Ngura Kunpu Ngaranytjaku

Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Lands

empowered COMMUNITIES

Submission to the Senate Standing Committees on Finance and Public Administration

on

The appropriateness and effectiveness of the objectives, design, implementation and evaluation of the Community Development Program (CDP)

June, 2017

Submission to the Senate Standing Committees on Finance and Public Administration, on behalf of Empowered Communities in the Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjarra Yankunytjatjara (NPY) tristate region, Central Australia.

June, 2017

On 22 March 2017 the following matter was referred to Finance and Public Administration References Committee for inquiry and report by 14 September 2017:

The appropriateness and effectiveness of the objectives, design, implementation and evaluation of the Community Development Program (CDP), with specific reference to:

a) the adequacy of the policy process that led to the design of the CDP;
b) the nature and underlying causes of joblessness in remote communities;
c) the ability of the CDP to provide long-term solutions to joblessness, and to achieve social, economic and cultural outcomes that meet the needs and aspirations of remote Indigenous people;
d) the impact of the CDP on the rights of participants and their communities, including the appropriateness of the payments and penalties systems;
e) the funding of the CDP, including the use of unspent funds in the program;
f) the extent of consultation and engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in the design and implementation of the CDP, and the role for local decision making within the program;
g) alternative approaches to addressing joblessness and community development in remote Indigenous communities; and
h) any other related matters.

The Empowered Communities secretariat is not tasked with making specific recommendations about an alternative to the current CDP delivery model as the partner organisations that oversee the secretariat have not developed a shared position.

The secretariat has, however, been directed to visit communities throughout the NPY lands to listen to concerns and ideas communities have in relation to all aspects of community life. Community members have generously shared their experiences, aspirations and frustrations with aspects of the service system that are not addressing their needs. A consistent and frequent message coming out of community consultations is that CDP is creating significant stress and hardship for communities that are already struggling.

This submission will therefore not propose an alternative model but will present case studies and data to highlight how the current model is failing communities, this clearly demonstrates that a new model is required.

This submission will address:

d) the impact of the CDP on the rights of participants and their communities, including the appropriateness of the payments and penalties systems

Background

In 2013, Aboriginal leaders from around the country came together with a common vision –

> "*…for our children to have the same opportunities and choices other Australians expect for their children. We want them to succeed in mainstream Australia, achieving educational success, prospering in the economy and living long, safe and healthy lives. We want them to retain their distinct cultures, languages and identities as peoples and to be recognized as Indigenous Australians*."

Empowered Communities is an initiative devised by Indigenous leaders throughout Australia. It seeks to develop a new relationship with Government, based on the ideas and aspirations of local Aboriginal people. Empowered Communities seeks to reform the 'top-down' approach to decision making, by listening to the ideas and worries of Aboriginal people and working with them to develop a more responsive, locally driven service system, that will deliver more positive outcomes for Indigenous Australians.

The **goals** of Empowered Communities are:

1) To close the gap on the social and economic disadvantage of the Indigenous Australians of the Empowered Communities regions.

2) To enable the cultural recognition and determination of Indigenous Australians of the Empowered Communities regions so that we can preserve, maintain, renew and adapt our cultural and linguistic heritage and transmit our heritage to future generations.

Empowered Communities leaders across Australia agree that there are 5 priority areas for improving life for Aboriginal people –

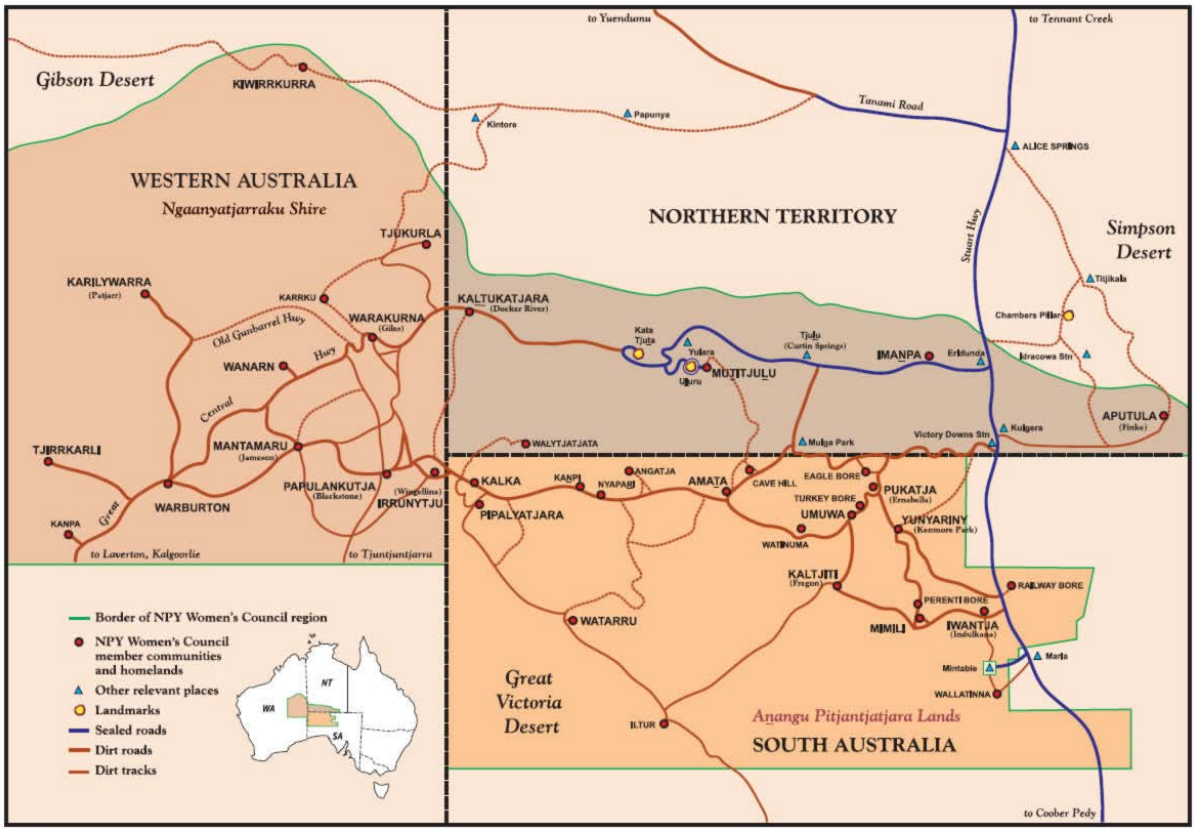
- Good education
- Safe communities
- Work or meaningful engagement
- Proper housing
- Care for children, elderly and the disabled

At the heart of these priorities in the NPY region is a strong commitment to maintaining culture and traditional values, through *Tjukurpa* (Law), *Walytja* (Family), *Manta* (Country) and *Wangka Uti* (Language). The backbone organisation for Empowered Communities in the NPY region is the Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Women's Council (NPYWC), and the interim Steering Committee is c0-chaired by NPYWC and Regional Anangu Services.

"*Empowered Communities seeks to create a genuine and balanced partnership between indigenous organisations, government and corporate Australia, where everybody is working together on a level playing field and towards a shared strategy*"

Andrea Mason, CEO, NPY Women's Council

The NPY region covers 350,000 square kilometres in the cross border region of Central Australia, and is home to 26 remote Aboriginal Communities and homelands (see map below).



Over the past 12 months, Empowered Communities has been visiting communities throughout the NPY region. We have been listening to people's concerns and ideas, with the view to developing a shared vision for an Anangu[1]-led Regional Development Agenda for the region.

Parallel to this we are collecting and analysing data pertaining to the demographic and social indicators of development, as well as investment in programs and initiatives for the region.

Of the total population of 5276[2] Indigenous people in the region, 63% of the population aged 20-64 years are receiving Centrelink benefits[3].

We are also aware of a significant proportion of the population who are eligible, and in need of Centrelink benefits, but have not accessed this support due to a range of barriers– detailed further below. Nonetheless, the majority of the Aboriginal population in the NPY region are dependent directly on Centrelink benefits.

[1] Aboriginal people
[2] 2011 Census
[3] December 2015, Centrelink Administration Records.

TABLE 1: DURATION OF INCOME SUPPORT PAYMENTS, NPY LANDS, DECEMBER 2015

	Female		**Male**		**Total**
	No activity required				
	Non-Indigenous	Indigenous	Non-Indigenous	Indigenous	
0-<12 months	<5	42	<5	20	68
12-<24 months	0	40	0	12	52
24-<60 months	<5	153	<5	56	212
60 months+	5	323	7	184	519
	Activity required				
0-<12 months	8	74	18	163	263
12-<24 months	<5	62	n.p	119	191
24-<60 months	<5	132	n.p	199	345
60 months+	6	331	7	147	491
	27	**1157**	**57**	**900**	**2141**

We have facilitated 10 meetings involving 12 communities between October 2016 to May 2017, listening to Anangu men and women. Work and CDP has featured strongly in all meetings. Work, and worries about CDP has been consistently raised by both men and women, and is the most commonly raised concern in all meetings held.

Empowered Communities whole of community meetings have been held in the following communities:

APY Lands South Australia	**Northern Territory**
Iwantja (Indulkana)	Kaltukatjara (Docker River)
Mimili	Aputula (Finke)
Pukatja (Ernabella)	Imanpa
Amata	
Fregon	
Kanpi and Nyapari	
Pipalyatjara and Kalka	

A total of approximately 300 Anangu (Aboriginal people) have actively participated in these meetings.

The desire for jobs was the most commonly discussed issue - raised as a key area of concern in ALL meetings held.

Initial meetings with Community Council representatives throughout the Ngaanyatjarra Shire (Western Australia) also highlighted community leaders' very real concerns about CDP and its deleterious effects on their communities.

CDP was highlighted as a specific concern, amongst overall themes of:

- *Not enough jobs for people in community*
- *Desire for jobs that contribute to community*
- *Support for young people to access jobs and training*
- *CDP does not provide real jobs*
- *Access and interface for Anangu with Centrelink is difficult*
- *Centrelink penalties for CDP breaches are causing significant hardship on families*

Several interviewees recognised that some aspects of CDP are having a positive influence on some participants and these observations will be included. However, the problematic aspects, both in design and implementation, far outnumbered the positive aspects.

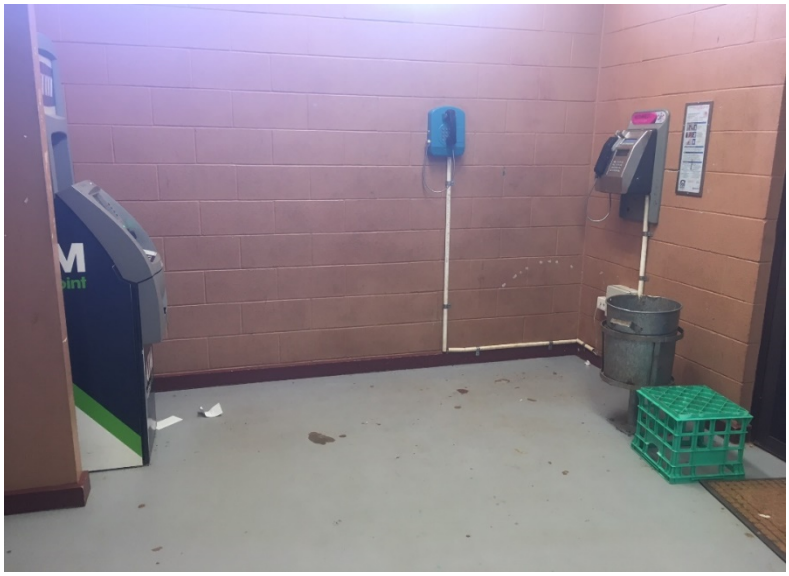
Our submission will demonstrate three major aspects of CDP that impact negatively on remote communities. Case studies and interviews are provided to illustrate the urgent need for CDP's redesign.

Three main areas of concern:

1. Access

2. Implementation

3. Penalty regime



Centrelink phone between ATM and public phone in a community store foyer

1. Access

- **Residents in many remote communities have access to only one computer and one public landline for community use, with no mobile phone access.**

There is often a queue of people waiting for the phone and it is usually in a public space. Communicating clearly in stressful situations over the telephone is often difficult. English is not the first language for the majority of CDP participants in the NPY region and interpreters are not readily available. Few people know how to access the interpreter services even if they know they are entitled to.

PP is 20 years old and expecting her first child. At approximately 8 weeks gestation she was cut off her Centrelink benefits for not meeting her participation requirements, and has not received payments since. PP's payments have been suspended for approximately three months now.

A NPYWC Child Nutrition Program caser worker (CW) met with PP in a remote community on the APY lands to try to assist with resolving Centrelink suspensions. While attempting to log on to PP's myGov account a number of functions were not available, because a verification text message was sent to a mobile phone. There is no mobile coverage in this remote community.

- **Centrelink call centre wait times are often more than two hours.**

We have been told of people waiting so long that the music tape has finished and the ensuing silence is interpreted by the caller that they have been disconnected so hang up before the call is answered.

One worker told of young men getting so frustrated that they have smashed the office phone.

Another, in one of the few communities with mobile phone coverage, told of the chorus of Centrelink 'on hold' music as women in the art centre have their phones on speaker so they can continue to paint while waiting for calls to be answered.

Financial counsellor/Centrelink agent notes that waiting times for participation line are significantly longer than for any other Centrelink line, and that this is a frequent occurrence. If we did not allow clients to remain in our office over lunch time (during which the office is supposed to be shut for an hour to allow staff to have a break) they would not be able to get through to participation line as the wait times are so long calls cannot be completed within a morning or an afternoon's office hours.

- **Very few remote communities have resident Centrelink staff or agents.**

A phone call is often the only way to communicate with Centrelink

'You finally get through after waiting for hours and it's never to the right person. You tell your problem and they put you through to someone else then they can't fix it and put you on to someone else. It makes it really hard.'

- **Internet access is inconsistent**

In one community two local workers were ready to help the queue of people waiting outside but haven't been trained in troubleshooting if the computer system isn't working.

'We have two computers here but both are off line and now we have to wait for someone who knows how to start it up again.'

- **Confusion regarding when people have to present in person to Centrelink which can be unreasonably demanding for people in remote communities**

NPYWC worker assisted mother to phone Centrelink representative to report and have her payments restarted. Mother was informed that she was not able to do this over the phone as she was required to resubmit all of her ID. Mother did not have a birth certificate, drivers licence or any other form of ID in her possession and did not have money to purchase a birth certificate.

Mother 26, lives in Kiwirrkurra, which is approximately 700kms north west of Alice Springs. Mother has a 6 year old and 2 month old child involved with the NPYWC Child Nutrition Program (CNP). Mother phoned CNP requesting support to be transported in to Alice Springs, her Centrelink payments had been suspended and she was under the impression she needed to hand paper work in, in person, to the Alice Springs Centrelink office. She was prepared to travel to Alice Springs for one night in order to pursue her Centrelink payments. Mother was unaware that she could complete her parenting payment claim from Kiwirrkurra, and would no longer be required to work to receive Centrelink payments because she now has a newborn. (Dec 2016)

- **Explaining personal circumstances and situations over the phone is difficult for people for whom English is their second or perhaps third language.**

A very articulate male explained he hasn't been breached because he knows how to argue his case: *'I don't get cut off but others do. They (CDP Provider) look after me because I can speak.'*

- **Privacy protocols dictate notification of interview times by mail and many people don't in fact receive their notification, or if they do then don't understand the letter's content and the consequences of not responding or attending an interview.**

Many letters are undeliverable as people don't realise they are expected to change address if they are absent from community, for even a short time. '*Why do I have to change my address when I'm away on sorry business for three weeks? I'll be back home soon.'*

One community store manager was frustrated that he is not allowed to assist by faxing participants' documentation to Centrelink.

'Most of them do Income Management at the store so I know their details anyway but I'm still not authorised to share their information. If the Centrelink agent is away on leave or training there's no way they can submit their forms.'

Case Study:

24 year old female client on Newstart seen November 2016 by financial counsellor and solicitor from Welfare Rights SA. Client advised Centrelink money had been reduced and she had no money for food. Said she had been reporting for activities, but had missed a week due to being ill, did not get certificate from local clinic. Client also said she had not received letters regarding attending

appointments with local job service agency. Financial counsellor checked client's Centrelink income, client had $390 penalty being deducted from Newstart payment. Client would only receive $9.80 in next payment and $29.59 the following fortnight if she did not contact participation team. Client with no support in community as family members away in various other locations. ***Client rang Centrelink and was advised that there was a 43 minute wait for the participation team and then another 2.5 hour wait to speak to an appeals officer in relation to penalties.***

Financial counsellor attempted to refer client for emergency relief, agency not open at the relevant time, client advised to return after lunch. Client returned late afternoon, had missed timeframe for referral to Emergency Relief agency. Said she would try to call Centrelink the following morning and then see financial counsellor again after lunch

Client seen again the following morning on phone to Centrelink. Gave permission to solicitor from Welfare Rights to speak to Centrelink for her to try to get an appeal lodged regarding the penalty. Solicitor sat with client for four hours, during which time she spoke to both the participation team and the social workers. Client became increasingly distressed during this period, at having to repeat her story multiple times. She asserted she wanted nothing to do with Centrelink and threatened self-harm. Solicitor took over speaking for her and was able to have penalty fee refunded from following day. Client refused to go to clinic re self-harm.

- **CDP providers have difficulty recruiting and retaining staff. In the past month two local providers have lost staff in at least six communities in the APY lands**

One such example is Docker River - The CDP provider there has been unstaffed since Easter, thus the office has been closed for a number of weeks. No monitored activities are occurring in this time, and the implications for Anangu on CDP are unknown.

Another community now has CDP staff on a rotating basis.

'The worker who was here for a long time knew us and knew when we had to go away for sorry business. The fly in fly outs don't know us and we forget to tell them. They want us to change our address even if we're only away from the community for three weeks.

Local (CDP provider) Anangu workers aren't treated equally – we can't use the car to collect people and we don't have email addresses.'

- **Many people do not understand the relationship between a CDP provider and Centrelink, often mistakenly believing that their information has been forwarded.**

'(the provider) told me that they would let Centrelink know that I had reported but they didn't and my payment was cut.'

'People tell Centrelink they are working when they are actually doing activities. If they get a payment for artwork they get cut off.'

Repeated requests have been made by service providers and community elders for a simple one page explanation of the requirements and processes – in both plain English and the relevant community languages. No action has been taken to address this.

- **When CDP reporting requirements are unclear and difficult to understand, Centrelink clients are more likely to be breached.**

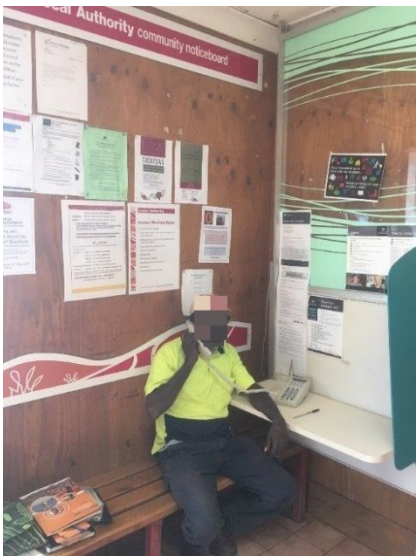
Penalties are much harsher than the mainstream JobActive program – disparities include up to 8 weeks' suspension of payments rather than 4 weeks in the JobActive regime and penalties can be incurred immediately on CDP participants rather than after 12 months participation for JobActive clients. Full-time activity requirements are 1150 hours pa while JobActive is 600 pa.

This is not an exhaustive list of access related issues and of course they interconnect to make the situation even more difficult:

41 year old male client into our office at 9:30am (time we open to clients) to call Centrelink. At 15:00pm financial counsellor noted client still on phone. Rang Centrelink agent line, as he is also a Centrelink agent, to see if they could assist the client more quickly. Agent line informed financial counsellor that client had spoken to participation team, and everything had been sorted out. As financial counsellor hung up phone, Centrelink answered the other phone on which the client was waiting. Client told matter was not sorted after all, and he still needed to speak to participation team. Client eventually given next reporting date. Financial counsellor advised client to return on next reporting date, at which time he would teach him how to do online reporting.

Client returned to office on next reporting date. Financial counsellor assisted client to reset his online password. Was not able to do so on Centrelink self-service terminals, as these were not working at time, so had to use computers within office. Client completed online reporting, but again was required to contact participation team. Client then spent a subsequent 4 or 5 hours on phone again awaiting participation team.

Financial counsellor/Centrelink agent notes that waiting times for participation line are significantly longer than for any other Centrelink line, and that this is a frequent occurrence. If we did not allow clients to remain in our office over lunch time (during which the office is supposed to be shut for an hour to allow staff to have a break) they would not be able to get through to participation line as the wait times are so long calls cannot be completed within a morning or an afternoon's office hours.



This man waited on hold to Centrelink for more than two hours then his story is clearly heard by several people waiting in the council office reception area where the phone is located.

2. Implementation:

- **Contracted providers**

Although contracts clearly direct CDP providers to support participants in meaningful 'work-ready' focussed activities, the providers appear to have considerable discretion in organising activities that are available to participants.

Expectations of participants and the activities they were directed to undertake varied greatly both within and between communities.

One provider had a ute to fit four participants so the first to turn up got their activity hours ticked. As the team was working on country and no other activities had been organised, the later arrivals had nothing to do and were therefore recorded as not participating.

In another community the men watched the women doing enjoyable, less onerous activities:

'It's not fair that women get to sit inside and do paintings while we work really hard outside in the hot sun'.

- **Deadline for the timesheets to be sent to head office**

Several CDP provider workers were frustrated that timesheets had to be sent off before the 5 hours of work had actually been completed so the choice is between pretending on the timesheets or sending them off showing insufficient hours worked, potentially inviting payments to be cut.

- **Type of activities are unsuitable (not 'real jobs')**

When CW asked PP why she has not been meeting her participation requirements, she expressed that her activities were to cook for herself at the Tafe, and this activity felt and appeared meaningless to her. Skill Hire, who arranges the participation activities, was closed when this discussion was had, so PP and CW could not raise concerns with them. CW visits community approximately every three months. It is unlikely PP will raise concerns with (the provider) alone without an advocate.

- **Activities that replace real jobs**

At the other end of the spectrum, CDP providers are required to ensure that participants engage in 'work-ready' activities, not activities that would replace actual jobs. Finding or creating activities that don't mirror real jobs is a challenge with high levels of unemployment in communities that have few amenities and inadequate infrastructure.

'People are doing almost full time work for an extra $20. It's just like slavery. We're going back to the ration days – working for blankets and a bit of tea and sugar.'

- **Meaningful training for real work**

Access to meaningful training at appropriate levels is problematic. It appears that contracted CDP providers have a great deal of discretion in defining what an activity is. Some participants describe their activity as 'sign the paper'

'Some days there's no room for us in the centre so we just have to tick the sheet.'

While others are undertaking activities that are considered real jobs for no pay.

There are very few opportunities to undertake meaningful skills and training that prepares participants for work. Literacy and Numeracy skills development is sorely lacking.

'We had a very good CDP worker who taught practical skills to the young men but he couldn't keep up with all the reporting and paperwork. He was a real tradie. When he left he was replaced by someone who could fill in all the forms but had no idea about practical skills and the young ones stopped coming.'

- **Requirement to work 5 hours per day, 5 days per week**

The disparity between urban and regional participation requirements of JobActive (600 hours pa) compared to remote communities under CDP (1150 hours pa) is patently unjust.

Female -28 years. Mother to 6 year old, and 20 weeks pregnant. Medical history of renal failure and low iron…cut off Centrelink for 8wks as she was unable to work outside in mid-summer heat. Referred via clinic to service provider for emergency food assistance.

Female – 27 years. Pregnant and mother of 2 small children. Often unable to work due to prevalence of domestic violence in the home. Subsequent suspensions have occurred. When payments are restored, deductions (due to overdue personal loans and school food fees) leave only a small amount of money left (in one instance only $25 per fortnight, over a number of weeks); exacerbating the cycle of poverty and indebtedness.

Case Study:

39 year old female with extensive history of suffering domestic violence who presented to Money Mob Team (MMT) in fear of her life. Client has post-traumatic stress disorder and multiple other chronic health conditions. Client frequently expresses suicidal ideation. Client had reported DV to job service agency and to a government officer, but received no help. Client on Newstart at the time she requested support from MMT. On suggestion of our Financial Counsellor (FC), application for Disability Support Pension lodged. Client's application supported by evidence of doctor from local clinic and several other treating professionals. Doctor took approximately two months to provide the relevant medical reports to MMT, claim initially had to be submitted without them. At time of application, doctor's view was that client clearly met the Centrelink criteria for DSP.

Initial application for DSP rejected following job capacity assessment interview, at which the client was supported by financial counsellor. Centrelink claimed client's conditions not fully treated and stabilised, and that she could improve with treatment or by moving to another location such as a city. Authorised Review Officer (ARO) appeal requested. Conduct of person who conducted the job capacity assessment (JCA) was noted as being abrupt and aggressive in appeal documents as one of the grounds for why the decision should be reviewed as unsound (apart from the extensive medical evidence already provided and the fact that it was not reasonable to expect the client to move from her familiar environment to access treatment). Centrelink subsequently informed FC that they would likely take some sort of counselling or disciplinary action against the officer who conducted the JCA.

The Area Review Officer affirmed original decision that client not eligible for DSP. Client case taken up by Welfare Rights Centre SA. Appeal lodged with Administrative Appeals Tribunal Tier 1. FC supported client during AAT hearing and she was represented by Welfare Rights Centre Advocate in relation to Centrelink decision. Tribunal member noted during hearing that he thought the medical evidence

provided had been very comprehensive, that the client was eligible for DSP and had been since date of application and that he would be recommending this to Centrelink. Client now awaiting Centrelink decision to grant DSP or appeal Tribunal decision. Process to this point has taken 10 months. Client does not have phone contact and so our staff are frequently required to outreach and locate her so that paperwork and other matters relating to Centrelink claim can be completed.

- **Post Placement Support**

The focus appears to be on compliance with CDP requirements rather than developing meaningful pathways to employment. Only one CDP provider made a cursory reference to post placement support – a feature of the current system designed to support participants who have successfully gained full time employment. Employers are rewarded with cash bonuses for retaining CDP participants in actual jobs with substantial payments at both the six and 12 month milestones of ongoing employment. Post placement support is often essential to facilitate the transition from CDP to employment. Without support during this sometimes difficult and confusing transition, participants may not understand the full range of their employee obligations and many soon end up back on CDP.

3. Breaches:

Engaging all unemployed 18-49 year olds equitably and fairly in meaningful activities that don't replace real jobs for 5 hours per day 5 days per week is an enormous challenge in remote communities.

Given the range of access difficulties and implementation inconsistencies cited above it is hardly surprising that people are frequently breached, often resulting in suspension of payments for up to eight weeks, sometimes more.

Such breaches that incur penalties of suspension of payments of up to 8 weeks places enormous pressure on individuals, families and entire communities.

Consequences of the breaching regime that dramatically reduces income for families and communities include:

- **The 8 week suspension of payments is leaving people hungry and impoverished**

55 year old female who came to see Money Mob Team about trying to get her super out and asking for a loan. Client receiving $1216 per fortnight in Centrelink payments, advised she spends all of this amount. On further investigation, client advised she has 5 other adults and a two year old living in the house, and is expected to pay all the rent and food for all of these people. Other adults in the house refuse to engage with Centrelink, client says their reason is they find it too hard to talk to whitefellas and it takes too long to wait on the participation line to talk to them. Because culturally it is so difficult for Anangu to say 'no' to family members, this woman is effectively being financially coerced and deprived by her family members. The system is not effectively modifying the behaviour of the target group, but is having negative unintended consequences for others.

- **No limit on deductions withdrawn from payments**

It is common for Anangu to have Centrelink make regular deductions from payments before depositing in bank accounts. Rent and loan repayments when breaches are enforced often leave no money in accounts when all the deductions taken out. When payments are suspended the rent arrears and loan repayments create very large debts that are difficult to repay.

Pregnant Mother 27 years of age, has contacted NPY WC requesting ERF at least 7 times in the course of her 3rd pregnancy, not all were met due to eligibility requirements. Also during the course of her pregnancy she has been suspended twice from her Centrelink payments because of not meeting working requirements. (Between July-Dec 2016).

When Mother's payments have been processed during the third pregnancy, there are deductions of at least $260 per fortnight because of personal loans, bush bus fees and school food fees for her 2 children. All of which are not being paid off during her 8 week suspensions.

Completing required hours to receive payments has been challenging due to a number of reasons for Mother including, high transience, domestic violence, partner's payments being suspended and at times reportedly caring for a grandmother and not receiving carer's payment.

- **Pressure on those whose income is not conditional on compliance activities, and are typically the most vulnerable –i.e. those on aged, disability and carer payments.**

Cultural tradition dictates that when in need, family members will support each other. Sharing of resources is an expectation and a norm – even in times of scarcity. Thus, those whose CDP payments are cut off, will turn to others in the family to support them. In many instances, this means that elderly or disabled family members on non-activity tested payments, and mothers caring for young children are expected to share their income to support other members of the family who have been cut off.

Thus, the most vulnerable in community become the primary source of income – often supporting a large number of family and extended family members who have all been cut off. The incidents of exploitation and abuse in this scenario is widespread.

NPY Women's Council staff administer an Emergency Relief Funds (ERF) to those in need across the NPY region. Staff report that the requests they receive are predominantly from those 'at the end of the line' – i.e. grandparents, mothers of young children and those on disability payments, whose entire income has all been used up supporting other family members who have had their payments suspended.

ERF payments are granted only under strict criteria for use and frequency of requests.

NPYWC Tjanpi Desert Weavers report that the income artists receive for their fibre art enterprise is increasingly used to support the whole family in light of the high rate of penalties applied to CDP recipients across the Lands. Women report that what was before an opportunity for independent and additional income for women, has now become a source of humbug and harassment from hungry family members. The humbug that these female artists face is having a notable impact to the way Tjanpi staff conduct their business.

'Pensioners and carers don't have to do activities but have to pay for others who are cut off – more than 8 weeks – and they sit at home feeling shame.

We need activities on homelands, put the water back on.

We need cash like we got before in the little yellow envelopes.

We ask 'What am I supposed to do?' We feel stuck in the middle between Centrelink and (CDP provider). We say we have a problem and Centrelink asks what the problem is – young people, everyone, too shamed to say.

The (CDP provider) truck can only fit 4 young men – others have to miss out – no activities and then cut off. CDEP was like real jobs with superannuation and insurance.'

Increased break ins of houses, schools and services for food

'The kids break in to the community centre or the youth shed looking for food.'

- **Violent outbursts through frustration at finding payments have been suspended**

'One young fella drove around and around and rammed the bowser cage with his car when he didn't have money on his card to buy fuel.'

- **Paradoxically, increases in overcrowding and vacant houses – as people without income move from their home (can't pay for electricity) to other family members' homes**

'They move in with us and we feed them. They are still meant to pay rent so their debts get bigger and bigger while they have no money.'

- **Inability to travel for significant cultural events**

'They (CDP provider) still get paid but cut off our money if we visit families in Alice Springs or Adelaide or hospital on dialysis and can't make the appointment. We don't think about that first we just think about hospital then don't realise till payday (with no money in the account) that we missed the appointment.

Then we get a debt for the rent and the loan and the debt gets worse. We get only $150 for food. Then we have to call NPY Women's Council for help.'

'A lot of people are very worried and upset. It's not working for us. Sometimes we get a little pay from the art centre. Some people are asked if they are working and they say yes because they do activities at the art centre and say yes that they get paid – Centrelink thinks they have a job but it's not true. They just got paid once for a pot or a painting. Sometimes we're painting and forget to go to an appointment. Skillhire says they will tell Centrelink that they did activities but don't actually call so the payments get cut off.'

- **Increased transience as people move to regional centres where compliance requirements are not as onerous**

Observations from an Anangu worker:

'We see people in town doing less work for the same amount of pay, compared to what we have in community. People are moving into town, staying with family there, because of this. We have seen people move to town and living with family there, where they do less activity hours, and have better support to do those hours, compared to how it works in community. It's not fair.

CDEP was better. People were paid weekly, and you got top up money for the work you did – there was an incentive. There was more work to do then, and you got paid for your work, not like now.'

Conclusion

The local experiences inform our opinion that while some experiences of CDP are positive, the current model unfairly discriminates against (mainly Indigenous) people living in remote Australia. It is harsh, unjust and unreasonable, impractical to implement in remote communities and is therefore contributing to considerable hardship and community stress throughout the NPY region.

There are many aspects of the current CDP regime that are cumbersome, confusing and very difficult to navigate, especially for those who are not fluent or confident English speakers. English is the second or even third language for the majority of CDP participants in the NPY region. Real disadvantage is exacerbated by the harsh penalty regime. A review of the CDP model is therefore timely.

This submission does not advocate the abolition of CDP as some benefits are visible to Anangu. Anangu shared examples of CDP projects that have improved community infrastructure and amenity. Some participants expressed pride and a sense of achievement and gained satisfaction from the activities they are mandated to undertake.

However, the CDP scheme unfairly targets people living in remote communities. The hours participants are expected to do and the penalties for breaches if they don't complete their mutual obligations are harsh, unreasonable and unjust compared to JobActive, the work for the dole scheme in urban and regional settings.

Parity with the JobActive scheme in terms of supports for participants (no work for the dole for the first 12 months while meaningful training and 'job ready' skills are provided), with equitable reporting requirements and breaching regimes should be enacted immediately; along with appropriate investments in community infrastructure and resources to overcome the systemic impediments that unfairly penalise remote Australians.

Thank you:

To community members who shared their often frustrating and sometimes traumatic stories, Anangu and workers who were candid in their observations about CDP, both its shortcomings and possibilities.

Liza Balmer

Co-Chair Empowered Communities

Acting CEO

NPY Women's Council