

Submission

Northern Territory Emergency Response Review

The Emergency Response Reforms and Tjuwanpa Outstations

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List of Acronyms

CDEP	Community Development Employment Program
CHIP	Community Housing and Infrastructure Program
CLC	Central Land Council
DEWR	Department of Employment and Workplace Relations
DLGHS	Northern Territory Department of Local Government, Housing and Sport
FACSIA	Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs
IBA	Indigenous Business Australia
JNP	Job Network Provider
STEP	Structured Training and Employment Program
WfD	Work for the Dole

Sometimes these people in government don't communicate. People live in a dark corner here lookin' for the light. 'Where is the light?'... just feelin' their way. The question mark is communication. How do they judge a coloured person and a white person? Still comes down to judgement – white and black. Do they share questions? Do they sit away or do they mix in? Government is judgin' people down here – its one sided. Politics uses hard words instead a plain English – but you still gotta communicate to understand each other... understand the perspective. (Man: 40s)

PART 1: Summary

This submission presents the perspectives and experiences of outstation residents and staff of the Tjuwanpa Outstation Resource Centre as they experienced the reforms over the first year of the Federal Government's Northern Territory Emergency Response.¹ Situated 130 kilometres west of Alice Springs, the 37 outstations serviced by the Resource Centre are spread over some 4,500 square kilometres of Aboriginal Land Trust lands. They are home to approximately 300 Western Aranda people who rely on Tjuwanpa for maintenance and repair of power, water and housing. Tjuwanpa has also managed a local Centrelink office and a large CDEP program.

Presented as a case study of the implementation of welfare reforms and employment measures, the submission draws on data collected as part of PhD studies supported by Southern Cross University and the Desert Knowledge Cooperative Research Centre. The writer has shared the content of the submission with Tjuwanpa and the people whose voices are represented, and has their consent to use the comments quoted. While the case study is necessarily detailed, members of the Review Team who visited the Resource Centre in July 2008, requested that Tjuwanpa provide a written account of Resource Centre's experience.

The submission highlights the poor understanding of government agencies and policy makers about the complexity of the reforms; the context and environment in which the reforms were implemented; the many unintended impacts they would have on people's lives, and the consequences for delivery of basic power, water and housing services to outstations.

The impacts of welfare and employment reforms on people

At the end of October 2007, Tjuwanpa's Community Development Employment Program (CDEP) closed and 168 people were required to register on the Centrelink system or find work. Income management arrangements also came into effect at this time. Under the Intervention the Federal Government also committed to transitioning people into 'real' jobs. There is evidence that income management arrangements resulted in an increase in the amount of grocery items that families purchased locally.

¹ The Northern Territory Emergency Response is referred to locally as the Intervention. This is the term used throughout the remainder of the submission.

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Women in particular acknowledge that less money is being used for alcohol and gambling. Although these behaviours have been curbed they have persisted. Six full time and eight part time salaried positions were also created. The combination of these measures, however, also led to unanticipated difficulties in people's lives.

- Following the cessation of CDEP there is evidence that large numbers of people were not fully registered on the Centrelink system. This created financial hardship for many families in the first three months of the transition, which included the Christmas period. Payments were delayed as a result of failure to register, difficulties with appropriate identification and problems within Centrelink. Many people also failed to understand requirements to lodge Centrelink forms.
- Income management arrangements also caused financial hardship. Misunderstanding income management arrangements, some families had most of their benefits paid to their account in Alice Springs. This created problems in accessing funds needed locally for groceries, fuel and electricity.
- Many families reported difficulties in meeting car repair and running costs. This in turn impacted on housing arrangements and ability to travel to Tjuwanpa to lodge Centrelink forms and attend interviews.
- There are also reports that some people experienced problems with debt repayments on vehicles.
- Anxiety levels rose. With the combination of the loss of access to 'top-up' wages and restrictions on how cash could be spent, residents worried about how they would service outstation power needs, meet vehicle costs and repay debts.
- Work participation levels dropped. The loss of workers impacted on the ability of the Tjuwanpa Rangers program to take up contract work in the pipeline. Participation in transitional work activities was also very poor. With the closure of CDEP people considered their CDEP work obligations had ceased. Restrictions on earnings through the loss of 'top-up' also acted as a financial disincentive to work.
- Government efforts to create 'real' jobs led to four new essential services positions, two full time Ranger positions and 8 part-time Ranger positions. Although salaries were funded, no provision was made for the training, supervision or logistical support required to support these jobs.
- Staff morale and attendance dropped. The loss of CDEP threatened Tjuwanpa's viability and staff worried about future employment prospects.

Many of the problems Aboriginal people experienced in understanding the new arrangements can be attributed to the difficulties they had understanding the language of the Intervention and the complexities involved in Centrelink's compliance requirements. Although Government agencies attempted to advise residents of the reforms through community meetings and fact sheets, government communications assumed English language and literacy proficiency. Further, government communications processes and timelines did not take into account the realities of a very remote environment where communications infrastructure and mail services are very limited.

In this context, requirements for the payment of Centrelink benefits to those on Jobstart and Youth Allowance were particularly difficult for people to understand and comply with. These Centrelink clients had to:

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- i. Undertake initial assessment interview with Centrelink.
- ii. Undertake a second Centrelink interview to determine preferred arrangements for income management.
- iii. Sign up with Tjuwanpa for a transitional work participation activity.
- iv. Register with and undertake an interview with a Job Network Provider.
- v. Prepare and submit timesheets to Tjuwanpa who would then forward these to the Job Network Provider.
- vi. Lodge SU19 forms to demonstrate that they had looked for work.
- vii. Check mail for notification of any interviews required with either Centrelink or a Job Network Provider. People were also required to check their mail for any other information that Centrelink might request such as personal identification.

Failure to complete these steps resulted in delays in payment or suspension of benefits for many residents in the Tjuwanpa area. These risks and the subsequent financial hardship people experienced could have been minimised in a number of ways. Tjuwanpa's Aboriginal Centrelink staff could have been briefed and enlisted to support the remote teams. Tjuwanpa would also have been able to assist with communicating Centrelink registration requirements if advance notice of the date of transition had been provided. This was not known until two weeks beforehand.

In addition to the complexities of language and Centrelink requirements, the difficulty for people - including non-Indigenous staff, was the scope and detail of the reforms. As little was known about how new programs would be implemented on the ground people struggled to understand what they would mean on their lives.

The impact reforms on outstation service delivery

Throughout the first six months of the Intervention the operating environment at the Resource Centre can best be described as chaotic. Tjuwanpa not only had to continue to deliver the power, water and housing services essential to people's survival, but it had to do so in an environment in which the loss of CDEP and uncertainty of Federal Government funding arrangements meant that the Resource Centre faced closure. Tjuwanpa was also expected to respond to the many demands of different government departments who relied on the Resource Centre to implement or communicate the reforms on the ground. All of these demands fell on the shoulders of the Resource Centre Manager. At the same time Tjuwanpa had to respond to the increasing confusion being experienced by residents who failed to understand what was required of them under the welfare to work reforms.

The threat to outstation service delivery resulted from government plans to replace CDEP with Work for the Dole (WfD) and expectations that CDEP providers could either host the WfD program or tender for the Structured Training and Employment Program (STEP). Neither of these programs proved viable in the outstation context. Under reform arrangements government also planned to transfer all CDEP assets to Indigenous Business Australia (IBA). This required that Tjuwanpa quickly restructure itself as a business entity and competitively tender for services contracts. Tjuwanpa lacked the operating capital and qualified staff to do this. Further, there was a significant risk that in taking up tender work outside the area, outstation service

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delivery – which often requires an urgent response to emergency loss of water and power, would suffer.

Although Tjuwanpa's CDEP has been reinstated as an interim measure, should CDEP or similar program not be refunded, Tjuwanpa will be forced to cease operations in June 2009. This would leave outstations without essential water, power and housing services as Tjuwanpa relies on CDEP capital assets service delivery and the funds needed to meet management costs. In brief:

- CDEP equipment, vehicles and machinery are used by essential services staff to fix bores and bore lines and to maintain rubbish tips and outstation roads. With the exception of two vehicles, all of Tjuwanpa's equipment, heavy machinery and vehicles have been purchased as CDEP capital items.
- The Tjuwanpa Rangers access CDEP machinery and equipment for contract work.
- CDEP vehicles are used to transport Rangers. Housing staff also access vehicles as NT Government housing funding precluded purchase of capital items.
- CDEP employs or augments the salaries of office, Centrelink and services workers.
- Fifty percent of the Resource Centre Manager's salary is funded by CDEP.

As Government agencies have yet to make alternative provisions for outstation service delivery beyond June 2009, the potential loss of outstation services would inevitably result in a movement of people into Hermannsburg.

Loss of CDEP also impacted on rental revenue. With Tjuwanpa unable to direct debit rents from CDEP wages, the Resource Centre was reliant on residents making these arrangements with Centrelink. Many did not do so. In 2007/08 Tjuwanpa's rental dropped to less than 25 percent of targeted income impacting on funds available for housing services and payment of wages.

Ongoing uncertainty over funding arrangements and the future of the Resource Centre put a halt to services planning. Plans for the development of housing services and the Tjuwanpa art centre were put on hold as both initiatives were reliant on CDEP and the Resource Centre continuing. The competing demands of different government departments also impacted on the quality of service delivery.

Provisions introduced under the Emergency Response legislation potentially threaten outstation viability. For example, if the cost of a bore or solar system requires replacement or repair in excess of \$50,000, legislative provisions would appear to require that a lease be negotiated. If negotiations over leases is time consuming, this could result in the loss of access to power and water on the outstation. This would result in people leaving their outstation homes.

Inequity also exists with respect to government funding provisions for outstations when compared with prescribed communities. Prescribed townships have benefited from the community clean up program and increased funding for housing repair and maintenance. Outstation housing funding has remained static. Townships have also benefited from discretionary funding for projects negotiated by General Business Managers.

What is working?

The overarching goal of the Intervention has been to create the conditions in Aboriginal communities that would see children protected and able to thrive. It is evident that income management arrangements have generally resulted in better use of funds for the purchase of essential grocery items and this is likely to benefit children. It has also reduced alcohol consumption and gambling and although these behaviours continue, most people would agree that the Hermannsburg township environment is somewhat quieter.

What isn't working?

At the same time there is evidence that income management arrangements have created hardship, particularly impacting on people's ability to repair vehicles and meet emergency cash needs. This has impacted on mobility and in some cases, resulted in people staying in or near to Hermannsburg.

In examining the issue of employment and training at Tjuwanpa, the evidence suggests that current strategies, which rely on assumptions that people will relocate to Alice Springs, are likely to fail. Aboriginal residents articulate substantial barriers to living and working in town. Further, the evidence at Tjuwanpa suggests that the financial incentives offered under CDEP encouraged involvement in work programs and the loss of these incentives led to a decrease in work participation levels.

With the continuation of CDEP an ongoing issue is the structure of CDEP funding. This links participant numbers to operational overheads creating a barrier to enforcement of the no work-no pay rule and compromises training efforts.

In combination, a number of the reform measures could establish a set of conditions which cut outstation access to power, water and housing. This would force people to relocate away from the outstations to Hermannsburg and Alice Springs, exacerbating existing overcrowding in these areas. The potential movement of outstation residents to larger townships would also seem ironic in view of the Government's intentions under the Intervention to make communities safer for children. Aboriginal families see the outstations as safer places than townships to raise their children. They value the outstations as places where they can avoid alcohol, gambling and 'trouble'. The movement of families from the outstation environment to townships or Alice Springs would therefore seem counterproductive and contrary to Aboriginal views that outstations are safer and healthier environments for children.

Are there alternative ways of working that should be considered?

Preliminary research findings suggest that Aboriginal people welcome the opportunity for training and employment but want these developed locally. The success of the Tjuwanpa Rangers program would appear to support this strategy. The Ranger's experience also highlights the importance of financial incentives to encourage participation in work programs.

In pursuing the economic opportunities that exist in the Tjuwanpa outstation area a number of conditions must feature in any training and employment program.

- The complexities and strengths of local conditions and service delivery arrangements must be taken into account and agreements carefully negotiated.

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- Family and kinship groups need to be targeted rather than individuals and programs need to work with and build on Aboriginal responsibilities for and knowledge of country.
- Increased funding needs to be made available for training and supervisory positions so as to attract well qualified people who are prepared to commit to work in remote locations.
- On-the-job and flexible approaches to learning need to be used rather than short-term that are geared to urban industry standards.
- Funding needs to be decoupled from ‘the numbers game’. Training and employment programs need to recognise that core costs and management overheads will be a feature of delivery regardless of the numbers of participants.

Underpinning all of these measures is the ability of government to establish the systems and processes that enable a real engagement with Aboriginal people and take into account local assets and strengths. At a minimum, governments must recognise that language limitations and different cultural interpretations of events will significantly impact on Aboriginal people’s understanding of government intentions. Reaching an understanding or agreement about desired outcomes through new initiatives will, however, need to go further. Any agreements must involve a dialogue that recognises and builds on cultural responsibilities for family and land.

The new work and training measures proposed under the Intervention were never assessed in terms of their feasibility and appropriateness for very remote outstation locations. The Tjuwanpa experience highlights the need to carefully consider the interdependency of government service arrangements in very remote Aboriginal settlements. When human and capital resources are scarce, service delivery relies on a complex set of arrangements and relationships between different programs. External changes to these arrangements can destroy a very delicate balance that has been developed in response to local conditions.

The Tjuwanpa case study also illustrates how the Intervention has touched every aspect of people’s lives. The question is whether the imposition of Government controls will improve the well being of people in remote communities. On this question the answer is mixed. For Tjuwanpa’s outstations, more food on the table came with significant costs to work participation, anxiety levels and financial hardship for many families. The reforms have also interfered with a delicate balance in service delivery arrangements and impacted on people’s mobility. In combination a number of reforms continue to pose a threat to people’s ability to live on their outstations. This could see families forced to move to towns and townships, away from the outstations that Aboriginal people consider are healthier and safer environments for their children.

PART 2: Case Study: The Emergency Response and Tjuwanpa Outstations

1 Introduction

This case study examines the implementation of welfare reforms and employment measures as they have unfolded at outstations serviced by the Tjuwanpa Outstation Resource Centre. It describes the events that took place on the ground in the lives of Aboriginal people as the Intervention rolled out and draws on a series of interviews and community meetings which recorded how they experienced these measures in their lives. The case study also reviews the implementation of reforms as they unfolded at the Resource Centre and examines the impact of these events on outstation service delivery arrangements.

Following a brief outline of the methodology used to collect the data, the case study provides an overview of the outstation environment. This is followed by an examination of how the reform process was understood by Aboriginal people and how it unfolded with respect to the transition from CDEP to Centrelink. The impacts of these changes are then put forward. The case study then illustrates the demands on the Resource Centre during the first six months of the Intervention and the impacts of these measures on service delivery arrangements to Tjuwanpa outstations.

The researcher was encouraged to prepare this submission by the Emergency Response Review Team following their visit to Tjuwanpa in July, 2008. As many outstation residents and staff felt shy about presenting their views directly to the Review Team, the submission gives voice to the people I spoke to throughout the first year of the Intervention who told me they wanted to be heard. The submission also has the support of the Tjuwanpa Outstation Resource Centre who shared information on the reform process throughout its first year. It is hoped that the voices of their experience gives readers a sense of the lived reality of the Intervention. While the report is necessarily detailed, a case study such as this can provide insights into the conduct of the Intervention and highlights the difficulties experienced when policy change is rapid and local conditions are poorly understood.

2 Methodology

Findings have been drawn from research data collected over the first year of the Emergency Response. The research is being undertaken as part of PhD studies supported by Southern Cross University and the Desert Knowledge Cooperative Research Centre. Throughout the first year of the Intervention the researcher was able to observe daily events at the Resource Centre, including government interactions with outstation residents and staff. As the Intervention rolled out, the researcher recorded the views and experiences of staff and residents and maintained a detailed journal and chronology of events as they unfolded in the field. Information from emails, correspondence and phone calls relevant to the conduct of the Emergency Response was also collated and recorded to ensure the accuracy of events. Before finalising this report, the researcher reviewed its contents with Tjuwanpa staff and outstation residents quoted, and obtained their written consent to use the material contained in this submission. To maintain confidentiality names have not been used.

3 The Outstation Context

To understand the Intervention at Tjuwanpa it is important to sketch the context in which the reforms were implemented. The 37 outstations serviced by Tjuwanpa are home to Western Aranda² kin groups. They are scattered across some 4,500 square kilometres of ranges and plains that surrounds the historic Hermannsburg mission settlement. Although six of the outstations in the western region require travel of an hour or more, most are within a 20 to 40 minute drive to the Resource Centre and Hermannsburg. Road travel, however, incurs significant costs as a result of vehicle wear and tear and the cost of fuel, which by August 2008 was approaching \$2.25 per litre at the Hermannsburg bowser.

Families have maintained constant occupation of the lands, despite the encroachment of pastoral leases. Family groups began to establish permanent settlements in 1974, with 27 of the current outstations settled between 1974 and 1977. Since the incorporation of the Resource Centre in 1984, government grants have been channelled through Tjuwanpa for housing, water reticulation and electrification.

Western Aranda is spoken as the first language throughout the lands. Traditional cultural and spiritual practices are a part of everyday life. Family relationships and responsibilities underpin every daily interaction. As with other outstation settlements across remote Australia, connections to country are a driving force in people's decision to live on the outstations. It is their home - the place where they were raised; where their families are buried, and where their parents and grandparents told them the stories that maintain their link to the land and its spirits. Living on the land creates their sense of identity. Outstation lands are also critical to the future identity of their children and grandchildren. Aboriginal elders and leaders talk about their responsibility for fostering this identity.

We got a little one coming up. When I'm six foot down they'll look after it. Oldest grandson or oldest son will take over. Oldest son when he gets older, he passes on his knowledge to his son...the grandson. We got one grandson, eldest grandson, he'll take over and the second grandson, he'll be the second in charge. I got dreaming way. I got it here. I can't leave this place. I got songs. I'm just telling you. All my young fellas - gotta teach them black fella ways, white fella ways. They can't lose this - the main one (Aboriginal way). I got my title there sitting in the office but we got our way. The white way - that paper can just go in the rubbish. Old men, we pass on knowledge and it goes on and on and on. When you sing em, you got em on your tongue all the time. You can't forget. This country is the Centrelink office for us. Nobody can push me out. I got title here. That's why I don't like leaving. I got grandchildren here...all grow up here. (Man: 60s)

Outstation is a place....a place where you grew up... you spent time with your grandparents you know. That they gone now...they taught you a lotta things about your outstation. That's home...well to me it is. Just where the memory stays you know. Its home! That's home. There's nowhere like home. That's where we grew up. That's where we got all our knowledge from...bein' on our land. We went to school in Alice Springs but still came home. It's our grandfather's country and now it is ours, you know. He left it there for us and there's no way we'll be leavin' that country. Nah! (Woman: 40s)

² Aranda is the preferred local spelling

People also talk of the peace and quiet on the outstation. For some the outstation is a place where they feel free to be who they are. For others, particularly women, the outstation is a safe and healthy place for themselves and their families where they can avoid the risks of alcohol, drugs and gambling that they encounter in Hermannsburg (Ntaria) and Alice Springs.

When I used to live at Ntaria, and work at Ntaria, I used to spend all my money. That's why I went back to Injartnama (outstation)...to stay therethen Arrkapa (outstation). Then I stopped there. I stopped there for good now. I don't feel like stoppin' Ntaria...spendin' all my money playin' card. It's no good...everything in my family...feedin' my family...my mothers and my aunties...two old people - you seen em. Outstation it's more....quiet. It's nice out here ...its quiet...there's more food out here....food lasts out here.....its good too for kids to grow up...for babies. They grow up strong without getting sick. Plus the old peoples like it out here too cause they always out at the outstations – they been out here all the time. It's safe place – open place. You can see everything around here. Better health. Don't get sick more often. (Woman: 40s)

I want to go to Camel Hump (outstation) 'cause I'm worried about town and Alice Springsthere's trouble in there and I might get caught again by the police. (Man: 30s)

It's good for kids. In the community you got a lot of these um places – like you got your drunks there and you got other things, and outstations its free from everything ...from noise and everything. They can grow up properly....'cause on the community you can't bring em up because you got a lotta people like the drunks humbugging, and kids think, 'Ah, it must be alright to drink grog.' So it's not right. (Man: 40s)

The importance of outstation living to Aboriginal families is evidenced by their preparedness to invest their limited income to maintain cars, buy fuel and purchase the diesel necessary to generate outstation power, despite rising fuel and food costs.

Although the 2006 census enumerated an outstation population of 300 (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2006) the population on the Tjuwanpa outstations is highly mobile. Deaths, health needs, children's schooling, family arguments, work opportunities or imprisonment of a family member can mean that families move for weeks, months or in some cases, for many years. Funerals and cultural business, particularly the men's camps which take place in the hot summer months, can see the area's population swell by hundreds of people as families travel in from the Pitjantjarra lands across the South Australian border or from the areas to the west, north-west and north around the settlements of Papunya and Santa Theresa.

The outstations are accessed by a 600 kilometre network of dirt roads that are maintained by the Resource Centre. The Centre also services 17 outstation diesel or solar energy systems, 200 kilometres of water lines and 15 major bore sites. In addition, Tjuwanpa is responsible for the repair and maintenance of outstation housing stock and the management of septs and rubbish. It hosts a Centrelink agency for Commonwealth Government income and family support payments, and prepares and administers a range of small government project grants for community activities including an art centre.

For many years Tjuwanpa has managed a large Community Development Employment Program (CDEP) of between 150 to 300 participants, resident on outstations and in Hermannsburg. This has been central to the outstation economy and underpins Tjuwanpa's service delivery arrangements. A successful initiative emerging from this program has been the Tjuwanpa Rangers group, which has secured independent contracts for land management activities and in 2007, won the Northern Territory's Landcare Award.

Tjuwanpa also plays a critical role in the daily life of residents that is unfunded by governments. It acts as the distribution point for a twice weekly mail service; manages utilities payments on behalf of households; assists individuals with police and court matters; provides emergency support to families in times of illness or death; brokers contact for residents with government agencies; provides Western Aranda interpreter assistance and deals with the host of local disputes and grievances characteristic of a small community. With only 8 of the 37 outstations connected to a phone, Tjuwanpa also provides residents with access to land lines and computer connections.

Government, business and non-government agencies with business in the area rely on Tjuwanpa as an essential contact point for the outstations. It hosts visiting researchers and official government visitors, provides data and information to a range of government agencies and disseminates information about upcoming events, meetings and consultations.

4 The Emergency Response as it unfolded in the lives of outstation people

4.1 Trying to understand the Intervention

In the week following Minister Brough's announcement on June 21 2007, few outstation residents had heard about the Federal Government's Intervention into Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory. Although the Intervention created headlines in national and local media, many local residents lacked the means to access the news. Most outstations have limited radio or commercial TV reception and few people bother to purchase the weekly Alice Springs News distributed through the two Hermannsburg stores. Although families in Hermannsburg can access news broadcasts, adults say it's difficult to compete with the noise and preferences of a large group of children and teenagers.

A copy of the Minister's press release (Brough 2007) pinned up on Tjuwanpa's community notice board soon after the Intervention was announced, failed to attract much attention. Interviews conducted over the next three months showed that people did not understand the language of the Intervention. Words such as 'quarantining' of CDEP and Centrelink benefits; 'acquiring' leases in 'prescribed' communities; introducing normal 'tenancy arrangements'; undertaking 'compulsory' health checks, 'stemming substance abuse' and 'improving governance' had entered the lexicon. They would have consequences for the way that people lived their everyday lives but there was no understanding of what they meant. A week after the announcement, people's awareness of the Intervention is perhaps summed up in the response of one man to news of the presence of police and military in Areyonga:

What they goin' there for? Is there a big fight on or something? (Man 30s)

Initial information about the reforms relied on media reports and web searches. Late July, the Central Land Council published a poster outlining key elements of the reforms and disseminated this to Indigenous land owners and Aboriginal organisations. DEWR provided information on the welfare to work reforms to CDEP providers late July, and in August FACSIA produced a 33 page web based Fact Sheet. Each of these documents required English language proficiency. By September Fact Sheets produced by the Central Land Council and Centrelink made efforts to use plain English to describe various aspects of the reforms including income management. The majority of outstation residents either had no access to these sheets or found them difficult to comprehend. In the absence of early written advice, Tjuwanpa prepared plain English versions of the Minister's press release and key elements of the reforms as well as organising a series of meetings with leaders and residents.

Over the four months that followed the announcement of the Intervention, government representatives held four community meetings to brief residents on key aspects of the changes taking place. While these efforts were appreciated, there was little understanding of the outstation context. For three of these meetings Tjuwanpa was given less than three days notice. With phone connections limited to eight of the outstations, Tjuwanpa had to disseminate information via staff travelling to the outstations or relayed information when people arrived to pick up mail. The meeting organisers also assumed English language proficiency so no provision was made for interpreters. With Government presenters also using a bewildering array of acronyms, words and concepts that were unfamiliar to residents, few understood what was being said. Understanding was complicated by the fact that in order to accommodate 'avoidance' relationships many people were sat on the ground some distance from the presenters. As there was no amplification, only those nearest the government presenters could hear what was being said.

In addition to the complexity of language being used to communicate the changes, the difficulty for people - including non-Indigenous staff, was the scope and complexity of the reforms. Little was known about the detail of how new programs would be implemented on the ground. Consequently staff and residents struggled to interpret what implications the reforms would have for families and for outstation service delivery. A discussion with one of the Aboriginal staff at Tjuwanpa in August captures some of the questions and concerns about what the reforms would mean in the day to day lives of outstation residents.

People need to understand how this thing is workin'. If people start askin' questions there is no answers there to give them. If people don't get a top-up – are they going to get a top-up? How you gonna get that gear to do those things out there (on the outstation)? They gonna ask – if CDEP is gone how you gonna supply them with materials, tool to do (work on the outstation)....the way this government is changing.

We just gotta really try to understand it – what they're sayin'. Some people don't understand what you are askin' or tellin' them about. There's another thing... 'real jobs'...gotta have an answer for that too. This is like a question to them...gotta come up with an answer to explain...what meanings....see even for lease and permits on Aboriginal lands.

If people gonna start a little small business on the outstation...how they gonna start? Who they gonna talk to? Where do they go? Got to have an answer to that – a REAL good one!

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So how are people gonna to pay for their own home? That's another question. If people go to the back, get a loan....how they goin' to pay that back?

Big wall between here and there. It's too difficult for these people to give you an answer. It's up to them (government) to give us an answer. (Man: 40s)

Dilemmas and questions posed by the reforms for outstation residents were coupled with confusion over the proposed changes to local government arrangements due to come into effect in July 2008 but were unable to distinguish these from the Intervention. Those who had heard about changes to the Aboriginal Lands Rights Act were alarmed at the prospect of hearing that lease provisions would apply to Aboriginal land if government investment in infrastructure above \$50,000 was required. The Minister's statements about home ownership and Alice Springs newspaper reports at the time which called for Aboriginal people to go back to the bush further complicated how people saw the reforms. For many, the changes just did not make sense. This is reflected in comments made by one of the Tjuwanpa staff who at the time, was paid in part by CDEP.

What does that mean....the government is concerned that Aboriginal people don't have jobs....and that CDEP does not prepare people for work? (Laughs) I reckon that's so stupid! What about people like us....we're hard workers! I think it goes back to the parents. The way that government is talking about us - I reckon it's twisted!

And real jobs! They want people to get jobs in Alice Springs – so everyone will have to move there. But the people there want Indigenous people to go back to community!

So they gonna do that (help people buy their own house) for outstations or what? It's stupid! (She starts laughing) What if the person that's in that house built a humpy....some person gonna come along and buy that too? (Laughs) That's why it's so stupid. You know. Ohhh.... (Woman: 20s)

The confusion experienced under the reforms was summed up by one of the residents:

But at the moment its like a ...I dunno...just like a big whirl of water....you know if you stir that water round it's just like it's goin round in circles! You got circles and you just got bits and pieces comin' out! (Man: 40s)

Although there was considerable confusion about many elements of the reforms, there was strong support for any changes that would result in opportunities for work particularly if work opportunities could be supported on outstations.

Well like we'd like to see CDEP changing...everybody workin. Just work for CDEP money...not only sittin down....gotta do little bit rubbish, clean the yard up, fixing the fence. (Man: 40s)

Strong support was also evident for training, particularly for young people.

Well I think that there is a real good sign there what they done...little bit of changing there you know....getting all these young people to learn how to work and Learn, just a little bit of living there... that was a real good opportunity there so it's startin to change a bit. (Man 40s)

We been talking about that for a long time...for that training for young people! Well that's starting to look a little bit alright. (Man: 50s)

People expressed concern, however, at the prospect of training outside the area and wanted to see it based on the outstation.

And there might be young people that want to come and work in the tourism area. Yeah...we'll be happy to have the young people trained to be a tour guide or a community ranger...but you know we'll look at young people to where their patch is...representing the land or their totem. (Woman: 60s)

There was scepticism; however, about whether 'real' jobs in the area could become a reality.

What you mean...work? 'Bout work? But how we gonna find work out there...we got no work! (Man: 50s)

4.2 The transition from CDEP to Centrelink

On July 23 the Minister announced that CDEP would be cut so that income management arrangements could apply to all those in receipt of government benefits. A week later DEWR phoned to inform Tjuwanpa that the remote area exemption applying to Centrelink beneficiaries would be lifted. Outstation residents would be required to meet normal Centrelink requirements to look for work, participate in work programs and regularly submit forms to verify they had met these conditions.

Since its inception, CDEP and the remote area exemption had enabled people to live on the outstations. The implications of the difficulties that people would face with the new Centrelink requirements were first articulated by Tjuwanpa's Aboriginal staff early in August 2007.

Staff 1: They don't have the English

Staff 2: Lot of them don't know how to read and write. That's the main one.

Staff 1: Cause you've got Abstudy, youth allowance, new start allowance, pension payments, disability support pensions and carers pensions.....and all those things and there are a lot of forms and they ask a lot of questions..... questions people don't understand or they can't answer those questions.

Staff 2: That's what I'm sayin.....to explain. That's the main thing.

Staff 1: Especially you know...how is it gonna work with the Centrelink agency...we have to fill in all these forms for all these people.....and the time we got to spend with people for their forms and that.....for some people they don't know when they gonna get their form or that... or sometimes they put their form in and its not their day...and you know, we gotta know what form...because they can't read that paper from Centrelink. We gotta help them because they just don't understand. And then they gotta wait two or three weeks for their payments to actually to be processed....and be finalised....and they have to wait for their money to be granted to them.and what they gonna do or where they gonna get that money while they wait all that time...and they're waiting, waiting.

Staff 2:so all of the complainin' will come to me...its gonna fall back on us 'cause they'll still be reliant on us for help because the government won't understand what the Aboriginal person is talkin' about, and the Aboriginal person won't understand what the government wants.

Welfare to work reforms subsequently became the focus of government efforts. At a community meeting called by DWER and Centrelink staff on August 29 residents were told that CDEP would be cut; the remote area exemption would be lifted, and income management arrangements would be put in place. When this would happen was not known but it would be 'soon', and residents would be required to register with and undertake an interview with Centrelink and a Job Network Provider.

A second government delegation visited Tjuwanpa on October 3 to again brief community members on the transition from CDEP to Centrelink. Twenty nine people attended the meeting - a considerable number considering Tjuwanpa had only two days notice to advise residents of the visit. While the non-Indigenous staff interpreted this to mean that the closure of CDEP was immanent Government representatives were still unable to confirm when CDEP would close, repeating the statement made a month earlier that it would be 'soon'.

Meetings and interviews with Aboriginal staff and residents indicated that despite these meetings, people had little understanding of what the transition to Centrelink would mean.

Cause... like, when there was a coupla meetings at here...when Centrelink came and told the people. That afternoon, people went, 'Yeah, we know what's gonna happen'. But a couple days or weeks later they come back to the office confused! They've got all these paperworks and forms that's been sent to them and they don't know what it's for. Because most of the people can't read...or can't understand English...yeah... (Woman: 20s)

A question and answer sheet on income management distributed through the mail mid September did little to help increase Aboriginal understanding of what was to take place (Centrelink 2007). While efforts were made to lay out information in a question and answer format, the language structure and small font size made reading difficult for most residents. For example, one of the first questions on the fact sheet is:

Q: How much of my Centrelink payment will be managed by Centrelink?

A: After deductions like child support and government debt repayments, half your regular fortnightly payments, and all of any advances and lump sum payments, will be managed.

For Aboriginal people the answers provided were also vague.

Q: What happens if I do not talk to Centrelink?

A: Half your fortnightly payments will be managed until you talk to Centrelink about how to use it to pay for the things you need.

What did 'managed' mean? Inevitably the paper cluttered the floor of Tjuwanpa's mailroom. An indication of the problem of relying on paper communications was noted by one of the residents.

People can't (even) hold on to their key-card – if it's a piece of paper they just screw it up and throw it away. (Male: 30s)

Centrelink commenced the process of registering people onto Centrelink and making provisions for income management on October 8. By the end of the second week of the team's visit, however, it was evident that many outstation clients were still not aware they had to undertake Centrelink interviews. A Centrelink list posted on the Resource Centre notice board on nine days into their visit showed that the Centrelink team was looking for approximately 80 of its existing clients. This did not include the

170 CDEP participants who would be moved onto the system once the closure of the program was announced. To help people understand the new requirements Tjuwanpa initiated a third community meeting on October 17th, Centrelink representatives attended this meeting and urged residents to tell their families to see the Centrelink Capacity Assessment teams. With no date announced for the transition, many people either did not understand the urgency of attending an interview or were unaware that they had to do so.

In the week before the first Centrelink payment was due on November 12, it was clear that many people in the area were still not fully registered on the Centrelink system. A meeting called by the Tjuwanpa Rangers Coordinator found that only 18 of its 37 Rangers had undertaken a Centrelink and Job Network Provider interview. This raised concerns that there was possibly a large group of people in the area who would not have their benefits paid on November 12.

The reason for the failure of people to comply with Centrelink requirements only became apparent to Tjuwanpa staff less than three working days before the first Centrelink payment and income management was due to come into effect. Discussions with visiting Centrelink and DEWR staff at that time revealed that clients would need to comply with a complex number of steps. This included:

- i. Undertaking an initial interview with Centrelink. This interview would determine the type of benefit a CDEP worker was eligible for. If a person was already receiving Centrelink benefits, the interview was necessary to put in place arrangements to lift the remote area exemption.
- ii. Undertaking a second interview with Centrelink. This interview would determine each client's preferred arrangements for income management.
- iii. Contacting the Tjuwanpa CDEP Coordinator. This applied to people on Jobstart and Youth Allowances who, in the absence of WfD were required to sign up for and undertake a transitional work participation activity registered with DEWR.
- iv. Those on Jobstart and Youth Allowance were also required to then register with and undertake an interview with a Job Network Provider.
- v. Transitional workers were also required to submit timesheets to Tjuwanpa who would then forward these to the Job Network Provider.
- vi. With the lifting of the remote area exemption Jobstart and Youth Allowance clients had to demonstrate that they had looked for two jobs and provide these details to Centrelink every fortnight via an SU19 form.
- vii. Jobstart and Youth Allowance clients were also required to check their mail for notification of any interviews they were required to attend with either Centrelink or their Job Network Provider. People were also required to check their mail for any other information that Centrelink might request.

Failure to undertake any of these steps had serious consequences. If people were not properly registered on the Centrelink system they would not receive payments. If they had not advised Centrelink where their managed income was to be deposited, they would have no funds available for groceries or fuel at the local store. Nobody, including Tjuwanpa's staff, understood that even if people had had a Centrelink assessment interview, they needed a second interview to advise Centrelink of their preferred income management arrangements. An additional interview with a Job

Network Provider was also required. The failure to comply with any of these steps would effectively place people in breach of their Centrelink or work participation requirements or delay payment of income managed funds. This in turn would potentially place them in a situation where they would not be paid.

During October and November, problems with internal government communications and processes were also becoming evident. The same day that local DEWR staff advised Tjuwanpa's outstation residents that they did not know when the transition from CDEP to Centrelink would commence, DEWR staff in Darwin mailed a letter to Tjuwanpa, setting the closure date for CDEP as October 26. Although this was preceded by fax advice, the fax arrived later that afternoon after the community meeting had ended. Tjuwanpa effectively had only two weeks to inform its 170 CDEP participants that they must register for benefits on the Centrelink system.

Indications of problems within Centrelink furthered concerns that there may be delays in payments. Informal discussions with the Alice Springs based Centrelink staff in the first week of November revealed that Centrelink was having difficulty finalising the registration process before the first payment was due on November 12. At this time Tjuwanpa's Aboriginal Centrelink staff also reported that Separation Certificates sent to Centrelink on October 26 had been lost in the system. These documents formalised the cessation of CDEP payments and were essential to process payments.

Still Centrelink are askin for the separation certificates. You know, on the 26th of October they received that separation certificate. But every time we ring up for the customers they still askin for the separation certificates so again this remote team came out and sorting out the customers and they were askin' for the separation certificates. So I told them, 'All right then I'll make another copy for you.' So I made a copy, gave it to them...you know put the separation forms back...the certificates...and that was twice! And I don't know...some of these customers go to Ntaria (Hermannsburg) too, to see the remote team and they send them back, 'Oh we need the separation certificate.' That made me more angry so....you know we gave them a few copies...what are they doing with that! (Staff 2: 20s)

The lifting of the remote area exemption meant that Centrelink clients had to regularly lodge paperwork. By December there was evidence that this was also causing confusion.

It's been busy....very busy....yeah it's been very busy because we've just got all these confused customers. Cause they're confused about income management and they're confused that they have to lodge their forms every two weeks...cause it used to be like ...they use to have a remote area exemption...to lodge their forms every six weeks... or 12 weeks...but now its two weeks and some people they are unaware of that...and some people got forms that probably been sittin there (in their mailbox) for probably coupla weeks now...and some of their payments have been cancelled...some people...payments have been suspended....cause they haven't lodged their lodgement form or made first contact to Centrelink. (Staff 1: 20s)

Even when clients had appointments with Centrelink or their Job Network Provider there were at least two occasions in October when these teams failed to arrive at the arranged times. On other days, they left early. This would mean that outstation residents would turn up, find nobody in the Centrelink room, and go home.

4.3 The impacts of the welfare to work reforms on outstation people

4.3.1 Problems experienced with Centrelink payments

As Centrelink client data is confidential, it is not possible to enumerate the number of people who experienced problems with payment of benefits in the first three months of the welfare to work reforms at Tjuwanpa. There is, however, evidence of a sharp increase in the number of people that sought assistance from the Tjuwanpa Centrelink staff during the period from November to January.

Well sometimes it can get up to 20 people a day or more than 20....or sometime it just lesser than 20l...seein' quite a few people. Its been a bit stressful cause we've got...we have to work in the hot heat in the office and we've got all these customers that are comin' all at the same time, and it makes us confused cause we got a customer sayin', 'Can you ring up for me!' and there's another... 'Can you ring up for me!' Yeah it's been a bit stressful cause we've got all these customers...and sometimes we don't even get a break...don't even get the chance to have a break...(Staff 1: 20s)

The Resource Centre Manager also reported an exceptionally large number of requests from residents for financial help. During two weeks leave over the Christmas break she reported over 70 calls on her mobile phone, most from residents requesting funds for food and fuel.

From these accounts, and given the problems that people in the Tjuwanpa area experienced understanding what was required of them under the new arrangements, it is very likely that a significant number of people linked to Tjuwanpa's CDEP and Centrelink office, experienced delays in the payment of their Centrelink benefits in the period between November 2007 and February 2008.

4.3.2 Financial hardship

There is also evidence that people's inability to understand what was taking place during Centrelink interviews, resulted in income management arrangements that led to ongoing financial hardship. Centrelink interviews were brief. People had little time to think about their income management arrangements but were expected to determine how much needed to be allocated to food and where they wanted to buy it. An interview with an outstation woman in May 2008 highlights some of these problems.

Well, my income's just sittin' there in Centrelink.... just for food...not for not for...like only \$50 comes to Top Shop (in Hermannsburg)...and that \$50 goes, then I got no fuel.

(Researcher) So can you use that \$50 for fuel at the top shop?

Yeah....then after that...

(Relative): And then when that finishes she's got nothing for food.

After that nothing! So I have to go back to town, but there's no car!

(Researcher) So where does the rest of your money go then?

Centrelink....it's staying there.

(Researcher) Can you get more money... to put \$100 at the store?

'Cause I pay Austar, then I'm left over with \$50 from my pay. I only get \$200 (in cash) then I gotta pay that Austar....then I got nothing for food. 'Cause I

couldn't believe it when it start. 'How come my money's sittin' there... like \$400, \$600 sittin' in the Centrelink (in Alice Springs) n' not payin' it out to me?'

(Researcher) So how come?

I don't know.

The woman lives on an outstation about 50 minutes drive over a very rough road from the Resource Centre and Hermannsburg. Without a licence, she relies on her husband to drive her to the Top Shop in Hermannsburg where she is able to use her income managed funds for food or fuel. The problem for the woman is that when she was interviewed by Centrelink in October, she only allocated \$50 from her income managed funds of approximately \$220 a fortnight to be spent in Hermannsburg. This meant that the remaining \$170 accumulated in her account in Alice Springs. To access it required a 320 kilometre round trip to Alice Springs from her outstation. With an ageing Toyota and the cost of diesel in Hermannsburg approaching \$2 per litre in May 2008, this represented a cost of around \$100 for the return trip. From her perspective the woman understood that she had to go to Alice Springs to spend these funds.

Although she received half her benefits in cash, which amounted to approximately \$220 per fortnight, \$120 per fortnight of this was needed to pay her Austar bill. Being outside the range of radio and commercial broadcasts, Austar provided entertainment and access news in the outside world. She could not use income managed funds to meet this payment. This effectively left SC with \$100 in cash and \$50 allocated from her income managed funds at the Hermannsburg store to meet her fortnightly fuel and food costs. Although it was seven months into income management arrangements, the woman did not understand that she could renegotiate her income management arrangements and increase the amount she had allocated to the Top Shop.

4.3.3 Work participation

Since its introduction CDEP had enabled Aboriginal workers to earn up to \$20,000 annually in 'top-up' wages above their CDEP wage. This was a strong incentive for people to work and provided flexibility in work arrangements that responded to the limited work opportunities in the local area. The implications of the loss of CDEP were expressed by some of the Tjuwanpa Rangers.

Terrible. We'll have nothing in our pocket. No money for diesel to go back home. Got to have money for the care – you got to feed your car too! Might as well shift back to the creek there! Just spoilin' everything up. Work... now we can't get a top-up. That's what makes you keep on working. It's good money. When this thing came it spoils everything. Plans – yeah...can't go out to do Ranger work now. (Man: 30s)

Prior to the cessation of CDEP the Rangers had been able to earn approximately \$800 per fortnight. CDEP wages of \$490 were augmented by additional contract work and special project funds. For them it was a 'real' job. On Centrelink, people dropped to an average of \$447 per fortnight with additional earnings above \$20 impacting on benefit payments. The Rangers quickly saw a drop in the numbers of men turning up for work.

Yeah. Before...they (other Rangers) would see if there was top up. If there's no top-up they just don't come in. (Man: 20s)

They'll say, 'Why we gotta work with you mob? We're on Centrelink. We're not getting paid to work. (Man: 30s)

The men were not interested in getting 'dole' money. They were recognised locally and nationally for the work they did as Rangers. With CDEP topped up by other avenues of funding, they had 'real' work already. The withdrawal of men from the Rangers group subsequently impacted on the Rangers' ability to tender for contract work that was in the pipeline.

4.3.4 Impact on morale and anxiety about the future

The loss of the ability to earn a salary, and the perception that Work for the Dole was not a 'real' job, subsequently led to loss of morale and impacted on anxiety levels of Rangers, staff and residents.

The change has affected all of us, including me. I feel morale has gone to rock bottom. It's normal to expect that this will happen....but now everything is falling apart. The uncertainty is the worry – it may not be as bad as we think but it's hard for people because they will only have half of the money that they used to have. (Man: 50s)

Yeah...don't want to do tender work on work for the dole.....Spoiled the feeling for work. It's shame for us.(Man 30s)

It's just bugged everything up. A soon as we heard yesterday that it's finished (CDEP)...just sorta...sorta startin' to lose interest then. (Woman 30s)

Aboriginal staff employed as CDEP coordinators and supervisors were also worried about their employment futures and their ability to meet existing financial obligations. They expressed anxiety about being able to find work in Alice Springs because of their lack of qualifications and also because of the discomfort of working in a non-Aboriginal work environment where English would be required.

It means a lotta things for me. Yeah. I mean if I lose my job... that's if CDEP goes that's when my job ends as well.... and I don't know how I'm gonna get another job. It's very hard to get a job in town....I mean you gotta be expert...you gotta be well educated and ...I'm feeling real happy where I am, workin' my own family you know, with my own side. It makes me feel comfortable and you know the people who you're workin' with, who you're talking with you know. You got your language and to explain to the people.

Like, people are proud of us workin' as an Aboriginal here you know, with our language and our knowledge, and it's gonna be hard for people as well. I mean I know we got kids to educate too, and we just not gonna have enough money...you know, still gotta put our kids to school and that. And....its just gonna be hard for people, cause they feel comfortable when you got your own tribe workin' here you know.

All these changes make me feel weak – no energy. I just don't know what to do. I used to look forward to my job...making us feel slack at the moment all these changes. That's how I feel. It just like everything is fallen out from here. I mean....I was really excited at first....now it's just....feel slack with all these changes. (Woman: 30s)

The impact of the work pressure and uncertainty experienced by Tjuwanpa's staff as the Intervention rolled out began to become noticeable in October. Although the

Resource Centre had experienced difficulties in September when CDEP staff and participants had taken required leave, there were notable staff absences throughout October. During this period two full time Aboriginal staff resigned. The essential services coordinator was on compassionate leave and the CDEP Aboriginal Coordinator was hospitalised during the eighth month of her pregnancy. The Tjuwanpa Rangers were seeing a drop in the number of men turning up for work.

4.3.5 Vehicle costs

The loss of 'top-up' impacted on people's inability to earn the additional money they needed to repair their cars

People like their money – bit of money on the side. Nearly everybody's got a car...to fix their car....go shopping....tyres and all that....if it breaks down. When you put it in the garage it's about \$1000 to get it out. And 'specially for parts....costs you thousands for just little things...\$300 maybe \$400. That's why people want to earn a little bit. (Woman: 30s)

Yeah, you gotta fill your car up to go home.....Some people are worryin' about how much money we are gonna get, wages wise...they worried about fuel and all that sorta thing...to get home. (Man: 50s)

Many people reported that limited cash under income management arrangements had impacted on their ability to run and repair cars. One woman told the following story. As there is no local mechanic she needed \$250 in cash to pay for the local towing service to get her vehicle to Alice Springs. She puts \$95 per week into her income management account in Hermannsburg for food and necessities and leaves \$25 in her account in Alice Springs. She uses her non-managed cash income to pay for debts, and other family expenses.

Can't even get my little car in for the parts. Only have \$25 going into my income management thing there (in Alice Springs). Its nearly \$250 for a tow truck to take it in...and then if the car's taken into the garage I gotta wait nearly six to seven months for that money to build up so I can pay for the bloody what you call it...for the mechanic, for labour and all that, you know. (Woman: 40s)

Unable to find the money to fix her car, the woman has stayed with relatives at Tjuwanpa and in Hermannsburg. With no public transport she occasionally travels to her outstation when she can borrow a car or get a lift. Because of the lifting of the remote area exemption, she also needed her car to travel to the Centrelink office to submit her forms.

And the thing that Aboriginal people are worried about is doin' forms and things. Forms are the main thing I reckon...they don't like doin' the forms... And here (with Centrelink requirements), you gotta come in and out, in and out, you know!

Income management arrangements also made getting a car fixed more problematic for people if they wanted to use quarantined funds. For example, the car owner would first need to obtain several quotes, submit these to Centrelink and then wait until the payment voucher was organised. One woman described the inconvenience of this.

And this time you got to run around get quote from here, quote from there. And at the end you got nothing. (Woman: 40s)

4.3.6 The ability to meet existing debt obligations

The sudden loss of additional income earning opportunities also impacted on people's ability to meet existing debt obligations.

*Got a car and motorbike in the garage. ... yeah, and got fines... 'bout \$1,800.
(Man: 20s)*

The young man was concerned that he would have difficulty paying off his motorbike. His fines would be debited before his Centrelink benefit was quarantined. This left him with very little cash to meet his vehicle repayments.

4.3.7 Income management and food and alcohol consumption

Women generally agreed that income management arrangements were impacting on the amount of food that people were purchasing locally and that this was good for children. There was also acknowledgment that less money was being used for alcohol.

Well I reckon it was a good...it is a good thing that the government do these changes...for the children's sake...so that they'll always have food there for them. In a way it is (working)...in a way it's not. In a way people understand it. In another way people don't understand...and get confused.

*They understand government is doing this for the children's sake...to protect their little children ... and that there is always food there for them. And ...
...think people are realising that the government had enough...all this Centrelink money gettin spent on alcohol and drugs all the time.*

*'Cause when I go to the shop I see like mothers, or the grandmothers, with their trolley ...big shopping....to take home to their children...and because they..just used to spend it on gambling and that...tobacco and alcohol and drugs. Because I think people are startin' to spend their money wisely now.
(Woman: 20s)*

It's slowed people down from drink. Least they got something in the store now and they got money going to the store card in Alice. (Woman: 30s)

However, there were some who felt that the blanket application of income management was extremely unfair.

What's this thing quarantining? It's not fair! What about people who don't have kids, or don't do anything wrong! (Woman: 20s)

Restrictions in access to cash under Income Management arrangements and the loss of 'top-up' were repeatedly seen as 'real hard', with many people worried about not having the funds to run and repair vehicle and service outstation power needs.

It might be good for white people! Cause they got money in the bank! For Aboriginal peoples there is nothing! Just money in half...what's that? For food and for pocket money...you think about shopping. How much is clothes? Fifty dollars! You might come outta the shop with five cents! You gotta have enough money to fill up your car! It's real hard! (Man: 50s)

Alcohol restrictions and government's attempt to curb gambling met with a mixed response. Although most of the outstations have always been 'dry' areas, men in particular were not happy with the prospect of having this enforced. Women, however, were generally supportive of efforts to reduce alcohol use. Both men and women, however, were sceptical of government's ability to stop people from drinking

and gambling, believing that only a complete ban on the sale of alcohol in Alice Springs would work.

Deal with the problem of alcohol! People'll still be gettin' Newstart n everything and still they'll be buyin' grog! You know. They're not gonna put a stop to it! Close the bottle shop and things. That'll do it you know! Leave the money there...just shut that alcohol thing. (Laughs). Ah no. (Woman: 40s)

5 The Emergency Response as it unfolded at the Resource Centre

Throughout the first six months of the Intervention the operating environment at the Resource Centre can best be described as chaotic. Tjuwanpa not only had to continue to deliver the power, water and housing services essential to people's survival, but it had to do so in an environment in which the loss of CDEP and uncertainty of Federal Government funding arrangements meant that the Resource Centre faced closure. Tjuwanpa was also expected to respond to the many demands of different government departments who relied on the Resource Centre to implement or communicate the reforms on the ground. At the same time it had to respond to the increasing confusion being experienced by residents who failed to understand what was required of them under the welfare to work reforms.

This section outlines the nature of these demands and the issues raised by the reforms in the context of outstation service delivery.

5.1 The implications of reforms for service delivery arrangements

Tjuwanpa felt the impact of the Intervention less than a week after Minister Brough's announcement of the Emergency on June 21, 2007 (Brough 2007). At 5:30 p.m. on June 26 the Resource Centre was informed by email that in view of the Intervention, its 2008-09 CDEP program would only be funded for a three month period until September 30 (Forbes 2007). Tjuwanpa had three days to pick up the new contract, have it approved by its Board of Management and return it to Alice Springs. The contract outlined new conditions to those negotiated with DEWR in April, 2007. With only three working days remaining in the financial year Tjuwanpa had no alternative but to sign the contract although some of its new contract conditions had not been budgeted for in its original submission. Three weeks later on July 13 FACSIA advised that due to the Intervention, the Resource Centre's essential services contract funded under the Federal Government's CHIP program would also be limited to three months.

On July 23, the Federal Government announced that CDEP would be scrapped (Brough 2007) despite Minister Hockey's statement a month earlier that CDEP would continue (Hockey 2007). A week later on July 30, DEWR informed Tjuwanpa by phone that the remote area exemption applying to Centrelink clients would also be lifted.

This decision had far reaching implications for all CDEP participants moving onto Centrelink Newstart or Youth Allowance. They would have to meet requirements to look for work, participate in Work for the Dole programs, submit appropriate forms to

Centrelink, and attend Centrelink or Job Network Provider interviews as required. If they failed to do so their benefits would be reduced and could be cut.

Meeting these requirements posed significant issues for most Aboriginal residents. No Work for the Dole program was in place in the local area. Visits by Job Network Providers were irregular, with staff usually arriving at the Resource Centre without warning. Low English literacy and ability to regularly pick up mail was also likely to mean people would experience difficulties in responding to Centrelink requirements. Given the limited number of jobs available locally – particularly for Aboriginal workers without qualifications, looking for work would require that participants seek employment in Alice Springs. The difficulties that people faced in doing this was summed up by one of the Aboriginal staff.

You wouldn't get a job there! I mean, it's all really....um...I mean everybody struggles to get a job in Alice Springs. I mean people... Indigenous people...some - they struggle to get a job in town. (Woman: 30s)

Looking for work in Alice Springs would incur high travel costs. The cost and shortage of rental accommodation in Alice Springs would force many people to rely on relatives living there, potentially increasing overcrowding. Many Aboriginal outstation residents would not have the language or experience needed to interface with employer groups. In combination, these realities raised the prospect that individuals would quickly fall into breach of their Centrelink requirements resulting in financial hardship for them and their families.

Preliminary information about the implementation of the welfare to work reforms was provided to Tjuwanpa by DEWR at a public meeting in Alice Springs on July 30th. CDEP providers were told that CDEP would begin to be phased out by the end of September so that income management arrangements could be applied to government payments (Harvey 2007). Managers would be retained until June 2008, but all CDEP participants without 'real' jobs would be moved on to Centrelink. CDEP provider organisations would receive departmental assistance to develop transitional plans, with DEWR anticipating this would occur some time in August. What the transitional planning would involve was unclear. However, the meeting encouraged CDEP provider groups to consider hosting a Work for the Dole (WfD) program. Alternatively they could tender to become a Structured Training and Employment Program (STEP) provider, the date for which would soon be announced. CDEP organisations could also apply to Indigenous Business Australia (IBA) for assistance to establish themselves as business entities. This would facilitate their ability to tender for contracts and enable organisations to apply to lease back CDEP assets which were to be transferred to IBA.

With the date for the closure of CDEP given by DEWR as 'soon' or 'by September', and in the absence of Federal Government funding for service delivery beyond September 2007, Tjuwanpa had approximately two to three months in which to restructure its service delivery arrangements from a Government funded service provider to a business entity. This required:

- Closing CDEP and informing participants of the need to register with Centrelink and a Job Network Provider.
- Assessing the viability of having Tjuwanpa sponsor a Work for the Dole program.

- Determining Tjuwanpa's capacity to tender as a STEP provider.
- Determining the feasibility of setting up the Resource Centre as a business enterprise so that it could tender for service contracts and apply to lease back CDEP assets to be taken over by IBA.

Throughout August and September, Tjuwanpa endeavoured to explain to DEWR the complexities that faced Tjuwanpa with the loss of CDEP and its likely impact on service delivery. The manager also expressed concerns regarding the likely difficulties that outstation residents would face as a result of the transition to Centrelink and the lifting of the remote area exemption. In addition, Tjuwanpa raised questions about the feasibility of operating a WfD program and sought advice on how it would operate in an outstation context. Tjuwanpa's outstations were located on Aboriginal Land Trust lands, all of which are private lands. WfD guidelines would not permit the implementation of WfD on private land. In order to plan outstation service delivery the manager also sought clarification regarding how IBA leasing arrangements would work. With the exception of two vehicles, all of Tjuwanpa's equipment, heavy machinery and vehicles had been purchased as CDEP capital items. These were now to be handed over to IBA. It was therefore important that Tjuwanpa know when transition arrangements would come into effect. DEWR was unable to respond to these queries.

Reforms to Indigenous housing arrangements announced by Minister Brough in May 2007 compounded uncertainty about the future of service delivery to the outstations (Brough 2007). Under these reforms responsibility for the management of Indigenous housing would be transferred to the Territory Government. The lease provisions announced under the Intervention enabled Territory Housing to take over management of Aboriginal housing and other infrastructure in prescribed communities. While Tjuwanpa eventually ascertained that this would not apply to outstations, the legislation linked leases to the provision of Federal Government funds for infrastructure developments. Under the new laws, outstations would be required to negotiate a lease if Federal Government funding of more than \$50,000 was spent on infrastructure (Parliament of Australia 2007). Adding to the confusion was uncertainty about how the Emergency measures would tie in with local government reforms to be introduced throughout the Northern Territory in July 2008.

5.1.1 The impact of the loss of CDEP on service delivery

Tjuwanpa struggled to determine how it would deal with the impact of the loss of CDEP on outstation service delivery. Government CDEP equipment, vehicles and machinery were used by essential services staff to fix bores and bore lines and to maintain rubbish tips and outstation roads. The Tjuwanpa Rangers also accessed machinery and equipment for contract work in the nearby National Parks and for a variety of feral animal and weed eradication projects on Land Trust lands. One of the CDEP troop carriers was used to transport groups of Rangers to work sites, many located over an hour from the Resource Centre. As the Territory Government's housing funding did not make provision for a housing vehicle, CDEP vehicles were also used to transport housing staff to the 37 outstations scattered across the five land trusts.

The closure of CDEP and uncertainty regarding FACSIA CHIP funding also jeopardised the employment of the Resource Centre Manager and Essential Services Coordinator. Fifty percent of the Resource Centre Manager's salary was funded by

CDEP. A further twenty five percent of the manager's salary was funded by CHIP essential services funding. CHIP also funded fifty percent of the Essential Services Coordinator's position.

From Tjuwanpa's perspective, cessation of CDEP would effectively mean that Tjuwanpa would have to close its doors unless it could quickly restructure its operations. Closure of the Resource Centre would not only mean the possible loss of services to repair and maintain outstation housing, water and power but would also result in the loss of other unfunded services. These included access for residents to mail services, phones, the internet, a local Centrelink service, interpreters, help with the whitegoods and provision of emergency assistance. To maintain any level of service to the outstations Tjuwanpa was faced with the prospect of having to rapidly develop a business structure, effectively changing from a grants based service agency to a business entity capable of competitively tendering for service contracts.

The reliance of outstation service delivery on CDEP can be seen in the following diagram.

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Tjuwanpa's ability to plan for WfD, tender for STEP and restructure the organisation, was underpinned by uncertainty about IBA arrangements to take over CDEP assets. All outstation services with the exception of Centrelink were reliant on CDEP vehicles, machinery and heavy equipment. When would IBA resume the Resource Centre's CDEP assets and how long would it take to negotiate lease arrangements? How would Tjuwanpa be able to continue to provide essential services and manage outstation housing stock? Without these assets, a breakdown in a generator or a broken water pipe would effectively force people into Hermannsburg. If CDEP assets were to be handed over to IBA, where would Tjuwanpa find the funds to lease back its machinery, equipment and vehicles? What would leaseback cost and where could funds be found within existing contracts for housing and essential services?

5.1.2 The complexities of hosting Work for the Dole

In considering whether Tjuwanpa would host WfD the central question was whether the program could be implemented on the outstations. On October 12, six weeks after Tjuwanpa initially requested clarification of this aspect of WfD policy, DEWR informed Tjuwanpa that WfD was unable to be implemented on outstation land.

For Tjuwanpa, this raised practical issues regarding the Resource Centre's ability to manage the program. While the numbers of Centrelink clients who would be required to participate in a WfD work activity were unclear, Tjuwanpa estimated the program would potentially involve up to 150 people. Tjuwanpa could not safely manage this number of participants within the limited physical area of the Resource Centre. There was also the question of what would happen if people brought family members with them to work. As most families are reluctant to leave children, the sick and the elderly on outstations without a car, this would swell the number of people sitting around the Resource Centre compound. Existing toilet facilities would also be inadequate if large numbers of people were working in or visiting the Resource Centre. There were also questions of how appropriate work could be organised during the coming months when summer temperatures often exceed 40 degrees. In addition there were concerns about how people could meet the cost of travel from their outstation twice a week, particularly when disposable income would be reduced due to income management and opportunities to earn 'top-up' were constrained.

Even if WfD activities could be implemented on outstations, supervision of work groups would be problematic. If Aboriginal supervisors were recruited they would have difficulties enforcing work participation requirements as most would be reluctant to breach a family member because of the impact this would have on receipt of Centrelink benefits. Each group of 15 participants also needed to have a supervisor with OHS qualifications. At a rough estimate this would require recruiting five new staff from outside the area as there were no local Aboriginal workers with the requisite OHS certification. Given the low salary levels offered to WfD supervisors; who would be required to work in a difficult and remote environment; where would recruits be found? DEWR's figures for employment in the Alice Springs employment region showed that 1 in 8 vacancies (13%) were unfilled in the region with 70% of employers finding recruitment difficult (Department of Employment and Workplace Relations 2007). Even if Tjuwanpa could recruit sufficient qualified supervisors, staff housing was not available to accommodate them.

By early October, the lack of understanding of work participation requirements under WfD became apparent. Within the first two weeks of starting Hermannsburg's WfD program in September, 30 of the 38 participants were in breach of their work requirements. This meant they faced a reduction and possible loss of their Centrelink benefits. An incident in the Hermannsburg WfD program had also highlighted to Tjuwanpa the risks of undertaking WfD without adequate supervision or planning. Here the WfD team had been instructed to paint the historic Albert Namatjira house, a listed heritage site located on the Importna outstation outside the Hermannsburg township area designated under the emergency lease provisions. The building's lime-washed walls were spruced up by the application of canary yellow acrylic paint complemented by a pink interior. Neither the traditional owners of the land nor Tjuwanpa had been contacted to obtain permission undertake the works or obtain permits to enter the land. Further, no heritage approval had been sought.

In response to these concerns Tjuwanpa submitted a paper to DEWR outlining the issues faced in delivering WfD in the outstation environment. It was not until the end of October that DEWR agreed that Centrelink participation requirements could be met through work on four existing CDEP activities, which now would be termed 'transitional' activities. By this point, however, in the minds of Aboriginal residents, CDEP was gone. As they understood it, they were no longer required to work on their CDEP activities. Effectively work participation levels ground to a halt.

5.1.3 The feasibility of tendering for STEP

With the announcement mid September of the STEP tender, Tjuwanpa began to research requirements for the program. Structured to help build Indigenous employment opportunities, STEP providers would effectively play the role of training and employment brokers, liaising with local businesses and organisations and providing practical assistance to Indigenous job seekers.

After reviewing the guidelines Tjuwanpa decided this option was not feasible. Tjuwanpa was structured to provide outstation services. It did not have the requisite skilled staff base, contacts or experience to act as an employment broker or training agency. As there were few jobs available in either Hermannsburg or Tjuwanpa for unskilled Aboriginal job seekers, Tjuwanpa would have difficulty in placing any workers locally. With the majority of residents lacking formal qualifications and having poor English language and numeracy capacity, Tjuwanpa would have little chance of negotiating employment opportunities in Alice Springs. Aboriginal workers

seeking work in Alice Springs would face additional problems finding accommodation, and few men or women would be prepared to leave families behind without transport. Workers also feared discrimination and isolation in a non-Aboriginal work environment.

5.1.4 Transitioning to a viable business

On October 11 IBA formally advised that they would be sending representatives to advise on support available to help Tjuwanpa transition to a commercial business. Arrangements for the transfer of CDEP assets would also be advised at this meeting. Prior to their arrival Tjuwanpa was asked to prepare copies of the following papers:

- Annual reports for the last 3 years
- Audited financial statement for the last 3 years
- Audited management letter for the last 3 years
- Any organisation strategic plans or studies and any business plans
- Any policies, procedures and protocols
- Any studies or documents assessing the organisation based on the proposed Shire changes
- The latest management reports
- Employee information including lists, resumes, records and summaries
- An asset list, especially of assets that are currently used in the business and details of their ownership. An organisational chart
- Board minutes where relevant to the business decisions
- Any other document or information that might be relevant to the future development of your businesses.

Arriving on November 1 the IBA team informed Tjuwanpa that the Resource Centre would need to work urgently to restructure its operations as a business entity. As demand for CDEP assets held by IBA would be high, Tjuwanpa would need move quickly to set up as a business entity and once this was done, could apply to lease IBA assets for its new business.

The Resource Centre was faced with an untenable position. Without CDEP assets it would be unable to deliver housing maintenance and essential services. At the same time, Tjuwanpa's Aboriginal staff did not have the technical qualifications or the necessary experience to competitively tender against commercial contractors. Even if the Resource Centre sought contract opportunities for roads works, it would be forced to seek tenders across the Central Desert region in order to pick up sufficient work to maintain cash flow and cover the Centre's annual management overheads which were estimated to be a minimum of \$300,000. Contracting for works outside the area would compromise service delivery to the outstations where emergency repairs to water supplies were a common occurrence as a result of feral horses damaging pipes and tanks in their search for water.

Progress on these measures was halted by the Federal elections.

5.1.5 Leasing requirements for Federal funding of infrastructure on Aboriginal land

Tjuwanpa also had to deal with confusion surrounded the status of outstations with respect to leasing arrangements. Although Tjuwanpa eventually ascertained that outstations did not come within the provisions of the five year township lease, the

Emergency legislation left the status of Federal Government funding for outstation infrastructure in the absence of a lease uncertain.

With the Minister announcing on September 18 that the \$514 million in Federal funding to the Territory Government for Aboriginal housing would include provisions for the delivery of municipal and infrastructure services to outstations (Brough 2007), it was unclear what this implied regarding leases on outstations. What would happen if an outstation needed to replace a bore or solar system?

Reforms to lease arrangements met with alarm, particularly among male leaders who were worried about the impact of leases on outstation infrastructure.

And where are we gonna get the money from to fix the bores when they breaks downif the bore breaks down well you got no water...where we gonna get the money to fix it? Not only that it's the solar lights too...the solar panels....if somebody steals them. (Man: 50s)

Underlying the issue of leasing of outstation land was a deep fear that failure to understand leasing arrangements could result in people making decisions that would lead to the loss of their land.

If I go for that five year one, if I want to bring my outstation up to...I sign that five year lease....then they're still talking about that 99 year lease...that's a long one...I gotta be careful! (Man: 50s)

One proposal under consideration was that the NT Government would negotiate with Land Trusts to take leases for the management of land so that the management of housing stock and infrastructure could be taken on by Territory Housing. When and how this was to take place was unknown. Given sensitivities surrounding the leasing of land containing sacred sites, this proposal was unlikely to get off the ground quickly.

5.2 The demands of the reform environment

In the period from August to October, Tjuwanpa staff struggled to assess and respond to new service arrangements and ongoing uncertainty about its future. Meanwhile the volume of government demands and visitors increased daily. As well as determining the feasibility of WfD, STEP and restructuring the Resource Centre as a business entity, Tjuwanpa was required to:

- Negotiate with DEWR on potential jobs that could be created under the Government's promise to create 'real' jobs.
- Provide the community with information on the reforms as it became available.
- Respond to ongoing Government requests for information to assist with the reform process.
- Participate in monthly Shire transition meetings to plan the NT Government's local government arrangements due to come into effect in July, 2008.
- Provide housing and office space for visiting Centrelink and Job Network Provider teams.
- Organise community meetings on behalf of government to communicate the welfare to work reforms and their requirements.

- Provide assistance in locating Centrelink clients and CDEP participants not yet registered with Centrelink or a Job Network Provider.

Tjuwanpa was also required to manage ongoing requests from various government agencies that required an urgent or immediate response. (Annex 1). The environment in which these demands were made is illustrated in journal extracts prepared by the researcher which capture daily life in the Tjuwanpa office, (see Annex 2). Illustrated below is an example what was involved for Tjuwanpa staff in responding to one such request and gives a sense of the complexities involved in responding to demands for quick action.

On October 15, Tjuwanpa received email advice that FACSIA would fund an additional four essential services positions. Tjuwanpa was given 24 hours in which to provide the names of those to be recruited. This would enable funding to be effective from October 19.

Before providing a response, Tjuwanpa needed to consider a range of factors. The new staff would need to have a driver's license and have basic technical capacity to do the work. They would have to be representative of different outstation families to ensure the community viewed the appointments as equitable. The recruits would need to and have appropriate cultural and family relationships that would enable them to work on different outstation areas. The relationships between the new recruits and the older men on the essential services team also needed to be considered. Further as the new recruits had to be males, the Tjuwanpa manager needed to consider the impact of a fully waged position on their female partner's Centrelink eligibility. A Centrelink payment provided women with a level of economic independence that might be lost if they were reliant on a male wage. Selecting the men therefore required considerable consultation and discussion with some of the senior Aboriginal leaders and male staff at Tjuwanpa. It was not until the end of the week that the manager was able to undertake the necessary discussions with Aboriginal staff and leaders and could submit the names.

Although funding covered salaries for the four new positions, no provision was made for training or supervision. The addition of four new staff also created difficulties with deployment. Existing vehicles were already in use or were out of action. Vehicle repairs had been delayed as the Essential Services Coordinator was on compassionate leave and the Manager was struggling to deal with a workload that had effectively doubled under the Intervention.

Until May 30, 2008 Tjuwanpa's ability to continue operations beyond June remained uncertain. Although the Rudd Government promised to reinstate CDEP (Macklin 2007) it was not until the end of April 2008 that the new Minister confirmed that CDEP would be reintroduced as an interim measure (Macklin 2008). NT Government staff had indicated that Tjuwanpa would continue to receive housing and essential services funding but these grants did not provide adequate funds for the Resource Centre's management costs, 50 percent of which were met from CDEP. As there was no provision for outstation service delivery under the new MacDonnell Shire's annual plan, Tjuwanpa still did not know if it would be able to open its doors on July 1.

It was not until May 21, five weeks before the end of the financial year that Tjuwanpa was invited to submit a new CDEP application. The Resource Centre manager had

three working days to do this. The application was approved this a week later on May 30, providing the management funds and assets needed to continue service delivery for another 12 months. However Tjuwanpa had to wait until June 30 before the Department of Local Government Housing and Sport provided verbal advice that funding for Tjuwanpa's 2008-09 essential services program had been approved.

5.3 The impact of the reforms on outstation service delivery

Ongoing uncertainty over funding arrangements and the future of the Resource Centre put a halt to services planning. At the time that the Emergency Response was announced, Tjuwanpa had begun to implement plans for a new approach to delivery of housing services. This linked accredited training for outstation housing teams to a more structured approach to housing maintenance and repair. Plans were also on the table for the development of its art centre. As both initiatives were reliant on CDEP and the Resource Centre continuing, they were unable to proceed.

The reform process also impacted on the quality of service delivery. The reforms came at a time when Tjuwanpa was endeavouring to increase Indigenous employment opportunities. This meant that the manager shouldered the competing demands of different government departments while also trying to supervise and manage CDEP, essential services, housing and the Centrelink services. At the same time, confusion over Centrelink requirements meant that community demands for help and financial assistance increased.

By January, 2008 the loss of CDEP was also impacting on rental revenue. With Tjuwanpa managing housing and the CDEP programs, rents were automatically deducted from CDEP wages. In previous years with a large CDEP program Tjuwanpa had achieved 95 percent of its targeted rental income. Once participants moved onto Centrelink payments, Tjuwanpa relied on residents making arrangements with Centrelink for direct debit of rental to the Resource Centre account. Many residents failed to do so. This significantly reduced rental income. In the seven months to January 2008, Tjuwanpa had a shortfall of \$73,000 against targeted income. This raised additional funding problems as rental income is linked to the level of housing funding received from the NT government. The reduction in rental income also put in jeopardy Tjuwanpa's ability to pay housing and essential services salaries that were dependant on rental revenues.

Interestingly, although housing improvements have received a great deal of attention under the Emergency Reforms, outstation housing has been left outside of these arrangements. Townships have benefited from the community clean up program and additional funding for housing repair and maintenance while outstation housing grants have remained static.

Although service delivery has been able to continue with the reinstatement of CDEP, future service delivery to Tjuwanpa's outstations remains uncertain. A combination of measures already begun under the reform process, could establish a set of conditions which would effectively force people to relocate to Hermannsburg. For example, if the cost of a bore or solar system requires replacement or repair in excess of \$50,000, legislative provisions would require that a lease be negotiated. Given Aboriginal sensitivities and difficulties understanding lease agreements, negotiations over leases could prove time consuming due to the complexities, mistrust and misunderstandings involved. This could result in the loss of access to power and water on the outstations

which would make the outstation unviable. Tjuwanpa also remains reliant on a large CDEP program to meet its management overheads. Although Federal Government plans for a new training and employment strategy to replace CDEP are unknown at this point, unless Tjuwanpa is able to access management funds in 2009, or alternative arrangements for service delivery are put in place under the new MacDonnell Shire, the Resource Centre will be forced to close. Further, if new arrangements for training and employment require frequent travel to Hermannsburg or Alice Springs, rising fuel and vehicle costs could prohibit people's ability to live on the outstations.

6 The Way Forward

6.1 What is working and what isn't working?

The overarching goal of the Intervention has been to create the conditions in Aboriginal communities that would see children protected and able to thrive. It is evident that income management arrangements have generally resulted in better use of funds for the purchase of essential grocery items and this is likely to benefit children. It has also reduced alcohol consumption and gambling and although these behaviours continue, most people would agree that the township environment is safer.

At the same time there is evidence that income management arrangements have created hardship, particularly regarding people's ability to repair vehicles and meet emergency cash needs. This has impacted on mobility and in some cases, resulted in people seeking accommodation in or closer to Hermannsburg.

In combination, however, a number of the reform measures could establish a set of conditions which would effectively result in numbers of people relocating to Hermannsburg. The potential movement of outstation residents to larger townships would seem ironic in view of the Government's intentions under the Intervention to make communities safer for children. Aboriginal families see the outstations as safer places than townships to raise their children. They also value the outstations as places where they can avoid alcohol, gambling and 'trouble'. The movement of families from the outstation environment to townships or Alice Springs would therefore seem counterproductive in view of Aboriginal families seeing the outstations as places to protect their children and family life. It would also exacerbate existing overcrowding in Hermannsburg and Alice Springs.

In examining the issue of employment and training at Tjuwanpa, the evidence suggests that current strategies, which rely on assumptions that people will relocate to Alice Springs, are likely to fail. Aboriginal residents articulate substantial barriers to living and working in town. These include their lack of qualifications; the difficulties they experience using spoken and written English; the demands of family responsibilities; the cost of rental accommodation in Alice Springs, and the prospect of 'trouble' because of the ease of purchasing alcohol. Further, the evidence at Tjuwanpa suggests that financial incentives, such as the 'top-up' offered under CDEP, encouraged involvement in work programs and the loss of these incentives led to a decrease in work participation levels.

An ongoing issue remains with the current structure of CDEP funding. This links participant numbers to operational overheads. This situation forces Tjuwanpa to keep

CDEP participant numbers high. This has a number of effects. It undermines efforts to enforce the no work-no pay rule. It also compromises training. As trainers are paid out of operational funds, participant numbers have to remain high in order to ensure continuation of their salaries. In addition, trainers are forced to compromise on skills assessments, activity planning and supervision.

6.2 The alternatives

Preliminary research findings suggest that Aboriginal people welcome the opportunity for training and employment but want these developed locally. The success of the Tjuwanpa Rangers program would appear to support this strategy. The Ranger's experience also highlights the importance of financial incentives to encourage participation in work programs.

In pursuing the economic opportunities that exist in the Tjuwanpa outstation area a number of conditions must feature in any training and employment program.

- The complexities and strengths of local conditions and service delivery arrangements must be taken into account and agreements carefully negotiated. This will require that planning is undertaken with the involvement of local Aboriginal people. In turn, this will require that experienced facilitators are used who can work with the local community. Long term planning timeframes also need to be established that enable relationships to be built and through which, work and training outcomes can be negotiated and understood. This implies multi-year funding and flexibility in contracting arrangements. Models currently used by AusAID in the Australian aid program could allow the flexibility needed by programs to respond to demands as they unfold.
- Family and kinship groups need to be targeted rather than individuals.
- Programs need to use assets based approaches that work within and build on existing Aboriginal responsibilities for and knowledge of country.
- Increased funding needs to be made available for training and supervisory positions so as to attract well qualified people who are prepared to commit to work in remote locations.
- On-the-job and flexible approaches to learning need to be used rather than short-term that are geared to urban industry standards. English language and literacy limitations preclude people's ability to undertake currently accredited courses.
- Funding needs to be decoupled from 'the numbers game'. Training and employment programs need to recognise that core costs and management overheads will be a feature of delivery regardless of the numbers of participants.

Underpinning all of these measures is the ability of government to establish the systems and processes that enable a real engagement with Aboriginal people and take into account local assets and strengths. At a minimum, governments must recognise that language limitations and different cultural interpretations of events will significantly impact on Aboriginal people's understanding of government intentions. Reaching an understanding or agreement about desired outcomes through new initiatives will, however, need to go further. Any agreements must involve a dialogue that recognises and builds on cultural responsibilities for family and land.

Case Study: The Emergency Response and Tjuwanpa Outstations

The new work and training measures proposed under the Intervention were never assessed in terms of their feasibility and appropriateness for very remote outstation locations. The Tjuwanpa experience highlights the need to carefully consider the interdependency of government service arrangements in very remote Aboriginal settlements. When human and capital resources are scarce, service delivery relies on a complex set of arrangements and relationships between different programs. External changes to these arrangements can destroy a very delicate balance that has been developed in response to local conditions.

The Tjuwanpa case study also illustrates how the Intervention has touched every aspect of people's lives. The question is whether the imposition of Government controls will improve the well being of people in remote communities. On this question the answer is mixed. For Tjuwanpa's outstations, more food on the table came with significant costs to work participation, anxiety levels and financial hardship for many families. The reforms have also interfered with a delicate balance in service delivery arrangements and impacted on people's mobility. In combination a number of reforms continue to pose a threat to people's ability to live on their outstations. This could see families forced to move to towns and townships, away from the outstations that Aboriginal people consider is a healthier and safer environment for their children.

6.3 Some final words

The Tjuwanpa Centrelink officers felt that if visiting Centrelink teams had recognised their knowledge and relationships in the local area, a great deal of confusion could have been avoided.

'Cause when customers come to the office...like...we've got a connection with our customers...an understanding connection...good communication ...likecan communicate with them directly. Like if they've got something they wanna talk about they'll come to us and talk about it. Or if they wanna ask questions or find out answers, they come to us. Or they'll just sit and have a good yarn...talk about the changes in Centrelink and all that...and they feel more comfortable talkin to us...to me. An because they know us as well and I think they feel very comfortable talking with us. 'Cause some people will tell us that they too ashamed to talk to non-Indigenous people...they shy or some of them are afraid....but to us they come like openly, because they know they can communicate with us and they'll get the help that they need. (Woman: 20s)

Other Aboriginal voices from Tjuwanpa had this to say about how the Intervention should have proceeded:

They needed a bit of explaining there too...so it not just....quick, quick, quick, quick....you know its fast pace and time. Maybe a whole day's meeting is more better where you can understand them. You have a break and you can talk about it...and maybe you can have question and answer for that. Yeah. They was just rushin' everything. Government needs to come more often. Need to say it over n over – not just bang! Instead, you need to go round the whole community n ask what do they think. (Woman: 30s)

And others felt that Aboriginal people needed to understand the meanings and implications of the reforms in their lives.

But...doin these changes you know, people's gotta be aware and tryin to understand all these meanings. It's just that they (the government) gotta come out and tell the right story to those people too.... now that we are listening to all these politics. The way they talk they don't really tell the truth you see. That's why, people out here doesn't really understand what they talking about. It's just the meanings you know....sorta like - tell the rightful meaning....the truth. For the meaning you gotta try to understand that too! See it's not just like its written there. They'll understand that! But the truth....they (outstation families) don't know....you see! See it's just that you gotta understand the understanding! (Man: 40s)

Annex 1: Examples of government demands on Tjuwanpa management staff June – November, 2007

Numerous demands were made on Tjuwanpa's Management and CDEP staff during the first six months of the Emergency Response. The list outlined below provides information on requests made over the first six months of the Intervention where Tjuwanpa was asked to provide a rapid response.

- June 26: DEWR informs Tjuwanpa that it has less than three days to sign an interim CDEP contract. The Manager is in Darwin at the time finalising end of year accounts and the contract must be discussed with and ratified by the Board of Management.
- July 2: Tjuwanpa is advised two days in advance of the Task Force meeting in Hermannsburg.
- July 13: Two weeks into the financial year FACSIA informs Tjuwanpa that essential services funding will only be released for three months.
- July 31: DEWR staff call to request an immediate response to their request for information on outstation locations and government payments to outstation residents.
- August 7: Centrelink calls to request urgent accommodation for remote area team.
- August 7: Team undertaking children's medical checks arrive unannounced to request help in locating outstation families.
- August 9: Centrelink staff arrive without notice to request that Tjuwanpa assist in informing outstation clients that they must attend interviews in Hermannsburg.
- August 22: Tjuwanpa asked to advise outstation residents of a Centrelink/DEWR community meeting to be held in a week's time.
- Sept 26: DEWR advises that Centrelink teams will be visiting the week of October 8 and that Tjuwanpa inform outstation clients.
- Sept 26: DEWR calls Tjuwanpa at short notice to request a meeting to discuss estimates of the number of CDEP positions to be transitioned to 'real' jobs.
- October 1: Tjuwanpa advised by fax that TASK Force and government staff will hold a community meeting on Wed October 3 to discuss welfare to work requirements.
- October 8: New Job Network Provider team arrives without notice and require office facilities.
- October 15: FACSIA call to offer 4 new essential services positions and request names by close of business the next day.
- October 23: Tjuwanpa receives formal notification that CDEP will cease as of October 26.
- Nov 1: DEWR notifies Tjuwanpa that CDEP separation certificates must be completed by Friday 9. Centrelink ask for certificates on Mon 5.

Annex 2: One Day in the Life of Tjuwanpa Wednesday October 17, 2007

The following account was written up by the researcher. It has been prepared from notes written by the Tjuwanpa Manager and also contains the researcher's observations of the day. The researcher has permission to use the account as written.

“Got up at 5:15. Over breakfast talked with AK about the preparations for the leader's meeting and what was to be covered on the agenda. The gathering was prompted by outstation leaders who requested at earlier meetings in September that there should be a follow-up meeting involving *all* the outstation leaders. Also looked at copies of the questions and answers sheet that AK had prepared following the September leaders' meetings. At the office by 7:45 a.m.

Over the next hour or so I checked emails and responded to requests from FACSIA, DLGHS, DWER and the accountant. In the middle of this were a couple of calls - an early morning phone call from Intjartnama outstation, to apologise for not coming to today's meeting as the outstation leader was not well, and a call from Ipolera – no water again at the outstation.

By 9:30 a number of community members started to arrive, wanting to know what time the meeting was starting. In the midst of this the Centrelink team arrives. They are in the second week of interviewing CDEP workers as part of their transition to Centrelink. I arrange office space in the training room and spend time with them to discuss concerns and questions I have about the transition and about income management arrangements. Meanwhile, Ulpunda residents are waiting in the office distressed about a broken phone at the outstation. They say they can't talk to the white fellas at Telstra– can you ring them for us? Before I can do this more phone calls come in – one from Power and Water about the training for some of the staff that is to take place next week in Alice Springs; the second from a resident who is stuck in Lajamanu and is worried what will happen if he can't make it to the Centrelink interview this week.

Finally see the one of the essential services staff – the only one around this week with the rest on leave or sick, and ask him to travel out to Ipolera to deal with the water supply issue. Behind him is a resident from Mbalkanaka wanting a vehicle, trailer and posthole digger so that he can finish a fencing job to manage the horses at his outstation. Also waiting are family members from Kaporilya who have a smashed windscreen. Can Tjuwanpa organise a pay deduction from CDEP wages to cover the cost of this? Had to deal with their anger when this request was refused. There will not be enough time to pay off this debt by the time Tjuwanpa transitions from CDEP to Centrelink in two weeks time. The Arts Coordinator drops by to request a meeting to discuss orders for materials and to give her resignation letter. She has decided to return to Adelaide and has given two weeks notice. DEWR calls to ask for the names of all of the people who will be continuing CDEP activities on a transitional basis. FACSIA is the next to call to ask for the names of the people who will be taking up the four additional positions that were announced two days ago on Monday. How can I do this? ...there is a lot to consider before I provide names. Finally able to call Telstra. It takes 15 minutes to get through to service difficulties and faults and to arrange for them to come out to fix the phone at Ulpunda.

Head back to the house just before 10 a.m. to help AK bring over materials for the meeting. While I am there a resident from Undurana drives in distressed that there is

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no water for the horses out at the outstation. The horses are dying. The soak has dried up and the solar pump for the horses has not worked for a long time as the owner has not fixed it. He wants Tjuwanpa's essential services staff to take out a grader and deepen the soak in the river bed. I told him that Tjuwanpa can't fix the pump as this is used for a small private horse enterprise and is not for domestic use. Taking the grader would involve a round trip of almost 170 kilometres and would tie up staff and equipment for the whole day. I explain to him that we can't do it.

Get back to the office and find Job Network Provider staff waiting. They have arrived unannounced and want to discuss the horticulture training taking place at 8 Mile outstation and to debrief on anxieties about the implementation of WfD. Centrelink staff conducting the transition interviews then request a brief discussion. In the middle of all of this, residents from Arrkapa, Alkngarrintja, Ulpunda and Mbalkanaka who have turned up for the leaders meeting, make requests for fuel orders. Palm Paddock wants to discuss private business opportunities on the outstation. DEWR calls again to ask for contact details of the Tjuwanpa accountant. Just before heading out to the meeting there is another call – this time from IBA wanting to hold a community meeting on October 22nd as a matter of urgency. I had already informed them by email two days ago when I was advised of this date that I would be unavailable as this date clashed with the NT government's new Shires Transition meeting in Alice Springs. Agreed to have them visit on Nov 1. Don't know when I will get time to provide them with the information they requested which is extensive.

The meeting starts at 10:30, about half an hour late but over 30 people are there from across the outstation region. During the meeting I take a call from the Hermannsburg CEO, requesting that I do an interview with foreign journalists from Italy and France who have been invited by the Federal government to cover the intervention. I decline. The meeting is still in progress when a government car pulls up and senior Centrelink staff emerge. They speak to me and ask if they can organise another community meeting next week. They want to let people know that everyone registered with Centrelink have to come to another round of Centrelink interviews taking place over the next fortnight. These interviews will explain income management arrangements and people will need to decide which shop they will designate as the point at which they will spend their quarantined income. People here will have a choice of the Top Shop or the Bottom Shop in Hermannsburg but at this point the Top Shop is saying that they simply can't manage the work load and level of accounting that this will require. I negotiate with Centrelink to join the end of today's meeting and then seek the approval of the meeting participants for this.

As lunch is organised for participants I quickly grab something to eat while calling DEWR. Need to check on the transition date from CDEP to Centrelink. Informal discussions with Centrelink staff this morning indicated that it will be the October 26th - two weeks away! DEWR has been saying since August that we will be informed 'soon' of the transition but we have been unable to get a confirmed date. DEWR is still unable to divulge any information but says that we should receive official notification some time today.

I head home at 2:30 for a short break, but am called to the door by residents from Ipalala. Can they get an advance for fuel? Although payday was on Monday they don't have any money left.

Arrive back in the office and Arrkapa residents are waiting. They want a house to live in at Tjuwanpa. Their car has broken down and they need to get their kids to

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school. They are staying temporarily in the staff house next to the office with one of the staff. I tell them there are no spare houses available. Centrelink staff appear again and I help them with some information about outstation residents. Ipolera calls – has the water been fixed yet? DEWR calls – have I got the email from Major Gen Chalmers yet on the transition date? I open the email. It confirms Oct 26th as the transition date. It's now too late to tell people who came for the meeting. They have all gone home. Need to let the accountant know that this will be the last day for CDEP wages. Found the essential services staff person and asked what was happening with the repairs at Ipolera. He replied that it had been too hot earlier and that he also needed to go to the community meeting. He'd attend to it directly. Meanwhile the resident from Mbalkanaka had returned to talk about the fencing job. He was worried about working near the gas pipeline and wanted me to call the gas company. 'You know how to talk to white fellas better than me'.

At this point I am interrupted by a resident who comes into the office demanding money for food. I refuse. Clearly drunk he becomes rude and offensive. I ask him to leave.

I go back to my emails. I finally have a chance to read the letter from Major General Chalmers regarding the transition and to study the new transitional guidelines. As I was doing this a leader came past with an election poster for the notice board and we chatted about the meeting earlier that day. Finally tidied my desk, did some filing, gathered the papers I needed to work on so that I could complete the solar rebate, swept the floor, emptied the rubbish and headed home. It was 7:00 p.m.

At home I quickly packed a bag. I needed to be in Alice Springs Thursday to pick up a staff who was returning from compassionate leave, and see Bushlight about the solar rebate. I also wanted to call the police to report the earlier incident. Made a call but could not get through. I could still not get through 15 minutes later so left a message with the Alice police. Twenty minutes later on the drive to Alice the Hermannsburg police returned the call, saying they would delay conducting a breathalyser test until the following morning. Got to Alice at 9:15 p.m and finally settled into bed at 10:30.

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