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**‘THE NEW FIT’ – mainstreamed work/living in Indigenous  
Communities under the new Federal Government Shared  
Responsibility Agreement and Community Development Plan  
policies – new deals and issues for Correctional Service  
Indigenous ex-prisoners.**

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**ABSTRACT**

The new mantra of the Federal Government’s Indigenous Shared Responsibility Agreement Policy which enforces mainstreamed working/living onto Correctional Service ex prisoners by determining all educational training employment outcomes to conform to Community Development Plan strategies of each community is tied to partnerships with Government and non Government Agencies.

The bottom line of the Shared Responsibility Agreement Policy is that the Federal Government will not give any financial support for resources to Indigenous Communities unless partnerships are struck up between Government agencies and the community members.

Simply it’s called ‘We will not give unless you (the community) give back’.

The community Development Plan is where the Community Council and the community members decide what they want and the strategies they will put into place to do their side of the agreement in return for the Federal Government’s support eg. resources.

Educational training employment outcomes that the Indigenous ex prisoner possesses as a result of TAFE - ANTA training package courses and rehabilitation in the NT.

goals will now have to fit the aspirations and vision statements of the new Community Development Plan of his/her community and the partnership struck with agencies working within the community.

This requires a 'return' on the Government's investments and ex prisoners is regarded along with the rest of the community as an investment product and will have to 'deliver'.

The 'delivering' aspect of the Indigenous community members, to perform according to the Community Development Plan can be seen as a positive deal for enhancing the working and living conditions of the community as well as for self determination however it has its 'hiccups while cutting its baby teeth' and issues are surfacing.

Where does this leave the ex prisoner who is geared up for employment options to kick in?

Will the present Education programs in the NT. gaol system gear the ex prisoner effectively?

The paper presented will discuss the new Federal Government deal and the issues for the ex prisoner as a new viable product.

## **The Paper**

The Australian Federal Government established from 1<sup>st</sup> July 2004 the new Shared Responsibility Agreements (SRAs) as a key concept for new arrangements in Indigenous Affairs.

This was after winding down the management of the Federally funded Indigenous body ATSIC which previously nationally managed special Indigenous programs through their elected ATSIC state councils.

Basically it recognised that shared responsibility is where the government cannot alone bring about all the changes necessary to overcome Indigenous disadvantages and that Indigenous people and communities must be involved in planning and building their own future.

This new mantra of the Indigenous Shared Agreement Policy enforces at its foundation that all services, facilities and resources to support communities are mainstreamed through government and non government departments through a process of Community Development Plan Drafts put forward by communities.

At June 2005 76 SRAs have signed with 64 communities (some communities have more than one SRA).

Each community that signs up to the agreement must outline strategies through their Community Council and members within the framework of the Community

Development Plan whereby the outcomes are linked to TAFE/VET educational training, CDEP employment, full time employment, business employment, mental and physical health, school education, social advancement and will be carried out responsibly.

The bottom line is that the Federal Government will not support any program put to them in the agreements unless the community is serious and comes to terms with the bottom line issues that are affecting them.

The Indigenous Coordination Centres (ICCs) in 30 locations around Australia are charged with listening to local communities and negotiating the SRAs.

For example the need for sewing classes to make quilts is now not the reason for wanting training.

ICC will ask - 'Why do you need to sew quilts?'

The community might answer - 'Because we want to keep our sick children warm'.

ICC will answer - 'Oh, this is a health issue you are talking about. How can we fix up the health issue?'

The community might answer - 'We will clean our houses' or 'we need to feed our children with good food-more fruit or vegetables'

ICC will answer - 'Oh, we better talk to the right people to help us with that' - the right partnership agency dealing with 'Grow Well program' eg. Anyinginyi Congress-Aboriginal Health Centre -Tennant Creek'.

Simply it is called 'We will not give you support, infrastructure, resources unless you (the community) give back by addressing the right underlying issue.'

It is up to the community to work out just what this 'giving back' entails whether it be making sure that children attend school routinely, parents help out at the school, parents making school curtains, health and hygiene is adhered to for example the 'washing of faces' in return for a new community swimming pool or petrol bowser outlet that has been detailed in the major newspapers and shocked many readers. This deal had the effect of the Australian public ricocheting, that such a deal could be struck to enforce Indigenous health 'clean ups'. How degrading to Indigenous people was the backlash in some urban city camps. However such a deal was considered okay and kosher by particular Indigenous leaders; that if this is what the community wanted then so be it for their future visions to be carried out.

The deals struck to carry out the strategies/ideas that the community wishes to implement to bring about the changes they want can only be carried out with the help of partnerships which are struck through the mainstream department set up by the Federal Government which have replaced the workings of the previous National Indigenous organisation ATSIC (it was supplied funds from Commonwealth Grants and managed them through Advocacy policies).

There many Australian Government Agencies that have contributed to the SRAs management to help communities build on long-time visions for their futures. These for example are Department of Employment and Workplace Relations, Department of Transport and Regional Services, Department of Education, Science and Training. There are also several non Government agencies that also are involved in SRAs and have Community Development Outcomes as their mandates to support Indigenous

people to become self empowered eg. World Vision, Oxfam, Anglicare, Frontier Services of the United Church and Centre Care.

Educational training employment outcomes that the Indigenous ex-prisoner possesses as a result of TAFE/VET- ANTA (Australian National Training Packages) which he/she has gained and has been the rehabilitation outcome of their term in gaol, whereby their punishment is being removed from mainstream society, may or may not be relevant to the Community Development Plan Draft of the community they belonged to.

### **ISSUES under the Indigenous Community Development Plans which may affect the ex prisoner's successful re-entry into community life:**

Having worked in NT. remote communities in the Barkly Region and Central Australia for 8 years and under three SRAs this year, I have gained knowledge of how the new agreements are unfolding and believe that I can shed light on the major issues that have surfaced so far within my scope of experience as a TAFE trainer and Arts/Community Development Consultant for World Vision Australia, a Government employment agency (not to be named) and Local Government in the Barkly Region.

#### **1. Agency Pillage**

While it seems that partnerships would be ultimately utilitarian and be seen to be morally and ethically transparent, agencies that operate within communities and have done so for quite a long time or a short time do at times have their own agendas for being involved in community management processes.

Often there is (a) **overlapping of services** – whereby the same service is offered by other organisations eg. Educational training RTOs offering the same certificates and employment outcomes.

It is hard for the community members who have very little knowledge or none at all to gauge the best product that will service the community's long term vision. They do not understand the teaching procedures, performance criteria, assessment outcomes and links to desired employment paths.

Hence they are usually go with the person representing the organisation who offers them stability i.e. will go out on a routine basis to conduct the course, is culturally aware and offers them some level of success with their products and in a lot of cases do all business management with the external world. This ensures the development of a trusting relationship which has the potential of being co-dependent.

There are promises of handing over the ropes to designated members in the community to run the 'new' business but it is inevitable that when the business is put in motion and there are the dealings of business acumen, ethics and finances, as it is well known in many instances, the external world person is needed to drive the business. Although there is now evidence of good Indigenous business mentoring programs run by the Department of Business, Industry and Resource Development (Division of Indigenous Business and Industry Services) that have become successful in making community business self standing and profitable using local labour.

From my experience the issues being referred to, do make life hard as the communities suffer at the hands of some project managers of partnership agencies who have not lived at all in remote communities, do not have qualifications or the

mentoring experience needed to drive businesses or qualifications to assess or evaluate educational training and most importantly lack cultural awareness; listening skills to determine what the grass roots is saying and being able to turn needs into positive strategies with knowledge of networking.

(b) **Agencies using(in terms of abusing) educational training courses** as being put under their specific Community Development outcomes without finding out, cross referencing to see whether the same service is under another agency's community development outcomes as well and interacting in partnership collaboration; other words use a cloak and dagger approach by not sharing their real agendas at all.

This duplicity occurs often and seems to be growing since the agencies are not answerable once they are on community ground or drive over the hill back to their urban base. Instead they work on a 'we know best' patronising attitude and give the impression to the community members that their involvement in the community plan is in their best interest when really it is to build an empire for status seeking.

2. **Agencies' project officers being unqualified** to assess and evaluate educational training outcomes of the courses done by RTOs in the community. Also they have been seen to be running agendas and training for Governance of Community Councils where they do not possess the experience or the qualifications in the field eg. hold a Law Degree and therefore have knowledge of reading Legislation and its processes and Common Law.

3. As a result successful programs that have received good patronage and attendance by the community members have been wound down and deemed not a priority any longer by these project officers to fit within budget constraints when in fact it is because they themselves lack the credentials to see the 'big picture' of business potential for the particular program employment outcomes.

4. **Results:** This causes much confusion and grief with the community members who do not understand why a program is no longer supported and had been doing so well. Examples can be found in communities where art products which were the result of art training, trips to capital city festivals to sell work and exhibitions, money flowing in and then almost 'overnight' the program is no longer supported and closed down to make way for refurbishing an air strip or to build the foundations for a church. The Women's Centres are full of materials and equipment which becomes surplus, deteriorating with the help of the dust storms while parts of sewing machines become machine parts for bush toys or the foot pedals for guitars.

The employment outcomes in the above scenario has been lost whereby it could have reach a successful conclusion where the business, if under the correct qualified person who could deal with the mentoring and training aspect, would have been able to hand it over to educated well trained community members.

## **5. Agencies power brokering**

Agencies which have a habit of routinely managing community development in Indigenous communities fall foul of becoming dictators of the community vision statement in that they believe they know best for the community i.e. have patriarchal or even matriarchal attitudes (one agency representative, a line manager of a Australian Aid organisation, coming from Melbourne to 'meet and greet' the community wanted to bring all the children in the community 'presents' - however she was quickly reminded that this would not be a good idea as it would set a precedence for all other agencies).

This patronising attitude is common especially since that there is now so much emphasis on 'dysfunctionalism' and beliefs in the genocide of the Indigenous Culture and it's parallel to Third World poverty.

Such agencies believe that the community members need to be coaxed into handing their power over to the agency which will organise every aspect of community life for them and are willing to pour money into all kinds of programs they deem fit to solve the dysfunctionalism from Youth to Old Age.

The scene of 4 WD drive trucks forever arriving in the community loading up community members to go to any number of forums, workshops in other communities, towns and cities which is deemed by the agency to be in the 'best interest' of the community when in fact it may only be seen as yet another 'junket trip' where certain family members who hold community power vie for a placement. It also may be seen as a negative for breaking up routine family life by some family members.

**6. Partnerships upholding the SRAs principles** essentially are there to be meaningful for the communities and this means that the ex prisoner would essentially have their needs met. However there are many factors that will inhibit this to occur besides the issues discussed above that he/she will have to contend with.

**(1) Lack of real employment prospects.** In an average community of two hundred people there are only so many 'real' jobs besides CDEP - Work for the Dole Program.

The Health Clinic can at a maximum employ 1-2 Health workers of either gender, the school of 45 students in a excellent week where there is no Football carnival, Sorry business to attend or even visiting other urban centres in school holiday time may employ up to 2 Teacher Aids as well as a couple of ATAS Tutors. The CDEP Manager may have office staff of 1-2 people who would be from the CDEP pool.

Epenarra Community NT. 120kms East off the Stuart Highway 20kms north of Devils Marbles on the way to Tennant Creek prides itself on the fact that it now with its 200 community members has over 90% now on CDEP and only 20 people, old pensioners, sitting down. There are 2 health workers (male and female) in the Clinic, 2 Teacher Aids (male and female). Every other worker is

connected to CDEP doing maintenance and rubbish. There is one female receptionist for the CDEP office, 4 women do Smoko food program at the school and 2 women run the Women's Centre and its activities.

There are 2 members that work at the Epenarra station store at the check out, one house cleaner and 2-4 men who do the cattle mustering.

In 2004 most of the community learnt to drive under a IAD Driver Education TAFE course and this year 2005 IAD –Institute for Aboriginal Development again went to the community and ran a two week literacy and numeracy course for all community members to help with 'shame job' lack of general living skills knowledge issues.

CDEP work for the Dole Program is a problem in that it is not a pathway for real job employment as training for higher positions is not available or there are no jobs to aspire to. We can joke and say that there are only so many white rocks which stand at the entrance to the community that can be painted or in the Epenarra Community case there are only so many times the rocks can be painted to be brighter than white, so many times the rubbish truck can go around in the day, so many new signs pointing to offices and places in the community to be painted and as the ladies said, 'We are so sick of picking up rubbish. We want to do training. We want to do it regular and we want something for the young girls.'

CDEP is a revolving door which does not evolve to anything to broaden the horizons just ready labour.

The ex prisoner will have to work out where to fit in with his/her new knowledge for employment. Where will they fit? Is there any scope for new jobs within the new partnerships? Movement may be slow to bring partnerships to the table and beat out the agreement since it may take a while for the community to get to the bottom of their real needs- the 'Why' - what is the community's function and 'why' does it function as it does.

The Community Council that may have been installed in 1983 may have to be ratified again, new council members elected. It may be that it has taken many CDEP managers to try to get the council up and running but community issues have intervened i.e. Deaths and accidents over the years whereby the community has left to go live in other communities, leaving empty houses from Sorry Business for a while and depleted numbers on the ground. Hence the community either swells or subsides depending on the circumstances.

The ex prisoner will have to keep very positive that their new skills learnt in Gaol will eventually be put in practice eg. Automotive and Welding. The real reason for wanting cars fixed may be to go to another community for a funeral and this will not be seen by ICC and the partnerships as the real need for the automotive trade to start up or to get a new maintenance shed.

A new issue to contend with soon is that payment for work will be tied to being well and truly on the job i.e. staying on the job and not jumping off. ICC officers are being placed in the communities to manage this process.

(2) **Positive aspects of gaol rehabilitation** can be seen in action with the attitude of commitment that the ex prisoner learnt in gaol to tasks eg. paid work for work parties, time in the kitchen and laundry could help them here with the new mainstream ideology.

- Also by the ex prisoner getting elected on the Community Council and taking responsibility for community strategy plans will be a positive move since learning about Law in TAFE Certificate 1 in General Education and knowing about Native Land Claim Titles from Literacy and Numeracy classes were bonuses while in gaol. This could also mean becoming involved in land management and resource programs.
- The ex prisoner may also take to being a community representative for the Central Land Council now that they know the history of Native Land Title Claims and can be a useful cog in the wheel when the community is thinking of becoming involved in Eco-Tourism.
- A business plan will be the main component of the Community Development Draft. The ex prisoner's skills if in automotives can be involved in convincing the community council members to establish maintenance plants eg. Automotive mechanics as has been done in Ali Curung NT. and Alpururulam NT. to service the community's machinery.
- For ex prisoners who are female it may be more difficult to move into an area where their training will benefit as art work, health and education are usually the areas women are specialised in and as already discussed, jobs in these areas are very thin on the ground and it is competitive in nature.

**In conclusion** the 'new fit' that the ex prisoner will have to mould into will in fact depend on the needs, strategies to bring about the changes to overcome disadvantages with partnerships struck up under the Community Development Plan. These will have to be shared for everyone's benefit of the community and not just for them as an individual.

The vision plan of the community will have to be seen in the light of 'building' up the community whereby basic values and beliefs of mental and physical health, education may be the foundations to build on first before any other plans are given priority.

Hence becoming the community's only mechanic may not be a priority when the air strip to fly in the Flying Doctor may be the first priority for Primary Health Care of the community. Even then, maybe it is more that housing needs to be fixed for health reasons eg. drains, toilets and cleaning up rubbish so that people do not get sick from over population may have to come first as it is the priority of health in the community. The air strip becomes number two priority. Partnerships to fix up the main priority will be brought in and hence jobs will be allocated as such.

If the ex prisoner is multi skilled he/ she will be able to be flexible.

Overall the ex prisoner may or may not know what is happening in his/her community and will have to adjust to working and living conditions.

If they have had substance abuse problems in the past, their rehabilitation in Gaol in substance abuse programs and Education should in accordance with external world belief system make them strong to stand against peer group and family issues.

However it depends on the prisoner's mental attitude, values and strength of character to surpass the problems to see themselves as positive role models. Traditional cultural values and beliefs will be working either for or against these factors.

Hopefully the Education received in Gaol will give the prisoner a Holistic approach and a Holistic pathway to embrace old and new values, ride over the disadvantages to encompass the 'new fit' and find a place with the new partnerships of the Community Development Plan.

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