JUVENILE OFFENDING IN AURUKUN: A RESPONSE AND OVERVIEW

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Aurukun—A response and overview

AT THE BEGINNING OF THIS YEAR, THE SHIRE OF AURUKUN ACHIEVED national notoriety when a "riot" brought national media attention to the Shire. As a result of the riot twelve young people aged twelve to sixteen years appeared in the Children's Court. This paper outlines the response taken by the Department of Family Services and Aboriginal and Islander Affairs, Division of Protective Services and Juvenile Justice and seeks to raise issues for future responses to offending in remote communities.

Aurukun

The township of Aurukun is situated on the western tip of Cape York Peninsula, at the mouth of three rivers—the Archer, Watson and Ward. It is approximately 80 km south of Weipa and approximately two hours flying time from Cairns. Contact by road is limited to the dry season and then only by four-wheel drive vehicles. The population of Aurukun at the 1991 census was 783 with 175 aged between ten and nineteen.

History

European contact has greatly undermined the way in which social control was maintained by the clans around Aurukun and created a complexity of issues that need to be recognised by workers with the Aurukun community.

Under the missionary period 1904 to 1965 and in particular, during the Reverend William MacKenzie era 1923 to 1965, the community led a very structured existence as control centred with the superintendent. Children were removed from families and placed in dormitories so the influence of the kinship system was eroded, even though some contact was maintained with families. Without role models these children had difficulty with parenting skills. The housing of children from differing clans led to clans with a history of disputes having to live in close proximity to each other. Further erosion of natural systems of social control occurred when MacKenzie gave selected people the responsibility of carrying out punishments. The paternalistic attitude of
controlling people's wages did little to prepare people for administration and financial skills.

After 1965 Aurukun became exposed to a wide range of institutions and agencies. The people were now exposed to a whole range of departments with differing goals and administrative structures. In 1978 the Local Government model was established at Aurukun. It was introduced with little or no consultation with the people. Although designed to give local people more say in running their affairs, in reality it has lead to a greater number of white people being in key administrative positions. The report by the Aurukun Support Group (Dec 1991) highlights some of the issues facing this council today. They include the clarification of its roles and functions, training for staff and greater involvement by Aurukun people.

The impact of the MacKenzie era and post MacKenzie developments have altered all areas of Aurukun life. Although it is necessary to be aware of this influence, it is the area of social control that must be of significance to the juvenile justice worker. Under MacKenzie, social control was maintained through his presence and the system he developed. However, his removal of young children from mothers, setting up of dormitories, and Christian marriage arrangements have all had a negative impact upon the system of social control between the generations. This has been further eroded post 1965 by the lack of meaningful employment for people and the exposure of young people to the technological culture of today. An Aurukun man expressed recently that while he could live in both the white and Aboriginal world, he feared that his children would only be able to live in the white world. Such has been the impact of European culture on the Aboriginal society.

**Division Involvement**

The Department of Family Services and Aboriginal and Islander Affairs, through the Division of Protective Services and Juvenile Justice has had involvement in the Cape and Gulf areas since 1970. During the early 1970s intervention was primarily concerned with neglect and occurred when complaints were made by police or medical workers. Stafford and Venables (1987) say that the likely outcome was that children were removed from the community and placed in long-term white foster care. The results of the intervention policy are still being addressed today.

From 1977 regular visits to isolated communities began and with this came an increase in statutory case loads. It also saw the beginning of placements in culturally appropriate foster care and Aboriginal Health team workers often offering "more accurate definitions or useful explanations of child neglect, than those perceived by Managers, Hospital staff and Police" (Stafford & Venables 1987).
From 1984 a community service development approach aiming to "devolve responsibility and power to a local body who then uses the statutory service of the Department when needed" (Stafford & Venables 1987) was undertaken.

This approach was introduced into areas that expressed an interest. It involved the establishment of a core committee of local people who could call upon professionals. Such an approach was considered successful, with Yarrabah recording significant benefits. This approach was and is dependent upon the support given by the statutory body and thus is very demanding upon the time of the individual worker and other resources.

In the late 1980s with the high increase in the notifications of child abuse/neglect in the Cairns district, coupled with the high turnover of staff and the lack of adequate financial resources, the decision was made not to service the Cape area in 1990. Instead it monitored concerns through contact with the Aboriginal Coordinating Council. The Department was back at the initial response of the 1970s, where it primarily responded to issues raised by police and medical staff.

In 1990 the restructuring of this Department saw the formation of the Community Services Development Division. This Division, with its community services development approach, is seeking to address the underlying issues of child neglect and young offending and is working closely with the Juvenile Justice sub-division in seeking community responses to offending.

In August 1991 the Aurukun Shire Council, following a spate of offending, requested that the Department address the council in regard to juvenile justice and community development issues. The meeting proved beneficial as better ideas of the needs of the community were gained. Issues raised at that meeting included the diverse role of the Shire council; the lack of recreational activities for the young; the gaps in knowledge regarding legal rights; and the use of out stations and funding. This contact was to prove beneficial once regular visits by a juvenile justice worker occurred in February 1992.

**Issues Facing The Aurukun Community.**

The document, Woyan Min Uwamp Aak Ngulakana (Finding The Right Road Ahead) by the Aurukun Support Group (Adams et al. 1991), highlights eight critical issues facing the Aurukun people and makes forty-four recommendations on how these may be overcome. The issues identified include education; community control of alcohol; homeland development; role of Aurukun Shire Council; health; families in crisis; developing a local response to justice issues and the delivery of government services. All of these issues impact greatly on the Aurukun community; however, it is education, families in crisis, and a response to justice issues which directly affect juvenile justice.

*Education*

Although "Education of Children (or lack thereof) was most frequently mentioned and felt most deeply by people" (Adams et al. 1991), only a very small proportion of children attended school on a regular basis. They considered that two essential reasons for the failure of school are "People have little involvement or control over schooling" and "the present structure and process of schooling are wrong" (Adams et al. 1991, p. 24). The Education Department is currently addressing these issues and is looking toward developing a response involving Homeland schools.
When visiting Aurukun it is apparent that a schooling problem exists. Down the streets youngsters, aged between five and thirteen, can be observed playing stick ball during the normal school hours. Adams et al. (1991) give several reasons for this. Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people referred to drinking and fighting leading to kids being too tired and upset to attend school; social divisions which carry over into the school resulting in fights between families being continued at school, including situations when the Aboriginal teacher's family was in dispute with the pupil's family; many children live on out-stations but receive no educational services, and they have little involvement or control over schooling in Aurukun. Non-Aboriginal people in the main referred to parents who "won't, can't and couldn't care" about sending kids to school and that the school curriculum was not culturally appropriate.

Families In Crisis

A further factor requiring consideration when looking at the background of the spate of offending is the fact that many families at Aurukun are in crisis. It is apparent that parents of young people at court are genuinely concerned about them, but they are at a loss about what to do. It is very easy to blame them for not providing an adequate example and to the casual observer they may present as not caring. It is the author's opinion that they care but are unable to influence a system which maintains them in a state of dependency. They are left with feelings of inadequacy and powerlessness as they struggle to deal adequately with the undermining of their cultural heritage.

Boredom and the influence of peers (with coercion sometimes mentioned) are two reasons given for offending by young people. Young people equate the increase in offending to alcohol abuse by parents and close family members and in at least one instance have related it to firearm offences (Adams et al. 1991, p. 64). As previously mentioned the cultural social controls have been eroded and although young people would still welcome control when appropriate, the parents and the kinship system have lost some of their credibility.

Adams et al. (1991) suggest that more be made of the people's strengths and links to the homelands; emphasis be removed from offenders and placed on creating opportunities for all young people; development occur which ensures recreational, educational and career opportunities; personal support systems be provided; families obtain greater control and responsibility over their lives and the Department of Family Services and Aboriginal and Islander Affairs provide services to the community in the areas of protective services and juvenile justice.

Justice Issues

Within Aurukun two laws are operating—the European and the traditional. Both laws are important to the people but it is the European legal system that dominates. The local people are far from versed in the intricacies of the European system and if anything are disadvantaged by it. At court English is the spoken language even though it is a second or third language to the people. Parents of children appearing in court are often intimidated by a system which may have little or no understanding of their values, customs or needs. The Criminal Justice Commission's paper Youth, Crime and Justice in Queensland (March 1992, p. 57) quotes the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody: "The exercising of the ideal of impartial justice is necessarily accompanied by the values of those who enforce the `rule of law'".
Adams et al. (1991) suggest that the issue of justice can be addressed by both systems supporting each other; empowering clan leaders and the provision of mediation services.

Offending

On the 12 February 1992, twelve young people appeared in the Aurukun Children's Court charged with a total of 136 offences. The majority of charges were property offences including unlawful use of a motor vehicle, wilful damage, break enter and steal, as well as the serious offences of assault and armed in public to cause fear. The whole episode began with car stealing but soon escalated into a frenzy of destruction and violence. The reasons behind the offending are not clear. When asked the young people claimed that they were not drinking, but rather that someone asked them to become involved. At the same time at least seven adults appeared in court on 100 charges.

Considerable pressure was being brought to bear on the responsible Department to do something. Police and the community were demanding that something be done, with the main emphasis upon the young people being removed from the community.

Departmental Response

The initial response was to consider what was known about Aurukun and how to work with Aboriginal offenders. In this community incarceration was not necessarily the best solution and should be used as a last resort; Aboriginal workers worked best with Aboriginal people; some young people would need to be removed from the community; contact with family was important to maintain; activities which assisted their re-integration into the community was essential and factors causing the offending were more likely to be traced to social issues at Aurukun rather than to individual pathologies. These factors influenced the Department's response post court.

Program Development

The nature of the offending, the damage caused and the community's pressure for removal from Aurukun, prompted three strategies to be developed. One involved removing the "ring leaders" from Aurukun into a work/skills orientated program. Another involved sending young people to out-stations, and the last involved the use of voluntary community service within the township of Aurukun. All were designed to be alternatives to incarceration.

Placement on cattle properties was suggested as a work skill program. Although some success had been experienced with such programs, under training grants, concern centred upon isolation from families, the ability to monitor the progress, state of mind of the individuals, the ability to provide adequate and immediate support, and the relevance of station work to the young people of Aurukun. A further consideration was cost. There were limited funds available and what funds there were would need to be diverted from community support programs for adolescents. This cost factor quickly ruled out the option of cattle stations when contact with two stations revealed that their services would be provided at $500 per week per child.

A further option of an adventure/work experience program based in the Tully/Ingham area was considered. This option was worthy of consideration because Aboriginal support people were accessible, the individual's welfare could be monitored closely, and a variety of work skills could be accessed. Contact with the
respective managers of National Parks and Forestry in the Ingham/Tully area indicated that they were not averse to young people working on projects in the parks. Accommodation could be provided through a Forestry Barracks with on-the-job supervision and equipment provided by Forestry or National Parks. The Department of Family Services and Aboriginal and Islander Affairs would need to meet the costs of a full-time supervisor and food.

Contact with the community throughout this time was through the Aboriginal Coordinating Committee. One elder and former Shire Chairman, Mr Dennie Bowenda, had been identified as being interested in being involved and had expressed a desire to take a group of six, other than the "ring leaders" to an out-station where with other elders’ input, he would take them hunting and fishing, and teach them craft skills over a two-week period. This was an alternative approach with the added advantage of being identified by the community as a suitable response to the offending.

Two weeks prior to the court date three options had been designed to cater for the offenders should they be found guilty of the charges. One involving an adventure/work skills program was an initiative of the Department whilst the other two had their roots in the Aurukun community. The Departmental program was the most difficult to organise due to staffing and the probable need to have the young people remain out of Aurukun for a period of twelve weeks. The staffing problem was overcome with the release of a worker from the Division of Aboriginal and Islander Affairs. The worker, employed as an Aboriginal ranger at Coen, proved to be effective with young people.

At Court

At Court on 12 February 1992, twelve young people appeared charged with numerous offences. Of the twelve, two were admonished and discharged, one was remanded in custody after a plea of not guilty and nine were committed to the Care and Control of the Director for a period of two years, convictions recorded and restitution ordered. It was further recommended that five be detained at a place other than Aurukun for a period of three months. The Department, basing its recommendations on previous offending, number of current charges, and arms related charges had recommended that three young people be placed on care and control orders. Conversations with families and young people prior to court revealed that two parents wished to take their children to out-stations. Meetings with Dennie Bowenda also indicated that the two-week camping program would not be able to be undertaken because of the mix of top-end and bottom-end boys.

The court officer sought a remand period prior to sentencing for six young people in order to enable a worker and community elder to work with them on a community project. It was further suggested that this would enable the worker to assess the suitability of a Supervision order rather than a care and control order. The worker had also reasoned that this was a more appropriate consequence for their offending in that they would be seen by the community as making amends for their behaviour. These proposals were put to the court, but when it was obvious that the court was not in agreement with a remand for sentencing, the court officer sought a supervision order. This was rejected with all six being placed on care and control.
Post Court

Four young people were taken to Cleveland Youth Centre for a two-week period. Although this was hoped to be avoided, the logistics of the camping program and requirements at Aurukun post court made it impossible to avoid. Of these four, one was remanded in custody until March and one was a first offender from Thursday Island. He was returned to Thursday Island after one week in custody, once support was assured.

Two young people were placed on out-stations. In one case the parents of the boy accompanied him to the out-station and in the other, the Clan Elder advised that he would take firm control of the boy.

Four boys, although on Care and Control Orders were not removed from the community. They became involved in working with the Department representative and a community elder. Agreement was reached with them and their families for them to be involved for forty hours in a community project.

Only two were left at Cleveland who were in a position to attend a camping program. One other Aurukun boy was detained at Cleveland Youth Centre at this stage and it was decided to include him in the program. Each was given the choice of participating, with all three accepting.

Camping Program

The program was not seeking to further punish the young people, as their punishment was being sent from Aurukun. They certainly missed home as was apparent by their frequent phone calls. Based at Cardwell the three boys and supervisor resided at the forestry barracks and worked around Mission Beach and Tully. Work activities included, cleaning areas of undergrowth for walking tracks, constructing barbeques, paving, and building viewing ramps over swimming holes. The exercise was conducted in a relaxed atmosphere with the emphasis not on output but rather on skills. Relationships developed with the leaders and the other forestry workers, and an increased awareness of other options available to them.

The work done by Bernie Singleton and the support and assistance provided by the Cairns Office of Aboriginal and Islander Affairs was paramount to the program. Bernie, with no previous experience of working with “delinquents” handled all situations with the skill of a professional. On the one occasion two of the boys decided to abscond, he found them, advised them of their options and the consequences of both and left them to decide. They chose to go back with him.

The boys were provided with entertaining activities on the weekends by Townsville Aboriginal and Islander Child Care Agency, Tharpuntoo Legal Service, a student social worker and the author's family so that the supervisor could have a break. The final weekend was spent at Clump Mountain. The program offered at Clump Mountain is conducted by Aboriginal people from the Innisfail region. It was on the agenda for the group to go there as it offers a craft and culture program. A further benefit, made possible through the Cairns Division of Aboriginal and Islander Affairs, was that Mr Dennie Bowenda attended and was able to gain valuable ideas for possible similar programs at Aurukun.

The death of a close relative of all the boys at Aurukun necessitated that all return for the funeral. As they were now back at Aurukun it was decided that they would remain, but attempts be made to have them go to out-stations. This did not eventuate
but they maintained contact with Dennie Bowenda and to this day have not been charged with offending.

**Program Issues**

A number of issues evolved out of the post court response by the Division which deserve some comment. Firstly the use of out-stations. Experiences in other states have indicated that the use of out-stations as a form of punishment has not proven successful. Experience at Aurukun would suggest that out-stations should not necessarily be seen as the only response but one option in a range of responses. It can be successful when parents or a direct care-giver is present. Although the concept of punishment may not be removed entirely, the emphasis should be placed more upon the benefits of being with their family and the opportunity to gain greater knowledge of their culture. Care needs to be taken to ensure that all people at the out-stations are in support. It is important to remember that many on the out-stations are seeking to avoid the fighting and situations involving alcohol.

Of great benefit throughout the program has been the involvement of a community elder. This person was able to provide advice and guidance. Very few decisions have been made without prior consultation. Since the initial contact in January the role of this person has developed from one of adviser to one where he feels confident enough to make decisions regarding children in care.

Re-integration into the community is a major concern with any program. Experience had shown that it is easy to take young people on camps, which provide education, work skills and cultural awareness, but the difficult task occurs when the young people return to a setting where access to employment, education and support is missing. They are "returned" to the very conditions of existence that give rise to particular kinds of offending in the first place (White 1991). Attempts to overcome this were done by, firstly providing workskills that were applicable to their community and secondly by the Tharpuntoo Legal Service's proposal to provide access to TAFE. This has yet to come to fruition but all boys remain keen for it to occur.

Programs which are directed toward responding to offending on remote communities need to employ Aboriginal workers. One preferably should have youth work skills or experience and at least one other should be from the community group. The strain placed upon the inexperienced worker could have been reduced by having a co-worker. Both require the support of a third, experienced in programs of this nature. Consideration needs to be given to the location of programs. Programs which allow access to family would not only maintain family ties but would also recognise their importance and lessen the difficulties created by homesickness. From observations these young people have strong bonds to their culture but want to access the world outside.

**How the Court Responds at Aurukun**

Prior to 1983 it is reported (Adams et al. 1991, p. 64) that the number of children appearing in court did not exceed one or two. In 1991, twenty-five males aged between twelve and seventeen presented on fifty-two occasions in the Aurukun Children's Court on a total of 342 charges. In 1992 until the end of April, sixteen males have presented on twenty-three occasions for a total of 204 charges (see Table 1).
A breakdown of the charges reveals:

**Table 1**

Charges, Aurukun, 1991

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Charges</th>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Break and/or Enter and/or Steal related charges</td>
<td>147</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>43.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unlawful Use or Misuse of a Motor Vehicle related charges</td>
<td>136</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>39.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Firearm related charges</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violence/Bodily Harm related charges</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Armed related charges</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>342</td>
<td></td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 2**

Charges, Aurukun, 1992

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Charges</th>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unlawful Use of a Motor Vehicle and related charges</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>45.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Break and/or Enter and or Steal related charges</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>42.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violence/Bodily Harm related charges</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Armed related charges</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>204</td>
<td></td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The majority of the offences were carried out conjointly which explains the high number of actual charges, that is, one unlawful use of a motor vehicle would result in four charges if four young people were involved.

Figures also reveal that offending in 1991 was concentrated in the months of July (124) and August (86), that is, approximately 62 per cent of the charges were laid in those two months. In 1992, a similar fact is revealed with February (136) and March (55) being the main months of offending. Attempts to gain an understanding of this phenomenon would suggest that a group of young people urged on by a few leaders—there is some hint of "standover" tactics—went out of control and police and families were powerless to stop it.

A further feature of the offending is that in 1991, seven young people were charged with 172 offences which means that 25 per cent of all the young people charged in 1991 were responsible for 50.3 per cent of all charges. In 1992 a similar figure emerges where five young people are credited with 108 charges or 31.25 per cent of those charged are credited with 52.9 per cent of all charges laid until April. Using 1991 census figures this means that 12.9 per cent of males aged ten to nineteen years at Aurukun were responsible for over half of all the charges laid in 1991-92.

Results of appearances in Children's Court in 1991 are as shown in Table 3:

Table 3

<p>| | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Admonished and discharged</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supervision</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>13.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Care and Control</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>75.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remand</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Convictions recorded</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>55.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restitution</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charges withdrawn</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orders Imposed</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>88.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Juvenile offending in Aurukun

Results of appearances in 1992 until April are as shown in Table 4:

Table 4

Appearances, Aurukun, 1992

<p>| | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Admonished and discharged</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>13.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Care and Control</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>73.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remand</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Convictions Recorded</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>65.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restitution</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>17.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charges withdrawn</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orders Imposed</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>82.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A young person appearing in the Aurukun Court in the last two years had approximately an 85 per cent chance of being placed on an order and about a 60 per cent chance of having a conviction recorded. Furthermore in North Queensland 1.06 per cent of the ATSI population aged 0 to 17 years are under orders whereas in Aurukun 9.59 per cent of that age group are under orders. These figures are alarming and require some discussion.

The Aurukun experience certainly supports the findings of the recent Criminal Justice Commission (1992) that Aboriginal young people are dealt with less leniently by the Children's Court. Of the twelve appearing in Aurukun three were first offenders. Of this three, one aged twelve was admonished and discharged while the other two were placed on care and control and convicted. The court histories of the others appearing revealed that none had ever been admonished and discharged. All had either received supervision or care and control orders on their first appearance.

A goal of this Department is to reduce the number of Aboriginal and Islander people coming into care. It is primarily seeking to do this through its policy of diversion. Although this Department is endeavouring to improve its service to juvenile justice, there is a need for other players in the justice system to critically evaluate their performance and to seek ways which ensure that young people are not brought into the system unnecessarily.

The system under which the court operates is an adversarial one where guilt needs to be proven. It assumes people know their rights, and if this is in doubt then an independent person can be enlisted. In principle this is sound, but in practice it has its flaws. This person has a responsible role in ensuring that people are treated fairly and that any statement made is done voluntarily. It is questionable as to whether all the independent persons have the knowledge and assertiveness to carry out this role. Adults in Aboriginal communities are just as intimidated by white authority figures as children. The independent person is of little or no value while they lack training and understanding of the role.

Further, it must be remembered that English at these communities is a second language. Yet at police interviews, and at court, there is no guarantee people will understand exactly what is occurring. The Court process can be quite mystifying and
O'Connor & Sweetapple (1988) point out most young people are confused by the process. At Aurukun this confusion is heightened by the spoken word being in English and is not assisted by the process of "hand up statements" where no one other than the magistrate, prosecutor and the defence knows what is going on.

Naffine et al. (1990, p. 203) highlight the fact that many young people "admit the allegations made against them thereby waiving all those rights which accompany the contested hearing". The lack of knowledge, the powerlessness of the people and the language used in the process does not benefit those accused. At court the adversarial position is curtailed by confessional evidence given in front of an "independent person". It is only when time is taken by legal services such as Tharpuntoo that discrepancies between what the young person says and the police statements may become apparent.

If anything, there is an expectation that all young people will plead guilty, as evident when one young person pleaded not guilty to the majority of charges. The reaction of the public to this was that it was stalling the inevitable and that guilt would be established eventually. Although this was expressed outside of the court it could be suggested that it was also the feelings of most in court that day. The exception being the Defence and the Department. It is this atmosphere which is of most concern. It would appear that kids appearing in court are presumed guilty by the fact that they are there. The process is there to protect them but is it adequate? It is of concern that these young people do not get the same rights as others. In court, one sees that they have legal representation and the right of election is advised to them so the duty is done. Yet it is not difficult to be left with a perception that what is occurring is a game with little or no meaning to all the players as long as justice is seen to be done. Police and others say court is a joke to kids. If it is a joke to them then we are the ones who make it so. The kids have little power in the system so it is certainly not their problem. There is a need to recognise the importance of the court and ensure that all parties leave knowing they have been treated fairly and justly.

**Working Strategies**

This Department has sought to assist the people of Aurukun in two ways. One which directly addressed the offenders, and the other of developing structures which would assist with crime prevention and meet other needs of the community. This task is being undertaken by two divisions, Protective Services and Juvenile Justice, and Community Services Development working closely together. The approach by the divisions has focused upon community support and development and sought to take note of the report by the Aurukun Support Group (Dec. 1991, p. 1) which highlights the need for government workers to accept that "Aurukun people identify with family, clan, regional ceremonial and political associations and other natural groupings". Further to this, it seeks to take away the emphasis of control from outside and replace it with one of empowerment of clan and family members in order for them to meet the needs of the Aurukun people. The role of the Department is to facilitate this development and to provide support. This approach looks at the strengths that exist within the individual and the community and builds upon them. The strength of any people is their culture. It is culture which establishes Aboriginality or the values, beliefs and social patterns of behaviour and organisation. These need to be built on if we are to assist a fragile society.
Conclusion

The spate of offending that has occurred at Aurukun in 1991-92 may be interpreted as a statement by young people about their alienation from the older generation and their minimal life prospects.

Individual pathology rather than community quandary has become a focus with the children becoming victims twice over. Firstly, to the system of their community life and secondly to the judicial penal system (Smith 1992).

A response which only seeks to control offending behaviour by deterrence does not take in or seek to address the issues which underpin the offending behaviour.

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