



## **MEDIA CONFERENCE UPDATE RELEASE**

**10<sup>th</sup> April 2010**

**Event: National Centre Against Bullying Conference 2010:  
Navigating the Maze**

**When: Saturday April 10**

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### **SPORTS ACADEMIES CREATING ABORIGINAL BULLYING PROBLEMS**

Julie Coffin from the Combined Universities Centre for Rural Health in Western Australia has told the National Centre Against Bullying Conference that Aboriginal children are being bullied daily and require their own solutions to tackle the problem.

Meanwhile football, netball and other sports academies in Aboriginal communities were making the problem worse, by dividing the community further, Ms Coffin, an expert in Aboriginal health, said.

But the organisations and corporations backing these programs, often involving huge sums of money, were not seeing the problem.

"They can't see it. Can you just tell me what happens to the Aboriginal kids who are not good at sport? There are those kids who are very undervalued if they are not playing sport," Ms Coffin said.

"We are creating another layer of the haves and the have-nots," she said. "Unfortunately, what looks positive is having quite a negative effect."

Ms Coffin's research has also revealed 95 per cent of bullying occurred amongst Aboriginal people themselves, a study of more than 300 people of the Yamaji community in WA found.

Mainstream bullying programs don't work because they don't address Aboriginal culture and a lifetime of oppression which has resulted in post traumatic issues and parenting issues, Ms Coffin said.

Bullying is not even used as a word in Aboriginal communities. "Violence is normalised, it's cyclic and there's children growing up under a lot of pressure to conform to this behavior," she said.

"There are very few Aboriginal families you talk to that it doesn't affect. It's there all the time, it doesn't go away."

A sense of "haves and have-nots" and jealousy, and use of drugs and alcohol, were big issues fueling the problem. "If you live in a poverty situation and that's your life and that's your knowledge, jealousy is going to second nature to you," she said.

Looking back to traditional ways of resolving disputes was part of the solution, such as learning and healing circles and shared care.

A new website has been developed for Aboriginal children, parents and teachers called Solid kids - solid schools solid families, based on four years of research to try and tackle some of these problems.

The Alannah and Madeline Foundation School Services Project Leader Mandy Ross said the program highlighted the need to make all anti-bullying programs culturally and locally relevant.

"Perhaps that's the biggest lesson," she said.

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