



When Reform Is No Longer Enough

The Case for Mainstreaming Aboriginal Affairs

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November 2026

Introduction

Senator Pauline Hanson has called for the abolition of the National Indigenous Australians Agency (NIAA) and the mainstreaming of Aboriginal services. Her proposal, like mine, risks being judged by perceptions of its proponent, who may become a focal point for broader public anxieties and frustrations unrelated to the proposal's merits. This paper examines the proposition itself. It asks: after more than half a century of building an increasingly separate system of Aboriginal public administration, organisations and services, has the time come to dismantle that system and make mainstream institutions and services the principal means of meeting Aboriginal Australians' needs?

Abolishing NIAA would remove one expression of the separate system, but not necessarily the system itself. Its functions could be redistributed while the underlying principles and assumptions remain unchanged. Genuine mainstreaming requires examining those principles and assumptions, not merely reorganising departments. Drawing on more than twenty-five years of practical experience, I approach these questions primarily through the lens of employment and worker mobility.

Mainstreaming in Practice

The Work Placement Scheme (WPS) ran trials to recruit unemployed young people from remote welfare settlements and help them enter mainstream private-sector employment elsewhere. All participants required varying degrees of highly specialised support and supervision. However, the purpose was not to integrate them more deeply into an Aboriginal service industry. Rather, it was to enable them to function independently outside it.

Mainstreaming does not mean denying different needs or withdrawing necessary assistance. It means providing specialised support and supervision where needed, with participation in ordinary economic and social life—not continued dependence on a separate service system—as the objective.

Nor were these needs unique to Aboriginal people. Earlier worker mobility projects included disadvantaged non-Aboriginal young people who faced many of the same problems. Further, Aboriginal participants generally preferred mixed groups, reinforcing a simple principle: assistance should be determined by individual need rather than by Aboriginality.

Two young people facing similar barriers may require similar assistance regardless of ancestry, while two Aboriginal young people may have entirely different needs.

Mainstream participation was not merely the destination of the WPS; it was integral to the intervention. The everyday demands of a real workplace—turning up on time, working with others, accepting supervision, managing money, solving everyday problems, and taking responsibility for one's conduct—provided experiences that no other Aboriginal training program or welfare service could replicate.

Capability Developed Through Participation

Assistance was gradually reduced as participants gained independence. Success meant functioning without the service, not remaining dependent on it. The 2005 Proof-of-Concept Trial began with 16 young people travelling from Cairns to Adelaide for fruit-picking work. All 16 started work, 14 completed the three-month trial, and 10 chose to remain employed. The WPS, implemented between 2005 and 2008, achieved a six-month retention rate of 74 per cent in horticultural work and a twelve-month retention rate of 69 per cent in meat processing. The model was later replicated through the Remote Area Work Scheme (RAWS), where 50 per cent of meat processing participants completed twelve months, and through the Aurukun Youth Orbiting Project (AYOP), where the twelve-month retention rate reached 72 per cent. The Worker Mobility Project (WMP) continued the model after the Cape York Institute withdrew from AYOP.

All participants faced serious employment barriers, including behavioural problems, poor literacy and numeracy, family violence, health and hygiene issues, substance abuse, and, in some cases, criminal records. These circumstances help explain the retention rates.

*Work, Not Welfare*¹ examines the early development of this approach. The principle that emerged was simple: *Start young, and the best training for a real job is a real job.*

When the Aboriginal Service System Becomes the Obstacle

The WPS, followed by RAWs, revealed a more difficult problem.

Local Aboriginal organisations and the broader Aboriginal welfare apparatus could themselves become obstacles to worker mobility.

Developmental Notes dating back to 2005 revealed the need to build a system that could operate independently of the negative influences of family, community, and Indigenous organisations. Reliance on community-based organisations seriously threatened the scheme's viability. At the time, I wrote that the WPS needed a system that "stands outside" these destructive influences and the institutions with a vested interest in maintaining the status quo.

The problem went beyond institutional self-interest. Welfare systems can create expectations about providers and recipients, and about responsibility and disadvantage. Recipients may adapt their behaviour accordingly, while providers reinforce those expectations.

These expectations also shaped decisions about who should provide assistance and how to organise interventions. I recall a 2006 Cape York Institute board meeting where the Mayor of Aurukun insisted that Aurukun Aborigines be sent south to provide the support and supervision that his community's participants required. I rejected the demand, asking: if Aurukun had people competent to manage some of its most difficult young people successfully, why weren't they already applying those skills to the longstanding, widespread dysfunctional behaviour within Aurukun itself?

The Mayor and I were operating on fundamentally different principles. I was asking what assistance these young people needed and who was best qualified to provide it. He was seeking to return the intervention to the familiar racial framework in which Aboriginal young people were expected to be assisted by Aboriginal people. Those providing assistance were to be selected primarily based on Aboriginality and local residence rather than competence. Similar difficulties arose in the scheme's host communities, Robinvale, Victoria, and Narrandera, New South Wales.

Another risk was that young people who relocated together from the same settlement could reproduce destructive features of their home environment. Geographical movement alone did not guarantee a changed social environment; a group from Yuendumu could quickly recreate Yuendumu elsewhere.

Group composition was therefore important. Mixing participants from different settlements, backgrounds, races, and cultures made it harder for destructive behaviour within any one group to take hold in the workplace. Individuals had to form new relationships and adapt to a new social environment rather than simply reproducing the old one. But diversity alone was not enough. The group's interactions also needed to be understood and, when necessary, managed constructively.

Properly constituted and professionally facilitated groups could become powerful instruments of behavioural change. In my practice, I found that individuals were often more relaxed among their peers, leading to spontaneous interactions that revealed what I describe as problem-laden personal beliefs, attitudes, and assumptions. Left to themselves, group members might reinforce these beliefs without questioning their consequences. However, through professionally facilitated group work, those same interactions could examine how established attitudes and assumptions contributed to problems and prevented alternative approaches from being considered. Group work was therefore not simply a means of managing participants. It provided opportunities to challenge established patterns of thinking and behaviour that might otherwise remain unexamined.

¹ James M, 2018. *Work, Not Welfare: Critical Rural Social Work Practice and the Work Placement Scheme*. Critical Social Work Publishing House

The need to operate independently of established community organisations extended to recruitment. From the beginning, I handled recruitment myself because experience had taught me that relying on local organisations threatened the project's viability. After Noel Pearson's organisation assumed control of the original WPS, ultimately bringing about its demise, Pearson approached me again to work with his organisation. Each time, I gave his organisation responsibility for promoting worker mobility within the settlements, recruiting potential participants, and undertaking initial assessments. Each time, not a single suitable participant was recruited.

Similarly, across the country, service providers reported that young people were uninterested or that they identified no suitable candidates, while young people continued to approach me directly seeking work. The WPS, RAWs, AYOP and WMP therefore maintained independent recruitment, assessment and support arrangements.

From Reform to Mainstreaming

Australia has built an extensive Aboriginal-specific apparatus of agencies, corporations, land councils, consultants and service providers.² Many do valuable work, but institutions develop their own interests. Ongoing disadvantage sustains funding and institutional employment, often insulated from demands for competence, performance and accountability; success should instead be measured by whether individuals eventually cease needing assistance.

In *The 1960s Aboriginal Fruit-Picking Scheme—A Critical Evaluation*,³ I examined Reverend Ron Trudinger's employment and community-development philosophy at Ernabella Mission in the 1950s. Trudinger described a model based on progressively transferring responsibility for managing work programs to Aboriginal people. His objective was a community capable of becoming economically self-supporting. He warned that the alternative was "to add and add to the white staff". At the time, 240 Aboriginal people were employed, with only four white men and two white women on staff.

Seventy years later, Trudinger's concern has, in important respects, materialised. Rather than administrative assistance diminishing as individual and community capabilities developed, continuing disadvantage became the justification for maintaining and expanding an apparatus that had failed to overcome it.

Article 1(4) of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, to which Australia is a party, permits special measures where necessary to secure equal enjoyment of human rights. Importantly, it also provides that such measures must not maintain separate rights for different racial groups and must not continue once their objectives are achieved. A special need may justify special assistance, but not its indefinite continuation without regard to its effectiveness. Yet this is exactly what happened and continues to happen. Training settlements became welfare settlements; transitional assistance became continuing entitlements; institutions outlasted the circumstances that justified them.

Mainstreaming therefore does not require denying special needs. It requires that assistance remain connected to the need that justified it and, wherever possible, to an objective beyond itself. When the need diminishes or disappears, the special arrangement should diminish or disappear with it. If the need persists, question the arrangement's effectiveness rather than assuming it will continue.

In *Just Leave Them Where They Belong*,⁴ I describe a related problem as the Tolstoyan Perspective. Tolstoy criticised attempts to make war more humane, arguing that easing its suffering could make war easier to perpetuate. The same danger applies to welfare:

continually softening the consequences of prolonged unemployment and dependency, without addressing their underlying causes, can normalise the condition we originally intended to overcome.

² James M, 2026. The Machinery of Aboriginal Disadvantage. *Quadrant* 27 August

³ James M, 2018. *The 1960s Aboriginal Fruit-Picking Scheme—A Critical Evaluation: An Instructive History of Social Policy, Social Work, and Central Australian Aborigines*. Critical Social Work Publishing House

⁴ James M, 2026. *Just Leave Them... Where They Belong: The Cruel Business of the Culture-Cult, Service Industry, and Welfare Dependency*. Critical Social Work Publishing House

Reform may make a dysfunctional system more humane without altering the conditions that sustain it. Eventually, the question becomes whether its organising premises must be replaced. The WPS applied the alternative: intensive support and supervision were progressively reduced as participants developed the capacity to manage without them.

Why Trudinger's approach to community development failed to achieve its intended objectives is one of the questions running through *Just Leave Them... Where They Belong*. The sheer size of that book reflects the complexity of the answer. There was no single wrong turn. We got many things wrong—in the delivery of community services, including the theory and practice of social work and community development; in institutional design; and, ultimately, in what we came to understand by self-determination. Many of those errors became embedded in the institutions we created and continue to reproduce. Closing NIAA alone would not constitute mainstreaming if its classifications, principles and assumptions remained intact elsewhere.

The question is whether the existing system can still be repaired from within, or whether its organising principles and assumptions have become the problem: racial status rather than individual need; institutional separation rather than mainstream participation; Aboriginal control and representation as objectives in themselves; preservation of remote welfare settlements despite their lack of viable labour markets; and specialist institutions whose continued existence can become an objective in itself, regardless of whether their clients achieve independence.

At some point, repeatedly reforming individual programs within that architecture ceases to address the problem. Revolution, rather than reform, then has a precise meaning. It does not mean political upheaval.

It means going all the way: replacing the organising premises of Aboriginal affairs rather than rearranging its administrative machinery once again.

Self-Determination and Institutional Separation

The separate institutional system has often been justified in the name of Aboriginal self-determination. Over time, however, the principle became increasingly associated with Aboriginal control of organisations and services, rather than with the independence and opportunities available to the individuals these institutions were established to serve. The growth of Aboriginal-controlled institutions could therefore be seen as progress, even when the people relying on them remained dependent.

Yet institutional control and individual self-determination are not the same thing. An organisation may gain greater authority over service delivery without its clients gaining greater control over their own lives. By contrast, a person who is employed, manages their own income and accommodation, and makes independent decisions may exercise a more meaningful form of self-determination, even with minimal involvement in Aboriginal-specific institutions.

Anthropologist Peter Sutton has challenged some of the assumptions underlying this development. In *The Politics of Suffering*,⁵ he argued that Aboriginal policy had at times overvalued traditional culture at considerable human cost and that evidence of disastrous failure in major policy areas since the early 1970s was increasingly difficult to ignore. His argument was not that Aboriginal culture had no value, but that cultural preservation and political ideology could not be allowed to obscure the consequences of policy for real people.

Nor does mainstreaming mean returning Aboriginal people to the control of non-Aboriginal officials. The question is how much control individuals have over their own circumstances. Anthony Dillon, an academic, researcher, and clinical psychologist of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal ancestry, has similarly argued that self-determination should mean greater control over individuals' own lives, while noting that, within Aboriginal affairs, it has increasingly come to mean Aboriginal people and organisations providing services to Aboriginal people. He has also argued that competence should take precedence over race in determining who provides those services, and that prolonged welfare dependency is difficult to reconcile with genuine self-determination.

⁵ Sutton P, 2009. *The Politics of Suffering: Indigenous Australia and the End of the Liberal Consensus*. Melbourne University Publishing

Worker mobility illustrates the distinction. Participants initially need assistance with recruitment, placement, accommodation, budgeting, and intensive support and supervision. However, the objective is to make that assistance progressively unnecessary.

Mainstreaming can therefore advance individual self-determination. Employment, direct dealings with employers, and responsibility for everyday decisions provide opportunities for personal independence that institutional representation alone cannot guarantee. As Christopher Lasch suggests, institutions matter not only for the principles they embody but also for their capacity to cultivate individual character, responsibility, and independence.⁶

Reciprocal Welfare and the Limits of Remote Job Creation

The argument for mainstreaming must also confront what has happened to reciprocal welfare in remote Aboriginal Australia. Australian unemployment benefits have traditionally rested on the principle that those capable of working should undertake reasonable activities directed towards employment in return for public income support. Welfare carried obligations as well as entitlements.

That principle was weakened on 12 May 2021, when compulsory participation in Community Development Program (CDP) activities ended. Job seekers retained other mutual obligations, but attendance at regular work-like activities became voluntary.

The decision followed longstanding criticism that CDP's requirements were more onerous than elsewhere, including legal challenges under the *Racial Discrimination Act 1975*. The Australian National Audit Office (ANAO) reported that, in January 2021, the government was presented with a recommended option to meet the terms of a legal settlement and reduce the risk of further litigation by making most CDP participation voluntary. Internally, this was described as a compliance pause.

I do not see any discussion of whether CDP's different activity requirements reflected the absence of functioning labour markets in remote settlements. Where jobs are scarce or non-existent, conventional job-search obligations have limited relevance. Introduced in 2015, CDP sought to establish routines and prepare participants for employment through regular work-like activities. The issue was whether its requirements and penalties were proportionate, not necessarily whether different requirements were justified.

The government could instead have revised the obligations to reflect local circumstances and individual needs.

Equal treatment need not entail identical requirements when circumstances differ, nor does it justify excessive penalties.

Furthermore, reasonable work-related obligations are not inherently incompatible with international human rights law. In *Faure v Australia*,⁷ the United Nations Human Rights Committee did not find that Australia's Work for the Dole arrangements violated Article 8(3) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, although it found a separate violation of the right to an effective remedy. The decision does not establish that every compulsory scheme is lawful, but it shows that conditional unemployment assistance does not necessarily amount to forced labour.

The broader policy question received insufficient attention. In settlements where unemployment was endemic, what were the consequences of removing regular, work-like activity? Despite consultations on replacement programs, where was the public debate about whether people capable of contributing should undertake reasonable activity in return for long-term income support?

Disturbingly and predictably, the ANAO reported that participation in CDP activities fell by about 50 per cent after the change.⁸ Within two months, Jobs Australia reported service providers' concerns about increased domestic violence, reduced school attendance, substance abuse and aggression towards staff. Subsequent government consultations also

⁶ Lasch C, 1996. *The Revolt of the Elites and the Betrayal of Democracy*. W. W. Norton & Company

⁷ *Faure v Australia*, Communication No. 1036/2001, UN Human Rights Committee, UN Doc CCPR/C/85/D/1036/2001 (31 October 2005)

⁸ Australian National Audit Office, 2024. *Remote Employment Programs*. Auditor-General Report No. 29 of 2023–24, par 2.29

found that some remote settlements considered participation in community activities in return for income support fair and reasonable, and that they wanted compulsory attendance restored.⁹

The decline in attendance revealed a problem that extends beyond mutual obligation. Deciding to work involves weighing effort against reward. Unemployment benefits may be substantially lower than wages, but staying on welfare can still seem preferable when employment demands greater physical effort, regular attendance, changed routines, and acceptance of workplace responsibilities. This is not necessarily laziness. It can be a rational response to the incentives and circumstances people face, particularly when prolonged unemployment has shaped expectations and habits.

NIAA recognised job-seeker disengagement as a risk and trialled financial incentives to encourage participation. Under the Remote Engagement Program Trial, participants received an additional \$190 per fortnight for completing at least fifteen hours of activity each week. The ANAO also reported that employers in an earlier CDP trial were reluctant to recruit participants, despite wage subsidies, citing additional workload and risk. Both findings illustrate the limitations of relying solely on financial incentives. Effective employment assistance must address the practical and behavioural costs workers and employers face—something my worker mobility projects addressed directly.

CDP ended on 31 October 2025 and was replaced by the Remote Australia Employment Service (RAES) on 1 November. Participation in community projects, training and other activities remained voluntary. From 1 September 2026, mutual obligations resumed after the transition pause, including Job Plans, appointments, appropriate job search and acceptance of suitable employment. However, compulsory attendance at regular work-like activities was not restored. Although income support remains conditional and means-tested, for working-age people in settlements with few realistic employment opportunities, the practical result can approach a de facto basic income.

Consequences of Our Own Making and Failure to Learn from Past Mistakes

In the early 1970s, unemployment benefits replaced training allowances in remote Aboriginal settlements. What might have supported a transition to employment became a permanent feature of life across generations—what recipients called “sit-down money”. The Tolstoyan Perspective discussed earlier is relevant here: alleviating the consequences of unemployment can also make prolonged dependency easier to sustain without effective pathways out.

Successive governments have sought to address the lack of viable labour markets by creating jobs in remote settlements. The Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP) provided useful community work in some places, but struggled to establish pathways into ordinary employment. CDP subsequently placed greater emphasis on work-like activities and mutual obligations. Neither approach could overcome the underlying shortage of economic demand for labour.

The Remote Jobs and Economic Development (RJED) program is another attempt to address this problem. In February 2024, the Commonwealth announced \$707 million over three years to create 3,000 jobs—approximately \$235,667 per job. In February 2026, the program expanded to target 6,000 jobs by 2030, with additional funding and an ongoing annual commitment.

RJED differs from its predecessors in important respects. It funds actual employment with wages, leave and superannuation, rather than merely work-like activities. Grants can support employers with equipment, infrastructure, training and operating costs. Jobs are intended to reflect community priorities and may be created in existing businesses or community organisations. But have the economic and behavioural lessons from earlier schemes been learned?

The ANAO’s 2024 audit raises serious doubts about the evidence underpinning the original program. It found that the RJED announcement was not clearly evidence-based. There was no completed program logic or evaluation framework. The proposed number of jobs was not supported by modelling, and the advice to government did not incorporate evidence from several relevant predecessor programs. It also did not model the expected economic impacts. NIAA has since commissioned monitoring, evaluation, and cost-effectiveness work, but the initial funding decision preceded an adequate demonstration of how RJED would overcome earlier programs’ shortcomings.

⁹ Australian National Audit Office, 2024, par 2.29

The behavioural question is equally important. RJED offers considerably greater financial rewards than CDP activities, but creating a funded position does not necessarily produce a willing, work-ready employee. Recruitment, regular attendance, and sustained employment are separate challenges. NIAA recognises the importance of mentoring, training, and employment support, but published evidence has not yet established whether its measures will sufficiently address the barriers identified in earlier programs. The decline in voluntary CDP participation cannot predict RJED employment take-up, but it provides a compelling reason to investigate how prospective workers respond to the demands and rewards of paid employment.

International research reinforces this concern. Reviews of public works programs in low- and middle-income countries have found that employment and earnings gains often diminish after participation ends, although some interventions produce more lasting benefits.¹⁰ Individual RJED-funded positions are limited to three years. What happens when the subsidy expires? Will employers have developed enough economic activity to retain workers, will participants move into other jobs, or will they need further subsidies? Counting funded positions does not establish that lasting employment has been created. To what extent have the lessons from CDEP's closure been learned?

Some publicly funded positions provide essential community services and may warrant ongoing government support. However, maintaining publicly funded services is distinct from establishing commercially sustainable enterprises or enabling people to enter the wider labour market. Their purposes, costs and outcomes must be assessed separately.

The financial comparison is highly instructive. RJED's original allocation of approximately \$235,667 per intended job was about sixteen times the Aurukun Youth Orbiting Project's (AYOP) actual expenditure of \$14,589 per participant over just over twelve months. These are different funding measures, not equivalent annualised costs, and RJED's allocation includes wages and other expenditure. Nevertheless, the contrast warrants scrutiny. AYOP achieved 72.7 per cent employment retention at twelve months by helping participants enter existing businesses in functioning labour markets. Importantly, the Project did not subsidise participants' wages. Employers paid them for productive work undertaken in response to genuine market demand. The Project directed expenditure toward the practical and personal support needed to help participants enter and sustain that employment.

Worker mobility approaches the problem differently. Rather than creating employment around unemployed people based on where they live, it helps willing participants enter existing jobs, using established infrastructure and responding to actual economic demand. Intensive support and supervision help participants adjust to ordinary employment, with assistance progressively reduced as independence develops.

One approach subsidises the worker's movement into the economy. The other subsidises building an economy around the worker.

This does not mean all locally subsidised employment is unjustified, nor that people should be compelled to leave their settlements. Some local initiatives may be viable and worthwhile. But after decades of similar interventions, governments should be expected to demonstrate that further investment in subsidised local employment is likely to yield more durable outcomes than helping willing and capable people obtain employment elsewhere.

Nor am I proposing simply to restore Work for the Dole. The issue is what reasonable obligations should accompany long-term public income support when ordinary employment opportunities are scarce, and how those obligations can contribute to genuine employment and independence. My experience suggests that permanent inactivity cannot be an acceptable policy objective. Work provided participants in the WPS, RAWS, AYOP and WMP with more than income: real work requires routine, responsibility, social contact and opportunities to develop independence. When real employment was unavailable locally, worker mobility connected them with places where it existed.

The fundamental question is whether public assistance helps people move towards productive employment and greater independence, or has become another permanent feature of the separate institutional system that mainstreaming aims to overcome.

¹⁰ Bagga, A et al, 2026. Do Public Works Programs Have Sustained Impacts? A Review of Experimental Studies from LMICs. *The World Bank Research Observer* 41(1), 1–38

Conclusion

The proposal to abolish NIAA has reopened a question that extends far beyond the future of a single government agency. Abolishing NIAA would achieve little if its functions, assumptions, funding arrangements and institutional relationships were simply transferred elsewhere.

For more than half a century, Australia has built an elaborate system of Aboriginal-specific administration, organisations, programs and services. Many responded to genuine disadvantage, but arrangements originally intended to be temporary or transitional have become permanent. Training settlements became welfare settlements. For some, income support became an intergenerational condition. Special assistance developed into enduring institutional arrangements.

Somewhere along the way, the temporary became normal.

My experience with worker mobility showed that even highly disadvantaged young people could enter and remain in mainstream employment with appropriate support. Work developed capabilities through participation, responsibility and effort. As participants became more independent, support was progressively reduced. Success meant becoming less dependent on the intervention, not remaining attached to it.

That experience also showed how established institutions could obstruct independence. Stronger institutions, more programs, and greater expenditure are not necessarily evidence of better outcomes. Nor can we judge publicly funded employment solely by the number of positions created without examining participation, retention, and sustainability. That is why I argue for revolution rather than reform—not political upheaval or the indiscriminate abolition of Aboriginal organisations, but replacing the assumptions on which the separate system has been built.

Mainstreaming does not mean abandoning people with special needs. It means providing assistance according to need, selecting providers with demonstrated competence, and directing interventions towards individual capabilities and participation in ordinary economic and social life.

Rearranging the machinery is insufficient. Its organising principles must be changed. It replaces race with need, institutional separation with mainstream participation, and permanent service provision with assistance whose ultimate purpose is to make itself unnecessary.

Milton James

Milton James began his working life at 18, in 1973, with Peko Mines in Tennant Creek, Northern Territory. Over the next three years, he worked in a variety of jobs in mines across Australia before returning to South Australia to join his parents on their newly purchased horticultural property in Waikerie, Riverland.

In 1978, he travelled to India to manage a horticultural project in a remote region of Bihar. That experience sparked an enduring interest in community development in the developing world and led him to pursue it professionally. He returned to Australia in 1980 to undertake a Diploma of Agriculture at Roseworthy Agricultural College, followed by a Diploma of Social Work at the South Australian Institute of Technology. He later completed a Bachelor of Social Work at Charles Sturt University in Wagga Wagga, New South Wales.

After qualifying as a social worker, James worked in Renmark in regional South Australia before moving into statutory social work in Victoria, the Australian Capital Territory, and later the Torres Strait and Cape York in far north Queensland.

In 2003, his work came to Noel Pearson's attention, and he was seconded to the newly established Cape York Partnerships. There, James began developing a different approach to engaging and assisting disadvantaged young people through work. His early efforts focused on establishing regional enterprises, but they increasingly shifted toward helping young people enter mainstream employment in southern Australia.

He subsequently established his own organisation, *Boys from the Bush Projects*, and relocated to the Northern Territory, where he continued to develop and test worker mobility as an alternative to long-term welfare dependency. This practical work continued until 2014, when declining health ended the organisation's direct service work. Coincidentally, this occurred just after its trials concluded successfully, allowing the organisation to shift its focus to documenting its work and advocating worker mobility as a policy approach.