



East Kimberley Impact of Changes to the Community Development Program

This brief summarises the response from local people to the changes made in May 2021 to the Community Development Program's (CDP) Mutual Obligation Requirements and presents data on the impact the change has had in the East Kimberley. BBy has consulted with members of Empowered Communities and other local agencies to capture their views on how and why the decision was made and what they have observed in the community since. These observations are backed by data that evidences the reduction in attendance rate across almost all CDP activities in the East Kimberley since the change was made.

Empowered Communities East Kimberley leaders are calling for the decision to change mutual obligation requirements to be reversed, and for all future changes in the Community Development Program to be made in consultation with community members.

“It gave people a routine, a reason to wake up in the morning, to work somewhere away from home, it gave them purpose.”

- Jean O'Reeri (Director, Binarri-binyja yarrowoo Aboriginal Corporation)

Key Messages:

- On 11 May 2021, the Government made changes to Mutual Obligation Requirements for all CDP job seekers. As a result, job seekers are no longer required to participate in work-for-the-dole activities to receive their benefit payment. Participation in activities is now voluntary.
- Local people were not consulted about this change and the reasons for it are not well understood by community members.
- Data shows that attendance has decreased on average by 5% across all CDP activities in the East Kimberley in June and July 2021 period compared to the April and May 2021 period.
- Community members are concerned that by changing the mutual obligation requirement to participate in work-for-the-dole activities, job seekers no longer have an incentive to develop routine and work readiness skills required to sustain regular employment and enable economic participation.
- East Kimberley leaders are also concerned about the impact on children and families, citing the change as leading parents to role model poor behaviour for children.
- Activity providers have taken the opportunity to use more innovative engagement strategies to maintain attendance rates of job seekers. However, they are also finding it more difficult to engage job seekers in wraparound services.

Data Snapshot

Since mutual obligations requirements were changed on 12 May 2021, attendance has decreased on average by 5% across all CDP activities in the East Kimberley.

CDP activities in the East Kimberley (Activities without data for the period were omitted)		Change in Attendance (Change in average proportion of hours attended in June/July 2021 compared to April/May 2021)
1	Artopia Hosted Art Therapy Project	-33%
2	Balgo Community Project	-2%
3	Cert II Rural Operations	-5%
4	CFN – Women’s Centre Kalumburu	-8%
5	Dawn to Dusk Work Readiness Program	-12%
6	Doon Doon Community Activity	14%
7	East Kimberley - Community Remote Action Projects	5%
8	Glen Hill and Surrounds Outstation Projects	4%
9	Halls Creek Building a Brighter Future	-11%
10	Halls Creek Horticulture and Arts	-2%
11	Halls Creek Outstation Development Program	-7%
12	Hosted WfD Activity - Yirliyiil Art Centre	-3%
13	Kalumburu Community Advancement Projects	-18%
14	Kira Kiro Arts Kalumburu	-10%
15	Kununurra Community Gardens	5%
16	Mindibungu Production Horticulture	-18%
17	Miriwoong Language and Cultural Development	-7%
18	Ringer Soak Culture, Language & Arts	-2%
19	Ringer Soak Production Horticulture	8%
20	Strong Gawooleng Healing Program	-5%
21	Strong Men's Community Beautification	-18%
22	Waringarri Indigenous Arts and Culture	-7%
23	Warlayirti Arts and Culture	12%
24	Warmun Community Advancement Projects	0%
25	Warmun Outstation Projects	-30%
26	Wyndham Community Advancement Projects	9%

Local voices: the impact on the community

East Kimberley community members and leaders were interviewed about the positive and negative impacts of the changes to the CDP mutual obligations on the community.

The reasons for the changes are not well understood and people are disappointed that the decision was made without consultation with the community.

“The activities were an opportunity for people to be upskilled to be ready for the workforce.”

For some activity host organisations, the program has been used as an **employment and training pathway** for jobseekers in the community. Compulsory attendance at activities has given people the accountability and consistent routine needed to develop work readiness skills. A reduction in attendance in activities has been observed since the mutual obligation was made voluntary, and this has been described as a disappointing **‘loss of momentum’** for jobseekers and activity providers that work to support the development of their job readiness skills.

Community members have described the reduction in activity attendance having a **negative impact on children**. Parents who usually had a routine and were leaving the house during the day to engage in activities now ‘have no reason to get out of bed anymore’ which is **role modelling antisocial behaviour to children**, community members say. Work readiness is a ‘learned behaviour’ and the CDP activities were a way to encourage the development of habits and attitudes required to sustain regular employment and economic participation. With the sudden change in mutual obligation requirements, there are concerns that the loss of routine and participation will have lasting impacts on the next generation.

“If children see their parents sitting at home, they will sit at home too, they won’t go to school.”

Another impact of the change has been the increased responsibility placed on activity providers to maintain attendance rates. By removing activity attendance as a mutual obligation, activity host organisations ‘need to be more creative’ and **need ‘innovative thinking on how to keep community members engaged on limited funding and resources’**. Providers are also finding it more **challenging to engage jobseekers in wraparound services** during the day, citing the loss of routine impacting on the motivation of regular program participants.

What we don’t know yet: *Long term impact on children and families*

The removal of activity attendance as a mutual obligation has reduced participation rates across almost all activities in the East Kimberley. Without sufficient support to re-engage jobseekers, community members are concerned about the ‘poor role modelling’ on children and the lasting impact this may have on the next generation.



What we don’t know yet: *Impact on activity providers and wraparound services*

The drop in attendance rates has driven program providers to develop more innovative engagement strategies, to encourage jobseekers to attend both work-for-the-dole activities and community programs including wraparound services. It is unclear how this will impact program providers and jobseekers in the long term, and whether the impact will be positive or negative.