

The Best of INTENTIONS

Mainstreaming, the Not-For-Profit
Sector and **Indigenous Australians**

Gwenda Claire Colyer

BA (Hons) (University of Sydney)

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Department of Environment and Geography
Macquarie University

March 2014

Abstract

This study investigates interconnections between government approaches to policy in Indigenous affairs – characterised by mainstreaming of services for Indigenous Australians – and the ways in which the not-for-profit sector (NFP) has responded. In terms of both policy and practice it offers a window on the intercultural and interpersonal challenges for organisations and individuals working in the cross-cultural spaces evolving between mainstream (white) organisations and Indigenous Australians.

The thesis offers a detailed case study of Australian Red Cross – one of Australia’s oldest and most prestigious humanitarian organisations. In 2007, Red Cross commenced new programs and services for Indigenous Australians as part of its mission “to help the most vulnerable”. Drawing on Nakata’s concept of the “cultural interface” and field-based research across Australian Red Cross, the thesis explores the interfaces between Indigenous staff, the organisation, and Indigenous communities in the early stages of this venture during the period 2010-2012. The thesis also reviews in detail the experience and challenges of adapting and introducing a Canadian family/community safety program to Australia as an Indigenous community development program.

As NFPs move into domains that were previously mainly Indigenous and with increased co-dependence between the NFP sector and government in providing Indigenous programs and services, the thesis offers a timely account of lessons, risks and challenges for all involved. In conclusion, the thesis questions whether the current policy direction and its resulting collaboration between governments and the mainstream NFP sector have secured the outcomes intended.