



## Transcript

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Compere: **VICKI KERRIGAN** Summary ID: **W00054372640**

Item: **INTERVIEW WITH THE GUNDJEHMI ABORIGINAL CORPORATION'S JUSTIN O'BRIEN ABOUT A NEW LOCALLY CONTROLLED HEALTH PROJECT TO IMPROVE THE LIVES OF ABORIGINAL PEOPLE FROM ACROSS THE KAKADU AND WEST ARNHEM REGION.**

**INTERVIEWEE: JUSTIN O'BRIEN, GUNDJEHMI ABORIGINAL CORPORATION**

<b>Audience:</b>	Male 16+ N/A	Female 16+ N/A	All people N/A
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**VICKI KERRIGAN:** News today from West Arnhem Land of a new locally controlled health project to improve the lives of the Mirrar people. Now, you might not think this is such a big deal, but it is. It's kind of huge. For the first time the Mirrar people will use their own Aboriginal knowledge to break the cycle of poverty and the health issues that go with it.

Justin O'Brien is from the Gundjehmi Aboriginal Corporation, they are a key player in this plan. Justin, can you explain why this is such a big deal?

**JUSTIN O'BRIEN:** Thanks Vicki. Just a point of clarification, the beneficiaries of this announcement will be well beyond the Mirrar people. It's Aboriginal people from across the Kakadu, West Arnhem region.

**VICKI KERRIGAN:** Fantastic.



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JUSTIN O'BRIEN:

And why it's a big deal is, well, for the first time we have a - at this scale, a multi-million dollar, 25-year intergenerational plan being designed and developed by the community using their money, with inputs from the Federal Government and the philanthropic sector, to achieve long-lasting goals that they determine, and seek to deliver in their own way. That's why it's groundbreaking.

VICKI KERRIGAN:

Okay, so who has been kind of working on the health plans for the people of the West Arnhem Shire, if it hasn't been the people themselves?

JUSTIN O'BRIEN:

Well historically of course we've had a situation where Aboriginal people are managed as a management issue by Government, and - at all right. So service integration will play a critical role in this, as well as fundamental basics, where you have Aboriginal health teams doing work that they've designed in a way in which they deliver. Early childhood education, working with some of the other initiatives that we've already got in place in terms of education out here - the college that we've built.

And, with a real result in mind. I mean, bearing in mind that a study in 2010-2011 found that non-indigenous peoples' direct Government expenditure per annum for that period was 19,000 per person. That's against the figure of 44,000 per Aboriginal person. 25 per cent of that funding, which is some 25 billion, we're told is targeted. Well I've seen that sort of funding, it's not targeted. It's not yielding to the community the resources they need in a way in which they need it to



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deliver themselves out of the difficulty they've found themselves in.

This makes some serious inroads to start to do that, that's why it's historic.

VICKI KERRIGAN:

I'm trying to get a bit of a concrete handle on this, at the moment everything is sounding pretty large and bureaucratic to be completely honest Justin. I'm wondering if we can take an example of - whether it be ear infections, for example, in a remote Aboriginal community. How would dealing with ear infections change under this new regime?

JUSTIN O'BRIEN:

We've got people who have serious, chronic illness here who have not presented at all in 15 to 20 years to the clinic. We've got children who aren't - who live in an ostensibly first world country who aren't receiving education because of... The mere fact that it's - it's like you go to the doctor, Vicki, and the doctor speaks French, and only French, and you don't speak French. Or you send your children to the school and they're being taught in Russian, yeah?

So you have to overcome this paradigm, you have to be able to say how do we get people more comfortable with that service? How do we design and deliver that service in such a way that they're going to use it? Now, that will result - so we had a community engagement phase which went over a six month period here, and this is - people are hungering for this across this entire region. People are saying finally you're going to let us -



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you're going to listen to us and we're going to be part of this solution. [indistinct]

VICKI KERRIGAN: Don't those kind of support workers, those health support workers already exist though?

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: Yes, but it's within the Government paradigm. Which is you have initiative to reduce, I don't know, infant mortality, foetal alcohol syndrome, whatever it is, so you produce some hats. Maybe some badges, and you'll get some posters too, if you're lucky it'll be some fridge magnets.

VICKI KERRIGAN: [Laughter]

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: An Aboriginal health worker will come from Darwin - you know, it's laughable, but it's what happens.

VICKI KERRIGAN: I know.

[Laughter]

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: And this is targeted funding. It's just lunacy.

VICKI KERRIGAN: Okay. And so the money on that kind of thing, on let's produce a hat to try to raise awareness around ear infections or whatever, and it doesn't - it's not culturally appropriate...

JUSTIN O'BRIEN: It is replaced by a locally trusted person, who can have that dialogue about everyone in that family's health.



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VICKI KERRIGAN:

Yeah, okay, yeah. Look, it sounds like definitely a positive step forward, and I think that we've all observed that the policies that have been in place, they haven't been working, so why not try to put it back onto the community and whether or not the community can deal with it themselves in a better way. Let's try.

JUSTIN O'BRIEN:

I loved your introduction, I thought it was on the money.

VICKI KERRIGAN:

Thanks very much Justin.

JUSTIN O'BRIEN:

Okay.

VICKI KERRIGAN:

Bye bye. Justin O'Brien from the Gundjehmi Aboriginal Corporation.



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It's a big deal for the people of the West Arnhem Land area today. They have signed up a new deal with the Government, and with some other service providers, and what it means is that the Mirrar people and those around them are now going to be in control of their own health services. And if you have good health, you know that everything else will improve as well. If you have good health you can go to school, if you have good health you get an education, you can get a job, you can treat your family - each other - you're healthy, you're happy. It's the key, isn't it, health?

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