**A life filled with learning**

Steve Menzie

TAKING on a new role in the community is the goal of a Tertiary student after 45 years in the Northern Territory for popular educationalist Paul Fitzsimons.

"Being able to run into former students now in their fifties, who are parents and grandparents of children I have had something to do with their education, is my favourite part of Alice Springs," Mr Fitzsimons said.

"I want to keep my mind active by being involved in community activities, on whatever basis, around town.

"I will also learn to swim. When I was young I was a handy swimmer but since coming to NT I have hardly participated in any aquatic activities.

"I need to learn to swim so I can exercise. My knees hurt when I walk."

Mr Fitzsimons finished as the Charles Darwin University director for Central Australia on Friday. He has been involved with the NT education system since arriving to teach grade 5 at Ross Park Primary School in 1970.

During his career Mr Fitzsimons has fulfilled many tasks, including being the professional assistant to Earl Watters, the head of southern region education, with the responsibility for small communities, and in the 1990s he established schools for disadvantaged children including Alice Outcomes.

He was seconded to Darwin in 2000 where he wrote a paper on disadvantaged youth for the then Education Minister, Mr Don Chipp.

On returning to Alice Springs, he became the director of regional and remote education.

A restructure of the university in 2009 saw Mr Fitzsimons become the director in 2009.

He said times have changed and this applies to the education system as well.

"We have to live in the current times and so have to educate students in a manner that suits people living in the 21st century," Mr Fitzsimons said.

"The significance of the quality results for Central Australia in this year’s Year 12 is all students are provided with role models for their own education on how to succeed and cope in the education system."

Mr Fitzsimons has already made a significant contribution to the town.

He began as an active sportsman — playing football for Melanka, basketball for West, cricket for Hotel Alice Springs and squash — before moving on to administrative roles as chair of the AFL/CA advisory committee, being on the board of Tennis NT and the president of the Federal Sports Club for nine years.

He has also published books since 1986 with Outback Books to "keep historically important books on the shelves."

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**Income management fails to meet its objectives**

Matthew Campbell

COMMENT

IN recent years, Tangentyere Council Research Hub has undertaken data collection in Alice Springs town camps as part of a longitudinal study of income management.

The final report of about 300 pages was handed to government in September and was finally released last week.

As a participant in the data collection, we received four pages of feedback on the research. This showed that, to a large extent, income management does not achieve its stated aims.

The one group of people who do gain a little benefit are those who choose to have their income managed voluntarily.

The report is based on administrative information from Centrelink, from stores that accept the so-called Basics Card, a survey of more than 1000 people on income management and interviews with a range of stakeholders.

Income management guarantees 50 per cent of a person’s welfare income, which is available for spending through the Basics Card.

The Basics Card enables the holder to buy alcohol, pornography, tobacco and tobacco products, gambling products, gambling services, household kits and home-brew concentrate. In brief, the study findings are:

Income management does not change people’s behaviour, particularly in their ability to "manage" their money, then we need to question whether expanding this system makes sense.

And if income quarantining does not work, what are the alternatives?

Parity report that people receiving welfare should get a "Healthy Welfare Card."

Those receiving age or veterans’ pensions would be excluded, though there is no explanation for this.

If quarantining welfare payments does not change people’s behaviour, particularly in their ability to "manage" their money, then we need to question whether expanding this system makes sense.

And if income quarantining does not work, what are the alternatives?

To properly answer this question, we need to go back further and explore the origins of the thinking that produces "solutions" like income quarantining. Then we will be able to explore other policies that may provide different and more effective solutions.

In Australia (and the US and UK), a reconceptualisation of what welfare was "for" started with the measure is essentially a moral concept. It is now directed toward assisting them to get "work".

Our study showed that society is made up of individuals rather than abstract concepts imagined by policymakers, who tend to assume that society is made up of individuals rather than groups. This thinking leads to the construction of solutions that target people as individuals first, rather than as members of extended social networks.

The practical problem with this is that it undermines the building of strength that change is predicated upon. Aboriginal people in the town camps are looking to engage with governments in ways that strengthen their knowledge and culture, which in turn produces tangible meaningful change in their lives.

They reject the contradictory logic at the heart of compulsory income management in relation to who drives (and should be driving) change in their communities.

We should be asking serious questions as to whether the proposed Healthy Welfare Card will produce the transformation desired by government. If, as this research suggests, the answer is "it won’t", then we need to fundamentally rethink our approaches.

*Matthew Campbell is the Research Coordinator at Tangentyere Council in Alice Springs.*

The Council received funding from Colman Brunton to conduct the field work for this research in Alice Springs Town Camps. This article was originally published online at www.theclassroomdevelopment.com