

CHECKOUT

CCJP

November 2008

The Northern Territory Intervention

Myth: The intervention is improving the lives of Aboriginal people in the NT.

Fact: In the year since it was introduced by the now unseated Mal Brough and John Howard, the intervention has created chaos, increased poverty and racism for Aboriginal communities living in "proscribed areas".

"My name is Dianne Stokes, I'm a Warumungu-Warlmanpa woman, I'm one of the responsible people that's spokesperson for my community. I live in a community called Kalumpurlpa. I wanted to talk about this intervention because intervention is the biggest problem in Tennant Creek".

Brian Dennison. Tennant Creek: *"I'm really disappointed with the intervention because what they doing, is, they are taking away our rights. They're controlling our money. We haven't got a chance to go and talk or get food where we get our food before. Even when we go to Alice Springs for a doctor's appointment or any other meeting. We usually go to united, but now we can't hardly go there, because this intervention stopped everything, we just do one big shopping at the food barn".*

Myth: The intervention is designed to address child sexual abuse in Aboriginal communities.

Fact: The sensational claims of rampant paedophilia and child sexual abuse which spurred the NT intervention have not been born out.

There have been no paedophilia rings uncovered, and there haven't even been any child sexual abuse prosecutions as a result of the intervention.

The "**Little Children are Sacred**" report was cited as the catalyst for the "Emergency Response" Brough launched, yet over a year later **only 2 of the 97 recommendations** in that report have been implemented.

The government has funded only 20 child protection workers to cover the whole Territory, and currently only 1 is actually employed!

Myth: Successive governments have "thrown money" at the remote communities, and yet conditions continue to worsen.

Fact: "The vast majority (of proscribed areas) are substantially deficient across the entire range of selected services." This cannot be explained by size and geographic isolation, as John Taylor, Deputy Director at the Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research (CAEPR) says, "even the largest of the remote communities do not have the full range of services and infrastructure"

The government spends less than half the amount on education per child in Wadeye, one of the major Aboriginal communities, than on equivalent areas in the "mainstream" NT.

- 94% of Aboriginal communities in the NT have no preschool and 56% have no secondary school.
- 99% of all Aboriginal communities in the NT have no substance abuse service
- 99% have no dental service.
- Only 54% have state funded primary care services and
- 47% have an Aboriginal primary health care service more that 50km away.

The Australian Medical Association has estimated that \$700 million is needed to bring up to minimum standard the basic infrastructure needed to maintain health, such as water and sewage. It costs tax-payers \$7000 per person to administer the welfare quarantine (according to HREOC) which has seen people going hungry trying to access the most meagre Centrelink payments.

Myth: "Closing the gap" in Indigenous life expectancy is more important than rights like Aboriginal self-determination.

Fact: In order to implement the intervention the government has suspended the Racial Discrimination Act (1975). This sends a clear signal to the whole country that racism against Aboriginal people is acceptable. Numerous studies have shown clearly how bad health is inextricably linked to the experience of racism.

The capacity of Indigenous people to control the affairs of their community is the only road to improvements in quality of life. For example, a study from the University of British Columbia by Michael Chandler shows that rates of youth suicide amongst Aboriginal people in Canada are dramatically lower where there is secure title to traditional lands, structures of self-government, community-directed education, health and fire services and resources for practice of traditional culture.

Discrimination and the neglect of human rights in health policy has resulted in obscene misallocation of funding.

Chris Wilson, a remote area nurse working in proscribed communities says about the mandatory children's health checks: *"Children in remote communities are the most examined in Australia. The intervention has not turned up anything that was not already known – it is the follow up treatments that need to be concentrated on... Once again, most of this money benefits those who least need it, those comfortable and already employed professionals. The intervention would have done far more good if it had invested in the established health services, as well as in measures to reduce poverty, developed in consultation with the communities themselves."*

Myth: Welfare quarantines are making life better for Aboriginal children in remote areas.

Fact: Welfare quarantining has significantly increased overcrowding in town centres, as people from remote communities are forced to shop with "store cards" from multinational chains like Coles and Woolworths. Town camps in Darwin, for example, have doubled in population since the intervention started, and existing services are deteriorating.

The families of people who have left remote communities to try and escape welfare quarantining cannot say no when people ask to be accommodated in their already overcrowded house. **It is a family's cultural responsibility to house family members in need.** Families have been under considerable pressure since the intervention with an increase in evictions from properties.

As Larissa Behrendt, director of research at the Jumbunna Indigenous House of Learning at UTS in Sydney argues: *"There is no evidence that the use of welfare as a stick improves school attendance. In fact, all of the research points to the fact that using welfare payments in this way can add an additional stress factor into an already dysfunctional situation."*

Web Addresses:

http://epress.anu.edu.au/agenda/014/03/mobile_devices/ch07s02.html

http://www.hreoc.gov.au/about/media/media_releases/2008/36_08.html

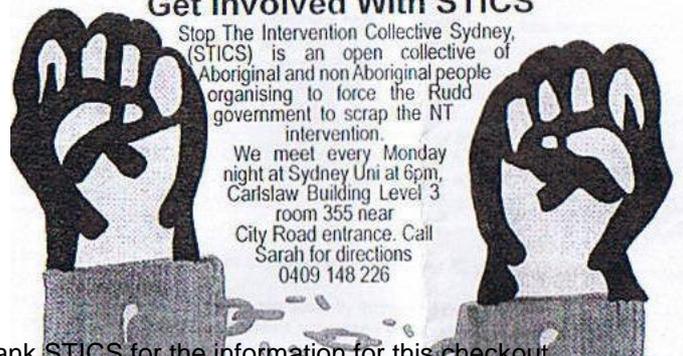
<http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2008/10/10/2387412.htm>

Should you wish to receive further **CHECKOUTs**, contact Margaret Keyes, CCJP, PO Box A21 Enfield South 2133, ☎/Fax 02.97450820 Email: ccjp@bigpond.com Web: www.ccjpoz.org

Get Involved With STICS

Stop The Intervention Collective Sydney (STICS) is an open collective of Aboriginal and non Aboriginal people organising to force the Rudd government to scrap the NT intervention.

We meet every Monday night at Sydney Uni at 6pm, Carlslaw Building Level 3 room 355 near City Road entrance. Call Sarah for directions 0409 148 226



We thank STICS for the information for this checkout