



**Northern Territory Community Development Project**  
**March 2008 – February 2009**  
**Final Report**

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**Funded by**

**Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs**

## **Acknowledgements**

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Sincere thanks go to the NT Deaf Community; they have been actively involved in this project. Thanks also to the DeafNT coordinator and management committee for their support and input.

## **Background**

The NT Community Development Project was a one-year project to help Deaf people in the NT to gain skills in advocating for services that they need.

The project was for both Indigenous Deaf people and non-Indigenous Deaf people. The major aims were to:

- Identify what Deaf people in the NT need to learn to develop their knowledge and skills to be more confident in advocating for services they need; and
- Provide training to Deaf people in the NT to develop their knowledge and skills to advocate for the services they need.

The idea for this project began in 2004 when DeafNT requested that Deaf Australia (at that time known as Australian Association of the Deaf) visit Darwin to discuss the possibility of setting up a branch of Deaf Australia in the NT. Deaf Australia sent two people to Darwin to consult with DeafNT and members of the Darwin Deaf community.

The Deaf community in Darwin is very small and Deaf Australia concluded that it is too small to support two community organisations. It was therefore decided that Deaf Australia would try to work with DeafNT to try to support DeafNT and the NT Deaf community to become well-constructed and self supporting. DeafNT agreed that this was the best way forward.

In 2006 Deaf Australia asked the Australian Government for funding for a project to provide skills training for the NT Deaf community. The Australian Government through the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs agreed to provide funding, which commenced in April 2008.

Deaf Australia worked with DeafNT on this project. Everything the project did was in partnership with DeafNT. The project began on 1 March 2008 and ended on 28 February 2009.

## **Project Activities**

The project focussed on how the NT Deaf Community can gain access to services and advocate for themselves for improved access. The lack of community awareness of the specific needs of Deaf individuals is a major issue in the NT.

Many Deaf individuals are not aware that they can advocate for equal opportunities. Through the project's consultations with Deaf and hard of hearing people, it was discovered that this is a major problem that needs to be brought to the attention of service providers.

There is only one advocacy organisation specific for Deaf people – DeafNT, and because DeafNT is not well funded or supported its ability to provide advocacy support is extremely limited.

Due to community ignorance many Deaf individuals are left to exist in a state of constant disadvantage and poor quality of life. Many of these Deaf people do not know what services are out there that could assist them. Throughout the consultation period the project officer found that the main problem was a lack of awareness of services available for Deaf people, and their lack of communication with each other.

At the commencement of the project a work plan was developed. The workplan and detailed activity report is attached as Appendix 1.

## **Consultation**

The project officer worked closely with DeafNT to reach out to Deaf and hard of hearing individuals known to DeafNT. Contact was also made with various organisations such as community health centres and Indigenous-specific agencies, to reach isolated Deaf or hard of hearing individuals, to ensure information about the project was known throughout the Territory. A total of 42 organisations received a project information flyer.

Some aspects of the project plans were changed, specifically how information sessions, consultations and training workshops were held. The consultation phase of the project – to hold public meetings to explain the project to Deaf and hard of hearing people – was changed on advice from DeafNT. DeafNT advised that it would be more effective to meet individuals separately before hosting a community meeting, due to past experience and ongoing conflicts between members of the minority Deaf community. The project officer met 33 Deaf and hard of hearing individuals at various times and locations, in Darwin, Timber Creek and Alice Springs.

Information about the project was published in the DeafNT newsletter which was sent to its members, of whom 17 were Deaf or hard of hearing, and was mailed directly to another 16 Deaf and hard of hearing people known to not be members of DeafNT. Information about the project was also put on the Deaf Australia website.

A media release was sent to the local newspaper (NT News) and to NT Council of Social Services (NTCOSS). The project information was made available on NTCOSS website. The NT News did not publish the information despite several contacts being made with the editor.

Several months after the project began, an attempt was made to host a community consultation meeting in Darwin and another in Alice Springs to reach out to more Deaf and hard of hearing people. The Darwin community consultation invitation was mailed out to local Deaf people who had not made previous contacts with DeafNT but their addresses were known. The consultation was attended by one person only. The Alice Springs community consultation was held during National Week of Deaf People and information about it was on Deaf Australia's website and in its newsletter. It was attended by one person as well. There

may be a number of reasons the meetings were not well attended: many people were already aware of the project; some were not aware the meeting was being held; some had no access to transport; some did not want to attend due to ongoing friction within the Deaf community.

The project was well received by those Deaf and hard of hearing individuals with whom the project officer met individually, and by organisations that were contacted.

## **Identification of skills requirements and provision of training**

Information about key Indigenous and non-Indigenous Deaf and hard of hearing people interested in becoming involved with the project was collected during one-on-one informal meetings and small groups meetings, from professionals, and from parents of Deaf and hard of hearing people.

A total of 14 Deaf and hard of hearing people were identified as key individuals for involvement in the project.

Information about their current skills and abilities and about training/learning needs were recorded. From this information it was determined by the project officer that the planned approach of providing training to groups of Deaf and hard of hearing people would not have the desired impact for a number of reasons: the wide variety of skill levels and educational backgrounds; the vast geographic spread of the community; and personal conflicts within the Deaf community. It was decided that one-on-one training would be more effective. It was suggested that a group workshop could occur later in the project, when the Deaf individuals were more confident about learning with others.

A total of 43 one-on-one and pairs training sessions were conducted from April 2008 to February 2009. The training sessions covered a variety of methods, including mentoring, providing information and basic training. The training delivered was focused under 5 main categories: advocacy skills; presentation skills; independence skills; computer skills; and management skills. Feedback on training was very positive and indicated that customised training to suit their needs, training provided in Auslan, and the hands-on practical training had been factors for positive learning experiences.

At a later stage of the project, the project officer identified a workshop that would potentially support most Deaf people's desire to develop their skills. An Anger Management and Positive Communication workshop was organised and two Deaf people experienced in presenting this type of workshop were brought to Darwin from interstate. Ten Deaf people attended and this was considered an excellent number. The workshop was very successful, with much discussion among the participants indicating they were keen on improving their own feelings and responses to conflict. The workshop presenters were both Deaf and were able to empathise with the participants. There were requests for similar workshops where learning and socialising could happen.

In addition, the project officer worked closely with DeafNT personnel to provide one on one training to develop a number of skills and areas of knowledge that DeafNT personnel identified would help them. The main successful outcome was an improvement in DeafNT's presentation of Deaf Awareness Training sessions to the wider community with the use of

visual media. Training in submission writing also led to success in gaining funds to run the Anger Management workshop.

A number of resources were developed to assist DeafNT, including:

- a directory of relevant government and non government organisations, Indigenous organisations, and community service providers across the city of Darwin for referral purposes;
- a factsheet on access of interpreter agencies and a diagram of 'how to provide feedback and complaint procedures';
- a booklet about advocacy for Deaf people in easy to understand English.

## **Outcomes**

### **Key successes**

It was found that individuals generally were more enthusiastic about accessing training and mentoring when a relevant issue, such as accessing information on the Internet, had arisen for them and it became essential for them to seek support. The opportunity to have one-on-one training at a time and location most convenient for them also encouraged them to seek training, as did the fact that the training provided by the project was not conducted in a formal educational setting but in a relaxed familiar environment such as the DeafNT office or their home. It is known that some Deaf people resist attending anything that is labelled as "education" or "training", due to previous negative experiences with education and training. The training was delivered at the Deaf person's request and at their own pace. In addition, the project worker was Deaf and fluent in Auslan, which was a positive factor.

The major success in the project was the evident improvement in self confidence of the participants. Over the duration of the project the participants became more and more confident and were willing to advocate for their own rights, where they demonstrated assertive behaviours.

The other major success was the increased understanding of participants regarding opportunities available to them. The project helped the participants stop and think about what services were available and accessible for them and led to them being willing to attend the Anger Management group workshop.

The project officer learned that networking with various existing service providers is essential to enhance awareness and increase resources to meet the needs of Deaf and hard of hearing people. There are now 43 organisations/service providers within the NT who are aware of the project and are aware they can refer Deaf clients to DeafNT (and could also refer them to the project officer during the project).

DeafNT is now able to provide better quality Deaf Awareness Training sessions to the wider community and has increased skills in other areas such as submission writing and action planning. DeafNT also now have more resources such as service providers directory for referral, feedback & complaint procedures for interpreter agencies and advocacy booklet.

## Key challenges

A major challenge was targeting participants for this project, due in large part to the geographic isolation of Deaf and hard of hearing people, in particular Indigenous people. Locating Deaf Indigenous and non-Indigenous people was not an easy task, due to lack of information on their whereabouts. Participation of Indigenous Deaf and hard of hearing people was limited, with 4 Deaf Indigenous people out of 25 individuals involved in the project. Contact with Indigenous Deaf people was limited due to their living in remote communities and the communication barrier due to culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (Indigenous Deaf people use different sign languages), but also because the Indigenous communities are generally difficult for anyone to access.

Another major challenge was the small number of Deaf and hard of hearing people in the NT. They are considered a low priority by many service providers; several providers look after other nationalities or disabilities which greatly outnumber the needs of Deaf and hard of hearing people. The project officer's main concern about the the majority of services providers was their focus on ear health of Indigenous people rather than their communication and self advocacy abilities.

A further challenge was the implementation of advocacy training without being able to offer community service support/welfare due to the nature of this project. We had not anticipated the intensity of need for support of some participants due to their lack of knowledge, information and confidence. Some of the participants needed to be reminded regularly that advocacy can increase awareness but does not always provide the solution they might expect. The creation of a booklet about advocacy was an attempt to provide ongoing assistance to them after the departure of the project worker.

The project experienced a good deal of resistance from both Indigenous and non-Indigenous Deaf people (and the hearing people surrounding them). We learned that in the NT nothing happens quickly; it takes time and a lot of effort to get them to accept "outsiders" and that they do need support. With this project being for only a one year period, many people did not want to develop a relationship with us, seeing us as "people from the south who will blow in and blow out again in a short time".

This resistance was particularly true of Indigenous Deaf people. The Indigenous situation has also been complicated by the NT Indigenous intervention programs that government introduced in the preceding years. The Indigenous communities have become more closed to outsiders as a response to this, and this made it harder for the project officer to establish contacts. The project officer tried to overcome this by developing relationships with the service providers who already have established relationships with Indigenous communities as the entry point and access to Indigenous Deaf people. Because this takes time, the short time period of this project has been a disadvantage.

The project concept was new in the NT and participants and service organisations needed time to digest information about the project. Our experience showed that projects in the NT need to be of a longer duration because they take much longer to be accepted and to establish a relationship of trust with project stakeholders.

## **Recommendations**

Overall the project achieved a great deal in difficult circumstances and was enjoyed immensely by those who participated. Some participants gained additional skills in advocating, such as requesting the provision of staff skilled in Auslan in an education setting and gaining access to information through using the internet by developing skills in the use of computer to achieve desired outcomes.

Participants requested more opportunities for Deaf-friendly workshops in the future. DeafNT could continue to seek funds to cover the costs of workshops with Deaf or Auslan skilled presenters. DeafNT and other service providers/organisations could work together in partnership to better meet the needs of Deaf and hard of hearing people.

This project report provides a significant step to better understanding the needs of Deaf and hard of hearing Indigenous and non-Indigenous people living in the Northern Territory. However, it was a short and small-scale project and has highlighted a number of concerns and needs:

1. Lack of information about numbers and whereabouts of individuals who are isolated, and the difficulty of locating them.
2. Short term projects such as this will inevitably have limited success in the Northern Territory due to (a) inherent suspicion towards “outsiders” and “blow ins” and (b) the relatively low starting base – i.e., the entrenched lack of knowledge of what is possible and awareness of one’s own lack of knowledge.
3. Ongoing need for an outreach support worker (community services worker/case management) for Deaf and hard of hearing people; many people need more basic “welfare” type support before they will be ready for “advocacy” type training.
4. Ongoing need for an advocacy service that can help Deaf and hard of hearing people and their families to develop their advocacy skills and gain the integrated support they need from service providers. DeafNT in its current form is not able to provide the level of advocacy that is needed.

Deaf Australia recommends that:

1. An on-going program be established to provide a community services worker (case management) for Deaf and hard of hearing people in the NT. This worker could be based at DeafNT but may be more effective if located separately as part of some other generic disability or community service.

This social worker would:

- a) Work intensively with other service providers to provide guidance on how to improve the accessibility of their services to suit Deaf and hard of hearing people’s needs;

- b) Implement and co-ordinate the involvement of other service providers to meet the Deaf/hard of hearing person's needs;
  - c) Partner with other agencies, e.g., health centres and Indigenous-specific agencies to reach the minority Deaf communities;
  - d) Provide outreach services that are Deaf –specific to all areas of the Northern Territory to provide information and support to Deaf people, parents and professionals in a holistic approach.
2. DeafNT be funded on an on-going basis to employ a dedicated advocacy worker to provide information and advocacy training to Deaf and hard of hearing people and information about Deaf and hard of hearing people to the wider community.

For both of these recommendations it is vital that the personnel involved be fluent in Auslan and preferably themselves Deaf.

## **Conclusion**

Overall, the project demonstrated the importance of the availability of training and mentoring tailored to individual need, especially the ability to communicate in Auslan. Various strategies were required when skilling Deaf and hard of hearing people in the area of advocating for their own needs. To ensure the learning experience is positive for them, the one-on-one and smaller size of groups and an awareness of and knowledge of how to respond to the cultural and linguistic needs of various individuals are essential.

Future strategies and program activities should be developed to better meet the ongoing needs of Deaf people and hard of hearing people in the Northern Territory.