# Statement by Alliance for Aboriginal Youth in Mbantua

2 August 2024

**As a group of Aboriginal business owners, community leaders and support workers with direct daily experience in supporting Aboriginal children and young people in Mbantua we call for local Aboriginal organisations to be empowered to lead and facilitate fundamental change in the delivery of services and support for Aboriginal children ad young people in Mbantua/Alice Springs.**

**Hundreds of young people with capabilities, capacity and an innate wish for a better life are currently living in the Mbantua area without hope or agency to change their lives, because of the failures of the current approach to support them. Some have won attention through crime and / or anti-social behaviour, but many others wait, without expectation of changes required to allow them paths to a better future. This dark reality is a stain on the future of our community and the character of the nation.**

**We call on national leaders, journalists and public commentators to stop vilifying our youth and stop pretending that more arrests will solve this issue. We call for change in implementing support for Aboriginal children and young people in Mbantua so that we can achieve better outcomes, together.**

**We have seen goodness and potential in our young people, who too frequently are misbehaving or committing crimes as a direct result of hunger, homelessness, mental health, injustice, gaps in service provision and other issues. We don’t seek to excuse or justify crimes or misbehaviour, but see no prospect of change unless the underlying causes we see every day begin to be addressed.**

**We note there is extensive funding to coordinate the justice system, but little or no coordination of the more than 150 services provided government funding to support our young people. The very small number of local Aboriginal organisations involved in supporting our young people have formed the Alliance for Aboriginal Youth in Mbantua with community leaders, frontline workers in provision of youth services and ally organisations to provide new solutions and a vision for better service delivery and outcomes for young Aboriginal people in our community.**

**We call on political representatives and political candidates, Government departmental leaders, business and community leaders to consider the following solutions, which are based on centuries of collective experience in working with children and young people in Mbantua.**

**Solutions:**

**Coordination and Gaps** – while millions of dollars are spent each year attempting to support out young people, too much is lost to cars, executive salaries and administrative overhead costs – with the failure of the current approach clear to all. With millions being spent, we should not still have children and young people hungry, homeless and/or dressed in rags. But we do. We propose a series of meetings led by the Alliance to identify further opportunities for collaboration, efficiency and accountability. We want to see a channel to build awareness of key issues that have been known by frontline workers and community members for years but ignored in developing policies and solutions. We want to help and we want to be heard. It is up to Governments to demonstrate how they will respond – or whether they will continue to waste millions of dollars on failed interventions.

**More opportunities for young people to work** – there are limited opportunities to work, especially for young people involved in the justice system. Alliance members are going to apply for permission to accept young Aboriginal offenders into employment and / or training roles, expanding the range of diversion opportunities available, strengthening support in the transition from the justice system to the community. Diversion program funding should be made available to local Aboriginal organisations to expand placement opportunities.

**New Voice:** we have concerns about the lack of transparency in operation of local youth justice facilities; a lack of controls on the use of force including dogs to contain young people; alleged overcrowding in watchhouses; and a conflict of interest in Northern Territory Families controlling care and also incarceration of young people. We seek increased Aboriginal representation throughout the justice system, and greater transparency and collaboration between actors in the justice system and the Alliance.

**Justice collaboration:** we propose an event involving judges, lawyers and court officials, where Alliance members can present information on their activities and capabilities. We recognise the need for the courts to understand the services for diversion and rehabilitation available from local Indigenous businesses and community members.

**Role models:** we recognise the importance of role models in building esteem, hope and pathways to self-development and employment for our young people. We seek to connect young people and funding opportunities with existing programs which demonstrate the strengths and value of role models and mentors.

**Collaboration:** despite millions of dollars being spent on service providers in Mbantua alone, hundreds of young people are still without enough food, housing or essential services. We call for improved coordination and accountability, empowering local Aboriginal organisations to lead change. We call for a recognition that existing approaches are not working and changes must be made.

**Domestic Violence** – we recognise that domestic violence is anecdotally reported to be an increasing issue in the relationships of teenagers and young people, and this issue has been highlighted by the courts. We propose a training program to train Alliance members in how to deliver a culturally-relevant version of the Love Bites program.

**Money issues** – many young people have poor financial literacy and many do not know how to access financial support currently available to them, such as centrelink payments. We propose a training program to train Alliance members in how to deliver a culturally-relevant personal financial management program

**Education** – we propose new approaches to engagement in education based on further work with young people and Aboriginal-led pilot programs, which could include night school options and piloting a larger pool of Aboriginal tutors. We need resourcing to implement new pilots based on insights from young people.

**More information:**

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