers Rehabilitation Strategy;
- Counteracting Centralisation Trends in the Wider Region;
- Research components; and
- Program Evaluation. (Memmott et al 1999A.)

The rationale for the approach was anchored on two premises: finding an Aboriginal approach to problem solving, which involved maintaining Aboriginal control; and making a concerted effort to revitalise Traditional Law as a guiding force behind Tangentyere's decision-making.

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### **Table 1: Draft Rules for Bush Mob Visiting Town Camps: Social Behaviour Rules**

Produced by the Four Corners Elders Council, Tangentyere Council, Alice Springs, 1991.

1. Visitors coming in from bush should stay no longer than one week.
2. People shouldn't come into town to avoid ceremony business.
3. People coming out of gaol should go straight back to their community.
4. Bush Councils should help Tangentyere to get troublemakers out of town.
5. Bush Councils should worry about their people who are in town.
6. People shouldn't stay on a town camp unless they've got permission from the bosses of the camp first.
7. When people from the bush are asked to go back to their community they should do so as quickly as possible.
8. Bush visitors shouldn't chase after other people's wives and daughters in town.
9. People visiting Alice Springs should have full respect for Arrernte people and their country.
10. People visiting town for drinking should only stay one or two days and should learn to drink without fighting.
11. Visitors from bush should take notice of what Four Corners Elders, camp bosses and Night Patrol mob tell them.
12. Visitors should be careful where they camp in town.
13. People who are banned from drinking at road houses shouldn't come to Alice Springs for drinking.
14. People who make big trouble on camps and won't go home should expect to get into big trouble with the police and wind up in gaol.
15. People banned from town shouldn't break their parole or bond. They should stay out of town.
16. People from bush shouldn't camp with dialysis patients and pensioners, or make trouble for them or bludge off them.

### **The Darwin 'Long Grassers' and Larrakia Nation**

In Darwin, the Larrakia Nation Aboriginal Corporation was established to support the eight family groups who are the traditional Indigenous people of the area, the Larrakia. One of the organisation's main aims during 2000-01 was to facilitate activities in the area of native title. It also conducted projects in land care, employment, art, social behaviour, and site protection. One of the key requirements of the Darwin Indigenous Itinerants Study, conducted by Memmott and Fantin (2001), was that it be carried out in close association with this organisation. Larrakia Nation was one of a number of Indigenous community agencies that had been concerned for many years about issues related to Indigenous homeless people in the Darwin and Palmerston area. Many of them were from remote communities and lived an itinerant lifestyle otherwise known as 'living in the long grass'.

The Darwin 'Long Grassers' report (Memmott & Fantin 2001) provides a summary of the post-contact history of Indigenous people in the Darwin area, and highlights aspects that have contributed to the situation of modern itinerants and public place dwellers. Its summary begins with a description of how Indigenous people were displaced by non-Indigenous settlement patterns, whereby they were periodically and arbitrarily shifted around. It also recounts how colonial settlement throughout the Northern Territory impacted on Indigenous people and their movements. Darwin and its periphery became an early site where transiently employed groups, and those trying to access health services and supplies, would camp. Bagot Reserve was established in 1938 as a prescribed residential area though its size was reduced by over 90 per cent in 1965. During the 1970s, Sansom (1980) identified 23 urban camping areas in use by Aboriginal people from various cultural groups, including those from out-of-town. After 1979 there existed four Special Purpose Leases in Darwin that were designated for Aboriginal living purposes. Aside from the Town Camps built on these leases, there were a number of other locations used for camping around the Darwin area. In 1991 Foote recorded over nine itinerant camp locations. Since World War II, numerous attempts by Aboriginal organisations to have various camping locations developed as residences for transient populations or as new Town Camps failed or were seriously delayed. (Memmott & Fantin 2001:35-37.)

During the Darwin itinerants study (Memcott & Fantin 2001), personnel from Larrakia Nation held a number of workshops through which they voiced their concerns about Indigenous itinerant people in the Greater Darwin area. They devised the following 'Cultural Protocols' for all people visiting Darwin and Palmerston. These Protocols were to form a key part of the Indigenous Itinerant Strategy that was developed in that report. Changing people's patterns of residence in public places was regarded as one of the most challenging parts of building an effective strategy.

**Table 2: Larrakia Nation's Draft Cultural Protocols for Indigenous Itinerants in Darwin and Palmerston**

*You have come by way of the Larrakia land.  
You will go taking something of the Larrakia spirit.  
You will hear the voice of Larrakia ancestors.*

The Larrakia people have always welcomed people on to their land throughout their long struggle for the recognition of their land. The Larrakia aim to foster partnerships according to the cultural protocols which we ask others to understand and respect.

- The Larrakia people are the Aboriginal traditional owners of all land and waters of the Greater Darwin area including identified Aboriginal living areas.
- Aboriginal law requires respect for the cultural authority of the traditional owners.
- Larrakia speak for Larrakia country, other traditional owners speak for their traditional lands.
- We have a mutual obligation to care for our own country with our neighbours.
- Visitors should be aware that we have a body of knowledge in our land and waters which includes sites of significance.
- Larrakia people expect visitors and service providers to be aware of Larrakia cultural obligations and to respect and acknowledge them.
- Visitors have the right to be treated with respect and understanding.
- All visitors are responsible for their behaviour and should respect the guidance of Larrakia.
- Learning about country is everybody's responsibility and it is also the responsibility for government and non-government agencies. Inappropriate behaviour reflects badly on Larrakia people and we do not accept it.

**Anti-Social Behaviour and Street Crime in Redfern**

A strategy similar to the Tangentyere Social Behaviour Strategy was recommended for the Redfern situation during the early 1990s. Some elements of it were in operation by the mid-1990s. (Memcott 1994.) During this period there was widespread anti-social behaviour and street crime being perpetuated in the Redfern area by Aboriginal people and it was not clear to what extent these problems were attributable to locals or visitors. It was recommended that the most effective way to deal with this violence was for the community itself to take action using a broad set of long-term strategies. Memcott recommended that the ATSIC Regional Council consult with the Redfern community with a view to incorporating, into its Regional and Community Plans for Redfern, some form of Aboriginal 'law and social behaviour' strategy which involved some of the following types of community-controlled elements:

- alcohol and drug strategy;
- community policing strategy (night patrol);
- support for the Redfern Elders Group to provide an Aboriginal authority structure for the community;
- conflict resolution and mediation strategy;
- Aboriginal justice programs (participation in judicial and corrective services systems);
- strengthening leadership and social cohesion strategy; and

- programs for 'at-risk' youths. (Memmott 1994:77.)

### **Endnote on Addressing Anti-Social Behaviour**

One reason for including Traditional Owners in an itinerants' response strategy, particularly in more traditionally oriented areas, is that such people may be more inclined to respect Aboriginal Law than non-Aboriginal Law. Therefore a more effective approach may emerge, and one that is more clearly Aboriginal-directed. The role of local Traditional Law Holders has, in the case studies previously described, primarily involved the establishment of models of appropriate versus anti-social behaviours (in terms of Aboriginal value systems) of public place dwellers, and territorial rules concerning where particular groups should dwell.

# PHILOSOPHIES AND METHODS OF CLIENT INTERACTION AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

In addition to respecting and working through customary principles of Aboriginal law and custom, the current literature search uncovered several other professional philosophies adopted by various service providers.

## Grannies Group, Adelaide

The previous section dealt with the potential role of Traditional Owners in urban places in asserting their customary authority to direct or participate in strategies to deal with Indigenous visitors and campers arriving from other places. However, another way in which Elders might engage with public space dwellers is through their kinship links with their own people. Such appears to be the case with a group of Indigenous 'grandmothers' working and living in metropolitan Adelaide, who have focused on their needy 'young folk'. Such young people were described as those who had spent or are spending time in jail, had heroin or other drug addiction problems, experienced frequent rejection by landlords, were single parents, and had persistent and acute difficulties in their attempts to find paid employment. (Grannies Group 2000.)

The Grannies sadly noted that it was common to find young people with a multiplicity of these problems.

"With our extensive knowledge of what is going on in our community we decided some time ago that we were not going to sit by and watch the desperate plight of our children and our grandchildren keep getting worse. So far we have lobbied government departments so as to bring our deteriorating circumstances of family and community to their attention. We are constantly trying as much as we can to get resources allocated to the problems that we have described. Naturally, we put our own time into counselling our people and provide support for professional counsellors who work with our young people that are in difficulty. We also have regular meetings to inform ourselves about relevant events that are taking place outside our community and also to work out effective ways of helping our offspring and their children to overcome their problems..." (Grannies Group 2000.)

## Individual and Family Case Study Approach by Centrecare, Perth

In 2001, Centrecare in Perth, through four outreach-based programs, assisted approximately 75 families on a weekly basis, and at least 60 of these client individuals/families identified as Aboriginal. Centrecare's work was founded on a philosophy that emphasised the need to assist families and individuals in finding their own solutions, not by fixing and solving client's dilemmas and problems for them. The agency aimed to guide rather than lead, to empower and respect rather than perpetuate welfare dependence and its associated mentality. (Durkay et al 2001:13.) This approach involved Centrecare counsellors and other staff establishing a personal and amiable working relationship with their clients.

"There is a difference in the way our agency's workers, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, related to Aboriginal people, in that it is relationship-based. This then informs the underlying way in which we work with people from all cultural backgrounds. In this sense, it is the reverse of what usually happens. That is, normally a worker would present the mainstream cultural understanding, therapeutic interventions and educational knowledge with everyone in the same manner and in a formal way. In our work with Aboriginal people, counselling is experienced by them as a support, having a yarn, someone to talk with outside of the household, etc, not as formal counselling. The relationship between client and counsellor is closer than it would be in a formal setting, as you are within the confines of people's personal space and their home. However this does not mean relinquishing clear boundaries." (Durkay et al 2001:13.)

"The therapeutic or healing relationships that you develop with Aboriginal people can only be developed over time and need to be relationship-based ... Additionally there must be an understanding and appreciation of cultural obligations to family, including understanding where they are coming from and seeing it through their eyes. Demonstrating respect and understanding for the person and their family is vital in the development of any positive working relationship with Aboriginal people." (Durkay et al 2001:15.)

An essential ingredient in this approach is the maintenance of a consistent group of staff who remain in employment for the long-term. This enables a continuity of service and one that is relatively personal, spanning the clients' own cycles of failure and success in addressing personal goals.

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“Persistence has been a key feature of our work, as has acceptance of what is realistic for people to achieve. Persistence is linked with how long we can hang in or are willing to hang in there with people. Being willing to persist has often demonstrated our commitment to clients and has proved successful in many situations. Additionally, our willingness to reassess someone’s circumstances, even if the person has declined support at earlier stages, has proven successful with a large number of people. Continuity and willingness to be involved over time, in bad times and in good times has assisted many people who have needed our services. Persistence does not mean, however, that we disrespect people’s right to decline a service or that we will work with people who are disrespectful of our agency or our workers. A mutual and healthy respect is fundamental to every working relationship in which we participate, whether with a client, government agencies, non-government agencies and the community generally.” (Durkay et al 2001:14.)

## **The Community Development Approach**

Few commentators and researchers overtly comment on the issue of empowerment and participation by itinerants and homeless people in the process of social planning for them. An exception is Coleman in her critique of the facility erected in New Farm Park by the Brisbane City Council (BCC). “Long-term homeless people are, conceptually at least, now acknowledged as members of the Fortitude Valley community, and this conceptual awareness has strong potential to be developed into actual participation by homeless people in relevant policy processes and decisions” (Coleman 2001:193). Following the trial of this facility, the BCC developed clear processes and protocols for working with homeless people. One outcome of this was to have regular communal meetings with homeless people at Kurilpa Point (Eastwood 2001).

“Policy processes must be designed specifically to invite and include the participation of homeless people, since this participation does not occur naturally or spontaneously. As well as conceptual openness on the part of mainstream participants, participation can be facilitated by attention to venue, use of inclusive language, and a demonstrated commitment to respecting difference and honouring agreements...If they are excluded from participation, there will continue to be contests over public spaces which long-term homeless people will not surrender, and [the result] will represent another divided community in a divided society.” (Coleman 2001:172.)

In her analysis of the homelessness of Indigenous women in inner city Brisbane, Coleman outlined a number of ways of empowering these women that could be facilitated at various levels of governance (federal, state, local government and community organisations). Coleman emphasised the need for responses to be ‘owned’ by these women. The difference and inter-relation between park people owning the response and government agencies facilitating the response needs to be carefully thought through and accommodated. Some of Coleman’s responses are applicable to all Indigenous public space dwelling people:

- Recognition of the presence and role of Indigenous people in the inner city in symbolic ceremonies involving non-Indigenous people.
- Handback of areas of significance in the inner city area, including designated spaces, and recognition of the links between Indigenous people and these spaces.
- Urban design, which impacts on the ways people can use and move through public spaces, should recognise existing patterns of use by Indigenous public place dwellers.
- Council resources should be made available for capacity building and development work with Indigenous community members, including the Indigenous people who use inner city public spaces; this work should lead to their full inclusion as community members. (Coleman 2000:27.)

Coleman emphasises that for such empowerment to be effective there is ideally a need for some degree of policy and consistency in this regard across the various levels of governance (2000:25).

Selwyn Johnson of the Musgrave Park ATSI Corporation has also emphasised the need to have ‘parkies’ involved in defining and planning for their needs and represented on committees, either personally or by persons who know them well and are trusted to put forward their views and interests (Hale 1996).

Durkay et al from Centrecare Outreach in Perth wrote the following on this subject:-

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"Models of service delivery need to be based on self-empowerment, self-determination and be solution focused and away from the ongoing creation, maintenance and support of welfare dependency for Aboriginal people. It is difficult to move away from a model of service delivery based on welfare dependence. This movement is not only difficult for Aboriginal people but also for government and non-government agencies and the broader community. It is the year 2001 and there are still many people who are welfare-orientated and feel they can't survive without the assistance of handouts. It is our belief that Aboriginal people need models of working that encourage them to become proud of who they are, strong as individuals and as a race, to be independent again and to get their younger generation to take control of their lives for the future." (Durkay et al 2001:15.)

Diversionary strategies such as a sobering-up service or an Indigenous volunteer Night Patrol do not usually replace the need for a long-term commitment to changing the life circumstances of itinerants and park dwellers. The approach that best encapsulates this commitment, and which stands in direct contrast to a law-and-order approach, is a community development approach (Hale 1996:16). Hale promoted the following strategies in Townsville in line with this strategy.

1. Councils to take leadership in reconciling inequity between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people, and not fuel racism by a 'blame-the-victim' stereotyping of itinerants or public place dwellers.
2. Change the systems that perpetuate inequality and discrimination, rather than focus change upon those itinerants who are then branded as deviant or deficient in some way.
3. Require a long-term commitment to change the life circumstances of itinerant people, rather than a 'law-and-order' response.
4. Require a Community Development approach that emphasises empowerment and self-determination whereby the itinerants define their problems, needs and solutions.

Coleman also recommended (2000:27) that in Brisbane, "Council should exercise community leadership on matters of community relations and social inclusion [in relation to homeless people], recognising the diverse interests in local communities."

Drawing on the work of other social planners, Hale (1996) proposed the following principles of a self-determination approach to community development for itinerants:

- Assist the itinerant or public place dweller group to clearly identify their problems and needs.
- Inform the group about the relevant resources available to them.
- Encourage the group to draw on their collective resources.
- Create an environment where the group can work out what to do about their problems.
- Assist the itinerants to have a 'voice' eg. through incorporations, meetings, workshops, representation on agency committees for itinerants.
- The Community Development approach should emphasise empowering the itinerants to take their own initiatives.
- Recognition of citizen entitlements (public space access) for long-term itinerants. (Hale 1996:21.)

## **A Healing Framework for Service Provision and Responses to Indigenous Homelessness**

Coleman argued that a 'healing framework' be instituted through service provision and strategies, which addressed the needs of Indigenous women who used inner city spaces.

"In order to respond holistically and accurately to the needs of Indigenous women who use Brisbane's public spaces, a framework which incorporates both a response to the immediate issue and an understanding of how Indigenous women make sense of their experiences and behaviour is needed." (Coleman 2000:22.)

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Coleman proposed a 'healing wheel', which features at its centre the dispossession and loss of land, social roles, children and culture (see Figure 1). The outer edge of the wheel is divided between symptoms of this loss and dispossession including: self harm, suicide, alcohol, drug abuse, deaths in custody, violence, apathy, depression, and high imprisonment rates. To provide effective strategies and responses to Indigenous homelessness, Coleman argues that the core issue at the centre of the wheel must be addressed not just the symptoms of these issues. (Coleman 2000:20-22.)

"The behaviours and the needs of Indigenous women which evoke concern remain important points of response but it is no longer behaviour or immediate needs only which are responded to. In [this healing] model, these outward signs are just that - outward indicators of deeper issues which themselves must be addressed. Drinking, lack of accommodation, and drug and alcohol use are all symptomatic. Models of response under a healing framework would recognise this explicitly and enact this understanding in practice, for example by responding to drinking indirectly and using empowerment strategies as well as (or instead of) abstinence models". (Coleman 2000:22.)

Healing based models recognise the interlinked nature of problems in Indigenous communities. Such linkages are likely to lead to the relationships with spouses, children, wider family and community members as well as community leaders. Healing processes may need to encompass a range of such people in the social field of the public-space dwelling person. Within this social field there may well be individuals who are contributing to the problems of such persons, as well as those who could provide healing support. (Coleman 2000:22.)

Healing processes require an on-going commitment from funding bodies and service providers to ensure that service provision is shaped by the experiences and needs of the target groups and not by imposed policy guidelines. Services could explicitly acknowledge long-term healing work as their core business, thus facilitating resourcing in a way that acknowledges the degree of difficulty of the work, and recognises and recompenses workers appropriately. Cross department programs and linkages should be integrated through commitment to the wider framework of healing. (Coleman 2000:23.)

In her report, Coleman provides suggestions as to how SAAP might adopt these recommendations:-

"This way of reconceptualising 'problems', and of seeking out the root cause, has implications and wider challenges with regard to policy response and service delivery to a range of people with chronic or entrenched disadvantage. Immediate needs must be met as they present, but they may be addressed most effectively when service provision recognises the links between immediate and long-standing, unaddressed issues." (Coleman 2000:23.)

## **Endnote on Philosophies and Methods**

The Perth Centrecare approach emphasised the need to guide and empower families and individuals in finding their own solutions (not impose solutions), through a long-term personal and amiable relation with clients, using a combination of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal staff. Coleman extends this to include a healing therapy that encourages self-exploration of the many underlying issues and causal factors behind the circumstances of public place dwellers.

A number of researchers emphasise the community development approach in working with Indigenous public place dwellers, whereby through participation in the process of addressing their problems, qualities of group cohesion, leadership, problem-solving capacity and self-esteem are fostered. There is a need for public place dwellers to have sufficient ownership of the process in order to be prepared to participate in that process in a meaningful way that results in real lifestyle changes and does not further entrench welfare dependency. Ideally there needs to be a parallel and common acceptance of this approach by all local stakeholders (e.g. governments, councils, charitable groups).

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## **ALCOHOL STRATEGIES**

Many public space dwellers are involved in chronic substance abuse, and it is very likely that some of these people are arrested for alcohol abuse in particular. Amongst Indigenous homeless people, there is also a strong correlation between heavy alcohol consumption and violent behaviour and/or self-injury. (W.A., State Homelessness Task Force 2002:49.) In addressing the needs of public space dwellers, whether it be their health, the impact of alcohol violence on other group members, or the impact of intermittent anti-social intoxicated behaviour on the general public, there is clearly a need to formulate a strategic response to this heavy drinking lifestyle.

### **Alcohol Strategies in Redfern**

In Redfern during 1994, the Cope Street drinkers' group purchased their liquor from a local takeaway outlet. A number of people argued that if this outlet were closed down the drinkers would move to another venue. A local Aboriginal Committee of concerned people proposed a campaign to close the takeaway liquor store. This, they argued, would prevent the consumption of cheap cask wine, which was detrimental to health, and reduce the risk of a car hitting a drinker crossing the street in an intoxicated state to purchase liquor. There was a general feeling of anger directed at the proprietor of the outlet who, in pursuit of profit, was seen to be supporting the alcohol problems associated with the drinkers' group. Some suspected that the proprietor kept bank withdrawal forms on his premises that he allowed drinkers to sign as credit, and then made withdrawals from their accounts on 'pension days'. The proprietor of the liquor outlet later vigorously refuted these allegations and threatened legal action over them. His reaction appeared to be sufficient to dissuade stakeholders from pursuing the strategy of putting a complaint to the NSW Liquor Administration Board. (Memmott 1994:75-76.)

In considering further the problems of the Cope Street drinkers through a number of Indigenous forums, all parties agreed that there was a lack of culturally appropriate, Aboriginal-controlled alcohol services in inner Sydney, including Redfern. Types of culturally appropriate services that were elicited as being required included:

- (i) a detox centre;
- (ii) a treatment centre and/or rehabilitation centre;
- (iii) a one-to-one counselling service;
- (iv) Aboriginal Alcoholics Anonymous;
- (v) programs for co-dependents of people with drinking problems (families, spouses, children);
- (vi) educational programs and strategies (eg. role models, posters, videos, drop-in centre, school programs);
- (vii) alternative activities such as bush trips, fishing trips, social trips, cultural activities, etc;
- (viii) liaison and co-ordination with other agencies and department providing related services or mainstream services; and
- (ix) referral and support for individuals going through different stages of treatment or reform eg. referral to rehabilitation or treatment programs, and once completing such programs, assistance with seeking accommodation, employment and counselling for such individuals. (Memmott 1994:78-79)

### **Alcohol Strategies in Cairns**

Dillon and Savage (1994), whilst not making any comprehensive suggestions on how to address alcohol abuse amongst the Cairns 'parkies', did note their preference for drinking in large groups in public parks, which was against the law and attracted police attention. The authors suggested looking at forming legal social clubs. Another of their recommendations was for an Aboriginal controlled detoxification centre to be established.

### **Alcohol Strategies in Coober Pedy**

Alcohol misuse and alcohol related problems have had a high impact on both the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal population of Coober Pedy (S.A., CPU 2000: 4). Coober Pedy is an important regional centre for Aboriginal visitors from communities in the Anangu Pitjantjatjara (AP) homelands to the north-west. A 'dry zone' (alcohol free) has been in place in Coober Pedy since 1996. This strategy has been somewhat ineffective as critical

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support strategies were not developed, or were initially implemented but not sustained. The report by the Crime Prevention Unit of the S.A. Government found that as a single strategy, the dry zone in Coober Pedy had in fact led to an increase in “harm to the community through the displacement of drinkers to marginal areas around the township, or to residences, leading to an increase in domestic violence and other problems” (S.A., CPU 2000: 3).

Problems related to alcohol misuse have had a significant impact on the Umoona community, which is situated on the edge of Coober Pedy. This community made repeated requests to be declared a dry community because of the social problems they experienced. The ongoing social problems experienced by the Umoona community prompted the Elders to leave the community and establish a ‘dry’ Elders camp 10 kilometres outside of Coober Pedy. (S.A., CPU 2000: 12-13.)

In 2000, an Alcohol Strategy was developed by the Crime Prevention Unit of the South Australian Government. The key elements of this strategy were:

1. Mobile Assistance Patrols: These patrols removed intoxicated people from public places to safe places where they were to be encouraged to engage with rehabilitation programs.
2. Sobering Up Service: A ‘medically safe’ accommodation facility where intoxicated people can recover.
3. Licensing Restrictions: Reduce harm caused by alcohol consumption by restricting takeaway sales until 11am.
4. Day Centre: The day centre would provide access to food, showers, washing facilities and access to other services and agencies.
5. Transient Camps and Gathering Places: In order to reduce the harm created by alcohol misuse the strategy proposed the development of three spaces. The first of these was a designated gathering place where people could consume alcohol. Two transient camps were proposed, one for transient people who drank and a dry camp for transient people who did not drink.
6. Rehabilitation: The strategy aimed to improve access to rehabilitation.
7. Early Intervention: The early detection of alcohol problems and intervention with appropriate strategies to address those problems. (S.A., CPU 2000: 4-7, SA Department of Human Services 2001.)

## **Alcohol Strategies in Darwin**

In 2000 and 2001 there were two Indigenous agencies in Darwin dealing with alcohol problems, the Council for Aboriginal Alcohol Program Services (CAAPS) and the Foundation of Rehabilitation with Aboriginal Alcohol Related Difficulties (FORWAARD). Indigenous public place dwellers, who refer to themselves as ‘Long Grassers’, utilised both of these organisation’s services at various times. The researchers found that these services were being augmented by related church-based ones (St Vincent de Paul, Salvation Army, Anglicare). The Darwin ‘Long Grassers’ study (Memmott & Fantin 2001:10) stated that the overall outcomes for homeless people would be improved through better coordination of the resources of all available services.

As described in the Darwin ‘Long Grassers’ report (Memmott & Fantin 2001:V2, 82-86), CAAPS provided substance misuse prevention, intervention, treatment and after-care services to Aboriginal people, families and communities in the Darwin and Palmerston region, including those living in bush, town and beach camps. These services consisted of three main components: a residential treatment program, a hostel, and community-based program teams. The first of these was based on a Minnesota Family Treatment Model, which was adapted from an Australian Institute on Alcohol and Addictions Program, and then customised for use with Indigenous people. One of this program’s core principles was to address the “misuse of Aboriginal kinship obligations or [the] co-dependency aspects of alcohol and other drug dependency” (Memmott & Fantin 2001:V2, 83). The program ran for six weeks and included client assessment and referral to an appropriate sub-program, group awareness sessions, family counselling, recreational cultural activities, and the development of individual and family treatment management plans. There was an after-care or follow-up service, which was very important to the program’s success. The Treatment staff regularly liaised with several service agencies both in Darwin and in remote areas.

The second key component of the service run by CAAPS was its hostel and the activities related to it. The hostel accommodation consisted of purpose-built units, which could house up to 30 clients using the Residential Treatment Program in a semi-bush setting. Clients were supplied with nutritious food with which to cook meals for themselves and their family, and were required to keep their units, and, in collaboration with other users, the

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grounds, tidy. However, the facility was not staffed or resourced to cater for clients who required 24-hour supervision or specialist medical care.

The final component of the CAAPS service was its Community-based Program Team, which referred clients to the treatment program and also provided after-care support to them. Its focus included: intervention counselling, client assessment and referral services, liaising with local and remote area service agencies and court, prison, hospital and medical assessments and referrals. (Memmott & Fantin 2001:85.)

Memmott and Fantin found that FORWAARD also provided a wide range of services in the Darwin and Palmerston area. Five days a week they ran a Day Group Therapy Program that was based on the Alcoholics Anonymous '12 steps to recovery' plan. They also administered a full-time residential program for alcohol rehabilitation over 12 weeks with 16 beds available. Assistance was given to individuals attempting to maintain their responsibilities with such agencies as Social Security. FORWAARD also employed a counsellor to facilitate educational group sessions covering topics like the physical effects of alcohol and life skills. It organised and supervised recreational activities and trained Aboriginal Alcohol Workers. They reported that their alcohol treatment services to outlying communities had been updated in response to the increase in usage of other drugs, such as those in pill form and marijuana. (Memmott & Fantin 2001:V2, 101-103.)

As described in the Darwin 'Long Grassers' study (2001:V2, 66-74), Anglicare worked closely with CAAPS providing a referral service, particularly with young Indigenous people with whom its Youth Program had come into contact. Health was a key component of this program. Also with regard to complimentary services, St Vincent de Paul was seen to be providing hostel accommodation at two centres in the Darwin area (2001:149-151) and the Salvation Army were providing addiction services (2001:153-154).

While the overarching concern expressed by CAAPS representatives was to do with a general lack of resources for health, policing, counselling, and low-cost housing programs, FORWAARD interviewees stressed the need for more after-care and follow-up services. A number of components of the Darwin study's Alcohol Strategy for 'Long Grassers' put forward by Memmott and Fantin (2001:9-10) address these concerns, namely the establishment of a residential or outreach facility to cater for long-term substance abusers over periods greater than twelve weeks. This is required to provide ongoing support for individuals addressing their alcohol problems who might otherwise find themselves returning to their public place dwelling lifestyle with its associated binge drinking. The report also recommends the expansion of current Sobering-Up facilities, both in terms of increasing the numbers who can be accommodated and improving the day care facilities. The Darwin strategy further advocates programs to educate visitors about appropriate drinking behaviours and locations, and manage the cases of people caught in a cycle of homelessness, alcohol consumption and offensive behaviours.

## **Alcohol Strategies in Mt Isa**

Alcohol "was generally a huge presence" in the lives of the Mt Isa river dwellers interviewed by Durnan in 2001. The interviewees did not consider their alcohol consumption to be problematic. However, they did identify dangers that they faced from other people who had been drinking to excess. These included assault, sexual assault and theft. Durnan noted that Aboriginal people who resided in rental housing also contributed to alcohol-related issues associated with the public spaces of Mt Isa. (Durnan 2002:9-10, 13.)

Many of the interviewees had previously encountered difficulties accessing and maintaining rental accommodation. Durnan argued that these problems were related to their drinking habits. The problems included uncontrollable visitors, overcrowding, complaints from neighbours, and difficulties meeting rental costs. (Durnan 2001:10.)

Durnan recommended the formation of the Mt Isa 'Alcohol Action Group', which would seek reform of liquor licensing arrangements and regulations in the town. These measures were to include: (i) a reduction in the availability of take-away alcohol through reduced hours of sale, (ii) eliminating the availability of certain alcohol products such as cheap wine, and (iii) ensuring that public opinion effectively informed liquor licensing. In addition, Durnan recommended that Yapatjarra Health Service in Mt Isa be resourced to develop a regional 'Alcohol Misuse Action Plan' to focus on preventative measures. (Durnan 2001:13-15.) One of the first tasks of what became known as the Riverbed Action Group was to initiate a petition against the opening of a bottle-shop in a Mt Isa suburb (North West Star 7/6/01).

In August 2002, restrictions on alcohol sales were introduced, including a ban on wine sold in 4-litre sized casks. Media reports from December 2002 suggest that as a result of the ban, the city's homeless drinkers have switched

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to consuming wine purchased in glass bottles. Because of this, it appears that smashed glass has replaced wine casks as the predominant type of litter found at popular drinking venues in public spaces. It has also been reported that some homeless people, in seeking intoxication, have switched to drinking mouthwash brands that contain ethanol. Thus, rather than positively altering the alcohol consumption behaviour of certain people, the bans have contributed to making them more harmful. (North West Star 05/12/02.)

## **Response to Alcohol Violence Contexts**

A review of a number of sources indicates that in certain centres, public space dwellers are prone to enact, or become the victim of, alcohol-related violence in their daily lives (Berry et al 2001:59-60; Durnan 2001:10, 29; Memmott & Fantin 2001:68; SA Government, CPU 2000:11-12). In addition, there is sometimes a significant proportion of people present amongst these groups who have been displaced from their homes or families due to certain forms of family violence.<sup>1</sup>

A number of response strategies that offer respite for public space dwellers who suffer from the effects of violence-related behaviours have been identified by the authors. The most common types of these are Indigenous Women's Refuges (eg the Nowra Aboriginal Women's Refuge) or Safe Houses and Sobering-Up Centres.

A more proactive approach has been taken by the Hedland Homeless Support Service, which has provided information and education on violence to Indigenous individuals, groups and families who access the Service's breakfast program. Much of this assistance has been recognised as being only partially effective because in many cases some level of violence is seen as normal. However, two of its key aims have been the fostering through education of a greater awareness of what constitutes violence and dysfunction, and the erosion of the general acceptance of violence. This is an arduous process and many of the outcomes are minimal. A parallel approach has been enacted through the promotion and implementation of certain rules of client behaviour applying to people who are actually at the Centre for breakfast and other purposes. There are basic codes of behaviour, such as: (a) respect for each other; (b) the requirement to speak nicely and use manners; and (c) to refrain from yelling, swearing or abusive behaviour while at the Centre. These may seem like small steps but it has been the start of a personal realisation in many cases. Since implementing these basic rules, the number of incidences of violent or abusive behaviour by clients in the Centre has substantially dropped. (Port Hedland ... Group 2002.)

The Hedland Outreach Workers have also engaged with their clients during mediation held in a non-threatening forum. The mediation program uses culturally appropriate references and guidelines relevant to the target group, and endeavours to follow appropriate Aboriginal therapies. In most cases mediation has involved the family rather than just the individual. Some clients may then be referred to the Port Hedland Sobering-Up Centre Group Inc, which has a Prevention and Intervention Program for Family Violence funded through the WA Ministry of Justice. This program is a perpetrator program and provides ten-week group session. (Port Hedland ... Group. 2002.)

## **End-Note on Alcohol Strategies**

It can be seen that in all of these cases, responses to the alcohol abuse by public place dwellers involve multiple strategies including patrols or outreach services, providing meals, sobering-up shelters, women's refuges, detox centres, legislative supports including licensing restrictions, approved gathering and camping places, rehabilitation programs (including counselling, education, group therapy, co-dependants support, excursions and activities), and residential options and support.

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<sup>1</sup> Of course, there are many community-based services in response to Indigenous violence. The reader is directed to Memmott et al (2000) for an overview of such services.

## REGIONAL STRATEGIES

An in-depth understanding of Indigenous public space dwelling and homelessness in metropolitan and regional urban centres necessitates a regional approach that examines Indigenous migration and residential mobility patterns. A number of studies have highlighted the lack of facilities in home communities and the quality-of-life problems there, all of which contribute to visitors migrating to regional centres. Loveday and Lea (1985:xvii) made this point concerning Katherine's transient campers in the mid-1980s. Similarly, Dillon and Savage (1994) reported that the reasons for 'parkies' choosing to live in Cairns was often related to the poor living standards of their home communities in Cape York. These researchers made reference to the poor state of health, housing and shelter, education, training and employment in Aboriginal and Islander communities in Far North Queensland. Cairns was also regarded by many as a place of respite from problems at home. Dillon and Savage made recommendations for improving the quality of life in the wider region through the provision of new and upgraded housing, improved housing management and access to electronic media and its educational potential.

### A Regional Strategy in Central Australia

A regional strategy was a key component of the Tangentyere Social Behaviour Project in the early 1990s. A multi-lingual and initiated male field officer took town-based male Elders back to their home communities to discuss the protocols on preferred and unacceptable behaviours for visitors to Alice Springs (see 'Draft Rules' earlier). Over a six-month period Elders from all over Central Australia were informed of the new position of the Four Corners Council and its efforts to strengthen Aboriginal Law in Mbarntwe (Alice Springs). The field officer kept in contact with these communities by phone and newsletter. A large Conference of approximately 80 Elders was then held to discuss the relevant issues, obtain a consensus endorsement for the project and develop ongoing strategies to deal with violence problems.

One strategy, aimed at reducing the violence problems and levels of gang warfare being experienced by the Warlpiri people in Alice Springs, involved the establishment of an Aboriginal social club 300 kms to the north-west of the town in the Warlpiri homelands, with an associated bus service (or similar proposal). The Western Desert Councils were warned that they had to accept that many of their people would remain in Alice Springs consuming alcohol, despite the ideological rejections of grog undertaken by their Elders and senior women. Such a social club (like that of Tangentyere's) needed to be designed as a form of 'targeted service delivery' for its client group, with appropriate controls and support services. This proposal did not eventuate. It seems well established however that the presence or absence of an alcohol outlet in a remote Indigenous community will have a marked influence on the level of travel and displacement of residents to regional urban centres.

### Darwin's Proposed Regional Strategy

The Darwin and Palmerston itinerants study found that a large proportion of the 'Long-Grasser' population were originally from Aboriginal communities located throughout Australia (Memmott & Fantin 2001:62). The largest number of 'visiting' itinerants came from communities in the Northern Territory such as Wadeye, Maningrida and Millilingimbi (2001:62). Some were recent arrivals, while others had been in Darwin for over a decade. Approximately 60 per cent of the people interviewed intended to stay in Darwin, while approximately 28 per cent had plans to return to their home communities (2001:72). One respondent described one of the itinerants' main problems as follows:

"If we mix with different tribe there'll be problems. We don't mix with people from different country. It's ok if we are all one people - we understand one another. We all related from Belyuen to Port Keats area; Wadeye, Daly River, Pepperminarti, Palunpa; even at One Mile Dam, Bagot Knuckey's Lagoon." (Memmott & Fantin 2001:65.)

The Darwin Itinerants report cites Aboriginal Development Foundation and Bagot Community representatives' concerns regarding short-term visitors placing enormous pressure on Town Camp services and facilities. "Visitors use up power, water and waste services but rarely contribute to rent. Added household numbers also contribute to potential property damage, which must then be maintained by the Town Camp management authority and reduces the lifecycle of accommodation" (Memmott & Fantin 2001:74). The representative body for the Indigenous Traditional Owners of Darwin, Larrakia Nation, expressed their concerns to the report's authors regarding itinerants using traditional camping areas and not respecting sacred sites.

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One component of the overarching strategy that was developed as part of the 2001 report (Memcott & Fantin) to deal with the issues raised about Indigenous itinerants in Darwin and Palmerston involved educating Aboriginal people throughout the wider region about appropriate behaviour when visiting the area. It was suggested that Larrakia Nation representatives undertake consultative visits to various bush and remote communities in the Top End and Katherine regions. During these visits personnel would explain their 'Cultural Behaviour Protocol' for Darwin - why it was developed and its relationship to Darwin City Council by-laws and State law - and attempt to gather support for its precepts from Councils and Elders. Apart from being educated about their obligations as visitors when in Darwin, remote communities need to establish programs that encourage respect for local Traditional Owners, that provide understanding of town rental tenancy rules and knowledge of the problems associated with the 'Long Grasser' lifestyle (Memcott & Fantin 2001:93-94.) The accommodation strategy that was devised through the Darwin study (Memcott & Fantin 2001) recognised that the needs of long-term campers, people who had been in the area for more than 15 years, had to be provided for. The project workshops that were held, involving all relevant stakeholders, clearly agreed on the importance of locating different groups of itinerants in different camping areas. The general cultural principle upheld was that different accommodation options are required for different language, tribal or clan groups. These kinds of strategies are to be implemented through a coalition of relevant government and Indigenous agencies in the coming years. The proposals were advocated by a number of the relevant stakeholders working with Indigenous itinerants in the Darwin and Palmerston areas, such as Council for Aboriginal Alcohol Program Services (CAAPS), Aboriginal Media Services Alliance of the Northern Territory Incorporated (AMSANT) and Indigenous Housing Association (IHA).

## **North-west Queensland Region**

Durnan noted that many of the Aboriginal 'goomies' and river campers residing on the banks of Mt Isa's Leichhardt River had originally come from remote centres to attend major events such as the annual Rodeo and Mardi Gras, so in the social planning he conducted for them in 2001, he made an urgent recommendation that a specific plan be developed to deal with the stresses and special needs associated with such events. (Durnan 2001:17-19). His 'events' proposal included: provision of temporary camping facilities; operation of a special night patrol; engagement of leaders from bush communities as marshals at camping areas; prior communication with bush communities; provision of return transport to communities; and appropriate planning of liquor supply arrangements.

Durnan made a number of further regional recommendations. He suggested the trial of a 'Return Home to Country Service' that would provide transport assistance for people who were stranded in Mt Isa and wished to return to regional communities (Durnan 2001:27). He also recommended that better regional development coordination be striven for, including the maintenance of relevant infrastructure and services in all parts of the Mt Isa region (Durnan 2001:23).

A notable characteristic of the river dwelling population interviewed by Durnan was the lack of people in it from north-west Queensland communities other than Doomadgee and Lake Nash (Queensland border communities). Durnan interviewed 38 homeless people. Of these, 13 people were originally from the Northern Territory, largely from the Tennant Creek and Alice Springs area. 23 of the group were from other regions of Queensland: 19 from Doomadgee (Qld), three from Normanton and one from Cloncurry. Over half of the Queenslanders had lived in the riverbed for ten years or more. Ten of those interviewed camped in parks or near the rodeo ground rather than in the riverbed. (Durnan 2001:9.)

## **Endnote on Regional Strategies**

In order to reduce the numbers of Indigenous public place dwellers and discourage their numbers from growing in urban regional centres, it is necessary to examine the nature and dynamics of regional migration to understand why people leave their home communities, or what prevents them from returning. Based on such analysis, a regional strategy to deal with Indigenous itinerancy and homelessness must include a shared set of values and a communication system between urban centre service providers and regional communities, which facilitates shared decision-making in addressing the needs of individual clients. This in turn may be accompanied by a regional education program in relation to urban lifestyles and values, and what might be expected of Indigenous people when visiting large cities, both in terms of mainstream and Aboriginal laws and behavioural values. A converse requirement is education materials for non-Aboriginal Australians and tourists on Aboriginal lifestyle values and the need for mutual cross-cultural accommodation of such values. Finally, where there is constant migration of Indigenous people to urban centres, serious questions need to be asked of public servants and politicians in

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Aboriginal Affairs and Indigenous community leaders and Councillors, concerning the quality of lifestyle in those remote and rural Aboriginal communities.



## ACCOMMODATION OPTIONS

Although mainstream homelessness strategies usually include special crisis and short-term accommodation facilities, these options may attract Indigenous people in only a limited way, for a range of culturally-based reasons. Gaining access to such specialist services may be as problematic for Indigenous people as gaining access to mainstream rental housing programs. Two of the key issues are: (a) the cultural appropriateness of accommodation facilities in relation to the residential experience of public space dwellers, and (b) the extent of management and support facilities required to maintain the residences and their occupants in a stable manner. Another standard theme already mentioned earlier is the reluctance of groups from different tribal or language backgrounds to reside together in one location.

“The housing provided may need to be designed in different ways to respond to the different needs and uses of families. For example, many Aboriginal families may be happy with their current housing options and experiencing no difficulty in maintaining their existing, standard housing option. However, for other Aboriginal individuals and families, larger style housing that allows for high traffic of visitors would be more appropriate. What constitutes culturally appropriate housing inevitably has different meanings in different places and the location of the housing also needs to be taken into account.” (Durkay et al 2001:16.)

The difficulties encountered by homeless Indigenous people in obtaining accommodation are similar to those encountered by Indigenous people in general, but they are likely to be more pronounced. Some examples of the factors that contribute to the situation include: (a) excessively high rents and bonds; (b) demanding eligibility tests that often require literacy skills; (c) discriminating practices and prejudices, especially in the private rental sector; (d) excessively long waiting lists; (e) resorting to overcrowded circumstances which destabilises existing tenancies due to onerous housing management regulations; and (f) previous rent arrears preventing eligibility. (Hamann 1999:20, Berry et al 2001:26,46,59, Kenny 1998, W.A. State Homelessness Task Force 2002.)

Notwithstanding these problems, a number of successful approaches and themes emerge in the ensuing examples of accommodation strategies. One standard approach is to first establish emergency or crisis accommodation over one or a few nights. This may involve Women’s Refuges, Safe Houses or Sobering-Up Shelters. Secondly, a medium-term accommodation option, sometimes referred to as transitional housing, must be provided until conventional rental housing becomes available. Even the latter option may also necessitate some form of special support. Finally a range of miscellaneous services may be required that assist people into these categories of accommodation and provide ongoing support. (W.A., State Homelessness Task Force 2002, Berry et al 2001:Ch.3.)

There is also an increasing call for targeted accommodation services for Indigenous women (with or without children), youth, single men, and elderly people suffering from homelessness and living in public places, but little research is available to understand these different categories of specialised need. More challenging accommodation responses, in terms of public policy and governance, involve recognising the right of public place dwellers to their outdoor lifestyle and providing forms of managed and serviced camps.

### **The Problem of Finding Separate Living Areas for Different Tribal and Cultural Groups**

Many Aboriginal people have a settlement tradition of residing in sub-camps, each of which is generally occupied by an aggregate of domiciliary groups possessing some common social identity and characteristic social structure. (These camping arrangements can be called ‘socio-spatial patterns’ or structures ... see Memmott 2002B.) Historically, the decision about which part of a campsite a group should occupy was normally made by the local Traditional Owners of the camp. In post-contact times, the process of sedentary life and the associated formation of Town Camps have generally been characterised by some continuity in these patterns, especially when Aboriginal people have had some degree of choice about where they might camp.

In contrast, the random imposition of unregulated groupings of different Aboriginal peoples on residential settings by non-Aboriginal authorities constitutes what is a historically recognised trigger for social difficulties. This was certainly the research finding made by the author (P.M.) in Alice Springs during the 1980s, where Tangentyere Council managed 19 town camps whose residents were affiliated with some 15 or more language groups from Central Australia. Tangentyere staff asserted that visitor behaviour constituted a major (if not the major) source of problems in the Town Camps. Within Tangentyere Council, there existed an ideal that each camp should preferably consist of families with close kinship ties and with leaders who were respected as such by the camp residents. However once members married into other language groups, foreign visitors tended to accumulate and

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form satellite sub-groups. Much of the alcohol-related violence was attributed to conflicts between these various sub-groups.

As a result of the 1990 Alice Springs River Campers Study, it was recommended that Tangentyere's Customary Law leaders needed support in their efforts to revive and maintain traditional camping rules. These rules allocated camping places according to principles including social group identity, the geographic origins of groups, and attachment to sacred sites. It was deemed necessary to apply them to both Town Campers and river campers, especially to new arrivals or to those moving camp. This provision was made in consideration that it was undesirable to change stable patterns, but that some ongoing conflicts between various groups must also be taken into account, as well as movement due to death and other reasons. A corollary to the previous was the need to support the recognition of Aboriginal camping patterns and principles in town planning (the need for tribal zones, house clustering and adequate distancing between such clusters).

An example of a settlement pattern related to inter-marriage, which is worth some comment to indicate the extreme social impacts that can eventuate, is the Yardgee residential sector in Halls Creek, Western Australia, and its demise (Memcott 1991A). In the mid-1980s, Yardgee comprised 22 houses, which were located in a small enclave near the centre of town on an old Aboriginal reserve. They were in a high-density layout and occupied predominantly by Kija people, a local Traditional Owner group. On the outskirts of Halls Creek was 'Dinner Camp', an informal and illegal campsite used by Aboriginal visitors to Halls Creek, all of whom came from Western Desert communities to the south, including Billiluna, Mulan, Balgo, Yuendumu, Nyirripi, Papunya and Kintore. There were only a few permanent and semi-permanent campers there; it was an itinerant's camp. Dinner Camp had a reputation for being a venue for heavy drinking and it was largely populated by groups of travelling single men. It was estimated that between 10 to 30 people camped there on most nights; this number increasing to 50 or 80 during the wet season or football carnivals, and becoming as high as 150 during race week.

Following the development of intimate relationships between some young Kija women and Western Desert men, a steady incursion of Western Desert visitors into Yardgee occurred via Dinner Camp. During 1989 and 1990, the Kija tenants lost control of their housing, and eventually after much violence 18 of the 22 houses were left deserted, smashed, vandalised and boarded up by the State Housing Authority. Yardgee was reduced to a ghetto, while Dinner Camp continued to be patronised by the visitors. In trying to develop an approach to what was called the 're-growing' of Yardgee, or the management of the visitors' camping behaviour in Halls Creek, the consultant (Memcott) explored the possibility of Traditional Owner Elders revitalising their customary authority and 'cementing' any preferred camping arrangement in Aboriginal Law. This, it was supposed, would give Yardgee a chance to renew itself. Concern was expressed by the Kija and Jaru Elders about the inter-mixing of the desert people with their own people in Halls Creek. It was agreed that the desert people could visit town, but that they should camp separately on the western side, this being the direction of their approach (a traditional sociospatial principle). The consultant recommended that any ongoing work on this project should capitalise on the decision-making capacity of the group of local Traditional Owner Elders.

The same type of mechanism has been proposed at Port Hedland where Elders are reported as having wanted to sanction Aboriginal visitors according to customary law (Hale 1996:30).

There is no shortage in the literature of examples of town camp visitor and itinerant situations that illustrate the need for principles of sociospatial planning to be enacted in certain residential locations. Two separate consulting reports completed during 1985 in Katherine mention it. Wigley (1985:11) identified twelve to twenty different socio-territorial groupings in and near Katherine, and argued that it was critical to provide a number of different living areas that supported the physical differentiation preferred by different Aboriginal people. Aboriginal representatives had repeatedly asked for small camping areas to be made available to accommodate visitors to Katherine from the outlying regions, in geographic locations related appropriately to the town centre (Wigley 1985:56). Loveday and Lea (1985) recorded town camp visitors in Katherine as either staying in separate groups or 'sleeping anywhere' because they did not know people well. Problems arose when two or more large groups of visitors came to Katherine because there was only one designated transient camp (Loveday and Lea 1985).

In the late 1980s the Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority in WA had stated in a policy document that when planning 'satellite camping grounds', "more than one camp may be required to cater for linguistically or culturally distinct groups which have well established camping patterns around towns" (Irvine 1991:14). A more recent consulting report from Cairns describes two identifiable groups of 'parkies', with members either (originally) from the East or the West Cape York communities. Those from the East Cape York region were found to generally reside around Fogarty Fountain Park and the Alluna Hostel Area, while those from the West Cape York area occupied land around the Water Street Munro Martin Park and the railway yards (Dillon & Savage 1994).

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## **Housing Units for Redfern Squatters**

During the mid-1980s, the Redfern Black Theatre building became derelict and then the residence of a large group of Aboriginal 'goomies' (seven died in the first half of 1989). The Black Theatre building eventually burnt down due to a squatter's fire and the remains were demolished. From 1990, the core drinking group was re-housed either at the new Mac Silva Centre, in Housing Commission flats or in alternate accommodation. There were also a significant number of overnight emergency facilities for street drinkers in existence in South Sydney. These 'proclaimed places' were supervised facilities where intoxicated people could sleep, such as St Vincent de Paul. The Mac Silva Centre, was established in Wellington Street, Redfern, and consisted of 3 three-bedroom departmental housing units allocated for homeless Aboriginal people with alcohol problems. The Centre worked under an ideology of self-help where people voluntarily engaged in rehabilitation. The recurring cost of running the Mac Silva Centre was covered by funding from Aboriginal Hostels.

In 1992, it was alleged that members of the Black Theatre mob were experiencing problems with the rules at the Mac Silva Centre. Its coordinator at that time commented: "Well certainly we do have rules and the rules are very strict that there is no alcohol allowed on the premises and this tends to turn people away, those who want to have their grog." Other complaints raised during a particular meeting were that the hostel did not allow children to reside there and that the television was turned off at 10.30pm. The following description of the problems involved in making the transition from homelessness to residing in the Mac Silva Centre was given by squatter, Lennie Bolt:

"Mr Bolt, who squatted for more than 10 years in the theatre, said he was glad but apprehensive about the transition by 12 long-term squatters to the houses in Wellington Street [Mac Silva Centre] ... Since moving in just after Christmas, their health has improved and families have been reunited. Mr Bolt is now living with his children in one of the two-bedroom houses .. Mr Bolt said the main problem was trying to cope with alcoholism ... 'The Government seem to expect us to just fit in right away and stop drinking ... People are jumping out of their heads trying to cope because they're so far into alcoholism – myself included'." (Cited in Memmott 1994:35.)

## **Halls Creek Visitors' Camp Proposals**

In the early 1990s, a proposal for Halls Creek was made by Memmott (1991A) regarding the establishment of three managed camps. These were for visitors respectively from the Balgo, Billiluna and Mulan communities, and were to replace the informal Dinner Camp. The primary goal to be achieved by establishing the camps was to raise environmental health standards. The minimum standards for services that was required therefore included water and plumbing fixtures, toilets, shelter, fuel, rubbish disposal, telephone, lighting, landscaping, and other facilities (storeroom, cleaning equipment).

The consultant recommended that during the planning process, the three client Councils (Balgo, Mulan, Billiluna) develop their own management plans, which were to incorporate rules about: (a) preferred drinking and camping styles; (b) the eligibility criteria for campers (i.e. Origin); (c) the appointment of a caretaker (possibly using CDEP), to carry out a range of specific duties; and (d) the contracting of a service agency in Halls Creek to carry out any necessary servicing to the camp. The role of being a full-time caretaker in such a camp was seen to be very demanding, and Councils would have been required to choose their candidates carefully. Another of their considerations was the relationship between the police and the camps. They had to consider if there was either a desire for regular police patrols or for intermittent visits when the police were called by the caretaker or through a complainant. It was recommended that the planning process also include a component whereby the Community Councils negotiate a mutually acceptable arrangement with the police with respect to campers' behaviour in public places.

At the time of writing this report, the problems as described above, were more or less continuing. Little has been done at Dinner Camp apart from the provision of rubbish drums. (p.c. F.S. 2/12/02.)

## **Accommodation for Musgrave Park Drinkers**

A research study undertaken during the mid-1990s provides the following information on accommodation options for Musgrave Park itinerants in Brisbane. The Musgrave Park Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Corporation administered several accommodation establishments that were all within easy walking distance of Musgrave Park. People were given a choice between hostel accommodation for 12 to 14 elderly people (the Born Free Club); four

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flats run by the Corporation; and another hostel with 40 single rooms and a 10-bed dormitory. People were provided with meals and laundry facilities, and assisted to maintain their health and hygiene (see Hope Street profile in this report).

“The people who were previously living in the park made the decisions about the range of accommodation needed, which the corporation then worked to implement by preparing and submitting for grants. Before the corporation was formed, some people lived in other hostels near the park, however the people found that the rules and regulations of the hostels were too strict and that they were being charged too much for what was being offered.” (Hale 1996:22.)

When a range of options, whose character they had planned and agreed to and whose rules for occupation they had participated in setting, were offered to park dwellers many considered it not worthwhile to continue living in the park. They felt welcome in their new accommodation. The people continued to visit the park on a daily basis for drinking and socialising but did not live there (Hale 1996:22,23).

In 2002 the Musgrave Park Aboriginal Corporation (MPAC) owned and managed two accommodation facilities for homeless Aboriginal people, the Bowman Johnson Hostel in West End and a block of flats at Yeronga. MPAC was the only organisation in Brisbane, outside of Aboriginal Hostels, that provided accommodation specifically for homeless Indigenous people. (p.c Dulcie Bronsch, MPAC, 26/11/02.)

## **Report of a Safe House and Town Camp for Transients in Ceduna**

A 1996 research report states that in Ceduna, a focal point for a transient population of Aboriginal people from remote communities in South Australia, there was a house supervised by an unpaid person (who received free rent) providing safe haven for people who had previously been camping out. They were free to come and go as they pleased (there were no strict rules or restrictions). It was seen as a temporary measure until both the campers and the Aboriginal community, through the auspices of the Town Camp Authority (TCA) and the Council, could make decisions about long-term accommodation options. The TCA wanted to consider carefully the types of accommodation that would best suit people’s needs. For example, they were looking at open, canvassed spaces for people to live and sleep in, if their preference differed from standard housing options (Hale 1996:27-29).

More recently, a Ceduna town camp development was initiated as a transitional housing measure. It was to accommodate people from the Yalata community, approximately 200km to the west of Ceduna, who would come into town to use services and businesses. There were certain social problems associated with this group of visitors, including excessive or inappropriate alcohol consumption. The town camp was established to provide low cost accommodation alternatives. (p.c. Baker 2002.)

“Accommodation and integrated service needs of transient and homeless Anangu in Ceduna are being addressed after extensive consultation with Anangu residents and local service providers. A strategy has been developed that drew upon experiences of Aboriginal homeland movement on and around the Far West Coast, and wet and dry areas in Alice Springs.” (S.A., Dept of Human Services 2001.)

The Ceduna-based Community Development and Liaison Officer was reported to be assisting in the establishment of:

- “Culturally appropriate accommodation and habitat for residents and transient Anangu people on the new homeland.
- A medical step-down facility for needy and unwell Anangu people.
- A project officer to develop a Substance Abuse Strategy.
- A mobile Assistance Program.
- Aboriginal management for the Sobering-Up Unit.
- The need for a safety house for vulnerable Aboriginal women, children and frail aged people is being assessed ..” (S.A. Dept of Human Services 2001.)

Stage one of the Ceduna Town Camp included the construction of an amenity block and an undercover outdoor area for residents. A second stage was to involve the construction of single and double unit-style living areas, and related amenities and ablution blocks. (AHA 2001.)

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## **Proposal for a Trial Town Camp in Mt Isa**

In Mt Isa, Durnan found that many of the river dwellers whom he interviewed wanted to be able to camp cheaply and safely in the open on the riverbed or elsewhere in Mt Isa. The interviewees believed that such designated camps needed showers, toilets, rain protection, freedom from police interference, and an on-site caretaker to ensure safety. They identified the need for appropriate spacing between different camping groups. (Durnan 2001:10.)

Durnan proposed that an arrangement be negotiated with existing campers in the central area of the river that would restrict their public drinking and camping to a temporary, designated area. Stakeholders would then be approached regarding the creation of an interim camping place for homeless or transient people (particularly those of Doomadgee origin) in a central location. This would be done as an experiment over a fixed period (Durnan 2001:17-19.)

Over an extended period of time, he proposed that suitable areas be leased or purchased for town camps and allocated basic facilities for Aboriginal homeless and transient campers. These camps would need to be sited in consultation with the users. It would also be necessary that residential areas within these camps belonging to different groups be appropriately spaced. Rules governing the camps were to be firmly administered. Campers were to be encouraged to move on to other accommodation options after a defined period of time. (Durnan 2001:30.) Durnan also recommended (2001:31) that an adequately resourced Aboriginal Night Patrol be developed to support the establishment of such transient camps.

In addition, Durnan (2001:28,29) recommended a range of other accommodation services: rationalisation of shelter services; provision of greater assistance to tenants; provision of housing with on-site caretakers or managers; provision of gated or compound type accommodation; provision of accommodation with associated security patrols; and provision of emergency, crisis and specialist accommodation for groups such as medical patients, students, recovering alcoholics, domestic violence victims and homeless youth.

[Note that supported camps have previously operated in Mt Isa. For example, the Old Ballyana Hall, which was located on the riverbank until the early 1990s and was used as a camping place for a number of years. A resident caretaker provided various forms of assistance to campers. (Durnan 2001:11.)]

## **Accommodation Options for Cairns**

The major problem for the 'parkies' in Cairns was found to be a lack of suitable accommodation and ablution facilities. The lack of available adequate shelter during the wet season was one of their main concerns, as well as limited access to toilet and shower blocks. Itinerant men could at times wash in the surrounding waterways, however it was considered culturally inappropriate for the women to do so. Harassment from police and security service personnel was also a concern, with the 'parkies' wanting to be free of this attention. "The message is that they want a dry, secure place to sleep, but without have to give up some [desirable] aspects of their current lifestyle." (Dillon & Savage 1994:6.)

Dillon and Savage (1994) suggested a wide range of accommodation options in response to the identified needs of the Cairns 'parkies', but unfortunately no rationale for selecting between these was provided. The options comprise temporary camping facilities adapted from sheds and imported pre-fabricated ablution and office units, and permanent camping facilities (for east and west Cape York groups). Also suggested was conversion of a workshop site for emergency accommodation, and increasing the crisis accommodation capacity of existing facilities. Further options included: purchase of flats, a boarding house and a caravan park; establishment of a night refuge and hostel facilities; and the provision of culturally appropriate housing to accommodate extended families and visitors. Dillon and Savage recommended that community Councils in Cape York individually manage some accommodation units in Cairns for their respective peoples.

In a report on the Cairns 'parkies', Dillon and Savage (1994) also advocated the establishment of a daycare or drop-in facility providing activity programs, ablution and laundry facilities, and games and recreation areas for Indigenous 'parkies'. They promoted the idea of installing lockable storage facilities in this Centre, as well as in other places where itinerants were interested in participating in recreational or craft activities. The idea of storage places in which homeless people can leave their belongs has been implemented more recently (in late 1999) by

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the Brisbane City Council at South Brisbane (refer to 'The Physical Design of Public Spaces – Kurilpa Point Storage Shelves, Brisbane' section of this report).

## **Accommodation Options for Darwin**

Memcott and Fantin's report on the Darwin 'Long Grassers' (2001:86) recommended the provision of a range of diverse accommodation options that would be appropriate for Darwin given the size and complexity of its itinerant and visitor population, and given the range of accommodation requests and proposals that had come from the Aboriginal itinerants interviewed.

A key problem that was identified involved the difficulty in finding suitable land on which to situate any accommodation proposal. There appeared to be general political opposition to having more land allocated for town camps or transient camps. The report's authors (Memcott & Fantin 2001: 86-87) recommended that future development control plans and land use planning proposals for Darwin take itinerant and town camp needs into consideration. They also asserted that the NT Government must ensure that extant town camps, operating under special use lease agreements, do not have them revoked or resumed, so as not to exacerbate the accommodation shortage. The design of rental accommodation was considered to be important to any strategy addressing the accommodation needs of homeless Indigenous people in Darwin. It had to be culturally appropriate and cater for extended family groups and Aboriginal living practices.

The Darwin 'long grasser' report, in conjunction with the stakeholder workshops that were run, developed a number of accommodation proposals to assist Indigenous itinerants in the short to long-term. Its short-term options included: supported or transitional housing for those not immediately able to manage 'mainstream' housing; extended sobering-up shelter facilities with daycare facilities attached; a managed camp; and a safe house alternative to the sobering-up shelter. The latter would be staffed by people with an effective level of cultural authority and provide an appropriate environment for breaking the alcohol abuse cycle. The short- to medium-term accommodation options that were suggested included hostels and health-related residences. As for the mid- to long-term, options were suggested such as single men's and boarding house-style residences, flats, upgrading of existing accommodation and facilities in town camps, and appropriately designed housing for extended or larger families.

One outstanding need was that of suitable Aboriginal single men's accommodation, of both managed and unmanaged types. No facilities of this type were available in Darwin at that time. It was suggested that a single men's housing scheme should help young men reduce their welfare dependency and encourage them to be responsible for themselves.

In order to address the issues raised by their 2001 report, Memcott, Fantin and the project's Management Committee proposed the establishment of four 'working parties', one of which was to be an Itinerant's Accommodation Working Group. This would achieve stronger coordination, networking and collaboration between agencies.

## **Accommodation at Port/ South Hedland**

The Hedland Homeless Support Service (HHSS) provides crisis accommodation to clients in need, organised through its Outreach Workers. Clients who access the crisis accommodation are required to participate in a Support Plan. The Service has developed a working relationship with the WA Ministry of Housing, which assists clients in seeking rental accommodation. HHSS also utilises the hostel managed by the Bloodwood Tree Association, which can provide medium-term accommodation for clients who are accessing the Ministry of Housing for longer-term housing. Clients are also able to access the Hedland Women's Refuge if required.

Many clients, given appropriate support, are successful in either obtaining alternative accommodation or transport to another location. At the client's request, the outreach workers will contact an outlying community to assess the availability of accommodation there. Transport can be arranged to such a community by various means, for example, through an agency such as Community Health, which regularly conducts visits to various outlying communities.

Over the period in which people are utilising short-term emergency accommodation, support and other practical assistance is provided in the form of meals, shower and laundry facilities, local transportation, telephone facilities (supervised), information on community resources, and referrals if required. The Transitional Housing Assistance

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Project provides clients with assistance in acquiring long-term rental accommodation and an understanding of its requirements, including 'homemaker' skills (i.e. cooking, cleaning, basic furniture) and training and education in budgeting. (Port Hedland ... Group 2002.)

## **Accommodation for Women in Victoria**

Homeless women with children are generally treated as a priority in the range of Indigenous accommodation options. For example, in Melbourne there are two services specifically for women: a free Aboriginal women's refuge provided by SAAP and a 'user-pays' hostel (Aboriginal Hostels) which does not have support staff (Berry et al 2001:59).

The Bairnsdale Koorie Women's Shelter was established in 1987 and was originally called "Willaneen Women's Shelter." The shelter provides a service to both Koorie and non-Koorie women, and in so doing promotes reconciliation and enhances the wider community's understanding of the issues Koories face in their everyday lives. The location of the shelter is not hidden from the public, as are most traditional women's shelters. The shelter provides crisis accommodation and an outreach service, which assists with matters such as court appearances. The priority of the shelter is to first provide safe accommodation and then deal with other issues. The shelter ran a camp in 1996 called the 'Mother and Daughter Life Education Camp', and were planning to hold further camps concerned with spiritual healing and life skills needed to cope with crises and the stress of everyday living. (Solomon 1988:11.)

## **Housing Needs for Homeless Young People in Rockhampton**

Olive (1992:24), when carrying out research on both crisis and rental accommodation in Rockhampton for homeless Aboriginal people, reported that young women in particular were reluctant to use services of this nature not run by other Aborigines. It was found that when they did use these services it was only for very short periods, and that communication between non-Indigenous staff and Aboriginal women was frequently problematic. Interviewees also indicated that when using accommodation services, particularly crisis accommodation, they often experienced discrimination from the other residents (Olive 1992:24). "Any response to the housing needs of Aboriginal young people must be Aboriginal-controlled or at least sensitive to Aboriginal requirements. The basic principal of self-determination is relevant to all parts of Aboriginal lives, including housing and the needs of young people." (Olive 1992:24.)

Olive concluded that "accommodation for young people who have exhausted extended living situations must be available. Separate accommodation for young males and females would be preferred." She also stated that a secure hostel for the sole use of Aboriginal women should be established, featuring private rooms and facilities for mothers with young children. This hostel should provide short-term, medium-term, and crisis accommodation. These services should be supplied at minimal cost in order to: provide overnight and longer-term accommodation; provide counselling; emphasise self-sufficiency with minimal supervision; help young people to be stable and find them permanent accommodation; and provide ongoing and accessible support. (Olive 1992:24,25.)

## **Youth Accommodation**

In most Indigenous communities in Australia, young adults and teenagers are able to obtain accommodation within a range of households occupied by their extended family. Residential mobility between such households is accepted as customary and normal (Victoria 2002:19). However, there are a growing number of Indigenous youth, living particularly in metropolitan settings, who are not only dysfunctional with respect to their own social behaviour but come from largely dysfunctional families. It is this group who may not be able to access stable, extended family accommodation and who may eventually become public space dwellers. A negligible amount of research has been conducted to document, clarify and quantify this problem. There is a clear distinction to be made between the residential mobility of youth that is normal and desirable according to Aboriginal cultural standards, and that which is the result of disintegrating relationships in the home. The latter is characterised by an increase in personal problems and the level of conflict with others, that culminates in a situation where the young person no longer wishes to, or is not welcome to, reside with relatives (Henry and Daly 2001, Victoria 2002). Berry et al (2001:56) highlight the relationship between youth homelessness, ill health and destructive behaviours.

An example of a crisis accommodation facility targeted at Indigenous youth is the Meerindoo Youth Hostel located in Bairnsdale, Victoria. It provides services and programs for both Koorie and non-Koorie youth within a framework of Koorie culture and knowledge. When Meerindoo was established its aim was to provide crisis

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accommodation for 15 to 19 year old youth in East Gippsland. It has since developed and provides a number of integrated programs. Meerindoo has a relationship with the East Gippsland Aboriginal Co-operative that has assisted in the development of its service. The 12-bed hostel is staffed over 24 hours. It also offers community based living options, such as its integrated life skills program. This features three key elements. The first is a Wilderness Program, which is operated on a 37-acre property by a Koorie coordinator. This program provides an opportunity for selected youth to learn about Koorie culture and engage in developing their self-confidence. The second component is a practical skills course of making and maintaining equipment used by the Wilderness Program and the third component is a philosophy of respect, which underlies all of Meerindoo's work. (anon. 1997:10.)

In Queensland, a program known as the 'Crucial Connection Program' targets young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness and whose mother is incarcerated. It aims to improve the connection of these young people with their extended family and community, and with employment and training opportunities. Culturally appropriate counselling is provided to young people, their mothers and families. The program includes an advocacy role raising the issues encountered by these young people with various organisations that impact on them. A 'Personal Support Program' assists women to achieve social and economic goals upon release. (Sisters Inside 2002.)

### **Transitional Housing for Homeless Families in Port Augusta**

South Australian regional centres such as Port Augusta and Port Lincoln are of special interest to those studying Aboriginal homelessness. Port Augusta is a regional centre to which many inland people gravitate for varying periods of time. There is a continual movement of people between outside communities and this centre, with some people staying for long periods, and others leaving and moving back to remote centres relatively quickly. In Port Augusta, 36 per cent of mainstream Housing Trust housing is occupied by Aboriginal families. This reflects both the level of need and the size of the Aboriginal population. Port Lincoln is another regional centre with a relatively large and mobile Aboriginal population. Over a number of years there have been discussions regarding resources being made available for a targeted service or program in Port Lincoln, but nothing has eventuated.

In Port Augusta the Salvation Army ran a SAAP-funded operation targeting homeless people. They found that there were numerous at-risk Aboriginal families containing above average numbers of children, and there was an identifiable need for appropriate accommodation for them. The Housing Trust transformed four duplexes into houses of the required size. They broke through the walls common to a number of the duplexes in order to create a five-bedroom house. The completed houses were of a very high standard and the residents liked them. At the time the Housing Trust was trying to promote home ownership in the area and there was a great deal of interest in these houses as exemplary of what could be done with existing housing stock. The tenants were found to like the houses a great deal, however, one of the problems was that they were transitional, and there was a chance that when families moved into a more permanent residence it would be of a lower standard. These new properties said 'we care for you', they were clean and tidy, and they gave people a fresh start. (p.c. Dennis Hawkins, SA Dept of Human Services, 2/8/02.)

### **Possible Negative Aspects of Establishing Transient Camps**

A key research question, as yet not investigated, is whether the formation of transient camps and other camping facilities in regional centres might actually attract more remote Aboriginal people into them, with the eventual result being a growth in the number of town camps. The authors determined that no objective research studies of this phenomenon have been conducted. However, where environmental health problems combine with the established practice of long-term visiting of relatives, as engaged in by many Aboriginal people, some sort of accommodation facility like this must be considered.

The only logical way to counter this drift of population into regional centres is to provide appropriate facilities, resources and programs in home communities. Recreation, employment and training opportunities, in addition to more traditional cultural activities, are required to counteract boredom. However, even if strategies for upgrading the facilities in remote communities were implemented, the lure of alcohol remains. What is of greatest concern is the likelihood of ongoing and increased alcohol abuse and alcohol-related violence amongst visiting people if town camp facilities are provided. Assuming that remote communities have no intention of establishing their own licensed canteen or social club, the most promising strategy for urban accommodation facilities would also incorporate alcohol tolerance and prevention strategies, and environmental health components.

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## **Final Note on Accommodation**

A knowledge of the social structure and cultural identity of Indigenous public place dwelling groups is required to understand their needs and social dynamics when providing separate accommodation areas in accordance with traditional sociospatial structures (Memmott 2002B). Types of accommodation exemplified in the foregoing case studies comprise housing units, safe houses, town camps, temporary visitors' camps, hostels, flats, boarding houses, large and extended family houses, and hostels attached to hospitals.

It can be seen from the above case study analyses that there is a defined need to provide or ensure access to a range of accommodation types. These facilities have to be supported by varying degrees of management and security, and must suit a range of culturally-derived lifestyles. In light of this, Durkay et al (2001:17) recommended the "development of more community and crisis accommodation options for Aboriginal people such as cooperatives, cluster housing, sobering-up centres, and a continuum of accommodation from short to long-term."

When planning a sequence of supported accommodation - from crisis facilities, to medium- and longer-term solutions and eventually to mainstream public housing - an onus is placed on housing authorities and agencies to ensure that there are effective connections between each stage of this sequence. If such strategies for moving people successfully through the system are not in place, the likely result will be clients returning to earlier stages of accommodation (Hamann 1999:20) and possibly to public places.

Providing targeted accommodation facilities for Aboriginal public place dwellers usually brings with it a formidable range of local political problems. These can include the fear felt by local residents, which sometimes results in discrimination on their part, and the potentially negative reaction by local politicians. Obtaining suitable land is another obstacle. There is a need to overcome this latter problem through a more proactive approach to urban planning that will ensure suitable land is set aside when development opportunities arise. Similar problems would be expected with the establishment of dedicated service centres or gathering places.

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## DEDICATED SERVICE CENTRES AND GATHERING PLACES

Research on Indigenous people in metropolitan centres has revealed that they have always had regular meeting or gathering places where those arriving from remote communities can find peer group support while orientating themselves to city life.<sup>1</sup> For example, Aboriginal people told the W.A. State Homelessness Taskforce in 2001 that there has

“...always been a high value on central meeting grounds and gathering places. In the Perth inner city, this involves several central parks. The Nyoongar Alcohol and Substance Abuse Service, Aboriginal Medical and Legal services are also located within these areas. Over the years these localities have become well known places to meet relatives, have a yarn, socialise, and to rest and for some, a place to sleep. Only a small percentage of the people who go to these central places are said to be homeless.”

Providing meals to homeless people at their gathering places in parks and other public places is a fundamental and humane service that in the past has been carried out largely by charitable organisations such as St Vincent de Paul and the Salvation Army. There is potential in situations where food is distributed to promote ‘capacity building’. A service provider could take advantage of such a concentrated gathering of clients to establish a working relationship with them and provide more pro-active services aimed at improving the itinerants’ quality of life.

More ambitious facilities, which follow in case study examples, involve the provision of a building with a set of internal and external spaces, in which a range of services can be offered whilst public place dwellers gather and socialise.

### Food Provision Services

The most common food distribution services appear to be mobile food vans that can shift their location and times of service in response to changing clients needs or imposed pressures from public or local authorities. One example servicing Indigenous people is the Ecumenical Coffee Brigade in Brisbane, a mobile morning coffee and sandwich service that operates in the Brisbane inner city locations of Fortitude Valley, Albert Park, the Botanical Gardens and Kurilpa Point (also a park) (Coleman 2000:15). A second example, which also services predominantly Indigenous peoples, is the St Vincent de Paul’s Bakhita Centre in Darwin, whose volunteers run a mobile food drop-off service which operated in two locations, one near the airport and one opposite the Northern Territory’s Parliament House. In 2001, this service reached up to 70 or 80 people depending on the season. The meal that was provided includes sandwiches, a piece of fruit and a cup of tea or coffee. Before the Council revoked the charity’s permit after receiving a number of unspecified complaints, the service also operated at a park area called Rapid Creek. St Vincent de Paul believes the complaints involved the anti-social behaviour of homeless people using the park. (Memmott & Fantin 2001:App.2.)

The opportunity to extend operation beyond a food provision service has been taken up by the Hedland Homeless Support Service, which provides its predominantly Aboriginal clients with a breakfast service three days a week. The breakfast program is a starting point for support and assistance, whereby clients are served in a friendly, non-threatening atmosphere and provided with easy access to outreach workers and community information. The following services are simultaneously offered:

- Basic nutritional requirements;
- Education sessions;
- Alcohol and other drug information;
- Community awareness sessions;
- Case management and referrals;
- Children’s activities;
- Assistance with food preparation;
- Hygiene information; and

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<sup>1</sup> For example see Memmott (1994) for Redfern, Memmott (.....) for Alice Springs.

- Minor medical assistance. (Port Hedland ... Group 2002.)

The venue is used to provide clients with the opportunity to meet Outreach Workers and familiarise themselves with the mainstream service options available to them. Many of the regular clients have subsequently gained the confidence required to access these services without assistance.

## **Toonooba Day Activity Centre, Rockhampton**

The Toonooba Aboriginal Community Centre was established in the early 1990s to serve a group of informal riverbank drinkers in Rockhampton who were disadvantaged Aboriginal and Islander people abusing alcohol and at times subject to police abuse. Their plight was highlighted in the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (1991). The Centre was located in a timber building located on the southern bank of the Fitzroy River, close to the centre of the city. The site was covered in large trees and there was an attractive view of the river where many small boats were moored. The building had Aboriginal murals painted over it. Entry to the Centre was off the street at the river's edge. Visitors first entered into a complex of rooms containing a range of facilities for the drinkers group, such as a TV room with reading materials; an area for church services (altar); a kitchenette with stove; a surgery (regularly visiting doctor); and an office with manager.

The doctor carried out practical surgery (stitching wounds), a Hepatitis program, pap smears, blood tests, and other health checks. Sometimes people were referred to hospital. The drinkers received free coffee, tea and sugar, and there was a voucher system for distributing food. The Centre obtained donations of food and clothes [presumably through the church]. On the lower part of the bank, out of sight of the middle of the street, was a terrace that extended underneath the main building. It provided a space that was partly outdoors and partly roofed in which the 'riverbank drinkers' could informally gather. The facilities here included a shower, a toilet, washing tubs and clotheslines, hearths, a barbecue, a music system and darts equipment.

Up to 30 people gathered here every day to socialise and drink alcohol. These people had an understanding that they were not permitted to sleep at the site (the upstairs office was unattended after hours). However, it was reported that some people slept there on occasion. Most of the members of the group were from such Central Queensland rural areas as Daringa, Dingo, and Woorabinda. Police attended a community meeting held at the Centre once a month.

It is believed that Toonooba was managed by the Careforce Group from within the Anglican Diocese. The authors are not certain as to exactly why it ceased operation, but what is known is that its being used in the past as a morgue would have greatly restricted its use by Aboriginal people (Gartlan 1992-3:31). The current authors have no evaluation study of this facility, but it would appear to be something of a model for a successful Day Activity Centre serving an itinerants' group.

## **Hope Street, South Brisbane**

For many years Musgrave Park Aboriginal Corporation (MPAC) has operated a service and drop-in centre in South Brisbane for Aboriginal homeless people. The centre is located on the edge of Brisbane's CBD and is very close to public spaces used by Aboriginal people, in particular Musgrave Park and Kurilpa Point. The centre is locally known by the name of the street on which it is located – 'Hope Street'.

A mass migration of Aboriginal people from reserves to Brisbane commenced in the late 1960s and continued into the 1970s. South Brisbane was the focal point of this migration with many new arrivals heading to Musgrave Park and other public spaces in South Brisbane to meet up with friends and relatives. Although there is a strong history of Aboriginal identification with and use of the South Brisbane area, it was during the 1970s that Aboriginal people began living in places such as Musgrave Park. In response to the accommodation needs of people coming into Brisbane, the first Aboriginal run hostel, known as the 'Born Free Club', was established in 1974. In the late 1970s a food program for Aboriginal people living in public spaces, known as the Park Feeding Program, commenced operation out of the kitchen of the Aboriginal medical centre in Grey Street, South Brisbane. Aboriginal people in Musgrave Park began talking about setting up an independent facility to operate the food service and to provide other services for homeless people and as a result the MPAC was established in 1984. MPAC has been run by an Aboriginal board and has been staffed by Aboriginal people. (p.c Dulcie Broncsh 26/11/02.)

Since 1984 MPAC has supplied breakfast and lunch for Indigenous public place dwellers, five days a week. Shower and clothes washing facilities have been provided, as well as spare clothes for those needing a change of

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clothes. In 2002, two buses were used to transport clients. For example, people were transported to appointments with other services. To ensure that people make appointments, Hope Street has kept a record of appointments for clients. During 2000-2002, the Indigenous Community Health Service operated a clinic out of Hope Street one day a week and St Luke's Nursing Service operated a clinic for a half day a week. The health services came to Hope Street because the clients would not go to them. Centrelink has also visited Hope Street once a week. In 2002, the Mater Hospital seconded an Aboriginal Health worker to follow-up on patient care. Other services that have an association with Hope Street are: West End Mental Health, Drug Arm and Community Options. (p.c Dulcie Bronsch 26/11/02.)

Over the last 18 years MPAC has occupied three different premises, all within the South Brisbane Area. Because MPAC does not operate an outreach service it has always sought premises that are highly accessible to their clients. (p.c Dulcie Bronsch 26/11/02.)

## **A Proposed Day Activity Centre in Redfern**

In the early 1990s, a group of Aboriginal drinkers made daily visits to the Redfern Black Theatre site on Cope Street and convivially engaged in social alcohol consumption. Unfortunately, at times they did so to the point of intoxication and some of their number occasionally harassed passers-by. ATSIC owned the vacant land on which they gathered, but wished to develop it. Research was carried out on what the impact such a redevelopment would have on the drinkers (Memmott 1994).

In 1994 the drinkers prepared a petition to the South Sydney Council requesting that a park be developed on the Cope Street site, which they considered 'their land'. The drinkers stated that they required a shelter for wet weather, toilets (especially for women to urinate in), a drinking water supply, showers, a barbecue and a firewood supply. They emphasised the centrality of the site in relation to other services in the area that they required ("close to everything") and their desire to continue using the site. They also said they needed to be off the street to provide them with a degree of protection from the police. The 'other services' that they used in the area, included:

- take-away liquor shop;
- take-away food outlets;
- the Redfern railway station as a venue for 'cadging';
- Rev Bill Bird's morning breakfast, shower and toilet service;
- Aboriginal Medical Service; and
- a good view of Aboriginal passers-by on Regent and Redfern Streets who may be engaged for gossip or cadging.

The drinkers maintained a consistent view that they wanted the site developed as a park for use by their group. The position of the non-Aboriginal Cope Street residents regarding the drinkers staying on the site also appeared to be one of support conditional on their social behaviour patterns being changed.

The debate about allocating a suitable place where an itinerant group can gather and consume alcohol invariably leads to the issue of whether the implementation of such a proposal merely supports their alcohol abuse. In this case, all Indigenous organisations emphasised the need to do something for the Cope Street drinkers and their desire that they not be pushed away or dispersed. The case for the drinkers having a gathering place was well supported, as they did not otherwise have access (as a group) to a formal drinking venue because of their disadvantaged state and culturally distinct behaviour (drinking style).

Local Indigenous organisations were committed to the development of a set of culturally appropriate services or supports for the 'Black Theatre Mob'. There was a strong feeling that this group should not be dispersed, marginalised or disadvantaged by the redevelopment process, and that their attachment to the existing site be respected. It was stated that Aboriginal people had, for many decades, suffered from forced dispersals and removals under colonial governments. The Indigenous organisations did not want to perpetuate this type of action.

While it was recognised that the drinking style of many from this group was harmful to their health, a number of other factors were simultaneously understood. They would not readily be persuaded to give up drinking; they had developed their own sub-culture of drinking; and they had a right to a meeting and gathering place that was

culturally appropriate to their needs. Accepting these tenets, two alternate courses of action were possible. Either the drinkers would be formally accommodated on the site by any redevelopment, or negotiations would be held to convince them to move to an alternate, suitable location.

The workshop group that was convened came to agree that an appropriate proposal could follow very closely the model provided by the Toonooba Community Centre in Rockhampton. This would involve finding and obtaining a suitable block of land in, or close to, Redfern, at which certain services, developed through negotiations with the leaders of the 'Black Theatre mob', would be provided. Such a support centre would not only serve as a focus for the group, but also provide a point from which to administer short- and long-term support programs such as: (i) alcohol counselling; (ii) health checks (Hepatitis, V.D., Aids, vital organ failure etc.); (iii) banking and food voucher services; (iv) lunches; (v) second-hand clothes; (vi) structured meetings with police, if necessary; (vii) employment programs; (viii) accommodation referrals (the site would not be used for sleeping at night); and (ix) excursions to bush camps for varying periods to engage in alternate activities and 'dry out'. It was suggested that some sort of Aboriginal and/or Christian ceremony be planned with the 'Mob', to mark the occasion of moving from the old site to the new. This would be done out of respect for those who had died on the old site, and to facilitate a type of 'square up' between the Redfern Community, the Black Theatre Committee and the 'Mob'. As far as the current authors are able to determine, this proposal never came to fruition.

## **The New Farm Park Designated Space Trial**

The New Farm Park 'designated space' was the site of a Brisbane City Council (BCC) response to pressure from local residents and community groups to move out a group of Indigenous people, who were long-term users of the park. The activities conducted in the park by this group included: sleeping, meeting with friends and relatives, and social alcohol consumption. The complainants were concerned about certain impacts felt as a result of the behaviour of this group of park users, such as noise, bad language, litter accumulation and alcohol consumption. Rather than displace this group and their activities to some other public space, the BCC decided to trial a 'designated space' in the park for their use. The BCC recognised that public spaces in Brisbane are significant spaces for "Indigenous people to meet and sustain traditional, historic and/or social relationships." (BCC 2000:5.) The aims of the three-month trial were:

- (i) to provide a safer space for New Farm Park Users (sleeping out) with improved access to shelter (basic amenities) and support services;
- (ii) to reduce the impact of homelessness in New Farm Park for nearby residents; and
- (iii) to raise local residents' awareness about homelessness and needs of park users.

The space was enclosed by a screen fence made of shade cloth. Basic infrastructure that was provided included: toilets, a barbecue, rubbish bins, a shelter, seating, security lighting and a shower. The space was largely out of sight, so difficult to see from other parts of the Park. The Council funded a homeless support service to monitor the trial and provide daily assistance to the users. The BCC negotiated with the police to "improve safety by ensuring more frequent patrols during the night and day." (BCC 2000:3.)

The users perceived a number of positive attributes to the designated space being established. These included: the opportunity to socialise and support one another; access to toilets, showers and a covered area; freedom, fresh air and views of the stars; and improved safety. The bad aspects they perceived were too much fighting, visitor problems and too much supervision from police. (BCC 2000:8.) A Council Project Officer reported that there seemed to be a reduction in the number of incidents in the park and there was an increase in stability and a reduction in alcohol consumption amongst the 'parkies' (Eastgate 2001.)

The BCC's trial of park infrastructure in New Farm Park progressed for several months but was terminated earlier than had been planned. This closure was partly the result of a strident campaign (rumoured to have been funded by local businesses) that forecast dramatic reductions in property values and mayhem in the streets because of the very visible presence of homeless people in the area. Several negative incidents in the local community, such as the burning down of a kiosk in the park where the trial was being held, were attributed to homeless people, and there were genuine fears for the safety of the people who were sleeping out in a well identified location. (Coleman 2001:192.)

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An Evaluation Study of the project made the following findings. The first aim, of providing a safer space with improved access to amenities and support services, was only partly fulfilled.

“...It is evident that crime did not increase due to the initiation of the designated space. However, safety was compromised when visitors became violent. The amenities provided were appropriate to users; and ... access to support services increased as a result of the trial” (BCC 2000:11).

The second aim was to reduce the impact of homelessness in New Farm Park on nearby residents. Residents indicated that the trial had partly reduced the impacts generated by park users. Residents continued to be most concerned with language, public alcohol consumption and violence (BCC 2000:3).

The third aim of raising local resident's awareness about homelessness and the needs of park users was fulfilled. However, negative media reports and the distribution of inaccurate and extreme views concerning homelessness by a group opposed to the trial contributed to community division concerning it. The media persisted in making an association between homelessness and crime in its reporting. The publicity attracted people to the site, some of whom harassed the space users (Eastgate 2001). Although residents became more aware of the needs of homeless people through the trial, it was in the end community pressure that led to the closure of the designated space. Most residents wanted the space closed down or moved elsewhere. In contrast most of the space users wanted Council to retain the space with additional support services. While 67 per cent of the space users reported the trial as positive, 52 per cent of local residents felt that the trial was negative (BCC 2000:16,17).

The BCC closed the space due to: concerns for the safety of the core group of users; community division concerning the trial and location of the spaces; the impacts on local residents such as noise and drinking; and public pressure expressed in the media and local community. The New Farm Park trial was clearly successful from the users' perspective, but it was clearly unsuccessful in terms of a wider acceptance from the community (Eastgate 2001). Eastgate confirmed that bad publicity meant that the Council had to shut it down.

The strategies employed by the BCC following the closure of the trial were to: provide support for the user group during the closure; negotiate with the Housing Department to provide alternative accommodation; develop homeless policy; and engage others to develop innovative responses to homelessness (BCC 2000:7,19).

Coleman (2001:193) commented in a positive note that “it is one small step towards a community that is more open and inclusive, and where the alternative meanings long-term homeless people give to the public spaces they use can be heard.” Another important outcome of the New Farm trial is that the BCC saw the importance of being able to get services more effectively to homeless people, either via a fixed service point as was tried at New Farm (and Toonooba) or through mobile field agencies. Eastwood of the BCC reported (2001) that “the council is striving to get a lot more support services to people where they are; getting mainstream service providers to go to people, rather than people coming to them.”

## **Proposal for a Transient Camp in Darwin**

In the Darwin 'Long Grassers' Report, Memmott and Fantin (2001:88) argued that the issues arising out of the New Farm Park Trial were typical of what one would expect to encounter in establishing a 'Transient Camp' for a group of itinerants in a place like Darwin. Unless a relatively private site could be located out of the public view, such a project would run the risk of attracting public complaints, media attention and consequent scrutiny from local and state politicians. The degree of the trial's success, from the user's perspective, suggests that the idea is still worth being attempted in Darwin, perhaps as a pilot project. It must be remembered that New Farm park is a spatially restricted park surrounded by medium to high-density suburbs (of a much higher density than exist in Darwin). Perhaps a site on an existing Town Camp would be the best option to explore in the first instance.

There are a number of existing Town Camp locations throughout the Darwin and Palmerston area and it is worth providing an overview of these. The land on which these Town Camps are established is defined by having some sort of recognised tenure over it. The record of the Town Camp's establishment and growth has been haphazard and often adversely affected by other property development concerns. The information presented here is drawn from the 'long grasser' report prepared by Memmott and Fantin in 2001, and the brief summary of events featured there. The Town Camps in Darwin include: Bagot Reserve, Kulaluk, Railway Dam and Knuckey's Lagoon. Bagot's Special Purpose Lease was established in 1938, but its area was reduced to more than twelve times less than its original size in 1965 to accommodate other, partly residential, developments. At Knuckey's Lagoon, Aboriginal people from many different remote communities are represented, particularly those from southern regions such as Katherine, Alice Springs and Tennant Creek. It has been a camping location since the early 1900s. Railway Dam

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Camp or One Mile, again recorded as a campsite since the early 1900s, was granted a Special Purpose Lease in 1978. After this the Aboriginal Development Foundation established some basic housing and infrastructure. This camp is inhabited predominantly by people from settlements to the south and west of Darwin.

An effort was made to establish two transient camps on Kulaluk Camp's lease. Its Special Purpose Lease had been established in 1979. In 1981 there was an application made to establish the transient camps. Development stalled until 1989 when Mimnarama Park was built. The maximum length of an initial stay at Minmarama Park was three months, but it quickly became a permanent Town Camp. (Wells 1995:76.)

There are many itinerant camp locations around Darwin and Palmerston. A 1991 review by Foote recorded their locations as: Vestseys Beach, Mindil Beach, Sailing Club Beach, Casino Creek, Casuarina Drive/Rapid Creek, Bill Sullivan Park, the Water Gardens, Ski Club Beach, and Harvey Street. Residing in these camps are Aboriginal people from the following communities: Maningrida, Milingimbi, Elcho Island, Yuendumu, Wave Hill, Bagot, Ramingining, Groote Eylandt, Kulaluk, Lajamanu, Queensland and WA. The 2001 itinerants study (Memmott & Fantin) found a similar range of groups at a similar set of locations, albeit with seasonal variations. 15-Mile Camp near Palmerston was successful in being nominated as a special camping area in 1979.

Any further attempts to establish an area specifically designated for itinerant camping on a Town Camp lease would have to take the Camp's existing population's concerns into account. It would be important to manage where people from outlying communities stayed in relation to the main Town Camp village. Therefore it may be necessary to establish a number of camping locations, either on the same lease or on different leases.

## **End Note on Gathering Places and Service Centres**

A range of precedents exist involving in-situ services for public place dwellers within those very gathering places where they dwell. The most politically acceptable of these are mobile food vans, however a number of semi-permanent solutions have been tried, the most notable being the Toonooba Day Activity Centre on the bank of the Fitzroy River in Rockhampton and the New Farm 'Designated Space' in the New Farm Park near the banks of the Brisbane River. This latter facility is one of the very few services reported in the current study for which there is a formal evaluation study. 'Hope Street' in South Brisbane is the longest running service centre (over 18 years) and it is located centrally in the urban locale of parks, sidewalks and vacant lots where its clients dwell. The Port Hedland Breakfast Service cleverly combines the attributes of the mobile food van with the in-situ service centre.

It can be seen that a range of service providers and local councils in Australia have, in contrast to the law and order crisis response of some local authorities, taken a proactive approach to the "acceptance and development of culturally appropriate gathering places in central areas" (Durkay et al 2001:17).

The proposed location of a planned service centre for Indigenous street dwellers requires careful consideration in terms of the territory and constraints encountered by homeless groups. Coleman warns:

"Whether Indigenous women in the inner city use Indigenous community-based services can be complicated by community dynamics which are not always appreciated outside the Indigenous community. Some women in this group know about a service but are reluctant to access it because of their perception that the service is 'owned' by a family or area group with whom they are not affiliated. Sometimes a service is not used because it is located in an area where people do not want to go, meaning that a service set up to meet genuine need might not be used because it is located wrongly." (Coleman 2000:13-14.)

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## **THE PHYSICAL DESIGN OF PUBLIC SPACES**

Recognising that Indigenous people either have a right to dwell in public places, or at least should be provided with modest comforts until such times as they are able to attain a more conventionally Western type of accommodation, a few local authorities have provided physical improvements to such public places.

For example, a report from a Member of the Australian Parliament pertaining to the late 1990s, mentions that the Adelaide City Council deliberately planted groves of casuarinas in Adelaide's west parklands to provide a soft under-bed of pine needles on which Aboriginal (and other) homeless people could sleep (Kanck 2001). Two other examples are storage shelves for public place dwellers at Kurilpa Point in Brisbane and a design from Melbourne for a park bench that can be transformed into a nocturnal shelter.

### **Kurilpa Point Storage Shelves, Brisbane**

Kurilpa Point is a public park within a strip of parkland on the south bank of the Brisbane River. This park was used as a gathering and meeting place by Indigenous and non-Indigenous homeless people. This group made use of public toilets, barbecues and picnic tables/shelters within the park. The park was used as a drinking venue and some injecting drug use has been reported. Numbers of people slept in the park at night with bedding located under the arches of the William Jolly Bridge and adjacent to a pedestrian/cycle path. The numbers of people using the park has varied but as many as 35 people used the park at night. Park users made use of facilities at the Musgrave Park Aboriginal Corporation (Hope Street) and St Vincent de Paul Hostel, which are both nearby. (CASS/BCC nd.)

In 2000 the Brisbane City Council installed a set of open storage shelves in the park for homeless people to store their possessions. The shelves were installed to protect the possessions of park users from the weather and in response to complaints about mess in the park and the storage of possessions in the public toilets. The shelves were located in a semi-discrete position adjacent to the William Jolly Bridge and are only visible from the pedestrian path. (CASS/BCC nd; p.c Vanessa Fabere 4/12/02.)

At the time of writing there were reports in the media that the Brisbane City Council intended to provide additional park infrastructure for use by homeless people at Kurilpa Point, Musgrave Park and in the City Botanical Gardens. This included additional park benches, toilets, cold showers, storage facilities and sharps/ syringe bins. (The Courier Mail 13/11/02; The Sunday Mail 1/12/02.)

### **Park Bench /Shelter, Melbourne**

The Melbourne architect Sean Goodsell has recently designed a park bench that transforms into an overnight shelter. The bench-shelter is supposed to provide an alternative, safer and more comfortable overnight space for use by people who sleep rough in the inner city. The bench seat is hinged on one side and is propped on the other side to form a small roof over a timber and wire bed frame. The transformation from bench to shelter and shelter to bench is to be carried out by council workers at dusk and in the morning. There are a number of problems with this design (i) the hours of operation are determined by council workers, (ii) co-operation between users and council workers is required, (iii) poor wet weather performance, (iv) poor cold weather performance, (v) inability to modify the shelter in response to wind direction, (vi) the conspicuous design could lead to increased safety issues for users, (vii) limited size of the shelter, (viii) single occupant usage. Despite these concerns, the published prototype illustrates the important contribution that architects, industrial designers, urban planners and other design professionals can make towards the design of public spaces for homeless people. (Johns 2002: 24.)

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# EDUCATION STRATEGIES

## The Role of Public Education Concerning Indigenous Itinerants

The customary practices of camping without any shelters, in mild tropical climates, contributes to the ease with which Indigenous people can readily 'fall' into the itinerant lifestyle in regional centres. Although such a lifestyle may be acceptable to more tolerant citizens, such tolerance may be quickly eroded by regular alcohol consumption and subsequent intoxication and other anti-social behaviours of public place dwellers. Externally-oriented living is but one of a number of cross-cultural differences that can lead to misconceptions amongst non-Aboriginal people about Aboriginal public behaviours. To offset such value differences, Dillon and Savage (1994) recommended that in Cairns there be developed cross-cultural awareness programs for the non-Indigenous community, to inform people on culturally-specific lifestyle choices and define appropriate urban behaviour guidelines.

Another potential role of a public education campaign is to reduce the level of unrealistic fear through better information on the circumstances, feelings and background of Aboriginal itinerants. Coleman, in writing about the long-term homeless in Fortitude Valley, argued that if public space was to be accessible to a range of people, for a range of purposes, including long-term homeless people, then all users of public space must feel safe in the spaces they use.

"A number of complex issues arise out of this proposition. The first issue is that of differentiating between reasonable fear and manufactured fear. Realistic fears about accessing public space need to be addressed by developing a range of strategies based on local knowledge, for example the design and lighting of public spaces. Manufactured fears need to be challenged, and the distance between labelled outsiders and mainstream community members must be decreased, rather than increased. However, this research suggests that safe and positive interactions in Fortitude Valley public spaces are facilitated by an awareness of its traditional communities and patterns of interaction in public space." (Coleman 2001:177,178.)

Durnan has also argued for the need for a public education campaign in Mt Isa to accompany any strategic approach to Indigenous homelessness. He suggested the development of a "Real History Project", which documented and published the oral history of the Mt Isa region. Durnan believed such a program would help non-Aboriginal people to better understand the Indigenous community and, in particular, the background to the plight of the river camping groups. (Durnan 2001:24.)

The education strategy put forward in the Darwin and Palmerston itinerants study (Memmott & Fantin 2001:8-9) contained a number of parts. The first of these, which coincided with its regional strategy, involved informing the populations of various remote communities about the 'Cultural Behaviour Protocol' developed by Larrakia National (refer to the 'Involvement of Traditional Owners' section of this report). Council members and Elders would be encouraged to exercise their authority to engender respect for these rules by their communities' visitors to Darwin. They would help enumerate the obligations of visitors when they travel to Darwin, the need to respect local Traditional Owners and town tenants of rental accommodation, and the problems associated with a 'long grass' lifestyle. The Larrakia Nation would lead the education program that the 'long grasser' study endorsed and target non-Aboriginal people in Darwin and the staff of relevant agencies and service providers, as well as bush peoples. Cross-cultural training of staff working regularly with homeless people was seen as an important component of the Darwin education strategy. A final element of it was the installation of signage in public areas advising people about cultural protocols.

Leadership in education is another important aspect. It is argued that non-Aboriginal people, particularly those invested with civic leadership roles, must take responsibility for demonstrating progressive leadership if there is to be lasting change in the position of Aboriginal people and in community attitudes toward many of the situations faced by Aboriginal people (Hale 1996:1). "It is the denial of the past, the silence, which continues to cast a shadow over the relationship between non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal....." thereby reinforcing and feeding into the negative stereotypes and racism prevalent in the community. Hale warns that public figures must accept responsibility that their views, no matter how well intentioned, can feed into and encourage the racism of others.

Drawing on Ryan (1971), Hale argues that a 'blaming the victim' ideology constitutes a formidable barrier to the instigation of social change in that those people who are considered 'deficient' then become the focus of change, rather than the focus being on the systems that perpetuate power inequalities and discrimination. Councils too often perpetuate an attitude of blame rather than reflecting on and believing the truth of the white contribution to

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the current situation facing Aborigines, and rather than taking a progressive leadership position toward a fair resolution. The denial of history, which leads to the apportioning of punishment to the park dwellers, serves only to blame them for their own powerless situation (Hale 1996:7).

## **Adelaide City Council Information Brochure – Homeless in the City: Explaining Myths & Facts**

The authors have identified an educationally useful information brochure, produced by the Adelaide City Council, which aims to educate the wider public about homelessness issues even though it is not Indigenous specific. The booklet identifies six key myths to homelessness and provides information that counters them. This information includes the following:

1. Myth: People choose to be homeless. Fact: No one chooses to be homeless.
2. Myth: Homeless people are criminals and make the streets unsafe. Fact: Due to their extreme vulnerability, homeless people are more often victims of crime rather than the perpetrators.
3. Myth: Homeless people are older, male and single. Fact: There is no such thing as a typical homeless person.
4. Myth: The presence of homeless people, and those agencies which cater to the homeless, bring down property values. Fact: Homeless people have little effect on property values.
5. Myth: Homelessness is bad for business. Fact: People who are homeless contribute to the economy.
6. Myth: Homelessness is bad for tourism. Fact: It is the overall character of a city which draws tourists, not the presence or absence of poor homeless people.

The booklet raises awareness of the prevalence of homeless people and those at risk of homelessness, and it argues that homelessness is a feature of city life the world over. It also argues that the nature of a city's response to homelessness is an indication of the quality of community life in that city. The wider public are also informed of homelessness issues by two short life histories or descriptions of life experiences of homeless people in Adelaide, one male and one female.

The booklet identifies community and personal responses to homelessness. Community responses identified include: acknowledging the reality of homelessness, accepting the presence of homeless people and recognising their contribution to the city's life, recognising the continuing demand for accommodation and support for homeless people, considering ways to contribute to the community through volunteer work or donation. Personal responses identified include: calling an ambulance for homeless people in need of medical attention, calling the police if someone is threatened, calling the Adelaide City Council with complaints or concerns, lobbying politicians for more affordable housing, discussing the creation of employment and training opportunities for disadvantaged people with other members of the community.

The brochure provides a listing of twenty services and agencies that work with homeless people in Adelaide and three peak bodies. The name of each agency is given, a phone number and a short description of the service it provides. This listing could be used by homeless people to access services; it could also be used for information exchange between services. The brochure is available from the Adelaide City Council's website.

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## PHONE-IN SERVICES

This study was unable to identify phone-in services that were specifically aimed at Indigenous homeless persons, although some State Housing Departments were found to provide a free call number for general Indigenous housing clients. In addition, in NSW there is a well-resourced general phone-in service for homeless persons, 6 per cent of whose callers or clientele are Indigenous. Although many Indigenous public place dwellers may not be initially inclined to avail themselves of such a service, an outreach worker equipped with a mobile phone may well be able to contact such a service on behalf of people 'on the street'.

### NSW Homeless Persons Information Centre

The New South Wales Homeless Persons Information Centre (HPIC) began operation in 1984/85 with a limited telephone service (CoS, n.d.: 10.). Since then, the service has grown in stages as demand has increased. The HPIC is directly operated by 'The City of Sydney' (CoS), the local authority in Sydney's CBD, which jointly funds the Centre along with the NSW Departments of Community Services and Housing. (CoS, 2002.)

The HPIC is a state-wide service, despite being run through the CoS. HPIC receives telephone calls and makes referrals throughout NSW and interstate. The Centre operates from 9am to 10pm, on every day of the year. It can be contacted via a 1800 toll free number, and itself is in constant communication with welfare service providers throughout Sydney and NSW. Callers are often referred directly on, or the operator sets up an appointment while the inquirer remains on the phone. Each day the operators are provided with the number of vacancies that are available in the various crisis accommodation centres. The majority of operators are qualified in welfare or social work, etc. (p.c. F.R., CoS, 26/9/02, 1/10/02, CoS, n.d.: 10, CoS, 2001.)

The HPIC helps homeless people, as well as agencies working with homeless people, by providing immediate advice, information, referral to crisis accommodation and other support services. It also advocates on behalf of clients regarding service provision and collects homelessness data. (CoS, n.d.: 10.) An example of a referral scenario is the City of Sydney's funding of a Brokerage Program that accommodates clients in a hotel for up to two weeks. This program's budget also has the capacity to cover travel fares. It is administered by the YWCA with CoS funding (p.c., F.R. 26/9/02, 1/10/02).

One method used for advertising the activities of the HPIC is a pictorial postcard. This provides a range of useful information in a compact format, including brief explanatory information and relevant phone numbers. The cards also feature the names of other agencies that the HPIC can liaise with to arrange services (Mission Australia, St Vincent de Paul, Salvation Army, Anglicare, Wesley Mission, YWCA), as well as the types of services on offer said to be within walking distance of the central city area (accommodation, food, transport, showers, laundry, health services, clothing, legal services). (p.c. F.R. 26/9/02, 1/10/02.)

The HPIC is accredited under a national standards system for customer service. In 2000/2001, it responded to 41,397 calls. Of these, 34,542 calls (83 per cent) were from clients requesting assistance, while the remainder were from other agencies and not client specific. The number of people seeking assistance from the Centre rose 14.7 per cent in the 12-month period ending 30 June 2001. In 2000/2001, it successfully assisted 84 per cent of clients who sought crisis accommodation and support assistance. (CoS, 2002.) The total number of callers who were recorded as being of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander background in 2001-02 was 2,608, or 5.8 per cent of all callers. (p.c. F.R., CoS, 23/10/02.)

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# SKILLS AND TRAINING FOR THOSE WORKING WITH INDIGENOUS PUBLIC PLACE DWELLERS

“People working with Aboriginal people have to have an understanding about history, culture and difference in values, as well as be non-judgemental, genuine, interested, flexible, honest, friendly and not be afraid of discomfort or long silences within meetings. It is important to be able to show that you can feel ok in many different situations whether it is messy or dirty, a rough or hectic environment and that you can see past the physical presentation. Further to this, you need to be respectful, have a lot of patience and be able to demonstrate that you are in it for the long haul. This is difficult when you work in an environment where there may be constant turnover of staff. You also need to be person/family focused and not afraid to work with what is presented on the day. You largely have to be yourself and find a way where what you do and how you do it does not conflict with your own rules, boundaries and employer expectations.” (Durkay et al 2001:15,16.)

Encountering and engaging with Indigenous public place dwellers who may not have bathed for some days, may be sick, intoxicated, stressed and suspicious, is not easy work, and requires a special set of skills and tolerances. Yet there are negligible formal training opportunities for those who wish to engage in such specialist work. Those few aspects of skill acquisition and training that were identified by the authors in the literature are set out below.

## Effective Use of Indigenous and Non-Indigenous Field Staff

Durkay, Morrison and Strommen (2001:8-10), based on their Perth experience, provide an enlightening discussion on the relative effectiveness of Indigenous and non-Indigenous field staff when interacting with Aboriginal persons who are homeless or who are vulnerable to homelessness.

Advantages of Aboriginal staff include immediate ability to connect and empathise with an Aboriginal homeless person. Disadvantages for Aboriginal staff include (i) extensive ongoing long-term expectation that services and assistance will always be provided by such staff, both out of working hours and into the distant future, (ii) emotional difficulty in advising or instructing Aboriginal tenants that they cannot host extended family in rental accommodation when this violates cultural norms; (iii) subsequent mental exhaustion and ‘burnout’ arising from continual inescapable involvement with Aboriginal problems at all hours. (Durkay et al 2001:8-10.)

By contrast, advantages for non-Aboriginal staff include comparative ease and effectiveness in advising or instructing Aboriginal tenants that they cannot host extended family in rental accommodation, and ability to mentally and physically disassociate work problems from home life. Disadvantages for non-Aboriginal staff include (i) naivety and susceptibility to believe and generalise one assertive Aboriginal person’s views as being applicable to all others; (ii) taking culturally inappropriate actions in response to issues; and (iii) imposing non-Aboriginal values on clients unreasonably (Durkay et al 2001:9,10).

It is argued that the optimal staffing situation is to have both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal personnel who work as a team and who can decide their respective roles in relation to a particular matter, taking the above factors into account and in such a way that their combined efforts yield maximum effectiveness. Durkay et al (2001:11) also discuss other important work problems experienced by staff involved in addressing homelessness issues, including the emotional and morale impacts of racial or discriminatory complaints against such staff.

“For example, neighbours and local communities play a big part in how people from different cultural backgrounds are accepted and welcomed in a particular locality...Frequently, as an agency that provides accommodation and services to Aboriginal people, we experience, along with the Aboriginal family, ongoing acts of racism and discrimination. Neighbours regularly contact us with complaints and expressions of fear about the families that we house.” (2001:11.)

## Staff Training and Development

In terms of responding to Indigenous public place dwellers with alcohol problems, the work of Ngwala Willumbong in Melbourne is worthy of mention. Ngwala Willumbong commenced in 1975 as an Indigenous community organisation to implement an alcohol rehabilitation centre for men. The organisation is now responsible for four drug and rehabilitation services for Indigenous people across Victoria. Ngwala Willumbong is structured as a community co-operative and is controlled by a Board of Indigenous community representatives. Indigenous community control has ensured that the organisation has a high ratio of Indigenous staff employed (up to 80 per

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cent). Ngwala require their staff to possess the necessary cultural knowledge for them to be effective in the provision of services to the Indigenous community. (Ngwala Willumbong and Swinburne, n.d.)

“Many of Ngwala Willumbong’s staff have themselves experienced the trauma of drug or alcohol dependency, homelessness and the various factors including racism, family breakdown, unemployment, depression and low self esteem which contributed to these problems at some time in their past. Staff therefore possess an intimate knowledge of what clients may be experiencing and are well placed to provide effective and culturally appropriate solutions.” (Ngwala Willumbong and Swinburne, n.d.)

With the growth in its services and responsibilities, Ngwala Willumbong developed a requirement for staff development and training, particularly in the areas of occupational health and safety, information technology, management, and induction of new workers. In a partnership between Swinburne University and Ngwala Willumbong a program of training for Victorian Aboriginal Alcohol and Drug Workers has been implemented. It was necessarily sensitive to the fact that most staff did not have formal qualifications and had other learning needs, and training occurred at the Ngwala Willumbong establishment. Staff also played an integral part in the development and delivery of training. (Ngwala Willumbong and Swinburne, n.d.)

In 2002 the Swinburne/Ngwala Willumbong partnership conducted a tender to deliver training to Koori drug and alcohol workers across Victoria. Graduates of the program trained other Koori workers at regional Aboriginal cooperatives in Victoria. By October 2002, 50 people had graduated from the program. (The Koori Mail 30/10/02; Ngwala Willumbong 2002.)

To date Ngwala Willumbong has received two awards for this program. In 2001 it received the Community Services and Health Industry Excellence Award for Employer Achievement in Creating a Learning Culture and in 2002 it was awarded the Victorian Community Services and Health Industry Award for Innovation in Training and Assessment. (Ngwala Willumbong 2002.)

## **Information Sharing and Exchange**

Berry et al (2001:74) have recommended that the National Homelessness Strategy fund “a national homelessness forum to discuss and exchange information on the issues and challenges facing Indigenous communities across Australia, and appropriate policy interventions”. At the time of writing this report there were plans underway to implement such a forum. Perhaps as a result of such a forum a volume of writings on Indigenous homelessness and public place dwelling might be compiled.

A useful pocket aid for homelessness workers is “The Homeless Handbook, a Medical Guide”, prepared for use in Victoria, which contains basic information to assist diagnosis and response to alcohol and drug abuse problems, psychiatric disorders and a range of typical life-threatening street scenarios. It also provides an ‘on the street’ aid to medication (tablet) identification (Daly et al 1996). A conscientious Commonwealth Department might consider sponsoring a national version of this valuable resource booklet.

Providing educational information to Indigenous prisoners is an important strategy. Coleman (2000:13) has emphasised the vulnerability of recently released Indigenous female prisoners.

“Indigenous women who are discharged from correctional facilities without support, appropriate transitional accommodation or money often find their way to inner city parks and public spaces. Many would return home but do not have enough money, and so go to the parks looking for a loan or for company. These women are vulnerable to a range of factors including re-arrest for street/ public order offences.”

In Queensland, 'Women's Transition Workers' support female prisoners, their children and families throughout the release process, and 'Release Kits' are regularly distributed to female prisoners. These Indigenous and non-Indigenous targeted kits include information that women in prison have identified as needed upon their release. Topics include: transport, accommodation, parole and home detention, finances, getting children back, legal issues, family, well being and relationships. (Sisters Inside 2002.)

## **Endnote on Skills and Training**

Staff engaged in working with Indigenous homeless people and public place dwellers will experience a range of difficulties including communication problems, gaining trust, interpreting and understanding client behaviour,

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demands on out-of-work time, confrontation with intoxicated persons, mental exhaustion and burn-out. The pattern of staff problems will tend to vary between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal workers.

Despite the potentially demanding behavioural and communication difficulties of working with Indigenous public place dwellers who may be suffering from substance abuse, identity crisis and poor physical health, there appear to be few available training options for professional or para - professional field workers. An exception is the Swinburne/Ngwala Willumbong alcohol and drug worker training courses in Victoria. Equally lacking are educational texts, information kits or videos on Indigenous homelessness and public place dwelling, exceptions being The Homeless Handbook Medical Guide (Daly et al 1996) and the Queensland female prisoners 'Release Kits' (Sisters Inside 2002).

## PARTNERSHIPS

Given the complex needs of Indigenous public place dwellers, it is desirable to develop partnerships wherever possible that deliver mutually supportive services to them. These partnerships can involve any plausible grouping of Indigenous community agencies, government departments or private sector groups. Coleman, in reviewing such partnerships, asserts that one of their most important qualities is that both ownership of, and responsibility for, them should desirably remain with local Indigenous groups or agencies (Coleman 2000:24). Coleman observes:

“While the capacity of cross program linkages has been enhanced during the 1990s, it is still not a routine method of funding or planning, and there are still difficulties in achieving cross departmental co-operation, although examples of successful joint ventures do exist. The At Risk Resource and Putreach Service (ARROS) [for example, see Coleman 2000:9]...was initially funded across programs within [the] Department of Families. The contradiction here is that co-operative ventures and partnerships are promoted in an environment that encourages competition in a climate of shrinking welfare state resources. Real incentives which recognise effective cross-departmental ventures should be incorporated to encourage what is frequently difficult work to achieve, given the logistical and financial constraints.” (Coleman 2000:17.)

The available literature contains little information on the advantages of partnerships in general, although the authors have located profiles of homelessness partnerships operating within particular state governments.

### The NSW Partnership Against Homelessness

As homeless people often require assistance from a range of government agencies, the ‘Partnership Against Homelessness’ was formed by the NSW Government in 1999 to “co-ordinate and improve a wide range of housing and support services for homeless people in NSW”. The partnership involves ten state government agencies, including the various State Departments of Housing, Health, Community Services, Corrective Services, Women, Juvenile Justice, Fair Trading, Cabinet, and Ageing, as well as the Aboriginal Housing Office. The Department of Housing (including the Office of Community Housing) is the lead agency for the Partnership.

The aims of the partnership are:

- (i) to help homeless people access services – to help direct people to services;
- (ii) to co-ordinate support services – to get agencies working together;
- (iii) to improve access to temporary or crisis accommodation; and
- (iv) to assist the move from crisis or temporary accommodation to long-term accommodation.

Some initiatives of the Partnership include the following:

- (i) Homelessness Action Team (Department of Housing) was formed to assist long-term residents of crisis accommodation in metropolitan Sydney to find more suitable accommodation.
  - (ii) Co-ordination of extra support services for homeless people or ‘recently housed’ people, in Sydney (3 areas) and regional NSW, to assist them in their new homes.
  - (iii) Broadening the range of accommodation models – Department of Housing is trialing two different supported housing arrangements in Inner West Sydney and Newcastle.
  - (iv) Office of Community Housing is working with the Aboriginal community and the Aboriginal Housing Office (metro Sydney and regional NSW) to develop more easily accessed crisis and transitional accommodation.
  - (v) The Crisis Accommodation Program (administered by the Office of Community Housing) aims to improve the move from crisis to transitional housing. They aim to provide additional transitional accommodation to free up crisis services and accommodation.
  - (vi) In 2001 the Department of Housing established an after-hours late-night call centre service for people who required temporary accommodation in the Sydney Metropolitan area and the Central Coast. This service is known as the ‘Homeless Out-of-Hours Service’.
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- (vii) NSW Government is working with local government to assist people living in public places to find “support and housing that is right for their needs and in creating a cleaner, safer neighbourhood.” (NSW, Department of Housing, 2002A, B.)

## **The Victorian Homelessness Strategy**

In 1999, Tony Cahir, the Director of Aboriginal Affairs Victoria, operating from within the Department of Human Services, reported that Indigenous homelessness was being addressed in Victoria through (i) reforms within the public housing sector; (ii) agencies working in partnership with the Koorie community; and (iii) reversal of social and economic disadvantage, which he maintained are the fundamental causes of homelessness. (Cahir 1999: 9-10.) Cahir asserts that the provision of additional funding for Indigenous housing, combined with reforms such as the integration of segmented waiting lists for public housing and a transitional housing management program, will improve the homelessness rates in Victoria. The first reform will accelerate access for those with a high level of need, and the second will assist those in crisis to find stable accommodation. (Cahir 1999: 9.) Cahir also argued that in addressing Koorie housing needs the government must draw on the expertise of Koories and Koorie organisations. (Cahir 1999: 9.) The potential for such partnerships was increased further with the advent of the Victorian Homelessness Strategy.

A working partnership involving government agencies and experts from community organisations and services was employed in the development of the Victorian Homelessness Strategy. There were four elements to this partnership, the first of these was an 'Inter-Departmental Committee' consisting of representatives from the Departments of Human Services, Justice, Education, Premier & Cabinet, Treasury & Finance, and the Offices of Local Government and Youth Affairs. This committee coordinated the Government input into the strategy. The second element was a Ministerial Advisory Committee consisting of representatives from community agencies with experience in homelessness issues, including a representative from the Aboriginal Housing Board of Victoria and a former manager of the Bairnsdale Koori Women's Shelter. These committees were supported by a Project Team from the Department of Human Services. The fourth element to this partnership model consisted of regional representatives from the nine Department of Human Services regions who coordinated regional inputs to the strategy. (Vic, DHS 2001.)

Despite the implementation of this Partnership in Victoria, Berry et al found that:

“Dealing with housing, employment and health in separate policy channels makes it difficult and cumbersome for homeless Indigenous young people to access services and to commit to them.” (Berry et al 2001:56.)

A range of consultation approaches were employed by the strategy, including consultation with people who were currently homeless, or who had been homeless, consultation with regional service agencies and interest groups, and a public submissions and focus group program. The focus groups discussed issues and responses related to specific target groups such as 'homelessness and pre- and post-release services for prisoners', 'single men and homelessness' and 'homelessness in rural and remote communities'. (Vic, DHS 2001.)

## **West Australian Homelessness Strategy**

In July 2001, the West Australian Government established a Taskforce whose aim was to develop a homelessness strategy for the state in consultation with all relevant stakeholders. It produced a report in January 2002. This report contains a review of current thinking and practice with regards to homelessness, and the findings of the consultation process. It makes a series of recommendations, which are supported by an Action Plan. (W.A. Homelessness Taskforce 2002:Foreward.) One of the key recommendations put forward is that an Implementation Committee be established, whose membership includes representatives from the State Departments of Indigenous Affairs, Housing and Works, Community Development, Health and Justice, as well as the Aboriginal community agencies involved in homelessness and social welfare. The Committee's role would be to provide advice on policy, prioritise the initiatives that arise from the Taskforce's recommendations and monitor their implementation (W.A. Homelessness Taskforce 2002: 3).

The Taskforce report's Action Plan emphasised the importance of forming and maintaining partnerships between stakeholders in one of its final sub-sections entitled '3.4 Working Together'. To enhance the implementation of the homelessness strategy, it recommends a number of efforts be made. The first two of these involves the State Government improving its methods of collecting data about people who are homeless, and the means by which it makes funding available. The Plan encourages more flexible funding arrangements that will enable government to

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work more closely with community agencies and suggests developing a central, cross-portfolio source for these funds. (W.A. Homelessness Taskforce 2002: 9.)

The Taskforce heard representations from Aboriginal people and organisations, which stressed the importance of involving Aboriginal people fully in the implementation of the strategy. (W.A. Homelessness Taskforce 2002: 41.) They strongly recommended that a strategy be developed to identify Aboriginal people who are homeless, such as those in temporary accommodation or staying with relatives. This would involve mapping kinship practices and related lifestyles, which could inform “a culturally-appropriate service system based on collaborative ways of working between communities and organisations” (W.A. Homelessness Taskforce 2002: 43).

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## HOLISTIC APPROACHES

The existence of partnerships between agencies providing services for Indigenous homeless people or public place dwellers is critical to develop holistic approaches to addressing the needs of these people. Durkay et al (2001) of the Centrecare Outreach in Perth succinctly set out the case for taking an holistic approach to Indigenous homelessness which addresses both the presenting problems and other underlying issues which may not be readily identified by the particular client.

"From our experience, the main issues facing the target group are often multi-dimensional. From this perspective, Centrecare has found that exclusive strategies which only seek to answer the presenting problems often fail to effect ongoing change because the presenting issues are normally only a reflection of other contributing factors. From this perspective, Centrecare's model is aimed at working in a holistic manner to address, where possible, family, relational and community interactions....People in need of our services are therefore offered support in a number of ways including individual counselling, couple and family counselling, advocacy, parenting information, financial counselling, case management, alcohol and drug counselling, and referrals within our agency and to generic community agencies. As such, the service operates according to community development principles and uses holistic and realistic approaches to enable clients to find their own solutions to the problems they face and to improve their opportunities for self-determination." (Durkay et al 2001:13.)

A similar type of argument for an holistic approach was put by Berry et al in their recommendations for Victoria.

"A recurring theme throughout the consultations [in Victoria] was the need for a holistic response to the issue of homelessness and the recognition that single purpose agencies cannot respond to the range and complexity of presenting issues." (Berry et al 2001: 61.)

In consulting on the needs of homeless Indigenous women in inner Brisbane, Coleman (2000:29) identified what she called the 'core elements' of a combined service delivery system, but which might be better thought of as a set of service delivery principles and assumptions, and which would be applicable in a number of Australian urban centres. They can be summarised as follows:

- (1) Outreach services and/or service centres need to provide 24 hour, 7 day a week service, i.e. when other services are shut (i.e. nights and weekends).
- (2) Safe places are required for women, but they need to be complemented with safe places for men.
- (3) Indigenous public place dwellers need to be involved with the service design and the development of any proposed service responses; they need to be supported to attend meetings and develop skills so that they can truly own and steer any service set up to respond to their needs.
- (4) Funding for services should be able to draw on a pool of money linked to agencies' core business, rather than determined (and often restricted) by a number of cross-program and funding guidelines.
- (5) Services should recognise and respect the strong ties which Indigenous public place dwellers have with inner city public spaces, and develop these links. Providing safe space for people is the preferred alternative to moving people on, harassing people or attempting to move them out of the area. (Adapted from Coleman 2002:29.)

To the above could be added (a) the need for Indigenous ownership, or shared ownership in the case of a partnership, over the strategy, and (b) the need to attempt to design into the strategy social capacity building goals for the public place dwellers. With respect to the former strategic need, Berry et al (2001:65-67) formulated a proposal for the Department of Human Services to coordinate an inter-agency policy development forum in which government and community sector organisations participated, including Indigenous and non-Indigenous organisations, in order to establish an Indigenous Homelessness Action Plan. Key attributes of the Plan were to be improved information exchange and protocols for cooperation between organisations, and culturally appropriate staff training. (Berry et al 2001: 72.)

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## **Holistic Approach recommended for Homeless Strategies in Mt Isa**

Durnan ( 2001: 12) produced a set of policy guidelines to inform future action for the Mt Isa river dwellers and the implementation of recommendations:

- a community development framework;
- a whole of government/ whole of community approach;
- Aboriginal controlled services to play a leading role;
- empowerment of local Aboriginal people to control action over local problems;
- recognition of the role of family, spirituality and country in Aboriginal societies; and
- recognition that improvements in the services and opportunities for Aboriginal communities as a whole will be more effective than measures that target specific offenders.

Durnan also noted the need to carry out a Mt Isa "Trust and Respect Project" to overcome the destructive divisions between some important organisations, government agencies and individuals (Durnan 2001: 16).

Durnan recommended that a Project Manager be seconded as a Coordinator from a government department to implement the recommendations of his report. The roles of the Coordinator would include:

- bringing together key stakeholders in a team building exercise;
- the development of an Indigenous services reference group consisting of the chairs and CEO's of all Indigenous organisations to integrate Indigenous services. (Durnan 2001: 20.);
- rationalise housing management/maintenance and tenancy support services under one organisation. This organisation to enforce rental collection, place limits on household numbers, pursue people for vandalism, and provide regular maintenance. (Durnan 2001: 29.)

## **An Holistic Approach at Port and South Hedland**

The Hedland Homeless Support Service operates in both Port Hedland and South Hedland, and is a support and referral service for all families and individuals who are homeless or at imminent risk of homelessness and in crisis; however most (if not all) of its clients are Indigenous. The service also provides a mediation and education service which deals with issues such as family and community violence. The Hedland Homeless Support Service has been funded through the WA Department of Family and Children's Service, and is designed to be appropriate and relevant to Aboriginal culture. A range of services are provided within limited budget constraints, but in so doing there is an attempt to address a broad range of interconnected problems.

The following services are provided:

- practical assistance, including the provision of low cost meals;
- crisis accommodation for short periods and transition to long-term accommodation;
- counselling, advocacy and case work services;
- assistance with transportation for people back to their home communities;
- mediation in situations of family dysfunction and violence;
- information and education to communities and families on violence prevention;
- assessment of client's needs and appropriate referrals to other services; and
- a Women's Project that includes a home-maker skills service, shopping assistance and other support.

Target groups included: (a) families and individuals who are homeless or at imminent risk of homelessness; (b) people who are affected by family and/or community violence, (c) families and individuals who are transient, who are in Port and South Hedland from surrounding communities, and are living in unfavourable circumstances; and (d) others who are referred to the service. Within the 'transient' category are to be found 'the ditchies' of South Hedland, groups of Aboriginal campers who sleep in large open drains in areas of spinifex and scrub surrounding

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the town. A string of regional funerals will result in people moving back and forth to communities and the process may leave many people stranded in Hedland. These people soon become accustomed to a lifestyle of substance misuse and, at least for the time being, may lose interest in returning to their home communities. The cost to the community of South Hedland caused by the presence of this group has been enormous. (Port Hedland ... Group 2002.)

Due to the perceived limited stay of these transients in town, housing is not of importance to them, as they view their stay more as a longer-term visit. These people, whose cycle of substance misuse gradually becomes fully entrenched, become aware of the Hedland Homeless Support Service through constant contact with the police and the Port Hedland Sobering-Up Centre. However, once they become clients of the Hedland Homeless Support Service they often have no intention of applying for housing and only use the breakfast service to satisfy their basic nutritional requirements, and on occasion to seek assistance with Centrelink. The Hedland Homeless Support Service encourages these clients to return to their communities if possible. In many cases the support becomes discouraging, as substance misuse is prevalent. Many of these clients who are transient do not necessarily view their circumstances as unfavourable. It is only the most basic needs that they tend to seek, such as shower facilities, laundry facilities, meals, and minor medical assistance.

Nevertheless, the objectives of the Hedland Homeless Support Service in assisting these people in transience are:

- to assist with basic requirements such as food and assistance with accessing clothes;
- to assist and support clients with information on government services such as Centrelink and Family and Children's Services;
- to ascertain current living arrangements and options available;
- to ascertain the possibility of the client/s returning to their community and transport available if required;
- to assess family living arrangements and crisis needs; and
- to encourage client/s to participate in case management and a support plan.

## **Ideology and Rationale Behind the Long Grassers Strategy in Darwin**

An Aboriginal Itinerants on Long Grasses Strategy for Darwin was developed during 2001 by Memmott and Fantin. To achieve this strategy, a set of strategies to address itinerant's issues was first compiled by the consultants from several sources:- (i) a literature analysis on Indigenous itinerant problems around Australia, and (ii), proposals collected from over 30 Indigenous organisations, government departments and other agencies in Darwin, and (iii) a set of issues and needs as defined by the Long Grassers themselves compiled from interviews with them. These strategies were reviewed by the Project Management Committee and divided into several categories for the purposes of a Workshop. The Workshop was then held for the Project Reference Group and representatives from about 30 relevant agencies and departments. The workshop participants formulated and recommended strategies that were then weighted in priority by the wider workshop group. The Workshop findings were then added into the overall strategy.

The Indigenous Itinerants Strategy is divided into the following components:

1. Patrolling Strategy
2. Education and Regional Strategy
3. Alcohol Strategy
4. Accommodation Strategy

A summary of the various elements of the Strategy is as follows:

### **Part 1 Patrolling Strategy**

It was recommended that the existing Darwin Night Patrol evolve into a 'Community Patrol' adopting and operationalising broader community-based objectives other than 'night watch', such as education, community capacity building, liaison with other agencies, referral and coordination with Council and Police Patrol. The 'Community Patrol' needs to develop its operational ideology in accordance with the Larrakia Nation's 'Cultural Behaviour Protocol'. Patrollers were to present itinerants with options concerning either alternate accommodation

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or transport to their home community, and implement those options. Darwin's agencies were to assist and support with case management, and with a permanent Case Manager as part of the Community Patrol team.

The envisaged Community Patrol needed to be funded to expand its service so that it can be pro-active in the mornings and on weekends (as well as during the weekday evenings and nights). A culturally appropriate protocol was required for assessing people's intoxication level (and hence whether they require taking to the Sobering Up Shelter) for use by the Community Patrol.

An employment strategy needed to be devised for the Community Patrol which took account of the Indigenous clan identities of the Patrollers. Cross-cultural training and induction was to be a matter of preferred policy for all Patrol staff (including NT Police, City Council, Night Patrol staff, security organisations and all other agencies and departments working with Indigenous people in Darwin).

An Indigenous Housing Association was to investigate the establishment of a special Housing Patrol that dealt with visitor problems in rental housing 24 hours a day and moved out troublesome visitors.

## **Part 2 Education and Regional Strategy**

Representatives from the Larrakia Nation were to carry out a program of visitation and consultation with bush and remote communities in the Top End and Katherine regions to explain the overall strategy for Darwin, the associated problems of alcohol abuse and anti-social behaviour, and to gain the support of Councils and Elders in those communities. A key part of the campaign in bush communities was to explain the Larrakia Nation's Cultural Behaviour Protocol and its relation to existing by-laws and laws for visitors when in town; what the problems of urban living were, and particularly what the problems of the 'long-grass' lifestyle were, and why the protocols were being put in place; the obligations of visitors when they came to town; and the need to respect local Traditional Owners and town rental tenants.

There was also a need for an education campaign for non-Aboriginal people in Darwin concerning Aboriginal culture and behaviour. There were widespread concerns about the public perception of Aboriginal people, and clearly there was a need to improve mutual tolerance and understanding. Cross-cultural training for those agencies and departments that were working with itinerants and visitors was another educational requirement.

There was substantial agreement at the workshop that the Councils of the home communities of the itinerants needed to take a much stronger role in addressing the itinerant issues. N.T Government and ATSIC Councils needed to continue to increase services to remote communities to improve their quality of lifestyle and thereby reduce 'urban drift' to Darwin. Aboriginal Community Councils were to be asked to adopt policies, practices and educational campaigns that encouraged their people to purchase return tickets when they travelled to Darwin.

Remote communities needed to carefully review their internal policies of alcohol access, given the displacement of their residents who came to Darwin and who engaged in alcohol abuse and binge drinking. Given the moral dilemma of addressing this issue, there was a strong recommendation that a review be carried out on the evidence of the behavioural, social and health impacts of licensed clubs in remote communities in the Territory. Increased funding was required for Alcohol Awareness and Treatment Programs in remote communities. This could also involve the development of programs in Darwin with outreach linkages to such remote communities.

## **Part 3 Alcohol Strategy**

Both short-term and long-term Aboriginal visitors to Darwin needed to be strongly encouraged to take responsibility for their public behaviour and be aware of the implications of socially irresponsible drinking. Existing alcohol programs need to be strengthened in some cases and targeted at itinerant people, with closer alliances between alcohol agencies. There was a need for either a permanent accommodation facility or an outreach program (or both), to care for Aboriginal people affected by long-term drug and alcohol abuse where treatment required a longer period than 12 weeks (which is the limit of most current alcohol treatment programs).

Relevant Government and Indigenous agencies were to identify individuals in Darwin who were caught in cycles of alcoholic and offensive behaviour and who were being incarcerated as a result of such, so that they could be targeted for treatment and if necessary transported to their home community, to assist in breaking their drinking and behaviour cycle.

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The Sobering-Up Shelter required an expansion of facilities to increase the number of beds, so as to reduce the likelihood of clients being placed in the watch-house, and reduce the likelihood of clients having to leave the shelter during the night or early morning. There was also a need for improved Day Care facilities at SUS.

There was a need to develop a clear protocol concerning alcohol retailers supplying alcohol to Aboriginal people and the practice of allowing credit and the holding of key-cards to facilitate the supply of alcohol; also concerning the cross-cultural perceptions by shop-keepers of what sort of behaviour constituted intoxication.

A review of Darwin City Council's 'exempt public places' was recommended, in terms of both the selection of the places that should be 'exempted' from alcohol restrictions, and the times of use for drinking. (Aboriginal visitors to Darwin have a right to be able to drink alcohol in a culturally appropriate setting albeit in a self-controlled and moderate manner.) Consideration was also to be given to the establishment of an extended beer-garden in Darwin (relaxed dress standard, appropriate social context, meeting patrons' needs in licensed premises), as well as a weekly alcohol-free day in Darwin.

There was a need to create diversionary activities for Darwin itinerants to reduce harmful drinking, intoxication, and anti-social behaviour e.g. a 'Long-Grass Bus' for excursions for 'Long-Grassers'; a 'floating CDEP' for short-term employment of itinerant persons and a Day Care Facility.

#### **Part 4 Accommodation Strategy**

A set of culturally appropriate accommodation options needed to be available for those people leading a long-grass or itinerant lifestyle who were not prepared to leave Darwin and who had a need for accommodation. Information on such options should be provided to itinerants through the members of the Community Patrol or Case Managers who came into contact with them. The Project Workshop identified the need for a range of accommodation options:- (i) short to medium term, (ii) mid to long term, and (iii) short term supported accommodation for Indigenous itinerants and visitors to Darwin.

A review was required of housing/accommodation needs for health patients and their family members who come to reside in Darwin to support them. More single men's accommodation was to be provided in Darwin, either (a) boarding house type as an interim form whilst waiting to obtain flats, and (b) more flats to reduce pressure on rental houses and hostels from young men. Upgrading of existing accommodation and facilities in town camps was required, with a view to accommodating long-term itinerants who socially relate to these camps. Appropriately designed housing for extended/larger families was also required.

A series of Pilot Projects to evaluate alternate types of accommodation proposals for itinerants or long-grassers was proposed, including (a) a short-term managed camp for one group with open roofed sleeping areas, ablution facilities and basic cooking facilities, with a well-defined management plan; (b) large remote communities buying accommodation in town and managing it for use by their own community members when visiting Darwin; (c) two small-scale accommodation facilities offering temporary supported accommodation for visitors and those awaiting rental housing, one for drinkers and one for non-drinkers; (d) a Day Care Centre to provide facilities for Aboriginal people in transition, where they could wash, toilet and spend part of the day out of the rain in the wet season.

Housing management systems and policies in all town camps and Indigenous rental housing needed to be reviewed and revised in order to promote stronger Aboriginal leadership and control strategies for alcohol use and visitor management and to decrease the impact of visitors on tenancy stability.

It was recommended that further development control plans and land use planning proposals for Darwin should consider the needs and land use patterns of itinerants and town campers. The N.T. Government should ensure that existing town camps under special use lease agreements were not revoked or resumed, so as not to exacerbate the current accommodation situation.

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## **CONCLUSION**

This conclusion contains a summary of the findings on the various strategies and responses to Indigenous public place dwelling and homelessness that have been identified by the authors. In general, the services or facilities selected as case studies for inclusion in this analysis have been targeted specifically at Indigenous people. No attempt has been made to survey all mainstream services for homeless people. Nevertheless, a number of programs, although having been established for all homeless people, serve predominantly Indigenous clients in their day-to-day operations. Also, profiles have been included of a small number of mainstream services for homeless people that, while only impacting on a small (or perhaps negligible) number of Indigenous homeless people, have been brought to the authors' attention because of their interesting potential for possible application to Indigenous groups. Programs of this sort included in the current analysis are the ICLA Street Outreach Service in inner Sydney, and NSW Homeless Persons Information Centre. The converse of the previous category of examples is a number of programs that, although run by Indigenous organisations to target Indigenous homeless people, have also been made accessible to non-Indigenous people eg Bairnsdale Koorie Women's Shelter.

### **Multiple perspectives**

There are multiple ways of constructing problems associated with Indigenous public place dwellers depending on the perspective taken, either Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal, camper or non-camper, Aboriginal agency or government department, etc. In terms of evaluating a strategy or response, one has to bear in mind these multiple perspectives of problem definition. What may be a legitimate response by one stakeholder may be entirely unacceptable to another. Any problem definition, if it is to be politically acceptable in an urban regional centre, should incorporate the perspectives of all of the major stakeholders with interests in the public place dwellers and the spaces that they occupy. To understand the dynamics of any discrimination it is essential to have the capacity to adopt bi-cultural views and empathy. Similarly, if there is to be a solution to a problem it must be articulated from a number of positions using methods that are mutually acceptable or at least tolerable to all stakeholders. Not to take such a cross-cultural position in approaching social problems is likely to fuel already existing racial tension.

The variant views on the problem definition pertaining to the phenomenon of Indigenous public space dwelling, gives rise to a broad range of diverse responses.

### **Legislative Approaches**

The law-and-order approach, using reactive policing and supported by various forms of legislation, may be only partly successful, and even totally unsuccessful, in eliminating Indigenous public place dwelling, and is likely to only result in temporary and/or local displacement, whilst overall cycles of incarceration, alcohol treatment and public place dwelling continue. In preparing legislation that is motivated by a need to move Indigenous public place dwellers, authorities may also run the risk of breaching anti-discrimination legislation. Forced physical removal to distant remote settlements is also equally repugnant and a violation of civil liberties. As a general principle, any movement of Indigenous people from their occupied public spaces due to conflicting public needs should be carried out in a process of negotiation, no matter how protracted, and accompanied by a planned set of alternate accommodation and servicing options that are acceptable to all parties.

### **Patrols and Outreach Services**

A variety of services are provided by either individuals, pairs, or small groups of field workers, who seek out Indigenous itinerants or public place dwellers in the places that they frequent. Within this broad category come Aboriginal Night Patrols, Wardens and Outreach Workers, although the precise nature of their services varies. The functions of Night Patrols and warden schemes include intervention in situations of substance abuse (especially alcohol and violence), mediation and dispute resolution between people in conflict, and the removal of disruptive or potentially violent persons from public or private social environments. Outreach workers tend to take a stronger case file approach, attempting over a period of time to assess clients' needs and establish linkages to relevant wider service agencies in response to those needs (eg accommodation, health, employment, transport).

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## **Diversionsary Strategies**

This approach normally involves taking people who are intoxicated, and possibly aggressive or otherwise at-risk from their own actions or those of others, and placing them in managed accommodation until they can become sober, sleep and have a meal. The approach can be regarded as a short-term proactive strategy. It is 'diversionary' because it aims to keep at-risk, intoxicated individuals out of the watch-house in line with the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (RCIADIC). The collection of such people is usually performed by either the police, an Aboriginal Patrol, or both. The 'managed accommodation' to which they are taken may be the house of a relative, a Sobering-Up Shelter, a refuge, or other such facility. The utilisation of the diversionary approach is now widespread in many parts of Australia.

A variety of additional strategies can be incorporated into the basic diversionary model in an effort to expand its short-term and proactive qualities into the medium- or long-term. Examples of these include: follow-up 'shaming' and 'square-up' sessions between offenders and aggrieved members of the community; the presence of a 'detox' centre in proximity to the Sobering-Up Shelter; the opportunity to then move directly to a residential facility in an alcohol treatment centre; and the presence of a Day Centre adjacent to the Sobering-Up Shelter for recreational or entertainment facilities.

## **Addressing anti-social behaviour**

Only in a few of the case studies was there any emphasis given to the role of Traditional Owners in dealing with public space dwellers. These were found in Alice Springs and Darwin. They both involved Traditional Owners taking exception at the anti-social behaviour of certain public space dwellers, particularly those involved in intoxication, begging, alcohol violence, and enacting sexual and excretory functions in public places. Traditional Owners saw this behaviour as 'shaming' local Traditional Owners and their law and custom, and they were adamant about asserting their authority in an effort to prevent such.

One reason for including local Traditional Owners in a public place dwellers' response strategy, particularly in more traditionally oriented areas, is that such itinerant people may be more inclined to respect Aboriginal Law than non-Aboriginal Law. Therefore a more effective approach may emerge, and one that is more clearly Aboriginal-directed. The role of local Traditional Law Holders has, in the case studies previously described, primarily involved the establishment of models of appropriate versus anti-social behaviours (in terms of Aboriginal value systems) of public space dwellers, and territorial rules concerning where particular individuals or groups should dwell.

## **Philosophies and methods of interaction**

In addition to respecting and working through customary principles of Aboriginal law and custom, the current literature search uncovered several other professional philosophies adopted by various service providers. The Perth Centrecare approach emphasised the need to guide and empower families and individuals to find their own solutions (rather than imposing solutions), through a long-term personal and amiable relation with clients, using a combination of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal staff. Coleman extends this to include a healing therapy that encourages self-exploration of the many underlying issues and causal factors behind the circumstances of public place dwellers.

A number of researchers emphasise the community development approach in working with Indigenous public place dwellers, whereby through participation in the process of addressing their problems, qualities of group cohesion, leadership, problem-solving capacity and self-esteem are fostered. There is a need for public place dwellers to have sufficient ownership of the process in order to be prepared to participate in that process in a meaningful way; one that results in real lifestyle changes and does not further entrench welfare dependency. A common and parallel acceptance of this approach is required by all local stakeholders (governments, councils, charitable groups).

## **Alcohol strategies**

In addressing the needs of public space dwellers, whether it be their health, the impact of alcohol violence on other group members, or the impact of intermittent anti-social intoxicated behaviour on the general public, there is clearly a need to formulate a strategic response to the prevalent heavy-drinking lifestyle, which is a common characteristic of many of these groups. Responses to alcohol abuse by public space dwellers involve multiple

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strategies which include patrols or outreach services, meals, sobering-up shelters, women's refuges, detox centres, legislative supports (including licensing restrictions and restricted public zones of consumption), approved gathering and camping places, rehabilitation programs (including counselling, education, group therapy, co-dependants support, excursions and activities), and residential options and support.

## **Regional strategies**

An in-depth understanding of Indigenous public space dwelling and homelessness in metropolitan and regional urban centres necessitates a regional approach that examines Indigenous migration and residential mobility patterns. In order to reduce the numbers of Indigenous public space dwellers and discourage their numbers from growing in urban regional centres, it is necessary to examine the nature and dynamics of regional migration to understand why people leave their home communities, or what prevents them from returning.

Based on such analysis, a regional strategy to deal with Indigenous itinerancy and homelessness must include a shared set of values and a communication system between the regional centre's service providers and the communities of the outer parts of the region, which facilitates shared decision-making in addressing the needs of individual clients. This in turn may be accompanied by a regional education program concerning urban lifestyles and values, and what might be expected of Indigenous people when visiting large cities, both in terms of mainstream and Aboriginal laws and behavioural values. A converse requirement is education materials for non-Aboriginal Australians and tourists on Aboriginal lifestyles and values, and the need for mutual cross-cultural accommodation. Finally the migration of Indigenous people to urban centres generates serious questions for public servants and politicians in Aboriginal Affairs, community leaders and Councillors concerning the quality of lifestyle in remote and rural Aboriginal communities, as well as the distribution and licensing of alcohol outlets throughout such regions.

## **Accommodation options**

A standard accommodation approach involves a threefold progression: first establish emergency or crisis accommodation for use over one or a few nights. This may comprise of Women's Refuges, Safe Houses and/or Sobering-Up Shelters. Secondly, a medium-term accommodation option, sometimes referred to as transitional housing, must be provided for use until conventional rental housing becomes available. Finally, a range of miscellaneous management services may be required that assist people into all of these categories of accommodation and provide ongoing support. Types of accommodation exemplified in the foregoing case studies comprise housing units, safe houses, town camps, temporary visitors' camps, hostels, flats, boarding houses, large and extended family houses, and hostels attached to hospitals.

When planning a sequence of supported accommodation - from crisis facilities to medium-term to longer-term solutions and eventually to mainstream public housing - an onus is placed on housing authorities and agencies to ensure that there are effective connections between each stage of this sequence. If strategies for moving people successfully through the system are not in place, clients may return to residing in the earlier stages of supported accommodation (crisis and medium-term) and possibly back into public places.

A knowledge of the social structure, cultural identity and lifestyle of Indigenous public place dwelling groups is required to understand their needs and social dynamics when providing separate accommodation areas in accordance with traditional sociospatial structures. More challenging accommodation responses, in terms of public policy and governance, involve recognising the right of public place dwellers to their outdoor lifestyle and providing forms of managed and serviced camps. There is also an increasing call for targeted accommodation services for Indigenous women (with or without children), youth, single men, and elderly people suffering from homelessness and living in public places, but little research is available to understand these different categories of specialised need.

Providing targeted accommodation facilities for Aboriginal public place dwellers usually brings with it a formidable range of local political problems. These can include fear and discrimination on the part of local residents and conservative reactions by local politicians who fear potential negative political impact. Obtaining suitable land is the first obstacle; there is a need to counter this problem through a more proactive approach to urban planning to ensure suitable land is set aside when development opportunities arise. The same problems apply to providing dedicated service centres or gathering places.

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## **Dedicated service centres and gathering places**

Research on Indigenous people in metropolitan centres has revealed that they have always had regular meeting or gathering places where those arriving from remote communities can find peer group support while they orientate themselves to city life. Providing meals to homeless people at such gathering places has been carried out in the past largely by charitable organisations such as St Vincent de Paul and the Salvation Army. There is potential in situations where food is distributed to promote 'capacity building'. A service provider could take advantage of such a concentrated gathering of clients to establish a working relationship with them and provide more pro-active outreach services aimed at improving itinerants' quality of life.

A further ambitious approach involves the provision of a dedicated building, at which a range of services can be offered whilst public place dwellers gather and socialise nearby. The most notable of these have been the Toonooba Day Activity Centre on the bank of the Fitzroy River in Rockhampton and the New Farm 'Designated Space' in the New Farm Park near the banks of the Brisbane River. This latter facility is one of the very few services reported in this study for which there is a formal evaluation study. 'Hope Street' in South Brisbane is the longest running service centre (over 18 years) and it is located centrally in the urban locale of parks, sidewalks and vacant lots where its clients dwell. The Port Hedland Breakfast Service cleverly combines the attributes of the mobile food van with the in-situ service centre. The proposed location of a planned service centre for Indigenous street dwellers requires careful consideration in terms of the territorial and other constraints imposed by both public place dwelling groups and local stakeholder groups.

## **The physical design of public spaces**

Recognising that Indigenous people either have a right to dwell in public places, or at least should be provided with modest comforts until such times as they are able to attain a more conventionally Western type of accommodation, a few local authorities have provided physical improvements to public places. Examples include groves of casuarinas in parklands to provide a soft under-bed of pine needles on which Aboriginal (and other) homeless people could sleep, storage shelves for public space dwellers, and a design for a park bench that can be transformed into a nocturnal shelter.

## **Education strategies**

The customary practices of camping without any shelters, in mild tropical climates, contributes to the ease with which Indigenous people can readily 'fall' into the itinerant lifestyle in regional centres. Although such a lifestyle may be acceptable to more tolerant citizens, such tolerance may be quickly eroded by regular alcohol consumption and subsequent intoxication and other anti-social behaviours of public place dwellers. Externally-oriented living is but one of a number of cross-cultural differences that can lead to misconceptions amongst non-Aboriginal people about Aboriginal public behaviours. To offset such value differences, cross-cultural awareness programs are recommended for the non-Indigenous community, to inform people on culturally-specific lifestyle choices and define appropriate urban behaviour guidelines. Another potential role of a public educational campaign is to reduce the level of unrealistic fear through better information on the circumstances, history and background of Aboriginal itinerants.

## **Phone-in services**

No phone-in services were identified that were specifically for Indigenous homeless persons, although some State Housing Departments have a free call number for Indigenous housing clients in general. In NSW there is a service for homeless persons in general, which attracts about six per cent of Indigenous callers in its clientele. Although many Indigenous public place dwellers may not be initially inclined to avail themselves of such a service, an outreach worker equipped with a mobile phone may well be able to facilitate such a service on behalf of a person 'on the street'.

## **Skills and training**

Despite the potentially demanding behavioural and communication difficulties of working with Indigenous public place dwellers who may be suffering from substance abuse, identity crisis and poor physical health there appears to be few available training options for professional or para-professional field workers. An exception is the Swinburne/Ngwala Willumbong Aboriginal and Drug Worker training courses in Victoria. Equally lacking are

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educational texts, information kits or videos relevant to Indigenous homelessness and public place dwelling, exceptions being the Homeless Handbook Medical Guide (Daly et al 1996) and the Queensland female prisoners 'Release Kits'.

## **Partnerships**

Given the multiple complex needs of Indigenous public place dwellers, it is desirable to develop partnerships wherever possible to deliver mutually supportive services to such people, whether such partnerships involve Indigenous community agencies, government departments, private sector groups or combinations of these entities. In reviewing such partnerships, an important quality is that ownership of, and responsibility for, such partnerships should desirably remain with local Indigenous groups or agencies. The available literature contains little detailed information on the advantages of such partnerships in general, although there are profiles of Homelessness Partnerships within particular State Governments.

## **Holistic Approaches**

The existence of partnerships between those agencies providing services for Indigenous homeless people or public place dwellers is critical to developing holistic approaches for addressing the needs of these people. The benefits of such partnerships can be improved information exchange, protocols for cooperation between organisations, and culturally appropriate staff training. A holistic approach to Indigenous homelessness addresses both the presenting problems and other underlying issues and causal factors which may not be necessarily identified by the clients themselves; it involves reactive and proactive components, which, by the nature of the problem, must be both short-term and long-term in their duration.

Important design principles for a holistic design strategy are (a) the need for Indigenous place dwellers to be involved with the design and the development of any proposed service response in a community development approach; (b) recognition and respect for the strong ties which Indigenous public place dwellers have with inner city public places; (c) the need for Indigenous ownership (empowerment), or shared ownership in the case of a partnership, over the strategy; and (d) the need to attempt to design capacity-building goals for the public place dwellers into the strategy.

Holistic approaches optimally require pool funding from a number of agencies and the employment of a coordinator to ensure the integration of several parallel strategies or program components. Such components ideally incorporate intervention in anti-social behaviour and crisis situations, short and long-term ways of addressing alcohol addiction and accommodation related problems, transport to home communities, and public education to establish or maintain tolerant values and cross-cultural respect in local communities and across regions.

## **Final Word**

Whilst it is hoped that the above survey and analysis is useful for those involved in addressing the complex social problems associated with Indigenous public place dwellers, there is clearly a paucity of material on this subject and the findings are clearly tentative and limited. (Only one strategy was identified as having been formally evaluated). Above all, those designing response strategies for Indigenous homelessness and public place dwelling situations should be guided by local analysis and a thorough consultation with all stakeholder groups.

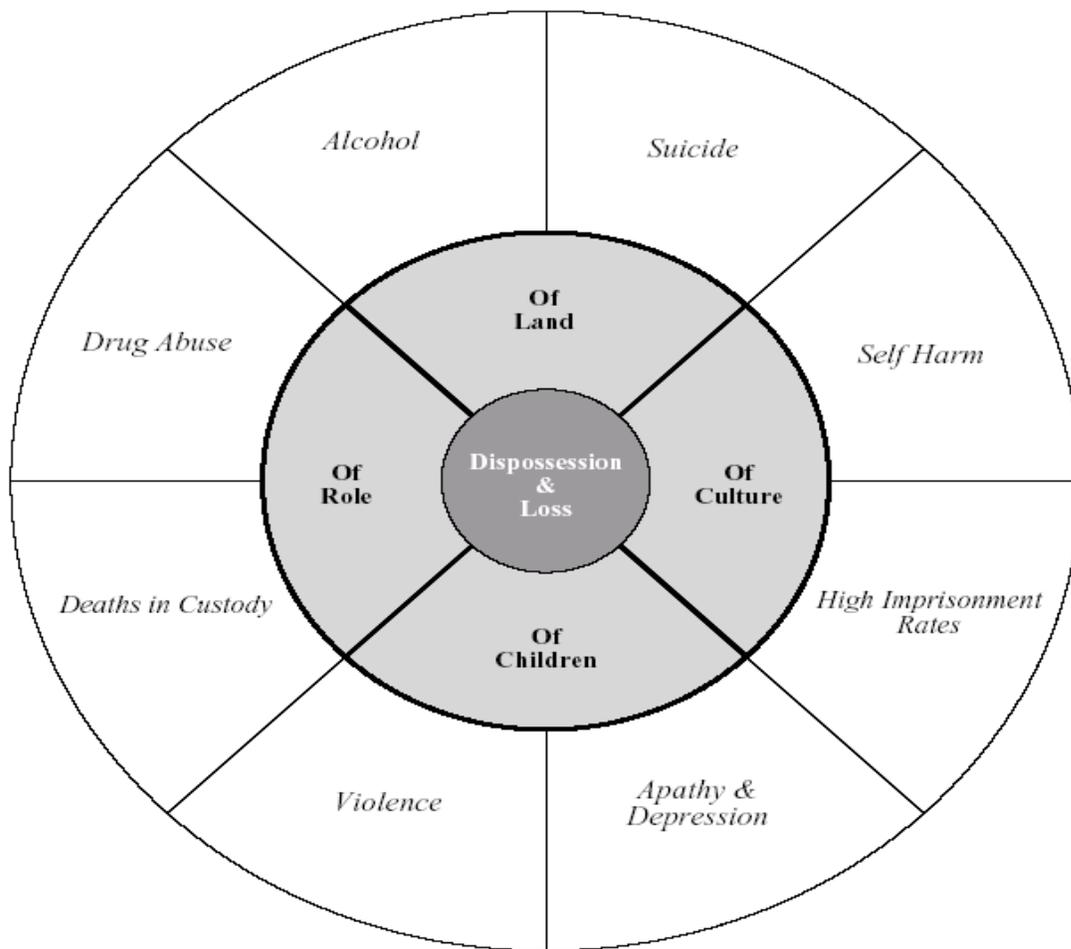
"Services and responses need to grow out of a recognition of the pain and frustration experienced by Indigenous people, as report after report documents their despair while around them their young men continue to be imprisoned, their community leaders die young and their women in Brisbane's inner city areas are exposed to risks of unresolved grief and loss, and a very public life style." (Coleman 2000:29.)

Finding an approach to Indigenous public place dwelling that respects the human rights of all those who use public places necessitates a careful balance between the reactive and proactive approaches. Too often in the past, some local authorities and police have emphasised the reactive approach (see Table 3) and ignored the proactive approach. The end result needs to be a 'win-win', not a 'lose-lose'.

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**Table 3: Two Opposite Responses to Indigenous Public Place Dwellers**

	<b>REACTIVE APPROACH</b>	<b>PROACTIVE APPROACH</b>
1.	<b>DISCOURAGE</b> Policing, Arrests. Prevent alcohol sales. No free meals.	<b>ENCOURAGE</b> Acknowledge Itinerant Rights. Address residential needs. Provide meals and clothes. Breaking the alcohol cycle.
2.	<b>PREVENTATIVE/PUNITIVE MEASURES</b> The 2km Law. Photos of offenders in liquor shops.	<b>UPHOLD ITINERANT RIGHTS</b> Rights to public space. Rights to welfare assistance. Rights to shelter.
3.	<b>REMOVAL</b> Send 'home'. Fence off camping areas.	<b>INTEGRATION</b> into public housing. into public spaces. into alcohol programs. into legalised and managed drinking venues.
4.	<b>LOW TOLERANCE OF ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR</b> No spitting, noise, drunkenness, fighting, defecating, urinating etc. Public fear.	<b>TOLERANCE OF PUBLIC SPACE USE</b> Recognised lifestyle. Camping. Socialising. Use of public facilities.
5.	<b>APPREHENSION AND ARREST</b> Watchhouse. Jail.	<b>DIVERSION</b> Night patrol. Sobering-up shelter. Detox. Culturally sensitive responses.
6.	<b>REACTIVE FOCUS</b> Just focus on the visible 'problem'. Focus on adults in public places, rather than families and children.	<b>PROACTIVE VISION</b> Education: local and in communities. Focus on children.
7.	<b>LOCAL STRATEGIES</b> Target itinerants in public places.	<b>REGIONAL STRATEGIES</b> Begin in Remote Communities. Address Remote or Rural Community problems.



**Figure 1** The beginning of a healing framework for Indigenous homeless women in Brisbane developed by Coleman (2000: 20) and adapted from Ross (1996).

## Acronyms

AHA	Aboriginal Housing Authority
APSCC	Arthur Peterson Special Care Centre
ATSI	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander
ATSIC	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission
BCC	Brisbane City Council
CAAPS	Council for Aboriginal Alcohol Program Services
CASS	Community Access and Support Service
CDEP	Community Development Employment Program
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CHAST	City Homeless Assessment Support Team
CoS	City of Sydney (Local Authority)
CPU	Crime Prevention Unit, S.A.
DCC	Darwin City Council
FORWAARD	Foundation of Rehabilitation with Aboriginal Alcohol Related Difficulties
HHSS	Hedland Homeless Support Service
HPIC	Homeless Persons Information Centre
ICLA	Independent Community Living Association
MPAC	Musgrave Park Aboriginal Corporation
NGO	Non-Government Organisation
RCIADIC	Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody
SAAP	The Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (based on agreements between Commonwealth, State and Territory governments)
SUS	Sobering-Up Shelter

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