

WPS DEVELOPMENTAL NOTE #58

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Topic: Welfare work vs Self-reliance/responsibility approach

This note contains two stories, both of which will be told in detail so as to help readers differentiate between the approach taken by the WPS and the more traditional forms of welfare work, particularly with Indigenous people. I am calling the WPS approach; ‘the **self-reliance/responsibility approach**’.

The first story is in two parts. The first part is about the antics of a young adult participant who, from the day he was born, was given an unrestricted, unconditional licence to misbehave. Superimposed on this was a life of abuse and neglect, chronic petrol sniffing and lack of education. Today he is well schooled in the receipt of traditional forms of welfare work and the art of manipulating welfare workers. The second part is about an inexperienced, confused statutory child protection/youth justice worker schooled in the delivery of traditional welfare work – typical of many service providers working in remote Aboriginal communities.

The second story is also in two parts. The first part is about the shocking tale of Robinvale Murray Valley Aboriginal Cooperative board members who fancy themselves to be the self proclaimed champions of Aboriginal people’s rights, particularly their “right” to welfare dependency. The problem is that their version of Aboriginal peoples’ rights involves the rejection of people’s right to take responsibility, including the rejection of parent’s rights to determine what is best for their children. What they did was to hold two of our young participants from Kalumburu away from the WPS and to try and return them to their home community in defiance of their families’ wishes and instructions of the Kalumburu Aboriginal Council. By words and actions, these board members believe that Kalumburu people do not know what is best for their children, and that they should not have been allowed to leave their community and that white people should not be caring for or teaching them how to work.

The second part of this story is about management and staff of the Berri office of the Department of Family Services South Australia, who in essence are not too dissimilar to the board members of the Robinvale Murray Valley Aboriginal Cooperative. The manager of this office picked up from where the Robinvale people left off and succeeded in the task of undermining the WPS, Kalumburu families, Kalumburu Aboriginal Council and the Western Australian Children’s Court.

Story I

On the 26 September 2006, participant #78 aged 18 years from Aurukun had left the Mildura work group and the WPS. His story serves as a very good example of how the approach used by many welfare workers on Cape York Peninsula can create

“monsters” out of young people. In fact, it was this same young person that helped me to come up with ideas around some of the components of the Work Placement Scheme many years ago and the development of the self-reliance/responsibility approach. This approach does not create “monsters” but it does, when given the opportunity, have the capacity to tame some of the “monsters” created by welfare work.

On my last visit to Aurukun, participant #78 asked me if he could join the WPS. I agreed and he entered the Scheme on the 26 August 2006. The fact that he came to me rather than me going to him was important. Its significance will become clear later in this note. It’s also important to point out that participant #78 left the WPS of his own volition; he was not sacked from his employment nor did I direct him to leave. He was, from the day he arrived, a very poor worker; barely making enough money to live on and regularly disrupting other participants. From what I was told, the other participants in his group preferred to keep away from him, including other Aurukun participants.

The situation came to a head on Saturday 23 September 2006 when participant #78 brought alcohol into the caravan park and caravan in defiance of the rules. He turned his CD player up full volume and then settled back to enjoy his drinks. Soon enough he was drunk, and like so many drunks, he then decided to go on a rampage; walking around the caravan park with a knife in his hand yelling, screaming, arguing, threatening other residents and throwing a bike wheel at some small children. He destroyed the annex of one our caravans belonging to another participant and smashed the window of another to gain entry and then trashed the inside. For those familiar with Aurukun, this sort of behaviour should sound familiar. Mind you, this sort of behaviour also occurs in non-Indigenous communities in towns and cities all around Australia. As you would expect, many people complained to the manager of the caravan park. The following morning the manager contacted our Work Group Supervisor saying that he wants participant #78 out of his caravan park and for him to never return, and, if he does return we can all pack up and leave. It’s important to note that participant #78 was a ward of state and had recently been released from a juvenile detention centre after serving 9 months for stabbing a person with a knife. For this reason, he remains a client of youth justice services.

It just so happened that I had arrived in the region on this same day. Hearing what had just occurred, I decided to pay a visit to participant #78 in company with the Mildura Work Group Supervisor.

My first request of participant #78 was for him to explain himself. I refrained from pre-judging the situation, preferring to give him the opportunity to influence my assessment before deciding upon any action. However, on this occasion, participant #78 chose not to explain himself. Instead he told me that he had already contacted his father and arrangements have been made for him to leave the Scheme. This sort of response is not uncommon. When you know you have done something terribly wrong, it’s easier to run away from your self-inflicted problems rather than face the impending consequences.

We then went into what I describe as a **narrative dance**. Now, readers need to understand that this young person is well acquainted with the administrators of the welfare service industry – social workers, youth workers, child protection workers, youth justice workers, detention centre workers, youth shelter workers, and the like – most of whom are urban white middle-class liberals feeling quite superior with their tertiary education. Participant #78 now fancies himself as a master at manipulating these people – an art form that I call **dancing the welfare worker**, others call it being street wise. In the past, these welfare workers would dance him, now he dances them.

My first comment to this young man was; *“Now that you say you’re leaving, and you say that all the arrangements have been made, the only thing I need to know from you is **when** you are leaving?”*

With a flick of his head and a smack of his lips, he replied; *“When are **you** gonna send me home?”*

I answered; *“I’m not going to send you home ... you know the rules ... besides your father is organising for you to go home, at least that’s what you said.”*

He then said; *“I didn’t want to come down here in the first place, I wasn’t ready”.*

I replied; *“You came to me remember. I didn’t go to you. You said you wanted to join the Scheme and I told you that this wasn’t going to be easy”.*

This is why no person can be forced to join the WPS. To do so would contradict the self-reliance/responsibility approach.

He then went on about how sorry he was and could he stay until his father has arranged everything.

I, on the other hand, was not going to let him off this easily, so I replied; *“Saying sorry to me is not going to solve your immediate problem. Your problem is that you have been kicked out of the caravan park.”*

There was a short silence as he was contemplating his situation. He then said; *“What if I apologise to the manager?”*

I replied; *“You can do that, but I don’t think he will change his mind”.*

Seeing that the usual method of apologising is not working, he then decided to change his tactic and try and portray himself as a victim. He said; *“Well, I will go and live on the streets”.*

Not wishing to buy into this one, I replied; *“Your plans are your business mate”.*

This young man was now beginning to realise that he had a battle on his hands, so he moved to play the blame game. He said; *“If I go and live on the streets and something happens to me, you’re the one that’s gonna get into trouble, you’re the one who is responsible”.*

I replied; *“Look, you said your father has arranged everything, if you are now saying you have got some other plan, that’s your business, it’s got nothing to do with me”.*

He was now getting rattled by my responses, so he decided to labour the point. He said; *“You are not talking to a stupid blackfella here, I know how it works, you’re responsible for me”.*

I calmly replied; *“Your 18 now, aren’t you; you’re an adult”.*

He now realised that this particular approach was not going to work. He then said; *“Well I’m gonna hang myself”.*

I smiled and said; *“Listen you best contact you father and tell him to hurry up”.*

At this point he was getting highly frustrated. He could see that this sort of threat was not working so he tried another form of threat. He said; *“The people in Aurukun know you, they know what you’re like, and they are going to get you”*.

Again I smiled and said; *“Well, I think I have finished here, I need to go now”*.

In a last ditch effort to try and turn the table around and portray himself as a victim, he said; *“So you’re kicking me out?”*

Sill determined to block him, I replied; *“No, I am not kicking you out. You said your father has already made the arrangements, this is unfortunate but there is nothing I can do. The only thing I need to know is when you are leaving”*.

At this, I got up and left. Of course the likely reality was that no arrangements had been made and that I was simply calling his bluff.

So where was I going with this? In WPS Developmental Note #11, I described a similar situation.

“The idea was that this ensuing crisis had the potential power to force him to reassess his behaviour at a depth that no other prior intervention had achieved. Those who understand crisis theory and intervention know what I am talking about. A state of disequilibrium was created – the realisation that their usual ways of dealing with a situation no longer works. This is a time when the person is vulnerable and more open to change.”

Readers should be able to see how this young man was plucking away at all the “right” cords that would normally send a welfare worker into an immediate panic and the formulation of a rescue plan. They would perceive this young person as a child; disadvantaged, unskilled, uninformed, vulnerable, innocent, dependent and in urgent need of care and protection. If anyone had any doubts, who would be brave enough to call his bluff? These welfare workers would need to be very careful. What if they made a mistake? If they did they would undoubtedly be crucified by their own organisation and every other welfare organisation. Have you ever seen the film, ‘The Crucible’? It was based on a true story about all these good people being accused of witchcraft by a group of bored teenagers led by one suffering from some sort of delusional psychosis. Nineteen innocent men and women were convicted of witchcraft by the village elders and dragged off to the gallows. This is what these welfare workers are afraid of; a modern day witch-hunt followed by a walk to the gallows in the form of public identification, professional discredit, loss of employment or promotional opportunities, loss of income, isolation, ridicule and humiliation. A similar process was attempted by a DEWR officer who attempted to make such a move on me over the Cobram incident (WPS Developmental Note #35).

This is what I call ‘Round One of the narrative dance’. Participant #78 tried to get the better of me to avoid the consequences of his actions, but he was unsuccessful. If he couldn’t dance me, his next move was to try and find someone else he could dance.

That evening, he miraculously “discovered” the good services of the Mildura Aboriginal Corporation and the Harry Nanya Hostel. They were only too happy to rescue him from the lonely, icy blast of responsibility and the competitive nature of the real world so that he could bask in the warm, leisurely, sheltered environment of

the Harry Nanya Hostel. It was a man by the name of Des that rang me to say that this young “boy” needs to be flown back home and could I arrange it. What Des wasn’t expecting to hear was me telling him that this young man has a good paying job which would enable him to pay for his own fare back home. All he needs to do is find somewhere to live. If he is unable to do that he is welcome to contact his Work Group Supervisor for some help. Strangely enough, I never heard from Des again.

Instead, a few days later I received a call from a Mr Mark Cooper of the Department of Communities Queensland saying that he has heard about what is going on and he has organised for participant #78 to be flown back home to Aurukun. I immediately contacted Mr Cooper’s manager. As it turned out, Mr Cooper had incorrectly advised his manager that participant #78 had been expelled from the Scheme. When I informed his manager that this was not true, the manager immediately cancelled participant #78’s flight.

On the 12 October, Mr Cooper contacted me again saying that participant #78 is still residing at the Harry Nanya Hostel and wanted me to make contact with him so that the matter can be progressed. In other words, Mr Cooper, Des and possibly others created a situation by rescuing participant #78 from the consequences of his actions and now they were stuck with him. Again I repeated our position, saying that participant #78 has **not** been sacked by his employer, **nor** has he been expelled from the Scheme. If he wishes to go back to work he needs to advise us of his new address. If he has no fixed address, he is welcome to contact the Mildura Work Group Supervisor asking for his assistance in finding accommodation, but I personally will not be making any contact with participant #78. This was unacceptable to Mr Cooper who insisted that I should make contact with him. When he realised his insistence on trying to get me to take responsibility for his mess was not working, he then decided to raise the stakes.

Mr Cooper said; *“There are cultural factors that prohibit him from making contact with you”*. At first he was not forthcoming on what exactly he meant by this. After my insistence, he said participant #78 is a remote area Aboriginal and doesn’t have the ability to find the Work Group Supervisor’s name and number and telephone him. This, of course, is absolute claptrap and I told him so. I said the only issue here is participant #78’s stubbornness and refusal to take responsibility for his actions; it has nothing to do with culture. Now that Mr Cooper had chosen to play this ‘cultural card’, I then decided to go on the offensive and turn his argument back on him.

I put to Mr Cooper that this matter has nothing to do with culture, and to try and suggest that participant #78’s culture prevents him from contacting us is to have a very low opinion of Aboriginal culture. *“Since when is not being able to carry out a simple task a culture matter? Since when is refusal to take responsibility for ones own actions a cultural matter, and therefore warranting some sort of exemption?”* I said; *“To me, this sounds very much like a racist comment; to have such a low opinion of Aboriginal people’s ability to carry out the most simplest of tasks.”* Infuriated by the suggestion that he was a racist, Mr Cooper declared himself to be part Aboriginal and that if I repeated this claim he will take *“action”* against me. He said he only wished that he had a tape handy so he could record what I was saying. I repeated myself, and

said “*If you are part Aboriginal, then all the more reason why you should think better of Aboriginal people than what you are. I for one, believe that Aboriginal people are capable people and that they can take responsibility for their actions*”. At this, Mr Cooper hung up the phone, obviously incensed by our narrative dance.

This is a good example of what I am talking about when I say that the welfare approach is essentially about rescuing people from competition and taking responsibility for their own action; to patronise and infantilise Aboriginal people.

Story II

This second story is about four participants from Kalumbaru who had the misfortune to come into contact with board members of the Robinvale Murray Valley Aboriginal Corporation.

These young participants had only recently joined the WPS and were finding the act of getting up in the morning and having to work for their board very hard, as most do; particularly when they are just setting out into the real world for the first time in their lives. Their work performance was so poor that they were barely making enough money to pay for their expenses, requiring a supervision ration of 1:2. This was understandable given that one of the boys was intellectually impaired; the second was socially withdrawn, affectively flat and expressionless; the third had a history of causing considerable amount of trouble at home and boarding schools; and the fourth was using his grandfathers funeral as an excuse to immediately return back home, whereas we suspect that the real reason for him wanting to get back home had something to do with his girlfriend.

We were told that these four young people were regularly discussing amongst themselves how they were going to run away to get back home. They were often overheard discussing how they needed to find an Aboriginal organisation that could help them get back to Kalumburu. All four were spoken to about this, but our words had no effect.

On the morning of 26 October 2006, these four participants took off from the Weir Caravan Park outside Robinvale to the office of the Murray Valley Aboriginal Corporation. Again, it just so happened that I was visiting the area on the same day and upon hearing what had happened, I immediately got involved. I and the new Robinvale Work Group Supervisor had located the boys in the company of a man named Bucky Peddit outside a shack down by the river on the edge of town. I was told that Mr Peddit was employed by the Robinvale Murray Valley Aboriginal Corporation. His wife, Lilly, was on the board of the Murray Valley Aboriginal Corporation. I was told that she was well-known in the district for her dislike and contempt for white people; a fact that the Work Group Supervisors were soon to experience first hand when they visited the office of the Murray Valley Aboriginal Corporation. Upon arrival, Mrs Peddit was heard to say; “*What do these white bastards want*”.

The first thing I noticed when I approached the four young people was Mr Peddit handing out bottles of beer to the boys. Mr Peddit then went on about how the boys wanted to go home for their grandfather's funeral and that I must immediately send them home. *"Do you know anything about Aboriginal people"*, he said. I answered *"yes"* and he then rattled on about how it was wrong for me to take these boys away from their home and community. I then turned to one of the four young people sitting in his car and took him to one side for a private chat. A few minutes later we returned to the group whereby the young person grabbed his bag from the back of Mr Peddit's ute and got into my vehicle. Mr Peddit, seeing what was going on, stood up and advanced towards me and yelled out *"Hey you, fuck-head ..."* We immediately drove off leaving Mr Peddit to the comfort of his own noise.

On 30 October 2006, I met with the board of the Murray Valley Aboriginal Corporation, whereby I gave them an overview of the WPS. This meeting was not a pleasant experience. Throughout my talk, I was interrupted by a number of board members going on about; *"We mixed bloods know our rights not like the full bloods; they don't know their rights"*, and *"Noel Pearson is on big money and just living off his own people, and that "you white people should not be looking after these boys"*, and that *"one of us should be looking after them"*.

The following day, the Chairperson of the Kalumburu Aboriginal Corporation, Clement Maraltadj, faxed a letter to the Chairperson of the Robinvale Murray Valley Aboriginal Corporation asking them to immediately send the three boys back to the Scheme and to the care and direction of Milton James. He stated that the Kalumburu Council and the boys' families wholeheartedly support the WPS and they have complete faith in Milton. The letter explained how the boys were sent down there for a real job because they do not have any work in their community.

Later that day, I sent our Robinvale Work Group Supervisor, Mat Worthington, into town to pick up the boys, armed with a copy of the Chairman's letter. Mat located them at the home of Mrs Judy Pearce, also a board member of the Murray Valley Aboriginal Corporation. As (bad) luck would have it, a police sergeant, by the name of Steven Phelan, just so happened to arrive at exactly the same time. Mrs Pearce again went on to Mat about; *"The Aboriginals around here understand their rights but these boys don't and what you're doing is wrong"*. She went on again about Noel Pearson saying, *"He is only using these boys and his own kind to get rich, he gets \$300,000 a year and he don't care what happens to them"*. She also went on to say that; *"Yeah we don't like this Milton James either. We don't like his attitude and we are going to look into him. Blokes like Milton James are just using these boys, he's just money grabbing. And these Aboriginal people should not be with these white people"* It was then that Sergeant Phelan jumped in to say; *"Yeah, guys like Milton are just lining their own pockets."* Strange how Sergeant Phelan had something to say about someone who he has never met. Mat said to me later how this Sergeant Phelan was simply pouring petrol on the fire. As you would expect in this situation, Mat had to leave empty handed; Mrs Pearce would not hand over the boys.

On the following day, I spoke to the Chairman of the Murray Valley Aboriginal Corporation, Marlin Parsons, asking for his intervention to bring his board members

under control. He went on about how this has nothing to do with his organisation, he has no control over people's private actions. I told him that, "*These people are board members and they were acting upon information they received at a board meeting, how then can you say you have no control over their actions? They were acting upon information they received in the course of their duties*". The Chairman's answer was to repeat his claim with the qualification that he will look into it. He then advised that I "*should not use Noel Pearson's name around here, he's not liked in this part of the country*".

I then telephoned Sergeant Phelan at the Robinvale police station asking him to please explain his comments about me the other day. His immediate response was denial saying that "*Mat is full of shit, and he had better watch himself*". When I suggested that we ought to meet so that I can explain what the Scheme is all about, he refused. He then went on about how these three boys were running around with local Aboriginals on Saturday night causing trouble. (We were later told by one of the boys how on that Saturday night, there was a fight between the local Aboriginals and Tongans and that one of the Tongans pulled up across the road from where the boys were staying and discharged two shots from a double barrel shot gun in their direction.) When I told Sergeant Phelan that these boys were taken in by board members of the local Aboriginal Corporation, he said "*Well it's your fault for not keeping control of them*". As you can see, Sergeant Phelan was a very unhelpful man, most likely from the same school as the officers from the Cobram Police Station (see WPS Developmental Note #35).

I think it was on the following day that Leonie Cameron, CEO of Kalumburu Council, spoke to one of the three boys over the phone and a short time later he returned back to us at the Weir Caravan Park, quite happy to rejoin the Scheme. We immediately transported him to another work group outside the Robinvale area.

A few days later, on the 9 November 2006, the two remaining boys also came back to the Weir Caravan Park wanting to rejoin the Scheme. They said that they had to leave their bags behind at Mr Peddit's place. Mat agreed to go with them to collect their belongings. It was then that the boys told Mat how they were left in the house on their own and that they were scared. They talked about how they were being regularly bailed up by local Tongans wanting a fight. When they entered the empty house to pick up their gear, Mat noticed how the house was littered with beer cans and marijuana paraphernalia; bongs, pictures of dope, etc. That night we transported one of the boys to another work group, well away from Robinvale.

We decided to leave the third boy, who had the intellectual impairment, at the Weir Caravan Park where there was greater support. The following morning, at 5:10 am, Mr Peddit turned up at the Weir Caravan Park banging on the caravan door of this young person, swearing and carrying on. When the boy came out, Mr Peddit got angry at him, repeatedly yelled out; "*Don't you wanna go home? Make up your mind boy and stop fucking us around. Both of you boys should have stayed at the house and there would be no fucking about*" He then demanded that the boy get into the car because he's taking him right now to the Adelaide airport. The boy got into the car.

If all this sounds like absolute mayhem, more was yet to come. We were informed that the air tickets were paid for by the Murray Valley Aboriginal Corporation in direct violation of the wishes of the Kalumburu Council and the boy's family. In fact, they had been reassuring Leonie Cameron, CEO of Kalumburu Council, that they would not do this; instead they would hand the boys over to "The Welfare". When the driver arrived at the Adelaide airport, he simply dumped the young person and drove off, ignoring the fact that he was intellectually incapable of knowing what to do next. When we heard that he was left abandoned at the airport, I had organised for one of our Renmark Work Group Supervisors to drive to Adelaide and bring him all the way back to Robinvale in Victoria.

How do I make sense of all this? I see this as the product of the welfare approach - people and agencies that have gone mad. They are hell bent on rescuing these young Aboriginal people – but from what? Are they rescuing them from white people? Or are they rescuing them from work? Or are they rescuing them from exposure to the outside world? Or are they rescuing them from Milton James? Or are they rescuing them from Noel Pearson? Who knows what goes on in the minds of these crazy people. Maybe it's all about trying to create some entertainment, some excitement, a bit of drama, to brighten up their own otherwise boring, meaningless lives, at the expense of young people's hopes and aspirations. Maybe they are all embarrassed or shamed by these young people who are working; they have a real job and earning real money, whereas these Robinvale people may have resigned themselves to squabbling over the slops from the welfare bucket.

Now, this story should have ended here, but unfortunately it continues on. Readers may recall WPS Developmental Note #48, where I talked about the welfare worker, Ms Barbara Kempt, Riverland Team Manager of the Department of Families, South Australia. Her claim to fame was to send one of our young people back into a miserable, abusive and neglectful environment under the guise (or pretext?) of "protecting a child-at-risk". Moreover, Ms Kempt carried out her devious action without making any contact with myself or anyone from the WPS or Cape York Partnerships. I suspect this was a breach of her organisation's procedures, or at the very least, a breach of professional courtesy.

Well, in true fashion of the welfare approach, it happened again. Within an hour of this young person being dropped off at one of our Renmark homes, he miraculously walked into the Berri office of the Department of Family Services, South Australia, 20 kilometres from Renmark. This young person is another of these masters at dancing welfare workers, but we obviously were unaware of the extent that our Scheme had been compromised by external interference. This was on Friday afternoon, and we didn't hear from the Berri welfare office until Monday morning, when an officer by the name of Julie rang one of our Renmark Work Group Supervisors saying that the young person has been taken into their care and they are now making arrangements to fly him back home. Our Work Group Supervisor immediately contacted me and I immediately contacted their office. It was not until the following morning that someone answered my messages.

In the meantime a senior welfare officer accompanied by two police officers went around to one of our Renmark homes to pick up his gear. Typically the police would have arrived fully armed. This is what our helping profession is being reduced to: jackboot authority, guns, patrol cars, hit and run rescue missions, lock down on communication, and a complete and inflexible adherence to standard procedures.

Make no mistake, this is not social work. This is welfare work of the worst kind. Real social work involves a commitment to social justice. Real social work involves action to prevent and eliminate discrimination based on race or culture. Social work should involve positive and constructive contributions to the well-being of people. Social work is to act to expand choices and opportunities for disadvantaged or oppressed groups and persons. Actual social work gives consideration to the implications of competing interests and promotes practices and procedures that encourage respect. Social work encourages informed participation. Social work is the development of knowledge. Genuine social work(ers) will not assume professional responsibility for the clients of another agency without appropriate communication with that agency.

I then spoke to the manager of the office, Ms Jacky Stevens. When asked why she had not spoken to me before sending him away, she replied that they have no statutory requirement to do so. All they were required to do is contact the parents of this young person, which they claim they did, and the boy's mother requested that he be returned home. This claim I challenged on two levels.

My first challenge was to say that I am very familiar with child protection assessments, including the South Australia Department of Families manuals on assessment frameworks and it fully recognises the importance of consulting with other service providers who have contact with the child. Why didn't she talk to the Kalumburu resident child protection worker? Why didn't she talk to the school, health centre, youth justice worker, police officer, the Chairman, the Deputy Chairman, the CEO, other council staff, or other family members? I have no doubt that Ms Stevens is in breach of her own assessment procedures.

My second challenge was to tell her that I was a child protection worker working out of the Berri office for many years and many other places besides, and I know that we were all schooled in the art of manipulating people and environments to obtain the answers we want. Make no mistake, welfare workers are skilled?/engaged in exploiting the weakness and vulnerabilities of the uneducated and ill-informed. Generally speaking, parents are ill-equipped to make informed decisions and welfare workers, with their superior knowledge and resources, exploit their ignorance and fears. Uneducated remote Aboriginal people stand no chance against these people. I am absolutely certain that if I spoke to this boy's mother, she would tell me that she wants her son to remain in the WPS, besides it is not the boy's mother that is his guardian.

Ms Stevens gave no answer to my arguments other than to repeat her claim that she had no statutory requirement to communicate to us.

I have described on a number of occasions how these welfare workers are part of the problem. They have little understanding of the situation in remote Aboriginal communities, yet they presume an authority to rule these people's lives. More often than not their private view on Aboriginal people is driven by either pity or scorn.

It is my experience that such welfare workers can only think and act in accordance with their procedures, and even then, many of them are not very good at that. Their social construction of a child is everyone under the age of 18 years and perceived as passive, powerless and incompetent. They believe the rightful place of all children is in a nuclear family. They have little or no understanding of passive welfare dependency or concepts like empowerment, respect, dignity and self-reliance. They have no idea on how to restore personal responsibility or how to overcome marginalisation. Nor can they apply an understanding of how human dignity and self-esteem flows from self-reliance. Neither do they have much idea of Aboriginal demographics or any appreciation of size and complexities of the problems that will soon befall this country if we do not act now.

I have just been advised by Leonie Cameron CEO of Kalumburu that Ms Jacky Stevens, Manager Berri office of the Department of Family Services, South Australia has now flown a second participant back home. What Ms Stevens actually done is to facilitate a breach of this young person's Youth Justice Order. It was an order of the Western Australian Children's Court to give this young person the opportunity to join the WPS or be sent to detention. When Ms Stevens was informed of this, her answer was that she didn't know. She didn't know because she was the one that blocked all communication with us. Clearly, Ms Stevens now appears silly and must quickly be brought under control.

The purpose of this note was to help readers differentiate between the constructive and realistic approach taken by the WPS and the more "traditional" forms of welfare work, particularly with Indigenous people. This is not simply a matter of a group of misguided fools from the Robinvale Murray Valley Aboriginal Corporation or a rogue office manager of Department of Family Services South Australia. It is much bigger than this; such a welfare culture is widespread and seems to exist in most, if not all government and non-government welfare offices. They differ only by degree. People of this kind reflect a mindset, a set of values, and attitudes that undermine and devalue the very nature of welfare work. Every time I come into contact with the welfare system and welfare workers I experience such problems. This is why I employ Work Group Supervisors who have not worked in the welfare system. This way I can protect the WPS from corruption from within. The WPS is indeed pushing against a very strong tide; we have suffered losses, but we haven't been swept away yet.

Wednesday, 15 November 2006