



MEDIA RELEASE

‘Government response and comments are dangerous and ignore lessons of Stolen Generation’

The Making Justice Work (MJW) coalition today expresses extreme concerns about the comments made on 14 April 2015 by Chief Minister Giles and Minister Elferink regarding young people and their families in Alice Springs.

MJW members are outraged at comments such as ‘If parents don’t want to see their children in care then they need to get off the grog and head back to their home community’ by Minister Elferink. These comments are disturbing and disgraceful. They are clearly directed at Aboriginal people and are dangerously generalised, reinforcing negative and untrue stereotypes.

The Northern Territory Government’s response comes at a time when they have defunded a number of youth programs in Alice Springs in the last 3 years. These include vital after-hours programs that give young people something useful and meaningful to do.

“It is significant that there were no school holiday programs funded by the Northern Territory Government for the recent holiday period”, said MJW spokesperson, Antoinette Carroll.

Minister Elferink also conveniently failed to acknowledge that a number of the children who appeared in court this week in relation to the recent incidents were already in the care of the Department of Children and Families.

“The current child protection service is itself failing many children. Minister Elferink might point the finger at families – but what about looking at the quality of care the Department is providing?”, said MJW spokesperson, Christa Bartjen-Westermann.

MJW is extremely concerned that the Minister’s comments are harmful in that they are not in line with Northern Territory child protection legislation. If the Government ought to have learnt anything from the disgraceful legacy of the Stolen Generation, it is that removal must always be the option of last resort.

The *Bringing Them Home* Inquiry unequivocally found that the separation of children from their families has long term negative consequences:

- They are more likely to come to the attention of the police as they grow into adolescence
- They are more likely to suffer low self-esteem, depression and mental illness
- They are more vulnerable to physical, emotional and sexual abuse
- They had been almost always taught to reject their Aboriginality and Aboriginal culture
- They are unable to retain links with their land
- They cannot take a role in the cultural and spiritual life of their former communities
- They are unlikely to be able to establish their right to native title

“A more helpful and proactive response from the Chief Minister Giles and Minister Elferink would be to work more proactively with local youth agencies. The NGO sector in Central Australia has long identified the importance of funding an appropriately resourced *After Hours Youth Drop In Service* (AHYDIS). This AHYDIS initiative, amongst other cost effective initiatives have been outlined in the recommendations contained in the Alice Springs Better Strategies for Working with Young People document which was first developed in 2011 and was consistently promoted to the NTG for endorsement since” said Ms Antoinette Carroll.

MJW members also note that it was widely known that a large number of families would be in Alice Springs due to school holidays, the football carnival and other events. Transport services back to communities have been limited and there was a lack of coordinated planning.

“The Government needs to work with, and not against families and local services. Funding needs to urgently be provided to youth services in Alice Springs for youth activity and support programs, as well as transport services for key events”, said Ms Carroll.

For comment please contact:

Antoinette Carroll – 0406 722 567 or Christa Bartjen-Westermann – 0438 552 584