
**The Australian Department of Families, Housing,
Community Services and Indigenous Affairs
(FaHCSIA)**

**COMMUNITY FEEDBACK ON THE NORTHERN
TERRITORY EMERGENCY RESPONSE (NTER)**

RESEARCH REPORT

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Cultural and Indigenous Research Centre Australia (CIRCA) conducted consultations in four remote Indigenous communities (Ali Curung, Hermannsburg, Ngiuu and Galiwin'ku) to be used in the review of the Northern Territory Emergency Response (NTER).

The main focus of these consultations was to explore two of the key measures of the NTER:

- **Community Safety** – Do people feel safer as a result of the Intervention?
- **Income Management** – Is Income Management positive or negative? How is it affecting community members?

For each of these issues, the consultations gathered feedback on:

- What is working?
- What is not working?
- What are the unintended consequences (both positive and negative)?
- How should this measure be taken forward?

1.1 METHODOLOGY

CIRCA worked with local Indigenous research partners and the qualitative methodology for each community was developed in consultation with the local partners. As a result, the approach varied in each location. The research methodology for each community is detailed below.

Ali Curung

- Worked with a male Aboriginal researcher.
- Research was conducted from 27th to 28th August 2008.
- Most people in Ali Curung were reluctant to be interviewed in large groups, preferring to meet in smaller family groups or individually. As a result the interview process was very time consuming with a total of 14 meetings held with 25 people in total. However, this approach allowed for in-depth discussions which yielded a large amount of individual feedback and enabled people to talk more openly about the effects of income management on alcohol use and gambling.
- Included:
 - Eight mini groups of 2 or 3 people, and 6 individual interviews;
 - 17 women and 8 men were interviewed;
 - A wide mix of age groups, with about half the participants being young people;
 - Most people interviewed were on income management or had family members who were on income management. Several people were either working or on CDEP;
 - Almost all the people interviewed had children.

Galiwin'ku

- Worked with four researchers from Elcho Island who also acted as interpreters for the groups. Interviews were conducted in a mix of language and English.
- Research was conducted from 1st to 3rd September 2008.
- Included:
 - 7 group discussions with the three main clan groups with 103 people participating.
 - 70 women and 33 men participated;
 - A mix of age groups was represented including 55 young people;
 - One group discussion was held at Low Down Camp with 12 people;
 - Three group discussions were held at Middle Camp. One with 19 people, one meeting with 12 people and a final meeting with 8 people;
 - One meeting of 26 people was held at Beach Camp;
 - Two group discussions were held at Top Camp, one with 14 people and another with 12 people.
- Most people who attended the meetings were on income management or had relatives who were on income management. About 10% were on CDEP, and some were employed.
- Most people who were interviewed had children.

Hermannsburg

- Worked with a female interpreter for the larger community meeting, and several local research partners facilitated the smaller group discussions.
- Research was conducted from 11th to 13th August 2008.
- Included:
 - A community meeting (approximately 20 people participated), including males and females and a wide range of age groups;
 - A mini group with 5 younger community members aged 15-21 (4 males, 1 female)
 - A mini group with 3 community members;
 - A mini group with 4 women from the Women's Centre and the Child Care Centre;
 - Meetings and consultations with key Shire staff including the CEO, the community services manager, and the housing officer;
 - Meetings and consultations with a number of key infrastructure people including staff from both community-based stores, the visiting Money Business worker who provides financial literacy advice to community members, the local school Principal and the youth programs coordinator.

Nguiu

- Worked with female interpreter.
- Research was conducted from 6th to 7th August 2008.
- Included:
 - Two women's groups (one group of 15 women and one group of 10 women, including older and some younger women);
 - Group with youth diversion staff (mainly younger community members, mix of male and female participants, 15 people in total);
 - Community meeting (approximately 75 participants in total). Included males and females, and younger and older participants. Skewed to male participants and older participants;
 - Group with young mothers (four participants);
 - Paired depth with Shire staff.



2. RESEARCH FINDINGS

2.1 OVERALL PERCEPTIONS OF THE NTER

Perceptions of the NTER in each community were mixed, and while qualitative research does not allow for the accurate measurement of these responses, the consultations do suggest that in some communities there is a significant group that support the positive outcomes of the intervention (Nguiu and Hermannsburg), while in other communities a significant number are upset with the nature of the NTER (Ali Curung and Galiwin'ku). In most of the community consultations there were many voices that talked about the positive impact of the intervention, as well as several who were critical of the NTER. The women included in the consultations tended to be more positive than the men. It is also worth noting that several women spoke up in opposition to men and elders in some of the community meetings who were opposed to the NTER. This open dissent was supported by statements about positive change.

“Our kids have got more food and clothes and they are going to school”

“The place is safer because the trouble makers have moved and gone to town”

“Our money's safe, kids are now being fed, good health, night patrols keeping kids safe, less drinking, less violence.”

There were also differences by location. In Hermannsburg and Nguiu it appeared that there was a more consistent positive response, while in Ali Curung the perceptions of the NTER were reasonably evenly divided with the people interviewed, with about half identifying the NTER as 'bad' and the other half viewing the intervention as 'good', with a few unsure or undecided. On the other hand, those in Galiwin'ku were far more critical of the nature and implementation of the NTER, with many participants angry and frustrated with the intervention. They complained about a lack of consultation and perceived that the government was taking control from the community and making decisions which should be made by Yolngu. There were very few positive comments about the NTER, and these were mainly in relation to the 'food card' (income management).

Lack of consultation and lack of community control were the main issues raised about the NTER in Galiwin'ku. People were concerned about their loss of human rights and also suspicious of the government's motives and their views of Yolngu people.

“Does the government think that Yolngu people can't manage their own money?”

“You're number one and I'm down, this intervention is like a new shoot coming out, fast one, too fast.”

“Government is interfering in other people’s lives, it shouldn’t be like that, especially with Yolngu people you know, they don’t interfere with Balanda people.”

It should be noted that perceptions of the intervention were driven by only a few of the NTER initiatives, and in many cases the overall perception of the NTER seemed to relate to the experience and perception of income management, as this was the primary interaction most people had with the NTER. Indeed, when asked about the NTER, there were quite a few participants that had not heard of, or had very little understanding or awareness of the NTER. These often responded with *“what is it, tell us what it is?”*. Positive perceptions were mainly in relation to the benefits of income management in increasing the amount of food eaten in the community, especially by children. A few in Ali Curung recalled the health checks for children, but generally there was little awareness of other initiatives apart from income management.

2.1.1 Positive perceptions of the NTER

In analysing the positive perceptions of the NTER, several outcomes were identified that drove these positive perceptions:

- An increase in the amount of food available, especially for children. This was the main outcome that drove attitudes towards the NTER, and was the consistent response in all communities.

“I reckon it’s a good thing, families have got more to eat”

“Good for them kids, need food”

“When we do the bus run to pick up the kids for school they are coming along with a piece of toast in their hands which never used to happen”

“The reasons why Centrelink done it, quarantined all the money, was they did a study on communities, and they found the money was not going the right way for the kids, that’s why they done this. People wasn’t spending their money the right way. Now it’s better”

- A reduction in alcohol consumption and gambling (Hermannsburg, Nguiu and Ali Curung). In Ali Curung this was mentioned by about half of the participants, and many of these felt that any improvements in community safety were primarily related to income management as a result of less money being available for alcohol and gambling.

- An increase in school attendance (Hermannsburg). For example, while there were mixed responses in Hermannsburg to the NTER, a common view expressed in the consultations was that there is evidence that the NTER is having a positive impact on the community, especially with regards to increases in school attendance. It should be noted that in Hermannsburg the consultations identified challenges due to limited resources in the school (staff and infrastructure) to deal with the higher levels of school attendance.

“I reckon that it’s successful because a lot more kids are going to school, and that’s great”

“Schooling has become a big focus of the changes and the shops are helping by not letting kids in to buy anything during school hours”

“The school is working with the community, each day they prepare a list of kids not at school and send it to the two stores and to the Council so that parents know if their kids are jiggling”

- Improved nutrition through the school nutrition program (Hermannsburg). This was perceived to have positive health benefits, as it was seen to help children by *“giving them more nutrition”* *“making them more alert”*, and *“giving them at least one good meal a day which means they are less likely to get sick”*.
- Improved standing of women in the community (Hermannsburg). This appeared to be based on a greater capacity to ‘feed the family’ and have more money for clothing, as well as generally increasing the power and profile of women in the community.

“Women have become empowered through the intervention”

- Improved stock available from the community store (Ali Curung). The improvement in the range of food stocked at the shop was sometimes accompanied by complaints that the prices have increased.

2.1.2 Negative perceptions of the NTER

In each community there was a loud voice of dissent when discussing the NTER, and among the Galiwin’ku participants a large number were very critical of the intervention. Negative perceptions of the NTER were generally in relation to its compulsory nature and the fact that people felt forced to have income protection with no individual choice. People expressed a desire for the government and Aboriginal people to work together instead of the government policy being imposed on communities. The fact that the changes to Local Government Shires in the NT came on top of the NTER also generated considerable concern about government control. In Ngiuu the signing of the 99 year lease also created some uncertainty as to what will happen in the future.

“Too many changes, intervention, shire changes, CDEP changes, causing confusion and people really don’t know what to do.”

“Your system and my system are they coming to meet or separate? If they come to agreement it can stay strong but if it goes on like this, no good, because we are feeling weak and you strong. We need to come together and make decisions together.”

“It’s like two buffalos fighting and the grass gets trampled, the community is the grass, its suffering.”

“People feel like it’s going back to the 60’s, or mission days, it’s forced upon them.”

“They are taking us back to the old days when they gave us a cup of flour and sugar, put a rope around our necks and pulled us like horses.”

Several people also felt that the concerns on which the intervention was based (child abuse, alcohol use, etc) did not relate to them personally, or to their community.

“We were all right before; they have come in and taken away our dignity”

“They say we abused our children, its all rubbish, it didn’t happen”

The NTER was also viewed as unfair because it only applied to Aboriginal people, and not non-Aboriginal people.

“Down south, does it happen like this; is there a separate government, or what?”

“These decisions are coming from a foreign law, not Yolngu law, no respect for our law.”

Another major criticism in the research was the lack of consultation and communication in regards to the NTER. There were several complaints from people interviewed that they had not heard anything from the Government since the NTER started, and that they wanted more information on the progress of the NTER and what they could expect in the future. Many people wanted to know what was going to happen with income management and ‘when it will end’. In Galiwin’ku participants were very critical of the lack of communication and the confusion this generated.

“We didn’t know what was happening at the start, now, if they make changes, why don’t they come and talk to us and let the community decide on the issue, we don’t want anymore changes because it’s too much and we are confused.”

“Someone from the government should come back every three months and tell us what’s happening”

“Government may have spoken to some people here who had good English, we don’t know, No-one came and talked to us about what happening.”

“Government people only come to talk to people who are well known in Western society, better to talk to ordinary people like this.”

Nevertheless, while there were concerns with the intervention and lack of communication, there is a willingness to work with the government, as long as there is a commitment from the government to change the approach and work more closely with Aboriginal people, and accept that Aboriginal people have skills, knowledge and experience to offer.

“Balanda and Yolngu need to work together but we have to do this well, meeting together, it’s like the freshwater mixing with the saltwater as it moves to the sea. This can be good, mixing in the middle, good communication and make it strong and grow.”

The NTER was also viewed negatively because expectations had not been realised. Several people in Ali Curung and Galiwin’ku mentioned that promises made about improved housing had not been acted on. There was also an example in Nguju where a few participants said that they were promised price reductions as part of the intervention that had not been realised. Indeed, in Ali Curung a few complained that the prices had increased.

“We were promised 50 houses. The government wants to extend the lease but it’s a bit like bribery, they give us the houses for the lease, bribery and injustice. Any government in the world that does things like that it’s not fair. Causing a lot of worry amongst the people, the community is suffering.”

“This house is crowded, you look at a Balanda, white people’s house they have room to themselves, they sleep, they come home, they have a room, they wake up, they have a shower, they go to school but here, crowded house, no good.”

As well, there were several participants in Ali Curung and Galiwin’ku who felt that the NTER focused on income management, when there were other more important issues.

“They said it’s all about kids eh ... intervention mob said they’d help but they are not here to help the kids up at the school, they do other things like stopping the monies, not mine but others... they just sit in their office and do other things.”

“Because of the overcrowding in houses, government should consider giving us more houses rather than this one (income management), first things come first, in our case, housing is important, government should consider this way.”

2.1.3 Reflections on the introduction of the NTER

In Ali Curung and Galiwin'ku, participants were asked about their first contact with the NTER. For many people, this was difficult to discuss, as memories of the introduction of the NTER were limited.

It was generally agreed that the NTER happened too suddenly and was accompanied by a lack of information and a high level of confusion and anxiety. People who were traditionally seen as interpreters for the community felt equally confused at the time. Some people felt that the government acted in a way that was taking responsibility away from Aboriginal people and removing their rights, and expressed regret and anger that there was no prior consultation with the community. There was a common feeling that the NTER was beyond their control.

“It sort of just came in and mixed people up, like most of the old people didn’t know what was going on, and people who couldn’t read or write, they had a hard time finding out what was going on and they sort of asked people like us, and we didn’t even know what it was.”

“That intervention, it just came up suddenly, they should have gone and talked to people, had a survey, but that all just happened too sudden.”

“They think we’re blind and dumb, but we’re not, it’s like a clown, come in, do a show and go away.”

“We were confused. What was the reason behind it?”

“There was a meeting and it was announced on the PA but it wasn’t explained, only a few people went and the rest didn’t go, no one understood what was going on.”

In Galiwin'ku, many people commonly spoke of the ‘shock’ related to the NTER as a result of the lack of community consultation and prior warning about what would happen.

“They didn’t explain it to us, we got shocked.”

“We don’t know about why it started or when it came and now we are beginning to see, to understand why, it was a shock.”

“We were caught by surprise, without warning it just came to us.”

Some participants said that at the time there was anxiety about what the intervention would mean for the community, although several noted that it was not as bad as expected, or that it had positive outcomes.

“I thought it was going to be bad but it turned out good. I don’t have the income management but my wife does and it’s good, we get more food now.”

“The intervention came in and shocked the community, shook them up, made them think about smoking ganja, sneaking in grog, not just sitting back, that was good.”

The research suggests that for many, the confusion and anxiety towards the intervention is still present.

“For the Yolngu it’s like a tsunami and people really don’t know what to do, there is a spirit of apathy and confusion in the community, no leadership, it’s forever changing and people don’t know what to do.”



2.2 INCOME MANAGEMENT

As with the NTER overall, there were mixed responses when discussing income management, although many participants identified positive outcomes. The main benefit identified was the increase in the amount of money spent on food for community members, especially children. There were several participants who were critical of income management, and this was based on perceptions that income management compromised the rights of people in the community, and that it was based on a 'one size fits all' approach. However, even those people who objected to income management for themselves could see benefits in it for other people, specifically *'the ones on the grog'* or gamblers, mothers with small children/large families and grandparents who are carers.

"It's been good for the grandmothers looking after two or three grandchildren while the mother is in town ... grandmothers know they've got the money for feeding them and buying them clothes."

There were differences by demographic group, and these were identified in Nguuu, Galiwin'ku and Hermannsburg, but were less visible in Ali Curung.

- In Hermannsburg, Nguuu and Galiwin'ku people who were caring for others were the most positive about income management; especially women who were caring for young children (older and younger women), larger families and/or people with disabilities. They often commented that *'there is more food in the house now'*. In Ali Curung there did not appear to be the same difference by gender. Interestingly, while women with children did not always agree that income management is beneficial, most community members felt that this is the segment where income management is providing most benefit, as it leads to women and children having greater access to food. There were suggestions that this is the main target group for income management, and that it should not necessarily be applied to other groups in the community.
- Single men tended to be less positive, although this was not always the case. This was true for older and younger single men.

"I'm a single person; don't need to have money to feed the kids...only feeding yourself, not very fair"

"Money should go in key card, because I got one son, but he is working, why take my income?"

- Several older people felt that income management is not appropriate for them, especially where they do not have child care responsibilities, and some were insulted that the initiative targeted senior community members. Older men especially were seen as disadvantaged because they were not free to spend the money as they wanted and income management was perceived by this group to be both patronising and dehumanising. As well, there were concerns that older people found it more difficult to fully understand the nature of income management, especially what is allowed and what is not. In some cases it was felt this led to the exploitation of older people by their nominees spending their 'food money' for their own purposes. Other senior participants identified benefits of income management in that they have greater access to food, and less 'humbugging' from family members, as sometimes older people are coerced to give their money to younger relatives and then do not have enough left for food for themselves. It was also generally acknowledged that grandparents now had more money for children in their care, when in the past they had been left without funds to provide food. Clearly for this segment there are mixed views on the relevance and benefits of income management.

"They don't understand what it is about and can be exploited by their nominees and carers"

"I find it a bit hard because it's just myself and I get less money...my husband is working and why taking money out of my pay. I don't drink or smoke gunga"

- Those in paid employment were less likely to consider income management as an issue directly relevant to them but many did comment that income management is relevant and beneficial for some community members, especially women with families, but less relevant for older single men.
- People that did not drink alcohol, smoke cigarettes or gamble were more positive when discussing the intervention, as were those who had relatives who smoke, gamble or drink alcohol. The food card was often referred to as 'safe' as it could play a role in protecting food money from being spent on alcohol, cigarettes or gambling. However, one woman who had gambling problems was pleased about the income protection as it meant that her children had more food.

"I don't drink; I don't smoke so it's OK with me"

"It is the drinkers who are complaining as they want more money for grog"

"I'm happy with the food card, why, because my daughter plays cards and extra money in the food card makes me happy so I can feed my grandchildren. She can get \$100 cash, \$200 and that's enough. Before I had problem, she spent it all on cigarettes and cards, she spent it all, no food on the shelf for kids. This is a good way of managing, looking after the food. Makes me happy, I don't gamble and I stay home and look after the kids."

As mentioned above, the compulsory nature of income management and the lack of personal choice was the main concern for most people who objected to it. Some people felt that the government does not believe that Aboriginal people can manage their own money and complained that income management was unfair, and removes the freedom of choice and control of the money from people which was seen as a basic human right. In Galiwin'ku this feeling was expressed strongly in all discussions, and many were angry that they had been forced on income management without consultation, and the negative perceptions of income management were primarily based on this view.

"Why shouldn't I be able to buy what I want, it's my money"

"It's taken away my dignity"

"My choice, make it my own choice."

"Not happening with non-Indigenous people, not a fair system"

"Income is like a mother for control, not good, we are like children, not good to have the money controlled by someone else, that's not their money, it's our money."

"Sometimes food card is working, for many of the mothers, money is set aside for food card, nutrition program, power card, rent but some people don't want their money to be controlled by someone else, they don't like it."

Some people objected to the implication that Aboriginal people cannot look after their finances and spend all their money on alcohol or gambling. For many this was seen as an insult, and it appears to have alienated some people who had previously been very involved in their community.

"We know how to manage our own money; we don't need someone to manage it for us"

"We know how to handle cash."

"Most Aboriginal people don't spend their money on grog; they spend it on tucker and the kids"

“They think we’re stupid with money”

“Some people are good at managing money and they don’t like this control.”

There was also some confusion about whether income management is only relevant for Aboriginal people. Several people who were aware of the different treatment felt this is unfair, and wanted to know why.

“I want to know why the Government wants to do this to Aboriginal people. Do European people have this income management?”

“It should be for all Australian citizens, it’s not fair, not just for Yolngu or Aboriginal people.”

Across the research there was considerable confusion about how the system worked, when and where people could get their money and how it was managed by Centrelink. There was a perception from several people that they got less money with income management, or people did not understand how much was ‘*taken away*.’ This confusion and inability to effectively access the system was more common in the people opposed to income management and appeared to fuel some of their negativity, as well as frustration. This is important as income management requires people to have skills in managing money that many people do not have, particularly young people. In Galiwin’ku there were numerous reports of people not understanding the system and not being able to work out how to transfer money, or being unable to understand where the food card money had gone.

“Sometimes we wait; it takes a long time for the money to go into food card, days, weeks and nothing there.”

2.2.1 Positive outcomes

There are a number of positive outcomes which community members attributed to income management.

Increased purchases of food and other essential items

The first and most important of these is the volume of food being bought by community members, with more food being purchased and a greater capacity for community members to make larger purchases. This was identified consistently across the research, and children were seen as the main beneficiary of this. Even some of the people who were opposed to income management felt that it had led to an increase in the amount of food consumed in the community and improved health of children.

“Kids seem to be better fed and they are looking healthier”

“I see people with the shopping, buying food every week now, that didn’t happen before”

*“Whenever I don’t have food for children, I can go there [the shop]; any time we don’t have food.
Helped me a lot. Used for clothes, grandchildren clothing”*

*“I love it, when first got income, my fridge full, because I have brother – share voucher and my fridge
full”*

*“Like this one, better than cash. Cash money we lose, we spend straight away and next day no money
for food”*

“Adult, children, pensioners are getting more food, healthier, safe money in food card.”

*“It works for us because there is food on the table and kids can eat and go to school, its working. The
way it was before we spent it all at once and some went on gambling, cigarettes.”*

Staff from the shops that were interviewed indicated a marked increase in the size of food orders they are placing with their suppliers, though there is still a strong tendency for people to buy canned and pre-prepared meals.

*“Cigarette sales have decreased 60%, meat sales have increased by 50% and vegetables are up
40%”*

In Nguiu, participants consistently mentioned the benefits in terms of people shopping and buying food on the weekend.

“Helps with the take away on weekends, so we have food on the weekends”

The research suggests that in the past many families did not have access to as much food on the weekends, and as a result many were pleased with the change. This is also significant given that school nutrition programs do not operate on weekends, and hence the positive response to income management as this allows families to buy food on the weekends.

While several people complained that they could not buy cigarettes on the food card, there were others (fewer in number) who commented that income management is positive because you cannot buy cigarettes.

Income management was also seen to lead to an increased capacity to buy other essential items, with many participants mentioning clothing. In Hermannsburg participants identified that warmer clothing was purchased for winter and during the site visit to Hermannsburg the local store ran out of children’s

socks in response to the cold weather.

“Income management has led to more warm clothing being purchased especially given how cold desert winters can be”

In Nguiu several participants spoke positively about the clothes they were able to purchase from Pwanga Women's Enterprises, which is a community business that sells clothes that are made from printed fabric by local Tiwi women.

Participants also mentioned the benefits of income management in allowing the purchase of a greater variety of goods from supermarkets and department stores in larger towns. This was mainly mentioned in Hermannsburg and Nguiu, where the distance to large regional centres was less.

“When I was on income management it was good as the money gave me backup and I could get what I wanted from K Mart and Coles”

It should be noted that this response was not consistent, as there were examples where people were confused by the new system, and left with no money, leading to a reliance on other people for food or for help to negotiate the system. This seemed more common among younger and older people who required a lot of help and sometimes simply gave up.

“It’s sitting there one dollar, for long time, in the food card, only one dollar.”

“I spent it all in one day, next day all gone and I’m just sitting here eating nothing.”

Increased savings

In each community discussions on income management identified the benefits of saving, and the positive impact income management is having on saving, although this was raised less often in Galiwin’ku. However, it should be noted that few people used the term savings, but most talked about it in the context of being able to purchase household goods from the ‘bucket money’. In Nguiu there was usually at least one person in each group who mentioned items that were purchased through ‘bucket money’, and this included kitchen appliances, fridges, beds, pillows, sheets, blankets, televisions, washing machines, mattresses and a pool table. In Ali Curung, Hermannsburg and Galiwin’ku, there was a small group that mentioned this. While significant, the personal experience of greater savings and larger purchases were limited to a small number of community members.

The ability to afford these larger items appeared to be a welcome change that most people had little experience of in the past.

“For me, I’m a single person, I saved up \$1,000, but I don’t smoke or drink.”

“I haven’t had fridge for a long time, now I have fridge”

As one shopkeeper noted:

“I have recently received orders for fridges and washing machines which has just never happened before”

“I’ve seen savings in accounts of up to \$3,000”

However, this view was not shared by staff from another community store that was included in the research.

“There are 400 with income managed accounts in the store and none have accumulated funds”

While in some cases income management may be providing a new awareness of the capacity to save and the need for changing financial management behaviour, there is a need to position programs to capitalise on this interest and increase financial literacy.

Reduction in alcohol consumption and gambling

Some also spoke of the impact of income management on reducing alcohol consumption and the level of gambling in communities, with several participants in Ali Curung and Nguiu saying that income management helped people who drank too much alcohol or gambled.

“Most of the people used to just run with the money and go drink it all or gamble and now that’s cut that down a bit.”

“Before there used to be six or seven card games going every week and now you probably see one a week.”

“Good for me too, instead of wasting money on gambling.”

One woman viewed income management positively because it had helped her increase the amount she spent on food for her children.

“I spend more money now on tucker for my kids instead of casks. I was spending a lot on grog and gambling every day but now only once a week.”

In Nguiu, while several participants felt that income management had limited the amount of money they had available for gambling, and others also mentioned that the amount of gambling had been reduced, this view was not identified consistently across the research, and observationally there were

still several large card games operating in the afternoons.

Ease in paying Bills

Another benefit mentioned less often was the benefit of paying bills directly from the managed funds.

“I am not as worried about money now. I would still like more but at least my bills are being paid”

“It’s good how bills get paid like the telephone bills”

Some discussed this in the context of feeling less indebted as the main bills were paid directly, thus limiting the potential for accumulated debt.

Reduction in family tension

Some community members suggested that income management had led to a decrease in family tension previously resulting from the demands of family members for available cash. However, it should be noted that this link was not identified consistently across the research, and was mentioned by the minority, and in most cases, women only.

“There is no more humbug from my family, they have just stopped asking”

“There are less arguments in the shop and there is a real change in men’s behaviour. We are seeing more men involved in the shopping”

For some, the quarantining of funds was seen to result in a decrease in the level of family conflict and demands being made on family members, and this echoes the views of several women that income management had empowering them by removing the accessibility of the welfare money they receive.

2.2.2 Negative outcomes

A range of negative consequences of income management were identified, and in some cases this varied by location. There was less consistency when discussing negative outcomes, as the criticisms discussed in the research tended to have an impact on small segments of the community, rather than be felt across the board. As already discussed, the major criticism was in terms of the compulsory nature of income management and the lack of personal choice.

The remainder of this section highlights some of the negative outcomes identified in the research.

Difficulties when travelling

In Ali Curung and Galiwin'ku most participants noted that one of the main problems with income management was the difficulty this presented as many community members are highly mobile, moving between homelands, other communities and Darwin/Alice Springs. Not surprisingly, given this high level of mobility, the impact of income management on travel was perceived to be a major issue.

The forward planning required to ensure money was available when people arrived in other locations was seen as very complicated, and several people complained about the difficulties in accessing funds in Darwin and in other communities. There also seemed to be a specific issue with the Arnhem Land Progress Association (ALPA) stores, where people were unable to use their food card in other nearby communities which also have ALPA stores.

People also complained about delays in the Centrelink system which did not always deliver as promised. While funds can be accessed in towns, participants were critical that it did not allow for money to be used when travelling, for example, at roadhouses or in other communities. In these situations people had to use their cash rather than their 'shop money' to buy food and fuel, which was difficult given the already limited amount of cash money available.

"I had no cash, no pocket money when I get to Darwin and that's why I start walking, Casuarina, Mindil Beach, looking for my family."

"Sometimes it takes two or three days to get money when travelling."

"Sometimes we wait, it takes a long time for the money to go to that card, two weeks, we can't get the money, we find out money from satellite but it's down, can't get it, before we used to get the cash for shopping, straight away, quickly finish."

People who were more involved in hunting, sorry business, going out bush and other travel were more affected by this. People complained that they cannot access enough 'food money' to go out bush for longer periods which they are used to doing. In some cases this reduced the amount of travel that community members were able to do. This was also seen to have a detrimental impact as it limited the ability to live on homelands, and as a consequence encouraged people to stay in the town, which was seen negatively as many felt health and wellbeing was improved when on the homelands.

"We can't use the food card on homelands, and forces people into town."

"I'm not a drinker, I want my money back, I'm on the pension...I ask for money but disappear, disappear... sometime we go to a funeral, sometime to visit family, ring 'em up and the money is gone somewhere."

The high cost of travel and fuel in the region means that people who move about do effectively have less money.

“\$200 to get to Alice and back and there’s no money left.”

People also complained about not having enough cash in their pocket, when the family is in another community or on the road.

“You might be in another community and the kids might need an ice cream or lolly and you don’t have money for that.”

There were problems negotiating the system and organising payments for both the young and old. People who were more sedentary and stayed in the community seemed to have less difficulty.

This criticism was heard far less often in Hermannsburg and Nguiu, which is probably because the distance for both of these communities to a regional centre is less. However, several participants in Nguiu suggested that accommodation in Darwin should be part of the voucher system.

Exploitation of older people

A few participants felt that the complexity of the income management measures is allowing the exploitation of older members of the community by their carers or nominees. Some community members mentioned knowledge of older people whose nominees are using the managed income for their own purposes.

“I have seen older women go into the store to be told that such and such had used the money and there was nothing left”

Difficulties paying large bills

The other major issue raised was the difficulty in paying large bills like car registration, and paying off large debts when much of the income is quarantined.

“I owe \$15,000 and how can I pay that now when I only get \$100 a week.”

“How are people going to pay their debts if their income is quarantined, that’s not fair.”

Challenges in managing debt

Another negative outcome is the effect of income management on existing credit contracts and other accumulated debt. In these cases individual community members are less able to service their existing debt commitments. This has been compounded by what can be seen as ‘ambitious’ contract commitments. Some people suggested that income management could be used to pay off loans at the bank, and in Nguiu several participants said that they had outstanding bills at shops in Darwin, and would appreciate the ability to use the vouchers to pay off this debt.

“The most concerning issue in the town is Austar and Telstra. People are signing up for the full deal of \$300 per month just to get the football”

There was some confusion about the treatment of such debt commitments by Centrelink and this is seen to be causing a level of stress and concern for people who have signed up for credit contracts and now find themselves unable to meet their commitments.

Confusion

There seemed to be administrative problems and/or confusion related to the functioning of income management, including considerable misinformation, and people expressed a desire for more education and information to help them understand how to use the system. Several were confused about what they can and cannot purchase through the voucher system, and others mentioned the difficulties in getting the allocation sent where they want it to be or actually getting the money at the right time or in time for emergencies.

“I think it’s mixed-up, can’t get anything, even in emergency, they say can you wait for the next day, and next day and we are hungry and we can’t get the food.”

“I don’t even understand what I can and can’t buy”

“I got this mobile with the food card but can’t get re-charge on the food card, have to pay cash.”

There were a few people who were confused about access to ‘bucket money’ at Christmas time, with some preferring access to cash at this time.

Several people were also confused about the proportion of money that is quarantined, as they were not aware that half had been quarantined, with some believing that the income they received had been reduced.

There was also confusion about the time period in which income management will be applied, with several people asking:

“How long do vouchers go for?”

An example of the confusion and misinformation present was found in Galiwin'ku in regard to the 'nutrition payment' for school lunches. Most of the women interviewed said they paid \$50 per week per child, and they were very upset about this as they thought it was far too much as the children only received a sandwich and water (and water did not appear to be regarded as a 'proper drink'). Centrelink confirmed that the deduction is actually \$50 a fortnight. While this is likely to be a result of misinformation travelling around the community, it could also be related to language, as a week may not have the same meaning to all people.

"This nutrition should be less because they don't get drinks, only dry food. Its \$50 each child, that's a lot, if you have two or three kids. It should be \$10 because it's only dry food (a sandwich) and no drinks, only water and that's free. A sandwich only costs \$3, so why is it \$50 a week, too much."

Another example of misinformation was found in Galiwin'ku where several participants insisted that in other communities people are able to purchase cigarettes through the food card.

High prices

In Nguiu there was some criticism of promises made regarding a reduction in prices at community stores when income management was introduced that had not been realised. This seemed unfair to these participants as they felt the shops would clearly be making considerably more money given that purchases are so much greater. There were also complaints about prices in the consultations at Ali Curung.

"Prices should go down, but haven't gone down. Costs too much at this shop here, people get a million dollars there.....need to sell proper food, prices have to go down"

Increased access to unhealthy food

There were a few complaints that the vouchers can be used at the take away stores, and a couple of people felt that this was not appropriate given that the food available is not healthy.

"Greasy food, junk food, chips and drinks...don't spend it on take away, gotta be stopped. I feel sorry for kids"

It should be noted though that most participants were happy that the vouchers allowed food to be purchased at the take away stores.

Negative perception of all payments being quarantined

Several people in Ali Curung felt strongly that family payments (family tax benefit) should not be included in income management as it means too much money is quarantined.

There were concerns in Nguiu among a few women that the baby bonus is quarantined. Some women were upset by this, and were asking why the baby bonus was quarantined. People had heard that all

of the baby bonus was quarantined and went into the 'bucket' "so mums didn't get any cash". It was suggested that the women should receive some of the baby bonus as cash.

Dissatisfaction with items available through income management

There were many criticisms with regard to income management because cigarettes could not be purchased through the food card, and younger people in particular were frustrated with this restriction, as they appeared to be more concerned with 'entertainment' purchases such as cigarettes, DVDs, etc. In Galiwin'ku many people also complained that they were not able to purchase soft drinks or lollies on the food card.

"Can't get Coke, Lemonade, only orange juice or apple juice but kids like fizzy drinks."

"I can't get the things I want; when I went to the shop they don't give it to me (cigarettes)."

2.2.3 Unintended consequences

Several unintended consequences were identified in the research.

Difficulty when sharing resources

Several people mentioned the complex relationship between family responsibilities, money and now income management. Income management was perceived as having complicated and/or having a negative impact on traditional approaches to sharing money within families. People tended to feel that it was harder now to share and pool resources because not everyone received the money at the same time, and 50% of income is quarantined, so there tends to be a smaller volume of money to share on non-food expenses. This issue appears to have put pressure on the community as there is less money available for larger expenses like travel, sorry business and cars, which are often shared expenses. Several people mentioned that this will be a significant issue at Christmas and other special events, as these usually rely on pooling resources. People were anxious that they would not have enough money to provide for a family celebration.

"You'd all throw it in and share but now it's not there."

"There is no sharing between ourselves with food card."

In Galiwin'ku several people referred to the food card as the 'no-share card' reflecting its' lack of congruence with Yolngu culture, with concerns that it is having a negative impact on traditional approaches to sharing resources within families. People talked about their roles and responsibilities in the family and community and the importance of being able to share. People felt that now they have limited access to cash and have to say "I only have no-share card". There was some concern raised about the impact of a system that discourages sharing in a culture where this is a basis of social organisation, and encourages a more individual approach which works against the traditional roles

and responsibilities of Yolngu people. This was a concern as sharing was seen to be the ethical and responsible way to behave.

Reduced access to 'small money'

Several people complained that after the deductions are made for power, rent, food and savings people are left with very little cash. The lack of cash was a big issue for many people, particularly to meet the demands of children for lollies, chips and toys.

"Sometimes the kids need pocket money and money for trips to say Tennant Creek for footy, but they don't have pocket money because all that money gone to income management... kids need to do their own shopping when they're gone to Darwin and they need to buy something."

In Ali Curung people who do not have key cards had major problems as their only access to cash is by going to a bank in Tennant Creek (150kms) or Alice Springs (360kms). This also meant that they do not have cash to give their children pocket money, and all they have easy access to is the quarantined 'shop money'. Previously these people received their money by cheque and cashed it at the shop.

Greater access to travel and alcohol

In Hermannsburg the link between petrol being an allowable purchase item and Hermannsburg's vicinity to Alice Springs was highlighted as having unintended negative consequences. Hermannsburg is a dry community and there is a perception that income management is enhancing the ability of community members to go to Alice Springs to buy alcohol and consume it there or attempt to bring it back to Hermannsburg. While access to Alice Springs was an issue prior to income management, there was a perception that petrol being an allowable purchase item encouraged this behaviour.

"On payday get money for petrol and go into town"

"We tried to limit how much petrol could be bought but Centrelink came down on us and said we could not do this. But I don't think this is the right use for the managed money"

Lack of privacy

Several people raised the issue of privacy because they have to scan the food cards on a screen in a public place, and it was felt that others could then see how much money was available through the food card.

Increased feeling of pride in the home

A few women felt that income management had changed their attitudes to their house, because of the capacity to buy things for the home.

"House has changed, it's changed because income, all the things we buy go in the house and we see the differences, house is home now"

Increased amount of rubbish

As the amount of shopping has increased, a few people responsible for rubbish collection noted that there is a greater amount of rubbish in the community.

Increased humbugging for cigarettes

Several participants mentioned that ‘*humbugging*’ for cigarettes had become more common.

“Now, more people going around begging smokes, for the smokers it’s too hard for them, they have to change.”

2.2.4 Response to voluntary income management model

The consultations explored the appeal of a voluntary income management model. It was very difficult to engage people in this discussion, as it created considerable confusion. As well, for some people this led to awareness for the first time that income management is only applied to Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory, especially in Nguui.

“How come they’re different?”

“How come Cape York mob doing it?”

In Ali Curung and Galiwin’ku the voluntary income management model was seen as very positive, and many suggested this was the preferred model because it could provide the choice that people felt had been removed by the NTER.

“You can make up your own mind, not be forced into it”

“We have to decide, the people not the government.”

“Give back the choice, everybody has to choose and by doing that we grow. Like this the government is putting us into a yard like sheep.”

“They should have said that in the first place, instead of telling all of us and we had no choice, they just shoved that into our mouth.”

“Why don’t they come and ask us, that’s the proper way, you want this or not, that’s what Australia is all about, free country, because we are the same as any other Australian, black or white.”

However, in Hermannsburg there was little support for the voluntary model. In Nguui, while there was

some appeal to the voluntary model, the most common response was for income management to remain as it is currently. This view was expressed by a small minority, usually women, in Galiwin'ku as well.

“Keep it. More food for kids, not cards and smokes.”

The main criticism is that those who benefit most from income management would be unlikely to volunteer for their money to be quarantined. This is backed up by responses when asked about whether people would volunteer for income management – very few of the people interviewed agreed that they would volunteer to have income management if they were given the choice, even those who were very positive and had identified a number of benefits that had been realised for them and their family.

“If you made it voluntary then those who should be managed would be the first to get out”

“Most people wouldn't choose, people who find it hard to budget wouldn't choose, would spend money on grog and gambling”

It also appeared that the people who needed the income management most (people who said they had trouble gambling) were less likely to volunteer.

When asked, the majority of participants said that they would not choose to be on income management.

“I wouldn't want to be on income management because I'm responsible with money. Also, I'm not married”

The idea that the community could decide who should be on income management was usually rejected. This was primarily because it was likely to cause too much trouble and arguments and *'it's not the Aboriginal way.'* There was some support for the idea that families or community could recommend people for income management, but then it would need to be taken up voluntarily. In Ali Curung several participants thought that the voluntary model would be beneficial as people that have *'trouble with grog and cards'* would benefit from income management, and income management could be compulsory in these circumstances. While it was thought it would be easy to identify families that do not look after their children and spend too much money on *'grog, cards and smokes'*, no one was able to suggest workable models to implement this approach.

Several CDEP workers felt that they should have the option to have income management but that, in their case, it should be voluntary. Most people felt that CDEP employees worked for their wage and deserved to have free access to it. It was also noted that most people would not do CDEP work if it

involved income management as it *'wouldn't be worth it, no one would turn up.'*

One young man who was on CDEP felt that he was seen as someone with more money (because he is not on income management) and is often expected to give money to other family members. He said he would like to have the option of income management on CDEP so he was not put in this position.

"I'm on CDEP and I hear a lot of good stories so I might go on the food card."

2.2.5 Suggestions for improvement

Generally, suggestions for improvement focused on addressing negative outcomes identified in the research. While there was a request by some for income management to be removed, there was also a strong voice that supported income management, but with suggestions for improvement. As well, it is important to keep in mind that there were differences both within and across communities, with Galiwin'ku and Ali Curung less positive when compared to Hermannsburg and Nguiu.

The research identified a number of opportunities for improvement, as follows:

- Greater Flexibility – Allowing for quarantined money to be used in smaller outlets like roadhouses when travelling. There were also requests for vouchers to be provided for accommodation in regional centres. A few young people also suggested an entertainment allowance where \$30 a week is put aside for entertainment that could be spent on cigarettes, fizzy drinks or DVDs.
- Simplification of the process for requesting the movement of funds and for accessing money in an emergency, and fewer delays in processing (shorter waiting times) - For example, one grandmother who was a carer for young children was distressed because half her money was allocated to a shop in Tennant Creek and she had no money for food in Ali Curung.
- Greater education and assistance about the nature of income management and the specific items that can be purchased through managed income - There was a clear need for information. For example, while the researchers were based at the Shire office in Ali Curung, people were constantly looking for help from the Centrelink staff. It is also important to pay particular attention to the information needs of older community members, who generally demonstrated a poor level of knowledge. The provision of factual information about income management would also act to mitigate the scaremongering that is prevalent in some community discussions on the issue.

- Consider existing debt contracts in the context of income management - This issue should also be referred to Centrelink for consideration and policy response. As well, there is a need for financial literacy counselling and training to enable community members to understand the impact of their purchases or contract undertakings in the context of limited disposable income.
- Linking government payments to school attendance - Several people in Hermannsburg and Nguiu raised this issue independently as they had heard the recent government announcement. Several people supported the withholding of payments linked to school attendance.

“I think it’s a good idea to get the parents to push their kids to school, I’ve been working there for years and it’s still the same.”

- Develop programs and services to stimulate and reinforce money saving behaviour.
- Offer those on CDEP and those working options to have their income managed, although it is unlikely that many people will volunteer for this.
- Community bank - To help people learn about saving and improve access to funds.
- Net banking – Enhance this option in communities.
- Reduce prices in community stores.
- Provide more ‘real jobs’ and employment so people do not have to rely on food cards.



2.3 COMMUNITY SAFETY

This section of the report focuses on the specific community safety measures of the NTER. In contrast to income management, there was a more equivocal response to this issue and a strong feeling that the NTER had not achieved fundamental changes in community safety.

While this was seen to be the case, a number of community members in Hermannsburg suggested that the place *'felt safer'* with the main reason given being the departure of perceived *'trouble makers'* (the more violent elements) after the commencement of the NTER. This view was not expressed in other communities, with participants in Nguuu, Galiwin'ku and Ali Curung more likely to say there had been no change.

2.3.1 Community Context

In exploring perceptions of the impact of the intervention on community safety, it is important to understand the context for each community, as this varied considerably. The table below summarises the context for each community.

Ali Curung

Ali Curung is a dry community.

Summary of NTER initiatives in Ali Curung

- Police presence – In Ali Curung there had been no increase in police presence
- Night Patrols – Night patrol existed prior to the intervention
- Safe House – There was a safe house prior to the intervention.

Galiwin'ku

Galiwin'ku has always been a dry community, and in the community alcohol was not regarded as a major problem.

Summary of NTER initiatives in Galiwin'ku

- Police presence –Increase in police presence
- Night Patrols – Additional night patrols
- Safe House – No safe house in the community.

Hermannsburg

Hermannsburg is a dry community. Recently there has been considerable public attention around community safety issues in the community, with senior community members commenting that this was a ‘beat up’ and that ‘that type of thing’ was not common in the community.

Summary of NTER initiatives in Hermannsburg

- Police presence – In Hermannsburg there had been no increase in police presence
- Night Patrols – At the time of the research the Night Patrol had not yet started. The indications were that it would begin operating in September 2008.
- Safe House - A safe house has been constructed in the community but it is not being used due to concerns about contamination.

Nguiu

Nguiu has a social club that is open four days per week. This club serves light beer, and there is a six can limit per person. These limits were introduced in response to community leadership prior to the NTER. The Youth Diversion Unit in Nguiu is very active, and provides lots of activities for children and youth, as well as running the night patrol service. For example, the day before the consultation youth diversion had picked up 38 children for school, supervised 60 children at the swimming pool, supervised 80 at the sport and recreation hall, conducted 6 interventions with children misbehaving at school, and night patrol had transported 100 adults and children.

Summary of NTER initiatives in Nguiu

- Police presence – In Nguiu there had been no increase in police presence
- Night Patrols – Night patrol existed prior to the intervention.
- Safe House - A safe house has been constructed in the community but it is not being used due to concerns about contamination.

2.3.2 Perceptions of the NTER impact on community safety

It was much more difficult to discuss community safety in the community consultations, and many participants found it difficult to identify initiatives of the NTER that had had an impact on community safety, and to discuss changes over time in levels of safety within the community. This is primarily a result of the limited number of highly visible initiatives that had been implemented in each of the communities included in the research, which led to a more equivocal response to this issue.

Responses for each community are highlighted separately, given the diversity in responses.

Ali Curung

Most people interviewed regarded Ali Curung as a safe place, and it was felt that the NTER had had little impact on this perception.

“They don’t fight here, most of the time.”

“Ali Curung is one of the best communities, not much problems with alcohol or fighting, it’s a good place.”

Participants were not aware of initiatives that the NTER was responsible for with regard to community safety, although one of the few things noted were the road signs about alcohol and pornography, and these were generally seen as unnecessary.

However, participants that supported income management as a good idea perceived that it had a positive impact on community safety.

“We’ve got less drunks spending their money on grog now.”

“It’s settled down a lot here because people have less money to spend on alcohol, less domestics, less husband and wife fighting and less people fighting over cards because they’ve lost their money.”

Similarly, those who did not support income management did not perceive that there is any association between income management and greater safety, or made no comment.

When discussing community safety in Ali Curung, there were requests for more police working longer hours, and for more support for the night patrols. One group of women complained about the noise level caused by ‘the drunks’ who come back after the police station closes at 10pm, bringing alcohol back and keeping everyone awake, including the children who have to go to school. The women felt that the police or night patrol do not address this issue, as they only become involved when there is violence.

“They sneak back in with the grog and put on tapes and start making noise.”

Galiwin’ku

People were reluctant to talk about community safety. Most people had not noticed any changes and when changes were mentioned, both positive and negative; they were generally regarded as minor.

“Things still the same.”

“Nothing has changed, it’s the same, same as white people, they drink, they gamble, same.”

“Nothing’s changed, people are still bringing in grog and ganja but less now. Still kids are running around at night time. Last night, big trouble, throwing rocks, smashing windows.”

A minority of people felt that there has been a reduction in gambling, fighting and violence.

“Things changed, yes, a little bit, little bit safer.”

“Before there was a lot of fight, husband and wife fight, boyfriend and girlfriend fight, underage married no job, borrowing rupiya (money), better now.”

Some people noted that there had been an increase in card games, as this was seen as a means for accessing money. However, it was felt that the amounts being played for are significantly reduced.

There was a common perception that children are ‘out of control’ and people related this to two factors. The first was that community power has been taken away by the government. The second factor was that children are more aware of their rights, and as a result the power to discipline has been removed from parents and elders, as children threaten their parents with ‘balanda law’.

“The kids say, if you hit me I’ll report you to the police.”

“Children are being silly and controlling the whole town. They are talking back now, after a long journey through confusion, children are not looking to the older people.”

When discussing safety, across the research it was clear that the homelands and outstations were perceived as safe and healthy places for everyone, particularly children.

“People are much better physically, emotionally and socially in the homelands. In the community, some kids, 16, 17 and 18 year olds wandering around, making trouble for their families like getting pregnant, throwing a rock in a window.”

There was a distinct division of opinion on the role of the police. Some people thought the police had made a difference, but most people felt that the police were not engaging with the community, and that the increased police presence had not made any difference. Others felt that the police needed to include more local men and women, rather than non-Indigenous officers.

“We had too many problems here before but now the police are here it seems to settle down.”

“They (police) are not engaging enough with the community. Don’t really want all the police, maybe two and that’s enough.”

“We need more police, more night patrols, but men and women and local people, not all Balanda.”

Some people expressed fear of the police, and there was also concern that the police are playing a role in taking children to school, with a preference for this work to be done by community members. One group also complained about police demonstrating gun use in front of children (police had demonstrated the stun gun at a local football match).

“People are scared of the police, especially the children, they are very scared.”

“Police and night patrol are rounding up kids to take them to school. But the kids are scared of the police. We want kids to go to school but they are worried that the police are going to get them.”

There was also some concern that although the increase in police numbers has helped with school attendance, it has shifted power from the elders to the police.

“It has helped, not greatly but in a small way to try and bring back some kind of the law, but not much. The power has shifted from the old people to the police. “

There is no safe house in Galiwin'ku, but many people could not imagine how a safe house would work, and wanted to know how long the person would stay there and how they could ever be safe when they came out again. Another group was keen to see shelters for men and women.

One of the major concerns raised for community safety was the lack of housing. Fighting and arguments in the community were seen to be closely linked to overcrowding. People were concerned that promises had been made about housing but the only new houses that have been built are for non-Indigenous people.

“It’s like a third world country, instead of asking questions, fix up housing, they talk about getting kids to school but look at the root of the problem, kids don’t get to sleep crowded into houses.”

“We need houses to be repaired, windows, doors, locks and keys.”

“We need more housing, the police have new houses and we thought they would be for Yolngu but it wasn’t for us.”

The concerns with housing were exacerbated due to a perception that the government had made false promises about the provision of more housing, and some also interpreted the connection between government offers of housing and negotiations over leases as a form of bribery.

“The government wants to extend the lease but it’s a bit like bribery, they give us houses for the lease... it’s not fair.”

Hermannsburg

Overall the consultations in Hermannsburg suggested that for some there is a sense of increased levels of safety in the community, although most participants were not able to identify concrete examples for this change in perception. Some suggested that it was because the ‘trouble makers’ had left the community, but this was not a consistent theme that emerged in the research.

“There is less grog and less violence. The intervention led to violent people leaving Hermannsburg”

On the other hand, there was also a perception that safety had not improved.

“Kids are still wandering around every night. Their parents are gambling and the kids are neglected”

When discussing the police presence, some participants felt that there was a reduced police presence in Hermannsburg since the NTER as the main focus of the police is to patrol the highway to intercept cars coming into the community with alcohol.

“Police attention is out of town and you can see the effects. There are empty bottles and cartons of VB leading up to the town which is a result of their intercepts and their tipping out the beer”

“There are grog parties every night in the place, and the police do nothing about it”

Given the perceived focus of the Police on the highway, there was a belief among participants that there was a lower level of attention given to dealing with alcohol consumption in the community. It was suggested by participants that there is a lot of alcohol in the community and that ‘drinking sessions’ and parties are common place in the town.

“There are parties every night and you never see the Police around, everyone turns a blind eye to the grog in the community”

Nguiu

Some felt that income management is having a positive impact on improving community safety because there is “less cards and less drinking”.

“It’s settled down with problem and mothers looking after the children with changes of the intervention and saving for clothes and food”

A few also suggested safety had improved since light beer had been introduced at the club, with a six can limit per person. These restrictions had been introduced prior to the NTER, in response to the

community action plan. Others also mentioned that Youth Diversion runs a lot of activities for young people, and that this has a positive impact on safety for children.

Some of the women suggested that there is less fighting due to income management.

“When they get cash and run out of cash and forget to buy family food, fight because of that, now income came, there is less problem with that”

Responses were mixed though, as many also felt that there had been no difference in the level of safety as a result of the intervention.

“Still have problems, family problems, drinking, kids problems, up and down, but not that worse.”

It should be noted that one Government employee identified several measures that were felt to indicate an increase in community safety in Nguiu. This person noted that the number of overtime hours for police had reduced dramatically, and the number of out-of-hours calls received by the health clinic had also dropped, and these were thought to indicate fewer violent incidences.

There were some complaints about the safe houses. Several people felt that they are unlikely to make people feel safe, as they would *“feel like they are locked in”*. Others complained that they were in the wrong location. Older women who currently provide support to women who experience family violence had requested that the safe house be closer to the police station, but instead the safe house is in the centre of the community, and near the club, which they felt was not appropriate. It was also thought that the safe house would only be effective if there was a bus or transport provided.

It is also worth noting that in the discussion on community safety in the large community meeting (approximately 75 community members), there was a very heated discussion on safety, and the need for changes to come from within the community.

“It’s up to us, community people... Tiwi people, we got to help each other, look after each other...nothing changed for 20 years now...People need to come together”

Older women also felt safety would be improved if the club was moved, so that it was not in a central location. There were also concerns about children waiting at the fence of the club, looking in.

The safety issues identified focused on violence, fighting as a result of gambling, and *“kids running around at night.”* Discussions on safety led to discussions on school education, and the importance of increasing school attendance and the level of education for children in Nguiu.

2.3.3 Suggestions for Improvement

Given the range of views expressed in the research, and the limited visible safety initiatives that had been implemented as a result of the NTER, it appears far too early to make a determination as to the practical outcomes of the community safety initiatives.

“Maybe question too early, lots of changes, such as shire changes”

Accordingly, the suggestions for improvement need to be focussed on getting the key community safety planks established and running in the communities. This would include but is not limited to:

- Increasing the visibility of police in the communities reacting to the consumption of alcohol in the town (Hermannsburg and Ali Curung) - In Ali Curung there was a suggestion for additional police to cover a 24 hour day, and for police to be involved in prevention activities.

“The problem is the police station closes at 10:30 every night, that’s it, they go to sleep they don’t care who rings up. The drinkers know what time the cops go to sleep and they just wait out bush until about 11 and they come back in. They should have staggered hours so it’s a 24 hour police station... that would make a difference.”

In Nguuiu and Galiwin’ku there were no requests for an increased police presence, although there were requests for female police officers in Nguuiu, and local officers in Galiwin’ku.

“Enough police, don’t need more police, we’re not wild people”

- Establishing Night Patrols as a matter of urgency (Hermannsburg only) and increasing support to existing Night Patrols (Nguuiu).
- Addressing the contamination issues around the Safe House project (all communities).
- Improved activities and resources for young people and children such as youth services and recreation and sports facilities - For example, in Galiwin’ku and Ali Curung there were requests for a swimming pool and organised sports like football and basketball. Other people also felt there should be an increase in activities for all age groups, including older community members.

“More activities for everyone, older ones, singing, art, keeps us strong and young”

- Support for cultural activities such as art, farming and hunting e.g. fishing, collecting shellfish, yams (Galiwin’ku).

- Enhancing opportunities for communities to address safety issues from within the community, led by the community, so that policy and decisions are not only coming from government (all communities) - This could include encouraging the development of a women's safety policy in communities.
- Improve housing - There was considerable concern in Galiwin'ku and Ali Curung that the housing improvements promised by the NTER had not been acted on, and that poor housing is the cause of many problems with regards to safety and school attendance. There was also a request for more information on the plans for housing improvements in the communities.
- Support for the homelands, including modern facilities, improved hygiene and clean water in the homelands, where people have access to hunting and traditional ways (Galiwin'ku).

