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Senate Standing Committees on Community Affairs  
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UTS CRICOS PROVIDER CODE 00099F

Dear Committee Members,

**RE: Out of Home Care Inquiry**

As you may be aware, Jumbunna Indigenous House of Learning, Research Unit (“Jumbunna”) undertakes research and advocacy on Indigenous legal and policy issues of importance to Indigenous people, their families and their communities.

Jumbunna has provided research assistance and advocacy for Indigenous families who have had their children removed across a number of jurisdictions, particularly in the Northern Territory. We are a partner in an Australian Research Council funded project investigating the civil and family law needs of Indigenous communities across Australia (Cuneen 2012), that has held focus groups with hundreds of Indigenous people and documented a glaring lack of access to justice for many Indigenous families who have had children removed. Jumbunna has also provided research assistance for the advocacy group “Grandmothers Against Removals”, first established in Gunnedah NSW and now a growing national network.

This submission will focus on the dynamics driving the rapidly increasing numbers of Aboriginal children in out of home care in the Northern Territory since the NT Intervention in 2007. We hope our casework experience in this jurisdiction will provide insights for the committee on the deeply discriminatory operation of this system and the urgent need for change. We would be happy to appear before the committee to discuss the national picture, along with the NT experiences documented here. The submission opens with testimony from four Aboriginal women who have had children taken from them by the NT Department of Children and Families (DCF). One of these women, Donna Damon, has successfully concluded her case and has also indicated a willingness to appear before the committee. The other three women have provided anonymous testimony as their cases are ongoing.

Yours sincerely,

Padraic Gibson

Prof. Larissa Behrendt

Submission to Senate Standing Committees on Community Affairs – Out of Home Care

**“It’s like the Stolen Generations again”: The forced removal of Aboriginal children by Child Protection services under the NT Intervention**

Prepared by Senior Researcher Padraic Gibson on behalf of Jumbunna Indigenous House of Learning, UTS.

**Submission summary:**

1. **Testimony from Aboriginal women who have had children removed:** Donna Damon (Alice Springs), Warlpiri Grandmother 1, Warlpiri Grandmother 2, Aboriginal mother from a remote community.
2. **Sharp rise in Aboriginal children in care:** Since the Northern Territory Intervention in 2007, there has been a threefold increase in the number of Aboriginal children in out-of-home care. NT Department of Children and Families (DCF) operations have come to focus almost exclusively on Aboriginal children. Children who have been removed are staying in out-of-home care for much longer periods and a smaller proportion are being placed with Aboriginal families.
3. **Lack of access to justice:** Many families who have children removed struggle to secure legal representation and therefore have no access to justice. For those who do have representation, delays in the court process mean that many months or even years can pass before family voices have a chance to be heard.
4. **Aboriginal self-determination is the key:** There is a chronic lack of support services available to struggling families and no formal processes for involvement of the Aboriginal community in decisions relating to the protection of children. Ensuring that resources are available to Aboriginal support services and shifting control over child welfare to Aboriginal controlled agencies are key steps needed to meet the twin crises of escalating child removal and deteriorating conditions for Aboriginal children.

**1. Testimony from Aboriginal women who have had children removed**

**Donna Damon (Alice Springs)**

My children were forcibly removed by the NT Department of Children and Families in March 2014 and restored to my care 8 months later.

These removals were completely unjustified and have put my family through an enormous amount of disruption and trauma. The allegations were never tested in court. I finally regained full custody of my children after a decision by DCF not to proceed with their attempt to have two year removal orders placed on my children.

The initial allegations which led to the removal were based on a judgement made by DCF staff that health issues suffered by my children, including the low weight of my two year old daughter, were the result of my negligence as a parent.

These allegations were completely untrue. Immediately following the removal, I had obtained expert medical opinion which demonstrated the allegations to be untrue, but DCF refused to listen, despite having no medical opinion that supported their case.

The removal process itself was very violent. Without any warning, police came to my door with DCF staff and demanded to take my two year old daughter. When I tried to negotiate, they threatened me with a can of pepper spray, pointed at my face, while I was holding my daughter. There was no thought about the “best interests of the child” that day. My daughter was taken away crying and two of my other children were taken from school without my permission or knowledge.

The time the children spent away from our family was very chaotic and traumatic. They were in a temporary care home, with workers coming in on shifts. I believe that my children had more than 30 carers over this time. These workers were all driving hire cars - I hate to think of all the money that was wasted.

My access to the children was very limited and could only take place under supervision. I was treated like a criminal.

DCF were seeking a two year order on my children and initially the hearing date was scheduled for September. This means that it would have been six months following the removal of my children that I was given the opportunity to have my side of the story heard by a magistrate.

Luckily, I had a good lawyer who kept trying to find other options. I believe that if I had not been very assertive with the lawyers at the Aboriginal Legal Service (ALS) following the removal, I would not have had such good representation. Initially, it was suggested that the best chance of getting my children back would be to just co-operate with the Department and accept the orders. But I demanded that the legal service fight against the orders. Many other Aboriginal people in my position do not have my good communication skills or confidence and would not get this outcome.

The Department put up a fight against to our attempt to have the children placed with my family while we waited for the court hearing. My sister is a primary school teacher and she agreed to look after the children. She took time off work to come to court and explain to the magistrate. The Department refused to accept this and argued strongly for the children to stay in the care home. Luckily, after first ordering a failed mediation process, after a number of months the magistrate ruled that my children should be placed with my sister while we wait for hearing.

A final hearing was set down for November, but in the end DCF decided to drop the case against me and I finally now have the children back in my custody.

I believe that my family have been victims of DCF because we are Aboriginal. Through my dealings with DCF I found the staff to be arrogant, dishonest and racist. They seemed far more concerned with justifying their own bad decisions and covering up their mistakes than

they did with assisting my family to deal with the challenges facing us.

There is a stolen generation happening all over again. Every day Aboriginal families are suffering what I suffered, I feel sorry for those poor families. They feel they have no where to go, no one to help. Some just go out and drink because they feel so helpless. They are victims just like I am.

### **Walpiri Grandmother 1**

I am a Warlpiri grandmother who was looking after two of my grandchildren, before they were taken away from me by DCF in September 2013. I had looked after both children since they were babies, with my husband. We always had help from family too, from other kids we raised who are now grown up and come back to stay with us.

One child came into my care after both of his parents passed away. Before they died, I promised his parents that I would look after him.

Last year I arrived home in the afternoon and found one of my grand-children very upset. She explained in my language that “the white people have taken those two kids from the school”. There were other family members there and we were all crying.

I did not know DCF were going to take these kids. They never explained it to me. Their removal from school was a shock which has caused deep distress both to me and the children.

DCF workers and workers from other social services reporting to DCF have made judgements on me that I have proven wrong. They can not communicate properly with our family, because they make no effort to understand how we speak with each other. They don't know where these kids have come from, that we love our kids and care for them.

So many workers from social services who said they were helping me wrote long statements for the court about how I couldn't care for my kids. They never raised their concerns with me or helped with a translator so I can communicate in my main language, Warlpiri.

This little boy has had problems with going to the toilet and it has been blamed on me. They don't understand he has had these issues all his life, they think it is because we don't look after him properly. They think we are making him shy, but he is a shy little boy. He lost his parents too which he still gets sad about. Being stolen away from our family has made things worse for him again.

There is a prejudiced attitude towards our family amongst staff at the school, where some of these reports came from. The principal himself has described my husband “hopeless”, even though he has raised many children and put them through school. Many of them are now adults with their own kids. I have never had any problems with DCF during my time raising

any of these children.

In fact, DCF have in the past acknowledged my skills as a parent. They placed a handicapped boy in my care when he was six years old. Despite all the challenges, I raised this boy until he was a young man.

DCF workers are judging us because of my Aboriginal culture. They say I don't supervise the kids properly, but they don't understand that we are always making sure the kids are safe. They say family members coming to stay makes the house "chaotic" and means the children have "no routine".

But this contact with my extended family is very important for the kids. They love their family and are always very happy to see them. Being raised with the extended family is important for their identity as Warlpiri children.

Since taken into foster care, the children have been forced to move between at least seven different foster care households. This has been incredibly disruptive and distressing for the children.

The children consistently complain about their treatment in foster care when they come to our houses for visits. They cry when they visit us, saying that they want to return to live with us and that they miss their family.

Both children have complained about being hit by foster carers. They were extremely worried when they visited us, saying that they did not feel it was safe to return to that carer. The children also tell us that DCF workers have smacked them.

The children often come to visits with us complaining that they are hungry and are not being fed properly while in foster care.

The children have reported to us that they were instructed not to call me and my partner "Mum and Dad" by foster carers. This has been incredibly distressing for the children. The children have reported to us that they have been instructed not to speak us about the conditions that they face in foster care.

There has been no involvement from my kinship group or broader Warlpiri community whatsoever in decision making about these children. They are currently being denied access to their culture, language, family and country as a result of being in the care of DCF.

[NOTE: Section 12 (2) of the NT Care and Protection Act says:

"A kinship group, representative organisation or community of Aboriginal people nominated by an Aboriginal child's family should be able to participate in the making of a decision involving the child"]

DCF supervised visits to our household have been infrequent and inconsistent, taking place without adequate notice for me to arrange proper cultural activities for the children to

participate in. Sometimes, DCF supervised visits to our household stopped without explanation, or because they say they have a shortage of staff.

When I tried to get a lawyer for all the court cases, nobody would help me. All the legal services said they could not represent me because I had no chance. I was lucky that a friend of mine knew a good lawyer, who has now taken on the case. The magistrate couldn't believe what DCF has done to my kids and it looks like we will get them back soon. But many Aboriginal people in my situation would never get legal support and never even make it to court.

This stolen generation happened to us before. Children were taken away from our community and only came back as adults. They were lost, they didn't know how to speak their language and didn't know their family. It was very sad.

It seems that this stolen generation is happening again. Me and my family are extremely distressed at the loss of culture and family connection currently being forced on the children. Our spirit is lost, they are part of our soul. We don't want them living with non-Indigenous people. We want them back with us. We want to take them to be on their land, to be able to speak their own language, to have the love and support of their extended family.

## **Warlpiri Grandmother 2**

I have been looking after two of my grandchildren since they were babies because I was worried their parents were drinking too much.

One day when those kids were three years old and two years old welfare came to my house and took them away from me. That was almost two years ago now.

I never got an explanation why they were taken away from me. I speak Warlpiri, not English. No one has ever spoken to me in Warlpiri about why the children were taken. I do not read and write. No one has ever sat down with me and explained any papers about why these children were taken.

I have never seen a lawyer about this. I have never been to court about this. I don't know when they will give the children back.

The children were safe with me. They were learning their language and they could visit with their family.

Now the children are with white people. They cannot speak their language Warlpiri. We are very sad about the children being gone, we cry all the time. I can only visit them at the welfare office, they can't come to my house to visit.

I want those children back, they should be living with me.

## **Mother from remote Aboriginal community**

I live with my husband and extended family in a remote community in the Northern Territory. It is 400kms to the nearest big town. We speak our language and are proud of our culture.

Almost two years ago now, DCF workers turned up at my house while we were eating breakfast. They had the police with them and they barged into my house and took my young son away from us. They drove him all the way into town. We were all crying. The old people said this is what it was like when the Stolen Generation was happening.

They only took my young son from me who was going to preschool. They left my daughter who is in primary school and my son from high school. But my young boy had been very sick. He had trouble putting on weight. There was a report from the clinic that he was still losing weight so DCF came to take him away. Those workers from the clinic who made the report ended up leaving the community because they felt ashamed about what had happened.

Recently I have had a new baby. DCF haven't said anything about this baby, he lives with me. He is a healthy happy little boy. All my children are healthy and happy, but we are still missing our little boy. He is still living with a white foster family in town.

I have never been to court about this. I don't know how long DCF want to keep him for. If we want to visit him, we have to travel into town to see him.

I have had so many different DCF workers who have made a lot of promises about bringing him back to the community. Sometime I have had case workers that have said they will give him back to me, I just need to wait. Other times they have said they need another family member to take him and I have organised for someone else to try and be a carer. But they have never followed through on their promises. He is still there in town with the white family.

I think some of these case workers are very racist. Even the foster mother for my son thinks that he should come back to me. There is no reason why I can't look after him, I am still raising three other kids including a little baby.

## **2. Sharp rise in Aboriginal children in care under the NT Intervention**

In June 2007, the Commonwealth government initiated the *Northern Territory National Emergency Response* (the Intervention). In 2012, a new policy *Stronger Futures in the Northern Territory* retained many of the control measures and investment priorities of the Intervention. Jumbunna has done extensive research on the impact of the NT Intervention and Stronger Futures and has provided a number of submissions to Senate inquiries detailing our findings and policy position. We oppose the overt discrimination of the continuing intervention measures and have documented many adverse impacts on Aboriginal communities experienced under these policies.

There are very serious social problems facing many Aboriginal communities in the NT, which impact directly on the safety and wellbeing of children. These include very high rates of substance abuse, family violence and chronic unemployment. There is however, no evidence that these problems have improved since 2007 and many indications that they are getting worse. For example, the current Aboriginal unemployment rate in the NT is higher than it was in 2007 (Productivity Commission 2013), the rate at which Aboriginal women are hospitalised for assault has increased (NT Children's Commission 2014), reported incidence of attempted suicide and self-harm has increased dramatically (FaHCSIA 2012), as has the number of Aboriginal being people incarcerated (ABS 2014).

In the field of child protection, the Intervention has seen a threefold increase in the number of Aboriginal children being removed from their families and placed in out of home care (NT Department of Children and Families 2014). This phenomenon is being driven by two factors.

Firstly, there has been a massive increase in resources available to the Department of Children and Families (DCF). The Havnen report (2012) detailed a doubling of expenditure by DCF from 2007 – 2011 and pointed to continuing planned increases in Commonwealth funding available for DCF under the *Stronger Futures* policy to 2022. Overwhelmingly, this funding has been directed to surveillance of families and removal of children, along with the costs of maintaining out of home care placements. To keep a single child in out of home care for one year in the NT costs in excess of \$100,000. Havnen contrasts these funding increases with the continuing chronic lack of family support and other community based programs to assist struggling families to stay together.

Secondly, it is our submission that the discriminatory policy and rhetoric accompanying the Intervention has served to further pathologise Aboriginal people and culture. The Intervention has bolstered an approach to struggling families that prioritises bureaucratic control over Aboriginal lives as a means of addressing social problems.

These shifts have manifest in data in the following ways.

i) Increasing number of Aboriginal children in out of home care:

June 2007: 265 Aboriginal children (Productivity Commission 2014)

June 2014: 787 Aboriginal children (DCF 2014)

ii) DCF focus is now almost entirely on Aboriginal children, as evidenced by a rapid decrease in the number of new non-Indigenous children brought into out of home care:

2006 – 2007: 106 new non-Indigenous children taken into care

2012 – 2013: 20 new non-Indigenous children taken into care (Productivity Commission 2014)

iii) Decreasing proportion of Aboriginal children being placed with Aboriginal relatives or kin

2006 – 2007: 37 per cent

2012 – 2013: 33 per cent (Productivity Commission 2014)



iv) Children are staying in foster care for longer periods:

The 2014 DCF Annual Report says, “Children in care are increasingly in care for longer. Forty eight per cent of the current children in out of home care will be in care until eighteen years of age”.

### **3. Lack of access to justice**

In each of the testimonies provided for this submission, there was a disgraceful lack of adequate legal representation available for families who have had children removed. This has meant that the decisions of DCF are essentially unaccountable and many children who are in care due to mistaken judgements on the part of DCF are kept away from their families unnecessarily.

This lack of legal representation in child protection matters was a serious issue highlighted in a major Australian Research Council funded project *Legal Needs in Indigenous Communities*, in which Jumbunna has been a partner.

In 2011-12, the Legal Needs Project conducted focus groups with 149 Indigenous community members in eight communities in the NT, in both urban and remote areas. We also conducted over 60 stakeholder interviews, with legal services and other Aboriginal and welfare organisations, many of which are involved in family support and advocacy around child protection issues.

Ten per cent of Indigenous women in focus groups reported having an issue with child removal in the last two years, with some focus group participants describing the increase in child removal under the NT Intervention as “like a stolen generation all over again”. More than 40 per cent of these women had not accessed legal support in relation to their child protection matters. Three percent of men in focus groups also reported having an issue with child removal, with only one third of these accessing any legal support. These ratios accord with testimony from a staff member from an Indigenous Legal Service who said, “On the child protection list this month we had six families in and three were represented - so half. The other parents weren’t even present in court”.

Many legal service providers reported dismay at the lack of resources available to assist Indigenous clients who had their children removed. Others described how some DCF caseworkers routinely fail to communicate with parents, many of whom have limited English, about the court process they were about to enter into and their entitlement to legal representation. Selected testimony from legal service providers gives some insight into the lack of access to justice currently afforded to Indigenous people who have had their children removed in the NT:

With our remote clients, the courts generally don’t hear any civil matters when they go out bush. So for child protection matters, the parents are out bush but we’re here dealing with all the court matters, so they are not participating in that process and not understanding what’s going on or the implications if [they] don’t turn up to court or if [they] don’t give instructions to their solicitor (Indigenous Legal Service staff).

In my opinion, the system that [this legal service] has at the moment is not effective...we don't have the funding for it... We don't know what's going on out in the communities (Legal Service Staff).

The problem that we find is that there is no real interface often between the Department of Child Protection and the parents. Parents are given applications with no interpreters, they are spoken to without interpreters, they're just given a chunk of paper and they don't understand what they are to do with it. Depending on the office you are dealing with in terms of care and protection, some offices will pay for the parents to be brought to court and help them out so they can have access to justice somewhat. Under the legislation and under the policy there is no requirement on the department to assist the family once they have served. The outcome is that it is up to the legal services/caseworkers as to whether they will help them to access a solicitor (Indigenous Legal Service staff).

Legal Services have no funding to fly the parents in for court, the department says they don't have funding, and the courts say it's not their responsibility. And yet there is a legal requirement that parents must be at court (Indigenous Legal Service staff).

Affidavit material is appalling. Failure to genuinely assess family carers is appalling. I had to list something for hearing in order to get them to do an assessment, and they have done that and are looking at reunification... I had to list it to get them to do their job (Indigenous Legal Service staff).

We are having decisions made, like that the educational outcomes in a remote community are low therefore the children should remain with foster carers in Darwin. That's the attitude of the court (Indigenous Legal Service staff).

#### **4. Aboriginal self-determination is the key**

Aboriginal self-determination needs to be at the centre of any effective response to the current crises, both in escalating rates of out of home care and deteriorating conditions for Indigenous children in their communities in the NT. Two papers annexed to this report, prepared by Padraic Gibson provide further insights on this question.

The first paper, "Stolen Futures", published in the *Overland* journal in 2013, details how consistent attacks on Aboriginal community controlled organisations and removal of productive resources from Aboriginal communities over the past twenty years lies at the heart of these crises. It addresses the chronic lack of Aboriginal controlled family support services currently available in communities and the manifest failures of large-scale child removal by DCF to deliver improved outcomes for Indigenous children.

The second paper is a short summary of the finding of the landmark *Bringing them Home* report, published in 1997. This report is popularly known for the comprehensive detail it provides about the Stolen Generations of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. However, a major component of

the report is an inquiry into the continuing phenomenon of forced separation of Indigenous children from their families, by both the Child Protection and Juvenile Detention systems.

We concur with the central recommendation of *Bringing them Home* on the way forward for Aboriginal child protection:

Our principal finding is that self-determination for Indigenous peoples provides the key to reversing the over-representation of Indigenous children in the child welfare and juvenile justice systems of the States and Territories and to eliminating unjustified removals of Indigenous children from their families and communities... The Inquiry supports the eventual transfer of responsibility for children's well being to Indigenous peoples and proposes a framework for negotiating autonomy measures (Recommendation 43).

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## ***Bringing them Home* and the contemporary removal of Indigenous children**

Summary by Padraic Gibson, Jumbunna Indigenous House of Learning (UTS)

The publication of the *Bringing them Home* report in 1997 was a watershed moment in Aboriginal politics.

The report contained comprehensive testimony and analysis about the removal of Indigenous children throughout Australia's history. It argued that the systematic child removal seen throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> Century was a genocidal process.

*Bringing them Home* contained many recommendations about how justice and healing could be brought about for the Stolen Generations.

However, *Bringing them Home* was not just about the past. The final chapter was focused on the contemporary removal of Aboriginal children through the Child Protection and Juvenile Justice systems. It argued that dynamics of the Stolen Generations continued to be present, as evidence by the severe over representation of Aboriginal children in juvenile detention centres and "out of home care".

Since the release of *Bringing them Home* in 1997, the problem of Indigenous child removal has become much worse. At June 30 1997, the year of the *Bringing them Home*, there were 2,785 Aboriginal children in out of home care. At June 30 2013 there were 13,914 - a five-fold increase (Productivity Commission, 2014). This is a higher number of Aboriginal children than were removed during any year in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century detailed in *Bringing them Home*.

### **Key findings in relation to child protection:**

#### **1. Discrimination and paternalism is alive and well in child protection departments**

"A focus on child-saving facilitates blaming the family and viewing 'the problem' as a product of 'pathology' or 'dysfunction' among members rather than a product of structural circumstances which are part of a wider historical and social context" (pg 376)

"We have seen that Indigenous families were historically characterised by their Aboriginality as morally deficient. There is evidence that this attitude persists." (pg 376)

"Indigenous families face both race and class prejudice among many welfare officers. (pg 376)

"Normal' Aboriginal practice signals a problem to many welfare workers... workers' perception of Aboriginality as a cause of delinquency and problems. Behaviour in both periods was frequently stereotyped in a racist way. Definitions of neglect are more subjective and culturally particular than definitions of abuse." (pg 395)

"Aboriginal families continue to be seen as the 'problem', and Aboriginal children continue to be seen as potentially 'savable' if they can be separated from the 'dysfunctional' or 'culturally deprived' environments of their families and communities. Non-Aboriginals continue to feel that Aboriginal adults are 'hopeless' and cannot be changed, but Aboriginal children 'have a chance'" (pg 395)

"Cultural difference, particularly different family structures, can lead to adverse decisions by juvenile justice, welfare and other agencies, particularly where cultural difference is not understood or does not inform policy development and implementation. At its worst, cultural difference can be treated as a type of abnormality or pathology" (pg 478)

“if Indigenous child-rearing is seen as pathological or abnormal, Indigenous families will be more liable to intervention by social workers, police and courts. Assimilation can become an implicit result as the values of the dominant group are imposed on Indigenous people.” (pg 479)

Examples provided of cultural bias within the child protection system (480):

- + The implicit or explicit interpretation of travel to maintain familial and cultural relationships and responsibilities as ‘instability’,
- + The implicit or explicit interpretation of extended familial responsibility as ‘abandonment’ or ‘inadequate supervision’,
- + differences in the level of freedom and responsibility accorded to Indigenous children interpreted as ‘lack of supervision’ or ‘lack of control’ over children, and
- + the cultural biases which become incorporated in assessments and reports may be used to justify more interventionist decisions by child welfare and juvenile justice agencies as well as decisions in relation to matters such as child removal, adoption and custody.

## **2. “Neglect” is the main cause of removals – this is due to poverty**

“Indigenous children are more likely than non-Indigenous children to be removed on the ground of ‘neglect’ rather than ‘abuse’.(pg 373)”

“The primary reason for welfare intervention in Indigenous communities is neglect. Social inequality is the most direct cause of neglect... problems which result in removals need to be addressed in terms of community development”.

“Indigenous communities throughout Australia gave evidence to the Inquiry of their need for programs and assistance to ensure the well-being of their children. Not a single submission to the Inquiry from Indigenous organisations saw intervention from welfare departments as an effective way of dealing with Indigenous child protection needs.” (pg 513)

### **Key recommendations for change to child protection systems:**

#### **1. Aboriginal people must be in control of child welfare**

“Our principal finding is that self-determination for Indigenous peoples provides the key to reversing the over-representation of Indigenous children in the child welfare and juvenile justice systems of the States and Territories and to eliminating unjustified removals of Indigenous children from their families and communities” (pg 15)

“Decision making about Indigenous children's well-being falls well short of accepted notions of self-determination” (pg 378)

“Existing systems have failed miserably. Nowhere is this failure more profoundly reflected than in the inability of States and Territories to reduce the number of Indigenous children placed in care, held in police cells and sentenced to detention centres.” (pg 493)”

“The starting point for a new framework is the right to self-determination... The Inquiry supports the eventual transfer of responsibility for children's well being to Indigenous peoples and proposes a framework for negotiating autonomy measures (Recommendation 43). It would be inappropriate and untimely for the Inquiry to pre-empt the results of these negotiations by outlining in this report the features of a self-government scheme.” (pg 493)

“Evidence to the Inquiry and substantial research findings establish conclusively the need for a fundamentally different approach if the objective of eliminating unjustified and unnecessary removal of Indigenous children from their families and communities is to be achieved. This goal is consistent with article 6 of the draft *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*. Indigenous peoples have the collective right to live in freedom, peace and security as distinct peoples and to full guarantees against genocide or any other act of violence, including the removal of indigenous children from their families and communities under any pretext.” (pg 493)

## **2. A “Social Justice” package is needed to lift communities out of poverty**

“Unless these conditions are altered and living conditions improved, social and familial disruption will continue. Child welfare and juvenile justice law, policy and practice must recognise that structural disadvantage increases the likelihood of Indigenous children and young people having contact with welfare and justice agencies. They must address this situation.”

“The denial of social justice violates the basic citizenship rights of Indigenous people in Australia. Citizenship rights include rights to standards of health, housing, education and equality before the law enjoyed by other Australians.” (pg 490)

“Earlier inquiries have made detailed recommendations relating to social justice. Commonwealth, State and Territory governments have committed themselves to implement the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody addressing social justice. The Inquiry commends those recommendations and draws attention to the link between the appalling living conditions in many Indigenous communities and the need for a social justice response built on the right to self-determination.” (pg 490)

“Recommendation 42: That to address the social and economic disadvantages that underlie the contemporary removal of Indigenous children and young people the Council of Australian Governments,

1. in partnership with ATSIC, the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation, the Office of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner and Indigenous community organisations dealing with Indigenous family and children’s issues, develop and implement a social justice package for Indigenous families and children, and
2. pursue the implementation of the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody which address underlying issues of social disadvantage.” (pg 491)



# STOLEN FUTURES

## Paddy Gibson on the revival of Indigenous child removal

*Before the Intervention, before all the work stopped in our community, I used to work as a nutritionist at the Family Centre. But there's nothing here now any more.*

*We used to provide food and I would encourage all the young mothers. How to look after their kids, how to make sure [the children] were fed healthy food. But now it's gone, we never got an explanation why.*

*It's hard for the young mothers now. If their little babies don't put on weight for two or three weeks, they'll be taken away from their mother's arms by welfare.*

*I've seen it. It's really sad for me because when I was working here I used to encourage them. Now they get no encouragement. There's just a report*

*typed into the computer for welfare.*

*For Aboriginal people, this thing is coming back for us. Stolen Generation. Taking kids away from own mother.*

*And that's really sad. It's really no good. It's not just happening here, it's happening everywhere in our communities.*

This testimony is from a strong Aboriginal woman in a remote community in the Northern Territory. It was given in the spring of 2011 when her people were preparing for a festival and protest. She had worked as a nutritionist, a vital service in a poverty-stricken community where raising children is a daily struggle. Cuts to the Community Development Employment

Projects (CDEP) program closed the service down. The cuts began with the Northern Territory Intervention.

The nutritionist told the story of a raid on a local house by child protection workers. Five children were taken without warning, put on a plane and flown hundreds of kilometres to Darwin. They were separated and placed with different foster carers who did not speak their language. The nutritionist had been supporting the children to stay healthy before she had been sacked.

Last month I was contacted again by friends from the same community, traumatised after another raid. The police had accompanied child protection staff to forcibly remove a toddler while the family was eating breakfast. The grandmother wailed and threw rocks at the car as it sped away. There had been a report from the clinic that the child, who had chronic health issues, was losing weight. Legislation mandates that staff report any ‘failure to thrive’. When the outcome is removal, such reporting can have a terrible impact on the relationship with the community. In this case, clinic staff came under pressure to leave rather than participate in the ‘new Stolen Generation’.

The people to whom I spoke were desperately worrying about the terrible impact the experience would have on the child. Why couldn’t there have been an attempt to work with the family about the issues? Why couldn’t the broader kinship network have been consulted first about the child’s wellbeing and living arrangements? Why had the family been singled out?

‘We’ve lost everything, there’s nothing for us here now,’ one of them said. ‘And now they’re taking our children away again.’

### Taking the children away again

The *Bringing Them Home* report, released in 1997 after two years of inquiry and hundreds of submissions, provides a comprehensive account of the history of Aboriginal child removal and its role in the colonisation of Australia.

In one of its many recommendations, the report argued for a national apology to the Stolen

Generations. The apology was finally delivered by Prime Minister Rudd in 2008, in what he says was the proudest moment of his career. During his speech, Rudd said of the testimony recorded in *Bringing Them Home*:

The pain is searing; it screams from the pages.

The hurt, the humiliation, the degradation and the sheer brutality of the act of physically separating a mother from her children is a deep assault on our senses and on our most elemental humanity.

Up to 50 000 children were forcibly taken from their families and this was the product of the deliberate, calculated policies of the state as reflected in the explicit powers given to them under statute.

Let us remember the fact that the forced removal of Aboriginal children was happening as late as the early 1970s.

If Rudd read *Bringing Them Home*, he must have stopped halfway through. The report’s final chapters warn that the operations of contemporary child protection agencies were replicating many of the discriminatory and destructive dynamics of

If Rudd read *Bringing Them Home*, he must have stopped halfway through.

the Stolen Generations era. It outlined the ‘unacceptable’ level of Indigenous over-representation within the child protection system. At the time of the report, 20 per cent of children in out-of-home care were Indigenous, despite Indigenous children representing only 2.7 per cent of the population.

*Bringing Them Home* expressed concerns for the safety and development of Aboriginal children growing up with their families in conditions of severe poverty and oppression. But the report provided comprehensive evidence that child protection agencies could not solve these problems – and, in fact, were exacerbating them in many cases. The agencies continued to



harbour paternalistic attitudes and often viewed Aboriginal cultural practice itself as a source of risk to children:

Not a single submission from any Aboriginal organisation saw intervention from welfare departments as an effective way of dealing with Indigenous child protection needs ... We have seen that Indigenous families were historically categorised by their Aboriginality as morally deficient. There is evidence that this attitude persists ... A focus on child-saving facilitates blaming the family and viewing 'the problem' as a product of 'pathology' or 'dysfunction' among members, rather than a product of structural circumstances which are part of a wider historical and social context ... The primary reason for welfare intervention in Indigenous communities is neglect. Social inequality is the most direct cause of neglect ... problems which result in removals need to be addressed in terms of community development.

*Bringing Them Home* offered a framework for ending the cycle of forced removal and despair: responsibility for Indigenous child protection needed to be given to Aboriginal-controlled agencies. A major transfer of resources to Indigenous communities – a 'social justice' investment package – was required for real community development to alleviate grinding poverty. *Bringing Them Home* argued for self-determination at the core of all initiatives in Indigenous affairs – nothing would be effective if not led by Aboriginal people.

*Bringing Them Home* was released under the Howard government, which was hostile to the very idea that the Stolen Generations existed, and so the report suffered the same fate as the 1987–91 Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody before it and the 2007 *Little Children Are Sacred* report after it, as well as many other reports in between. Hundreds of talented Aboriginal people and organisations working on the issue carefully crafted submissions or testimony in

good faith, only to be completely ignored.

The result has been an explosion in the numbers of Aboriginal children removed by child protection agencies across Australia.

Figures from the Productivity Commission show that at 30 June 1997, the year of *Bringing Them Home*, 2785 Aboriginal children were in out-of-home care. At 30 June 2012, there were 13 299 – almost a five-fold increase. For each of the last five years, approximately a thousand Aboriginal

We are fast approaching the Stolen Generation removal rate cited by Rudd: between 10 and 30 per cent of *all* Indigenous children.

children have been coming into the 'out-of-home care' system long-term. This is a higher number than were removed during any time in the twentieth century. Half of the children have not been placed with kin or relatives.

We are fast approaching the Stolen Generations removal rate cited by Rudd: between 10 and 30 per cent of *all* Indigenous children. A 2011 annual report from the Department of Family and Community Services found that 9.6 per cent of Aboriginal children in NSW were in out-of-home care. Across Australia, nearly 6 per cent of Indigenous children are in out-of-home care. If current trends continue, the figure will exceed 10 per cent by the end of the decade.

A wealth of evidence presented at the current Queensland Child Protection Commission of Inquiry illustrates the brutality of the contemporary removal process. According to a report in the *Australian*, the inquiry heard that up to 197 babies were taken from their parents just hours after birth in north Queensland hospitals between July 2009 and June 2012. Aboriginal legal services submitted that child protection agencies refused to engage with families before babies were removed and consistently favoured non-Indigenous carers over kin. Many women who had their babies taken from them were unrepresented through

their initial appearances in court, or simply didn't challenge orders because they didn't know that they could.

The testimony could have come straight from *Bringing Them Home*.

## The NT Intervention and Stronger Futures

Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory have historically played a crucial role in the national movement to recognise the destructive practices of the Stolen Generations, from the fight against discriminatory laws from the 1960s through to pioneering efforts in the 1970s and 1980s to establish Aboriginal-controlled services for struggling families. Territorian Stolen Generations members fought a number of high-profile civil court cases in the 1990s that helped build momentum for *Bringing Them Home*.

From the late 1960s, as a national movement for Aboriginal rights gathered pace, the dictatorial control exercised over Aboriginal lives by the Welfare Branch in the Northern Territory began to break up and in 1972 the incoming Whitlam government formally abandoned a policy of 'assimilation'. From 1978, the newly empowered Northern Territory government took over, implementing a policy of placing Aboriginal children with extended family networks. The result was a dramatic drop in the rate at which children were removed.

In 1983, the Northern Territory became the first jurisdiction in Australia to enshrine the 'Aboriginal child placement principle' in law. *Bringing Them Home* reported that in 1997 the territory had both the lowest numbers of Aboriginal children in out-of-home care and the lowest level of Indigenous over-representation of any Australian jurisdiction.

But the 'social inequality' that *Bringing Them Home* identified as the key driver of child neglect has been nowhere more acute than in the Northern Territory. Many NT Aboriginal communities suffer developing-world living conditions. Absence of basic municipal infrastructure and

social services, chronic overcrowding and homelessness, and a lack of serious investments in community development all contribute to extremely difficult conditions in which to raise children.

Such conditions breed debilitating health issues like otitis media, malnutrition, rheumatic heart disease and trachoma, a condition eradicated across the developed world but still endemic in many remote communities. The conditions also drive depression and despair, violence and substance abuse.

*Bringing Them Home* was published at the beginning of Howard's eleven-year term as prime minister. Throughout this period, Howard fought assiduously for a politics that blamed Aboriginal culture – and the 'failings' of Indigenous people and their communities – for the shocking conditions in which they found themselves. He promoted the conservative historians who, in the so-called history wars, argued that pre-colonial Aboriginal culture was violent and degenerate, and denied the brutality of the colonisation of Australia and the existence of the Stolen Generations.

This provided justification for attacks on native title and land rights. Under Howard, Aboriginal services were massively defunded, including by terminal cuts to hundreds of Aboriginal women's centres. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission was also dismantled in 2005.

A number of submissions to the current Queensland inquiry have argued that the huge spike in child removal over the last decade, and the falling rates of placement with Aboriginal families, are directly attributable to the disempowerment of community-based Aboriginal organisations through the Howard period.

Social worker Julie Bray, who has worked in the Queensland child protection system for thirty-five years, provided a detailed account of the operations of very poorly funded – but dedicated and effective – Aboriginal and Islander child-care agencies (AICCA). These were marginalised from the late 1990s:

The deterioration in outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families is a direct result of departmental intervention and forced changes to a successful community-driven Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander service model.

The AICCA worked alongside families to provide a wide range of services including general family support and practical help, intensive family support for families and children in contact with the statutory system (including support in the court process), placement services including recruitment and support of kinship and other carers ... it was a holistic service model which provided what the family needed at each stage while also ensuring the child's wellbeing.

The Intervention, announced by Howard in June 2007 during his final federal election campaign, was the most extreme expression of the 'mainstreaming' and assimilation agenda building momentum through his entire prime-ministerial term.

'Emergency' legislation suspended the *Racial Discrimination Act*, marking Aboriginal people as second-class citizens and bringing communities under Commonwealth control. Huge amounts of money flowed into the construction of new punitive bureaucracies to micromanage Aboriginal people. Income management, Government Business Managers, invasive police powers: surveillance and control on a scale not experienced since the old Welfare Board.

Part of the process was a big cash injection for a massive expansion of the NT child protection system.

According to a 2012 report by Olga Havnen, then coordinator-general for remote Indigenous services, in 2010–11 the NT Department of Families and Community Services spent \$47.8 million on keeping children in out-of-home care and \$31 million on child protection workers: three times its pre-Intervention budget. In a revealing exposition of the priorities of the department, over the same period it spent just half a million

dollars on intensive family-support services.

From June 2007 to June 2012, the number of Aboriginal children living in out-of-home care more than doubled.

Despite the department's nominal support for the Aboriginal child placement principle, only 135 of the 573 Aboriginal children in care at 30 June 2012 had been placed with relatives or kin. Most were living away from their communities, and with non-Indigenous people who did not speak their language.

Stronger Futures in the Northern Territory came into effect in July 2012, following the expiry of the 'emergency' Intervention legislation. Many discriminatory Intervention powers have been retained until 2022. Under Stronger Futures, the Commonwealth has committed \$442 million over ten years to 'strengthen the safety and wellbeing of Aboriginal children, youth and their families'.

The Intervention, announced by Howard in June 2007 during his final federal election campaign, was the most extreme expression of the 'mainstreaming' and assimilation agenda building momentum through his entire prime-ministerial term.

But Havnen argues that the measure will overwhelmingly 'continue to fund crisis or tertiary interventions – namely, front-line child protection workers and out-of-home care'. Her report slammed the continued focus on surveillance of families and removal of children, and the absence of plans to address seriously the extreme poverty driving 'neglect'. Havnen was sacked by the incoming Country Liberal government in September 2012.

There will be some increased funding for Intensive Family Support Services (IFSS) under Stronger Futures. But IFSS is only available in a small minority of communities and to gain access to support, parents need to be placed on Child

Protection Income Management, which quarantines 70 per cent of Centrelink entitlements.

As the major source of funding for the territory government, the Commonwealth has long been able to direct its spending priorities, as the expansion of child protection under the Intervention

Howard fought assiduously for a politics that blamed Aboriginal culture – and the ‘failings’ of Indigenous people and their communities – for the shocking conditions in which they found themselves.

demonstrates. Nonetheless, the new Country Liberal government, which took power in August 2012, demonstrated its own particular zeal when it comes to removing children.

In May 2013, Chief Minister Adam Giles gave an interview to News Limited in which he indicated that child removal would be a key pillar of the Country Liberals’ response to crises in Aboriginal communities. Giles argued that the lack of removals was in fact responsible for problems facing children: ‘People were too scared of the Stolen Generation. And I believe that’s why there’s a lot of kids out there with such social dysfunction.’

In the debate that ensued, the acting CEO of the NT Department of Children and Families made an extraordinary admission to the *Australian*:

The Office of Children and Families acting chief executive Jenni Collard told the *Australian* the lack of proper checks and out-of-date care plans – meant to be the ‘bible’ for a child’s wellbeing – had created ‘case drift’ that instead reduced a child’s chances of being reunited with its family. Ms Collard said that while her department was good at taking kids into care, it was ‘not very good at looking after them’.

‘If we are taking kids into care, we are not necessarily providing care that’s any better,’ she said.

The statement did nothing to prevent News Limited from clamouring for more removals, with Murdoch himself praising, on Twitter, Giles’ plans for a ‘Saved Generation’.

Giles even mooted the adoption of children who are being neglected, a proposal that would remove any legal right for family reunification. Adoption would also help the government’s bottom line – once a child is adopted, the state pays nothing for upkeep.

The Country Liberals took power on the back of massive anger across remote communities at the disempowerment for which Labor governments in both Canberra and Darwin were responsible. But after coming to office, they launched their own cuts to community services and support available to Aboriginal families.

In 2010, the comprehensive inquiry into the NT Child Protection System produced a report entitled *Growing Them Strong, Together*. It sounded alarms about the increasing focus on removal:

We cannot go on building larger and more forensically-focused child protection and out-of-home care systems while paying lip service to the need to support and enable families so that they can care for and protect their own children – and we cannot keep developing approaches and services without hearing the voices of those who are directly affected by our interventions.

*Growing Them Strong, Together* recommended the establishment of Strong Aboriginal Families, Together (SAF,T), a peak agency to represent Aboriginal interests within the child protection system – something already in place in every other Australian jurisdiction. Its guiding principle was an approach focused on ‘removing the risk from the child’ rather than removing children from communities. *Growing Them Strong, Together* envisaged SAF,T leading the revival of Aboriginal-controlled child safety and wellbeing services.

But the Country Liberals have cut SAF,T’s budget in half, ending the agency’s plans for the

opening of an Alice Springs office. Moreover, they forced a fundamental shift in the direction of the organisation, effectively integrating it into the removal process. The government insisted SAFT focus on designing an emergency-care centre in Darwin for Aboriginal children who had just been removed and were waiting on court orders or foster care.

So the large-scale removal of children from Aboriginal communities into largely non-Indigenous homes is being carefully planned and budgeted for by both the Commonwealth and NT governments. Based on the removal and retention rate in 2011–12, over 3300 Aboriginal children in the NT will be removed at least temporarily under Stronger Futures by 2022, with almost a thousand staying in the system long term. And if the rate of increase seen under the Intervention continues, these numbers could be four times as high. The number of children that governments are planning to remove dwarfs anything seen in any decade in the NT during the twentieth century.

## The politics of neglect

The federal government talks about the billions of dollars that have been spent on the Intervention and Stronger Futures. But this money is largely circulated through various bureaucracies managing ‘the Aboriginal problem’.

The experience in communities has been one of an acute withdrawal of productive resources. The gradual shutdown of the CDEP from 2007 meant a net loss of more than 3500 waged jobs, and the closure of vital programs. This was followed by NT government reforms in 2008 that abolished local community government councils in favour of ‘super shires’. The shires promptly seized the meagre asset base of the local councils, including vehicles, earth-moving equipment and cash.

The National Partnership Agreement for Remote Service Delivery, signed off by the Council of Australian Governments in December 2007, shows that the vast majority of Aboriginal communities are being excluded from investment that could ameliorate extreme poverty. The

agreement established the category of ‘priority communities’: that is, ‘larger and more economically sustainable communities where secure land tenure exists’. It urges governments to ‘avoid expectations of major investment in service provision’ outside these communities and encourages ‘facilitating voluntary mobility by individuals and families to areas where better education and job opportunities exist’. This is sending Aboriginal people a clear message there is no hope for a better life in their community – they must leave their land and their people in order to find work and housing.

The results surprised nobody who understood the structural violence to which Aboriginal people are subjected.

Since 2007, there has been some drift of population to urban centres on the Stuart Highway. But most people have not opted for ‘voluntary migration’; they have instead stayed in their communities and suffered. The NT Children’s Commissioner Howard Bath says that ‘on the whole, the child wellbeing indicators in remote communities are getting worse’. In January 2013, the Australian Human Rights Commission reported a 160 per cent increase in the rate of youth suicide under the Intervention and a more than five-fold increase in reported rates of self-harm.

New child protection workers moving into the NT from 2007 did not find children being abused by paedophile rings (the claim that built the Intervention). Productivity Commission figures show the rate of substantiation of child sex abuse through the protection system in the NT is much lower than in NSW and on a par with the national average.

The workers did, however, find an epidemic of ‘child neglect’. In 2006–07, there were 137 substantiated cases of neglect. In 2010–11, with ‘mobile child protection teams’ moving through

Overcrowding and squalid housing conditions are at the centre of the challenges facing Aboriginal families trying to raise children ... You would think, then, that the response would involve a housing and investment program to change the conditions and help children grow up safe and healthy.

bush communities as never before, there were 881 substantiated cases.

The results surprised nobody who understood the structural violence to which Aboriginal people are subjected. The cruel logic of holding them in developing world living conditions and then removing their children for neglect is most graphically demonstrated by the pro-removal public advocacy of NT Chief Magistrate Hilary Hannam. On 24 April 2013, ABC News reported on Hannam's appeal for 'tougher action' by the child protection system on neglect of children. She said the system was 'too focused on keeping Aboriginal children connected with families and culture'.

Four of Hannam's decisions have been overturned on appeal by the NT Supreme Court in the last year, and there are three more appeals pending. These relate to orders granted for removal of babies and young children until they are eighteen years old.

On 25 September 2012, Hannam told ABC Radio that many people working in child protection were 'too idealistic' about extended Aboriginal families being able to raise children in the conditions that exist in many remote communities:

[I]n effect [they are] sort of saying that it's okay if Indigenous kids get a lesser standard, which I think is just utterly unacceptable. It is not okay that Indigenous kids live in very overcrowded houses, it is not okay that they are exposed to all sorts of things in these overcrowded houses.

Hannam is right that overcrowding and squalid housing conditions are at the centre of the challenges facing Aboriginal families trying to raise children. In many remote communities, it is

common for more than twenty people to share a house. You would think, then, that the response would involve a housing and investment program to change the conditions and help children grow up safe and healthy. But despite trumpeting billions in long-term budget projections for Aboriginal housing, the government's own statistics show there will be no alteration in the rate of overcrowding.

The year 2012 saw a record boom in the construction industry in the Northern Territory. NT Department of Business figures show that more than 15 200 construction workers completed \$1.6 billion of work in the December quarter alone. But more than 90 per cent of this work was 'engineering', primarily building infrastructure for major resources extraction projects such as the INPEX gas plant in Darwin. Meanwhile, not a single person has been employed building new housing in the hundreds of Aboriginal communities and smaller outstations that exist outside of the 'priority communities'.

## Say no to a new Stolen Generation

During its analysis of the development of assimilation policies in Australia across history, *Bringing Them Home* says:

Following the 1951 Commonwealth-State Ministers Conference, Paul Hasluck, the Minister for the newly created portfolio of Territories, urged the Commonwealth to adopt a national co-ordination role and set an example in the Northern Territory by taking active measures to encourage assimilation.

With the Intervention and Stronger Futures, we have seen a similar process of 'active measures'.

Take the Australia-wide cuts to the CDEP. Rene Adams, head of the Toomelah Aboriginal Cooperative in north-west NSW, recently told *Tracker* magazine, 'all people who were on CDEP are basically unemployed now ... Mental health issues and suicides have increased. There's more drugs, more violence, more alcohol. It's heart-breaking'.

Punitive welfare controls are now accepted by the major parties as necessary for Aboriginal advancement across Australia. The only debate is over which model to use and how quickly to roll it out.

Punitive welfare controls are now accepted by the major parties as necessary for Aboriginal advancement across Australia. The only debate is over which model to use and how quickly to roll it out.

The triumphant politics of assimilation have exacerbated the drive to remove Aboriginal children. This has been mirrored by rapid increases in the rate of incarceration of Aboriginal adults and children alike.

But the invisible battle Aboriginal communities have been fighting with child protection agencies is beginning to spill out into the public arena. In the last year there have been a number of protest marches in Brisbane led by Aboriginal parents and grandparents demanding the department 'stop stealing our kids' and forcing negotiation around individual cases. In June, the Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC) launched a national campaign to reduce the rate of removal at their national conference, which drew an unprecedented 1100 delegates. They held a major public forum in Federation Square, Melbourne on 14 June titled 'Stop the creation of a new Stolen Generation'.

The battle to end the Northern Territory Intervention is still being fought. While

Commonwealth legislation continues to mark Aboriginal people as second-class citizens, 'solutions' based on punishment and control will remain central to the national agenda.

Following Giles' recent interview, Dr Djinyini Gondarra, an Elcho Island elder who has led the resistance to the Intervention, wrote a letter to the Chief Minister announcing the launch of a campaign called 'Keeping them Home':

The majority of our people live in Third World conditions, with poverty, unemployment and disadvantage a part of everyday life. The struggle of families to raise their children properly comes from this lack of stability, not from a lack of responsibility ... The dysfunction in our communities is caused by decades of neglect, and is now further exacerbated by the disempowering policies of the Federal and NT Governments.

Like everyone else in the world, we love our children deeply and want the best for them. We need support to do this. Not for our children to be taken away from us.

We need more family support programmes in every community run by Aboriginal people. When there are problems, we need ways to bring together those in the community who can offer support through family group conferencing. Together we can find better ways to keep our children safe.

A Yolngu child has a spirituality, his own 'skin', his culture, language, and place in his community. He belongs to that country and its people. You are committing a deep wrong by taking that away from him. This is why so many of the Stolen Generation have suffered so much ... What you now propose to do is to tear open the bandages and cut us again.

We need to remove the knife and stop the cutting. Large-scale removal of children cannot be allowed to stand as a 'solution' to the oppression and grinding poverty Aboriginal people continue to suffer Australia wide.

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