



Children's Ground Ltd.
ABN 74154403086
673 Bourke Street,
Melbourne, VIC, 3000
0447903084
cgadmin@childrensground.org.au

Royal Commission into the Protection and Detention of Children in the Northern Territory

PO Box 4215, Kingston ACT 2604

C/- ChildDetentionNT@royalcommission.gov.au

October 28, 2016

Commissioner Margaret White AO and Commissioner Mick Gooda

Dear Commissioners,

Please find attached the submission by Children's Ground Ltd, representing the views of experienced board members and staff who have been engaged – often for decades – in an attempt to change the future and prospects of First Nations children and young people in the Northern Territory.

I am proud to be the current Chair of Children's Ground. I have spent my entire life waiting to see what will happen if our people are given choice and real agency in their everyday lives; to determine how they would like to live their lives and to have ownership over the direction they take. Aboriginal people deserve that right as responsible free agents.

Aboriginal people don't desire to have poor health, to have diseases that have been eradicated in other parts of the world. Aboriginal people don't desire overcrowding because of poor housing design and second rate building practices. My people don't desire to be second class citizens and drift with the currents of prescribed solutions. My people don't desire educational failure because education is not designed for them.

The way that things are done – to people and for people but not with people and by the people - has led to Aboriginal people being disadvantaged, disempowered at every corner of every street. The odds are stacked against them. They are expected to participate in things that they have not worked or have not designed themselves; this is a fundamental failure of the past and present.

This is the experience we observed in the footage aired by ABC's Four Corners program this year about Don Dale. But it is a story with which many of us in the Territory have been familiar with our whole lives.

As we indicated last month in our letter of intention to make a submission, our long experience with successive and ineffective policies and service delivery solutions led us to create Children's Ground as a completely new approach for Aboriginal people and their children and families. The attached material goes to the efficacy and local control inherent in this new approach.

This submission by Children's Ground is relevant to your inquiry's Terms of Reference, sections (g) and (h), namely:

(g) what measures should be adopted by the Government of the Northern Territory, or enacted by the Legislative Assembly of the Northern Territory, to prevent inappropriate treatment of children and young persons detained at the relevant facilities, including:

- (i) law reform; and
- (ii) reform of administrative practices; and
- (iii) reform of oversight measures and safeguards; and

- (iv) reform of management practices, education, training and suitability of officers; and
- (v) any other relevant matters;
- (h) what improvements could be made to the child protection system of the Northern Territory, including the identification of early intervention options and pathways for children at risk of engaging in anti-social behaviour;

Children's Ground has been proving itself now, on the ground, and showing that there is an alternative to the existing siloed service delivery approach. Give Aboriginal people choice and the means. Let them vote with their feet. They will participate, they will develop, they will grow and the whole community will flourish with them. The ripple effect is wide felt.

We believed Children's Ground would work. Now I see it works. Our first evaluation report shows that we are moving in the right direction. The next generation are on a new path.

So there can be a new reality, supported by the Children's Ground Approach but created by the community. They are devising solutions that are practical and pragmatic and that achieve safety, education, good health and employment while protecting our cultures. Let's work with communities – elders families and children - and empower them to have choice and to feel proud about the decisions they make and the outcomes they achieve.

I see Children's Ground as stacking the odds in favour of Aboriginal people.

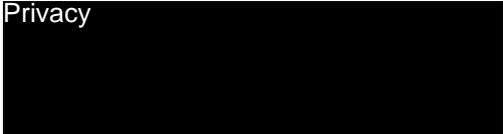
These are the improvements that need to be made in a 'whole of government' approach for a new child protection system for the Northern Territory. They put early intervention options in the hands of skilled community members and their supporters, and create new pathways for all Aboriginal children, but especially for those at risk of engaging in anti-social behaviour.

Please consider this as example of the practical changes that can be made to the current, failed and disconnected system of service delivery.

Our Chief Executive Officer, Jane Vadeloo, will also make a separate submission. We invite you and your staff and advisors to consider these submissions, and we would welcome the opportunity to speak at a subsequent hearing or hearings of the Commission.

Yours sincerely,

Privacy



William Tilmouth,

Chair of the Children's Ground Board of Directors