

Monday 13 March 2017

The Royal Commission into the Protection and
Detention of Children in the Northern Territory
GPO Box 4215, Kingston ACT 2604

Dear Commissioners,

RE: Creating The Recovery College Model for Adolescents and Adults in NT

Over the past 18 months Port Macquarie Community College (PMCC) in NSW has been investing in background preparations to begin establishing the Top End Community College (TECC), to bring Adult & Community Education (ACE) services to the Top End. Much of this work has been focused on supporting vulnerable community members – young people and women at risk, people with disabilities, those living with mental distress and/or substance misuse, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, migrants and refugees, returned service people living with PTSD etc.

The Registered Training Organisation arm of PMCC, known as SkillsLink Training, has been providing accredited courses for the Down Syndrome Assoc. of NT's Project 21 post-school college for young adults with intellectual disability (named after the 21st Chromosome that causes Down Syndrome) during 2016-17 under an NT Equity Grant, which runs out in July 2017. The community-run Board of PMCC chose to invest funds in exploring the potential for a TECC, while seeking opportunities for support from Governments.

On the Mid North Coast of NSW, PMCC has been offering a suite of Community Mental Health and Disability Support programs for the past three years. These foundations are now being built on (including becoming an NDIS registered provider), in a combined proposal to establish a four location pilot along the whole north coast of NSW (in Port Macquarie, Coffs Harbour, Mullumbimby and Lismore with our peer community colleges) of the US and UK model known as The Recovery College. This model already exists in the St George & Inner City precincts of South East Sydney Local Health District in NSW.

We believe The Recovery College, as a subset of the TECC and in partnership with Territory Health and Justice agencies, could provide alternatives to incarceration and constructive learning and life development opportunities for juveniles needing a new path.

The Recovery College is based on a 50:50 "consumer & clinician" program development and delivery model for adult mental health. We believe this can be adapted to the needs and abilities of adolescent participants, many of whom are living with serious trauma, risk of self-harm and substance misuse issues. Especially when combined with the Restorative Justice model of building self responsibility and facing consequences without being shamed and blamed.

Beyondblue's research shows at least one in five regular young people live with depression and anxiety. That figure could be multiplied nearly fivefold for adolescents in

detention or under orders from justice agencies, let alone the results of trauma and substance misuse.

PMCC's development manager for the TECC project, Dr Robbie Lloyd, has worked in the NT from 2007-2014, and did his postdoctoral fellowship in 2012 at the Menzies School of Health Research in Darwin, on Youth Health & Wellbeing. He actually attempted to bring a program in Youth Wellbeing to Don Dale in 2012, but despite the local on-site manager's support of this idea, the head office in Darwin rejected any such move. Dr Lloyd also founded (and remains on the committee of) the Miriam Rose Foundation for Dr Miriam Rose Ungunmerr Baumann from Nauiyu (Daly River), to resource Nauiyu elders in supporting young people at risk of self harm and suicide.

Dr Lloyd is also a long term member of the Creating Futures Collaborative, running the bi-annual Rural, Remote, Indigenous and Islander Mental Health Conferences with Professor Ernest Hunter and his team. Together, the Creating Futures team has brought Global Mental Health to Australia, PNG and soon Fiji (in Sept 2017). This work is directly relevant to rural and remote Top End locations, and the TECC project has been liaising with the Primary Health Network of NT proposing such approaches for the MH Reforms, and will continue to promote that idea as part of its development program.

Currently PMCC is running an alternative senior college, known as Nautilus, which supports young people (15 yrs+) who are rejected by mainstream industrial high schools. This program is one of ten running across NSW, known as the Alesco Schools (after the Latin term for "be nourished and grow up" used by WEA Hunter in Newcastle, who established the first such college in 2006). Ms Valerieanne Byrnes, the CEO of PMCC and joint Principal of Nautilus, ran the Western College in Dubbo (with 70% Aboriginal participants) from 2014-16 with its own highly successful Alesco college.

We are also working with Justice Health & Forensic Health in NSW to focus on programs for youth under orders in the Kempsey region, as well as supporting the program at nearby Benelong's Haven family drug and alcohol rehab. Centre (the old Kinchela Boys' Home). This is on top of our Stepping Up satellite programs for disadvantaged youth in both Kempsey and Taree.

Together with our peak body Community Colleges Australia (CCA), which has a vision for Australia to achieve more dynamic and vibrant communities, informed and empowered through adult learning, we believe the time is right for alternatives such as TECC and The Recovery College model in NT to be trialled and expanded. Our approach would be fully evidence-based and founded on best practice, while also collecting "live research" as we go, to inform further development across the Top End and beyond.

We would be happy to brief the Commission in more detail, and to appear at any public hearings if that assists the Commission's work.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Robbie Lloyd

Community Relationships Manager, and

Top End Community College Development Manager