

### CONTEXT

Central Australia spans more than 2 million sq kilometers. In the region there are over 50 remote settlements of the Pintubi, Luritja, Warlpiri, Pitjantjatjara, Ngaanyatjarra, Yankunytjatjara, Anmatjere, Altyawarre, Arrernte and other peoples. The settlements are small townships with some basic services and populations of up to 1000 people. In 2005 it was estimated that there were around 612 (2) people sniffing at various levels in the region and the cost of this in terms of factors like impact on the justice and health systems was estimated at (AU)\$75 million per annum. Substances sniffed were mainly petrol, paint and glue.

The Central Australian Youth Link Up Service (CAYLUS) is an Alice Springs based service which works with communities and services to decrease levels of alcohol and drug abuse among young people. In this work we have been integrally involved in the implementation of a variety of VSM Interventions.

### SUBSTITUTION OF STANDARD GASOLINE WITH LOW AROMATIC 'OPAL' FUEL

**Background:** Since 2006, a Low Aromatic Fuel which is commonly known as Opal has been widely available in communities and roadhouses across the Central Australian Region. The Australian Government supports its use through subsidy and promotion program which aims to comprehensively replace standard unleaded with the fuel in the region.

**Results:** A sustained 95% drop in levels of petrol sniffing in the region d'Abbs and Shaw(1). Based on data generated by Access Economics (2), this will have led to a (AU)\$53-73 million benefit to the community in terms of health system and other savings.



**Issues:** The roll out of the fuel is not comprehensive as some retailers refuse to stock it. d'Abbs and Shaw (1) found that the further standard unleaded fuel is away from a community the greater the reduction in prevalence of sniffing. Following calls from Community agencies and a Senate Inquiry (3) examining the issues, the Commonwealth Government is currently examining creating legislation to force retailers to make the fuel available.

Premium (high octane) Unleaded is still necessary for some vehicles particularly in regional centres and highways. This fuel is intoxicating if sniffed, in a few sites there have been instances of the fuel being sniffed.

The lack of appropriate complimentary measures on the ground such as diversionary and treatment initiatives to engage the youth who had been sniffing. A recent evaluation of the Impact of Opal Fuel (1) and Senate Inquiry (3) have called for a renewed focus from government on developing such measures.

Low Aromatic Fuel is still dangerous if inhaled, a young man in one community asphyxiated whilst trying to get high off the fuel in 2005. Levels of sniffing-related death in the region are far lower though as result of the use of Low Aromatic fuel.

### YOUTH AND DIVERSIONARY PROGRAMS

**Background:** There have been a variety of attempts both locally and regionally to provide activity and diversionary programs to engage youth and children in positive alternatives to sniffing and other high risk behaviors. Youth workers in some communities work with local teams to run a regular program of activities as well as providing limited case management and referral support and acting as a point of coordination for visiting youth services.

**Results:** Youth development and activities, programs based in remote communities have been associated with reduced levels of substance misuse, improved child health and nutrition and better school attendance (4). They are also an effective demand reduction intervention for alcohol, marijuana and other substances. Youth workers have provided a crucial point of response to emerging issues affecting youth wellbeing in remote communities

**Issues:** Successful Community development based youth work requires long term commitment and proper resourcing in order to succeed. Such programs don't provide the short term, high profile gains that are often being sought by government in order to justify the continuations of programs. Youth development work can take on a range of forms depending on the ideas, aspirations and opportunities in particular locations. This sort of work and its outcomes are gradual, meaningful results often only emerge in the context established and long term relationships. These factors coupled with the lack of an adequate physical and administrative infrastructure in the region have meant that these services have not been made available in most communities to compliment the roll out of Low Aromatic fuel. Rather, there has been a reliance on visiting short term services at the cost of community ownership and appropriateness. A recent study examining the results of a government scheme to roll out Low Aromatic Fuel along with youth services found that despite significant funding to do so there had been no coordination between the roll out of Opal Fuel and youth programs (1).

### VSM LEGISLATION

**Background:** In 2005 the Northern Territory Government implemented targeted VSM Legislation (5), the legislation;

- Granted police and other authorised persons the power to search and seize volatile substances and to compel the user to care of family or to a dedicated "safe place".
- Gave communities the ability to declare "management plans" to regulate the management and availability of volatile substances.
- Created a mechanism whereby users could be compelled to participate in a treatment program for up to two months.
- Increased penalties for supply of volatile substances and provided a mechanism for informants identities to be concealed.



**Results:** There has been a greater reduction in VSM prevalence in the zones affected by this legislation than in zones without this legislation (1). A number of communities have implemented management areas and the mandated treatment component has been used actively and has provided an effective mechanism to interrupt sniffing outbreaks (3).

**Issues:** There are few treatment programs willing and able to take mandated clients. A majority of placements under the legislation are now directed to one poorly resourced facility.

### OUTSTATION (COMMUNITY) REHAB PROJECTS

**Background:** At the remote outstations of Ilpurla and Mt Theo local families take volatile substance users into their care and offer an informal treatment/ rehab program. Mt Theo has run for 14 years and Barry Abbott at Ilpurla has done this for more than 30 years. The remote location of both programs means that clients cannot easily leave the facilities, frontline staff on both programs are Aboriginal people who speak local languages and hold cultural authority. These are the only services like this in the region, they take referrals not only for VSM but also take clients on court orders and through informal family referrals. In particular the services are able to take young violent men and clients on mandated treatment orders.

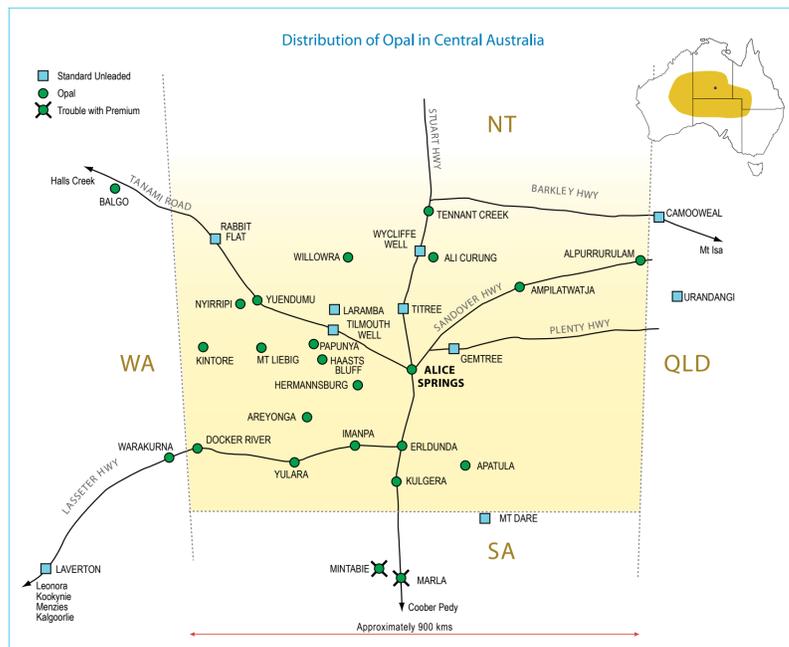
**Results:** Anecdotal accounts indicate these services are crucial not only in providing treatment to individuals but also providing families and communities with a way to take action when young people are sniffing heavily. The Mt Theo outstation and the associated youth program at Yuendumu led to cessation of sniffing in the community (6). Drug and Alcohol Services in the region identify the services of these outstations as being the only feasible option for many high needs clients (3).

**Issues:** The services provided by the outstations do not easily slot in to any main model for drug and alcohol treatment. This has been an obstacle to attracting and meeting the requirements of government funding, particularly for Ilpurla. Concerns around duty of care and reporting requirements have led to some government agencies refusing to refer to the services. The death of a young man at Ilpurla led to a coronial inquiry which made a raft of recommendations, some of which are yet to be implemented.

### SUBSTITUTION OF REDUCED TOXICITY SPRAY PAINT PRODUCTS FOR AROMATIC SPRAY PAINTS

**Background:** In 2006 CAYLUS supported retailers in switching to the Low Toxicity versions of selected spray paint products. These products are being produced to improve the safety and environmental impact of these sprays. They have lower amounts of Xylene, Toluene and other Hydrocarbons which means they are less intoxicating when sniffed.

**Results:** Christina Marel (7) found that the introduction of Low Toxicity Sprays led to a large drop in "suspicious sales" of spray paint as identified by retailers in Alice Springs as well as large drop in overall sales. Anecdotal accounts from youth and drug and alcohol workers in the region suggest a substantial drop in levels of spray paint sniffing due to the measure.



References

1. d'Abbs, P and Shaw, G 2008 'Executive Summary of the Evaluation of the Impact of Opal Fuel' for the Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing, Canberra, Australia
2. Access Economics 2006 'Opal Cost Benefit Analysis' for the Opal Alliance Alice Springs, Northern Territory Australia
3. Senate Community Affairs Committee 2009 'Grasping the Opportunity of Opal: Assessing the Impact of the Petrol Sniffing Strategy' Australian Government Canberra
4. Fietz, P 2005 'A Good Practice Model for Youth Program Development in Southern Central Australia' Alice Springs NT
5. The Northern Territory Volatile Substance Misuse Prevention Act 2005, Northern Territory Government, Darwin, Australia
6. Preuss, K 2006 'Stopping Petrol Sniffing in Remote Aboriginal Australia: Key Elements of the Mt Theo Program'. Drug and Alcohol Review Volume 25 (3) May 2006
7. Marel, C 2008 'Substituting Reduced Toxicity Spray Paints for Aromatic Spray Paints and the Effects on Suspicious Sales' Unpublished UNSW Sydney Australia