

COMMUNIQUE

3 August 2022

The Children and Families Tripartite Forum (the forum) held its third meeting of 2022 in Darwin. The forum was chaired by Acting Chair **Mr Rob McPhee**, who welcomed members and observers from the Northern Territory and Australian Governments, Northern Territory Council of Social Service (NTCOSS), North Australian Aboriginal Justice Agency (NAAJA) and Aboriginal Peak Organisations Northern Territory (APO NT).

The meeting began with a **Welcome to Country** from Larrakia woman Ms Nicole Brown who shared her own story about the importance of Country, connection to culture and Elders in her life.

The forum was joined in person by Northern Territory Government ministers the **Hon Lauren Moss MLA**, the **Hon Chansey Paech MLA** as well as the **Hon Kate Worden MLA** via teleconference. Australian Government ministers, the **Hon Linda Burney MP** and the **Hon Amanda Rishworth MP** sent their apologies.

Minister Moss started by reiterating her strong support for the Tripartite Forum and the Generational Strategy and has already impressed the importance of the work on her new Australian Government ministerial colleagues. She was also pleased to recently attend the opening of the Alice Springs Town Camps Child and Family Centre with Tangentyere Council and facilitate the extension of the youth voice project with NTCOSS.

Minister Paech advised that the process to raise the age of criminal responsibility to 12 years continues and he is hoping to introduce legislation later this year. He provided an overview of the extensive reform work that is underway including: reviewing therapeutic interventions to support the repeal of mandatory sentencing; in partnership with the Australian Government assessing Alice Springs as a potential Justice Reinvestment project site; exploring access to reform programs for those on remand; and working through a program of legislative changes. The forum discussed the need for a justice agreement specifically for youth and the Minister agreed to consider the idea; potentially linking it to the Aboriginal Justice Agreement.

Minister Worden provided an update on Domestic, Family, and Sexual Violence (DFSV). The Minister emphasised the importance of equitable funding for DFSV based on need and is hopeful to work with the new Australian Government minister. Youth justice in Alice Springs remains a priority for the Minister. The Department of Territory Families, Housing and Communities has temporarily relocated high level staff tasked with bringing together local stakeholders including from business, families and communities to review current activities and identify gaps. The community sector pressed the Minister on the use of spit hoods on young people by Police. She responded that Police had recently provided her a report with alternatives to spit hoods and that a decision will be considered by the NT Government by the end of the year.

The Independent Aboriginal Chair of the **Generational Strategy Steering Group**, Mr Rob McPhee, updated the forum on progress towards the first Generational Strategy action plan. He briefed the forum on the positive workshop held in July and highlighted that the steering group identified a key priority in implementing the Strategy was healing and improving cultural safety. He explained that the steering group would meet again in September to develop a theory of change. The forum noted the work of the steering group and welcomed a timeline for the delivery of the first action plan at the next forum meeting in November.

Ms Weston, Chief Executive of the NT Department of Education gave an overview of the special meeting held by members on the **Australian Early Development Census (AEDC)** data. Ms Weston said the meeting was productive and discussed policy levers to improve early childhood outcomes. . The discussion on improving outcomes in early childhood will continue at a future meeting.

Presentations were provided on **NT Remote Aboriginal Investment Agreement (NT RAI)** as well as progress on the implementation of the **National Agreement on Closing the Gap** in the NT. The forum noted the collaborative approach between the Australian Government, Northern Territory Government and APO NT to the process for development of advice to government on future funding options for consideration by the Australian Government. The forum noted that the Australian Government has provided \$3 million to APO NT over two years to support Indigenous Territorians to help guide future investments. The forum asked to be informed as it develops. They also discussed the alignment of the Closing the Gap priority reform areas with the work undertaken by the Tripartite Forum and its members, including the Generational Strategy. The forum resolved to consider its ongoing role in developing actions, and reporting and oversight of relevant Closing the Gap targets on child protection and youth justice.

The forum discussed the reporting of recommendations of the **Royal Commission into the Protection and Detention of Children in the Northern Territory** and agreed that the Community Sector would work with the Northern Territory Government to clarify key continuing priorities from the Royal Commission for discussion at the next forum meeting. The forum also agreed to discuss the implementation of family led decision in child protection at its next meeting.

Finally, the forum welcomed special guest **Anne Hollonds, National Children's Commissioner**, and Ms Jeanette Kerr from Territory Families, Housing and Communities for a **deep dive into youth justice**. Ms Kerr presented on the progress of the new Barkly Youth Justice Accommodation Facility, the design of the new detention facilities in Alice Springs and Darwin, professional development for youth justice staff and the new model of care for those in youth detention. Ms Hollonds highlighted the importance of culture change, through-care and family involvement. She commended the NT on its work so far, with regards to the design of the new youth detention facilities and development of a model of care and said that improving youth justice is national issue. The community sector members welcomed the changes to the model of care but pointed to the need to focus more on youth diversionary programs, to keep young people out of the system. The forum resolved to continue the conversation at a future meeting.

The next meeting of the forum will be on 1 November 2022 in Alice Springs