I have worked on a community in the Northern Territory and seen some of the situation first hand in the Macdonnell Shire. I am an experienced Social Worker and was surprised by the very poor administration of Federal Programs in which I was involved. The low educational standard and lack of relevant experience in white workers is a serious issue. Income management should be either voluntary or where a parent has been shown to be unable to provide for the child. Compulsory income management has hidden negatives which undo other more positive programs. Getting people to feel capable and able to do a job well is important. A sense of hope and agency is the crucial element to the success of any program.

If there are to be draconian efforts, then they should be directed towards making sugar less available. the amount of soft drink and sweets consumed is something you would have to see to believe. The shop figures should be a demonstration of the problem. Proper food was hard to get, expensive and difficult to cook when one has electricity erratically, and cannot afford saucepans. I myself drove 1,000 klms round trips to get to a chemist, a haircut, and to get good quality and cheaper food for myself. My staff could not afford to do that. The Shires are not managing well at all. the staff often have no real knowledge of community living. They waste a considerable amount of money. The Shires choose indigenous staff unwisely, leaving the more intelligent real leaders aside. There is also a strong culture of choosing white staff who will present no threat to the Alice Springs shire staff.

Aboriginal people would progress with better food, less sugar, and infrastructure e.g. access to mobile phone coverage and the NBN. If people are treated with respect at work, they will want to work and line up to get jobs. They want to work just like any other Australians. When they are employed on communities, they are not inducted like other young Australians into a workplace where everyone knows what work is and how to induct the new worker and show them the job and the expectations. Most white workers on communities are not a good example of standard workplace practice. O.H. & S is poorly understood by the employers.

Dry communities are a good idea and most people are happy with that.

The Federal blue and white signs are demeaning and make people feel ashamed and the objects of racism especially when the children ask about them.

In a number of communities cooking skills have not been established. Teaching men and women workers how to run a community kitchen providing cheap quality meals from readily available and affordable ingredients, would be an excellent expenditure. Initially, only put it into communities where the people actually already want it. And use basic community development skills to get the local people involved and feeling a sense of excitement and achievement.

Putting police into communities has been helpful, especially where they are caring and have helped people learn the road rules to get their licence. This prevents a common source of imprisonment.

Maureen Magee