



Ngaanyatjarra
Pitjantjatjara
Yankunytjatjara
Women's Council

United Nations

Human Rights
Office of the High Commissioner
By email: hrc-sr-vaw@un.org

Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls in sport

Foreword

The Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Women's Council ('NPYWC') writes in response to your request for input to the Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls in sport to the UN General Assembly on violence against women and girls in sport ('the SP').

Who are we?

NPYWC is an Aboriginal Corporation that advocates for Anangu in the NPY region and is a major provider of human services for the NPY Lands. The NPY Lands span across the tri-state Central Desert region of South Australia, Western Australia and the Northern Territory, covering 350,000sq km and encompassing 26 remote communities and homelands, with an overall population of around 6,000 Anangu and Yarnangu (Aboriginal people), **annexed and labelled "A"** is a map of the region. NPYWC core purpose is to work with the women and their families of the NPY region to increase their capacity to lead safe and healthy lives with improved life choices. The Council provides health, cultural and community service projects to over 6,000 men, women and children in our region. These services are not duplicated by any other service in the area.

NPYWC holds a deep legacy for the advocacy of human rights for women and children. Embedded in NPYWC's *tjukurpa* (story) is the gathering and strategic organisation of Anangu women who wanted to be seen and heard during the late 1970's and development of Indigenous land rights. **Annexed and labelled "B"** is a painting by M.W (dec) that tells the story of the time all Pitjantjatjara, Ngaanyatjarra, Yankunytjatjara women came together to form their own Women's Council.

The Directors and members of NPYWC have and continue to remain at the forefront of advocacy for women and girls that centres the voices of people with lived experiences and localised and culturally safe solutions. This advocacy is guided by NPYWC's vision of '*supporting the dreams of young women, the hopes of mothers & the vision of grandmothers*', including a future determined by the individual and collective agency of women, where women and children are free from violence. Strengths-based and localised processes are at the heart of transforming communities with the intention of every person fulfilling their right to full emotional, social, physical and spiritual wellbeing.

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The unique governance of NPYWC's council has been centred on the belief that cultural law, the collective agency of women, song lines, and excellence in governance allows Anangu to determine what is best for Anangu. This principle and commitment upholds *Article 23* of the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples ('UNDRIP'), that Indigenous peoples have the right to determine and develop priorities for the health, economic and social wellbeing and these be administered through their own institutions. The strategies for keeping Anangu women and girls safe in sport do not differ.

In this submission we will highlight the examples of good practice as implemented by NPYWC for women and girls in sport and the importance of practices that support the security, dignity and equality of participation of women and girls in sport through the lens of self-determination and cultural safety. NPYWC has a rich tradition in organising sport programs and events in order to support young Anangu women and to date continue to support young women through sport engagement (AFL, basketball, softball).

Submission

Educational and holistic objectives with young women in sport

NPYWC provides Youth Services that offer fun, safe and culturally relevant activities that support the development of young people and their communities. These services are targeted programs that seek to engage young women and girls and provide opportunities that are lacking in Australian remote communities. This includes sporting opportunities. Alongside these sporting opportunities are educational and holistic approaches for working with young women to dream big, overcome challenges and facilitate training and leadership opportunities. Leadership qualities have always been intrinsically intertwined with sports, however, these skills, and the confidence to use them, do not surface by default.

An investment in wrap around support for young women in sport is an investment in the confidence of women, and an assurance that they can speak up. When working with young women, NPYWC works towards self-confidence and resilience against *shame*. Shame fuels the silence that violence relies on. Instilling confidence and combatting shame encourages the individual self-confidence needed to speak up, whilst simultaneously encouraging collective confidence of young women to speak up for each other. This can be a fundamental safety net for young women in sport and is in line with the strengths of the collective agency of women.

In practice, we give the following case study to demonstrate this wrap around approach – intertwining sport and broader development objectives.

Kungka's AFL 9s side tournament

NPYWC facilitates a yearly AFL tournament for young women in the NPY region. This tournament is called the Kungka's 9s side. Kungka is the Pitjantjatjara word for young woman. Alongside this tournament are tailored trauma informed and culturally safe workshops that are administered through the *Kulintja Palyaringkunytyaku Program* (get better thinking). Activities through the program have an acute focus on mental health, healthy relationships and a chance for two-way feedback about the issues young women are facing in community. These activities are conducted in

culturally safe spaces and are female led with mentors from the NPY region. The creation of safe spaces allows for women to start the journey towards improved thinking and speaking up. Furthermore, the activities allow for the young women to focus relationships and forge connections with other women in the program – this strengthens the collective practices that Anangu women use to keep safe and thrive. In the 2023 Kungka AFL 9's competition 9 out of 10 young people said that participating in the event made them more likely to participate in social and community events. A participant in the program stated the tournament made them feel more connected with women from across the NPY lands.

The above case study aims to highlight the opportunities available through sport to empower women. Developing these sporting events in line with the priorities of Anangu young women fulfils the UNDRIP human rights principles that are the pillars for fostering safety and social wellbeing. Alongside these programs, we stress the importance of the fact that when young women do speak up strong, they are believed and responded to with urgency, transparency and accountability to people who use violence.

Collaboration and cultural safety

NPYWC recognises the benefit of collaborating with enterprises, Government, agencies and other organisations when there is a shared goal. At times this is crucial when considering the resource shortage in the NPY region and lack of consideration given to remote needs by outside agents when putting on sporting events and the like. This is not an isolated experience for NPYWC but for many Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations across remote Australia. For this reason, collaboration either means an invitation into NPYWC spaces or going outside of these spaces. When sporting events and environments are outside of NPYWC spaces there is a critical need for: collaboration to be genuine; decision making to be shared; and practices to be shifted, to create safe spaces. Genuine partnerships are vital to combat scenarios where unequal partnerships produce exploitation, domination and overtaking decisions by one party over another. This leads to unsafe practices. Being mindful of power dynamics and concentrated decision making can assist with preventing practices that put Anangu women at risk. Shared decision making must occur – from planning all the way through to the sporting event/outcome.

For collaboration to effectively meet the needs of young Anangu women in sport there must be a steadfast commitment to cultural safety and wellbeing. To undermine or prevent this is a form of violence against women in sport. This cannot be an isolated activity, a tick box or a once off consultation. Cultural wellbeing is vital for Anangu women to feel safe in sporting spaces. A commitment to creating culturally safe sporting spaces should not be isolated to sporadic sporting events but be a consideration for all sporting environments and opportunities across Australia. Nor should this commitment and cultural load fall solely on First Nations women in sport. To create culturally safe spaces also requires an investment from non-Aboriginal women and men in sport (on and off the field) to go on the learning journey and recognise the shared benefit of culturally safe spaces and be committed to combatting racism in sport. To demonstrate this point, the following practices occur when NPYWC host the *Kungka's 9s AFL Tournament*:

- Tournament hosted by an Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation;
- An Anangu support worker assigned to each sporting team;
- Cultural review of proposals put forward by mainstream agencies;
- Accepted decision making in regards to cultural appropriateness by mainstream agencies;

- Joint decision making with mainstream agencies for scheduling and activities of the event;
- Liaising at every opportunity throughout the planning stage of the sporting event; and
- No punitive or restrictive collaboration/funding requirements by mainstream agencies.

These practices allow sporting events to be localised to the needs of young Anangu women and prevents power vacuums emerging that jeopardise and minimise the safety cultural wellbeing brings. In addition, meeting localised needs includes long term commitments to using sport for a way to embed pathways for future engagement and opportunities. For example, the Kungka's AFL 9's tournament included exposure to the National Indigenous Training Academy and offered participants the ability to return to explore opportunities for employment at the academy and more. This was a localised need, met with a localised solution for what wellbeing looked like for young Anangu women.

Overlap of gender and race

There are dual priorities for young Anangu women – considerations for wellbeing as a woman and as Anangu. These are not to be competing priorities or to be supported differently. They are innately tied together. For this reason, any investigation into the types and causes of violence towards women in sport needs to have both a gendered lens and a race lens. Discrimination is not experienced in a silo and any policy or practice to combat discrimination based on gender alone does not absorb or minimise the violence experiences due to race. If the commitment to women in sport is about wellbeing and safety – considerations have to include racialised violence.

Thank you for providing NPYWC with the opportunity to comment to the special rapporteur, and please do not hesitate to contact us if there are any further questions about what we have raised in this submission.

Prepared by Chloe Fragos on behalf of NPYWC.

Kind Regards,



Liza Balmer
Chief Executive Officer
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