



Aboriginal Resource and Development Services Inc.  
P.O. Box 1671 Nhulunbuy N.T. 0881  
Ph: (08) 8987 3910 Fax: (08) 8987 3912  
Email: nhulun@ards.com.au  
www.ards.com.au

## MEDIA RELEASE

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### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

#### **Petrol Sniffing Band Aid, Why Not Address the Real Issues?**

**Aboriginal Resource and Development Services Inc (ARDS Inc.)**, an Aboriginal controlled non-profit organisation in the Northern Territory debates the proposed further roll out of “opal” fuel subsidies by the Commonwealth Government across the Northern Territory. While a necessary band aid solution, it does nothing to deal with the underlying issues that cause Aboriginal youth to get involved in petrol sniffing in the first place.

Mr Richard Trudgen (Business Manager of ARDS Inc.) stated: “Aboriginal youth sniff petrol because they have simply lost all hope and purpose in their lives. They have come to the realisation that they are lost in a white man’s, English speaking world. Yet it is a world they would love to relate to, but this world is simply beyond their grasp. The main reasons being they do not have access to information and knowledge, about this white man’s, English speaking world, in a form that they can understand. Neither have they learnt enough English so they can access the information themselves.”

“ Yet the government spends millions of dollars on ineffective education and other services that just compound the problem for Aboriginal communities; leaving Aboriginal children, youth and adults in a desperate uneducated, uninformed, confused state. This latest necessary band aid is yet another costly intervention to deal with problems caused in the first place by other destructive government programs, attitudes and policies.”

“Aboriginal people in the NT who are English fifth or sixth language speakers have almost no access to information and knowledge that makes any real sense to them and that answers some of the problems that they have in their heads when they go to sleep every night. They live in information deprived communities. Such communities, any where in the world will display the same social break down that many of these communities are now experiencing. It is not boredom that sends Aboriginal youth off to sniff a substance that gives you chronic headaches and that turns your brains into an ineffective noisy tennis ball. No; they have lost the will to live. Unfortunately Government institutions and the Australian community in general fail to understand the communication needs of the Indigenous people of this country.”

“Capacity building is the answer. Develop educational and media services in the people’s own language; it works! In that way the social capital of the people can be built and they then take control of their own lives and future.”

“Even the Australian Army does it better than the Education and Health departments of the NT. That is they teach their soldiers basic language and cultural awareness etiquette before they send them off for a tour of duty in another country where people speak another language. As the last group of soldiers going to Iraq did. Why can’t teachers and others do the same?”

ARDS makes these statements having successfully worked with an Aboriginal community in north-east Arnhem Land in the 1980’s to solve the increasing problem of petrol sniffing amongst teenagers.



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When ARDS community workers sat down with petrol sniffers, it became clear that they were very confused about how the world ticked.

As outlined in Richard Trudgen's book, "Why Warriors Lie Down and Die", the community development practices employed in this case empowered the community to stamp out the petrol sniffing problem. By providing information in language to the whole community, about what happens when you sniff petrol and the through reintroduction of traditional practices, the community was able to successfully deal with this and other issues. To this day petrol sniffing is no longer a problem on this community.

Richard Trudgen stated: "In 2005 we should be getting smarter about the way we approach the problems facing Aboriginal communities, not just repeating the same old mistakes over and over. And not just for petrol sniffing, but issues of education health, governance, economics and law. What we need to be focussing on is building capacity in individuals and in communities. Providing Indigenous Australian citizens with the necessary information tools so they can take control of they own lives and development."

ARDS is using a combination of multi-media to develop these "self learning" tools. Their first line strategy is the Community Development Radio Service, broadcasting across north-east Arnhem Land and Darwin in the language of the Yolngu (Aboriginal) people. Already programs have been developed on Petrol Sniffing, Diabetes, Law and Order and more.

An information deprived community can never grow. Yet as Richard Trudgen said: "Radio is a cheap and effective way to get information to a whole group of people, regardless of literacy skills. Because the information people are hearing is in their language, everyone can understand it and the whole group can move forward together. This will cost a fraction of what some of these ineffective, inefficient and even destructive programs now cost."

"Some people will say that traditional Aboriginal languages are not good enough to take Aboriginal people into the future. Well just have a look how ineffective and destructive English education is. Besides we can now say with confidence from our experience of using the Yolngu people's traditional language for a number of decades, that traditional Aboriginal Australian languages are extremely good instructional languages just like Latin was; in many ways far better than English."

Richard Trudgen travels to Canberra early next month to deliver seminars which outline some of the strategies ARDS employs to support Aboriginal communities to reach their full potential. Strategies they believe have a wide application for those working in the area of Indigenous policy development and implementation.

Richard Trudgen stated: "The answers are not so difficult but require us to look at the 'problem' in a different way, a bit of lateral thinking maybe. Anyhow it is about time we got it right!"

**For further details contact Mrs Alice Nurthen 08 8987 3910  
or visit [www.ards.com.au/seminars.html](http://www.ards.com.au/seminars.html)**