Busting crime: it’s that time of the year again! By KIERAN FINNANE.

Last week’s announcement by Chief Minister Paul Henderson and Minister for Central Australia Karl Hampton of measures to tackle truancy and anti-social behaviour followed an announcement on the same issue by the same pair at the same time last year.

Last year it was called a Youth Action Plan; this year it’s “New Measures”.

The season, summer, seems to have something to do with what prompts these measures.

Monday’s announcement to “crack down” on alcohol-fuelled violence in Darwin, also came 12 months after the announcement of a “CitySafe Night Patrol on the Beat” for the northern city.

Among the new measures for Alice is a dedicated unit of police officers working to address truancy.

One year ago the Alice Springs News, reporting on the Youth Action Plan, canvassed exactly this possibility.

We wrote on February 26, 2009: “In The Centre, where the traditional agencies policing truancy are consistently under-performing, the task may well fall to the police, a large, disciplined and well resourced force commanding respect.

“With luck, taking action before kids turn into criminals may well save the cops a lot of work later on.”

Police already had the power to enforce truancy laws but now, says Superintendent Michael White, they are “refocusing” on the problem, working with home liaison officers and others on a “more targeted approach”.

One instrument of the approach will be requiring parents of children with a long history of poor school attendance to “be engaged through family responsibility agreements, which will require improved school attendance”, according to the government’s media release.

Such agreements got off to a very slow start.

After legislation providing for them had been in force in Darwin for eight months, only two agreements had been entered into, as we reported in our issue of February 26 last year.

It now seems that there are five family responsibility agreements in Darwin but still none in Alice Springs.

However there are six families in each centre, 12 all up, who “are currently engaged with the Family Support Centres to develop strategies to take responsibility for and manage their children’s behaviour”, according to a spokesperson for Children and Families Minister, Kon Vatskalis.

The spokesperson says another five families “have successfully fulfilled” family responsibility agreements.

Supt White is the police officer who filled the position of Youth Services Coordinator, announced as part of 2009’s Youth Action Plan.

How has this worked, the Alice News asked him, given that one year later there still seem to be plenty of young people on the streets getting up to no good.

“They’re not all getting up to no good,” stresses Supt White.

“Youth are often on the street for issues that are not in their control and they are not all offending.

“Those who are offending are dealt with through the justice and diversion system.”

The coordination of youth services is a “big process to pull together, starting from scratch”.

He points to the Christmas holiday program as an example of the process. It was put in place by a number of agencies, government and non-government, working together.

Quite a lot of the 2009 action plan has come to fruition, he says, citing the police shopfront in Todd mall, the voluntary “no school, no service policy” widely taken up since July, the establishment of the Centralian Middle School.

The Youth Hub, which will house the youth diversion and crime prevention unit and the Department of Health and Families Family Support Centre as well as youth services of some non-government providers, such as Congress and Tangentyere, is still in the process of being set up on the campus of the former Anzac Hill High.
The hub’s “service delivery model” has been developed by a consultancy and is “about to be presented to government”, says Supt White.

With some other issues for youth being addressed by bigger picture programs, such as the transformation of the town camps, police are now free “to work with kids and families on school attendance”, he says.

The Youth Action Plan promised to make available additional safe house and emergency beds and the new measures include “new response arrangements [to] be developed between Police and NTFC to provide more immediate care for these [‘at risk’] children and find them emergency accommodation”.

SAFE HOUSES
The Alice News asked two local non-government services about safe houses and emergency accommodation for young people.

Tracey NcNee, manager of ASYASS (Alice Springs Youth Accommodation Support Services), says their target group, youth aged 15 to 17 years inclusive, are well catered for after gaining two extra beds at the refuge, up to eight more beds for housing and two beds for young mothers, all over the last 12 months.

“We are rarely at full capacity and I would not request any further beds at this point,” says Ms McNee.

Catering for young people aged 18 years and over is a “bigger challenge”, she says – the Women’s Shelter and the Salvation Army’s Men’s Hostel are at capacity.

Jennifer Standish-White says the Reconnect program, working out of the Gap Youth Centre where she is the CEO, is charged with responding to young people aged 12 to 18 years who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

“The main challenge for us is that there are so many young people who could be defined as being ‘at risk’, ” she says.

“A month ago we had 67 on our books, with only two staff.

“We had to prioritise and find alternative support for some who do have a home although it is not necessarily entirely appropriate.”

Some 12 to 14 year olds manage this situation themselves by doing “a lot of bed-hopping”. Others may be in the care of family members who are also homeless.

Reconnect was supporting one such family, including a 14 year old, on the last weekend of January. They were camping in the river and the program could find no accommodation for them other than a hotel.

Ms Standish-White, like Supt White, says not all youths on the street get into trouble.

Some are there trying to avoid trouble – their ‘home’ is either “not safe or not nice”.

It may also be in a place difficult to get to after being out with friends.

Ms Standish-White says better transport services would take care of some of the problems.

Supt White says 10 more emergency accommodation beds are coming on-line this year, with their management contracted to Tangentyere Council and Anglicare.

The News asked him, if police went out tonight (this was last Friday) would he be confident that there were enough safe places to take as many young people as necessary to.

“That would depend on a number of factors, such as their age and their family or extended family situation,” he said.

“If you can’t find anywhere and feel that they are at risk of harm by their actions or those of anyone else, you would refer them to NTFC and they would be placed in temporary care.

“I’m not aware of any occasion when the system was stretched beyond capacity,” he said.

Grog rehab full of flaws, client claims. By ERWIN CHLANDA.

When Russel Bray Junior woke up one morning in January and had no idea what day it was, nor where his ex-wife and three small children were, he knew it was time to act.

His out of control alcohol addiction had made a mess of his life.

He is 39. He had beaten his wife. An Apprehended Violence Order had been made.

“I feel bad, bad, bad about it,” he says now.

He couldn’t hold down a job. He was drunk most of the time. It needed to stop.

Born and bred in The Alice, he was aware that booze was the root cause of the town’s many serious problems.

And he knew governments are spending many millions of dollars a year on a string of local organisations to do something about the grog mayhem. He expected to get professional help easily. He didn’t.

On January 23 he checked into Aranda House in South Terrace (pictured), now the residential treatment facility of the
Drug and Alcohol Service Association (DASA). Its annual budget is undisclosed. The urgency of Russell’s admission was an open and shut case. He completed DASA’s questionnaire about his drinking habit. If you score 13 it means “referral is required”. Russell scored 33. He committed to the 12 week program but says he was evicted after 13 days, which he thinks happened because he had pointed out serious deficiencies of the operation. Some of them are so fundamental that, if true – which the Alice News has endeavoured to establish (see box this page) – it is surprising DASA is allowed to continue. Russell says there are just two counsellors for about 20 clients, giving them access to one-on-one sessions only about once a fortnight. Yet clients are in turmoil, says Russell: “Some are self medicating. They detox for 10 days. “The brain is going 100 miles an hour, not numbed with alcohol or drugs. “That’s why we are there. The counsellors open this can of worms and then you can’t see them again for two weeks. “The clients are agitated and short-tempered. People break down and cry. “You put your arm around them, tell them to let it out. “If you want to talk I’m here,” Russell says he would tell fellow residents. “This puts pressure on clients. They are untrained. “This is DASA’s job and they’re not doing it.” Russell says there are no proper and structured alcohol or drugs awareness programs. A staff member, Bruce, had told him that DASA is “in the process of instituting” programs but there is no time frame. Whenever Russell raised that subject he says he was told “there is the door – there are no awareness programs, maybe this is not the right place for you, maybe you should leave”. Russell says there are no drug tests, and marijuana smoking is frequent. The rehabilitation sessions, he says, are typically like this: the clients meet in the morning and share their news – “Good morning, everybody. I slept really well last night” or “I didn’t sleep very well last night”. That is followed by several hours of boredom, some TV watching, followed by the afternoon meeting of clients (inappropriately called inmates by some staff, says Russell), when the latest news is exchanged: “I was really bored today,” is the most frequent comment. Russell was given a note book. The only entry in it, copied from the blackboard, is this:- Affirmation: I have come so far. I have gone the distance. I look forward. I have serenity. I see clearly. I am positive. I am strong. This makes me happy. “Not many clients there would know what serenity means,” he says. He claims the nine support workers have no or inadequate training, and make up rules as they go along, unleashing their arbitrary decisions on the hapless clients. The support workers would stop a client buying a newspaper during the morning walk, he says. They would not allow phone calls to be made, even in emergencies, or to contact prospective employers, except at times set arbitrarily. CONCERNED However, Russell says: “Some of the support workers are genuinely concerned for the clients’ wellbeing and future prospects but feel their hands are tied by upper management and therefore feel their jobs are at risk if they act or ask what is in the best interests of the clients.” Russell says he’s completed Year 11 and most of Year 12, as well as IAD and TAFE courses in youth work and small group training. At age 16 two IQ tests placed him among the top 7% of the population. He’s well equipped to improve his work prospects. Russell says Aranda House doesn’t have a full time cook. “Clients take shifts,” he says.
“Some are from communities.
“The management doesn’t ask you whether you can cook. You are expected to cook.
“People do it in thongs, no gloves, no hairnets, in singlets, sweat dripping off their armpits.
“It’s unhygienic.”

When Russell returned from a doctor’s appointment on his 13th day at Aranda House a female staff said to him: “You are here to pick up your stuff”.
It already been packed, he claims.
He says he’s not had a drink since.
Meanwhile artist Caroline Johnson, 30, who normally lives in Hoppy’s Camp, signed up for a 12 week DASA course at Aranda House because “I wanted to sit down, do painting, do my job, get off the grog”.
Two weeks later she walked out of the facility “because they made me feel silly.
“They talked silly language. I was upset.
“I told them I’m not coming back, go to grandmother in the Charles Creek town camp.”
Ms Johnson says “I’ve been drinking for a long time. Started when I was 16.”
Now she is back with her grandmother, auntie, uncle: “They drink every day, never stop.”

Meanwhile DASA keeps mum.

All DASA had to say to these disturbing allegations, through its CEO Paul Finlay, was that it would make no comment.
The Alice News offered a full right of reply – which still stands – on Monday morning. We even emailed a story draft, an extraordinary privilege few journalists would offer their sources.
Soon after Mr Finlay, together with the Aranda House manager and a counsellor, met with me.
I asked for an on-the-record conversation, but Mr Finlay asked to speak off-the-record to begin with. I agreed, on the proviso that on-the-record statements would follow. After about an hour and a half we ended the conversation.
The off-the-record stipulation by Mr Finlay meant nothing that had been talked about could be used in our report, nor could we use it for corroboration and further investigation.
Mr Finlay undertook to give consideration to making statements on-the-record in the afternoon. In the meantime the News contacted the Alcohol Education and Rehabilitation Foundation (AERF) in Canberra to seek an independent comment on DASA’s performance.
I spoke with the foundation’s public affairs officer Joanna Allebone.
I suggested we would provide information about such matters as budget, one-on-one contact hours between clients and counsellors, the nature and number of programs provided, accountability to funding bodies and ways to judge the efficiency of the operation. Ms Allebone invited me to email the information. I contacted Mr Finlay, told him about this arrangement, and that we would hold the report for a week to give it a broader perspective.
He told me that the Aranda House manager was preparing a response and I said I would forward it to the AERF.
He said he would call me back at 3.30pm. When he did, he said there would be no comment from DASA on this story.
Client confidentiality cannot be an excuse for Mr Finlay’s evasive conduct: Mr Bray gave DASA written authority to answer any questions about him the Alice News may be putting to them.

Erwin Chlanda, Managing Editor.

Councils still out in the cold on town planning. By KIERAN FINNANE.

Almost nine years after Labor came to power in the Territory, local government has no greater control over town planning despite early Labor promises.
Quoting Peter Toyne, who would go on to be Minister for Central Australia and hold senior portfolios in the new government, the Alice News reported on August 22, 2001 that “Labor would open up the town planning process, shrink the powers of the Minister to override the Development [Consent] Authority, make it fully representative, give it a much greater autonomy from the Minister, and “link it much more closely to local government”.
In 2010 the Minister continues to have overriding power and while local government nominees continue to sit on the Development Consent Authority they still do not have the right to represent the views of the Town Council to the authority.
Their views are those of an individual authority member and have no more weight than those of any other member.
The Town Council thus has no more standing on the authority than any citizen commenting on an application before it, except in specified matters such as stormwater drainage.

COLLECTIVE
This is why Deputy Mayor John Rawnsley (pictured) sought to have council decline to put a collective view on the planning scheme amendment (PSA) to allow urban development south of the Gap.
This at present, is applicable only to the AZRI site and the Blatherskite Valley site, proposed to be an industrial zone.
But if the amendment is adopted, this may make other urban style land releases south of the range more likely to be approved.

In standing back from the process Ald Rawnsley wanted council to make its core message loud and clear that it wants a greater say over town planning.

His motion would also have had council writing to the NT Government and the Opposition to call for increased control and decision-making authority for council on planning issues as well as for equitable access to financial resources for development.
The motion won support from aldermen last week but Ald Rawnsley sees it as standing in contradiction to the other motion they supported, which had council expressing in principle support for the PSA, as reported in our last issue.
A council forum this Monday past agreed – “unanimously” according to Mayor Damien Ryan – that this in principle support would be conveyed to the DCA as council’s formal position. Submissions close tomorrow (Friday).

WITHDRAW
Ald Rawnsley will now withdraw his motion at Monday’s ordinary council meeting, but he is determined to find a way to continue his campaign.
“The key message, of demand for greater planning powers and equitable resources, has been overtaken, as I thought it would be, by the fact of council’s support for the PSA.
“Contrast the situation in Alice Springs with what is happening in the Top End.
“From my research I can see that 6000 lots will be rolled out in Palmerston over the next four years and a further 10,000 are on the cards for the new city of Wedell.
“At AZRI they have identified 1400 lots but as yet no money has been committed to their development in contrast to the $50m that has been fast-tracked for Palmerston.
“All that’s happening now at AZRI is a planning scheme amendment.
“A headworks study has not even been commissioned.
“The amendment process could have started immediately after the planning forum two years ago and a headworks study could have been commissioned at the same time.
“My main concern is that those delays and our lack of power in the process are not our main message to government.”
Ald Rawnsley says he will work to have the statehood convention next year support the embedding, in the proposed state constitution, of principles of regionalisation, including a fair distribution of resources.
He says council will also send some “strong motions” on these issues to the AGM of the Local Government Association of the Northern Territory, to be held in March, and attempt to bring the other regions “on board”.
“I’ll be advocating strongly on this issue whenever and wherever I can,” says Ald Rawnsley.

56 employers south of Gap warrant a satellite suburb. COMMENT by LIZ MARTIN OAM.

COMMENT by LIZ MARTIN OAM

An edited version of a submission by Ms Martin to Strategic Lands Planning on the South of MacDonnell Ranges Area Plan.

I comment on the plan from several perspectives but most significantly as CEO of the National Road Transport Hall of Fame as there are aspects of this plan that will greatly impact the operations of our tourist facility on Norris Bell Avenue.
I live by necessity, for security of my workplace, on site. Previous to this however, I have spent much of the last 30 years residing with my family south of the Gap, including [in Rangeview Estate, Palm Circuit, Brewers Subdivision, Ross Highway and on Ilparpa Rd].
I am a member of the Alice Springs Rural Area Association (ASRAA) and, while I do not agree with their stance on this development, I support their right to input and the fact that we should maintain the status quo on their residential properties wherever possible in well established areas such as Rangeview and Ilparpa.

I have been on the committee for the Hall of Fame since its inception in 1992. We have long supported appropriate development in this region as we see this as crucial to both our future development as a major tourist attraction and essential to our ongoing financial sustainability and viability as a community based organisation.

As an Alderman on the Alice Springs Town Council I believe we need to look at future development based on input from all tiers of government (federal, state and local) as well as from the wider community.

I am disappointed that the Alice Springs Town Council is divorced from having any real decision-making powers on the Development Consent Authority (DCA).

Nevertheless council still has a huge stake in the future growth of this town.

While I personally feel that council could not bear the full responsibility of planning, I believe our role should be strengthened and expanded. As such, I trust we will be duly consulted at all stages of this development.

This is not only in terms of the traditional rates, roads and rubbish role, but also in ensuring that new developments meet council requirements for open space, public art, traffic flow, car parks, public transport, affordable housing and urban design that embraces the uniqueness of our natural environment, culture, climate and solar city objectives.

I have been generally happy with what I have read about the proposals, however I would like to make the following observations and comments.

• Satellite Concept

There are many things I support about this plan particularly the new connector road through Norris Bell Avenue linking the two major rural residential areas through a light industrial and residential area. What I like is that it has many of the trademarks of a satellite-like development.

Taking that concept to its full potential will do much for Alice Springs particularly in relation to the current deficit in affordable housing and rental accommodation.

This area is already rich with employment opportunities and this plan will bring more. We need to look beyond Alice Springs development as a local issue and consider this project from state, national and even international contexts.

This is particularly pertinent given the integration of our town camps which must see them become an integral and vital part of our community if “normalization” is to be truly successful.

It will also enable Alice Springs to capitalise on projected mining, industrial, pastoral and agricultural growth by becoming a major transport hub better utilizing existing infrastructure such as the Adelaide Darwin Railway and the Darwin Port.

• Existing and Future Business Activity

When considering the viability of the area as a residential development it is important to consider not only the potential for future business and commercial opportunities but existing business as well. This area already accommodates several major employers of our population.

The great majority of their employees, I would imagine, currently travel through Heavitree Gap to get to work and this will always be the case to a degree.

Business south of the Gap include the Alice Springs Airport, the Alice Springs Correctional Facility, the Joint Defence Facility at Pine Gap, Brewers Estate, the Bohning Cattle Yards and adjoining rail facility, the Hall of Fame and Old Ghan Train Museums, the radio station, Hetty Perkins Home for the Aged, AZRI, the Desert Knowledge Precinct, St Mary’s Childrens Home, Yirara College, The Alice Springs Turf Club, a landscaping business, two plant nurseries, a sand mining quarry, the landfill, the showgrounds, camel rides, helicopter rides, air charters, the RSPCA, several caravan parks, a major tourist resort complete with shop and service station, the Windmill and Vietnamese Restaurants and a takeaway pizza shop, a housing construction business and an accommodation facility at the old Seven Mile Aerodrome just to name a few.

[At a recent council meeting Ms Martin reported a tally of 56 employers south of the Gap.]

I personally have had much difficulty seeking employees partly because of our distance from town and partly because of the lack of any affordable accommodation options anywhere in town.

It makes so much more sense to build a residential area south of the Gap because so many businesses are already in the immediate AZRI locality.

This is a factor that a satellite at Undoolya can not possibly compete with. Additionally, the two main roads in this area – the south Stuart Highway, the town’s only southern entrance, and the Ross Highway, the gateway to the East MacDonnell Ranges – both create unique opportunities for business and tourism that don’t exist in the Undoolya model.
There are also many town-based businesses that currently service south of the Gap and many of these would benefit from a depot or warehouse in this area – particularly given the proposed railway spur line and roadtrain access to the future industrial area.

Having said that, I would like to see this project commence ahead of Undoolya and not instead of Undoolya. I have no doubt that mining and tourism interests and the urban drift of indigenous peoples will cause our population to grow and the Undoolya development will ultimately be required.

- Roadtrains and other Heavy Transports
I recommend that the roadtrain access route be along Norris Bell Avenue parallel to the railway line spur (rather than through Karnte Rd) ultimately connecting not only with the future industrial area but with the railway spur at which major intermodal freight transfers are likely to occur.

The other obvious advantage to this move would be that roadtrains will not have to backtrack to the railhead on a road with a problematic angle through a residential area (Karnte Camp).

This is a very important consideration given that the great majority of trucks heading into Alice Springs from south are laden while the great majority heading into Alice Springs from north are unladen.

SOCIAL

Multi-combination vehicles (as are the standard operating procedure in the Northern Territory) are vital to our financial and social well-being given that much of Central Australia is not supported by an intrastate railway or indeed any other fully functional or cost effective freight mode (eg, air or water).

Perhaps it would make more sense to have the railway spur closer to the airport so that a complete intermodal freight facility, encompassing road/rail/air transit terminals and storage and warehousing facilities, could be constructed.

To take this concept further, the population south of the Gap may one day justify commuter trains running once or twice a day into town which would reduce traffic flow through the Gap – especially if it was a free service for locals.

- Roadhouse and Truck Stop
While I note that there is land allocated for industry, residential, commercial and community use including commercial development such as convenience stores, and public space, cycle ways and community activity, I am alarmed that there has been no specific allowance for any infrastructure to support the road transport industry.

I understand a submission is to be made to you from a major fuel supplier requesting land for a megaroadhouse south of the town.

This is a need that has been identified as crucial by the Australian Trucking Association and its member groups. I would like to support this submission 100%, irrespective of which fuel company is (or may be) successful.

A properly facilitated roadhouse south of MacDonnell Ranges would benefit the thousands of caravanners and motor homers who use the many caravan parks in our vicinity.

They would not have to go “back” through Heavitree Gap before commencing their southward journey.

Also, it is a disgrace that Alice Springs no longer provides appropriate facilities for long distance truck drivers.

This is vital not only to those freight forwarders who transit through Alice Springs but to those whose journey begins, starts or breaks in Alice Springs at the railhead or any transport depot. The Northern Territory, like most states of Australia, failed miserably in the recent national “rest areas audit” for long distance drivers.

If we are to become a major transport hub in the future, and that is likely with the Australian road freight task expected to double by 2020, we should be looking at this issue now.

If, as stated, the new AZRI subdivision houses some 15 to 20,000 people it will be well supported by the locals as well – again reducing traffic through the Gap.

- Transport and traffic management
I like that the plan includes cycle ways and provision for public transport. Both of these are essential ingredients in reducing traffic flow through Heavitree Gap and encouraging a healthy lifestyle for both body and environment.

I would personally hate to see an ugly bridge go through Heavitree Gap.

I would rather see a raised walkway which would not only make the Gap much safer for pedestrians (especially those who are inebriated) but could also serve as an educational walkway/ cycleway with great views and maybe some story telling interpretive signage about the cultural and environmental significance of the Gap.

The Todd River is often exposed as our greatest asset and the Heavitree Gap as a major feature and yet we do nothing to promote its significance or beauty. The removal of the existing walking path through the Gap minimizes the amount of reclamation we would need to build three lanes through the Gap.

- Tourism
From a tourism perspective the area south of the Gap has much potential.

There are already several caravan parks and a hotel resort in the area all of which are occupied at capacity in the high
Apart from the Hall of Fame and the Old Ghan Train there are several night shows, adventure type flights and other tourist activities. There is a small museum at the Old Timers, the Pitchi Ritchi Sanctuary (which I understand is looking to reopen in the future along with an interpretive centre) and access to the East MacDonnell Ranges and its many attractions. There are also the Old South Road attractions and Stuart Highway access to places like Rainbow Valley and the Henbury Craters and beyond. We also have the Finke, drags, horse events, BMX, the motorbike club, the rifle range and shooting club and a couple of under utilised gem fossicking areas just to name a few.

Public art in this area must also reflect our natural and cultural landscapes. I also believe the Desert Knowledge Precinct would be the ideal partner/host for an indigenous cultural centre/Hall of Fame and could combine a visitor and research centre with the development of a bush foods industry.

SPIRITUAL
We live in an amazingly spiritual and cultural place and we should be leading Australia in sharing our Indigenous culture with the world.

• Short Term Accommodation

Anti-social behaviour is a major problem in this town and much comes from the many illegal drinking camps in the area south of MacDonnell Ranges.

I really think, and I know its controversial, that some sort of precinct or facility providing short term accommodation and camping options for visiting indigenous families needs to be incorporated into this plan.

The volunteer spirit. By KIERAN FINNANE.

After 40 years of voluntary social work with the town’s youth, Graham Ross has come out of retirement to teach young people leatherwork at the Gap Youth Centre, which he helped set up back in 1970.

“Kids keep you young,” he says.

The youth work he and others did then after hours was all voluntary effort.

He cites many names – Helen Daff, Joan Higgins, Michelle Castagna, Peggy Campbell, Cath Blain, Joyce Giles, Trish Fenton, Bonnie Presley, Amy Swan – “the grandmother of all, the big boss” – Peter Lorraine, Marist Brothers Aiden Smith and Maurice Bainbridge, his brother Alec Ross and Joe Scheerer who taught boxing, the Johnson family on Vanderlin Island.

The list goes on (apologies to all whose names I didn’t quite catch), capped by the “patron saint of street kids, John Gorey”.

Mr Gorey had Yambah Station where Graham and others would take wayward kids for a spell of horse-breaking, fencing, yard-building, to straighten them out.

“Now kids wreck our streets – it wouldn’t have happened then.

“We’d rush them straight off to Yambah!” says Graham.

He and others would be out on the streets, finding these kids.

“You’ve got to be among them, 24 hours a day.

“We’d get the ring leader, the big bloke who knew all the others and could run faster than us, and we’d make him into a street worker too, put a bright orange t-shirt on him, work kid against kid.”

Once they had them, not pampering them was important.

“In 40 years of street work I never cooked a single meal for a kid,” says Graham.

“They’d have to cook me a meal, I’m their uncle.”

Ways to get the kids earning some pocket money were found: politicians like Bernie Kilgariff, Grant Tambling, Dennis Collins would organise lawns to be mown, paying so much in wages, and much more in a donation to the work of the youth centre.

“We got a lot of volunteers through the Catholic Church, there was a strong volunteer spirit.

“Maybe today people just haven’t looked into what they could do to help,” says Graham.

No queues for NT cancer patients. By KIERAN FINNANE.
There’ll be no queuing for cancer patients at the new radiation oncology unit at Royal Darwin Hospital, says practice manager Giam Kar, a radiation therapist previously with the Royal Adelaide Hospital’s Cancer Centre.

Once a patient’s treatment plan has been finalised, treatment can commence immediately in contrast to the prioritising (“triage”) that has to go on in the “big cities”.

There’ll be capacity to spare, says Mr Kar, because the $28m unit, funded by the NT and Australian Governments, has two state of the art radiation machines at its disposal.

Mr Kar attended a forum at the Alice Springs Hospital on Monday night, organised by the Cancer Council of the NT to allay local fears about having to receive radiation treatment in Darwin now, rather than travelling interstate.

Mr Kar suggested immediate access to treatment as an advantage that could offset the disadvantage some might feel about not being treated interstate where they may have more family and friendship support.

People attending the forum were “thrilled” to learn that treatment available at the new unit will be as good as any anywhere in Australia, says Cancer Council CEO, Helen Smith.

“They were very thrilled about the level of service and equipment at the facility and about the quality of staff the unit has attracted,” she said.

There were still concerns, however, about accommodation and travel assistance, as a lot of detail has yet to be finalised.

At present it is possible to cook your own food at the accommodation facility, or order a meal in, but there is no on-site catering.

It’s also not clear how patients will travel between the accommodation facility, which is in the city centre, and the treatment unit.

There will be assistance, says Ms Smith, but the detail is not known.

Some 95% of Territory patients eligible for radiation therapy will be treated at the new unit, says Mr Kar.

The exceptions will be babies and some children, as the unit does not have a pediatric oncologist; patients requiring “brackytherapy”, sometimes used to treat early stage prostate cancers; and some patients requiring multi-disciplinary management.

These patients will continue to be treated in Adelaide.

The rules about who gets treated where have not changed, says Ms Smith.

The rules have always been that patients were assisted to travel interstate for medical services that were not available in the territory.

Now state of the art radiation therapy is available, Territorians must use the Territory service.

“It’s extremely costly to buy cross-border medical services,” says Ms Smith.

She undertook to relay all concerns expressed at the forum to the department and Minister.

Landscape of Centre through English eyes. By KIERAN FINNANE.

You can take the girl out of England, but you can’t quite take England out of the girl: Al Strangeways, increasingly known in town for her skilled portrait painting, has titled her first solo exhibition, opening at Araluen this Friday, Dappled Things.

The title is drawn from the poem “Pied Beauty” by 19th century English poet and Jesuit priest, Gerard Manley Hopkins – a hymn of praise to “dappled things” such as “skies of couple-colour as a brinded cow” and “fresh-firecoal chestnut-falls”.

These are images that evoke her native landscape but remote from the one where Strangeways has lived since 2000, working as an English teacher, first at St Philip’s, now at Centralian, and discovering in her down time her love of painting.

Yet her exhibition speaks of ‘things’ of the Centre – people, animals, skies, landscapes, light.

If they’re “dappled” it’s in their shifting, elusive nature, and their essential diversity, rather than in outward appearance.

The portraits are mostly of young people – her Year 12 class from last year.

In contrast to Strangeways’ award-winning portrait of “senior Territorian” and fellow artist Dugald Beattie, who will
open the show, these are not homed in on their subject. The artist has left room for the young people to give a sense of themselves in their gaze and stance and in working from photographs to paint on canvas she captures well the adolescent shift between child and adult, between the things about them that are made and the things that are in their making, their determination to be ‘this person’ and yet their openness in the face of so much life to come.

Two paintings of the man who is her husband are quite different. Both views are of a moment seized, the artist/viewer on the outside looking in, emphasised by framing the subject through doorways, as if to say, here’s someone but what can we know about him.

Strangeways says it is much harder to do a portrait of someone you know well.

Portraits of camels, in particular one, Betty from Pindan Camel Tracks – “she’s the most beautiful and has a gorgeous temperament” – make a bridge to the other major strand of the show, landscapes, a new foray for the artist. She’d been painting plein air (out of doors) in company with some of her fellows from the Studio 12 artists’ collective, but “they were nothing that I wanted to look at again”. The opportunity of the solo exhibition, for which she wanted to make fresh work, pushed her to try anew. She began with clouds before tentatively moving down towards the horizon and little by little allowing more of the ground beneath her feet to enter the work.

She’d spend a lot of time looking, and training her visual memory, as well as taking “bad” photos – “good photographs make terrible paintings”. She’d use them as a starting point, and a fallback when memory failed, working quickly. While her portraits, the faces at least, are built up layer upon layer, the landscapes went down in one layer, which she found exciting. About half of the show will be made up of these small to medium sized landscapes, oil on board.

A next project, in the cooler months and now that she’s gained some confidence, is to do more plein air painting. What felt initially “quite overwhelming” – entering the Central Australian landscape tradition – is now a place into which she’ll venture.

LETTERS: Anti-culling arguments ‘unsubstantiated’.

Sir,- Trevor Shiell in his long letter spends quite some time berating me for using the phrase “stupid and short sighted”.

This a pity, as I did not say that.

What I said was “Talk of ‘an industry solution’ in this context is simply stupid”. I stand by that statement. It referred to the concept, not a person.

We Territorians are known for calling a spade a bloody shovel. In this case strong language was warranted.

Mr Shiell made an unsubstantiated claim about ‘Egyptian interests trying to build a $14m facility near Whyalla’. Who? What for? Why ‘trying’? What happened?

Mr Shiell continues: “There is an industry-based solution and part of the problem with Desert Knowledge thinking is that they think it wrong to try to turn ‘problem’ into an industry”.

I have personal first hand knowledge here. A researcher at DK, and her graduate student have been working on a project to make the kangaroo harvesting industry more viable, and on ways to recruit more people into the industry. They consulted me about the project because of my involvement with kangaroo research in western NSW.

Mr Shiell’s comment can only be described as uninformed prejudice.

He then invokes the Meat and Livestock corporation as the solution to all problems.

My admittedly out of date knowledge of the corporation is that they would be very wary of supporting government subsidised meat (from whatever source) coming into the market. Likewise their very limited research budget would be unlikely to fund research on an industry that does not yet exist, and which has as yet no demonstrated market.

Mr Shiell continues on the subject of industry control: “There are numerous examples of how this has been done in many different parts of the world, and one needs look no further than .. the crocodile industry in the Top End.”

I am happy to support the croc industry, but even the casual reader of the NT News would be aware that it hasn’t exactly been effective in controlling croc numbers.

I don’t have back copies of Time magazine at hand, but a google search failed to turn up anything about a market hungry for Australian camel meat in the Middle East.

Mr Shiell then informs us about a source (unnamed) who wanted 20 camel skulls. Wow ! The solution to a million
feral camels is at hand!
Mr Shiell then launches into a rambling discourse on camel breeding, and the involvement of Murdoch University. I quote from Murdoch’s website: “The camel project will utilise DNA fingerprinting technology ... to address two major aspects of camel ecology to define: (i) how large are populations of camels? and (ii) what are the dispersal dynamics maintaining these populations
This is a project sponsored by the Australian Feral Animal Control program ... Desert Knowledge CRC.” I could go on and on.

However there is one final point I would make.
An operator who has actually been involved in camel harvesting in the Centre has been reported as saying that only 30% of animals yarded are ‘useful’.
Which raises the question, what do you do with the 70%?
Letting them go would hardly serve the purpose of reducing camel numbers. It would also mean subsequent yardings in the vicinity would have increasing percentages of unusable animals.
Destroying them in the yards would be messy, and involve unsustainable costs to remove and bury the carcases. Which leaves what? The inescapable conclusion that “an industry solution” in this context is simply stupid.

Meanwhile regarding “Uluru”, (Alice News, Feb 11): If we followed your line of thought we would still be “Stuart”. Much as we love our icon ‘Stuart’ (Traynor, that is – see page 7) “A Town Like Stuart” doesn’t really cut the mustard.

Do we really want to go back to 12 pence, one shilling etc? Or even worse, remember Whitworth, SAE, BSF et bloody cetera. Give me 10mm any day.
As our current ‘poet laureate’ (must be a better aussie phrase for that) has said, “Uluru has power”.

Charlie Carter
Alice Springs

Camel meat for the earthquake starving?

Sir, – In answer to Trevor Shiell (Letters, Feb 11), it is a false dichotomy to pit the lives of camels against those of Haitian earthquake victims. First, the devastation of the Haitian earthquake is exacerbated by centuries of French colonisation and decades of US imperialism, which have destroyed Haiti’s economic sovereignty and pushed its people into extreme poverty.
Second, shipping camel meat from Australia to Haiti would be a tremendously inefficient use of resources, which would require the Aussie taxpayer to foot the multimillion dollar bill for slaughter, packing and shipping. Thankfully, the government is doing the sensible thing by supporting NGOs on the ground in Haiti.
Third, until contraceptive baits for camels have been perfected, let’s use the draw of water bores to surgically sterilise camels, and then let them live out their lives. Killing camels to rot or to eat simply creates a vacuum until they repopulate back to their original numbers.
Widespread and sustained sterilisation, on the other hand, would permanently remove camels from the Australian landscape so that native animals can be left in peace.

Let us have open minds and consider the arguments for a vegan lifestyle free of all animal products.
See: www.abolitionistapproach.com/video

Jeff Perz
Alice Springs

Embracing the first cultures

Sir, – Hal Duell (Letters, “Who’s to blame?”, Feb 4) takes issue with whitefellas being blamed for everything that is wrong with the life of Indigenous Australians today. To quote him: “Australia has evolved into a truly tolerant and inclusive nation that shows a willingness to embrace a myriad of cultures on a fully equal basis”.

When I was a teenager I arrived in Australia on a boat (the first post-war wave of boat people). I can testify that Hal Duell is absolutely right when it comes to Australia being willing to embrace a myriad of [newly arriving] cultures. So why is the Australian nation not prepared to extend the same willingness to the myriad of cultures that were here first? Why is it that the authorities are not prepared to embrace Aboriginal cultures on a “fully equal basis”?
Why does the NT Education Department impose a “four hours English only” policy on remote Aboriginal schools in places that have managed against all odds to keep their languages?
Why does the Federal Government persist with the 500 pages of NTER legislation (the Intervention) which clearly is not treating these places on a “fully equal basis”? Why does the Government hold off re-instating the Racial Discrimination Act (a broken election promise incidentally)?

Hal, I agree with you that you shouldn’t entirely shift the blame to others for the circumstances you find yourself in or for your actions. Remote Aborigines are now drifting into Alice Springs in ever increasing numbers (“Income Management Refugees” is what I call them) and I am told the social harmony there has been seriously disrupted. Residents of Yuendumu have virtually no decision-making power and have been marginalised within their own communities. Virtually everything is controlled from Alice Springs, Darwin and Canberra. Obscene amounts of taxpayer’s money is being spent on a multi-pronged ethnocentric assimilationist assault. Blaming Yuendumu residents for the current situation is like blaming civilians caught in cross-fire for getting in the way of the bullets. Fair go!

Frank Baarda
Yuendumu

Equal Australian citizens

Sir, – In reply to the letter from Dr G Stotz (Alice News, Jan 4) the reference to David Price as a “Whitefella” was clearly intended as a racial insult!

Mr Price is a good man, a man who genuinely works at stopping the degradation of those who are his life, people who are suffering due to the greed of a select few. He and his wife have taken up the long hard battle for equality for all Aboriginal people.

Dr Stotz, let me remind you that those Aboriginal people who are brain washed by people like yourself are not some prehistoric race that should be isolated from the life that others freely enjoy, simply as creatures for the likes of you to study. They are in fact equal Australian citizens who should be enjoying the same opportunities, in the same world as everyone else.

Our community must join the battle with Mr and Mrs Price. Evil only exists when good men and women stand by and do nothing. It is time to free the people from the chains of paternalism.

Janet Brown
Alice Springs

Correctness gap

Sir,– The recent exchange between Dave and Jacinta Price and Dr Stotz (Letters, Feb 4 and Feb 11) to me just demonstrates the wide gap between political correctness and reality. It reminds me of an encounter I had with an old friend who I hadn’t seen for a number of years.

In that time he had been studying Aboriginal culture in Adelaide and had just obtained his degree, while I had been working up here in Central Australia. He was so wide of the mark in terms of the realities of the situation and yet he had a degree saying he knew what he was talking about. I suggested he might like to take his degree out into the bush and compare his “knowledge” to the realities of Aboriginal life.

In my opinion there are few people as qualified as Dave Price to make comment on the problems and solutions. He lives them on a daily basis.

Paul Christensen
Alice Springs

Young anti-nukes

Sir, – Georgia Weinert’s survey of Alice Springs late teenagers (Alice News, Dec 17, 2009), although not a robust sample, does indicate that of those likely to be voting in Alice in the next election or the one after, the majority do not favour a mine near Alice.

Further there is understanding that the issue is not just a not-in-our-backyard one but includes much bigger problems about the nuclear industry generally.

Would the government allow mining if it were not safe, and put economy ahead of people’s health and wellbeing? Look at the problems with other mines and other aspects of the nuclear industry’s safety record.
Housing horrors

Sir, – Monday’s release of the 2010 ACOSS Australian Community Sector Survey demonstrates that vulnerable Territorians are suffering because community organisations are under-resourced. The ACOSS Survey found that in the Northern Territory, these organisations are simply unable to meet the demand for their services. Most worryingly, 77% of all those people turned away were seeking housing and homelessness services.

Working Territorian families are finding it harder and harder to get suitable housing and the most vulnerable people in our community – those with mental health issues, substance misuse concerns, and disabilities – suffer under the radar. The situation is critical and continues to deteriorate. The government must take decisive action.

The ACOSS survey indicates that the community services who work to assist those with housing problems and other difficulties are at breaking point. Average staff turnover in these organisations across the NT runs at a staggering 52%. Wages in the sector languish almost 20% behind the salary packages available to those doing similar jobs in government and private enterprise.

The chronic shortage of housing in the Territory also makes its difficult to attract staff from southern locations. Territorians are entitled to a strong and stable community sector to ensure that people in our community are happy and productive. The NT cannot prosper if people are left behind in large numbers.

At a time when increasing numbers of Territorians need a hand-up, the government must invest in the community sector to allow these skilled and efficient organisations to assist families and individuals to get back on track.

Wendy Morton,
NTOCSS

Helpful Alice traders

Sir,– Customer service is not dead!

Having travelled around Australia over the last five years, we have seen every level of customer service, but none to match that provided by Glenda of Central Car Rentals and Brenton at Opposite Lock in Alice Springs.

Glenda not only took the time to listen to our tale of woe (our own truck snapped a suspension leaf), she made time to explain the terms of our hire, offered us an esky, a fuel jerry can, water and travel suggestions.

She was also the friendliest person we have met in a long time – we even got a hug after she dropped us off!

Brenton of Opposite Lock was able to quote for our car repair over the phone, gave us a fixed quote and even drove us back to our accommodation.

Although Opposite Lock was not the cheapest, Brenton made us feel we were a valued customer, and above all, that we could trust him.

Contrast this experience with one of his competitors, who required us to make an appointment to sight the vehicle, didn’t keep to the appointed time, and finally didn’t even look at the car on the hoist “because we couldn’t work out how to turn off the disabler”.

Who would you trust with your pride and joy?

People like Glenda and Brenton make places like Alice Springs a desirable place to visit and stay a little longer, which helps all businesses in town.

Patrick & Elizabeth Imbert (on the road)

ADAM'S APPLE: 2010 was meant to be cooler.

Although we are officially into 2010 I am still unsure as to the correct way to say it. Is it 20-10 or is it 2000 and 10? Whichever it is, I have found myself horribly ill prepared for the turn of the new decade.

(Before you write in to Erwin, I know it’s not really the start of the decade. I know that 2010 is the last year of the decade but we are all expected to be metric and digital now so I’ll go with the flow.)
I must admit that 2010 has crept up on me. Wasn’t 2010 the date in all the Martian movies I saw as a kid? I guess in my mind I expected 2010 to look and feel different than it does. Why am I not wearing a silver jump suit and hopping on a shuttle to Xandax-7? In the Martian movies, technology seemed so much cooler than what we have now.

My sister gave me a mobile phone for Christmas. For the first time in my life I now have a mobile phone with a camera on the back. Don’t tell your kids, they’ll faint at the thought of life without a camera in your pocket to take pouty self portraits at a moment’s notice.

If we are completely honest with ourselves we’d have to say that these new fandangled mobile telephones are a bit ridiculous. Who really needs to play a smaller fuzzier version of a computer game on their phone? Who really needs to Bluetooth a video of a small child swinging a toy bat straight into the crotch of their father? It’s all just gilding the technological lily.

I want to know who composes the tunes for mobile ring tones. If like me, you are a bit slow on the whole 2010 concept, let me give you a bit of advice. If you are looking for a ring tone for your mobile phone that actually sounds like a ringing phone, give up right now. The grail for which you seek is as illusive as good things to watch on television at midday.

Instead we are given a selection of “tunes” that sound like they wear kaftans and smell of patchouli. “Ethereal Sunsets”, “Aqueous” and “Summer Calm” are just a few of the offerings that came with my new phone. Do they tell me that someone is trying to call or do they realign my chakra? I’m not entirely certain.

I can just imagine some ponytailed, fisherman’s pants-wearing bloke named Alisdair sitting in his mother’s spare room bashing away on his Casio coming up with this polyphonic drivel. I’m pretty sure his brother makes the film clips for karaoke songs. They’re that sort of family.

I’m not often a stupid man. I have my moments of idiocy but all in all my 34 years of life have taught me the skills needed to exist without hitting my head on something sharp. That being said I have not learned the patience required to set up my mobile phone without swearing at the customer service hold music.

I know that the call has been diverted to a large pre-fabricated building somewhere in a business district in a city somewhere in South Asia. I have no problem accepting the idea of outsourcing. In a global community the whole globe gets involved. What I do have a problem with is that once I am finally connected to a real living person in the aforementioned call centre, they have to pretend that they are talking to me from Glenelg.

“Good afternoon sir, this is Kevin. How may I assist you?”

I’m sorry, but I will bet the lives of my yet to be conceived children that your parents did not name you Kevin. How pathetic do these companies think we are that they believe we won’t discuss the connection of our newly acquired mobile phones with a man named Ranjit? A guy named Ranjit sold the phone to my sister in the first place! 2010 was meant to be cooler. We were meant to be beaming up Scotty by now. Where is my phaser, my teleporter and my holo graphic television?

I’ll tell you where they’ve gone. All the brilliant minds that were meant to be working on these inventions are making a small fortune developing the technology to make it faster and easier to download porn.

Move over missionary, misfit and mercenary. By POP VULTURE with CAMERON BUCKLEY.

Have you ever wondered what it would be like if Sunday School went out drinking with the devil? Well you need wonder no more, because the OK Sluts play it out theatrically.

It’s a musical and stage performance centred around that educated journey from south to centre, a missionary quest to the remote community, and the involvement that willy willys about it. Not so much touching on issues as molesting them!

This is the funniest thing to take root locally, finally something that both satirises and throttles the idea of the missionary, misfit and mercenary tag that is attached to any person who migrates to Central Australia.

Verse, music and cabaret, dirty surf guitar, cheese and chimes keyboard and a lyrical sense that digs deep into the dirt of western culture out of time and place in the desert.

With a strong emphasis on targeting the missionary life style, they use a wry wit laced with a kind of dark sunshine humour reserved for people that have seen it flow three times or more, or maybe not.

The quartet, Beth Sometimes, Matt Hill, Hannah-May Casper and Melissa Kerl, draw first hand experience with a
knife, dissecting popular culture songs and inserting a dark humoured cutlery piece to come up with their own brand of musical theatre. In-house references are piercings all over this body of work, the “My Aborigines are better than your Aborigines” song, a testament to the show’s originality and knowledge. It made me think that two wrongs don’t make a right but four definitely do. Ending with a fantastic retrospective piece about the Melanka’s nightclub scene, a bubblegum cesspool of lunchbox debauchery, with sticky floorboards to end all sticky floorboards. If you didn’t understand what all that means, it doesn’t matter. The OK Sluts made me deeply miss that hole of a place. Given the sudden venue change (the original venue at the claypans became a last minute ditch in favour of the KI Warehouse. It was at the cost of cacophonous sound engineering) and the fact that more rehearsal time is needed (to the point of physical conflict between band members) before this show heads to the Adelaide Fringe. Its final result should evolve into nothing short of exceptional, number one with an operatic bullet. How this act is perceived and received south of the border should only make better the story of this blueprint for shady hilarity.

**How to attract tourists with mulga. Naturally with ALEX NELSON.**

North of the MacDonnell Ranges is an extensive plain covered, for the most part, with mile after mile of mulga scrub. Most people find it monotonous to travel through – they would empathize with the opening verse of A. D. Hope’s famous poem ‘Australia’: “A nation of trees, drab green and desolate grey; in the field uniform of modern wars”. First impressions always mislead – this is a country where nothing is as simple as it seems. Mulga is the most widespread and dominant of the hundreds of species of wattles (Acacias) in Australia and the pre-eminence of mulga in Central Australia is the reason why mulga groves have been established at the Olive Pink Botanic Garden (OPBG).

There’s no question that mulgas do look drab and grey while enduring extended periods of heat and drought (I would, too, I reckon). This was certainly the case with the mulga at OPBG during the hot dry summer of 2004-05. So my attention was caught one afternoon in late March 2005 when I noticed a mulga smothered in golden blooms, and two more nearby also putting on a less showy display of flowers. This was intriguing – what had prompted these plants to put on such a display when all else remained “desolate grey”? The answer was quickly apparent – a dripper hose had burst apart, and each time the irrigation was automatically switched on these lucky individuals were getting flood irrigated. Each mulga at the OPBG was regularly watered with a single dripper but it was apparent this was insufficient for their needs and not reflective of the natural conditions to which mulgas are adapted. I sought and gained permission from the curator, the late Clarry Smith, to trial a different approach. During about two weeks of April 2005 I systematically watered the main mulga grove (near the car park) with sprinklers. Each night one or two sprinklers were allowed to run for about 12 hours then relocated to adjacent positions for the following nights until the grove was completed. This method imitated heavy rainfall (from memory the sprinklers emitted the equivalent of about 40mm rainfall in each position), which I expected would “break the drought” for the mulgas. The trial worked like a charm. The mulgas rapidly greened up, sprouting new foliage and buds. During May and June the entire grove erupted into a spectacular blaze of golden blossom, which had a further consequence. The late Barry Bucholz was a regular visitor to the OPBG. Barry is well remembered for his prominent role in Central Australia’s tourism industry – he was also a renowned bird watching enthusiast (or “twitcher”). Early one Sunday morning (when the mulgas were in full bloom) Barry was enjoying a cup of coffee, and in the space of about five minutes casually observed 12 different species of birds in one tree. Seven species were honeyeaters, including a grey honeyeater. Barry sent an email to his bird enthusiast friends in which he listed all 12 species of birds he had seen on that one brief occasion. Now if you think mulgas look drab, it’s nothing compared to grey honeyeaters. These tiny nondescript secretive birds specialize in avoiding drawing attention to themselves. They are probably more rarely seen rather than rare, and not much is known about them – but they do like living in mulgas. But it’s these characteristics of obscurity and elusiveness that make sighting of a grey honeyeater a high
priority for many birdwatchers.
The news that grey honeyeaters could be seen with ease in the mulga grove at the OPBG prompted an amazing response.
For the rest of 2005 twitchers from around Australia regularly dropped in seeking to glimpse a grey honeyeater – most were rewarded.
There were even people on flight stopovers at the Alice Springs Airport who raced in to Olive Pink to spend 10 to 15 minutes to spy a grey honeyeater before rushing off to catch their flights out.
This effect lingered on over the next two years.
All this from chucking on sprinklers for a few nights and an email – now how easy is that?

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