



NPY Women's Council submission re: home learning and teaching during COVID-19

Extension of the Parliamentary Inquiry into the education of students in remote and complex environments

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As a provider of boarding school support, we are taking this opportunity to provide feedback and recommendations about the challenges faced by boarding school students and their families affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

It is our intention to highlight key areas that relate specifically to the experience of young people engaged in the NPY Women's Council (NPYWC) Boarding School Project and their experiences upon returning to their home in remote Aboriginal communities across the NPY region of central Australia, during the COVID 19 pandemic.

This information gathered is from the experience of NPYWC staff, students and their families from across the tristate cross border region of South Australia, Western Australia and the Northern Territory to the House of Representatives Inquiry into Education in Remote and Complex Environments for consideration.

Criteria as per media release dated 14 May 2020

The performance and monitoring of those in home schooling to maintain national minimum standards

Currently there are 10 boarding school students enrolled in the NPYWC boarding school program. They all returned to their remote community residence as COVID-19 restrictions were coming into effect in March 2020. Of these 10, only one student that returned home has access to Wi-Fi in their home. All of the remote communities that these young people live in have mobile reception, however not all the communities in the NPY lands do. None of the students has home computers or access to a laptop in their homes. One school sent laptop computers and dongles for their students. The boarding school posted the equipment, which went from Cairns in Queensland, to Amata Community APY Lands in South Australia. It took five weeks to arrive. Most of the work provided for boarding school students was printed and posted in the mail. These work packs took weeks to arrive as well, with some not arriving at all. Thus significantly delaying students work progress.

During this time, NPYWC boarding school students had no access to computers or printers at home and questionable access to quiet spaces for study. For example, one family had an additional five young people in their home due to the pandemic and boarder closures. This household maintained 10 people already, so the additional five meant a quiet study space would near impossible to find within the household. In addition to these challenges, many households in the NPY region operate on power cards. This is a type of credit system where you put money on a power card to get electricity. If this runs out

(which it often does) then students cannot power their computers and access the electronic resources they need to do their work.

NPYWC staff spent a considerable amount of time for all 10 students locating places where our boarding school students could do their schoolwork. Social distancing rules made it difficult to find adequate spaces. It was also difficult to find ensure supervision for these students both in the home and in alternative venues. In most cases communities' schools were willing to support boarding school clients, but not in all cases.

With home schooling underway, the expectation falls to parents and caregivers to provide support for work packs to be completed by students. In almost all of the student's situations, this would have been as English is not the first language spoken at home. English is often the second, third or fourth language within that family unit and community. It is likely that parents/care givers, with English as a second language, would not have comprehension skills to interpret instructions with students.

The need for third party support such as that provided by NPYWC is significant. Our program notes that students who remain longer term in our program do so not because they are not achieving at school but because the students and families need the additional support of NPYWC to navigate the relevant systems and bureaucracy. Home schooling is a significant challenge at the best of times for many families who have access to great resources and is provided in their first language; therefore, it is safe to conclude that home schooling would be an even greater challenge for the families that access our program.

Challenges faced by regional schooling providers and initiatives in place:

NPY WC approached all local schools to determine if they could support boarding school students with mixed results. NPYWC spoke with Principals of these schools and depending on the principal, the space available and the resources available we came back with inconsistent results. Two schools within the same region, under the same direction by their state education department offered completely different help and support to boarding students. It was not clear to us why this was the case, one school was happy to assist without question and one was unwilling.

If boarding school students were to be taken in by local schools, we need to acknowledge that delivering the curriculum set by the boarding school would require separate classroom space and a teacher/supervisor to be across this different work. Remote community schools are often under resourced and during the pandemic most were under staffed. It would be unfair to expect the local school to be able to support boarding school students with their own curriculum without extra resources.

Across the tristate region, there was not a consistent approach to teachers remaining in the communities over the holidays to resume schooling on time. Plans for teachers to quarantine and resume schooling were all different. This meant that not all local schools were an accessible resource straightaway, again delaying schooling for students during this time.

Below you will find two case studies. These case studies highlight collaborative work between the boarding school, NPYWC, the local schools and the student's families.

Case Study # 1

Region: APY lands

Boarding school student: Emily 18yrs old

Background: Boarding school student Emily was sent home to her community at the end of Term 1 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Emily had been supported to go to boarding school through the Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (NPY) Women's Council Boarding School Project. Emily is in Year 12. The boarding school Project Officer was maintaining contact to assist with the ongoing education of Emily whilst at home. She attends a boarding school that is across state borders.

Situation: Once Emily was home in community her boarding school engaged with NPY Women's Council to see what support each of them could give during the pandemic. The boarding school had sent Emily home with a hardcopy work pack to complete. The project officer (PO) and the boarding school worked together to determine the level of support she required. The school recognised that the need for technology and access to internet would assist greatly in the ongoing learning. The school organised a laptop for Emily. This was posted (from QLD to SA) and took 6 weeks to arrive.

During this time, the PO was working with the NPY Women's Council Youth Worker in community to check in on Emily. Emily had been completing her work from home. The PO spoke with the local school about what support they could provide Emily, the school offered for Emily to do her work with the senior class. The school was very encouraging and happy to assist in any way. After speaking with Emily the PO and Emily decided that it worked for Emily to keep studying from home. She was happiest doing this and her home space was conducive for study. For extra support the youth worker in community set up a once a week time for Emily to do some work with them at the youth office. Emily had been able to use the laptop and dongle provided by the school to keep doing her Year 12 work. She was especially enjoying watching the hospitality videos online.

Conclusion: This collaborative process between the schools and Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Women's Council proved to bring great success in the learning outcome for Emily. With the quick actions of the boarding school providing a laptop, the wraparound third party support network, and a supportive home environment for this student we saw positive results. Aided by Emily who is a self-motivated learner.

Case Study # 2

Region: Northern Territory

Boarding school students: Sally, Julia and Dorothy

Background: Sally, Julia and Dorothy were all sent home from boarding school due to the COVID-19 pandemic. They are all in Year 11. All three students have been supported to go to boarding school through the Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (NPY) Women's Council Boarding School Project. The boarding school Project Officer (PO) was maintaining contact to assist the ongoing education of Sally, Julia and Dorothy whilst at home. They all attend a boarding school that is across state borders.

Situation: Sally, Julia and Dorothy were sent home from boarding school with work pack for them to complete. Once all three students were back in community, the PO, working with the boarding school, contacted the local school to see if they would support the students to do their set work. The local school was supportive and worked with the PO and the boarding school to set this up. The teachers were aware that the three students were going to attend the local school and supported them to get on the school bus in the mornings. The school had said the three boarding students could use their computer lab to access their schoolwork and that a teacher would be able to assist them.

Conclusion: This cross collaboration gave way to the support necessary to keep the three students engaged in their schoolwork whilst away from boarding. It was a testament to all parties wanting the same outcome, which is getting young people to school. What also became apparent was that the third party input from NPY Women's Council was incredibly helpful in bridging the gap between the two schools across state and territory borders, and from city to remote setting. This helped to bring understanding to each school about the needs of the students.

Recommendations

Support Indigenous Education and Boarding Australia to develop national boarding standards ensuring accountability for rural and remote student's quality of care and education.

As part of these standards, the following is to be considered:

- Boarding schools to have better contingency planning for their students to increase accessibility to schoolwork and technology in remote and rural areas.
- Consistent approach from boarding schools to supporting rural and remote students if faced with this situation again.
- Partnership with the local school in the remote community where the student is from, to ensure timely and adequate resourcing is in place as part of the contingency planning and students' progress.
- Review the adequacy of the system regarding implementation of temporary transfers of student enrolments between schools across the state / territory borders if required.