

three spheres of action



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The Cape York Institute for Policy and Leadership is a public policy organisation formed in partnership between the people of Cape York, Griffith University, and Federal and Queensland Governments. The Institute receives core funding from the Commonwealth Department of Education, Science, and Training and Education Queensland. The views expressed in this paper are intended to further the discussion about the challenges facing Indigenous peoples of Cape York, and possible solutions. The views expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the views of Griffith University or the Institute's funding agencies.



THREE SPHERES OF ACTION

From the very beginning of our partnerships enterprise in Cape York Peninsula we have been concerned with the way in which ‘community’ dominated questions of governance, and ‘families and individuals’ were suppressed under the proto-communist concept of community to which governments were committed and through which they organised all action.

The second of ‘Four Strategies’¹ which the Cape York Partnerships office identified as critical to tackling ‘passive welfare’ was:

Devolution of Responsibility and Resource to Families

We have sought to reverse the focus on communities and bring families and individuals into priority focus, which we have attempted to capture in the following nostrum: *Strong Families Therefore Strong Communities*. Indeed we argued that the longstanding focus on community had resulted in a dysfunctional opposition (and abrasion) between family and community in indigenous society.²

Community was (and to this very day, still is!) the preferred conduit for government inputs and ‘service delivery’ to indigenous peoples. Little notice has been taken by government of our arguments about the problems of the predominant policy focus on communities.

Despite this, Cape York Partnerships developed the Family Income Management (FIM) program, as one practical means of developing responsibility on the part of individuals and families to take action to improve their lives. What more basic a starting point for action than to manage money? As well as providing means for individuals and families to budget and manage their income, FIM now provides a new ‘third way’ mechanism for resource transfer from government to indigenous people – through families and through matching account incentive programs. The possibilities for constructing reciprocity incentive programs utilising FIM, are endless. Matching account incentive programs have the following advantages over traditional grant-making to community organisations:

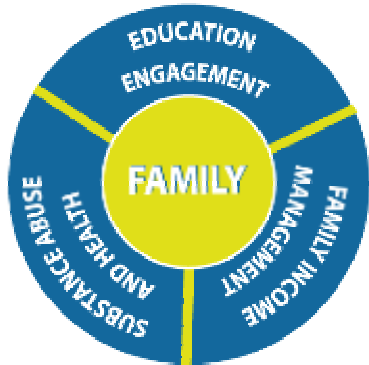
- They provide resources directly to individuals or families on the ground
- They provide direct incentives to individuals or families to do good things
- They can be done on the basis of mutual obligation or reciprocity rather than passive welfare handout

¹ *Four Strategies for Moving Beyond Passive Welfare in Cape York Peninsula*, Ideas Paper, Noel Pearson, 2001, unpublished

² *Strong Families then Strong Communities*, paper prepared for the Roundtable convened by Senator Jocelyn Newman, Old Parliament House, Canberra, 24 October 2000, see www.capeyorkpartnerships.com

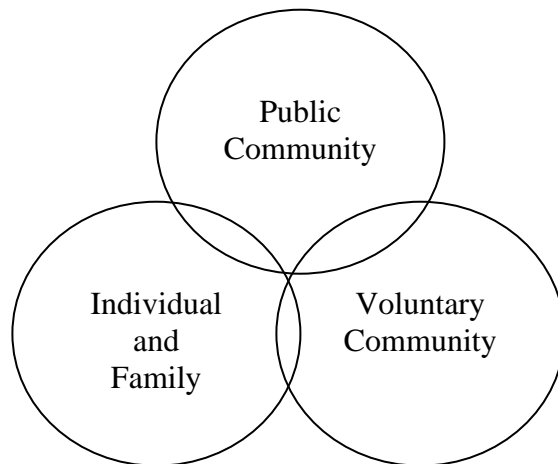
- Resource provisioning is not a political decision and depends on the recipient putting aside matching funds of their own, rather than convincing someone to make a political decision

There are other programs which the Cape York Partnerships office has developed under its Family Development Model dealing with educational engagement and engagement in health and substance abuse. These programs are family-focused and give expression to their agenda of devolving responsibility and resources to families – and seeing individuals and families as the building blocks of strong and successful communities. The model is represented as follows:



1. Income management
2. Substance abuse and Health
3. Educational engagement

The purpose of this note is to focus on the third sphere of action: that of the community voluntary sphere. Where people make contributions to their people and community, beyond themselves and their own families, without expectation of being paid.



For those conceiving and organising ‘projects’ and ‘programs’ in the Cape – it is worth being clear what sphere of action the project or program is aimed at. I would suggest the principles and the considerations differ (and the appropriate players differ) according to what sphere of action you are trying to precipitate action in.

In May 2002 I wrote a note setting out the concept of a ‘People Action Network’ (“*Ask not what your people can do for you, but what you can do for your people*”) which I

circulated to colleagues across our organisations. The PAN concept was greeted with a resounding silence, and it has remained just an idea posted at www.capeyorkpartnerships.com. However I am not resigned to allowing the concept to pass away, and I am writing now to revive consideration of it.

I believe that matching accounts, connected to FIM, can precipitate the growth of community voluntary action. One way of precipitating action could include the establishment of a PAN Matching Fund – through the Community Negotiation Tables process – which can provide incentives for voluntary groups and voluntary ‘social capital’ building activities in communities.

I propose that interested organisations and people work with us at the Institute to develop a plan for actioning PAN trials in the Cape.

Noel Pearson
29 June 2004