BETTER SUPPORT FOR BOARDING STUDENTS FOCUS GROUP MEETING NOTES

In 2018 Boarding Australia, now Indigenous Education & Boarding Australia, hosted a national series of focus group meetings to seek examples of ways to support Indigenous Boarding students.

Facilitated by Dr Steve Florisson, theses meeting notes are a summary of self-reported practices by the participating schools, residences and organisations that support boarding students in three stages of their boarding journey – Pre-boarding, In Boarding and Post Boarding.

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Boarding Transition Stage 1: Pre-boarding stage (readiness, visits and orientation)

➢ Aquinas College

- Aquinas College is collecting data to track and monitor students' experience of Year 7 transition.
- The Aquinas College pre-transition program includes online surveys and a focus group discussion. The Aquinas transition program commences 6 months prior to Year 7 enrolment and there are three data collecting points – two have already been done, 170 online surveys are due. Data can be disaggregated by place and Indigeneity.
- Results are indicating students place higher value on social matters, while the school's focus is more on procedure. The program's online forum allows the student to connect in the six months prior to boarding.

  David Mander

➤ Future Footprints

- The Future Footprints program students have a Facebook group pre-boarding and there is a lot of family contact. At present the Future Footprints program is not collecting program data.

- There is an orientation camp in Term 4 once Year 12 students have vacated the facility. The year 6 students can stay in the boarding facility in the accommodation vacated by the Year 12 students. New students get a buddy and familiarise themselves with the new routine and facilities/environment. Then the family has the Christmas holidays to have discussions about the boarding experience.

- Future Footprints also hold year 5 preparation sessions, working with 8 schools including Aboriginal schools and Independent schools

- ABSTUDY covers the costs for students, as well as parents, as long as the visit is claimed as part of a program for new students (e.g. selection process)

- Parents are encouraged to drop in whenever they are in town.

- A lot of schools run immersion programs to visit students' home communities during the holiday period.

  Lisa Newhouse

➤ Mount St. Bernard

- Many prospective secondary students from this school attend a camp one week before Term 1, to have a bonding opportunity with new people and places. This camp has made a difference with preparation and retention of students.

  Brenton Toy

➤ Darwin

Transition programming is based on the Victorian [respectful relationships/social] curriculum and the work of Professor Helen Cahill (University of Melbourne). Year 6 students in Term 4 are brought into Darwin to have an experience of boarding school. Potential secondary students are invited to participate in workshops over the 9-10 months prior to year 7. The workshops were designed using the guiding principles developed by Professor Helen Cahill at University of Melbourne. The workshops focus on: self-awareness, social awareness, self-management, responsible decision making, and relationship skills.

- If there is a large cohort in a school going into boarding settings, the TSU does one workshop at the school and leaves workbooks for the school to continue with.

- 15 students who completed a trial camp are easy to track. All 15 who completed the camp are still engaged in boarding. Not big numbers but very promising. The program consists of one week at school with parents, then a camp without parents. TSU staff are involved the whole time.

- This program has been built 'on the go', based on Professor Cahill's/University of Melbourne, paper on what works for communities, systems, schools etc; There have been no dedicated curriculum designers, but happy to share.

- Very important for boarding schools to have a presence in remote communities. The schools' visits to the children's home communities are well received and appreciated by families. Partner and origin community relationships are important.

Brenton Toy

➢ Broome Residential College

- Important to develop solid relationships with remote primary schools and start early with younger siblings.

- All remote schools come into camp. They spend a day at Broome residential college. The Residence at Broome holds a camp, in which wider family members including siblings are invited to participate. Children can be one or two years prior to secondary school. Staff members build relationships with family members over morning tea /dinner and younger siblings can experience their potential future learning environment. The college schedules a camp with all remote primary schools, 1 or 2 years prior to enrolment.

- At Week 8 of term three, educational and wellbeing screening sessions and a dinner with boys is held.

- Transition project in partnership with Groote Eylandt – bringing year 6 students to Cairns for 8 weeks, the teachers and community mentors also visit the island. The result of the project will be available next year.

Kristine Van

➢ AFL Cape York House

- This is the first year that Cape York has conducted an induction/orientation program in Week 9 involving Years 7 and 8. All education and wellbeing screening is done. The main focus of the Induction program is lots of fun. There is a dinner.

- Just back from Induction/Orientation visits in the Torres Strait. Groote Eylandt Year 6 students, six weeks with parents in school, includes 2 weeks in school to finish Year 6. Six weeks with parents and in school of origin for 2 weeks home. Two weeks in school to finish Year 6. Groote Eylandt has a 19% attendance rate and English is the fifth or sixth language.

- Staff work with principals to obtain information about students instead of repeatedly asking parents for lots of information.

Kristine Van

➢ Administration/ABSTUDY application process

- The TSU (NT) have been developing a transition plan for each student in Year 6, building the student's profile during the year before the enrolment. They work with family and community to identify three or four preferred school options. The TSU starts the enrolment process well before school commencement. Numerous issues emerge during this process such as lack of birth certificates or getting into contact with who in the extended family is receiving FTB for a student.

- To help families get ABSTUDY as soon as possible, TSU lets families know when the DHS Remote Servicing Team (RST) will be arriving in their community. This is doable because DHS RST provides the schedule of their remote community visits 8 weeks in advance. The RST gets to sit down with families to work through DHS issues, including ABSTUDY. DHS visits to communities cost less than TSU visits.

- TSU meets with DHS RST every second Tuesday.

- TSU has found that ABSTUDY applications via phone work the best. Three-way calls with DHS, TSU and the family expedite this very well.

- Transition Support Unit also uses a direct DHS phone number, which allows for three-way phone conversation with families to sort out application issues.

- Community members do not like waiting on the phone for extended periods, so the TSU does it for them. It can take 30 minutes or so on hold before a call is answered.

- It is also important to ask families to provide access permission in their applications. TSU gets families to prepare, sign and post-date the PPEs – forms that allow information to be shared.
- Schools use the third-party numbers very effectively. TSU encourages schools to add PPEs in applications.

Brenton Toy

➢ Parent readiness

- The working group agreed that parent and guardian's readiness is an important aspect of successful transitions and experience of boarding for students.
- Different strategies were discussed such as:
    - ❖ Information package to parents on:
        - ▪ What to prepare
        - ▪ What to do when certain things happen
        - ▪ How to apply for and other information about ABSTUDY, such as funds for travelling
        - ▪ What to prepare for the travel, and
        - ▪ What to do when a child needs to change schools.
- Ad-hoc one-on-one phone conversations are also part of best practice support to parents.

➢ Research

- There is a gap in research about how parents can support their children and parents' self-care, important aspect of successful boarding experiences. Parents often suffer from the sense of loss/guilt and grief about sending their children away to board. It is very challenging to parent from a distance and deal with new and difficult institutions.
    - ❖ Information about how parents can access support is important.
    - ❖ Asking for help is another important message to parents.

David Mander

Boarding Transition Stage 2: In Boarding

Orientation

➢ Wiltja Anangu Secondary College, South Australia

- ***Welcome to Wiltja weekends,*** held the weekend before school starts, are for *every* student – whether arriving for the first time or returning. The focus is to develop relationships between returning students and new students. This is part of strategically 'melding' the student cohort each term.

- ***Student-created welcome/orientation films*** are for all students commencing or returning. Student-made films are far more effective than films made by staff.

- Each new student is assigned a ***mentor*** from senior students of at least two years standing.

- ***Health screening*** for all returning and arriving students through an Indigenous health organisation

- ***Room allocation*** is planned carefully *before* students arrive, considering the mix of students' communities of origin, social skills and other matters.

- ***Case management.*** Each student has a case manager. Prior to term start, staff members are allocated a group of students to case manage. They meet with students individually, create individual student plans, and report student progress to leadership on a three-weekly basis via documentation. This continues over the first ~~for~~ 100 days and beyond. The case management process is different for pre-existing students and new students.

- ***Establishing a stable student cohort.*** Wiltja policy is not to have a large influx of new students at the start of any one term, so intake is limited to no more than eight students at a time. At the start of Year 7, particularly when students are young, they may be brought in as late as Week 3, once the rest of the student cohort is well established.

  Anthony Bennet

➢ St John's Catholic College, Northern Territory

- ***School ethos and identity. T***he most important thing is for students to feel welcome and expected at the school. The school looks for a balance between building the boarding house identity and the broader identity of the school, for example the boarding house has its own polo shirt which is worn in public.

- *St John's boot camp* is held two days before the weekend before school starts. A four-day camp seems to be optimum. More than four days, cliques can develop within the boarding house which may make it difficult to transition students into the rhythm of the school.

- *Routines around school and boarding* are established as quickly as possible. This includes shopping for toiletries and having the right uniforms, so that students fit in well with the broader school community.

- *Mentors* help new students get accustomed to boarding life. Strategic choices about where and with whom students get placed are important. Now that St John's student cohort has stabilised, it has been easier to find appropriate mentors.

- *Smoking and Welcome to Country* was originally only for the Indigenous boarding students, but it has now become accepted as an event for the entire college. This is a case of the boarding house coming into the rest of the school. This has improved the graduaal understanding of the day students and helps all students feel they are part of something special. The aim is to hit the 'sweet spot' where the boarding community is seen as part of the wider college community.

Lindsay Luck

Arrangements for escorts and travel

➢ St John's Catholic College, Northern Territory

- It is important to have an immediate connection and begin relationships from the airport, so St John's tries to have boarding staff, along with a student for all airport pickups.

- **Family/parents** escorting students to St John's is *very* rare. If they do come, they stay onsite to reduce the inconvenience when offsite accommodation needs to be changed or cancelled.

Lindsay Luck

➢ Wiltja Anangu Secondary College, South Australia

- **Separation from escorts.** Parents/grandparents/family escort only very rarely. ~~but~~ Experience has shown that half of all new students escorted to Wiltja by family will choose to go back home with the escorts.

- **Off campus accommodation for parents/grandparents** is a deliberate strategy to reduce the likelihood of students going home with the escort. Escorts are able to come to campus and visit classrooms, have dinner, but not stay.

- **Escort support or 'escort induction'**. Who the escort is, is very important. Escorts need to be well informed and well prepared. Wiltja communicates with escorts ahead of time about their role and what the issues might be. Once the student and escort arrive, Wiltja has separate meetings with the escort and then student.

- Legal/duty of care responsibilities prevents family escorts staying on site. The South Australian Government does not allow escorts to stay on site without a police/national criminal history check. Wiltja assists with finding **off site accommodation for escorts**.

Anthony Bennett

- **Complicated travel necessitates escorts**. Because it may take several stops over thousands of kilometres to get to a destination like AFL Cape York House in Queensland, there may be a mandatory requirement – or at least a request – that students are accompanied, particularly for first time travel. Usually this will be a family escort. ABSTUDY can assist with the fare and one day's accommodation for escorts.

- **Separation from escorts**. There is agreement in the boarding sector that engagement with close family members helps build relationship with schools. However, despite the important benefits of family escorts, sometimes young students are distressed when their escorts leave. There needs to be a way of having family escorts so that it doesn't impact on students' staying.

Richard Stewart

- **Difficulties for students adjusting** often depends on the student's family circumstances. We know that it is harder for students travelling from the desert, Central Australia, Santa Theresa. Students from Northern Australia and the Kimberley seem to have had more experience with long distance travel, including air travel.

Richard Stokes

➢ Aquinas College

- It is not common for parents to escort their children to boarding at Aquinas.

- Generally, Aquinas doesn't have issues of students returning home early with family escorts because parents and students are very motivated to be at the school.

- Sometimes we have the situation of students put on a plane in Broome without an escort and then picked up by someone that they don't know.

- Our issue is **getting parents to visit the school.** The very 'white male' elite environment at Aquinas College can be intimidating for some parents. Aquinas has staff who work with the parents and 'meet them where they are'.

David Mander

Boarding Transition Stage 3: Post-boarding (issues and support practices)

➢ Future Footprints

Immediately after students leave boarding there are two major issues:

1. A student's ABSTUDY payments will continue until 31 December to the boarding school/provider, and students are not entitled to new ABSTUDY until 1 January of the next year. This leaves students without funds to organise accommodation immediately after school finishes in December, so many go home.

2. If there isn't a secure plan for students in terms of what they are going to do or where they are going to live after Year 12, they are less likely to come back for traineeships, university, TAFE or other further study or employment. If students don't have the security of a post-school plan, they often flounder back at home and it is hard work to get them back into anything from there.

Future Footprints works with Career Trackers, an organisation that can place students in five-week cadetships or internships to be completed in the summer break, before they even start university, training or study. This creates a reason to come back to Perth for as well.

➢ Relationship building and student tracking for the long term

Future Footprints started with 70 students 14 years ago. In 2018, Future Footprints is supporting 361 students in school and unofficially supporting 480 Year 12 alumni through Facebook mainly, or when they come to Perth, or if I am travelling.

The key is maintaining sustained positive relationships – with the students and the providers. When students have not come back after holidays, we seek them out. Most can be reached on Facebook and we ask them what is going on. If they are in driving distance, I go and see them.

I know where all the Future Footprints students are, including where they go when they leave school. For example, I have one student who is a head chef in Melbourne, and even has his face on the side of a tram in Melbourne. Students stay in touch and this has already started to have positive intergenerational effects. I recently had a boy come in for an interview, accompanied by an uncle who had been one of our first students. The uncle hugged me and was very happy to assure his nephew that he would be in good hands.

We have been lucky to have good connections with 17 schools which helps us to find the right school for each student. If a school doesn't have the resources or programs to take on a particular student, then they normally don't, because it can do more harm than good by setting up the student to fail. This is why working with 17 schools with 17 different educational cultures allows families a choice of schools. For example, there are schools that don't have an academic program that can support students who have a very large educational gap in their schooling.

➢ Lack of secure funding

While ~~the~~ sustained relationships and tracking over time are critical, there is little or no funding for this. Annual Future Footprints funding through PM&C is about $200,000, but this doesn't cover the whole Future Footprints program. In Future Footprints, we do relationship building off our own bat.

Government doesn't always see the need for long term funding, usually only funding for twelve months at a time. Long term funding is needed ~~to~~ for proper change.

➢ The boarding family

Another thing that works well in WA is that students are together for so long, they create 'a family' and transition out of school as family. Having been and continuing to be together is protective; it takes away the fear of transitioning out of school/boarding and onto the next stage.

Future Footprints supports children from Year 7 through to university and into different accommodation services post-Year 12.   By the time they reach Year 12, they know exactly how these places work and because they are part of the 'boarding family', they will always know others who are or have been through the system. This will be of particular benefit in the unlikely event that a student is going into accommodation or a study setting as the only one in their year.

Lisa Fieldhouse

➢ Lack of information about students who drop out

In terms of post-boarding, we need a better understanding of the number of students who are vulnerable and unaccounted for. There are students who don't complete school and may return home during the course of the year or at the end of the year unenrolled for further study. This is of particular concern in relation to the number of well-funded scholarship providers who fail to account for these students after they leave a school/boarding provider. These students effectively become invisible. We don't know if they have re-engaged with education, or why they dropped out.

➢ Factors that may contribute to student drop out

When students drop out in Victoria we have no information as to why, whether it is about them, or if it is due to issues that may be in the school's power to control. Often, we assume that the reasons a child has been expelled or dropped out is to do with the child – they may not be academically capable or there is trauma in their life – but we often don't look at the culture of the school, such as social class, racism, teacher competence or curriculum.

In the affluent boarding schools, we know that social class is as important as Indigeneity. Students from remote communities may be in an environment that is completely foreign to them and they need somebody there to ensure that they have what they need to fit in. Some schools do a lot of work around this and some do none. Where nothing has been done to assist a child fit in to these very different milieu, there will be the cases like a child accused of stealing clothes, may have actually 'borrowed' something out of the laundry because they needed something to wear to a party and were just trying to survive socially.

We are also beginning to think more about racism in schools. My own research shows that a bullying issue can very quickly become a race issue. Normal teenage argy-bargy can rapidly become very ugly.

In examining the causes of student drop out, we also need to look at the social competence of teachers, and at curriculum.

➢ Lack of funding for post-school transition

In Victoria, there is not enough done to create seamless transition between school and university or other post-school destinations, largely because in Victoria this area is completely un-funded. Without funding, it is hard for an organisation to generate opportunities for better transition from, or retention in, boarding. This is the case for the Victorian Indigenous Education Network in the independent sector which would like to scale up from its current voluntary approach to be able to properly support Indigenous students in boarding. Future Footprints in WA is far ahead of what is possible in Victoria.

➢ Data on academic attainment

In Victoria, in response to HORSCIA review, we sought a range of student data from each of our schools. What we found from the data around academic attainment that we were able to examine was that the vast majority of Indigenous students were coming out with either an ungraded VCE, which meant they hadn't sat the exams at all, or an ATAR of sub 30 or sub 50.

So, in terms of transition to higher education, which is presumably the aim of these highly academic schools, those students aren't rating at all. In schools where the average ATAR hovers between 89 and 92, we are getting Aboriginal children with ATAR scores of 26. Clearly, these are students who aren't engaged at school. However, some of these students are intelligent young people who with bridging education, have gone on to succeed in higher education. The real question for these students, particularly those attending the expensive schools in Victoria, is where is the value for money if there is no academic attainment coming out of their years at school.

Marnie O'Bryan

➢ Queensland Transition Support Services

The post-boarding, post-school destinations topic is enormous. There are two major categories of students exiting boarding:

1) The early exiters – people use the term de-enrolling event – this can include students who don't return to school after holiday travel, who are excluded for lengthy suspensions, who are withdrawals.   There are a host of school and non-school factors involved.

2) The other group of boarding school leavers we are concerned about in Queensland are those who complete Year 12.

➤ Early exiters

In Queensland the TSS network has processes to support early exiters. The students who exit early are often excluded and/or disengaged from school without us knowing why. TSS has a student engagement team operating in FNQ, being led by a new regional director who uses the hashtag 'whatever it takes'. This team works to re-engage students and it monitors and tracks all students so that none get lost. TSS has lists of students posted on the walls and uses the traffic light system to track the status of every child in every community for which TSS is responsible. TSS liaises with a range of different agencies in communities and regional centres to try to track those students.

➤ Post Year 12 pathways

In Qld ~~is that~~ there is enormous variation in provider/school responsibility for creating viable post-Year 12 pathways. There is a continuum of providers who do career/transition planning well, working with families and students and those who do little. It is often work taken on by the boarding provider rather than the schools themselves, who frequently have very little idea of how to go about the post-school transition. AFL Cape York House is an example of a provider that has done an enormous amount of work for post-Year 12. However, there are many TSS-supported Year 12 students who have had very little work done to prepare their post-school pathways.

The lack of post-Year 12 preparation is a cause of frustration in communities. A number of families and community members are saying, 'You white fellas say Year 12 is what it is all about' but their experience is that many Year 12 qualified students, who have been studying away for 5-6 years, end up back in their communities in jobs that don't require Year 12, for example, teachers' aids, or drivers.

There is a need in our jurisdiction and probably Australia wide for better post-Year 12 planning. We need to be clear about what value Year 12 brings to the individual, the family and the broader community.

In summary:
- early exiters need a discrete set of strategies to be tracked and where possible to assist re-engagement in school, and
- Year 12 completers need a plan that makes completing Year 12 of value.

Richard Stewart

Data and accountability

➢ **Future Footprints program, WA**

All the data for Future Footprints students is kept and there is fourteen years of records for all four terms of each year. I track every student who has been through the Future Footprints program, even if they did not graduate. I know who has completed or who hasn't completed, where they all are. If a student exits early I keep that data. Every student who has been through the program is tracked, even interstate. This is not publicly available or available to researchers, but if we know exactly who dropped out when and why, then that gives us a chance to adjust our processes.

My concern is that if there is not someone following up and making sure there is some sort of education or training organised for students who leave schooling, they will fall between the cracks.

Lisa Fieldhouse

Even the largest boarding facilities in Victoria may have between 12 to 30 Indigenous students, which should not be an onerous responsibility to monitor.

Marnie O'Bryan

The best place to get data should be the schools or boarding providers themselves. It should be a requirement that if an organisation receives funding for boarding students, they should monitor and evaluate student progress, and maintain up-to-date records for each student.

Steve Florisson

➢ **Transition Support Services Data**

In terms of data sets for cohorts, Queensland, through the TSS, probably has the most accurate data set for any jurisdiction. The TSS database has information for all TSS-supported students. TSS supports 350 students in boarding from Cape York, the northern peninsula area and the Torres Strait. (TSS doesn't operate *in* the Torres Strait and the gulf.) Using our data, we can confidently say that the overall retention rate for TSS students in 2018 is 80-85% for Years 7 to 12 in boarding.

The understanding of course is that not every child in far North Queensland is a TSS student; for example, the Torres Strait has no transition support service yet and we intend to expand into the Gulf. However, for particular populations in communities in Aurukun, Lockhart River, and Kowanyama, for example, we can generate a comprehensive picture.

We have a lot of data analysis work to do yet, but we will be able to make public the 2018 end of year report. It will be made public with the understanding that it is a partial picture of Indigenous boarding in Queensland. The data will be de-identified and will provide information on numbers of children who enter boarding and numbers who make it to the end of a particular year. We also have data on all the TSS-supported students who have completed Year 12 going back to 2012-2013.

While the TSS database is for TSS-supported students, not the state as a whole, its data can be disaggregated for particular schools or communities going back a decade to identify trends and points for analysis and intervention. Two examples:

- Identifying trends for particular schools, the data makes it clear that the highest churn is in Indigenous-only schools, raising questions about the long-term viability of some of those schools.

- The data is being used to assess the important question of the impact of commencing boarding in Year 7 as opposed to Year 8. We know in some contexts Year 7 boarding is not always the best. Three or four years ago children started boarding in Year 7. For example, of eight children from Kowanyama who went to board in Year 7, only one made it through that first year in boarding. Because of our tracking we have been able to track the students who dropped out and some have been able to be re-started. The data tracking supports our regional focus on re-engagement and not having students in the region who are lost.

It should be noted that TSS does not manage or support students on scholarships. We are making progress in Qld on sharing data across various scholarship providers. For example, we do have a particular relationship with the Cape York Leaders Program, but there is not a lot of data yet.

Richard Stewart

➢ ABSTUDY data

The 2015-16 Commonwealth ABSTUDY data states that there are 5,700 students accessing ABSTUDY, of which 38% are from Queensland. This makes Queensland the jurisdiction with the highest number of Indigenous students in boarding. As a rule of thumb this would be about 350 students supported by the TSS, another 350 in the Torres Strait and 80-90 out in the gulf students from remote

communities in boarding. That is altogether between 900 – 1,000 students in Queensland from remote communities in boarding, whether they were TSS--supported, non-TSS supported, scholarship recipients and the like.

ABSTUDY has been keeping its data very close, historically. But there is work in train over the last twelve months with Department of Social Security to change this. I have a very strong sense that we have a toe in the door and we will soon have a foot in the door. The information that DSS has put out about ABSTUDY travel lets us now ascertain the ten communities in Australia with the highest take up of boarding. The information that DSS has put out about ABSTUDY travel indicates that seven of the ten biggest communities taking up ABSTUDY are in Queensland – among them Palm Island, Bardu Island, Kowanyama, Aurukun and Lockhart River.

Richard Stewart

➢ **Government funding and accountability**

Why does the government find it acceptable to continue to fund programs, putting hundreds of millions of dollars into boarding, without backing up their policy with any rigorous accounting of the data that they have themselves and when they know there are providers misrepresenting their programs and outcomes. There are some boarding scholarship providers with larger funding grants, but which do not appear to have the outcomes that would warrant their large funding grants.

A very important issue is accountability around scholarship and other funding. The philanthropic dollar and resource company payments, such as mining trusts, can be funding very well-meaning scholarship programs. But they are relying on the advice of others to help them deliver their corporate responsibility. It is not insignificant amounts of money.

Marnie O'Bryan:

The history of boarding is littered with some serious concerns and scandals, including organisations continuing to receive funding for programs where it is known that their data is misleading. There are still people in the Commonwealth who have been badly burned by what happened when a school maintained a phantom roll and were able to build up 7.5 million Commonwealth funding for which they weren't entitled. And then there were the issues at a Townsville College. The Commonwealth will not want a repeat of anything on the scale of these cases.

Richard Stewart

While it doesn't respond to concerns in the short term we can look forward, after the findings of the HORSCIA and Study Away reviews, to increased levels of accountability and more opportunities to access and interrogate government and other critical data, such as ABSTUDY data.

The fact that the Commonwealth is changing the structure for the payment for boarding schools as of 1 January indicates that they are trying to improve financial accountability in the sector. This change shows that the Commonwealth is saying that they know there are providers that, for example, exclude students after the Census day but then will retain seven weeks of income for the very children who have been at home for seven weeks. We have a recent example in FNQ of children who went home for a funeral and missed return flights back. The schools did not re-book the return travel and won't notify ABSTUDY, which means that they will retain the ABSTUDY payments for the rest of the term for students they will not have back until the following year. This is the overt and covert face of racism.

Richard Stewart

Summary of what we want for the boarding sector
➢ **Government transition support units**

Transition support services such as those operating in the Northern Territory and Queensland need to be created/funded in other jurisdictions like Western Australia, Victoria and New South Wales. At present support organisations are having to track students and stretch resources on an unfunded basis. These support units can:

- track student progress and wellbeing, and monitor students when they exit school/boarding, where they go and why.
- operate as an independent oversight which can monitor and ensure that children are returned to school after travel home, keep the scholarship providers in check and make sure that students and communities get the education they deserve. There should be no students falling through the cracks.

➢ **Improved data collection and access to data**

The boarding sector needs access to ABSTUDY data, because it is vital to see what needs improving. ABSTUDY should have records of who is dropping out or changing schools.

Schools need to be held accountable for their data. Data tracking is needed to monitor not just when and how students leave, but also to protect them in terms of educational outcomes. Schools should collect and make available academic attainment and engagement information for Indigenous

boarders. This information should include all forms of assessment whether it be literacy and numeracy, completion or graduation information.

The group agreed that there should be ways of ensuring the probity of student academic and engagement information given that there are schools currently alleged to be misrepresenting attrition and retention rates or not allowing Indigenous students to participate in academic testing. With the changes to ABSTUDY processes and data availability in 2019, it is hoped that more will be in place to make sure that schools and scholarship providers do better at keeping students in school.

➢ Funding for support organisations

There should be funding for organisations that are supporting schools, students and families through boarding and through the transition post-boarding. Organisations should not have to be supporting Indigenous students in boarding on a voluntary basis.

The group agreed that if governments are delegating responsibility for secondary education to boarding providers, they should make sure that there are organisations on the ground to work with the collective of Indigenous students in boarding in regional centres or cities. Relationships and support services need to be built at the point of need.

Given that secondary school is a six-year period, ideally funding for these organisations should be secured on a six year cycle, but funding for these organisations should be secured for a minimum of three to five years.

➢ Post-school transition pathways

In the post-boarding stage, the group agreed that there needs to be strategies to support both:

1) the early exiters – those who disengage from schools and who need support services, and
2) those who complete Year 12, who need viable post-year 12 pathways.

Schools need to work with students, families and communities to establish positive post-school outcomes, in terms of further studies, TAFE, universities.

The group recognised that parents and communities send their children away to study and graduate at great expense. Students should not end up either not working or in paid work for which studying away for five years in boarding was not warranted. Families want teachers, not just aides and nurses not just health workers. They want Year 12 to make a difference.