

# **Action Research to Build the Capacity of Nyikina Indigenous Australians**

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## **Dedication**

This thesis is dedicated to the continuing cultural actions of Nyikina people championed through the words of my uncle, John Watson, when he was Chairman of the Kimberley Land Council.

Aboriginal people in the Kimberley have been consistent about what we mean by Self Determination. It means to us the right to own our land, to control what happens on our land, to practise our culture freely with the certainty of passing on to our children our culture and law, and the ability to control through our own organisations those services that are provided to us by governments. The colonial structure of the Kimberley retards the region's economic progress and keeps Aboriginal people in poverty ... we want to develop local economic initiatives so that we can free ourselves from the dependence and control of governments (J Watson in Crough & Christophersen 1993:1).

Under the leadership of my uncles John and Harry Watson, our family continues to hold strong to our collective vision for a better world along the *Mardoowarra kandri* for our children and grandchildren.

## **Abstract**

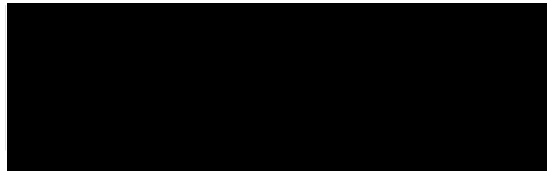
Indigenous Australian people in the remote West Kimberley region of Western Australia experience extreme disadvantage as a legacy from 128 years of European colonial rule. I bring to this study a unique insider perspective as a Yimardoowarra marnin, an Indigenous woman from the Mardoowarra, Fitzroy River, researching local people and communities. This research has been a deep personal and shared journey with the Nyikina people, as we made meaning of both the construction of disadvantage and strategies to reduce the impact of disadvantage in the West Kimberley.

Utilization of a cultural action research framework, with mixed methods of data collection, opened up an understanding of Indigenous disadvantage and strategies to overcome it in one particular context. Narratives of the Elders and other Nyikina people, plus multiple information sources, identified that the processes of systemic racism, established during the early colonial period, have evolved to maintain an endemic state of structural violence. This process has been responsible for the overwhelming disadvantage experienced by Indigenous people in the West Kimberley.

## Certification

*I certify that the substance of this thesis has not already been submitted for any degree and is not currently being submitted for any other degree or qualification.*

*I certify that any help received in preparing this thesis, and all sources used, have been acknowledged in this thesis.*



*Anne Poelina*

## Table of Contents

<b>Acknowledgements .....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Dedication .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Abstract.....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Certification .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Glossary of terms.....</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Figures</b>	
<b>Figure 1. <i>Historical legal and policy framework for Aboriginal citizenship.....</i></b>	<b>38</b>
<b>Figure 2. <i>Five Phases of Nyikina Cultural Action.....</i></b>	<b>128</b>
<b>Figure 3. <i>Concept Plan of the Nyikina Cultural Centre.....</i></b>	<b>243</b>
<b>Figure 4. <i>Proposed Nyikina Inc. Organisational Structures.....</i></b>	<b>258</b>
<b>Maps</b>	
<b>Map 1. <i>Geography of Derby-West Kimberley.....</i></b>	<b>20</b>
<b>Map 2. <i>Nyikina Land in the Kimberley.....</i></b>	<b>60</b>
<b>Map 3. <i>Nyikina and near Neighbours.....</i></b>	<b>188</b>
<b>Chapter 1: INTRODUCTION .....</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>1.1 Background .....</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>1.2 Research Setting .....</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>1.3 Context of the study.....</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>1.3.1 <i>Historical context of Nyikina People.....</i></b>	<b>21</b>

1.3.2 Contemporary Context .....	22
<b>1.4 Significance of the study.....</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>1.5 Conceptual Framework .....</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>1.6 Research Aim .....</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>1.7 Research Objectives.....</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>1.8 Thesis Chapter Outlines.....</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>Chapter 2: LITERATURE REVIEW .....</b>	<b>34</b>
<b>2.1 Introduction .....</b>	<b>34</b>
<b>2.2 Historical Context of Colonisation .....</b>	<b>35</b>
2.2.1 Scientific Racism .....	39
2.2.2 The Colonial Experience of Western Australia .....	40
2.2.3 Indigenous Australian Slavery .....	45
2.2.4 The Construction of Indigenous Disadvantage .....	48
2.2.5 Indigenous Disadvantage in the Kimberley region of Western Australia.....	55
<b>2.3 Nyikina People of the Mardoowarra .....</b>	<b>58</b>
2.3.1 Impact of Colonisation on Nyikina People .....	62
2.3.2 Understanding the Intergenerational Trauma of Nyikina People through the experience of the Watson family.....	82
<b>2.4 Contemporary Context of Colonisation .....</b>	<b>82</b>

<b>2.5</b>	<b>Oppression against Indigenous Australians .....</b>	<b>84</b>
2.5.1	<i>Anti-Dialogic Action .....</i>	85
2.5.2	<i>Dialogic Action .....</i>	87
<b>2.6</b>	<b>Redefining Indigenous Health and Wellbeing .....</b>	<b>88</b>
2.6.1	<i>Nyikina Kinship Skin System’s Influence on Health and Wellbeing.....</i>	93
2.6.2	<i>Culture and Health .....</i>	98
2.6.3	<i>Contextualising Nyikina Culture .....</i>	100
2.6.4	<i>Cultural Development in a Remote Nyikina Community.....</i>	103
<b>2.7</b>	<b>Cultural Action .....</b>	<b>105</b>
2.7.1	<i>Cultural Action at Jarlmadangah Burru .....</i>	105
2.7.2	<i>Strengthening Social, Human and Cultural Capital with     Young Nyikina People.....</i>	110
2.7.3	<i>Sustainable Development.....</i>	114
2.7.4	<i>Building Cultural Capital through Nyikina Stories .....</i>	116
2.7.5	<i>Sustainable Community Cultural Development.....</i>	119
2.7.6	<i>Evidence for Better Practice.....</i>	122
<b>2.8</b>	<b>Summary .....</b>	<b>123</b>
<b>Chapter 3:</b>	<b>METHODOLOGY .....</b>	<b>126</b>
<b>3.1</b>	<b>Introduction .....</b>	<b>126</b>
<b>3.2</b>	<b>Background .....</b>	<b>127</b>



<b>3.3</b>	<b>Researcher’s Position .....</b>	<b>129</b>
	3.3.1 <i>Building and Maintaining Trust .....</i>	131
	3.3.2 <i>Ethical Considerations .....</i>	133
<b>3.4</b>	<b>Ethical Clearance.....</b>	<b>135</b>
	3.4.1 <i>Community Consent.....</i>	137
	3.4.2 <i>Individual Consent.....</i>	137
<b>3.5</b>	<b>Action Research .....</b>	<b>139</b>
	3.5.1 <i>Cultural Action Projects.....</i>	141
	3.5.1.1 <i>Cultural Action Project 1: Nyikina Language and Culture Project .....</i>	141
	3.5.1.2 <i>Cultural Action Project 2: Nyikina Incorporated.....</i>	142
	3.5.1.3 <i>Cultural Action Project 3: Saying No Way to Family and Community Violence .....</i>	144
	3.5.1.4 <i>Cultural Action Project 4: Nyikina Culture Centre .....</i>	148
	3.5.1.5 <i>Cultural Action Project 5: Indigenous Governance of Nyikina Kandri .....</i>	150
	3.5.2 <i>Indigenous Science .....</i>	151
	3.5.3 <i>Justice .....</i>	153
<b>3.6</b>	<b>Data Collection .....</b>	<b>156</b>
	3.6.1 <i>Multiple Data Gathering Procedures.....</i>	157
	3.6.2 <i>Participant Observation .....</i>	157
	3.6.3 <i>Video Recording.....</i>	158
	3.6.4 <i>Audio Interviews .....</i>	160

<b>3.7 Data Analysis .....</b>	<b>162</b>
3.7.1 <i>Contextual Analysis .....</i>	<i>162</i>
3.7.2 <i>Discourse Analysis.....</i>	<i>163</i>
3.7.3 <i>Participant Observation Analysis .....</i>	<i>164</i>
3.7.4 <i>Video Recording Analysis.....</i>	<i>165</i>
3.7.5 <i>Interview Analysis.....</i>	<i>169</i>
<b>3.8 Discussion .....</b>	<b>170</b>
<b>Chapter 4: DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS PART A.....</b>	<b>172</b>
<b>4.1 Introduction .....</b>	<b>172</b>
<b>4.2 Social Context.....</b>	<b>172</b>
<b>4.3 Interviews .....</b>	<b>173</b>
4.3.1 <i>Nyikina People.....</i>	<i>173</i>
4.3.2 <i>Liyan .....</i>	<i>176</i>
4.3.3 <i>Identity .....</i>	<i>179</i>
4.3.4 <i>Disconnection from Kandri .....</i>	<i>180</i>
4.3.5 <i>Resilience.....</i>	<i>181</i>
4.3.6 <i>Overcoming Nyikina Disadvantage.....</i>	<i>182</i>
<b>4.4 Discussion .....</b>	<b>185</b>
<b>Chapter 5: DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS PART B.....</b>	<b>187</b>
<b>5.1 Introduction .....</b>	<b>187</b>

<b>5.2 Socio-historical Context of Projects 1 and 2.....</b>	<b>187</b>
<b>5.3 Cultural Action Project 1: <i>Nyikina Language and Culture Project</i>.....</b>	<b>189</b>
5.3.1 <i>Reflections of a Kimberley Woman</i> .....	191
5.3.2 <i>Nyikina Cultural Activities</i> .....	195
5.3.2.1 <i>Cultural Activity 1: Going To The Billabong</i> .....	195
5.3.2.2 <i>Cultural Activities 2: Windirri</i> .....	196
5.3.2.3 <i>Cultural Activities 3: Overlanding</i> .....	198
5.3.2.4 <i>Cultural Activity 4: Cooking Kangaroo Tails</i> .....	199
5.3.3 <i>Public Launch of Nyikina Language and Cultural Resource Kit</i> .....	201
5.3.4 <i>Nyikina Language and Culture Course</i> .....	203
<b>5.4 Cultural Action Project 2: <i>Nyikina Incorporated</i>.....</b>	<b>206</b>
<b>5.5 Discussion .....</b>	<b>211</b>
5.5.1 <i>Discussion Cultural Action Project 1: Nyikina Language and Culture Project</i> .....	211
5.5.1.1 <i>Nyikina Language and Culture Course Discussion</i> .....	212
5.5.2 <i>Discussion Cultural Action Project 2: Nyikina Inc.</i> .....	212
<b>Chapter 6: DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS PART C.....</b>	<b>215</b>
<b>6.1 Introduction .....</b>	<b>215</b>
<b>6.2 Social Context.....</b>	<b>217</b>
6.2.1 <i>Partnerships</i> .....	219

6.2.2 <i>Status of Violence</i> .....	222
6.2.3 <i>Cultural Action to Stem Violence</i> .....	225
6.2.4 <i>Systemic Violence</i> .....	225
<b>6.3 Community Solutions .....</b>	<b>230</b>
6.3.1 <i>Informing Policy</i> .....	230
6.3.2 <i>Sustainability of Community Solutions</i> .....	232
6.3.3 <i>Evaluation</i> .....	234
<b>6.4 Discussion .....</b>	<b>236</b>
<b>Chapter 7: DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS PART D .....</b>	<b>240</b>
<b>7.1 Introduction .....</b>	<b>240</b>
<b>7.2 Cultural Action Project 4: <i>Nyikina Cultural Centre</i> .....</b>	<b>241</b>
<b>7.3 Cultural Action Project 5: <i>Indigenous Governance of Nyikina Kandri</i>.....</b>	<b>249</b>
<b>7.4 Discussion .....</b>	<b>259</b>
<b>Chapter 8: SUMMARY, FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION.....</b>	<b>261</b>
<b>8.1 Summary .....</b>	<b>261</b>
8.1.1 <i>Methods and Procedures</i> .....	263
8.1.2 <i>Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage</i> .....	265
8.1.3 <i>Responding to Trauma Needs a Fresh Approach</i> .....	267
<b>8.2 Findings .....</b>	<b>269</b>
8.2.1 <i>The historical impact of colonisation on the construction of contemporary Indigenous disadvantage</i> .....	269

8.2.2 Rationale and process for engaging cultural action to strengthen community cultural development. ....	272
8.2.3 Cultural action to build community cultural development in partnership with Nyikina people in the West Kimberley region of Western Australia.....	274
8.2.4 Increase social cohesion and civic participation to provide the conditions for genuine partnerships for overcoming disadvantage. ....	275
<b>8.3 Conclusion .....</b>	<b>275</b>
<b>References .....</b>	<b>279</b>
<b>Appendices .....</b>	<b>294</b>
Appendix 1: Letter of Support: Nyikina Inc.....	295
Appendix 2: Participant Information Sheet A.....	296
Appendix 3: Participant Information Sheet B.....	299
Appendix 4: Consent Form.....	300
Appendix 5: Copy of Fax: Introduction to Communities.....	301
Appendix 6: DVD <i>Saying No Way to Family and Community Violence</i> .....	303
Appendix 7: Further Discussion of Data in DVD <i>Saying No Way to Family and Community Violence</i> .....	304
Appendix 8: Copy of Letter: JBA&VPF Coordinator.....	335
Appendix 9: Discussion Paper: Nyikina Cultural Centre.....	336
Appendix 10: DVD: <i>Nyikina Cultural Centre</i> .....	342
Appendix 11: Brochure: Nyikina Language and Culture Resource Kit 2004.....	343

## **Glossary of Terms**

Aboriginal - Aboriginal and Indigenous are terms used interchangeably to describe Australia's original inhabitants of the Australian mainland.

*Balginjirr* - the traditional name for the place the *Balginjirr* Aboriginal community is located, historically it is also known as the Lower Liveringa Outstation.

*Bookarrarra* - Nyikina word for Dreamtime or The Beginning, which represents integration of the past, present and future.

Cultural Action - is used to describe the type of conscious intervention and/or variation to the usual practice that intervenes to influence cultural change.

*Koorabi Koorabi* is a Nyikina word which refers to Nyikina people who belong to the upper region of the Fitzroy River.

*Jarlmadangah Burru* - a contemporary Nyikina community established in the Mt Anderson precinct several kilometres from Mt Anderson Station.

*Kaliya malina nganka* - the Nyikina meaning is stop talking, end of story, finish, and goodbye.

*Kandri* - a contemporary Nyikina kriol word for country.

*Kardiya* - refers to 'white', Caucasian people.

*Liyan* - a Nyikina word for feeling, emotion.

*Majala* - a Nyikina word for fresh water mangrove.

*Mardoowarra* - the Nyikina name for the Fitzroy River.

*Marnin* - a Nyikina word for woman.

*Noonkanbah* - the site of the billabong known as *koolkarriya*. The location was used to locate the Noonkanbah Homestead.

*Raparapa* – rapa is a Nyikina word for river bank. To this end raparapa means bank to bank, an alternative word for the *Mardoowarra*, Fitzroy River.

*Sit down* - an Aboriginal understanding of government policy where the belief may be that Aboriginal people prefer to be idle and sit around not wanting to be productive that they are passive recipients of government welfare.

*Warloongarriy*- is the community narrative that is sung and tells the story of the journey of *Woonyoomboo*, our first human ancestor to travel up the billabong. The song is our creation story and is significant in that it makes our connection and native title rights and responsibilities to the *Mardoowarra*.

*Warloongarriy nooloo*- a specific regional corroboree performed to the *Warloongarriy* song and danced in a ring around an Elder and a fire.

*Windirri* - the Nyikina word for human hair belt.

*Woonyoomboo* - the Nyikina word for the name of the first man from the *Bookarrarra* who created the billabongs along the Fitzroy River. All Nyikina people link their Nyikina heritage to the genealogy of *Woonyoomboo*.

*Yimardoowarra* - the Nyikina word to identify Nyikina people who belong to the Lower region of the Fitzroy River.

## **Chapter 1**

### **INTRODUCTION**

In 2003, my sister, a Nyikina Elder, approached me to develop a cultural and language program that would preserve our heritage and family history. Participation with my immediate and extended family in the development of this initial program gathering and preserving cultural information was a very personal experience for me, an Indigenous woman.

The expanse and richness of the program development created an understanding about the richness and complexity of an Indigenous Australian culture, the depth of impact from colonisation and the need to seek solutions to community issues from an Indigenous community perspective. This thesis is an attempt to convey the experience in a scholarly way so that others may replicate similar approaches and projects with other Indigenous groups. As I reflected on the experiences and stories of the Indigenous participants I became more determined to try and communicate the real meaning and importance of kandri and liyan, self-determination and empowering Indigenous leadership and governance.

This study grew out of my personal and professional life journey. There is no boundary between my personal and professional life as they are both focused on improving the quality of life outcomes for my immediate and extended Indigenous family. In this study I explored my family's journey from colonisation to the present day. To this end the theoretical and methodological



aspects of my self-reflexive participatory action research was qualitative and exploratory. It tells the story of the immediate and long term impact of colonisation on my family, the Nyikina people of the Mardoowarra-lower Fitzroy River in the West Kimberley region of Western Australia. The study utilises action research to explore several cultural action projects used as a process for generating sustainable community cultural development to assist in addressing social, emotional, spiritual, cultural, intellectual, economic, health and wellbeing disadvantages Nyikina people experience. The processes employed in this study are important because they describe the method for mobilising community engagement. This chapter describes the background to the study, the context of the research projects undertaken, conceptual framework and, the aims and objectives of the study.

## **1.1 Background**

I have been working to improve the health and wellbeing of Indigenous Australians for over thirty years. In that time I have been a public health nurse in the Pilbara, a remote community nurse in the Goldfields and Kimberley, nurse-in-charge of surgical and general hospital wards, senior lecturer and director of Indigenous health programs at universities and Indigenous community-controlled health training programs, as well as managing an Indigenous non-government organisation and private consultancy. I have participated as an active member and currently chair a wide range of government and Indigenous community committees.

From my observations in the field, investments into improving Indigenous health have focused on a medical approach to primary health care, which to date has produced mixed results. Furthermore, the past ten years have seen an increasing trend towards Indigenous social and emotional wellbeing programs. Yet, Indigenous quality and continuity of life indicators show that Indigenous health programs, including Indigenous community-controlled health services, have not demonstrated major improvements in Indigenous mortality and morbidity rates in Australia (Atkinson, Bridge and Gray 1999; Commonwealth Department of Health and Aging 2004; DIA 2005a).

While I acknowledge the need for medical care and primary health services, I believe there needs to be considerably greater investment into understanding the way disadvantage has been constructed over time as well as developing effective and sustainable responses to overcome Indigenous disadvantage. While acknowledging the alarming decline in the physical health of Indigenous Australians since colonisation, this thesis focuses on the social and cultural context of health and wellbeing in relation to Indigenous disadvantage in one geographic setting.

## **1.2 Research Setting**

The research was located within the Shire of Derby-West Kimberley local government area and ATSIC Malarabah Regional Council boundaries which are almost identical in the remote West Kimberley region of Western Australia. Derby is the main centre for this area. The 3,500 people are Indigenous, European and Asian Australian. Previous research in this region has revealed high levels of violence stemming from the impact of colonisation (Blagg 1999; Poelina & Perdrisat 2004a).

Fitzroy Crossing is a small town located on the Fitzroy River 259 kilometres south east of Derby. It is situated in the centre of pastoral, mining, tourism and Indigenous cultural activities. Fitzroy Crossing has a population of approximately 1,500 in the township, with further Indigenous populations living outside the township in remote communities. The Gibb River Road was built in the 1950s to transport cattle from surrounding pastoral stations to the ports of Derby and Wyndham. The road stretches 660 kilometres north east of Derby to the intersection of the Great Northern Highway between Wyndham and Kununurra. The small communities along it are almost exclusively Indigenous. The geography of this area is shown in the map below.



Map 1. Geography of Derby-West Kimberley

## **1.3 Context of the Study**

### *1.3.1 Historical Context of Nyikina People*

The European colonisation of Australia is the most influential factor affecting the health and wellbeing of Indigenous people, and is responsible for the construction of disadvantage in contemporary Indigenous society (Hunter 1993; Rowley 1971). Over time, Indigenous people have been alienated from traditional cultural and community life and excluded from the benefits of modern society, leading to reduced health and wellbeing. These factors have collectively contributed to the low self-esteem and diminished social value experienced by Indigenous Australians. Prior to colonisation, Indigenous Australians in the West Kimberley thrived for tens of thousands of years, yet in a comparably brief 128 years, Nyikina people have been reduced to a disadvantaged minority in their own land (Marshall 2004; Marshall 1988). In order to increase an understanding of Indigenous disadvantage it is important to examine the impact of colonisation and the implications of government policies and their underlying structures upon the lives of Indigenous Australians.

The history of oppression across all aspects of Indigenous lives demonstrates the holistic nature of the construction of Indigenous disadvantage. Since the coming of white Australians to these shores, Indigenous Australian people have become the most disadvantaged identifiable Australian group in all indicators of disadvantage including health, wealth, employment, education, housing, incarceration, disability, violence and death (Atkinson, Bridge & Gray 1999; Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision

(SCRGSP) 2005; Department of Indigenous Affairs (DIA) 2005b). It is widely acknowledged that Indigenous Australians have reduced life outcomes in almost all quality and continuity of life indicators (Atkinson, Bridge, & Gray, 1999; SCRGSP 2005; DIA 2005b). The effects of ongoing injustice are witnessed in poor health status and reduced life expectancy directly influencing social, emotional and spiritual wellbeing of individuals, their communities and a threat to the survival of Indigenous cultures. Strategies to overcome disadvantage need to acknowledge the collective alienation Indigenous people have experienced and promote emancipation and empowerment by generating opportunities for Indigenous participation in cultural activities and networks (SCRGSP 2007; Phillips 2003; Freire 2001). The experience of disadvantage and marginalisation is explored through an historical overview of the region in focus in Chapter 2.

### *1.3.2 Contemporary Context*

This study explores the shared journey of Nyikina people. I chose to undertake the study to increase an understanding of the colonial experiences of my immediate family and those of my ancestors in light of our people's current circumstances. I am a *Yimardoowarra marnin*, an Indigenous woman who is a direct descendant of *Woonyoomboo*, the first custodian of the lower region of the mighty *Mardoowarra-Fitzroy* River and my role in this research is one of an insider. As this story unfolded, the historical documents revealed the extent of racism and oppression suffered by my family, other Nyikina people and Indigenous Australians in the region at a personal, community and systemic

level. While these are my people, and this is my history also, I was horrified by what I learned and motivated even more to ensure the ongoing continuity of our culture.

I started my doctoral studies in March 2002 with a view to increase an understanding of the negative life indicators associated with the mental health of Nyikina people. From my previous experience working with elders and other extended family living in remote Nyikina communities I came to understand the role learning about your own culture has in building individual and community identity, resilience and wellbeing. In November 2003 Lucy Marshall, a Nyikina Elder who has a sister relationship with me through Nyikina law, asked me to use my skills and experience to save Nyikina language and culture from disappearing.

Nyikina language is an endangered language and many Nyikina people do not travel out onto the Nyikina traditional lands to exercise cultural practices. Lucy and other Elders share the view that knowledge of traditional language and culture has protective effects for maintaining social and emotional wellbeing. This provided the opportunity to generate cultural action with and for Nyikina people living in the remote town of Derby, the regional service centre on the edge of the Nyikina traditional lands. In keeping with the practice of action research, as will be explained in Chapter 3, I responded to advice from the Indigenous leadership in Derby and focused my efforts towards facilitating cultural action for local community cultural development to build evidence for better practice. Through an understanding of the concepts of oppression and

freedom, I focused my research on exploring strengths rather than a deficit approach to wellbeing.

The broader study that is reported here developed from this modest Indigenous community language and cultural development project. The collaboration with Nyikina people living in Derby occurred over the four years of the study and continues today. This cultural action project brought community members together and provided direction for subsequent and more highly developed community strategies. Using my professional experience and position within the community, I was able to take on multiple roles to work effectively as an insider. This approach required me to give something back to the community. More than this, my people – the Nyikina community, expected that once the process began I will, because of my cultural reciprocity responsibilities, follow that process right through to the end.

An action research approach was chosen to ensure the local Indigenous community ultimately benefited from my participation in the research process and outcomes. This study reports an ongoing process of Nyikina people's observation and reflection to build their capacity for engaging cultural action. In response to the need to maintain the language and culture project and develop new ways to promote Nyikina development, I facilitated the incorporation of the community not-for-profit agency Nyikina Incorporated (Inc.). This process is described in Chapter 5.

In July 2004 the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) through the Malarabah Regional Council funded the Nyikina



Language and Culture project. When the ATSIC Councillors saw the quality of Indigenous community engagement processes I used in the management of the Nyikina Language and Culture project and the formation of Nyikina Inc. I was invited to manage a project to raise the awareness of people in remote Indigenous communities about the destructive nature of family and community violence. I was able to negotiate widening the scope of the project to include the production of a film to capture examples of locally generated responses to family and community violence in remote Indigenous communities and distribute the film to show other Indigenous people positive activities some communities are doing. By focusing this entire research project on Indigenous community cultural activities I was able to explore, document and present (in written text and video format) an increased understanding of Indigenous community cultural development in the West Kimberley region. This provided the opportunity to learn about a wide range of strategies other non-Nyikina Indigenous communities have employed to create community action by working within an Indigenous cultural framework. I have referred to my involvement in this research project because cultural action as the collaboration between me, ATSIC and the participating communities was focused on raising awareness of an Indigenous cultural perspective to changing Indigenous outcomes. The development of these resources and the outcomes associated with them are described in Chapter 6.

Nyikina community members in Derby became more confident through participating in the language and cultural project and Nyikina Inc. During formal and informal meetings we discussed the need to build a cultural

centre to generate a cultural industry to promote the social, cultural and economic survival of Nyikina people.

Prior to the study I spent three years living and working in remote Nyikina communities on traditional Nyikina *kandri* along the *Mardoowarra-Fitzroy* River. Later in the study I found I was being drawn into land issues as a federal government body the Indigenous Land Corporation was preparing to hand back some land that was purchased for Nyikina and Mangala people; and the Nyikina and Mangala Native Title Claim was progressing to a stage where the community was starting to discuss governance and management issues. I found the discussions regarding ownership and management of traditional land to be a unifying process as it involves Nyikina people living on *kandri* and those living in Derby. The resultant meetings have revealed a model of governance to manage for the benefit of all Nyikina people. This is described in Chapter 7.

#### **1.4 Significance of the Study**

There is overwhelming evidence regarding the level of disadvantage Indigenous Australians experience across the country. There is an emerging body of knowledge to support the view that ‘Culture plays a significant role in Indigenous wellbeing, and must be recognised in actions designed to overcome disadvantage’ (SCRGSP 2005:7). This study documents how, through cultural actions, Nyikina people who were disconnected from cultural knowledge and practices can become emancipated and empowered; and how building sustainable community cultural development can be a

meaningful way to affirm their Nyikina identity. These activities aimed to provide a united and organised approach to respond to the contemporary disadvantage of Nyikina people through a renewed collective identity. Swan & Raphael (1995) wrote an extensive government report which emphasised the need for further development of health and wellbeing strategies. Importantly they recommend these strategies must be grounded in Indigenous perspectives for improved Indigenous policy and practice which are likely to emerge through locally generated actions. The community engagement processes used in this study were responsible for developing the Nyikina language and culture courses and other resources for building strong governance and sound leadership and initiating the development of a cultural centre for the preservation and maintenance of Nyikina cultural heritage for generations to come. Whilst each cultural action project provided a benefit to the community the significance of the study specifically relates to the integrated processes which took Indigenous community members through a range of interrelated activities which progressed from community engagement through developing pride from cultural participation to Indigenous community empowerment through improved leadership and governance.

## **1.5 Conceptual Framework**

Since colonisation, Indigenous Australian people have experienced the horrors of racism and widespread disadvantage, marginalisation and assimilation. Policies and practices have been defined according to Western values, which Freire(1968) describes as an anti-dialogic framework. This has resulted in the exclusion, exploitation, and degradation of Australia's traditional

owners (Bunbury 2002; Jebb 2002). Paulo Freire's (1968) conceptualisation of oppression provides the background for understanding disadvantage among Nyikina people. Adding to this conceptual framework, this research engages action research methods to document and analyse a holistic process for the creation of sustainable community cultural development.

The study process focused on building trust within the Nyikina community and between Nyikina people, me the insider researcher, government and community agencies and the wider community in Derby. Building trust has been the central element for developing partnerships for social change in remote Indigenous settings. This has been an important consideration in a small remote town because there is a high degree of uncertainty and mistrust in the wider community in Derby regarding the impact of changing the social status of a highly visible disadvantaged group.

## **1.6 Research Aim**

The aim of this research was to develop, implement and analyse action research projects that facilitate community participation to build the capacity of Nyikina people as they respond to and overcome disadvantage.

## **1.7 Research Objectives**

There were three objectives guiding this research, being;

Develop an understanding of the historical impact of colonisation on Nyikina people.

Analyse other non-Nyikina West Kimberley community solutions that may be relevant for building the capacity of Nyikina people.

Identify, implement and analyse a process for a holistic response to generate sustainable community cultural development for Nyikina people in Derby.

## **1.8 Thesis Chapter Outlines**

### Chapter 1– Introduction

This current chapter, Chapter 1, introduces the background of the research, the context, significance, conceptual framework, aim and objectives and concludes with an overview of the contents of each chapter of the thesis.

### Chapter 2 – Literature Review

Chapter 2 builds an historical understanding of the impact of colonisation on contemporary Indigenous communities. To demonstrate this, the chapter has a focus on discussing the intergenerational trauma my family, the Watson's, have experienced, to provide intimate details of how invasion has negatively impacted on remote Indigenous communities of the Kimberley.

The literature review examines community cultural action projects developed under the leadership of the Watson family in the remote Nyikina community of *Jarlmadangah Burru*. The community development activities that are grounded in Indigenous culture are referred to as cultural actions. This chapter concludes with a discussion of the cultural actions, being developed by

Nyikina people in the remote Aboriginal community, *Jarlmadangah Burru*.

The cultural action approach from *Jarlmadangah Burru* Aboriginal community was used to inform this study methodology for engaging community cultural development with Nyikina people living in Derby.

### Chapter 3 – Methodology

Chapter 3 describes the methodology for the study. I am an Indigenous Australian living and working in an Indigenous domain. To this end, ethical consideration is given to the use of Indigenous research principles as the process for understanding the issues regarding sustainable Indigenous community cultural development. This chapter documents how action research has been adapted to include multiple data collection and analysis procedures to create a valid and reliable research methodology which has meaning particularly to Indigenous Australians as well as others.

This is not a classic doctoral thesis reporting a scientific study. Rather, it is a contemporary piece of systematic qualitative action research in which I am intimately connected. A considerable amount of the data has been captured and represented in both texts and film. I would encourage the reader to view the films and read the thesis in order to take the time to enter into and become informed of a small part of the Nyikina worldview.

### Chapter – 4 Data Presentation and Analysis Part A

In Chapter 4, I privilege the voices and the lived experiences of seven Nyikina people and document their reflections on how they define ‘being

Nyikina'. This sense of 'being Nyikina' grounds the research context of this study and locates the following chapters 5, 6 and 7 in a personal and community narrative which has meaning to Indigenous people in the Kimberley region of Western Australia.

#### Chapter 5 – Data Presentation and Analysis Part B

In Chapter 5, I describe a series of cultural action projects engaged in by Nyikina people living in Derby. I used an exploratory qualitative approach to document the process of community cultural development to demonstrate how the actions of marginalised Nyikina people living in Derby can contribute to their sense of empowerment. Two projects are described in this chapter, being the *Nyikina Language and Culture Project* and the development of *Nyikina Incorporated*

#### Chapter 6 – Data Presentation and Analysis Part C

Chapter 6 investigates the regional social and cultural context by interviewing leaders from the West Kimberley region about key community cultural development projects non-Nyikina Indigenous people have undertaken. The community cultural development projects provided examples of other Indigenous community people who have developed local, culturally appropriate community solutions to deal with the disadvantage from colonisation, as it pertains to family, community and systemic violence. This chapter details the third cultural action project: *Saying No Way to Family and Community Violence*.

## Chapter 7 – Data Presentation and Analysis Part D

Nyikina community members in Derby became more confident through participating in the language and cultural project and Nyikina Inc. During formal and informal meetings we discussed the need to build a cultural centre to generate a cultural industry to promote the social, cultural and economic survival of Nyikina people. Cultural action project 4 included community engagement to develop a strategy for establishing the Nyikina Cultural Centre.

Cultural action project 5 revealed a model of governance to manage traditional Nyikina *kandri* along the *Mardoowarra*, Fitzroy River for the benefit of all Nyikina people. The discussions regarding ownership and management of the traditional *kandri* has been a unifying process as it involved both Nyikina people living in remote communities on *kandri* and those living in Derby.

## Chapter 8 – Summary and Conclusions

This final chapter restates the problem and the rationale as to why and how I set out to engage in cultural action projects in partnership with Nyikina people in Derby and the West Kimberley region. The opportunity to undertake a research project to understand the construction of disadvantage for Indigenous people in this region of Western Australia has been a deep personal journey.

The richest part of the research experience has been the opportunity to work in partnership with extended family members. Together we participated



in cultural actions to generate community cultural development as community solutions to reduce the impacts of disadvantage. This study contributed to building personal and community capacity for sustainable development on Nyikina *kandri* and along the *Mardoowarra*. The chapter concludes with what is required to continue building sustainable Nyikina community cultural development and the ways in which other marginalised communities may learn from these cultural projects.

## **Chapter 2**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

This literature review presents an overview of the colonisation of Australia, then focuses on the experience of Nyikina people of the Kimberley region of Western Australia and then more specifically, one family, the Watson's experience. The chapter starts with an examination of government policy, laws and practice that contributed to the discrimination and disadvantage of Aboriginal people. There is an overwhelming body of information about a wide range of issues which could be dealt with under the umbrella of disadvantage. To this end, I have not sought to represent all of the incidents and events that have taken place throughout this period. The purpose of the historical perspective to the literature review is to provide a broad understanding of the events of the past that have influenced the current circumstances. The later part of the literature review discusses Feire's (1968) anti-dialogic and dialogic conceptual framework and how this grounds the research by linking the past and present through a community narrative constructed from specific personal stories of Nyikina people.

The story of the Nyikina people starts in the Bookarrarra with Woonyoomboo, the first Nyikina man. I am a Yimardoowarra marnin, a Nyikina woman of the Lower region of the Fitzroy River and a member of the extended Watson family. Information about my grandfather William Watson,

mother Dorothy Hunter, and Uncles Ivan, John and Harry Watson have been recorded in this chapter to demonstrate the negative impact of the state and federal governments on Nyikina lives over generations. My family's stories illuminate the impact colonisation has had over time on the Nyikina way of life with particular reference to the negative impact government policies have had on individuals and their families. Our Nyikina story continues through the voices of the families that continue to live on traditional Nyikina kandri.

The inhabitants of the remote Nyikina community of *Jarlmadangah Burru* have a philosophy which ensures all activities are developed with a view to promote local Indigenous cultures. They have employed a range of activities to safeguard culture under the leadership of the Watson family, to build a safe and sustainable remote Aboriginal community. The information about the cultural action employed by *Jarlmadangah Burru* has been included in the literature review as it demonstrates positive outcomes for Nyikina people from participating in cultural action projects. I reflected on the cultural actions employed by the remote community of *Jarlmadangah Burru* to see if similar kinds of benefits could be generated from cultural action for Nyikina people living in a town based setting such as Derby.

## **2.2 Historical Context of Colonisation**

The ongoing relationship between Indigenous Australians and new Australians started in 1788 with the invasion, conquest and occupation of the south east coast of Australia by the British Government. After this time and over the following centuries, white Australians began to settle and take over

traditional Aboriginal lands. During 1829, Western Australia was colonised. A table that outlines the historical legal and policy development for Aboriginal citizens in Western Australia is included below to give the reader an understanding of the relationship between governments and Indigenous people in this state.

1829	Colonisation of Western Australia by the British. Governor Stirling’s Proclamation gave protection to Aboriginal people. If any Person or Persons shall be convicted of behaving in a fraudulent, cruel or felonious manner towards the Aborigines of the Country, such Person or Persons will be liable to be prosecuted and tried for the Offence, as if the same had been committed against any other of His Majesty’s Subjects.
1886	Aborigines Protection Board established under the Aborigines Protection Act, to provide Aboriginal people with food and clothing when destitute.
1900	Commonwealth Constitution made Aboriginal people a State issue, excluding the Commonwealth from making laws for Aboriginal people (section 51), and from including Aboriginal people on the Census (section 127).
1905	<i>The Aborigines Act</i> (1905) responded to the Roth Commission of 1904. This so called protective legislation made the Chief Protector the legal guardian of all Aboriginal children and instituted a system of surveillance and strict controls over

	Aboriginal people.
1944	<i>The Natives (Citizenship Rights) Act (1944)</i> gave limited rights to Aboriginal people who could prove, among other things that they had adopted a ‘civilised life’ and did not associate with Aborigines.
1960	<i>The Commonwealth Social Service (Consolidation) Act (1960)</i> lifted all restrictions applying to Aboriginal people receiving maternity and aged benefits.
1962	Aboriginal people were eligible to vote in State elections. Voting not compulsory.
1963	<i>The Native Welfare Act (1963)</i> lifted the remaining restrictions on Aboriginal people, unless they were ‘nomadic’.
1967	Commonwealth Referendum 91% of Australians vote ‘Yes’ to alter the Constitution to enable the Commonwealth Government to legislate in relation to Aboriginal matters and for Aboriginal people to be counted in the national Census.
1968	Federal Pastoral Industry Award allowing for equal wages for Aboriginal people in the pastoral industry.
1972	Aboriginal Affairs Planning Authority (AAPA) Act constitutes the Aboriginal Lands Trust, the Aboriginal Advisory Council and the Aboriginal Affairs Co-ordinating Committee. Last restrictions on ‘nomadic’ Aboriginal people lifted.
1977	National Aboriginal Conference (NAC) established

	as the first Aboriginal elected body with direct access to government.
1990	The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) commenced.
1991	The Report of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody was tabled in State and Federal Parliaments.
1992	The High Court's Mabo decision overturned the doctrine of 'terra nullius'.
1993	The Commonwealth Parliament passed the Native Title Act (1994), which came into effect 1 January 1994.
1996	The HREOC (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission) report tabled into the separation of Aboriginal children from their families.
2001	Signing of the Statement of Commitment to a New and Just Relationship between the Western Australian Government and Aboriginal Western Australians.

**Figure 1.** Historical legal and policy framework for Aboriginal citizenship.

Adapted from Department of Premier and Cabinet (2005:14-15)

Figure 1 show that while some legislation was implemented to protect Aboriginal people, other policies had the opposite result, and even in very recent times Aboriginal people have been treated separately from the majority of the population. Almost two hundred years after colonisation the

historical impact of this relationship, as described by eminent Australian anthropologist and historian A.P. Elkin (1979), reports that government laws, actions and an unwritten policy of oppression was responsible for the disadvantage of Indigenous Australians both historically and still to this day (Hunter 1993). More recently, Professor Henry Reynolds (2000) highlighted that contemporary Australians have not been made aware of the impact of early government policies on Indigenous Australians which underpins the ongoing racism and marginalisation from mainstream society.

Missing from historical accounts of colonial Australia, is the Aboriginal view and this is starting to emerge and be recognised as an integral part of Australian history (Ganter 2006; Haebich 2000; Hunter & Garvey 1998; Reynolds 1989). Indigenous West Australians share the experience of invasion and colonisation with other Indigenous Australians however this experience is unique to each local circumstance.

### *2.2.1 Scientific Racism*

Social scientists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries generated theories to stratify human racial difference reinforcing racism at governmental, institutional and social levels.

Scientific racism, where research is carried out by scientists into the physical, social, intellectual and moral qualities of culturally different people, was used to justify the murder, slavery and mistreatment of Aboriginal people. Invariably such differences are equated with inherent, biological inferiority

when compared to qualities associated with the scientists' own in-group. Most frequently this in-group has been Western European (Eckermann, Dowd, Chong, Nixon, Gray & Johnson 2006:9). Galtung (1990) argues Western knowledge is grounded in an empirical science to create a formal truth which is used to legitimise a culture of violence. The emergence of Western scientific racism was used to justify treating Aboriginal people as lower forms of humans and underpinned the practice of institutionalised racism where governments developed laws and administrative procedures with the specific purpose of disadvantaging Aboriginal people (Broome 1982). The lives of Nyikina people have continued to be affected by institutionalised racism to the present day. While there was a need to justify one's actions, Rowley (1970:67) asserts that along the frontier the common justification was the usual colonial code of white supremacy, experienced by other races under colonisation.

### *2.2.2 The Colonial Experience of Western Australia*

From 1820 to 1840 as invasion and settlement began to take effect in Western Australia, the British Government reaffirmed official policy decreeing Aboriginal people were British subjects, and as such should be afforded safety and respect under British law (Berndt 1969; Elkin 1979; Reynolds 1989). The Swan River Colony, the area that is now known as Perth, the capital city of Western Australia was established in 1829. Perth is the most isolated city in the world and Western Australia is approximately one third of the Australian mainland. Perth is located 2,125 kilometres from the nearest city, Adelaide, to the east and it is 2,500 kilometres northeast to the next nearest city



of Darwin (Jacaranda Atlas 2000). Consolidation and development in the early years of the Swan River Colony (now the city of Perth) involved cultivation, resource extraction and grazing. Free settlers were attracted to Western Australia by the opportunity to acquire free land and ‘settlement spread fan-wise with the rapid expansion into Aboriginal tribal territories from every coastal point of entry’ (Elkin 1979:285).

The non-Aboriginal settlers saw themselves as the dominant group who perceived they were lawfully opening up the country, and this view was reinforced by government policy (Bunbury 2002; Elkin 1981; Jebb 2002). These early settlers considered Indigenous Australians to be primitive and uncivilised beings from whom the settlers believed they needed protection (Broome 1982). From 1840 to 1880 a brutal method of pacification by force had tacit approval from the West Australian colonial governments with profoundly negative effects on Indigenous people. The justification was that settlers on the frontier asserted Indigenous Australians could not be civilised and that all attempts to civilise them had failed (Berndt 1969; Elkin 1981; Neville 1947). Expeditions, involving both police and landowners, to commit violence against Indigenous Australians became an institutionalised way of controlling Aboriginal people, and lingered on in the sparsely settled parts of the continent until the 1930s (Bunbury 2002; Elkin 1981; Jebb 2002).

Segregation and protection policies failed to ensure the survival of Indigenous Australians; these policies also failed to protect them from harsh

treatment which was justified by a deeply entrenched view amongst most settlers that Aboriginal people were an inferior race.

Force and punitive expeditions continued to occur. However from 1870, some anthropologists and other prominent non-Aboriginal citizens became interested in the welfare of Indigenous Australians and began publishing studies reporting the complexities of Indigenous social organisation and religious systems, worthy of preservation along with Indigenous people (Berndt 1969; Reynolds 1989). In the 1880s there was a general view in non-Indigenous society that Indigenous Australians were expected to die out. State governments legislated for segregation and protection policies to confine Indigenous Australians to missions and government settlements. In the case in the Kimberley region of Western Australia, Aboriginal people were often resettled away from their traditional lands on pastoral leases to provide a slave labour force (Bunbury 2002; Elkin 1981; Jebb 2002).

In 1885 Reverend John Gribble (Gribble 1905) attempted to challenge the culture of violence he witnessed in the negative stereotyping and mistreatment of Aborigines while establishing a mission settlement in Western Australia. Gribble came into the region as an outsider. He did not accept the views and treatment by the local colonial authorities and settlers toward Indigenous people. He condemned the mistreatment of Indigenous people which attracted the wrath of missionaries, pastoralists and settlers, and was forced to give up attempts to found a mission in remote Western Australia (Gribble 1905).

In 1886, the British Parliament established the Aborigines Protection Act. The Aborigines Protection Act (1886) was an Act of the British Parliament because Western Australia was the only Australian state that did not have self government by that time, thus this Act applied only to Western Australia. In 1889 the colonial government of Western Australia changed two conditions of the Act, being (1) Aboriginal people were no longer protected under law from *fear, coercion or restraint* by the colonists and (2) a native could not leave his place of employment without the permission of his employer, or the Police who were also named as the Protectors of Aborigines. If Aboriginal people left the pastoral station they belonged to, they were forced to return (McLeod 1984). At this time, the sense of ownership that the colonisers believed to have over Aboriginal people became entrenched. Western Australia became an independent state when ‘in 1889 self government was conferred,’ however ‘sovereignty was limited by Section 70 of the Constitution’ (McLeod 1984:3). Section 70 of the Act established an Aboriginal Protection Board that was answerable to the British Crown, not to the new state government, which had been established by this time. Section 70 made provision for the state to pay financial support for the protection and welfare of Aboriginal people. According to McLeod (1984: 4) Section 70 was:

the central instrument by which the Imperial Government sought to provide a minimum standard of legal protection for the indigenous population. [McLeod (1984:4) further explains] ...the reason the Crown was so inflexible on this issue and stood firm against the hue and cry of the leading colonialist’, was because of the ‘consistent

and growing evidence of acts of violence and genocide committed by settlers against the natives.

Each state and territory was provided funding from the Crown to support the protection and welfare of Aborigines. The Chief Protector of Aborigines was empowered by the state government to maintain strict control over the lives of all Indigenous people in Western Australia. As opposed to fostering protection these laws, policies and practices, justified by scientific racism were generated to oppress Indigenous people (Broome 1982; Eckermann et al. 2006), resulting in further marginalisation and destruction of the Indigenous people of Western Australia.

In 1897, the then Western Australian Premier, John Forrest, met with other State Premiers to draft the Australian Constitution (Elkin 1981). The new Constitution vested the interests, rights and responsibilities of Aboriginal people under the authority of State laws so that wider national and international political interests could not interfere with the western colonialists treatment of Aborigines. Furthermore, in 1897 Premier Forrest argued “the new Parliament would be forced to take the law into its own hands and pass a bill, each year, which would have to either receive the Royal Assent or be vetoed” (McLeod 1984:8). Forrest was unsuccessful in petitioning the British Secretary for the Colonies to disband the Aboriginal Protection Board which remained accountable to the British Parliament for the welfare and protection of Aboriginal people until 1905 (Elkin 1981).

The welfare of Aboriginal people was, and still is, a contentious issue. The Western Australian government repeatedly tried to remove what they considered to be interference from liberals in Great Britain. In 1898 the Western Australian government challenged the British colonial authority for the responsibility and control of Aboriginal people. Without the approval of the British Parliament, the Western Australian Parliament assumed authority over Aboriginal people giving rise to the establishment of the Department of Native Affairs and ‘Honourable members were pleased to approve the appointment of Premier Forrest as its first Minister’ (McLeod 1984:10). The Act of 1898 ‘was no more and no less a slave Act’ (McLeod 1984:10), whereby it created a permit system as a strategy to control and divide Aboriginal families (Elkin 1981; McLeod 1984).

### *2.2.3 Indigenous Australian Slavery*

When the colonial authorities’ invaded Aboriginal lands they believed that Indigenous people should be used as a supply of free labour, as Tuhiwai Smith (1999:27) explains: ‘slavery was as much a system of imperialism as was the claiming of other peoples’ territories.’ Indigenous people, particularly those who did not hold a permit which exempted them from the rules set out in the Aboriginal Protection Act (1905), known as an exemption certificate, could not move freely and had fewer rights than other Australians. Indigenous Australians who did not have exemption did not have Australian citizenship, could not leave their so called employment without the permission of the Protector of Aborigines, missionary, the police or their

employer – they were therefore, controlled entirely by the State (McLeod 1984:10) . Our Elder, Lucy Marshall explained the impact this had on the lives of the people:

Aboriginal people can't go where they want them days. If people ran away from one station and went to another one, the other manager used to send a letter back and say: 'Yeah, I got them here and oh well, they didn't want to come back ... some problem so they stayed back here.' And the other manager'd come back and pick them up, bring them back. (Marshall 2004:43).

Official policies of containment and isolation were introduced in the late nineteenth century to control and manage the movement of Aboriginal people. Aboriginal people were regarded as the property of their legal protectors; they were not citizens who were able to travel freely throughout the country at their own discretion. These conditions reduced Aboriginal people to the status of slaves (Austen 1998). When the colonial states federated in 1901, the Western Australian Premier and Minister for Native Affairs, John Forrest, entered federal politics as a member of the first Australian parliament. In this new role, he was able to influence federal politics to maintain a growing slave labour force to build the Western Australian economy and subsequently continue colonial brutality towards Indigenous Australians in Western Australia (Elkin 1979).

Don McLeod's (1984) advocacy work in Western Australia saw him actively resisting the government's oppression of Aboriginal people. One

of the high points of his action in confronting the propaganda and injustice was the claim in the High Courts that:

The Act of Native Affairs was a slave act. ...[the High Court] contended that it contravened the Antislavery Act passed by the English Parliament in 1833. The High Court admitted that Blackfellows in Western Australia were virtually slaves under the Act. However, it ruled that Western Australia, being a sovereign state, had the right to enslave any one it wanted to, providing it passed the necessary legislation. (McLeod 1984:60)

McLeod (1984) confirms he was instructed to abide by the law or else pay the prescribed penalties. It is interesting to note that it has only been as recent as 1998 that slavery was made illegal in Australia (Standing Committee, Commonwealth Attorneys General 1998). The Commonwealth Government Attorney General's Department Standing Committee (1998:8) commissioned a report, which defined slavery under Code 9.1.1 as 'the condition of a person over whom the powers attaching to the right of ownership are exercised'. Furthermore, this Committee described slavery offences under Code 9.1.1 (2) as:

(a) the capture, transport or disposal of a person for the purpose of reducing the person to slavery; or (b) the purchase or sale of a slave; or (c) any commercial transaction involving a slave, or exercising control or direction over, or providing finance for, any such act. (Model Criminal Code Officers Committee of the Standing Committee of the Commonwealth Attorney General, Chapter 9: Offences Against Humanity: Slavery Report 1998:8)

Under this definition, Indigenous Australians throughout the nineteenth and twentieth century's were subjected to the status of slavery. As McLeod (1984:110) describes: 'Had the state continued to be beholden to the north-west pastoralist, there is no doubt that there would have been greater pressure to maintain the old form of slavery' (McLeod 1984:110).

Anthropologist R. Piddington after his 1932 field work in the Kimberley 'accused the government of condoning "virtual slavery" in the pastoral north, and of "utter indifference" to the welfare of the aboriginal population' (Biskup1973: 94). To date no Australian Parliament has directly dealt with the impact of 'virtual slavery' on contemporary Indigenous circumstances from what occurred throughout Australia in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

#### *2.2.4 The Construction of Indigenous Disadvantage*

Premier Forrest went to London in 1898 to lobby to abolish the Section 70 in relation to Aboriginal Protection Board. However it was not until The Native Administration Act of 1905 was introduced into the Western Australian Parliament that the state responsibilities identified in Section 70 were removed. This new Act has been described as 'an all-encompassing, controlling and representative state of government administration placed over all Western Australian Aboriginal people well into the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century' (DIA 2005a:17). The historian Anna Haebich (DIA 2005a:17) described the Act as:

a loosely stitched together jumble of self interest and overlapping and contradictory policies of self protection, segregation,



assimilation, reform and unprecedented wide ranging duties and power open to interpretations.

In an effort to maintain a separation between races this Act made it illegal for a white citizen to be found within 5 chains (100 metres) of an Aboriginal person. Forty-five years later in 1949 the High Court of Australia repealed this clause (McLeod 1984). However, personal stories provide insight into how this policy failed with Aboriginal women becoming the sexual partner both willingly and forced, of white men who were settling or exploring Australia according to Lucy Marshall and reported in Hattersley (2004a). Austen (1998:82) describes the isolation white men in the Kimberley felt as they often went for many months, up to a year without seeing white women. Some white males disregarded the segregation laws designed to separate people of different heritage leading them to have sexual and family relations with Aboriginal women. Often sexual encounters were brutal violent rape, however some white men:

experienced friendships and love matches with Aboriginal females. White men who stuck by their black partners were rarely able to marry ... and often faced the opprobrium of their own kind. (Austen 1998:82)

Nyikina Elder Lucy Marshall described her experience of meeting and developing a relationship with a white man:

Then my Irishman came along ... He said, 'I'll grow your son up' so I got mixed up with that Irishman and policeman came out and picked him up. 'Oh, what for?' he reckoned. 'That girl is under the

Act.’ So I wasn’t allowed to live with him and he had to go to gaol.  
(Marshall 2004:47)

Relationships between Aboriginal and white people, whether forced or consensual, gave rise to a growing population of mixed race Aboriginal-European children. Many mixed race children, with European heritage were forcibly removed from their Indigenous families to prevent the children from being absorbed into an Aboriginal way of life, a policy practice that continued late into the twentieth century. Nyikina Elder, Paddy Roe describes his experience:

When I grew up a little bit more big, the policemen used to come round the country picking up children with this [light] colour, from white father. They send them to Moore River [Government Reserve], and Beagle Bay [Catholic Mission], too, from all over the country. (Roe, cited in McCord & Anastassiou 1992: 202)

The practice of removing Indigenous children from their families has had lifelong social and psychological consequences as they struggled to understand their personal and cultural identity (Choo 2001; HREOC 1997; Swan & Raphael 1995). It was only early in 2008 that the Federal Government formally acknowledged the profound impact this had not only on those removed at the time, but by their direct and extended families of past and present and the broader Indigenous community.

The ‘National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families’ (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC) 1997) reported government policies

prevented the opportunity for the Aboriginal children removed to experience a normal family life; often they experienced institutionalised living and subsequent physical, sexual and emotional abuse. The policies themselves were based on the premise that extended Aboriginal families could not provide adequately for their children. Aboriginal people were collectively considered by the State to be 'not good enough' parents or guardians to look after their own children (HREOC 1997; Swan & Raphael 1995). HREOC (1997) went on to report that reduced parenting skills amongst Indigenous parents are one of many negative outcomes from successive government policies.

Indigenous Australian families were forcibly separated and 'transported to live on missions and government settlements under oppressive regimes designed to destroy our languages and cultural heritage' (Kimberley Aboriginal Law and Culture Centre (KALCC) 1994:48). The Native Administration Act (1905) was in force until 1947 and provided for an increase in the number of government native reserves and missions run by church organisations (McLeod 1984). Elkin (1979) believes reserves and missions were established as refuges for the remnants of a dying race rather than for the preservation and development of Aboriginal people.

Early in the twentieth century separating Aboriginal children from their families became an ambitious social engineering project by governments. The government policy and practice forcibly removed Aboriginal children from their parents and denied Aboriginal people access to their culture (HREOC 1997). The government supported the establishment of missions by a range of

different faiths with missionaries coming from around the world (Elkin 1979; Choo 2001). These reserves and missions became the reservoir from which Aboriginal people were trained to work for settlers, pastoralist and pearling masters. According to Sanders (1995) it is not surprising that these factors reflected Indigenous peoples' sense of diminishing hope for a positive and sustainable future.

In the mid twentieth century policies of assimilation effectively targeted the essence of Indigenous culture which had the effect of social and cultural genocide (HREOC 1997). Governments through the mission and reserve systems were effective in segregating mixed race Aboriginal children. Children were denied their Indigenous identity in an effort to assimilate them into the dominant white culture. McLeod (1984) argues that government policy known as 'protection' was a covert strategy to action cultural genocide.

During this period, there was a commonly held view in white society that Aboriginal people lacked the ability to engage a meaningful life in the modern world. Elkin (1981) provided an alternate view. Whereby he believed Aboriginal people could participate in the Western oriented environment if they were able to combine the strengths of their own cultural values with mainstream skills, so Aboriginal people would become both culturally safe and technically skilled. In the case of northern and west-central Australian Aboriginal people:

The present day challenge of day to day living, with its problems of education ... technical training, and employment ... is to integrate

two cultures ... to bring within the ambit of their inherited, Indigenous culture, those elements of the white man's culture which have meaning and use for them. (Elkin 1981:377)

Conditions for Aboriginal people did not improve throughout the first half of the twentieth century (Berndt 1969; McLeod 1984; Reynolds 1989). The Western Australian Government introduced the *Natives (Citizenship Rights) Act 1944* to provide mixed race Aborigines with a marginalised form of citizenship, as Choo (2001) explains:

Under section 5 of the Act, the applicant had to be in good health and in good standing with the law. Most importantly, the applicant had to renounce his or her Aboriginality. Section 7 of the Act stated that the Certificate of Citizenship could be revoked if the holder did not 'adopt the manner and habits of civilised life', had been twice convicted of any offence under the *Native Administration Act* or of habitual drunkenness, or had contracted leprosy, syphilis, granuloma or yaws. No other group in Australia was subject to such discriminatory and racist conditions with respect to its members applications for [Australian citizenship]. (Choo 2001:263)

In 1967 Australians voted overwhelmingly to a referendum that decreed that Aboriginal people would be counted in the census, that is, they were citizens by birth and did not have to apply for the status. This change in policy also made it legal for the Commonwealth as well as the states to make laws for Indigenous people. Through this Referendum, the Commonwealth Government was given Constitutional powers under Section 52 to legislate for the wellbeing of Indigenous Australians. Dodson (cited in Attwood & Markus 2007:169) discusses the hope that was created in Aboriginal people from the

support they received from the wider Australian people demonstrated by this Referendum.

However, history now shows that the improvements that should have come with the change in status of Aboriginal people have not been realised. Mick Dodson (in Attwood & Markus 2007) contrasts the spirit of generosity of the wider Australian community which carried the Referendum with the tragedy of the current national political climate toward Indigenous people. Dodson believes a referendum to promote Indigenous rights would not have passed during the Howard period of government. The Referendum 'gave Aboriginal affairs to the Commonwealth and has meant exactly nothing to Blackfellows. They are still administered by the State' (McLeod 1984:109). Behrendt, Laughton and Dodson (in Attwood and Markus 2007:167-169) each describes the disappointment Indigenous Australians have experienced from the false hope that was generated for Aboriginal people by the Referendum which has not realised equity of life outcomes, a reduction in Indigenous disadvantage or increased hope. Furthermore, they put the view that government responses have been inadequate and slow; resulting in Aboriginal people experiencing the worst life outcomes in all categories of disadvantage in Australia.

The language of Indigenous affairs has changed over time, however; the relationship between the colonisers and the colonised has remained almost static. For example, in 1972 the Federal Government introduced the policy of Indigenous self-determination and self-management, yet a series of Acts passed by the state of Western Australia since the early

1970s has worsened the plight of Aboriginal people in this state (McLeod 1984). The inequity surrounding Indigenous people and our communities continues to be subjected to government policies and practices, resulting in diminished life outcomes for Indigenous people which maintain a framework of mistrust (Pearson 2000). Pearson (2000) believes contemporary Aboriginal people must begin to take responsibility for themselves and their families and focus outwardly on community owned governance and sustainable economic development to address this situation.

#### *2.2.5 Indigenous Disadvantage in the Kimberley Region of Western Australia*

Pearling, the gold rush and encroachment of the pastoral industry on Aboriginal traditional *kandri* disrupted Aboriginal life and began the colonial history of the West Kimberley. According to Battye (1915:118), G.J. Brockman was the first pastoralist to settle in the West Kimberley region when he brought 300 sheep to Beagle Bay north of Broome in 1879. Under the name of the Murray Squatting Company, the flock was moved to the Yeeda pastoral lease on the Fitzroy River (near Derby) in 1880. The towns of Broome and Derby were gazetted in November 1883. Gold mining at Halls Creek inland from Derby began in 1886 giving rise to an influx of disparate people, which led to a series of abusive and violent incidents with the local Indigenous people (Battye 1915; Edwards 1991; Jebb 2002).

Following years of reports of persistent brutality in the region, W.E. Roth, Queensland Chief Protector of Aborigines, was engaged to head a Royal Commission in 1904 into the employment conditions and treatment of

‘Aborigines and half-caste’ in the north of Western Australia (Austin 1998).

This Royal Commission found that the north-western Aboriginal people were malnourished, exploited and brutally controlled.

According to Austin (1998:160) a number of Roth’s ideas formed the basis of the 1905 Act:

Overall the Act tightened the European grip. It regulated state control over Aborigines- where they lived, work, movement, marriage and children. More than ever, in status and opportunity, the Aborigines were at a disadvantage. The new limitations meant fewer chances to achieve.

Ironically, while the Royal Commission’s comments were intended to promote more liberal outcomes for Aboriginal people, they ultimately led to recommendations that were endorsed in the Aborigines Act of 1905 which effectively reduced Aboriginal people’s human rights (McLeod1984).

The culmination of government policies and the loss of land and culture, resulted in the colonial social order assigning Aboriginal people to the lowest class devoid of rights and powerless to manage their own affairs:

In their relations with the white man on reserves or elsewhere, their role was to do what they were told and to accept what they were given by Government or mission officials and by everyone who regarded himself as the ‘employer’ and ‘boss’ of ‘his’ Blacks. (Elkin 1981:375)

Aboriginal people were rounded up from coastal, river and desert regions in the Kimberley and, at the point of a gun under police escort, were



transported to pearling ports in the Kimberley and Pilbara region of Western Australia to be used as slave divers on the pearling luggers. Aboriginal people thus became the major pearling workforce since the 1860s. A historical case study written in 1947 by A.O. Neville, Chief Protector of Aborigines in Western Australia during the 1920s and 1930s, identified Aboriginal women and men as the first pearlers who were instrumental in the establishment of the Australian pearling industry in the 1860s.

Aboriginal men and women experienced cruelty while working as slaves in the pearling industry (Edwards 1983 and Austen 1998). There were no minimum standards to regulate the employment conditions of Aboriginal men, women or children. Pearling history notes many of these Indigenous divers lost their lives to shark attacks, others who had been brought in from the desert and unfamiliar with sea life were not able to swim and lost their lives being forced to dive. Furthermore, Edwards (1983) describes how Aboriginal women were forced to dive in the last stages of pregnancy and divers had their fingers crushed by blows from heavy sculling oars from clinging to the side of the dinghy too long between dives.

There were no limits to the abuses suffered by Aboriginal people in the early days of the pearling industry. The introduction of the hard hat diving helmet and suit worn by Asian divers at the turn of the century replaced the naked breath holding Aboriginal divers. Aboriginal involvement in the pearling industry was greatly reduced when peoples from all around Southeast Asia came to the Kimberley coast to work. However, some Aboriginal people

remained as lugger crew while others worked on the docks grading and packing mother of pearl shell. The work was dirty and physically hard in the tropical heat and all ‘They received [was] a shirt, a pair of pants, and a bandana at the beginning and end of the season, and tea and tucker, and tobacco so long as they worked’ (Edwards 1983:42).

European law and order was brought to the region through the establishment of towns and pastoral leases where police assisted the pastoralists to manage the local Indigenous populations through slavery, massacres, imprisonment and relocation (Edwards 1983; Jebb 2002; Marshall 2004, Marshall 1988). The Queensland Chief Protector’s report of 1904, vindicated the concerns of Indigenous rights advocates by confirming their view that Indigenous Australians were ill equipped to deal with the rapid advancement of settlement into the more isolated regions such as the West Kimberley region of Western Australia. Indigenous weaponry was no match for settler and police rifles. Aboriginal people soon became the slave labour force to the pastoralist who quickly occupied the open plains and rich waterways of the Kimberley’s Fitzroy River to graze vast herds of sheep and cattle (Nangan & Edwards 1976; Marshall 1988).

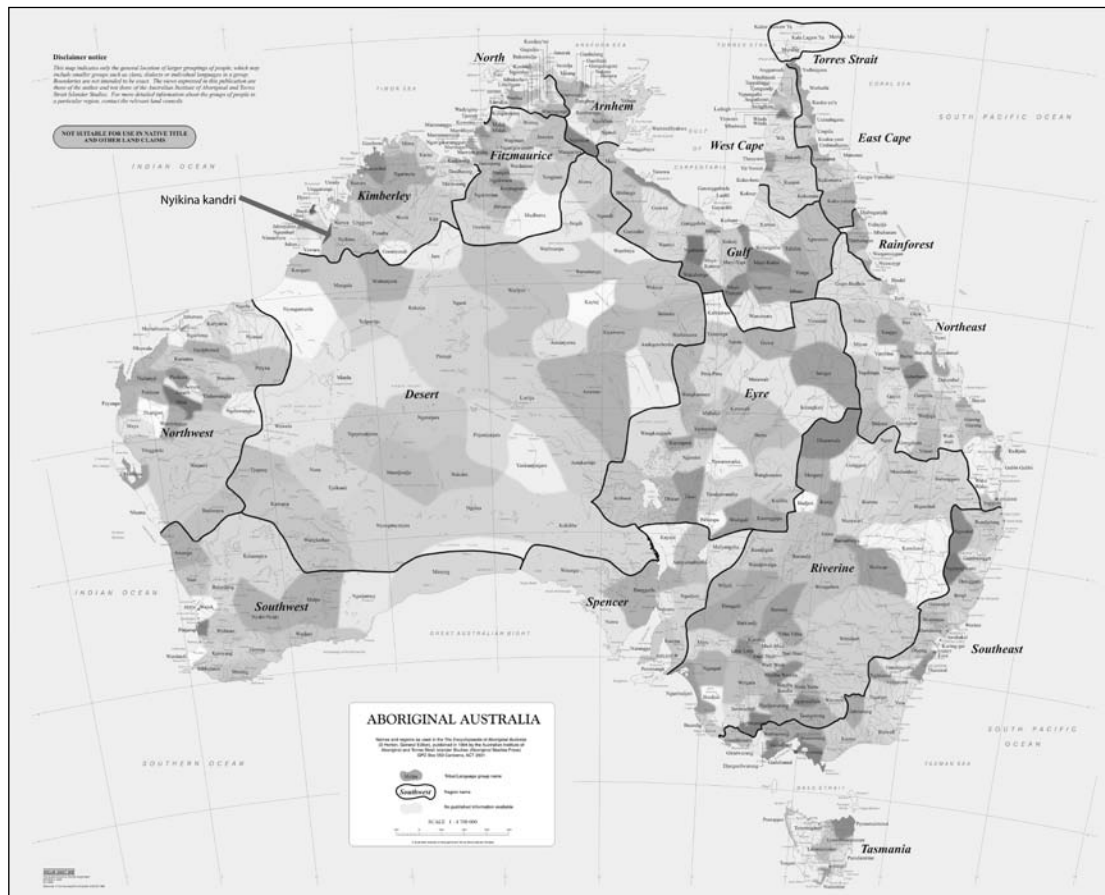
### **2.3 Nyikina People of the Mardoowarra**

The traditional lands of Nyikina people in the West Kimberley region of Western Australia were ‘one of the last fertile regions of the Australian continent to be invaded and colonised’ (Kimberley Aboriginal Law and Culture Centre (KALACC) 1996:47) by Europeans. Thus, the invasion of

Nyikina traditional lands is a fairly recent historical phenomenon, occurring in the 1880s, and therefore ‘the vast grasslands and open country of the interior were still largely unexploited’ (Bunbury 2002:16) until relatively recent times.

The Kimberley supported large numbers of Aboriginal people and was rich in Aboriginal culture with ‘30,000 people comprising nearly fifty distinct language groups’ (KALCC 1996:47). The rights of the large Aboriginal population were not considered when ‘the Australian government blatantly ignored the rights of the Traditional Owners and issued pastoral leases to anybody prepared to pay (KALCC 1996:47) and were supported to do so by the law and government policies of the time, as described above.

The West Kimberley rangeland is dry tropical savannah with very little surface water. The initial occupation of the Kimberley in the early 1880s by Europeans for pastoral grazing relied heavily on accessing the water resources from the Nyikina lands (Nangan & Edwards 1976; Marshall 1988).



**Map 2.** *Nyikina land in the Kimberley*

This map is just one representation of many other map sources that are available for Aboriginal Australia. Using published resources available between 1988–1994, this map attempts to represent all the language or tribal or nation groups of the Indigenous people of Australia. It indicates only the general location of larger groupings of people which may include smaller groups such as clans, dialects or individual languages in a group. Boundaries are not intended to be exact. This map is NOT SUITABLE FOR USE IN NATIVE TITLE AND OTHER LAND CLAIMS. The views expressed in this publication are those of the author and not those of AIATSIS. David R Horton, creator, © Aboriginal Studies Press, AIATSIS and Auslig/Sinclair, Knight, Merz, 1996.

Nyikina traditional river-land is a series of billabongs and each year seasonal floodwaters from the monsoonal rains connect the billabongs to form the *Mardoowarra*, Fitzroy River, which empties into King Sound near Derby. Nyikina people occupied vast tracks of land extending 100km either side of the *Mardoowarra*, Fitzroy River from King Sound to the Great Sandy Desert. Nyikina people were custodians of the rich river country that was abundant in wild life, bush foods and medicine (Nangan & Edwards 1976).

Creation songs welcomed other tribes to the river to share its resources. Visitors were invited to come to the river when times were hard due to drought. They were told through song to enjoy the bounty of the river's water and food and most importantly to look after the river and when its time, 'go back to where you come from'. In the audio-visual recording *Jarlmadangah Mob* (2000) my uncle, John Watson explains, 'The *Warloongarriy* song is the river of life song which connects our relationship to the river'. The singing has become progressively less frequent since the time when Nyikina and other Kimberley Indigenous people were physically and culturally invaded, conquered, manipulated, divided and ruled by the colonisers from the early 1880s, which continues to this day (Bunbury 2002; Jebb 2002).

The invasion of Aboriginal traditional lands and subsequent resistance to colonisation resulted in massacres and forced removal of Indigenous people from the West Kimberley (Austin 1998; Edwards 1991; Nangan & Edwards 1976). West Kimberley Indigenous filmmaker and playwright Michelle Torres's documentary *Whispering in our Hearts* (2001) gives account of police massacres of Aboriginal people in the West Kimberley in 1918. In this film, Michelle, my niece, describes the family relationships connecting the massacred with their contemporary descendants. Through the images and voices of remote Indigenous people, Michelle further explained the ongoing trauma descendants feel from the continued refusal of governments to acknowledge that the massacres took place. The European colonisation of the region has resulted in the death, removal and enslavement of large numbers of

Nyikina people as vast sheep and cattle pastoral stations occupied their land and the remaining Aboriginal people were forced to work for rations.

### *2.3.1 Impact of Colonisation on Nyikina People*

The remoteness of the Kimberley region of Western Australia is a unique feature which shapes the social setting of this research. The Nyikina worldview encompasses an understanding of the relationship between the body, land and spirit as the essential elements for engaging personal and community life. (Marshall 2004)

Like all Indigenous people of Western Australia, my family's personal files are held in the archives of the Western Australian Department of Indigenous Affairs. These files shed light on the extent of interference governments imposed on the lives of Nyikina people. These Nyikina life histories, with particular focus on the Watson family, captured in government files, published books and films provide further evidence to validate the Nyikina experience of discrimination.

In the following section, I have presented my family's story so that others may understand the social context of the colonial experience. These personal narratives provide the opportunity to recognise more fully the impact of past government policies and practices, injustices and consequences of trauma across generations.

*William Watson (1885-1952) Nyikina Man*

My grandfather, William Watson, was a mixed race Nyikina man who was raised by a white stockman. He learnt how to live in both the Indigenous world and the new ways introduced by the Europeans. He was a confident man who had genuine respect from contemporaries across the social and cultural divide and moved freely throughout the Western Australia droving stock. His non-Indigenous heritage gave him a degree of privilege, status and opportunities to learn Western skills. He was the overseer of Mount Anderson Pastoral Station and managed his own allotment at Lower Liveringa outstation.

Grandpa attempted to adjust fully to a modern lifestyle as well as maintain his connection with his Indigenous family and culture. Government policy at the time did not allow Grandpa to effectively participate in either society. My grandfather's life history became a matter of public record when in 1936 he met a Kimberley missionary and the following exchange was recorded:

[I was] waiting for the tide, when a half caste man named William Watson came on board: he told me that he had a family of five—four girls and one boy – and wished them to be educated and brought up as white children. He said ‘I want my kiddies to get a better chance than their father got’. He is quite prepared to pay for their education, etc. One cannot but admire his ambition, but how to help him is hard to say. There is no place where such children can be educated. In fact, up here they are treated as outcasts. (Drysdale 1936)

One month later on the 23 July 1936, a letter from the Chief Protector of Aborigines to Mr. Somerville, Minister for Native Affairs, was

written to rebuff Grandpa's ambition to provide a better chance in life for his children. The letter stated:

Dear Sir, I noticed in the June issue of the Australian Aborigines Advocate in a letter respecting the Sunday Island Mission written by Mr. Drysdale it is stated that there is no place where half caste child can be educated; and one is led to believe that no steps are taken for such children. Such, of course is quite contrary to fact.

This Department has for some years at suitable times collected the half-caste destitute and orphan children through-out the North and either placed them at the respective Missions for education and training or brought them for the same purpose to Moore River Native Settlement, which as you know is a Government institution.

I am personally acquainted with the man Watson referred to by Mr. Drysdale, and interviewed him and his family last year. Watson knows perfectly well that he has only to ask to have his children cared for by the Department when steps will be taken to that end. When half-caste children are in the care of parents, (they may be the children of two half-castes), it is not customary to remove them from care unless the conditions under which they are living renders this course desirable, or the parents themselves desire that such actions be taken.

I am acquainting you with these facts, as a wrong impression may have been created in the minds of the readers of the Advocate, which I think should be corrected. (Somerville in Native Affairs File 122/52)

Despite my grandfather's efforts to maximise his children's life opportunities through Western education, he was not prepared to have them removed from his care and placed under the control of the Department of



Native Affairs. The implication of the letter was that the Watson children would become wards of the state and institutionalised under Western Australian government, native welfare control.

This violation of Indigenous children's human rights has been evidenced by the inquiry into the separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families (HREOC 1997) often referred to less formally as the Stolen Generation Inquiry. The report of the Inquiry, *Bringing Them Home*, amplified the multiple stories of personal and community intergenerational trauma which resulted from the removal of Indigenous children from their families.

Grandpa, having an awareness of the practices of the Moore River Government Institution, had no option other than to maintain personal control over his children's lives and to pay for his children's education. He took his children to the Beagle Bay Mission in the Kimberley, established in 1890 by the Trappist monks. The mission provided basic education and training to prepare a labour force for the mission and future white employers. Unaware of how this type of action would impact on his children's educational aspirations, Grandpa enrolled his children into the Beagle Bay Mission on the Kimberley coast because mixed race children were prohibited from attending the all white school in Derby. William Watson's daughter, my mother Dorothy Hunter (nee Watson), provides the following account of being schooled at Beagle Bay Mission:

My father wanted us to be educated ... he placed us in a Catholic missionary boarding school. We were there a long time ... The missionaries at the school did not practice what they preached. There were many children there who the government agents had kidnapped from their parents, the Catholics worked hand in glove with the government, the Catholics were grabbing the land, and they used Aboriginal labour to build their churches. At school we were compelled into religious practices, that's where we learned about Jesus, we were made to sleep on the floor, we had one blanket each, which was provided by the government. If you wet at night they would place a placard on your back saying you were bad and you were a bed wet girl and made to stand in the church for all to see ... On cold mornings they would pump icy cold water from underground and shower it over us. We were not very well fed, I think they used to feed us donkey meat ... At Christmas time my parents sent us a parcel, we watched the nuns open it up and give it [the presents] to others. My father paid for us to be there. (Hunter in McCord & Anastassiou 1992:209)

My mother experienced a great deal of mistreatment under the care of the missionaries. Her trauma was heightened by the realisation that her father paid for the repressive education experience she and her siblings endured, even though his rationale for doing so was to provide his children a better future.

My mother explained how the Mt Anderson station manager, Canny Rose, a Justice of the Peace, was my grandfather's half brother:

My father worked for a man who lived on the adjoining property Mt Anderson Station. Later on in years we learnt that the boss was Dad's half brother. (Hunter in McCord & Anastassiou 1992:206)

Because of this relationship, Canny Rose sent a letter to the Chief Protector of Aborigines, stating William Watson was an important man and that it was too far for him to travel to Beagle Bay to maintain contact with his children. Through constant political lobbying the Watson children were eventually allowed to finish their schooling at the Derby State School. They were amongst the first Indigenous children to attend the state school in Derby.

The fact that Grandpa was able use his relationship with Rose and other networks to lobby mainstream advocacy processes demonstrates his capacity to explore and challenge oppressive Western systems. Grandpa's leadership qualities demonstrate his remarkable resilience and resourcefulness to build a better life for his children by investing in their education without losing control of his children to the state (McCord & Anastassiou 1992). His experience is unique in this area, in contrast to other Indigenous families who did not have any avenue to explore opportunities for their children.

To further advance his and his family's opportunities, Grandpa applied for exemption from the Native Administration 1905 Act (The Act). Every Australian state had legislation to supervise and control Aboriginal people. A condition of exemption required individuals to isolate themselves completely from their Aboriginal family, tribal associations and any other Indigenous people who remained under The Act. Failure to do so meant taking the risk of having the exemption revoked (McLeod 1984).

Grandpa's Native Affairs File (Native Affairs File 122/52) contains many letters by different men of authority and high repute providing

substantive argument recommending his exemption from The Act. The letters were supported with evidence regarding his family's whereabouts and what each was doing. Grandpa's exemption was granted on the 30 September 1930 despite the reluctance of the Chief Protector to grant exemption, as Indigenous people in the 'Kimberley [were] usually not granted exemption, unless it could be avoided' (Neville (undated) in Native Affairs File 122/52).

Grandpa's exemption had many conditions attached to it; one being the exemption would not extend to his children. They, like their father, would in due course have to individually apply for and navigate their way through government policies and practices to present evidence for exemption. Once exempted, they too had to abide by the policies of the day governing exempted Indigenous Australians and lived in fear of having their exemptions revoked. These laws placed considerable pressure on Aboriginal families as one of the conditions of 'exemption' required exempted Aborigines to disassociate from interacting with their extended Aboriginal families.

Grandpa's Native Welfare File maps his life history over time and after living as a married couple with my grandmother Emily Edgar, a Nyikina woman, for some 30 years, they were finally given permission to marry and according to S.G. Middleton, Commissioner of Native Affairs, the marriage took place at Derby on the 22 February 1952. Eight months later on the 23 October Grandpa died with his death being placed on the public record by order of the Native Administration Act, Department of Native Affairs, Perth on 9 March 1953.

While Grandpa was able to negotiate the discriminatory practices of the time with some degree of success, the impact of institutionalised racism upon Grandpa was extended to his daughter Dorothy Hunter (nee Watson). My mother provided her perspective on intergenerational disadvantage in the book *A Field of Short Poppies of Ordinary People* (McCord & Anastassiou 1992:206-213), summarised below.

*Dorothy Hunter (1923-1997) Nyikina Woman and daughter of William Watson: my mother.*

Following on from the history of William Watson above, Government surveillance of the Watson family continued. The Native Affairs files for my mother (Native Affairs File 562/39) demonstrate a high level of government interference in her early years. At the time my mother did not understand the implications of the conditions attached to her exemption from the Act, which were that exemption could be revoked if you were found ‘fraternising with the natives.’ As explained by Hattersley:

Less obvious results of the Act are the behaviours that structured everyday life and are still viewed with some bitterness. Behaviours such as class hierarchy on the stations according to degree of Aboriginality ... the existence of a native hospital and the ban on Aboriginal children attending school were all evidence of implementation of the non-association clauses of the Act. What Aboriginal people did not realise was that white people (and those declared so under the Act) behaving in this manner were acting according to Western Australian law. (Marshall 2004: vii)

My grandfather, William Watson grew up under the strict controls of the Act and was trapped by his aspirations to improve his quality of life; he had the dilemma of having to risk the benefits of being exempted from the Act against maintaining his family and cultural obligations. There appeared to be no opportunity to progress in the modern world as a modern Aborigine, as Dorothy describes:

When I was a little girl, there were two classes, half-caste, like my father, and the full blood people. They [the full blood people] lived in makeshift humpies and only got the order of the day – a slice of bread and a bit of corned beef. When you say Aboriginal, we didn't live that sort of life. We lived in a house and my father was very strict about not allowing us to associate with people from the camp ... My father, he always spoke highly about education. So he made sure we got education (Hunter in McCord & Anastassiou 1992:208).

Following her education in Derby, Grandpa set about finding a husband for Dorothy. 'I was married young. It was arranged by my parents' (Hunter in McCord & Anastassiou 1992:210). Under duress my mother consented to marry a much older man, over 30 years her senior, through an arranged marriage at the age of 16 on 26 July 1939.

When talking to her adult children later in life, Dorothy described him as a cruel man. His hostile behaviour towards Dorothy is documented in her Native Affairs File, file no. 562/39. With her children she escaped the violent relationship and briefly passed through Broome on her way to Port Hedland. It was during this brief stopover she met a Timorese pearl diver, Simon Poelina, my father. Dorothy chose Port Hedland as a destination as she

had hoped to find refuge with her cousin who lived there, but the 1940s were hard times. Dorothy and her children found they were not able to stay in her cousin's already crowded house in Port Hedland. She contacted Simon, who had befriended her on her trip, and took up his offer to return to Broome where he offered Dorothy and her children a home (McCord & Anastassiou 1992:207-213, Ganter 2006:95).

Reflecting on her early life Dorothy believed she 'was robbed of her opportunity to learn and live her culture,' a result of the exemption from the Act and her father's desire for her to be educated (McCord & Anastassiou 1992:208), as she explains:

My mother was brought up with aunts in the Aboriginal camps, so she spoke the language, several languages fluently. She had a beautiful singing voice. Would you believe this, I can still hear her voice. We used to say, 'Oh, stop singing those songs', and she said, 'Look, I will always be black'. (Hunter in McCord & Anastassiou 1992:207-213)

My mother recognised the depth of my grandmother's Indigenous knowledge; she was fluent in several Aboriginal languages often heard in song. She recalls feeling social pressure to discourage my grandmother from singing, but Gran was determined to maintain her Nyikina identity. Later my mother realised she was disadvantaged by not being able to fully realise her spiritual and cultural identity. She attributed government policy and social pressure to discouraging her from speaking her native language and singing the songs (McCord & Anastassiou 1992:207-213).

The following narrative, from my Uncle Ivan, further details my family's experience of oppression which underpins contemporary Nyikina disadvantage.

*Ivan Watson (1927-1995) Nyikina Man and son of William Watson, brother of Dorothy: my uncle*

Following his schooling, Ivan Watson left his home at Lower Liveringa outstation in 1939 to pursue his ambition to follow in his father's footsteps to become a cattleman. Ivan experienced firsthand slave-like conditions at a nearby cattle station which left him scarred for life, as he explains:

I was born on the 22 October 1927 at Lower Liveringa. My father had eight children. He was an overseer, a head-stockman. He used to manage Lower Liveringa, which was an out camp of Mt Anderson station in those days ... I left school when I was 12 and went down to Yeeda and started working with a fella called Stumpy Frazer. He was a very hard man ... I never got any pay during that whole time. I was there for 11 months with Stumpy Frazer and in all that time all I would have got was two sets of clothes, a pair of riding boots, a hat, and three feeds a day. That was my pay ... I still carry the whip marks on my back today from Stumpy Frazer. (I Watson in Marshall 1988:121-129)

Forty-six years later, in 1985, Uncle Ivan Watson and his brothers Uncle John and Uncle Harry, on behalf of Nyikina people, negotiated federal government funding to acquire the lease title of Mt Anderson Pastoral Station, including the section known as Lower Liveringa Outstation also known as



*Balginjirr*. But the pastoral lease had been stripped of assets and left in a depressed condition. Community members had a relentless struggle to re-establish the property as a viable pastoral business, as Uncle Ivan explains:

It's true that very few stations have been bought for Aboriginal people, but the thing that I'm more worried about is the condition those stations are in. The only stations Aborigines seem to get are the ones that have been run down or stripped. That's a very real problem for us. They were saying to us, when we started, it was a *sit down* place, but that wasn't the way we looked at it. (I Watson in Marshall 1988:152)

When we took over the station in Christmas '84, we discovered that both ADC [Aboriginal Development Commission] and the Aboriginal Land Trust had been made our silent partners. We've had quite a few meetings since then and we're still asking them about the role of the silent partners. (I Watson in Marshall 1988:166)

The Aboriginal Development Commission (ADC) paid \$339,000 for Mt Anderson, and in my opinion they were ripped off. It was supposed to be a walk-on walk-off sort of deal, but a lot of things had disappeared by the time we took over ... We got funding from ADC to cover vehicle and generator running costs, a few capital items such as fencing materials, and for the manager's wage. But there were no wages from ADC they said, 'No, that's not our concern'. They must have had the idea, when they bought the station, that we would all work for nothing, like we used to in the old days. An Aboriginal free labour issue all over again, working for sticks of tobacco, three feeds a day, or whatever. Otherwise, they must have thought that [my brother] Harry was going to do all the work of getting the station back to being a viable operation by

himself. We set out to help the brother anyway. We had some bonzer lads come through Mt Anderson, lads who've buckled down and worked for a while and then left because we had no money for them. I went down every avenue I could think of trying to get money for the boys' wages. (I Watson in Marshall 1988:156)

The struggle to develop the property as a viable business caused major stresses for my family who were forced to deal with continuing systemic racism from government bureaucratic processes. Because he was unable to achieve his objectives, Ivan Watson's health suffered. He became socially, emotionally and physically unwell (Marshall 1988), as he explains:

It finished up I had a nervous breakdown over this issue. They told me that I wasn't allowed to help my brother with the station. It really got me down, and in the end I got so bloody sick I had to have three lots of X-rays, blood tests and God knows what ... I would have been happy helping the brother at Mt Anderson. (I Watson in Marshall 1988:159)

Uncle Ivan was a strong and confident man who had leadership experience as overseer at Mt Anderson Station and foreman on the Department of Main Roads. The continued frustration from inappropriate government intervention and lack of support undermined our family's aspirations to develop a viable enterprise and contributed to Uncle Ivan's failing health and wellbeing. Uncle Ivan was forced to step back and pass greater responsibility for leadership to his brothers Uncle John and Uncle Harry Watson.

*John Watson Nyikina Man and son of William Watson (1940- ), brother to Dorothy and Ivan: my uncle*

Uncle John Watson constructs his personal and family identity around his lived experiences of growing up on Mt Anderson pastoral station. Uncle John reflects on growing up in a time when there was a strong work ethic; with all members of his family contributing towards station life:

I was born into the pastoral industry. I grew up working sheep, horses and cattle. All my family worked on the station, mustering, branding and fencing, yard-building, digging dams with donkey teams, breaking-in horses, building windmills. My mother and the other Aboriginal women looked after the gardens, and the boss's house. (J Watson in Marshall 1988:207)

Indigenous men, women and children worked in slave-like conditions in all areas of station work until Aboriginal people were awarded equal pay rights in 1966. Their labour was exploited to enable the cheap operation of vast pastoral holdings in an area where Europeans were less efficient, as Uncle John explains:

From the early days Aboriginal people were forced to work on the stations. The police issued the station managers with permits to work the Aboriginal people and to take charge of their welfare. That happened right across the Kimberley. All the stations came to depend upon cheap Aboriginal labour. The Aboriginal people knew they were being exploited but they didn't have any choice. Then, during the 'fifties and 'sixties Aboriginal stockmen started pushing for better wages. They didn't realise the drastic effect this would have on their lives. (J Watson in Marshall 1988:208)

According to Uncle John station managers refused to pay Aboriginal station workers award wages, which resulted in Aboriginal people

being forced off traditional lands. Indigenous people struggled to reconcile the situation that somebody, the pastoral lease owner, could have so much power that they could force Nyikina people off Nyikina *kandri*. This event seemed inconceivable to Indigenous people at the time and further contributed to a growing sense of hopelessness and overwhelming disadvantage (Marshall 1988: 208), as Uncle John explains:

When the equal wage decision was handed down by the courts twenty-odd years ago, the Aboriginal people were forced off the stations. It had far reaching effects, from one end of the Kimberley to the other. Hundreds of people were forced to leave the stations they'd grown up on, and to live under appalling conditions in town reserves. Those station managers just came out and said, "We can't afford to pay you the basic wage, and we can't afford to keep feeding you. The welfare mob have a lot of money for you to live on in the town. So, pack up your camp and start walking. (J Watson in Marshall 1988: 208)

The National Conciliation and Arbitration Commission in 1966 presided over hearings on the question of paying award wages for Aboriginal pastoral workers in the Northern Territory with the possibility of extending the conditions to the West Kimberley region of northern Australia. Daunted by the prospect of paying real wages to Aboriginal people, the pastoralists began to justify maintaining employment conditions which were overtly discriminatory. These existing employment conditions were a key factor to maintaining oppressive behaviours which promoted Indigenous disadvantage, as reported by Bunbury (2002):

During the hearings the pastoralist would argue that while they had not paid their workers award wages, they had fed, clothed and looked after entire Aboriginal communities often at considerable cost. (Bunbury 2002:15)

While pastoralists did not ascribe any minimum employment conditions to the Indigenous workers, Bunbury (2002:15) notes they did claim ‘that they also supported many within the community who were too old to work, and provided medical treatment for those who were sick.’ At these hearings the pastoralists warned, ‘equal pay would bring to an end the system by which the pastoral industry had run for almost a hundred years’ (Bunbury 2002:15). In essence, pastoralists lobbied to maintain a slave population (McLeod 1984).

In the Kimberley, some pastoralists paid fair wages to mixed race Aboriginal stockmen who had exemptions from the 1905 Native Administration Act (Bunbury 2002), although Aboriginal people who were not exempted from the Act did not enjoy the same treatment. The pastoral lobby was determined not to pay award wages to all Aboriginal station workers and began importing, paying and developing the skills of non-Indigenous workers, as Uncle John explains:

The next thing we knew the stations had brought up white stockmen who didn’t know anything about the country they were to work in. Quite a few didn’t even know how to work cattle. (J Watson in Marshall 1988:208)

As a result of these changes, Nyikina people were forced off the pastoral stations into the town of Derby and a state of welfare dependency,

being unable to continue employment in the areas they were experienced, as Hattersley (2004a) explains:

Change came in the form of the 1966 Decision of the Commonwealth Conciliation and Arbitration Commission on the Equal Wages case of the previous year. Though well motivated from a human rights perspective, this Decision, which required pastoralists to pay all workers award wages, had the effect of further dispossessing Aboriginal people and causing a major influx of homeless, unwaged people into ill-prepared remote towns. (Hattersley in Marshall 2004:viii)

The first time Indigenous people had received justice through the 'white' legal system, the recognition of their fundamental human right to be treated equal in the workplace inadvertently cost them the right to live on their traditional land. This situation is an example of Indigenous Australians let down by the government who failed to protect the interests and rights of Indigenous people. Disadvantage was further entrenched from policies that had an unexpected outcome of worsening the lives of those who were meant to benefit and contributed to a cycle of welfare dependency. Uncle John explains:

The Department of Community Welfare took all those displaced Aboriginal people strongly in hand and settled them into town reserves. But then their big failing was that they didn't have enough courage to say, 'Look, the Aboriginal people want to settle out in the bush. They want to maintain their own communities and have charge over their children's education'. For the same reason Aboriginal people are trying to re-establish their communities out in the bush today, despite the many difficulties. (J Watson in Marshall 1988:208)

Uncle John's experience demonstrates the impact of government policy on diminishing the quality of life of Nyikina people. Despite getting what seems to be a form of equal rights there were, and still are, many contradicting issues which confront and restrict Nyikina people's capacity to reach their full potential as human beings.

*Harry Watson (1941- ) Nyikina Man and son of William Watson, brother of Dorothy, Ivan and John: my uncle*

Uncle Harry Watson was born and raised on Mt Anderson station where he worked from the age of eight years until he left in 1960. Throughout Uncle Harry life, from the circumstances he was born into to the various government policies and practices that shaped his capacity to improve his quality of life, Uncle Harry lived in disadvantage.

All of us worked ... We'd have to be on the stock work, in the garden, in the workshop, cooking and cleaning in the big house, or some such thing. Our mother used to work in the kitchen of the big house. (H Watson in Marshall 1988:109-110)

Uncle Harry's life growing up at Mt Anderson Station is filled with stories of exploitative work and mistreatment. When he left in 1960 to broaden his experience working and travelling around the Kimberley he did not realise the decision to pay equal wages to Aboriginal stockmen, described earlier would effectively exclude him from accessing his country for twenty-five years. This had the direct impact of excluding Uncle Harry who was only able to return to Mt Anderson station when the Aboriginal Development Commission (ADC) bought the pastoral lease in 1985 for Nyikina people. At that time he did

not realise the government had bought the pastoral station for what is known as sit down country, for cultural and recreational purposes. As noted earlier, at the time of purchase the once prosperous pastoral station had been allowed to fall into disrepair.

I went away for 25 years and then, after the Aboriginal Development Commission bought the lease at the end of 1985, the newly appointed Looma Mt Anderson Pastoral Company appointed me as the manager. That's when I discovered how much the place had changed. (H Watson in Marshall 1988:106)

Uncle Harry and his brothers acquired the pastoral station with a view to work cattle and provide training and employment for Nyikina people to develop a sustainable economic base. When he finally returned to the station he was devastated to see the extent to which the property had been stripped of all assets necessary to run a viable cattle business, the bores and fences were all down, in Uncle Harry's words:

It looked like everything had been stripped off the place. Not only that, the previous owners had just let the station run down. When we took over, it was nothing compared to what it was before I left. I can still see the picture how this place used to be, I can still see it in my mind's eye. I nearly cried when I came back and saw how it had been run down the homestead was left in a terrible condition too. Now it's starting to fall down, and we don't have the money to do anything about it. If we let it go any further it'll cost a lot to repair. (H Watson in Marshall 198:107)



Uncle Harry continues, showing his intimate knowledge of the land and how this asset could assist in the redevelopment of the Station:

Well I know where all the fences use to be; because I once helped my father do all the fencing work. But when we took over the station there wasn't one fence left standing. They had been pushed over with a bulldozer. All the decent cattle had been flogged off [sold]. There was supposed to be a bulldozer belonging to the station but that had disappeared by the time we took over. When the Aboriginal Development Commission bought this station it was supposed to be a walk-on-walk-off sort of deal. But when we told the ADC about all the things that were missing they didn't say a thing. To my knowledge they didn't do a thing about it either. (H Watson in Marshall 1988:109)

Uncle Harry continued to struggle to develop a viable cattle production industry at Mt. Anderson pastoral station with the help of his brothers. The government provided limited funds to purchase materials to develop the infrastructure. However, the endeavour was undermined by the lack of wages to support Indigenous community members to install and maintain necessary infrastructure to farm the cattle, until it was self-sustaining. The station was not able to sustain a consistent work force because of the lack of government financial support to help pay workers during the developmental period. By only funding half of the resources needed to make the business viable, the government set up these Nyikina leaders to fail, impacting negatively on their health and wellbeing, as they felt they had failed their community. Importantly the government lost an opportunity to free a community from the myriad of negative impacts associated with disadvantage.

### *2.3.2 Understanding the Intergenerational Trauma of Nyikina People through the experience of the Watson family*

These personal stories from my grandfather, mother and uncle's illustrates the ways in which Nyikina lives were impacted by government policy and practice and sheds light on the social impacts of intergenerational violence and trauma derived from living under oppressive conditions. The type of emotional pain experienced by these Nyikina people is known as personally experienced trauma and intergenerational traumas (Atkinson 2002; Poelina & Perdrisat 2004a; Poelina & Perdrisat 2004b).

The information provided by members of the Watson family demonstrates the impact of social policy and practice on the personal lives, rights and freedom of Indigenous people. In struggling with intimate problems and life-changing events, Nyikina people in contemporary Australian society are required to reconstruct their world in order to recover and survive ongoing traumas. The extended Watson family believed it was important for each generation to understand the connections between the impacts of government policies and practices and the negative life outcomes they experienced and continue to experience to the present day.

## **2.4 Contemporary Context of Colonisation**

The violence towards Indigenous people from colonial Western Australian society resulted in the creation of institutionalised racism, physical, cultural and systemic violence responsible for diminishing the quality and continuity of Indigenous Australian lives throughout the state. This chapter has

presented the story of three generations of my family through a history of resistance to the negative impacts of colonisation, to the present day with my involvement in community development projects to assist Nyikina people. While my family has shown resistance to discriminatory and racist practices, we have been negatively affected by these practices, as have our extended family and Nyikina community. The following section describes the ways in which these historical practices continue to negatively affect indigenous people today.

Colonisation is not an artefact of history; rather it continues to be the lived experience of contemporary Indigenous Australian people. Okley and Gallaway (1992:105) make the point:

However, that the terror of direct physical violence produces the chaos that justifies the need for constant supervision and the withholding of basic rights from which Aboriginal Australians are excluded. Aboriginals seen as exemplars of chaos provide the disorderly 'other' against which settler Australians define themselves as civilised, rational, orderly and white. It is as if the limits of the gaze of the state are marked out in physical violence; as if the gaze itself can be extended through violence into the crevices of society that would otherwise be closed to it. This process needs to be recognised and labelled more accurately within anthropological discourse. There is a need to get away from language, which sanitises the horror of the practices of racism.

The horrors of racism practiced upon Indigenous Australians by successive governments and their institutions can best be described as structural violence. Galtung (1970) notes this form of violence is inherent in the social

order and can be viewed as taking three forms: 1) physical violence manifested in mortality and morbidity rates; 2) psychological violence manifested in poor mental health and high levels of substance misuse; and 3) individual and community violence manifested in family and community breakdown.

Inevitably the systemic frustration reduces aspirations resulting in the inability to reach ones full potential as a human being.

## **2.5 Oppression against Indigenous Australians**

The previous sections of this chapter provide literature and personal experiences that highlight the process and impact of colonisation. This provides insight into the background which has contributed to reducing the quality and continuity of Indigenous lives, with particular emphasis on the colonial experience of my family and the Nyikina community of the Kimberley in Western Australia. The work of Paulo Freire is now explained to further conceptualise how oppression is experienced and understood.

An Indigenous South American academic, Freire's (1968) work provides a conceptual framework to understand the intellectual construction of oppression from an Indigenous insider perspective. Freire (1968) explains how deep rooted oppression becomes so entrenched that the oppressed internalise and perpetuate their own oppression:

The oppressed suffer from the duality which has established itself in their innermost being. They discover that without freedom they cannot exist authentically. Yet, although they desire authentic existence, they fear it. They are at one and the same time themselves

and the oppressor whose consciousness they have internalised  
(Freire 1968:32)

Freire's (1968) model has been used in many diverse fields to critique and understand the experience of oppression and it is useful to apply here, to the experiences of the Nyikina people. The main parts of Freire's (1968) model are anti-dialogic and dialogic action. Each concept is explored below.

### *2.5.1 Anti-Dialogic Action*

Freire's (1968) model describes oppressive domination as being based on anti-dialogic action. He identifies instruments of oppression as 'acts of conquest' from the toughest to the most refined, from the most repressive to the most solicitous paternalism. Whereby, one group, usually the dominant society, described as the 'oppressors' decides on what is best for the other group, the 'oppressed'. This involves the absence of dialogue or minimal negotiations between the two groups.

Whether by design or not, by reducing communication between marginalised groups, oppressors promote misinformation and mistrust to divide and rule those groups. Furthermore, the oppressors will use any means, including violence, to avoid awakening the oppressed to the need for unity to ensure that the oppressors rule is not challenged. Freire (1968) includes manipulation as another dimension of his theory of oppression. Like conquest whose objectives manipulation serves, it attempts to anaesthetise the people so

they will not think independently, as he describes in his pioneering work on oppression:

Anti-dialogical action has one last fundamental characteristic: 'cultural invasion', which serves the end of conquest. In this phenomenon, the invaders penetrate the cultural context of another group, in disrespect of the latter's potentialities; they impose their own world view of the world upon those they invade, and inhibit the creativity of the invaded by kerbing their expression. It implies the 'superiority' of the invader and the 'inferiority' of those who are invaded, as well as the imposition of values by the former. (Freire 1968:150-151)

The colonial experience of Indigenous Australians suggests the instruments of oppression as described by Freire(1968) were influential in dehumanising Indigenous Australians and contributed to the disadvantage still experienced today. The indicators for disadvantage include loss of Indigenous culture and identity spurred by the trauma of colonisation and the racial policies that institutionalised violence towards Aboriginal people within the structures and activities of government (Williams 2001).

Nyikina peoples' life journey, as was the case for members of the Watson family, was fraught with many crises such as loss of identity, of culture, of land, of social structure, of citizenship and of language. The legacy of past acts of government continues to influence high level of contemporary multiple trauma in Aboriginal communities. Unfortunately throughout the past seven years that Labour has governed Western Australia and eleven years of national Liberal governance there has not been significant change in the

circumstances of Indigenous people living in the Kimberley. Both state and federal governments have adopted a more presidential style of government where fewer people have increased executive decision making responsibilities and neither level of government have a formal process to engage Indigenous Australians in constructive dialogue for planning, development and investment for change.

### *2.5.2 Dialogic Action*

In contrast to anti-dialogic action, Freire (1968) presents an alternate view that is idealistic and includes instruments of dialogic action. This framework is based on mutual respect involving open and honest dialogue. A heightened sense of cooperation has instruments known as unity, organisation and cultural synthesis which if undertaken leads to a process for a truly more positive life which enshrines the principles of human rights (Freire 1968).

To this end dialogic action is the process of opening up the conversation to include a wider range of ideas. This can be at range of levels for example the government could create a process to genuinely engage the community to develop and resource strategies for sustainable improvement in Indigenous lives. Another example of dialogic action is when individual Indigenous community members are drawn together to work collaboratively on a developing cultural action as described in this thesis. In this instance the participants through open and honest dialogue were able to steer the direction of the projects by participation in informal discussions about the projects as well

as creating formal processes for promoting dialogue within the groups as well as dialogue with external bodies such as government.

Together these two ways of viewing oppression are useful in understanding the historical way in which Aboriginal people have been treated in Australia, with policies and legislation used to rule and govern lives in an oppressive state: anti-dialogic action. The opposing way, dialogic action, provides a way in which to work together at all levels to create a new way forward. This is examined below.

## **2.6 Redefining Indigenous Health and Wellbeing**

The 'alternative' conceptual framework described by Freire (1968) is closely linked to a contemporary definition of 'wellbeing,' as it encompasses broad reaching factors in a person's life experience. While there is no single definition of 'wellbeing', this study will refer to it as the quality of life that one lives (Kahn & Juster 2002). Stewart (2004:276) notes that wellness encompasses a number of different dimensions 'including physical, psychological, social, mental and spiritual health.' Furnass, Whyte, Harris and Baker (1995) see wellbeing as a critical pathway to improve health and note that contributing factors include income, environment and social structure. Thus, a framework that takes this broader view, such as Freire's (1968) model of dialogic action, assists in describing an alternate view to the way in which things have been done in the past.

Despite its multiple layers of meaning, wellbeing has become a key criterion in policy development and evaluation within community sectors



(Kahn & Juster 2002). In the first major attempt to define the holistic nature of Indigenous Australian mental health, Swan & Raphael (1995) describe the need to balance all the inter-related factors that impact on an individual and their family. They contend the continued disadvantage experienced by Indigenous people is created by the maintenance of disruption to harmony caused by systemic racism. Their definition of an Indigenous Australian concept of mental health as being:

...holistic, encompassing mental health and physical, cultural and spiritual health. Land is central to well-being. This holistic concept does not merely refer to the 'whole body' but in fact is steeped in the harmonised interrelations, which constitute cultural well-being. These inter-relating factors can be categorised largely as spiritual, environmental, ideological, political, social, economical, mental and physical. Crucially, it must be understood that when the harmony of these inter-relations is disrupted, Aboriginal ill health will persist. (Swan & Raphael 1995:14)

In the past century Australia has seen significant improvement in population longevity among the general population, however the indicators of Indigenous disadvantage reflect the reduced quality, quantity and continuity of life of the Indigenous population and is comparable to that of a third world (Brown 2001; Roxbee and Wallace 2003, SCRGSP 2007).

There have been many reports commissioned to examine the particular issues that maintain Australian Indigenous disadvantage. The following reports have identified the need to seek strategies that include building cultural knowledge and activity to reduce significantly higher rates of

morbidity and mortality (O'Donoghue 1999; Brown 2001), substance misuse (Ministerial Council on Drug Strategy 2003; Gray, Saggars, Atkinson and Stempel 2004), family and community violence (Gentle & Taylor 2002), unemployment (Brown 2001), incarceration (Trewn & Maddon 2003), mental health issues, suicide (Commonwealth Department of Health and Aged Care 2000) and decreased levels and quality of academic achievements (Armstrong 2004; Beresford & Partington 2003).

Indigenous life expectancy is around 17 to 18 years less than other Australians and the health of Indigenous people in the West Kimberley is 'by almost every indicator, two to three times as poor' as non-Indigenous peoples health (DIA 2005a). Smallwood (cited in Clinton & Nelson 1996:103) argues:

The risk factors for poor mental health are socially determined in the Aboriginal community. Whilst being Indigenous is not itself a risk factor for mental illness, Indigenous individuals are likely to experience poor health, imprisonment, shortened life expectancy, poverty, poor education, drug and alcohol use and violence.

These social factors constitute Indigenous disadvantage and have developed from marginalisation since colonisation. This disadvantage diminishes opportunities for Indigenous families to develop and support the psychological mechanisms to cope with intense feelings of frustration, self harm and depression, further impacting on child rearing and parenting skills which in turn affect family relationships and inter-generational cycles of trauma (Atkinson 2002).

In a review of these social factors, Marmot (2000) discusses the important links between child rearing practices and frequency of health problems. Marmot (2000) demonstrates a link between maternal separation, depression, social status and mental health. Therefore previous government policies of removing Indigenous children from their families had a negative influence contributing to the ongoing poor health and wellbeing of Aboriginal people. Naccarella (1999) suggests Indigenous health and wellbeing is affected by social factors such as the larger structures of society, for example the distribution of wealth, the nature of hierarchies, the circumstances of the immediate setting and the support available, and also by the individual's heredity, luck, knowledge, attitudes, skills and relationship to the economic and social system, both as an individual and as a member of a community. Taking this into account and given the history of oppression of Aboriginal people in the West Kimberley it is not surprising that there is a high incidence of community and family breakdown, loss of cultural identity, racial discrimination, poor education and low standards of living, which contribute to high rates of poor health and wellbeing perpetuating a cycle of disadvantage.

The World Health Organization (WHO) expressed concern regarding the provision of appropriate care, especially to vulnerable and underserved groups such as Indigenous peoples (WHO 1999). WHO (1999) published an international overview of the world's Indigenous populations that was:

...unsurprising, first, in that the needs and rights of Indigenous peoples have been of little concern to those larger and powerful

nations. Remarkable, however, in that during the same period of colonialism there has been no lack of knowledge of the brutalities to which the Indigenous peoples of the world have been and continue to be subjected. (Cohen in WHO 1999:7)

Furthermore, the first National Report on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Mental Health (Swan & Raphael 1995) was commissioned in response to the lack of knowledge about the level and definition of Australian Indigenous health and wellbeing. Swan and Raphael (1995) and WHO (1999) advocate further research is required to explore the wider issue of colonially constructed Indigenous disadvantage and its impact on Indigenous health and wellbeing, but do not doubt the direct influence oppression has had on these communities.

The Mental Health Promotion and Illness Prevention Policy Framework and Strategic Directions, prepared for the Western Australian Department of Health by the Mental Health Promotion and Prevention Policy Development Group (2000) acknowledged that cultural factors determine Indigenous people's conceptualisation of health and wellbeing. In the wider milieu of disadvantage 'strategies in Indigenous communities cannot take place without strengthening those communities and enhancing cultural awareness and affirmation' (Mental Health Promotion and Prevention Policy Development Group 2000:14).

As long ago as 1946, the WHO widened the definition of health to a state of complete physical, mental, and social wellbeing and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity – providing a more useful definition in which to

understand health and wellbeing of indigenous people. This encompasses psychosocial elements of health, described as:

Health is created and lived by people within the settings of their everyday life; where they learn, work, play and love. Health is created by caring for oneself and others, by being able to take decisions and have control over one's life circumstances, and by ensuring that the society one lives in creates conditions that allow the attainment of health by all its members. (WHO 1986:1)

Defining health has become increasingly complicated. The medical construct (Catford 2004) of health has evolved dramatically since the 1980s. Within the medical model, health is principally the responsibility of the individual (Germov 1999). In recent years, there has been a shift away from individual responsibility for health, recognising environmental and social influences as impinging on health (Chu & Simpson 1994; DIA 2005a & 2005b; SCRGPS 2005 & 2007). This is explored below.

#### *2.6.1 Nyikina Kinship Skin System's Influence on Health and Wellbeing*

The Nyikina kinship skin system and its relationship to Nyikina wellbeing provides insight into the influence of culture and meaning and how colonisation has impacted on the way people related to each other and subsequently on Nyikina health and wellbeing. Nyikina skin kinship system traditionally assisted individuals, families and communities identify their relationship to each other. This system thus ensured that rules were observed in the local society, as Smith (2001:103) further explains, kinship theory is concerned with:

...phenomena as diverse as family structure, patterns of marriage, the organisation of kin-based clan groups, the names given to various relatives, the characteristics of family relationships, patterns of residence. In non-Western societies, kinship often provides the backbone of social organization.

Nyikina kinship is grounded in a skin system which is the backbone of our social cohesion and organisation. This kinship system is central to Nyikina people's social lifestyle and is formed around an extended family structure. In a contemporary context, as from time immemorial, a person's skin is pre-determined according to their position within the family. There will be groups of people who will be encouraged to associate with each other and other groups with which friendship is discouraged from birth and other people will have a complete avoidance relationship with particular individuals.

The network of family relationships involves parents, uncles, aunts, cousins and in-laws. Nyikina young people are aware of the relationships within their family and their relationship to the whole Nyikina group. Visitors to the community are often allocated to a particular skin group so that community members can adopt an appropriate relationship with that visitor. Kinship systems are used broadly among Indigenous Australians, whereby, 'Kin relationships stipulate what a person should or should not do in respect of the person he calls relatives of one kind or another' (Edwards 1998:216).

One of the main impacts of government policies of restriction and control over the lives and movement of Nyikina people has been the fragmentation of this complex kinship system which connected each child with

a variety of adults who were allocated responsibility for transmission of cultural knowledge according to their relationship to the child. Our kinship system has different naming conventions to the standard Western system and this alone caused much confusion in the minds of the colonisers.

Where the Western system is narrow, ours is broad and conversely, where the Western system is broad, ours is very precise. For example, the Western system recognizes direct genetic parents with restricted terms equivalent to 'father' and 'mother', and uses terms such as step- and foster- for adults in a position of care who are not 'real' parents. A child may enjoy relationships within an 'extended' family of grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins, but ultimately the responsibility for their safekeeping, education and moral development rests with the parents, the father and mother.

Nyikina culture views a person's place in society very differently. In our kin system we call our mother's sister by the same term as our mother. Therefore we may have a number of female adults in the reciprocal mother-child relationship. Of course we know and recognize our genetic mother, but the nurturing and educational responsibilities are shared by all women who identify with the term kooya in relation to a particular child. The same is true of our yibala, father. His brothers also respond to the term yibala and have paternal responsibilities towards the child which relate to physical knowledge, safety and wellbeing.

In the Western system we may have a variety of uncles and aunts who may or may not be directly related to us. The prime recipients of these

terms are father's or mothers siblings but the terms are often extended as respect terms for family friends and so do not necessarily express precise relationships. In contrast, the Nyikina term kookoo corresponding to English 'aunt' indicates father's sister and no other relationship. Mother's brother is kaka. No-one else is referred to by this term. Kookoo and kaka have cultural and ceremonial responsibilities to the child thus ensuring that consistent holistic personal development is the norm for each community member.

It is common in Western culture to consider a family of six children as a big family, but in the Nyikina system if our kooya's and yibala's children are our brothers and sisters, then that means all children of the people we call by those terms are considered our siblings. We have responsibilities to those people and they are not potential marriage partners. Our kookoo and kaka's children are our cousins and not so much our concern though we still have a strong connection. Thus the term 'extended family' is a different concept in Nyikina terms.

When it comes to grandparents, Western cultures have few conventions connected with naming terms, often accepting attempts of the first grandchild as the identifying name for father's or mother's parents. In contrast, our system has specific names for father's father, father's mother, mother's father and mother's mother. These people also traditionally had specific roles in the education and care of children. The terms also help people who may not have met before to work out their relationship to each other.



It can be seen that whereas in Western culture the primary responsibility for developing the child rests with the immediate parents in a linear fashion, in Nyikina culture this responsibility is shared by a variety of adults according to their specific relationship to the child. Cultural transmission and maintenance is ensured by a complex web of relationships. This web of relationships is reinforced and extended by an additional system known in English as 'skin'. In Nyikina culture everyone belongs to one of four 'skin' groups. One's skin is pre-determined by a mathematical system which results in children belonging to the same 'skin' as their same sex grandparent – eg mother's mother or father's father. The 'skin' system extends the family responsibilities expressed in the kin system by creating additional mothers, fathers, siblings and cousins according to generation and 'skin' group. The 'skin' group was a feature of most Aboriginal cultures varying from 2 to 32 sections in different parts of the country. Neighbouring groups were able to equate their system with others', thus creating an all encompassing system of connection over the whole land mass now known as Australia.

Nyikina people who were able to remain on their traditional land, despite being occupied by the pastoralist, were able to maintain aspects of Indigenous law and kinship practices and continue these practices in *Jarlmadangah Burru*. Daisy Loongkoonan, a senior Nyikina Elder who grew up living on Nyikina *kandri*, reflects on how our people continued to move around the country to practice their culture when she was young:

They used to take kids for ceremony. They have the rules from their grandparents then they have a meeting where they want to go. So,

they went to Udialla ...back to Geegully its Nyikina country. And from Udialla, they went to Yeeda and they have their ceremony there. (Loongkoonan in Marshall 2004:76)

The introduction of Europeans to the area disrupted traditional social structures based on the intricate kinship system. European men fathered children from a variety of unconnected women, and therefore created relatives of people who would otherwise not have been related within the traditional system. According to Marshall (2004) this has severely impacted on appropriate choices for marriage partners for subsequent generations of Nyikina people. These rules and codes for living increase the understanding of what Nyikina people mean when they talk about the construction of their identity and how they behave towards each other, as 'who is the right skin, who is the wrong skin' (J Watson in JBAC 2000a). Promoting traditional skin relationships has been seen by Nyikina people as an important component of the language and cultures programs as it builds respect and reciprocity between community members resulting in a collective sense of empowerment.

### *2.6.2 Culture and Health*

The 1999 WHO Declaration on the Health and Survival of Indigenous Peoples defines health in a similar manner to Australian Indigenous concepts noting:

Indigenous peoples' concept of health and survival is both a collective and an individual inter-generational continuum encompassing holistic perspective incorporating four distinct shared dimensions of life. These dimensions are the spiritual, intellectual,

physical, and emotional. Linking these four dimensions, health and survival manifests itself on multiple levels where the past, present, and future co-exist simultaneously. (WHO 1999:3)

The Indigenous concept of health is holistic and involves social and environmental factors impacting on the status of one's health. Indigenous cultural and social determinants of health which impact on wellbeing include 'oppression, racialism, environmental circumstances, economic factors, stress, trauma, grief [and] cultural genocide' (Brown 2001:34). The connection of Indigenous Australian people to their country, culture and kin is integral to the experience of wellbeing (Burgess, Johnstone, Bowman & Whitehead 2004).

The previous sections show the importance of culture in improving public health. However currently in Australia there are few health programs that support this Indigenous cultural model of health, or offer resources and training to learn local Indigenous languages and culture. Promoting Indigenous language and artistic cultural expression provides pathways to bridging the gap in health problems in a culturally appropriate way (Durie 2003). Davis, McGrath, Night, Norval, Frelander and Hudson (2004:107) agree that 'traditional art and cultural expression served as the principle means for integrating spiritual, emotional and physical aspect of health in modern times'.

Culture can be defined as a shared system of beliefs, knowledge, values, symbols, stories and ways of life in a group passed on through generations (Chu 1998). Chu (1998:126) highlighted that 'from infancy to old age, culture mediates one's experience and guides one's perceptions,

interpretations, and behaviour'. Stephen Kinnane (2003) describes Aboriginal culture in the Kimberley as:

'Culture' has been described as the glue that holds the diverse people of the Kimberley together. But it is a glue that has had to weather policies of removal, enforced concentration on the outskirts of towns, the impacts of grog and substance abuse and increase migration of *kartiya* [white people] as the potential development of natural resources is realised. There are stories of outright racism and conflict that inform the history and mark the present of this place, and stories of resistance and reconciliation that are equally remarkable. (Kinnane 2003:43)

Kinnane's (2003) description of culture as the bonding agent, which has held Aboriginal society together throughout the negative impacts of colonisation is similar to the description of social capital as the glue that binds society together, as described by Baum (1999) and Putnam (2000). Kinnane (2003) validates the notion whereby processes of maintaining cultural practices through resistance and reconciliation serve to maintain Indigenous identities and sustain resilience. People who are of the same culture hold the same conceptual map, that is, they view the world similarly because of their common ethics, language and practices (Hall 1997).

### 2.6.3 *Contextualising Nyikina Culture*

Culture is the abstract expression of a civilisation often through the arts. More broadly culture reflects the attitudes and values which influence the creative and intellectual development of a society (*The Chambers Dictionary* 1998). Culture can mean many different things according to personal perception

and lived experience of actions and ideas that make up living in the present.

Stockton (1995:5) defines culture as:

An integrated complex of shared assumptions within a given society, manifesting itself in a distinctive pattern of behaviour accepted as normal which is learned and transmitted by conventional symbols, adapting itself organically.

More specifically, Uncle John Watson, Nyikina Elder describes culture:

It's a big word, isn't it? Lot of people always trying to ask that question. And, well it is to me, culture is very unique. Doesn't matter what sort of people you talk to, I mean Aboriginal people, culture is a big thing. Culture means land, language, dancing, songs, the people the practice. It's been handed down from generation to generation. You know, this has all been handed down. Because it's not written down and that's why our culture has never been recognised by white people. Some people call it oral history, oral history which has been handed down. So that's how our culture has been handed down to us. We should hand it down to our children.

Uncle John recognises the importance of culture to wellbeing and the responsibility of passing culture on to young Nyikina people. Uncle John's effort to promote community participation in cultural activities confirms Stockton's (1995) position that Indigenous Australians, have not chosen to make a:

deliberate break with their culture. They have been overwhelmed by a new system, which for the most part swept away their links to

their land, their religion, their languages, their kinship and authority structures ... the essential pillar of their culture. (Stockton 1995:7)

To this end Elders such as Uncle John are trying to make culture relevant and accessible so young Nyikina people can have access to choose to engage Nyikina cultural activities.

Throughout the above discussion I have shown that Indigenous people, and in particular Nyikina people have experienced disadvantage, and how this experience has negatively impacted on their broad sense of health and wellbeing. Disadvantage experienced by Indigenous families and communities in the West Kimberly region of Western Australia confirms the need for Indigenous health and wellbeing to remain a vital issue for Australian governments (Atkinson, Bridge & Gray 1999; Poelina & Perdrisat 2004a). Aboriginal communities in the West Kimberley have recognised the low level of Aboriginal health and wellbeing and are attempting to respond to their problems. The challenge for improving health and wellbeing is to develop effective strategies for overcoming Indigenous disadvantage. These investments need to reflect Indigenous understandings of health and wellbeing in order to develop and sustain community owned solutions around cultural action (Blagg 2005).

The following section takes the literature review into the present and introduces how Nyikina families living in *JarImadangah Burru* Aboriginal Community, located on Mt Anderson Station, are developing holistic community solutions. The purpose is to redress disadvantage and reduce the

levels of stress impacting on their family to avoid being overwhelmed by systemic violence. Community solutions are situations ‘where resources are invested in communities in a way that empowers them to resolve particular problems’ (Blagg 2005:2).

#### *2.6.4 Cultural Development in a Remote Nyikina Community*

The *Jarlmadangah Burru* Aboriginal Community was established on Mt Anderson pastoral lease in the Nyikina traditional lands in 1987 under the leadership of Uncle John and Uncle Harry Watson. They planned to accommodate Nyikina families who wanted to live on *kandri* as an option to living in Derby as had been the case since these families were force off Mt Anderson Station in the 1966.

The Watson family moved back to their traditional *kandri* to gain greater control over their land, spirituality, language, kinship and authority structures, to improve health and wellbeing of their families. I have used contemporary text and video recordings produced by *Jarlmadangah Burru* Aboriginal Corporation (JBAC 2000a; JBAC 2000b; JBAC 2001) in this chapter and throughout the thesis to accurately represent the community’s views regarding the historical journey of Nyikina people’s resistance to oppressive domination. These community produced resources demonstrate that the *Jarlmadangah Burru* leadership has proved it is possible to increase community harmony by building positive experiences around cultural participation, as is presented below and throughout this thesis.

Building community harmony is reliant on talking, sharing and strengthening cultural practices and values at the community level. In the video recording *Jarlmadangah Mob* (JBAC 2000a) Uncle John Watson reflected on why he established the community:

This thing called living in harmony, it's a thing that I've been taught over the years with my old people; caring, sharing, loving each other or feeling for people, and if you're going to set up a community .... It means you've got to talk to your people, not setting up something just for me and my brother and my family. But we thought about all the other people, our family's people. It was set up for those people if they've got any feeling about living out here. We cared for them, we have thought about them.

Nyikina people living in *Jarlmadangah Burru* Aboriginal Community are engaging in cultural action to strengthen unity and cooperation in the development of a safe and sustainable community. This reconstruction and preservation of Nyikina knowledge and practice can be viewed as involving cultural synthesis, as defined by Freire (1974). Freire(1974: 183) affirms that cultural synthesis 'is thus a mode of action for confronting culture itself, as the preserver of the very structures by which it is formed'. Instead of following predetermined imposed plans from government, community leaders and the people at *Jarlmadangah Burru* are working together to create their own guidelines, their own rules for engagement to determine their future through what can be described as cultural action.



## **2.7 Cultural Action**

The term cultural action is used in this thesis to describe the type of conscious intervention and/or variation to the usual practice that intervenes to influence cultural change and regeneration. Freire (1974) offers a useful definition of cultural action as being:

an instrument for superseding the dominant alienated and alienating culture ... [establishing] a climate of creativity which tend to develop in the subsequent stages of action. (Freire 1974:183)

In 1997 the *Jarlmadangah Burru* community leadership under the direction of the Elders worked with the community advisor to conduct a thorough strategic planning process. This process encouraged the participation of all community members, particularly Elders and young people (JBAC 1997). The purpose of this planning process was to identify and prioritise key community initiatives. Through this process new knowledge and new actions have been generated and sustained through a series of cultural action projects. These projects are described in detail below. The outcome of this collaborative community effort is a reclaiming of the people's cultural and community identity and is strengthening the community's social cohesion in a collective response. Thus, overcoming the myriad of factors responsible for creating and maintaining their position of disadvantage.

### *2.7.1 Cultural Action at Jarlmadangah Burru*

Nyikina people living in *Jarlmadangah Burru* believe history is everything; it determines who they have been and who they are as Indigenous

Australian people. The historical dimension for these Nyikina people reaches back into antiquity however the invasion, occupation and loss of land through the colonial experience dominate the current circumstances. Nyikina people have lost a great deal of traditional knowledge and cultural practices from multiple life breaches and crises associated with being dislocated from their traditional lands (Marshall 2004; Marshall 1988).

Nyikina people living in *Jarlmadangah Burru* have published community information by way of video recordings and in text to publicly present cultural action projects they have engaged in for community cultural development. These activities portray how Nyikina people living in *Jarlmadangah Burru* are building community solutions through an approach that can be defined through Freire's (1968) dialogic approach involving the principles of unity, organisation and cultural synthesis to overcome their disadvantage.

My experiences living and working with my extended family at the *Jarlmadangah Burru* Aboriginal community informed me about the cultural engagement strategies initiated by Nyikina people in a remote community. The *Jarlmadangah Burru* Aboriginal community have demonstrated a process to generate effective strategies for promoting Indigenous community well being. The *Jarlmadangah Burru* Aboriginal community leadership have invested a great deal of time and community financial resources into building the spiritual, cultural, social, technical and economic well being of the community members.

The *Jarlmadangah Burru* Aboriginal community leadership has actively promoted Nyikina culture through every aspect of their daily lives.

The voices of Nyikina people living in *Jarlmadangah Burru* are used to describe how the construction of their cultural identity is based on a shared history and ancestry. Community cultural identities are built upon common historical experiences and shared cultural codes. It is from this position that these Nyikina people, their families and communities have a basis to hold onto their unique culture of today for the future (JBAC 2000a; JBAC 2000b).

The recovery of Indigenous people from oppression must be grounded in questions and reflection of identity, lifestyle and ethics, made possible through symbolic images, identities and an ethical vision, as described by Freire:

As men and women inserted [positioned] in and formed by a socio-historical context of relations, we become capable of comparing, evaluating, intervening, deciding, taking new directions, and thereby constituting ourselves as ethical beings ... an openness that allows for the revision of conclusions; it recognizes not only the possibility of making a new choice but also the *right* to do so, (Freire 2001:38-39)

Despite past and present individual traumas affecting Indigenous people on a personal level, the residual impacts are felt within Nyikina families and through the entire Nyikina lands. Nyikina people living in *Jarlmadangah Burru*, under the leadership of Uncle John and Uncle Harry Watson, are

focused on making new choices and believe this can be achieved by community cultural development grounded in family and community wellbeing (JBAC 2001).

*Jarlmadangah Burru* Aboriginal Community started a cultural mapping project in 1995 which developed to involve Nyikina people in a range of cultural actions over time which has generated a heightened sense of cooperation and strengthened community unity, organisation and cultural synthesis through community cultural development. It is defined by Sonn and colleagues (2002) as:

Community Cultural Development is used to foster participation in community life, mediated through culture and the arts, to achieve community building outcomes. (Sonn, Drew & Kasat 2002:3)

Community cultural development, such as this has been instigated under Uncle John and Uncle Harry's leadership. The *Jarlmadangah Burru* community looked to the elders for knowledge and guidance as they were the immediate cultural resource base needed to preserve and maintain their culture as documented in their series of video recordings (JBAC 2000a; JBAC 2000b; JBAC 2001). These audio-visual materials now serve as a resource base for Nyikina people and also consists of access to their traditional lands including the Mardoowarra (Fitzroy River), and is centred on Nyikina people with high levels of cultural knowledge passing on their culture to the following generations.

A primary focus of these community cultural development projects has been on young Nyikina people. Young people are an essential resource for sustaining Nyikina cultural action for without their involvement cultural identity and practice will cease over time. These ingredients are vital to strengthening cultural identity, as defined by Braziel and Mannur (2003) as:

... a matter of 'becoming' as well as of 'being'. It belongs to the future as much as to the past. It is not something that already exists, transcending place, time, history, and culture ... But like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation ... Far from being grounded in mere 'recovery' of the past, which is waiting to be found, and which when found, will secure our sense of ourselves into eternities, identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves with, the narratives of the past. (Braziel & Mannur 2003:236)

The *Jarlmadangah Burru* Aboriginal community established their own school which is based on Nyikina culture. Groups of young people are taken out camping, where they are taught traditional skills and knowledge. Resources including books have been published to ensure the ongoing survival of Nyikina culture (JBAC 2003). Furthermore the community actively promoted traditional skin relationships and use of Nyikina language.

Through these programs, the community members have developed a sense of empowerment based on their knowledge of, and participation in cultural activities. Individual, family and community sense of empowerment has come from reflection of their lifestyle and ethics, and consolidation of their personal cultural identity. The published books and video recordings produced

by *Jarlmadangah Burru* Aboriginal Community show harmonious ways Nyikina people are living and working together on traditional Nyikina kandri. The elders identified that engaging young people was an essential component for maintaining culture. These young people now have the cultural skills, language and knowledge that were in direct decline. These projects have enhanced a sense of identity in these young Nyikina people, which for too long has been missing, thus building social capital within Nyikina communities.

### *2.7.2 Strengthening Social, Human and Cultural Capital with Young Nyikina People*

Through community cultural development programs designed to empower young Nyikina people, social, human and cultural capital is being built. When observing the role of cultural practices in the promotion of better public health outcomes, the strategies to promote health through culture are supported by linking human, social and cultural capital (OECD:2001). Whereby, social capital refers to networks, norms and trust that facilitate greater cooperation between individuals and groups for mutual social and material benefits. Baum (1999) and Putnam (2000) describe it as the glue that holds the disparate interests in society together. Traditional culture holds the key to many health improvements through strengthening Nyikina cultural capital in an effort to increase community social cohesion, identity and social capital.

Human capital, as defined by the OECD (2001:4) is ‘the knowledge, skills, competencies and attributes embodied in individuals who

facilitate the creation of personal, social and economic wellbeing'. Human capital in *Jarlmadangah Burru* community is being nurtured through the revitalisation of traditional language and culture. Community participation in cultural learning builds protective factors for maintaining wellbeing and enjoying positive life experiences. At a contemporary level, and through the current Watson generation Ivan Watson's son Robert Watson (my cousin), is the manager of the Mt Anderson Station and Balginjirr Aboriginal community. Robert is a Nyikina cultural mentor with considerable experience supporting young people. In the video *Keep'N It Real*, Robert points out the importance of reinforcing the historical and social events, which have influenced the lives of people currently living in the Nyikina traditional lands, saying:

Part of investing in our kids is about picture building; looking at reality, what past acts of government have done to Aboriginal people. Why we suffer some of the things we suffer today, we need to build a picture so that they can look at the future in reality, no illusions. (Robert Watson in Madjulla Inc. 2003a)

Robert Watson believes it is important for young people to increase their understanding of how government policies and practices over many generations have shaped contemporary Nyikina life. He notes it is important for young people to learn how they fit into a contemporary culture and reconcile themselves to historical and social events.

Robert Watson's position is affirmed by Bourdieu (1984), who sees the need for reflecting on the reality of the subjective experience for shaping the individual's world view and capacity to engage in the wider society. To this

end, human capital is built on the subjective experiences around cultural practice. The extent to which cultural capital can be determined is in relation to the way culture is valued and practiced. For example, in the increased value or imposed quality of life experienced by community members.

The *Jarlmadangah Burru* community have developed their own community services based on Nyikina philosophy, ethics, knowledge and practices, while at the same time incorporating the benefits of Western technology. For example, Aunty Annie Milgin (Uncle John's wife), in her role as manager of the *Jarlmadangah Burru* Health Service, uses both Western medicine and Indigenous health practices with her patients. She promotes education by teaching Nyikina young people knowledge about Nyikina language, art, dance, bush cooking, crafts, medicine and bush food as well as provides clinical and health promotion services. In the video recording *Jarlmadangah Mob* (2000) Aunty Annie discusses the importance of building the human and cultural capital of Nyikina young people to enhance their pride and self esteem around positive personal and community identity, saying:

Kids learn about bush medicines, fruits, how to talk to tourist, telling stories, what sort of plant to look for in recognising bush food. Going to the river to catch fish or go hunting. Clinic side, from a health side, I teach the kids bush medicine, taking them out for collection, what sort of tree is required to extract the correct medicine. If they are out in the bush, if they get a cut what is the correct medicine to stop the bleeding and infection. In culture side I teach them about ... skin groups, which reinforced their knowledge of kinship obligations. Teach them that they are going to be a leader ... listen to the old people. Talk about skin group ... they going to



recognise who they are, what their skin group is ... They know who they are but they should show respect. When they grow up they gotta teach their kids what they learned. They gotta be happy like what happening now, working together, caring.

Nyikina Elders, such as Aunty Annie, work to maintain a strong partnership with young Nyikina people, their connection to the land and the rights and responsibilities associated with living on *kandri*, their traditional land. Aunty Annie makes the association between promoting traditional knowledge and language through cultural action for improving health, wellbeing and resilience. Nyikina leaders in *Jarlmadangah Burru* are determined to build a strong and sustainable future for young people focusing on Nyikina identity in order to strengthen social, human and cultural capital.

Contemporary young Nyikina people have responded enthusiastically to encouragement to participate in cultural and community activities. Their participation is seen by senior community members as a process for constructing and strengthening their personal and community identity. In the video recording *Jarlmadangah Mob* (JBAC 2000a), Indigenous cultural mentors, Uncle John and Uncle Harry Watson, recommend participation in cultural activities is an important part of educating young Nyikina people so they will have the cultural capital foundation to underpin social cohesion and economic sustainability. Uncle John makes the comment:

We take them out hunting, that's the thing they've got to learn to survive. They got to hunt, they got to know how to find things. Years ago families did that and handed down this knowledge to the few of us by taking their children out so they can survive for

themselves. We have a better lifestyle out here, learning about their own culture and making boomerang, making spear. This is part of our education and I've taken them [young people] out fishing and hunting.

Uncle Harry is of the view:

Show them [young people] how to look after the community. How they are going to run it, how to manage the community and enterprises. Like how they are going to look after each other. Teach them to work as a team.

Older Nyikina people living in *Jarlmadangah Burru* have maintained their traditions and developed social, human and cultural capital in their young people through collaborative cultural action. This cultural action is increasing the social cohesion and the collaboration found in the community and has become both a medium and outcome of sustainable community cultural development.

### *2.7.3 Sustainable Development*

Social, human and cultural capital have been defined above, with specific examples from projects undertaken by Nyikina people living on *Jarlmadangah Burru*. However, these activities must be developed in a manner that will lead to their ongoing success, within a framework of sustainable development. Sustainable development 'is often defined as development that meets the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of the future generation to meet their needs' (Jacobs 2002:4).

The community cultural developments being undertaken in *Jarlmadangah Burru* are having a positive effect on community members and these cultural actions are contributing towards the community's long term sustainability on *kandri*. Further, for true sustainability, cultural and economical sustainability must be taken into account. There are important reasons to consider the relationship between culture and sustainable economic development, as described by Fuller and colleagues:

Firstly, it is likely that recognition of the importance of cultural values assists in the prevention of alienation caused by social and economic dislocation imposed exogenously by dominant systems and institutions ... It is now clear that if specific programs and locally based projects are to prove successful, local support and knowledge is crucial. Cultural recognition can do much to re-energise the self-confidence and self-esteem of individuals and communities dislocated by rapid change ... Many Indigenous people are considering how best to utilise their own land for economic purposes and how to better maintain their traditional culture (Fuller, Howard & Buultjens 2005:43).

With this in mind, Elders recognise that the modern lifestyle presents many competing interests for young Nyikina people's attention. Wootten (2004:17) describes these competing interests as young 'Aboriginals are confronted by choice between two fixed entities; the highly praised Aboriginal culture and a materialistic modern 'white' culture'. To help counteract these competing interests *Jarlmadangah Burru* leaders have utilised contemporary technology to engage young people in cultural knowledge and practices so that young people will value their Indigenous heritage and at the

same time learn and utilise new ‘white’ technologies. They acknowledge this grounding is essential to the health and wellbeing of each Nyikina person and this information is being captured in the video recordings and in published materials. Indigenous cultures such as Nyikina are now able to maintain oral history traditional practices using modern technologies.

#### *2.7.4 Building Cultural Capital through Nyikina Stories*

Using modern technology to record Nyikina stories is one strategy for informing Nyikina people about codes of conduct and rules for contemporary cultural practice. Nyikina stories also strengthen Nyikina values and belief systems. Nyikina people have many community stories, in particular the Woonyoomboo creation story (JBAC 2000b). The Woonyoomboo story is, as the old people say, from Bookarrarra, the beginning. This story is captured in the film to demonstrate how Nyikina people have a historical connection to the Fitzroy River. Their ancestor, Woonyoomboo, was the first human man, not a mythological being, to travel up the Fitzroy River. In this process he was responsible for bringing an important bush medicine, majala, to the Mardoowarra. Woonyoomboo planted the majala, fresh water mangrove, all along the riverbank and around the water holes to ensure its propagation (Madjulla Inc. 2004a).

The medicinal property of majala is well known to Nyikina people and is used for healing and hunting purposes. It is used in hunting as a muscle relaxant causing the gills of the fish to become relaxed. The fish become anaesthetised for a short period, float to the surface where they can easily be

collected. The bark can also be crushed and applied directly to wounds to prevent bleeding, infection and pain.

The story of Woonyoomboo is known as the Warloongarriy song. It has been retold over generations and highlights the importance of survival knowledge, reciprocity and responsibility. The story has been preserved and transmitted independent of any particular individual and is known by many Nyikina people. Narratives such as the Woonyoomboo story create meaning and provide an instrument for individuals to create change or develop positive personal attributes. The narrative approach:

...explicitly recognizes that communities, organizations, and individual people have stories, and that there is a mutual influence between these community, organizational, and personal stories ... it is very clear that these stories not only exist but they have a powerful effect on human behaviour. (Rappaport 1993:239)

This story along with other stories provides examples of how oral story telling regulates Nyikina cultural code of conduct and rules for cultural practice. Nyikina people's interpretation of their stories impact on the way they think and act. The stories conceptualise the Nyikina relationship to land, people and spirit. Traditional community narratives provide a mechanism for affirming to Nyikina people where they have come from, who they are and who they can be (JBAC 2001).

When the story is danced it involves a partnership between the Elders and young people. When danced it is known as warloongarriy nooloo, the dance of the Nyikina creation story. By performing this dance and the

accompanying song while wearing the associated body designs, Nyikina people's cultural knowledge and experience strengthens their connection between each other. Their ability to relate, through this type of celebration connects physical and spiritual experiences with the past, present and future, thus continuing the practice necessary for health and wellbeing of Nyikina people, language and culture (JBAC 2001).

Young Nyikina people in *Jarlmadangah Burru* are taught creation songs and stories so that they understand their deep familial attachment to Woonyoomboo, the Mardoowarra and the historical connection that gives meaning to their relationship with kandri. The responsibility for singing about and caring for special sites is linked to the importance of maintaining and strengthening the Nyikina collective memory. This collective memory operates to support Nyikina culture by providing Nyikina people living in *Jarlmadangah Burru* with a source of emotional and intellectual solidarity. Nyikina history is constantly being told and sung in *Jarlmadangah Burru*. The stories ground the historical significance of culture to community wellbeing. In pre-colonial times, maintaining health and wellbeing was inherent in sustaining cultural knowledge.

An important part of young Nyikina people's wellbeing is to practice their birthright by maintaining close contact with the land. In *Jarlmadangah Mob* (JBAC 2000) Darby Narngarin, senior Elder, is convinced video is an important contemporary format for capturing and retelling oral history.

Well, we gotta teach'm telling from Dreamtime story. He [young people] gotta listen, believe old people are telling. He don't know stories from mother, he don't know stories from uncles, he don't know story from grandpa. That's right, meaning. Good thing to put it in the movies if young generation can listen.

Narngarin sees video as a process for increasing dialogue around the meaning of the Dreamtime stories and their relationship to land, which is central to Nyikina wellbeing. The strengthening of belief systems by using multimedia such as video recordings is undertaken to promote individual, family and community identity. Using new technologies to engage young people and to keep the cultural stories allows for the elders to know that their culture will continue in the young people once they have passed on.

#### *2.7.5 Sustainable Community Cultural Development*

In the video recording *Listening to a Community* (Centre for Educational Advancement 1997), *Jarlmadangah Burru* community members confirmed contemporary Nyikina financial independence relies on sustainable community cultural development based around contemporary cultural industries such as tourism, land management, research and education. The recovery and survival of Nyikina cultural knowledge and practices are important to future wellbeing of Nyikina people. My cousin, Bobbie-Anne Albert, Uncle John Watson's daughter is responsible for coordinating the cultural mapping program in *Jarlmadangah Burru*. In the video recording *Jarlmadangah Mob* (JBAC 2000a) she gave her insight into the need to ensure cultural maintenance, saying:

Cultural mapping is documenting people's stories, old peoples stories, Dreamtime stories, how everything connected from the people to the land and how everything, how people should live with the land. I think, that we do need to write down things, stories, old people's stories, Dreamtime stories, and this way when we're videoing it and writing it down, we know it's there for future generations to look at.

The maintenance of Nyikina culture is not just about learning culture; it is about living culture and maintaining it, as well as having respect for culture and keeping it strong. Nyikina people on their traditional *kandri* choose to live their culture because they believe culture is an integral part of maintaining and strengthening their own human potential and capacity to grow.

*Jarlmadangah Burru* community members are saying that learning language and culture, learning stories, listening to old people, working in partnership with Nyikina people and getting young people to work in partnership with each other is helping to build a strong sense of social cohesion in the Nyikina traditional *kandri* (JBAC 1997; JBAC 2000a; JBAC 2000b). Social cohesion is the bond necessary for building and maintaining a sense of identity, which is extended from the personal to family and community structures. Uncle John Watson in *Jarlmadangah Mob* (JBAC 2000a) describes cultural affirmation as a strategy for building identity:

It means a lot because our people [have] been undermined with all the culture that we have and the knowledge that we have of the country. And we [have] been shifted from our language area, or the boundary language and taken in to somebody else's language group. And in some way we're trying to wrestle with that to get our young



people back into their land; to understand about their culture and their land and their language.

In the *Jarlmadangah Mob* (JBAC 2000a) Nyikina young people such as John Albert, Bobbie-Anne Albert's son, are living in a contemporary society grounded in Nyikina knowledge and customs they have learnt from the Elders, such as his grandfather John Watson. As the next generation of Nyikina, he interprets his understanding of culture, saying:

Culture, means about what the Aboriginal people do, and what they believe in and stories they tell about long times. They go hunting. They never used to have guns, they used to have spears and boomerang and everything. And they used to catch kangaroos and all sorts of animals but in different seasons. The stories are about, how the Rainbow Serpent made the Fitzroy River and how the emu lost his wings and stories like that.

Young people in John's position have been encouraged to strengthen their cultural identity by learning about their traditional culture through contemporary means such as video recording and learning to write Nyikina language.

*Jarlmadangah Burru* community has started industries that will put Nyikina people in contact with other people who are external to their community so there can be a sharing of past and present lived experiences. At thirteen years old, John presented a youthful perspective about retaining culture and stories from Elders and their importance to his understanding of his heritage. The essence of culture and the lived experience of Nyikina community

life contribute to a sense of both personal and community cultural identity  
(Centre for Educational Advancement 1997; JBAC 1997, 2000a; JBAC 2000b).

The health and wellbeing of Nyikina people living in *Jarlmadangah Burru* are reliant on a positive personal and community cultural identity. Robert Watson in the video *Jarlmadangah Mob* (JBAC 2000a) made the following statement to describe his relationship with *Jarlmadangah Burru* community members:

I am related to them by blood. Well, we are all one big family. We're all descended from this piece of country here. My family is just one family amongst the whole community, but generally we're all integrated and I'm just one of them that's part of the community.

Robert Watson considers the connections through bloodlines and association to land as a key concept for promoting family harmony and building personal identity with the wider sense of community and cultural identity.

#### *2.7.6 Evidence for Better Practice*

Nyikina people in the remote *Jarlmadangah Burru* Aboriginal Community found that participation in cultural activities developed a solid base for building wider personal and community development benefits. Promoting community cultural participation was used as a way of creating a sense of civic responsibility necessary to widen the collective responsibility for preserving and maintaining culture for Nyikina people, as Wootten (2004) describes:

Experience shows that hopeful developments in Aboriginal community life usually flow from Aboriginal initiatives at local or

regional rather than national levels, and that they are exceedingly diverse in their institutional bases. (Wootten 2004:21)

Wootten (2004) recognises the diversity among Aboriginal people and that any approach towards building safe and sustainable communities must be holistic and specific to each individual group. He further suggests local and regional solutions, are more meaningful than nationwide projects. The outcomes from community development projects in this remote Indigenous community show the social, historical and cultural factors which have been important to increasing an understanding of the construction of wellbeing. From this understanding the *Jarlmadangah Burru* community has been able to plan and conduct cultural action for community cultural development to reduce Indigenous disadvantage in their community.

## **2.8 Summary**

This chapter documents the institutional racism and structural violence perpetrated against Indigenous people, by the colonial authorities, settlers and pastoralists since the colonisation of Australia. In addition, the chapter identifies how these issues have shaped the disadvantage of Indigenous people in the West Kimberley region of Western Australia. Violence was rooted in oppressive government laws and colonial practices towards Indigenous Australian people causing endemic intergenerational disadvantage. Freire's (1968) theory of oppression has been used to help understand the ways in which long term oppression shapes the lives of the Indigenous peoples of Australia and more particularly, the Nyikina people of Western Australia.

Following this overview of the historical degradation of Indigenous culture, with a particular emphasis on the Nyikina people, this chapter tells the story of four generations of the Watson family's resistance to colonial oppression and their struggle to overcome systemic violence responsible for constructing their disadvantage. This chapter discusses the emancipation experienced by Nyikina people living in *Jarlmadangah Burru* Aboriginal community by practicing their culture. Nyikina people in this remote Aboriginal community are documenting community cultural development which promotes strengthening social, human, cultural and economic capital. These cultural actions have led to building personal and community resilience and resourcefulness for Nyikina people living on traditional *kandri*. The remote community setting of *Jarlmadangah Burru* community operates in an Indigenous cultural domain; on traditional *kandri* and with Nyikina leaders who have high cultural knowledge. The literature review notes how these Nyikina people have become unified and organised around the revitalisation of Nyikina knowledge and cultural practice. I reviewed information from *Jarlmadangah Burru* to inform the methodology for this study.

The following chapter, Chapter 3, describes the methodology for the study. The literature review, Chapter 2, identified cultural actions undertaken by a remote Nyikina community were an example demonstrating in Freire's (1968) conceptual framework anti-dialogic and dialogic action. This chapter reveals how cultural actions enabled Nyikina people living on *kandri* to become emancipated and empowered towards building sustainable community cultural development as a meaningful way to reaffirm their Nyikina

culture through a united and organised approach and respond to their contemporary disadvantage.

The following chapter documents how action research has been adapted to include multiple data collection through a number of community development projects and the use of analysis procedures to create a valid and reliable research which has meaning to Indigenous Australians.

## **Chapter 3**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter begins with a background to this study and describes particular elements, which require ethical consideration when researching in the Indigenous domain. My cultural experience and extended family/kinship networks positioned me as an insider in the research environment. My academic and professional career has developed my technical capacity and understanding of Western scientific reasoning which has guided this self-reflective participatory action enquiry. Therefore, the research methods were shaped by my unique circumstances as an ‘insider’ researcher.

Principles of action research methodology and Indigenous science were adapted to create a cultural action research approach for this study, and are explored fully in this chapter. The use of a systematic mode of enquiry was aimed at changing the current circumstances of Nyikina people through community cultural development. Cultural action in this study focused on developing community cultural participation. The research process of facilitating human interaction through each of the five community cultural action projects is identified as an important part of the research process and outcome. This chapter reports on multiple data gathering procedures and concludes with a discussion of the method of data analysis.

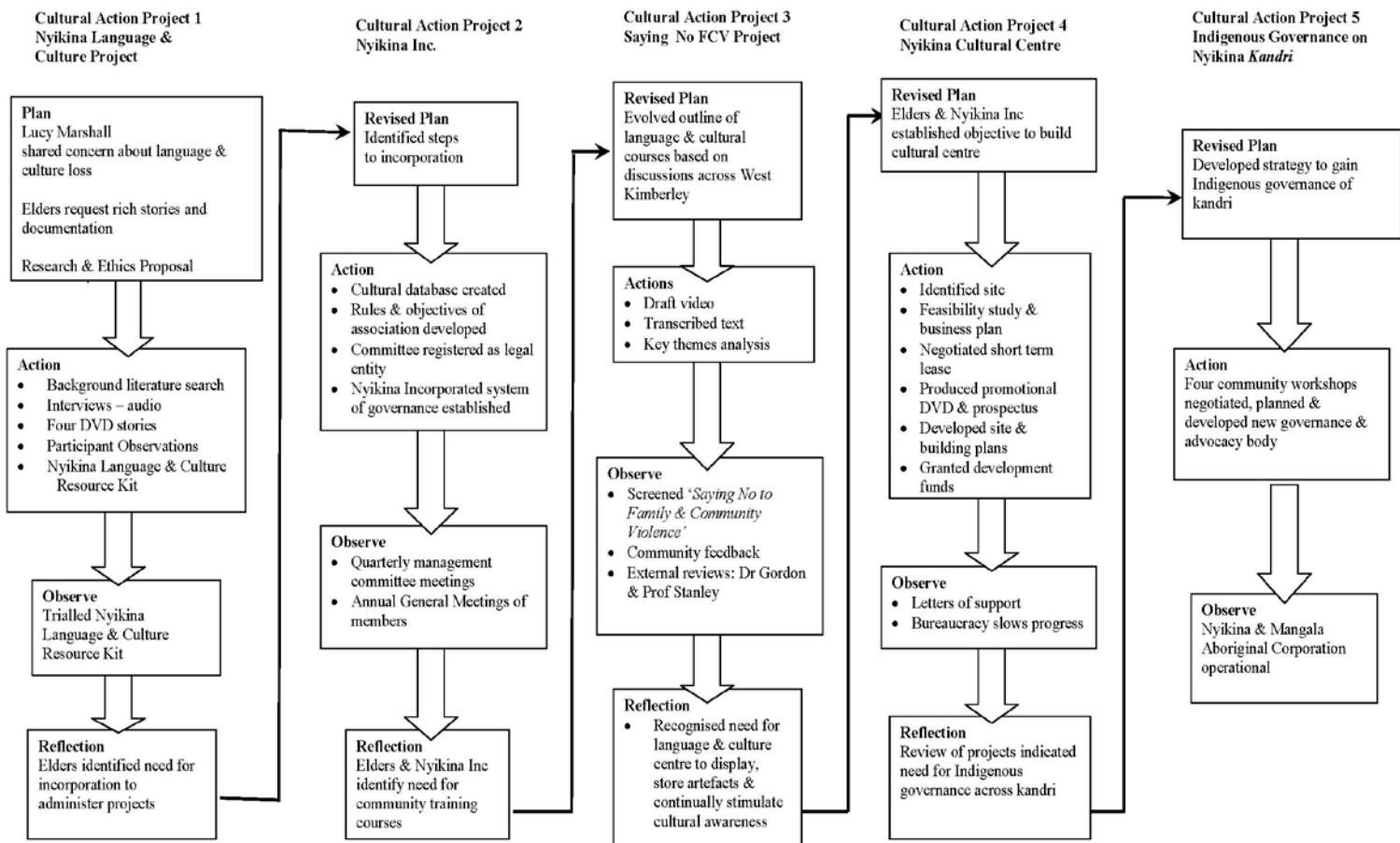
## **3.2 Background**

This chapter describes the development and implementation of five cultural action projects and how each project evolved in response to the changing Indigenous community needs and interests. Cultural action projects were funded by a variety of local, national and international sources. The formal analysis of the projects was enabled through a doctoral dissertation funded through an Australian Research Council Grant (ARC, project number DI240329) at the University of New England from 2002 until 2005. This funding supported my part time external researcher/lecturer position, fieldwork and administrative cost over the initial three year period of the study. Through this funding I was able to fully explore and analyse a culturally grounded research approach with Indigenous people in the West Kimberley region, with particular reference to the cultural actions of Nyikina people living in the remote town of Derby, Western Australia.

The five projects undertaken had specific objectives based on the premises of community cultural development, as explain previously. The first project (hereafter referred to as Cultural Action Project 1) was linked to building Nyikina language and culture and laid the foundation for three of the other projects. The second project (hereafter referred to as Cultural Action Project 2) consolidated the community momentum for cultural action through the formation of the Nyikina Incorporated (Inc.). The third project (hereafter referred to as Cultural Action Project 3) involved acquiring a macro regional perspective from West Kimberley community leaders. The fourth project (hereafter referred to as Cultural Action Project 4) focuses on the sustainability

of Nyikina culture through an economically sustainable cultural centre and the fifth project (hereafter referred to as Cultural Action Project 5) developed remote community leadership and governance processes for sustainable social, cultural, spiritual and economic Aboriginal development on Mardoowarra kandri. An overview of the five phases of the cultural action projects is depicted in Figure 2.

**Figure 2: Five Phases of Nyikina Cultural Action**



**Figure 2. Five Phases of Nyikina Cultural Action**



This diagrammatic representation in Figure 2 documents the constant reflection of the process and outcomes that have been achieved through the independent, yet integrated relationship created through all five cultural action projects. This action research approach had a cyclic nature involving planning, acting, observing, and continuous reflection as described in Figure 3 which has been adapted for the study around Zuber-Skerritt (2001:15) action research principles.

### **3.3 Researcher's Position**

I am a Nyikina woman and close relative of other participants involved in the research and therefore an 'insider' who had privileged access to Indigenous social, cultural and family networks. I collaborated with Nyikina people in Derby, my immediate and extended social, cultural and community networks to establish a series of cultural action projects. This position in the research community influenced the methodology, analysis and discussion. It is from this position that I have documented the research in the first person. As an insider researcher I was aware there would be competing demands. I invested a great deal of time and attention to maintain my responsibilities and obligations to family, community and the University, plus the need to maintain a balance amongst all three. Engagement in this study was framed by Smith's (2001) advice that:

The research domain through which indigenous research can operate are small spaces on a shifting ground. Negotiating and transforming institutional practices and research frameworks is as

significant as the carrying out of actual research programmes.

(Smith 2001:140)

Smith (2001) draws attention to the dynamic nature of the Indigenous environment where opportunities to capture meaningful research data are challenging. The prospect for me to do this work was generated from a small window of opportunity, created because the time was right. Aboriginal Elders were *going down*, and with their passing the potential loss of first hand cultural knowledge. The surviving Elders were becoming concerned that 'being Nyikina' (see Chapter 4) could be gone within a generation.

I had moved back to my traditional kandri three years before the study commenced. My home is in Balginjirr community, also known as Lower Liveringa outstation on Mt Anderson pastoral lease. This is where my grandparents raised my mother. I had the passion, time, capacity and the resources to try and reverse the current trajectory of the loss of cultural knowledge and identity.

In partnership with Indigenous Elders I maximised the opportunity to facilitate the preservation of Nyikina language and culture and then affirm a collective Nyikina identity. Cultural protocols for kinship relationships determined the appropriateness and extent of communication between me and various community members. As an inside member of the community, through family kinship skin grouping, the opportunity to negotiate access and entry continues to be a life-long process built on mutual respect, reciprocity and responsibility.

The way the research process was developed; trust was generated between me, consultants and community members allowing opportunities for open and honest discussion regarding concerns and aspirations for the whole community. I was aware of the multiple risks I could and would encounter. Risks and threats in these circumstances could be expressed in physical and emotional violence towards me, other participants and their families if not managed by an ongoing positive and constructive dialogue.

Collaborative research such as this continued to place high levels of responsibility on me in the multiple roles as the researcher, practitioner, advocate and community member. This study has heightened my respect for the collective ownership of Nyikina cultural information and has increased a collective commitment to develop further research with Nyikina communities. Furthermore, this study has been the first time that Nyikina people have had access to a level of authorship that was empowering being both author/creator and audience. The communication and trust developed within the Nyikina population and with non-Indigenous and other Indigenous people continues to be a critical ingredient for ongoing collaboration.

### *3.3.1 Building and Maintaining Trust*

Researching within one's own Indigenous community requires a relationship of trust. It was necessary to become close enough to the issues to understand and document them accurately from a subjective and deep personal experience. As an insider, I have written and narrated this study in the first person. The responsibility given to me by my Elders was to document the rich

stories from within, and about the Indigenous community perspective, yet not so invasive as to expose private information that would undermine trust between me and the community. While I have done this to the best of my ability, there is a possibility that some community members who may not be strong in reading may misinterpret both my position and my interpretation of the research field incorrectly. I would advise anyone reading this thesis to contact me directly to discuss any issue they may want clarified, at any time now or in the future.

I was mindful of the high volume of research that has been conducted 'on' Indigenous people and the real concern regarding the apparently minimal impact on improving Indigenous people's life outcomes from such research (Mack & Gower 2001; Phillips 2003; Smith 2001). A constant conversation around open and honest dialogue was important to build trust in an effort to ensure the research would be mutually rewarding to Nyikina people, the academic world and me as the insider researcher. Adopting the Indigenous position generated trust and in turn good ethical conduct which Indigenous researchers, such as Rigney (1996), Tuhiwai Smith (1999) and Westerman (2002) indicate are essential to doing this type of research. I was particularly aware of the need to maintain positive relationships with Nyikina people as I intended to continue living in the local community long after this study was completed.

### *3.3.2 Ethical Considerations*

To ensure this research operates within an Indigenous context, I have referred to the National Health and Medical Research Council (NH&MRC) document *Values and Ethics: Guidelines for Ethical Conduct in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Research* (2003) to guide the values and ethical standards of this study. This study comes from an Indigenous perspective as it reflects the values and ethics of the local people that has 'been informed by their [local Indigenous people's] own experiences, values, norms and learning' (NHMRC 2003:1). The NHMRC (2003) identified the following six values to ground the methodology within, being Reciprocity, Respect, Equality, Responsibility, Survival and protection; and Spirit and integrity (NHMRC 2003). Each of these principles is explained below.

Reciprocity is described as a mutual obligation with 'an equitable distribution of resources, responsibility and capacity to ensure cohesion and survival of the social order' (NHMRC 2003:10). I facilitated leadership within the study by encouraging Elders and other community members to participate in community cultural development decision making processes. This research was a two way process where ideas and products were returned to the community in relatively equal measures. This ensured any data collection which included community and traditional knowledge was developed and stored independently by Nyikina people for the mutual benefit of the researcher and the Derby community.

Respect for human dignity and worth is the foundation of reciprocity; trust and cooperation in Indigenous research (NHMRC 2003). This relationship is critical to the insider researcher who lives and works in their home community. This research is built on a long history of respectful relationships developed over four generations. It was important I completed all of the tasks I agreed to and respected the contribution of all participants in order to maintain the trust I have developed with each community member in the cultural action projects.

The NHMRC (2003) describes equality in Indigenous research as the equal value of people and is reflected in the way fairness and justice is distributed. In this instance equity does not necessarily mean sameness but ‘affirms Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People’s right to be different’ (NHMRC 2003:14). All the people participating in this study were treated as equals and worked collaboratively to affirm their cultural and community identity.

Indigenous Australians ‘have core responsibilities to country, kinship bonds, caring for others and the maintenance of harmony and balance within and between the physical and spiritual realms’ (NHMRC 2003:16). This study provided people with an opportunity to action their obligation to maintain Nyikina language, culture and identity through cultural action projects. To ensure the survival and protection of Indigenous people and our cultural heritage, Indigenous research needs to protect ‘cultures and identity from erosion by colonisation and marginalisation’ (NHMRC 2003:18-19). From

participating in the cultural action projects community members were able to contribute to reducing further loss of Nyikina language and culture. The ‘overarching value that binds all the others into a coherent whole’ has two components, spirit and integrity (NHMRC 2003:19). The NHMRC (2003:19) describes spirit as the continuity between past, present and future generations.

The cultural actions conducted in this study involved Nyikina people and others from a wide range of age groups from children to elders working together to ensure cultural information and community processes are transmitted to the following generations. *Integrity* ‘is about behaviour which maintains the coherence of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander values and cultures’ (NHMRC2003:19-20) and was a major focus of my conduct and the conduct of others throughout this study.

### **3.4 Ethical Clearance**

I enrolled at the University of New England (UNE) in 2001 into the Doctorate of Health Service Management (DHSM) Course. I enrolled in this course as I wanted to build my technical capacity in Health Management as an external student. The Head of the School identified a principal supervisor and a team of academics to work with me to develop a submission for funding. Through this collaboration we were able to secure an Australian Research Council (ARC) Scholarship to support my participation in the DHSM program and to provide a living allowance to support my engagement as an external part-time lecturer involved in external programs for the School of Health at the UNE.

The team supported me in the development of my initial research proposal and the University of New England endorsed the research 'An Ethnographic Participatory Action Approach for Understanding Indigenous Mental Health Promotion' on the 8<sup>th</sup> March 2002 and assigned the following UNE Research Ethics Clearance Number HE01/239. I successfully completed all of the course work for the DHSM Course and negotiated with my supervisor to transfer into the Doctor of Philosophy Program on the 1<sup>st</sup> November 2002. My principle supervisor is the Head of School. She agreed the process, was a natural evolution of my academic pathway. In November 2003, I was invited by a Nyikina Elder to work with Nyikina people living in Derby in a collaborative partnership to strengthen their social, cultural and economic capital. I used an action research approach to document the cultural actions of Nyikina people living in Derby. The title of the study reflected this evolution, being 'Development, implementation and analysis of action research projects to facilitate community participation in building the capacity of Nyikina people to respond to and overcome disadvantage'.

Through the action research approach continual reflection and action by the researcher and community members evolved to reflect the purpose of capacity building to overcome Indigenous disadvantage. The final title 'Engaging Action Research Projects to Build the Capacity of Nyikina Indigenous Australians' captures the theme of promoting Indigenous wellbeing by developing Indigenous participation to reduce Indigenous disadvantage.



### *3.4.1 Community Consent*

I began the process of gaining community consent to the research in November 2003 when invited by my sister, a Nyikina Elder, to establish a program to protect and promote Nyikina language and cultural heritage in Derby. Participant numbers grew when other Nyikina people living in Derby agreed to take a role in Nyikina cultural planning. As a consequence, a group of Nyikina Elders and their families living in Derby formed a committee which became responsible for guiding the research and in turn community cultural development. This informal committee later became formally known as the Nyikina Incorporated Executive Committee. The Executive Committee provided a letter of support for this study (Appendix 1: Letter of Support Nyikina Inc.).

### *3.4.2 Individual Consent*

Most of the community participants in this study had limited English language and literacy skills and therefore it was not appropriate to ask participants who were illiterate to sign consent forms written in English, as is the common practice for Indigenous people in remote areas. To overcome this, individuals were informed of the study and consent was gained in alternative ways, dependant on individual circumstances. In these situations participants were given the opportunity to have an independent community advocate present to ensure their rights were protected. I was able to communicate using a mixture of English and local Indigenous Kriol to negotiate consent with Indigenous people. The consent process was recorded on video or audiotape. In

accordance with empowerment principles, participants were invited to volunteer their participation with the opportunity to withdraw consent for the study at any stage.

Informants usually acknowledged their consent was based on our cultural association, which formed the basis of mutual trust. Just as Smith (2001:136) explains: 'Consent is not so much given for the project or specific set of questions, but for a person, for their credibility'. Community Elders, my family's history and cultural associations, validated the cultural capital that underpinned my personal credibility to do the research. In a similar way Smith (2001) reports that Indigenous familial history provided the mechanisms for building trust and was a determining influence for agreeing to provide consent. Through my personal and cultural knowledge and lived experience as an Indigenous woman I am aware of the need not to assume anything in the Indigenous domain. Linda Tuhiwai Smith supports the need for Indigenous researchers and practitioners to know Indigenous community protocols by stating:

Some knowledges are actively in competition with each other and some can only be informed in association with others. While there may not be a unitary system there are 'rules' which help make sense of what is contained within the archive and enable 'knowledge' to be recognized. These rules can be conceived of as rules of classification, rule of framing and rule of practice. (1999:43)

With the assistance of my cultural sister Lucy Marshall our relationship of trust was built on many hours of conversation around

community and cultural issues, as Lucy would say ‘getting it right’ learning ‘the rules’, to prevent possible misunderstanding that could arise in my research and community practice. I took particular attention to ensure informants and participants had an understanding of their rights regarding their participation in the study. This required extensive one on one discussion with informants and participants. In this process participants were asked to recount their understanding of the Participant Information Sheet A (Appendix 2), Participant Information Sheet B (Appendix 3), and Consent Form (Appendix 4). In no case were informants or participants to sign a consent form before demonstrating a clear understanding my intentions for using their information.

### **3.5 Action Research**

Throughout my professional career I have read a wide range of research material about Aboriginal people and the circumstances in which we live. While some of this research identifies causal factors of ill-health, disadvantage and alienation from the mainstream, there are few models that identify ways to create sustainable change in Indigenous community wellbeing. To this end I chose a qualitative research approach as it is a ‘specific research approach that reveals beliefs, views and feelings, and the meanings and interpretations given to events and things, as well as their behaviour’ (Hakim 1992:26). I wanted this study to create an opportunity for local Indigenous people to reflect on their own values, knowledge and resources. Furthermore I wanted Indigenous people to develop the capacity to maintain their language and culture and use their cultural networks to manage sustainable projects to reduce disadvantage in their community. This type of approach emphasises the

representation of reality by incorporating the views of the study participants (Grbich 2004).

While many methodologies are not suited to research with Indigenous cultures and communities, action research has been shown to provide a way of working with and within communities for tangible outcomes (Rigney,1996, Colorado 1994,Tuhiwai Smith,1999). Action research as described by Altrichter, Kemmis & McTaggart (2002), provides a framework that can be adapted to suit an Indigenous research approach. Kemmis and McTaggart's (1988:5) definition of action research states:

Action research is a form of collective, self-reflective inquiry that participants in social situations undertake to improve: (1) the rationality and justice of their own social practices; (2) the participants' understanding of these practices and the situations in which they carry out these practices ... The approach is action research only when it is collaborative and achieved through the critically examined action of individual group members.

The cultural action projects involved the participants in critically reflecting on community and government practices. Participants requested the research be incorporated into local cultural action projects, with similar goals to those described by Altrichter, Kemmis, McTaggart and Zuber-Skerritt (2002:128):

I adopted a pragmatic approach by focusing the research on creating opportunities for community members to actively participate in Indigenous community cultural development activities. Therefore, I was able to

work closely with Elders and together, over time, we identified the five separate action research projects as ‘cultural action projects’ to widen the Kemmis and McTaggart’s (1988:5) definition of ‘action research’ to represent this Indigenous context. The five cultural action projects in this study generated knowledge and informed an action or response. My role in each project is described below, along with a description of each project. Each cultural action project aimed to build the capacity of Nyikina people, and emerged from the foundations laid by previous project(s). Each Cultural Action Project is described in detail in chapters 5, 6 and 7.

### *3.5.1 Cultural Action Projects*

#### *3.5.1.1 Cultural Action Project 1: Nyikina Language and Culture Project*

Researcher role included; Project Manager, Insider Researcher, Language Student.

In 2003, I was approached by my sister Nyikina Elder, Lucy Marshall, to ‘do something to help save Nyikina’ language and culture. She identified my first task was to find money to pay the local Indigenous people and outside professional expertise to action the cultural development work. The need to maintain language and culture motivated Lucy Marshall to invite Nyikina people to work collaboratively. I prepared a research plan and funding submission to document Nyikina language and culture to the Derby office of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (Madjulla Inc. 2003b). I was successful in obtaining the financial support required to support the

revitalisation of Nyikina language and culture for Nyikina people living in Derby.

Lucy Marshall and six other Nyikina Elders and their families were involved in the first Nyikina Language and Culture Project. These participants encompassed a wide range of ages, across several generations. These participants met each day for three months working directly with the linguist, curriculum writer and information technology specialist as the project team. This collaborative effort occurred from March through to June 2004, community members played a role in designing, implementing and reporting to me, the researcher in the role of coordinator of the Nyikina Language and Culture Project. Furthermore I provided the project management, project evaluation and financial reporting of these projects to the government funding body as an in-kind, voluntary basis.

In 2004 Nyikina community members in Derby requested I formalise the project management meetings by developing a governance system to ensure the protection and sharing of the cultural materials produced. In response to this request I coordinated regular meetings with Nyikina people to discuss the progress of the project. This reflective and planning process was instrumental in the subsequent development of Nyikina Incorporated, as a new and emerging cultural action project.

#### 3.5.1.2 Cultural Action Project 2: *Nyikina Incorporated*

Researcher role included: Insider Researcher, Facilitator, Community Advocate and Committee Member (Secretary and Public Officer).

In 2004 I conducted regular monthly meetings with Nyikina people living in Derby that had developed out of Project 1. These meetings provided the opportunity for Nyikina people to consider a range of issues necessary for sustaining Nyikina language, culture and family networks. For long term sustainability, it was essential that Nyikina people living in Derby and participating in the cultural action projects were able to have complete ownership and responsibility for managing the process of community cultural development. In order to be more strategic in their actions and to maintain control over their cultural action projects the participants at the meetings decided to formalise the group's legal status.

My role in the establishment of Nyikina Incorporated involved writing the rules and objectives of the association and registering the committee as a legal entity. This research and work was always conducted under the watchful eyes of Lucy Marshall and the other Elders. I facilitated the first Annual General Meeting in September 2004 and was elected to the governing committee as Secretary and Public Officer. In the role as researcher, I informally discussed matters with Nyikina Inc. Executive Committee members on a monthly basis and all recommendations for action were presented and fully discussed at the quarterly Executive Committee meetings. This kept the Executive Committee informed of developments while enabling them to provide guidance and confirmation of cultural actions undertaken.

Towards the end of 2004, Nyikina community members requested I facilitate a process for teaching others about the information in the Nyikina Language and Culture Project to encourage wider participation in Nyikina language and culture. This was not seen as an independent cultural action project. Rather, it was perceived by the Elders as an evolution of the Nyikina Language and Culture Project which occurred following the establishment of Nyikina Inc. The funding process took a year to develop and when sourced funded a linguist and a training consultant to develop and teach the Nyikina Language and Culture Course which was piloted from February to April 2006.

#### 3.5.1.3 Cultural Action Project 3: *Saying No Way to Family and Community Violence*

Researcher role included: Project Manager, Interviewer, Video Producer & Director.

In June 2004 I was invited to collaborate with the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) Malarabah Regional Council to promote positive community solutions to respond to family, community and systemic violence throughout the wider West Kimberley region, including Nyikina traditional land. This regional committee of Indigenous leaders was elected to represent the broader views of Indigenous people throughout the ATSIC Malarabah Region which is almost identical to the Shire of Derby-West Kimberley boundary.



The Nyikina Inc. Executive Committee guiding the overall research project agreed this new cultural action project would provide the opportunity to look at a range of community issues and solutions in the region. The project was endorsed by the Nyikina Inc. Executive Committee as they believed it would increase the knowledge base for Nyikina people in Derby to better respond to their local circumstances and thus became part of this overall project.

I met with the full ATSIC Regional Council three times for the duration of the six month long project to plan this project and to monitor its progress and development. The first meeting was conducted on 22 June 2004 to negotiate the research plan and a project timeframe; second meeting 20 July 2004; and the final meeting on 12 August 2004 to formally submit my report (Poelina & Perdrisat 2004b). The Malarabah ATSIC Regional Council nominated a Councillor to advise on the project.

While the other projects included in this study primarily focus on Nyikina people, this project included the broader population, with the informants including twenty non-Nyikina Indigenous and three non-Indigenous leaders who lived and worked in remote communities in the Shire of Derby-West Kimberley. All participants were provided with a copy of the project information. I used the same research protocols. Community members who were not strong in reading and writing involved community members of their free choice. Those chosen were included in the negotiations because the informants were confident these representatives would respect their personal

views and their right to participate from an informed position (Appendix 3: Participant Information Sheet B). The information collected and analysed and documented in film and texts increased the understanding of how the macro context impacted on the lives of Indigenous people broadly throughout the West Kimberley region.

Discussions with the Malarabah ATSIC Regional Council and informally with the nominated councillor representative provided a process for dealing with issues of ethics and community participation that might have arose from my visits to these Indigenous communities. Prior to the research visits all of the communities were contacted by telephone to begin negotiations. The telephone calls were confirmed in writing. I wrote to every community chairperson to inform them of the purpose of the visit and to confirm the nominated time and day suitable to the community and or community organisation. I also sent a facsimile to the participating communities and organisations (Appendix 5: Copy of fax). Furthermore, I rang and spoke to the chairperson or their nominated representative the day before the planned visits to confirm support and approval to continue the visit. The development of a educational video filmed 'on location' was determined to be an effective approach to increasing the level of understanding around family and community violence and was used to help inform potential participants.

The consultation period visiting West Kimberley communities for the project took fourteen days from 12 August – 26 August 2004 to complete. I spent a further two weeks with the filmmaker selecting and editing sections of

the raw video recording footage. This process was repeated and subsequent changes made which resulted into four separate drafts of the video. Once the draft video was completed I then transcribed 60 pages of text from the video interviews. I spent approximately a week reviewing the texts looking for the key themes which would assist me in identifying the meaning behind what each of the informants was saying. I was able to use this information to ground the experiences of the people involved into the formal report to the ATSIC Regional Council. Copies of the draft report and video were sent to all participants for their feedback. I telephoned and spoke with each informant to obtain their feedback on my interpretation of events and the meaning I ascribed to the community solutions being developed in each of the settings.

Incorporating video recordings increased understanding of what the issues were for Indigenous people and how community solutions could be generated. The videoed interviews were edited into a community documentary (Appendix 6: DVD *Saying No Way to Family and Community Violence*, Madjulla Inc. 2004b). A concise analysis of the data appears in Chapter 6 and a more detailed analysis is included in Appendix 7: Further Discussion of Data in DVD *Saying No Way to Family and Community Violence* (Madjulla Inc. 2004b).

On 17 October 2004 the Coordinator of the Jayida Burru Abuse & Violence Prevention Forum (JBA&VPF) was sent a draft of the video to show all the participating agencies in Derby (Appendix 8: Copy of Letter to JBA&VPF Coordinator). This process allowed informants to view the draft video without me being present to reduce any bias in my effort to obtain objective feedback and comments from the informants. The Coordinator then

collated the feedback on changes required and forwarded these recommendations to me. This material informed me of the changes required before producing the final public copy of the video. All informants agreed they were accurately represented and consented to be included in the final edit of the video recording.

This dialogic process was time consuming but very important, as all informants involved in the study were made aware the video recording would go from the private to the public domain. As an insider researcher I was aware that if any of the informants believed they were being misrepresented my credibility was at risk, which would impact on future effectiveness in this region. It was clear I should attempt to diffuse any possible conflicts before they arose. When this project was completed in December 2004, I sent all of the ATSIC Regional Councillors a detailed report of the project, the video, and all the promotional materials developed. Participants also received copies of the video and promotional materials and have used these materials to create further awareness of family and community violence with their family and community members in each of the localised community settings.

#### 3.5.1.4 Cultural Action Project 4: *Nyikina Culture Centre*

Researcher role included: Insider Researcher, Community Advocate, Committee Member and Producer of promotional DVD.

I continued to be an active governing committee member of Nyikina Inc. by facilitating meetings and responding in a timely manner to the

emerging community business and subsequent cultural actions. The governing committee asked me to continue lobbying the Shire of Derby-West-Kimberley for an excision or the granting of land to locate and operationalise the Nyikina Cultural Centre. With the Executive Committee support I built trust with civic leaders; shire councillors and senior staff, Chamber of Commerce, Indigenous leaders, and state and federal government agency senior regional managers with a view to acquire land and funding for the construction of the cultural centre. I was able to persuade the local and state governments to provide 10 hectares of prime land for the Nyikina Cultural Centre. I built a body of evidence over a two year period to demonstrate the cultural centre would be a sound investment of immense benefit to the wider Derby community and the region. I advocated the wishes of the Nyikina Inc. Executive Committee in meetings with the state Minister for Indigenous Affairs and other state government ministers and the local state and federal members of parliament and public servants to lobby for funding to construct the cultural centre. With Nyikina Inc. support I also developed submissions for state and federal government funding. The outcomes from the ongoing work with Nyikina Inc. continued to be progressed through meetings and conversations which continuously evolved through the cycle of planning, action, observation and reflection generating new ideas and concepts which were aimed at building sustainable community action for Nyikina people in Derby and outwards into the Nyikina *kandri*. (Appendix 9: Discussion Paper - Nyikina Cultural Centre and Appendix 10: DVD *Nyikina Cultural Centre*)

3.5.1.5 Cultural Action Project 5: *Indigenous Governance of Nyikina Kandri*

Researcher role included: Project Management, Insider Researcher, Community Advocate, Committee Member (Deputy Chair).

In October 2005 I attended a public meeting with leaders from remote Aboriginal communities from the lower Fitzroy River to discuss the need for a new governance and advocacy body in response to the federal government terminating the ATSIC Regional Council. The local ATSIC council's role was to advise governments about developing and monitoring services to nearby communities.

The population of nearby communities is predominantly Nyikina with significant populations of Mangala, Walmajarri and other Indigenous people. I liaised with Indigenous community leaders to develop a governance plan which would represent remote communities on Nyikina *kandri* and work in partnership with Nyikina Inc. which represents Nyikina people in Derby.

I was successful in gaining government funding the development of an Indigenous community governance model. I was able to work with the Nyikina Mangala Native Title Working Group who was the group established to represent our Native Title rights. The Kimberley Land Council (KLC) is supporting our native title claim. I worked closely with a KLC Legal Officer to draft the constitution for the Nyikina and Mangala Aboriginal Corporation (NMAC) and I guided it through the Office of the Registrar of Aboriginal and

Torres Strait Islander Corporations. This whole process including the planning and registration, and took a further fourteen months to eventuate.

The process I used to involve community members in this cultural action project was made possible by what Freire (1974:29) refers to as ‘people need[ing] to be empowered to build on their personal lived experiences’. The level of participation by the community members was supported with the encouragement of both researcher and the Elders who were closely linked to community members at both individual and family levels. Furthermore, these Elders know fully how these relationships are lived out as community business. This nurturing of community members was visibly measured in the amount of outcomes generated from within a relatively short time frame. The formation of a new governance body that would include membership from Derby and from members living in communities on the *Mardoowarra kandri* was planned to promote cultural action by helping Indigenous people achieve greater confidence and power in; resource and community management, relationships, information and decision making.

### *3.5.2 Indigenous Science*

In addition to using an action research methodology to guide these cultural action projects, this research was based on what has become known as Indigenous science. Indigenous science indicates that it is important that research maps the labyrinth of living culture adding an evidence base of sufficient integrity to meet the academic requirements for this thesis (Rigney 1996) and not violate Indigenous culture. The Indigenous scientific approach

relies on data, which emerged from Indigenous lived experiences during the period of this study. To this end the research incorporated a methodology that revealed and respected the views and knowledge from within the Indigenous domain. Action research, used in developing the five cultural action projects, reflects an indigenous science approach through instilling sustainable outcomes in the objects of each project and engaging those who will ultimately benefit.

Indigenous Maori academic and practitioner Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) advocates Indigenous researchers decolonise their research approach by adopting a common sense understanding of their world based on lived experiences. Further, Rigney (1996) and other Australian and international Indigenous researchers (Atkinson 2002; Colorado 1994; Tuhiwai Smith 1999), advocates continued discussion to build Indigenous understandings and perspectives of research practice.

Indigenous science informs the methodology of this study as it legitimises principles, protocols and processes appropriate for investigating issues on Indigenous terms. This process informs Indigenous theorists and practitioners of a practical emancipatory response to de-legitimise racist oppression in research (Rigney 1996; Tuhiwai Smith 1999). I purposely set out to inform others working in Indigenous community cultural development about the cultural actions Nyikina people are participating in to build sustainable communities. Following Feire's (1968) framework of dialogic action this type of Indigenous research shifts the conceptualisation of research to a more empowering and self-determining outcome by generating research and research



outcomes ‘imbued with the social, cultural, political, economic, geographical and spiritual meanings and beliefs characteristic of Indigenous peoples’ (Phillips 2003:28).

Rigney (1996) described the unique nature of Indigenist research as requiring Indigenous researchers to put the struggles and experiences of their peoples at the heart of the study. It was a requirement that the process must contribute to building the capacity of the researcher and Indigenous communities involved. The fundamental principle of naming the research ‘Indigenist’ was for the subject matter to be examined and interpreted only as it was found embedded within its Indigenous context (Tuhiwai Smith 1999).

Rigney (1996:3) identified Indigenist research to be informed by three fundamental and inter-related principles: ‘resistance as the emancipatory imperative in Indigenous research, political integrity in Indigenous research and privileging Indigenous voices in Indigenous research’. I have used these principles, along with those detailed by the NHMRC, to ground the projects in an action research model.

### *3.5.3 Justice*

The participation and emancipation research process must focus on the type of rules that govern the development of Indigenous knowledge making and practice. Within this study the Indigenous perspective raised questions regarding the cultural and historical accuracy of Western interpretations of local knowledge. This research sought to balance wider society discussion by including Indigenous voices, to provide more accurate Indigenous perspectives.

McQueen (2001) confirmed the need to ensure voices from marginalised populations were included in dialogic processes. Fuller, Howard and Buultjens (2005), also support the view that people directly involved in the research required a process where they could express their views and influence policy and action, as described below:

In addition to its ability to provide understanding of the complex processes and phenomena, qualitative research offers policy and action possibilities that are grounded in the experiences of people that are directly involved in the issues under consideration or, who are most likely to be affected by related policy decisions. (Fuller, Howard & Buultjens 2005:63)

The literature review included the voices of Nyikina people to explain the impact of disadvantage through personal narratives. Their stories tell lived experiences of systemic racism in the creating and maintenance of their disadvantage, which continues today as a consequence of contemporary government policy and practice. In addition to providing the recorded history of colonisation on Indigenous people, it is the stories of those directly affected by racist policies and the disadvantage suffered as a result that give insight into the ongoing oppression suffered by Aboriginal people.

In order to redress disadvantage I considered Freire's (1973) concept of 'critical consciousness-raising' as a starting point for more just outcomes for Nyikina people who have been living in Derby for several generations. Emancipatory work of this type, according to Freire (1973), was based on the reciprocal determinism between environment and empowerment

and provided the conceptual framework for this research. From my lived experience I have witnessed both a direct and indirect relationship between people and their environmental circumstances. I saw this research as an opportunity to test these theoretical concepts to see if they could be useful to the work I wanted to do with Nyikina people in Derby and along the *Mardoowarra*. As an insider and an Indigenous woman with a high level of technical and academic training my 'common sense approach' was challenged by the rhetorical question in regards to 'what is the cost of doing nothing?' I was encouraged by the fact that there were Nyikina people in my family and cultural networks who were strong leaders with high levels of social, human and cultural capital. I believed these qualities were worthy of being harnessed to produce something meaningful for Nyikina people now and in the future.

Green and Kreuter (1999) are in agreement with Freire's (1968) concept of dialogic action, in particular the concept of cultural synthesis. The work of Green and Kreuter (1999) found that when poor people become conscious of the political realities of their situation they are likely to take collective action to address issues of equity and social justice. Green and Kreuter (1999) agree this is more likely to happen if the strategies incorporate the concepts of cultural synthesis. 'In the [cultural] synthesis approach, there are no imposed priorities: Leaders and the people collaborate in the development of priorities and guidelines for action' (1999:56). The 'cultural synthesis', I wanted to focus on was aimed at raising the level of consciousness of Nyikina people living in the remote town of Derby I believed that through

their actions Nyikina people in Derby would start to contribute and own their own processes by participating in cultural action projects.

### **3.6 Data Collection**

Data collection was integrated through each part of the study. I worked with Nyikina Elders to identify what type of data would be collected. Nyikina Elders expressed concern regarding the rigid time parameters of the research and requested I continue the study after the anticipated and scheduled research period. Community members expressed a need to prolong my involvement in the cultural action projects and in response I felt compelled to extend the collection of data until June 2006. The progress of the final cultural action project continued through until 2007 and these outcomes have been included in this study. June 2006 was negotiated with the Nyikina Inc Executive Committee as the exit point from the field. I negotiated with the University of New England to take leave and formally withdrew from the study from November 2006 to January 2008 to focus on writing the study analysis. I presented multiple data sources to Nyikina Inc. Executive Committee to inform their discussion about community issues and to promote participation of Nyikina people in strategic problem-solving processes.

An advisory group of Nyikina Elders met monthly to discuss and analyse data and process issues. Recommendations which arose from the monthly meetings informed the direction of Nyikina community cultural development. Decisions were discussed and actioned in the quarterly Nyikina Inc. Executive Committee meetings. The Executive Committee was provided

with the opportunity to comment on the cultural actions documented in the quarterly reports I provided to them. The Executive Committee made informed decisions about how the data would assist to build an accurate reflection of the strengths and barriers to Nyikina people overcoming their marginalised circumstances in Derby. This continual process of planning, action, observation and reflection led to a revision of the planned cultural action projects, where I worked with the Nyikina Inc. Executive Committee in a collaborated effort in the development of cultural action projects.

### *3.6.1 Multiple Data Gathering Procedures*

A combination of several methods was used to gather data from a range of perspectives to embrace the complexity of the action research projects in this study. Grbich (2004:152) also supported this approach, recognising that ‘multiple methods are used to build up a rich and complex picture of the culture’. Methods for gathering data for this study included: participant observation, video recording and interviews. Each of these methods is discussed below.

### *3.6.2 Participant Observation*

Participant observation according to Atkinson & Hamersley (1994) is a method of inquiry used for collecting first-hand information. This was useful for the work with Nyikina people living in Derby (Cultural Action Projects 1, 2, 4 & 5). As the insider researcher I continued to immerse myself in Indigenous community life and participated in a range of community events.

My participant observation activities included facilitating the cultural action projects with Nyikina people and other Indigenous people in the Derby and the West Kimberley.

I participated in local committees, cultural camps with Nyikina people, language and culture lessons, other cultural and recreational activities. On several occasions I reported the progress of the cultural action projects I was facilitating in Derby on 6DBY local community radio and ABC radio state-wide as well as wrote local newspaper articles to raise local community awareness to build trust with the wider community. I prepared media releases for community and cultural events to publicise the community cultural developments of Nyikina people in Derby as well as lobbying for broader community support. I paid particular attention to the social context of the community and generated community discussion and debate around historical and contemporary social and cultural issues impacting on Nyikina people. My participation in community life served to build trust with other community members, external to the cultural action projects and encouraged interaction with Nyikina people. At the same time, my status as observer allowed me to submerge myself in everyday life of the people involved in my research.

### *3.6.3 Video Recording*

The challenge for the Indigenous researcher was the production of knowledge, which supported Indigenous participants to build their confidence and competence over a three year period and continues today. The knowledge produced through participants' cultural actions was collected using video

recording as a culturally safe research tool. In the wrong hands this approach could have been quite invasive. Indigenous filmmaker Lester Bostock (1990:2) warns that if film is not used carefully it could portray people in a negative light. He makes the point that film has largely been used as a tool to disempower Indigenous people.

Bissell, Manderson and Allotey (2000) advocated using film as an empowerment strategy for Indigenous Australians because it has the capacity to influence power relationships when Indigenous people determine how they are represented to mainstream audiences. I used video to record data that is located inside local Indigenous settings. The planning, development and implementation of cultural action for community cultural development was extremely fragile and could easily have been undermined if community and professional members were perceived to be portrayed in the video recording in a negative or misleading way. The video recordings produced in this study sought to provide insight into the lived experiences of Indigenous people, which became community owned and generated data. The informants' voices revealed Indigenous perspectives in relation to the socio-political world in which the data was produced.

Once all of the draft video footage material was digitised by professional film makers I was able view the footage and isolate the chunks of information by using a cutting and paste method against identified time code into a story board to make sense of the story telling format. The first three drafts were far too long in duration to be suitable to retain viewer interest, regardless

of the story line. Gradually I became more proficient in viewing and interpreting the visual format so that I could reduce the content and maintain the story I wanted to tell as the researcher, producer of this knowledge. I was particularly important in the editing process to select examples of different community views to represent a wider community view. Furthermore I was responsible for organising the 'cut away' shots, text and 'voice over' narration as well as the original music and the copyright responsibilities associated with music. The draft films were sent out to all of the participants and informants for their feedback to ensure they were satisfied with how they are represented in the context of the whole film and not simply their edited interview.

This study demonstrated that video recordings became important social products for documenting Indigenous personal and community stories. Furthermore, film offered the opportunity to present contemporary community views for wider consideration and documented cultural heritage for the purpose of preserving Indigenous knowledge.

#### *3.6.4 Audio Interviews*

In May 2005 I conducted semi-structured interviews with seven Nyikina people regarding the Cultural Action Projects being planned and developed by Nyikina people in Derby. The interview questions were developed as an important part of the larger action research. I sought the views of Nyikina people to include a level of distance between myself as the researcher and facilitator of my work in Derby. I was interested in the independent views of these Nyikina people to find out first hand if the work I



was doing was being observed and reflected upon by Nyikina people. I wanted to interview a similar number of Nyikina people who were both participant and non-participants to inform my view. I worked with the Nyikina Inc. Executive Committee over 3 formal meetings to develop the interview schedule. The research questions included: what is your understanding of *liyan*, feeling/emotion?; what do you think has been the greatest change for Nyikina people; how well do you believe Nyikina people have responded to their recovery from the impacts of colonisation; and can you identify any strategies that Nyikina people are participating in?

Each participant agreed to record the discussion on audio tape. In order to increase my understanding and interpretation of the perceptions of Informants I adopted Rubin & Rubin (1995) recommendation to focus questions on the Informant's historical experience. Nyikina historical perspectives were used to gain a wider understanding of the impact of colonisation on contemporary Nyikina people and provide feedback regarding the cultural action projects. The informants provided an opportunity to reflect on a range of contemporary community perspectives regarding the effectiveness and cultural appropriateness of the actions being facilitated by me. The feedback from the informants suggested my efforts to mobilise and lift the profile of local people were seen as being both positive and constructive. Responses from these informants, both participants and non-participants reinforced to me that through their social, cultural and professional networks these informants were aware of the cultural action projects in this study and were fully supportive of these actions even if it was from a distance.

### **3.7 Data Analysis**

This research created the opportunity to describe and analyse Indigenous community action as well as reporting the level of sustainable development in particular the effectiveness of these cultural actions to the wider community. In presenting the data, some of the direct quotes from Indigenous people are longer than those usually included in a doctoral thesis; however, it was felt this was necessary in order to gain an understanding about the meaning behind the discourse. Full unedited quotes are included to privilege the Indigenous informants' voices and allow them to tell their story in their own way.

In order to ensure that this whole process was empowering to the individuals and communities involved, action research methodology used and the Freire (1968) inspired framework described earlier.

#### *3.7.1 Contextual Analysis*

To gain an understanding about the social, cultural and political circumstances of the local area I located the research in the local social context to construct a descriptive picture of the social environment. I presented my interpretation and understanding of the social context from my lived experiences and have validated this view from a wide range of evidence including both primary and secondary sources and events that emerged as a result of my actions in each of the community locations. The social context is presented up front in each of the chapters prior to the presentation of other data to enrich the analysis. In support of an approach such as this, Saukko

(2005:344) states we need to pay ‘attention to the way in which these social processes may be experienced’ in each particular circumstance as the social pressures will be ‘very different in particular local contexts’. According to Saukko (2005:344) to think through ‘how the research itself, for its small or big part, influences the process it is studying (self-reflexivity)’. This study involved continuous reflection and dialogue between me and the study participants. As an insider I was aware of the outcomes of intergenerational oppression, including issues of loss, grief issues, trauma, family dysfunction, and many other factors can disrupt individuals and communities. This awareness required a flexible response to not only the research process but the capacity of the community to participate in the project. An important aspect of the study was the opportunity for Indigenous people to have a voice, in telling their own stories in their own way and in a format they were happy using, be it film, audio or in texts format.

### *3.7.2 Discourse Analysis*

In this study, discourse refers to groups of statements that structure the way issues are thought about, and the way in which Indigenous people act on the basis of their planning, observations and reflections. Nead (2000:4) defines discourse as a ‘particular form of language with its own rules and conventions and the institutions within which the discourse is produced and circulated’. To this end I have used information from the five collaborative cultural action projects to build a body of knowledge through visual and verbal images as well as text. Discourse analysis is important to show the relationship

between informants, participants and the meaning carried by all images and texts. In order to do this I looked for recurring themes and grouped those using key words in relation to the social context and the existing body of literature in which meaning could be derived.

Discourse analysis was used to examine the socio-political context of both Western and Indigenous cultures in which I conducted my research. Participant observations allowed me to look for ‘patterns in textual material and using this knowledge to draw assumptions about how messages and meanings are both represented in and communicated’ (Lupton, cited in Minichiello, Sullivan, Greenwood & Axford 2004:484). Materials included all written documents such as transcripts of video and audiotape interviews, public speeches, letters, emails, contracts, minutes (records) from committee meetings and published stories. I examined these materials to identify relationships between participants and to the social, political and cultural issues which impacted on Indigenous people in the region. This material became important data that contributed to the body of evidence which emerged to build the picture of what was being generated as both research processes and outcomes. This discourse analysis occurred regularly over the life of the five projects and was incorporated into the body of the thesis to showcase the participant observation roles I used in the field.

### *3.7.3 Participant Observation Analysis*

My various roles in and around Derby involved regular discussions with participants to reflect on their experiences and to be informed by the

context in which planning and development of the projects occurred. This strategy was based on Saukko's (2005:346) claim referring to the importance of 'being aware, in the dialogic spirit, of local realities that may challenge general analyses as well as being self-reflexively conscious of the political nature of its analysis'. Saukko's (2005) approach lends itself well to the unique position of an insider researcher, as I was in these projects. This type of analysis stimulated discussions with participants in order to understand their views within the wider social context. Consequently, in a reciprocal way the participants increased their understanding of the wider social context and stimulated ongoing dialogue. I coordinated meetings so participants could discuss issues and effectively participate in the continual cyclic process; planning, action, observation and reflection. Discussion and analysis which emerged from the cultural action projects contributed to the research analysis.

#### *3.7.4 Video Recording Analysis*

Video was used to record cultural activities of Nyikina people for instruction in the Nyikina Language and Culture Course. I collaborated with a film maker to produce several drafts of the cultural activities. Each of the draft versions were provided to the mentors and cultural consultants who participated in the cultural activities depicted in the video. This work contributed to and shaped the final product for public viewing. The videos of these cultural activities have been used as educational videos for teaching Nyikina culture and reaffirming Nyikina identity (Madjulla Inc. 2004c and 2004d).

The research informants and participants in the *Saying No Way to Family and Community Violence* Project, involved Indigenous leaders in the West Kimberley who were able to retain power over the video recording material that was released to the public. It was on the grounds of being given the freedom to determine how they would be seen publicly that Indigenous leaders agreed to participate in the video recordings. These leaders believed video recording was a meaningful way to get their stories across because they had the power to tell their own stories in their own ways. Several community members went on to develop their capacity to produce their own audiovisual materials.

In this study, Indigenous cultures were made visible to the outside world through the use of video documentation and film making. Through continuous discussion generated around the continuous reviewing of subsequent drafts of the audio-visual footage by the participants I consolidated the view that film was both laborious and a culturally appropriate technique to both build evidence and engage community members in the study. The draft recordings provided immediate feedback regarding how informants were being represented. The audio-visual data provided a rich description of Indigenous community lives. Many of the informants came from an oral story telling tradition and had low levels of text literacy. The video documentation provided informants with a tool to gauge how accurately the material reflected their knowledge and experiences. This process involved Aboriginal people reviewing their recorded material and discussing themselves as Freire (1968) describes as subjects not objects. Participants and informants were encouraged

to be active in decision making, inquiring, knowing, taking action and owning the knowledge, consequences and outcomes of their collaboration.

The analytical process of interpreting video footage in this study became a culturally important method to not only collect but also to analyse the data in this study. Furthermore each story was filmed and reviewed with the full cooperation and guidance of the Nyikina Inc. Executive Committee. I interpreted the data through the multiple roles I played as researcher, facilitator, transcriber, producer and director. The identification and analysis of the emerging themes in each of the data chapters emerged only because of careful thoughtful laborious film making process. Careful attention was paid to academic rigor and competence in data collection, analysis and interpretation of the full body of the knowledge generated in the present the study. Careful collection and analysis are necessary to the process of capturing and importing the data into personal and community stories.

According to Gillian Rose (2007) when viewing the films produced as part of this research there needs to be full attention paid to the fact that the processes of film making is a complicated process with many steps. The first thing is having an idea of how the story line can be captured on film before starting to capture footage. Be very clear about the intended use of the film in the initial request of interview. This needs to be repeated the moment before data is to be recorded when filming on location. Set up the scene or the location to capture the data visually and with the best audio sound possible. The researcher must have the capacity to have a 'fall back' strategy if participants

and or their communities withdraw their participation from the process, even at the last five minutes before shooting. The researcher must be prepared to sit for long hours, days and sometimes weeks with a professional film editor to sort through the hours of footage to capture the meaning of what the participants are saying.

The video recordings provided an inside perspective of community life, in a range of settings which identify Indigenous community-generated solutions. During the cultural action projects and at community meetings the participants and I discussed which cultural activities should be made into DVD format for cultural affirmation and education purposes. Other video material was used to create documentary style information advocating development of community partnerships. Data was edited to produce video recordings of local people to reinforce a positive sense of identity and construct a collective community ownership, often providing an optimistic and positive view of the present and future. Of critical importance in making, preserving and showcasing this knowledge base using film was the constant and frequently requested position by all community members who agreed to be film. The position negotiated by each individual person was their desire to be continually and publicly represented in the work they have committed to film long after they have passed away, died. All community members who participated in the films wanted to be remembered and not forgotten after they have passed away which is in contrast to the generally accepted wider Indigenous Australian position. This position on Indigenous films is that *Aboriginal images and voices should not be seen or heard after individuals die and this must be documented*



*on the screen before viewing*. This is the usual practice when viewing public films despite the fact that many Indigenous people in remote areas who view these films may be further disadvantaged because they are not literate and cannot read the texts of the *warning*. The position of Nyikina people being viewed in these films after their death is now being respected by having a *waiting time* for viewing such footage. This *waiting time* is negotiated directly with significant family members through significant family members dependent on the status of the community member who has passed away.

### 3.7.5 *Interview Analysis*

After the Nyikina Language and Culture project and the formation of Nyikina Inc., I conducted semi-structured interviews with seven Nyikina informants who had participated in the cultural action projects in Derby which were recorded on audio tapes and transcribed. The opportunity to interview these seven Nyikina people in and around Derby was important to the research process and outcomes. As an insider I wanted to validate my own understanding of how other Nyikina people were responding to the cultural action projects being implemented in Derby.

The interviews captured in the video recording *Saying No Way to Family and Community Violence* project were transcribed and analysed as written texts. These interviews provided a rich source of data about community cultural development projects in the West Kimberley region involving Indigenous peoples from remote communities, Derby and Fitzroy Crossing. As described earlier, the Malarabah Regional Councillors and the other participants

of the *Saying No Way to Family and Community Violence* project were provided with a draft copy of the project report and in turn my interpretation and analysis to review and comment upon. All participants were requested to pay particular attention to the vignette capturing their words to help to ensure the accuracy of what was being said and in turn to comment on my interpretation of their situation.

The transcriptions from the audio and video tapes were examined and analysed to identify recurring themes and concepts. This form of analysis is informed by the work of Wiles, Rosenberg & Kearns (2005:97) to counter challenges caused by moving:

away from treating the elements of the interview talk as an object of analysis ... [by refraining from] treating the elements of the interview talk as discrete units to be codified, counted and depersonalised, to a more contextual analysis of interpretation.

Themes and concepts were analysed to increase an understanding of the contemporary experience of non-Nyikina and Nyikina people living in the West Kimberley region of Western Australia. I then analysed the perceptions and views of Nyikina people in relation to the socio-historical and political context that had influenced their lived experiences.

### **3.8 Discussion**

This chapter paid particular attention to the ethical considerations necessary to collect and analyse data for this Indigenous research. The chapter identified a wide range of methods for gathering data that was appropriate for

this particular cultural setting. The research was grounded in the views and actions taken by Indigenous people in the West Kimberley region of Western Australia. Our history, hopes and actions started a process of community participation through which a series of cultural action projects were planned, actioned, reflected upon and revised to investigate emerging community cultural development. Elements of Western and Indigenous research methodologies were linked to the conceptual framework which was identified in the literature review and this framework informed this research project. My academic experience and personal experience as a Nyikina woman living and working with my people in the West Kimberley region contributed to understanding and responding to both the Indigenous and the academic world.

I have presented an overview of each of the projects that are included in this action research thesis by grounding the research in its local context. I have provided my interpretation of action research, guided by Freire's (1968 & 2001) conceptual framework to ultimately empower the community in which these projects took place. The following chapter, Chapter 4, privileges the voices and the lived experiences of seven Nyikina people and documents their reflections on how they define 'being Nyikina'. This sense of 'being Nyikina' grounds the research context of this study and locates the following chapters, 5 and 7 in a personal and community narrative which has meaning to Indigenous people in the Kimberley region of Western Australia.

## **Chapter 4**

### **DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS PART A**

#### **Being *Nyikina***

##### **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter contains the interviews of seven Nyikina people to contextualise participation in the cultural action projects undertaken in this study. This contextual analysis is provided to increase an understanding about the social, cultural and political circumstances generated from the participant's views, perceptions and experiences.

##### **4.2 Social Context**

The literature review identified that many Nyikina people and their families were displaced into West Kimberley towns in the 1960s. This occurred as a consequence of a political and economic decision to require pastoralists to pay Indigenous cattlemen equal wages for their contribution to the thriving Kimberley pastoral industry. Indigenous families were relocated onto native reserves in nearby towns. As a consequence of this decision, Aboriginal families have been living in Derby for several generations. However, over the past twenty years Nyikina and other Indigenous people have been returning to their homelands along the *Mardoowarra*, the mighty Fitzroy River.

### **4.3 Interviews**

During the study I interviewed seven Nyikina people in Derby to increase my understanding about how they perceived the cultural participation of Nyikina people influenced their personal engagement within this local context. This involved a single 40-50 minute interview with me. These informants have been provided with numbers as the more formal interview process required the use of pseudonyms to protect their identity and maintain confidentiality. Direct quotes have been used to give voice to these people to provide the reader with an insight into their lived experiences. Analysis of the interviews uncovered six themes: 1) categorising Nyikina people, 2) *liyan*, 3) identity, 4) disconnection from *kandri*, 5) Nyikina resilience and 6) methods for overcoming disadvantage. Each of these themes is presented and discussed in turn below.

#### *4.3.1 Nyikina People*

The interviews undertaken provided an insight into the ways in which Nyikina people have transitioned into contemporary life. This insight is useful to understanding the social context in which Nyikina people in Derby live, work and recreate, as Informant 7 explains:

I put it in three categories. The traditional people are still carrying on in the way that they know best from a traditional perspective and trying to exist in the western world ... then you've got people in the middle who are trying to manage through the western way of life. Be it working in the mines or the hospital and trying to acknowledge their cultural identity, but only in small stabs. This informant describes this as:

And then there are people who are just completely cut off. They've just lost it. They're aware of it in the back of their minds, but their minds are tied up in chasing the rainbow and trying to chase that capitalistic way of life. And they've severed their ties ... They've made their mind up which road they're going down. (Informant 7)

Informant 7 separated Nyikina people into categories: the first was traditionally oriented people living a subsistence lifestyle in the town on the edge of Western society. These Nyikina people in Derby lived on the town reserve and in public housing. In contemporary Australian life Nyikina people continue to experienced intergenerational violence, unemployment and limited education, and continue to be reliant on government welfare and handouts. The second category consisted of Nyikina people who were living a Western lifestyle and yet still maintain traditional cultural associations and practices. Nyikina people in this situation had been exposed to Nyikina families who had maintained a level of Nyikina cultural knowledge and practices, while mastering mainstream skills and knowledge. These Nyikina people have the capacity to be resilient and resourceful, coexisting within Nyikina and *kardiya* world views. Other Nyikina people seem to have dissociated with their Indigenous heritage and live completely in the mainstream. The third category is those Nyikina people who have totally embraced a western lifestyle and tend not to acknowledge traditional, community and social relationships.

From my insider lived experience I have come to the view that some Nyikina people in these situations have chosen to construct their personal and community identity around *kardiya*, Western, values. Informant 7 suggest Aboriginal people who have taken this approach appear to do so because they

perceive this to be a survival mechanism for a smooth transformation for themselves and their families into contemporary Australian life. Nyikina people in Derby involved in Nyikina community cultural development have adopted a position whereby Nyikina people in this last category will be kept informed of the cultural actions in an attempt not to become exclusionist. In this way an open door policy has been adopted in case any of these disconnected Nyikina people or their children, wish to become involved in Nyikina community cultural development now or in the future.

The journey for Nyikina people is concerned with our way of life as Indigenous Australian people and our shared experiences of colonisation which continue to shape contemporary life. Without an awareness of the social context, outsiders will have little understanding of the intergenerational trauma impacting upon many Nyikina people. Christie (1991:26) views this as being ‘the context itself from which we are to learn. It is the context that starts us looking for alternative angles which transcend the limitations of pure empiricism’.

Those Nyikina people who were interviewed and participated in the cultural action projects have provided valuable information to reveal how they are attempting to overcome their position of disadvantage. By strengthening their individual knowledge and community practices some Nyikina people in Derby are focused on building individual resourcefulness and strengthening community resilience to promote social justice. Through understanding the social context and cultural forces that shape Nyikina people’s lived experiences,

outsiders can become informed about Nyikina people's interpersonal relationships and life events. Additionally outsiders can begin to appreciate power relationships and how these experiences influence Nyikina personal, organisational and community lives.

#### 4.3.2 *Liyan*

*Liyan* is a Nyikina word to describe 'feeling, emotion,' as documented by the linguist, Bronwyn Stokes, and her cultural advisors Gladys Johnson and Lucy Marshall (Stokes, Johnson and Marshall 1980). The first Nyikina-English lexicon appeared in the book *Mandajarra Nyikina* (Madjulla Inc. 2004e) which is a component of the Nyikina Language and Culture Kit developed as part of Cultural Action 1 in this study. Bardi people live to the north-west of Nyikina people's traditional lands and as members of the Nyulnyulan language family share words. The Bardi Dictionary describes *liyan* in the context of generating good and bad feeling and how these feelings impact on social, emotional and spiritual wellbeing (Kimberley Language Resource Centre 1999). Informant 1 defines *Liyan* as:

*Liyan* mean he [your spirit, inner being] gonna push you, you can feel free to talk to - and if he [your spirit, inner being is] blocking you say, 'oh well, I want to go here and I want to talk to that person. That's your feeling. If your feeling saying 'no', you don't go there. Sometimes you fight the fight to go there. But you find out it's too late. That's what they call *liyan*. (Informant 1)

Informant 5 defines *liyan* in terms of spirituality, saying:



It's just like a, it's just like a soul. Your *liyan*, you know. It's just like something spiritual in you ... it's there all the time. I'm not really a spiritual person. I'm a practical person. But you still believe, you have to live by a code. Everybody has to live by a code, and, that's why I just can't understand how these people that's benefiting have the right to how they're feeling. Every blackfella thinks about *liyan*. I wonder what their *liyan* is. You know? Like, if it's troubling them, that's all. Not doing the right thing in blackfella law. It affects black people more I'd say. (Informant 5)

The theme of *liyan* is well recognised as having meaning to Nyikina people. The informants identify *liyan* as deep personal beliefs, which underpin core values. *Liyan* embodies the core of Nyikina consciousness, which determines the status of individual emotional, psychological and physical wellbeing. *Liyan*, the capacity to stay true to one's self, is connected to body, land and spirit and provides a sense of balance, as Informant 3 explains:

I suppose everybody has their own individual belief, probably to do with their Dreamings or whatever, what they feel within themselves. As a younger child I used to have a lot of dreams. Now as an adult they make more sense, in connection with *kandri*. And those places up here, to believe in it yourself, to be able to make others believe. Not make them believe; leave it up to them to believe. I just feel the need all of a sudden to go there [to the traditional lands]. Just like, you feel, there's a part of you, something missing. Something is not there. You know ... I feel if I go back there, or if I go there, it will fill something. I can't explain it but I just feel it. Feeling connected and a sense that you belong. I think, I feel I'm connected to there and I have to go back there in order to be full again I suppose. Maybe to get the strength ... to enrich my spirit ... my *liyan*. (Informant 3)

The meaning of *liyan* is used to describe the capacity of individuals to make choices in their lives, on how to be guided through places and circumstances that unfold in daily events, as Informant 4 explains:

The *liyan* in the Nyikina way is, in our culture way, is the spirit in the river, the spirit from the Dreamtime. Well that's our birthplace, land. It's our blood, our *liyan*, in the culture word. (Informant 4)

Informant 7 described *liyan* as:

It's your spirit, it's a feeling inside you, which helps you to make a decision about which way you are going to move. It's your inner voice that determines how you make the choice to work with it [your *liyan*] or against it. (Informant 7)

*Liyan* is acknowledged as being powerful because *liyan* is known through a proliferation of spiritual manifestations, present everywhere in the natural and social world. This understanding of *liyan* is sometimes interpreted by the individuals as a 'sign' which intuitively helps to make informed choices to make the right or wrong decision, as is seen in the quotes from the informants above.

The concept of *Liyan* emerged from many of the informants when they described their personal resilience. *Liyan*, for Nyikina people, is based on the belief in the principles of reciprocity and like-mindedness in regard to the position of the individual as being a Nyikina person and their fit within Nyikina codes of conduct. *Liyan* is witnessed in the hearts and minds of Nyikina people through continued dialogue, reflection, hope and a sense of spirituality, intuition and consciousness. The informants in this study provide insight in how

they relate *liyan* to health by confirming it is connected to what Phillips (2003:27) believes is ‘spirit, creation, emotions, cognitive function, knowledge, culture, land, place, cultural obligations to land, body chemicals and reactions, history and collective familial and community wellbeing’. This insight fosters the notion that engaging cultural action can build individual and community wellbeing.

#### *4.3.3 Identity*

Nyikina identity is a matter of constructing and displaying a sense of cultural pride. This sense of Nyikina cultural identity is located in the past, present and future. It is something that already exists, transcending place, time, and history however the events of the past and present influence the constant transformation Nyikina cultural identity is undergoing. Informant 5 identified the need for Nyikina people to reconstruct identity within a contemporary context:

As a Nyikina person I went from family to family to find out where I come from. I've built a lot of relationships ... and I keep it [my cultural identity] as best as I can, respecting everybody and what they believe. And I tell my kids that they're Nyikina and where they come from. The recovery process is very slow. There were people living in town that didn't believe in it [Nyikina culture]. It's the relationships I reckon. That's what builds it and you sort of work from there and you go and you broaden it. And you find out more information and that's how you sort of learn to survive, it's who you are. Because if you don't you're lost and you're sort of going in circles going round and round finding out who you are and get your

grounding. I don't really cope well with contemporary lifestyle at times. (Informant 5)

Informant 5 describes his/her constant attempts to search out and be validated by other Nyikina people in an effort to build personal and community identity. Informant 5 was seeking the opinions of other Nyikina people to assist in building his/her cultural identity from different points of view. The end result is this informant admits they do not cope well with modern life.

Identity suggests the construction and maintenance of personal identity for Nyikina people is a collective community responsibility, which is rooted in relationships of a person's own making, as suggested by informants 1 and 5 above. Okely and Galloway (1992:126) state 'identities are constructed reciprocally; selves and others are invented and mutually objectified'. To this end, Indigenous identity is grounded in personal and community experiences, thus involves both a collective cultural identity in addition to an individual identity.

#### *4.3.4 Disconnection from Kandri*

Among all the informants there is an overall sense of loss, loss of land, loss of hunting rights, loss of dignity, and loss of the ability to be self-determining and self-managing in their own affairs, as seen in these words from Informant 1:

Well, I had to fight. I broke some rules, too. Because they were really mongrel too, you know? I had to break that rules. (Informant 1)

These experiences relate to personally challenging the new rules because this informant could not understand how the new rules would impact on their life. The transition to a new way of life requires understanding the new rules and new rituals. According to Turner (1985) it requires reintegration and incorporation of new values after challenging the old rules and reflecting on new ways of living. Informant 1 believed the rules were bad rules and challenged the lawmakers by breaking their rules. The data suggests Nyikina people are beginning to look inside themselves and their immediate surroundings for a sense of self and purpose.

#### *4.3.5 Resilience*

Nyikina Elder, Lucy Marshall, who championed the Nyikina cultural action projects in Derby illustrates how resilience has enable her people to function today:

Those people under the Aboriginal Act, they wasn't allowed to mix with white people, they wasn't allowed to mix with coloured people. The workers used to have their tea in the kitchen and the managers had their own dining room. And in the stock job, they sit down [by themselves] self and the Aboriginal people camp all 'round ... But I don't live in the past. I live in the modern world now, today. Like I said to my kids, we're the modern Aboriginals today. (Marshall 2004:44)

Elders, such as Lucy Marshall, were often caught between the positions assigned by past and present laws, customs, conventions and ceremonies. She believes this sense of the self is important in the construction

of identity as it relates to social cohesion, because without a social context, identity and a sense of self are meaningless. The data from the interviews further supports this view, with Informant 7 saying:

From a resilience and resourcefulness point of view, people are congregating and setting up language groups, are setting up a forum, an official forum under the name of the traditional background Nyikina association to start talking about all these issues. I think that's a real strategy. It looks like a coordinated approach to narrowing down some of the opportunities that are out there.  
(Informant 7)

Informant 7 provides information to suggest Nyikina people in Derby are transforming themselves through a unified approach towards their position of disadvantage, as is detailed in this thesis. This transformation has given rise to the emergence of a new identity that suits the needs of Nyikina people in Derby. This unified approach is critical to building a collective vision for unity amongst Nyikina people.

#### *4.3.6 Overcoming Nyikina Disadvantage*

Along with many examples of negative life experience in the stories of the informants and Nyikina people in general as detailed in the Chapter 2, there is also a sense of hope, a sense of survival and determination to revitalise traditional knowledge and practices to promote personal, family and community wellbeing. The wellbeing and transformation of Nyikina people is associated with their experiences and their connection with other people which is linked through a connection to *kandri* and their family. These Nyikina people

are collectively mobilising socially constructed responses in the form of cultural action, as Informant 6 describes:

In regards to just the Nyikina people that have come to Derby, I think there's been a lot of success stories of families being able to cope with the change; and being able to have their children educated. You know, with further education at university level, going through schools development programs so that their children will gain benefits of living a better lifestyle and being able to cope with all the changes that have taken place in the world today. I think a lot of the responsibility is on family. The family is the main structure to build, encourage, evaluate resources and to tap into opportunities. (Informant 6)

Informant 6 believes the influence of family is the primary agent for developing rules and codes for living in contemporary Australian communities. Recognition by her/him for some Nyikina people to redress their situation of disadvantage is cited in their ability to survive and build a new future, from their previous traditional life on their land, to their new contemporary life style away from the Nyikina traditional homelands. Informant 6 repeatedly acknowledged the changing concept of culture and the need to reignite, maintain and strengthen cultural knowledge, language and practices as a process for building personal and community capacity. S/he recognised the wellbeing of Nyikina people is reliant on building personal and group capacity through Western education. The harmony of oppressed Nyikina people is only possible when group members are engaged in the struggle to overcome their position of disadvantage.

The data suggest Nyikina people have a broad understanding of their colonial experiences and how this impacts on their everyday lives now. They have offered insight into how the community cultural development of Nyikina people living in Derby is strengthening social cohesion to rebuild the pride of Nyikina people in an effort to strengthen positive cultural identity. In this way, Freire's (1968) notion of dialogic action is useful in understanding the ways in which empowered people are connected to individual, family and community cultural regeneration and renewal (Freire 2001). This research links the relationship of Indigenous concepts of wellbeing to being socially connected to individual, family and community renewal. This renewal is focused on building Nyikina identity. Furthermore, this unified and holistic approach needs to consider what is acceptable for Nyikina people to ensure everyone who wants to participate in the cultural actions has an opportunity to do so.

Cultural action has become a systemic and deliberate form of action for Nyikina people in Derby to ensure the longevity of the unique culture of Nyikina people and our health and wellbeing. Nyikina people are using this action to preserve and transform Nyikina language and culture. Cultural action is being achieved by documenting and video recording language, making cultural books and films as well as participating in public meetings and launches. All these processes can be viewed as increasing dialogic action, which has resulted in a sense of liberation and empowerment for Nyikina people. Nyikina people who described themselves as lost are now beginning to



relocate a sense of their own self-determination by engaging in community cultural development to bring about permanent change.

It is important to understand that, as well as the many points of similarity within Nyikina communities there are also some critical points of difference. The similarities and the difference help to define who Nyikina people really are; or rather, since history has intervened, what Nyikina people have become. The experience of profound discontinuity identified by Informant 7 is now grounded in an economic paradigm:

I think the second part to that is to identify the economic opportunities that are there. This world is not the way we would like it to work. This world is the way it is. And the way is economics. So we need to identify the economic opportunities on that, because that immediately contributes to our social wellbeing and the biggest thing there is, we need to start building pride. That's what's gone out of all of us. That pride as a nation of people. And if we don't get that pride as a nation of people, then I think that's the biggest obstacle that's gonna bring us down. (Informant 7)

Informant 7 confirmed Pearson's (2000) view that if Indigenous people are going to continue to survive, our survival will be dependent on shifting from welfare based government funding towards wealth creation to overcome the position of disadvantage currently experienced. (Pearson 2000).

#### **4.4 Discussion**

The Nyikina informants painted a vivid picture of how effective the colonial experience has been in eroding the human spirit of Nyikina people. The interviews provide an increased understanding of the personal impact of

being dispersed from the traditional land for contemporary Nyikina people in Derby. The issue for these Nyikina informants is the scale of disruption, change and anxiety to the lives of Nyikina people that has occurred in a little over one hundred and twenty years since the colonisation of the region in 1880.

The seven Nyikina people interviewed provided insight into their despair; however they are overcoming their position of disadvantage by focusing on hope. The evidence presented by Nyikina people in this research is a story of triumph. Nyikina people in Derby have clung to their individual and collective identity over generations of separation from *kandri*, making it all the more important for Nyikina people who have never been to their traditional lands to identify themselves as Nyikina. In this context these Nyikina people have identified cultural actions to generate community solutions to improve wellbeing result in sustainable community cultural development. This type of community cultural development is important for Nyikina people to build new skills to cope with the continuing transition from their position of disadvantage, which they want to overcome.

The interviews provided details of how Nyikina people are overcoming adversity. Participation in the cultural action projects discussed in the following Chapter 5 has given rise to the emergence of a revitalised identity that suits the needs of Nyikina people, giving them a sense of 'being *Nyikina*;' a sense of autonomy and dignity.

## **Chapter 5**

### **DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS PART B**

#### **Cultural Action Project 1: *Nyikina Language and***

#### ***Culture Project***

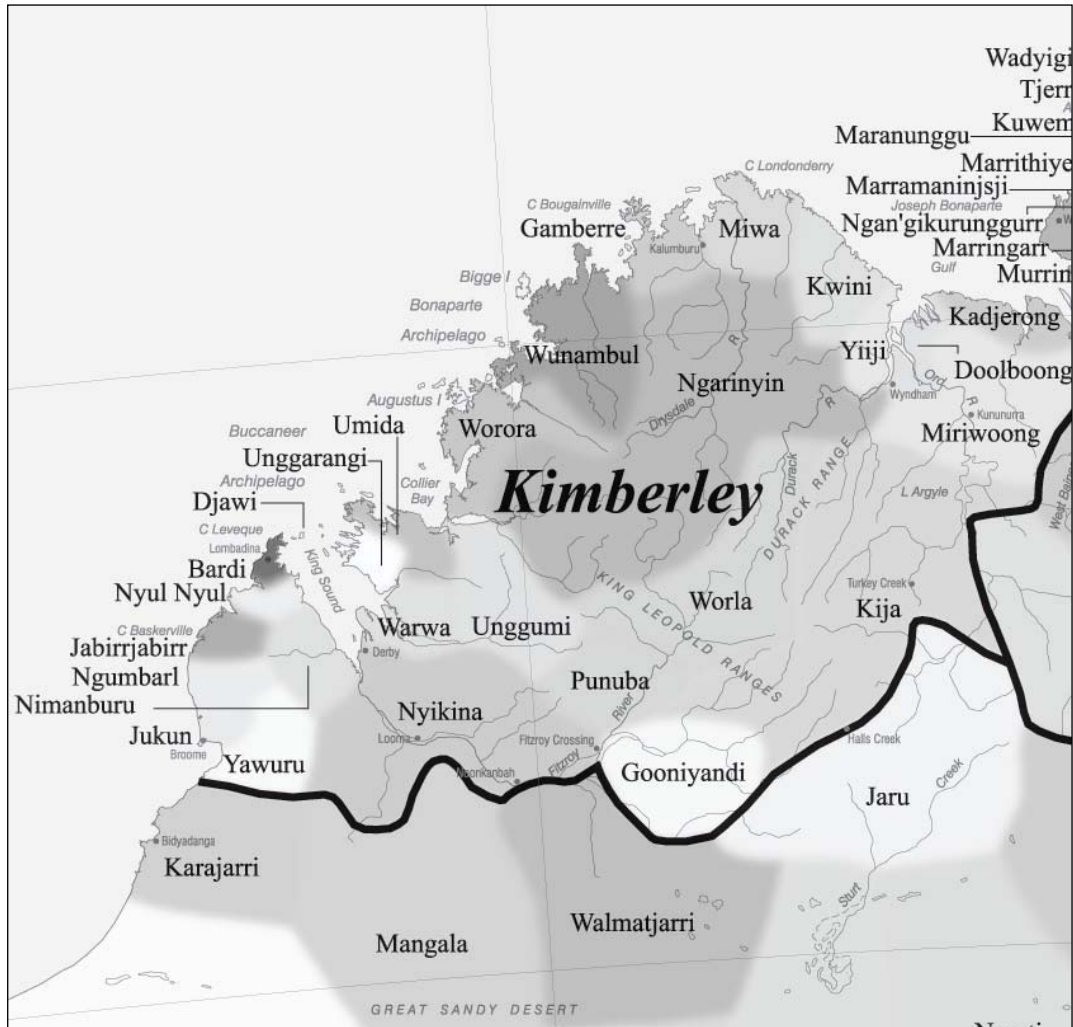
#### **Cultural Action Project 2: *Nyikina Incorporated***

##### **5.1 Introduction**

In this chapter data from two cultural action projects undertaken by Nyikina people living in Derby are presented and analysed. The first section provides the social context for orienting the study. This chapter examines the cultural action of Projects 1 and 2 through an analysis of community cultural development in these projects. The analysis explores the collaboration between me and Nyikina people living in Derby.

##### **5.2 Socio-historical Context of Projects 1 and 2**

Nyikina is an Indigenous language of the West Kimberley region of Western Australia. Its closest genetic relatives are Nyulnyul and Bardi of the Dampier Peninsula. The Nyikina language is regarded as an endangered Aboriginal language with fewer than 20 fluent speakers. Nyikina *kandri* is along the western reaches of the Fitzroy River to King Sound. The Nyikina *kandri* boundary extends north to the Oscar Range and southward to Dampier Downs Station and captures the township of Derby (Horton 2000).



**Map 3:** *Aboriginal Australia Section B2, (AIATSIS)*

This map is just one representation of many other map sources that are available for Aboriginal Australia. Using published resources available between 1988–1994, this map attempts to represent all the language or tribal or nation groups of the Indigenous people of Australia. It indicates only the general location of larger groupings of people which may include smaller groups such as clans, dialects or individual languages in a group. Boundaries are not intended to be exact. This map is NOT SUITABLE FOR USE IN NATIVE TITLE AND OTHER LAND CLAIMS. The views expressed in this publication are those of the author and not those of AIATSIS. David R Horton, creator, © Aboriginal Studies Press, AIATSIS and Auslig/Sinclair, Knight, Merz, 1996.

The history of colonisation in this area has been such that English, Kriol and other Indigenous languages, such as Walmajarri and Mangala, have contaminated the Nyikina language. There are now only a few speakers and only small numbers of Nyikina people learning Nyikina. Initial Nyikina linguistic work was carried out by Dr Bronwyn Stokes between 1979 and 1986.

She developed an extensive wordlist, some story texts and some grammar lesson outlines and these were lodged with the Derby public library in the early 1980's. However, the literacy level required to access these resources made them inaccessible to the Nyikina people. Yet, since Dr Stokes began her efforts in 1979 there has been a strong feeling amongst Nyikina people that the Nyikina language must not be allowed to disappear, and since 2000, Nyikina people in the West Kimberley have been taking steps to learn how to read and write it.

The first part of this chapter presents the cultural action project 1, which allowed me to document and explore the ways Nyikina people are preserving and maintaining our language and culture. The project built a database of language and cultural knowledge for current and future generations of Nyikina people. (Appendix 11: Brochure Nyikina Language and Culture Resource Kit 2004). Furthermore this project describes the benefits of the study going beyond the creation of cultural materials. By drawing together people with a shared interest the project built a sense of collective will. Cultural action project 2 formalised the emerging network as an incorporated non-government organisation that has continued to document, preserve and promote Nyikina language, culture and identity.

### **5.3 Cultural Action Project 1: *Nyikina Language and Culture Project***

As previously mentioned, my sister Lucy Marshall, a Nyikina Elder approached me, in November 2003, to use my skills and experience to generate

cultural action to help Nyikina people in Derby document and practice their Nyikina language and culture. This coincided with my progression from a professional doctorate into a Doctor of Philosophy program and thus became the first action research project for this doctorate.

I entered the research environment with two tasks in mind, firstly to find the funding to do the work Lucy had requested of me and secondly, to work with Lucy to bring together local Nyikina people in Derby to support the language and culture work. The now disbanded Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Service (ATSIS) provided project funding to ‘enable development of materials which will maintain the Nyikina language within the community and encourage community members to increase and pass on their Nyikina language skills’ (Malarabah ATSIC Regional Council, Annual Report 2003:45).

This initial funding was for a one year period to bring together a project team of cultural, information technology and linguistic consultants to work under the guidance of the committee of Elders. These Elders were committed to build on the work previously done by Dr. Stokes when she worked with Lucy and other Nyikina speakers over twenty-five years ago. Some of these same Nyikina Elders and their family members were involved in the Nyikina Language and Culture Project.

The project team worked with fluent Nyikina speakers to further develop an analysis and explain the structure of Nyikina language as well as document and record Nyikina stories. The process of documenting and preserving the language and the culture, the researcher as well as the Nyikina

people realised the depth and breadth of their story. It was only through the development of this first section of this research that the full worth of the story became evident. The stories were published in a variety of formats, including video/DVD, CD-ROM's, books and bilingual educational materials to encourage learning language and listening to Nyikina legends in a range of formats and to make these resources accessible to all. All of these cultural products were published within the year long project as part of the Nyikina Language and Culture Resource Kit. Copies of this kit are held in the Australian National Library and Western Australia State Library. One of the outcomes from the Nyikina Language and Cultural Resource Kit included Lucy Marshall's story, *Reflections of a Kimberley Woman* which was published as part of Cultural Action Project 1 in 2004 and is examined below.

### *5.3.1 Reflections of a Kimberley Woman*

On 29 September 2004 Lucy Marshall launched her book, *Reflections of a Kimberley Woman*. The book was published to increase an awareness of the lives of Nyikina people in the Kimberley and is included as part of the Nyikina Language and Cultural Resource Kit. The partnership; between Lucy the storyteller and Colleen Hattersley who was the storywriter, editor and linguist began in 1988. Colleen has developed a high level of expertise in Nyikina language and has maintained close personal friendships with Nyikina people over the years. Colleen was the principle facilitator bridging the technical expertise with local Indigenous knowledge in the Nyikina Language and Culture Project. Colleen also worked with Lucy to

finalise her story for inclusion in the resource kit that came out of Cultural Action Project 1. In Colleen's speech at the book launch she said:

First of all I would like to acknowledge that we are here today on the *kandri* of the Nyikina people and I would like to thank the Nyikina people for looking after the country so that we can enjoy it as we do today. I would like to thank everybody here who's come along. It is wonderful to see so many friends and so much support for Lucy and for her bravery in putting her words and her story into print.

What I wanted to say about Lucy's story from my point of view was that Lucy's life has covered a very important era of change where her early childhood on the station was still very much a semi-traditional way. The cultural practices were still available to people in a very strong way, but the new culture was coming in about learning to live in the white way. Lucy learned both of those cultures very strongly and she's carried that all through her life.

For me, and a lot of people I know, all of that is just in books. But for Lucy and many of you people here, it's your life and it's your memories. And for the rest of the country to be able to share that and to understand just a little bit – is just so very important. If there is anybody else here who is thinking along the lines of, 'well I've got a story to tell' please do something about it, because Australians need to know.

Of course Lucy lived through the time when the equal wages came in and all of that life on the stations was disrupted. I don't have to tell you people here how hard it was when all that change happened and you came into town and life was pretty bad. And now, you are just so strong and picking up and making things go forward. This story of Lucy's tells people about that. It's about all of those



processes and changes and challenges and the strength that was needed to go through them. (Hattersley 2004:1)

The publication of Lucy's book is a positive expression of reconciliation in action. It was a partnership between a non-literate Nyikina woman and a non-Indigenous woman. Colleen Hattersley made the commitment to become a linguist as a strategy to assist her to hear and write Lucy's story. Colleen and Lucy's partnership continues to build friendship and trust. Colleen's ability to relate with Lucy and other Nyikina people was important for the successful collaboration with the information technology, publishing, and curriculum and education resources technical consultants throughout the Nyikina Language and Culture Project.

Joan Rose, a long time non-Indigenous friend of Lucy, and wife of the station owner on Mt Anderson where Lucy spent much of her time growing up, could not attend the book launch but sent a letter which was inserted in Lucy's book and read to the audience by Lucy's daughter. Mrs Rose passed away in January 2007.

To my dear Lucy,

Congratulations on putting together your memoir and telling us the complexities of your many traditional languages and customs of which we were unaware. My first recollections of you are of a little girl with bright eyes and a lovely smile. You were very intelligent, quick and eager to learn. You have led a remarkable life taking on the responsibilities of your family and many relatives whilst being actively concerned with the rights and welfare of your people and I am very proud of you.

Reflections of a Kimberley Woman will be a treasured account of both Aboriginals and white people during the early years. Sadly, I won't be able to be with you at the launching of your book today, but I will be thinking of you especially and all of those with whom I have had a close association at Mount Anderson. (Rose in Marshall 2004:1)

The letter from Joan Rose, a 90 year old woman at the time who was the wife of the pastoral station owner during Lucy's youth, is included because in Rose's own words she confirmed how Lucy's memoirs revealed to her the complexities of traditional languages and customs of which she had been unaware. Despite having a close association over a substantial period of time, Rose was 'unaware' of the richness of Lucy's culture. The letter reveals the close bond, formed between these two people from very different positions in society. Lucy and her family had their lives controlled by the Roses as under the Act they were also regarded as the pastoralists' property. In her letter, Joan congratulates Lucy on writing the book and for providing a historical and contemporary account of a remarkable Nyikina woman's life.

The book has received several positive reviews; however there have also been some negative responses from Nyikina people such as my aunt who perceived the book to be 'airing events that would have best been left to rest with history' (Dora Hunter 2005, pers. comm., 26 January). Lucy's book does disclose a history of 'good times' as well as the abuse of her and other young girls, at the hands of men who believed they had the right to 'do with them what they wanted' (Marshall 2004:45). Not all Nyikina people approve of the self-

disclosure and possible negative perspective associated with Lucy's personal memoir.

### 5.3.2 *Nyikina Cultural Activities*

As part of this project, I produced two volumes of video recordings of cultural activities to demonstrate Nyikina cultural knowledge and practice. The short video recordings are part of the Nyikina Language and Cultural Resource Kit and highlight cultural protocol, values and norms. The cultural activities include going to and leaving the *billabong* (permanent waterhole). Other cultural activities include; learning how to make *windirri* (traditional hair belt), overlanding (killing and butchering cattle in the bush) and cooking kangaroo tails (Madjulla Inc. 2004c and 2004d). Each of these activities is briefly discussed below to show examples of how capturing cultural information in contemporary media is relevant to building cultural identity for Nyikina youth.

#### 5.3.2.1 Cultural Activity 1: *Going to the Billabong*

The cultural protocol of going to the billabong, the waterholes located along the Fitzroy River, requires a wide range of cultural knowledge and skills. Aunty Daisy Loongkoonan and Lucy Marshall grew up around these water holes. As cultural mentors they describe their role in the *Nyikina Cultural Activities*:

I will welcome you to the river. When you come to the river you must acknowledge you are a stranger in this country. You must ask

the river to look after you. (Daisy Loongkoonan in Madjulla Inc. 2004c)

Lucy validates Aunty Daisy's perspective in the following way:

I explain to the kids, when entering the river to introduce themselves to the river ... Smoke the river ... look for the track of the people and animals, look at the sky, see what is the wind doing ... The river it can be cruel, it can be kind ... look for the signs, the *kandri* will give you many clues. (Lucy Marshall in Madjulla Inc. 2004c)

Going to the billabong involves a ritual of gathering special plants to place on an open fire to create smoke. The smoking ceremony is an important cultural activity for making the connection between the river, the river serpent and the individual person. The cultural knowledge is necessary to ensure personal spiritual and physical safety. Another protocol requires intellectual sensitivity to understanding natural signs by being in harmony with the *kandri*. The signs can tell Nyikina people who and when other visitors were in the area.

#### 5.3.2.2 Cultural Activities 2: *Windirri*

*Windirri* is the Nyikina word for long hair. It is used in contemporary sense to describe spinning human hair into a hair belt to be used by Indigenous men for ceremonial purposes. I was able to use my cultural networks to locate cultural consultant Nora Nugaway to teach hair spinning for the teaching video. Nugaway is a Walmajarri woman from a neighbouring language who had been taught to spin hair by my grandmother, a *Koorabi*

*Koorabi* marnin, a Nyikina woman from the Nyikina community of Noonkanbah. In the *Nyikina Cultural Activities*:

Your granny, Emily Watson, bin teach me this how to spin hair into a hair belt when I was a young girl. Now I teach you. Now we putting this on to video so other people can learn so you don't all forget. (Nora Nugaway in Madjulla Inc. 2004c)

Nora Nugaway was in the role of teaching me these same skills with the aim of passing the knowledge on to others to prevent the art of spinning human hair being forgotten. The cultural knowledge and practice of making a *windirri* creates a strong symbiotic relationship between Nyikina men and women. Women have the responsibility of maintaining accurate knowledge and practice for this cultural activity.

This one [hair lengths] must be this long, we gotta separate'm [the hair] soak [the hair] in water, and we gotta join'm [the hair]. (Nora Nugaway in Madjulla Inc. 2004c)

While Nora was busy getting the hair ready for spinning Patsy Yambo, a senior woman from a neighbouring Mangala tribe, made the spindle. After identifying the correct plant species to make the spindle, Patsy begins by saying:

We cut this one and split the wood. Then you gotta straighten the wood in the fire. (Patsy Yambo in Madjulla Inc. 2004c)

Patsy completes the spindle by cutting the branch into three pieces and threads two shorter pieces into the remaining branch. She hands the spindle to Nora to start spinning the human hair. This cultural activity ensures Nyikina

young men going through initiation ceremonies wear correct traditional ceremonial dress. Initiated men wear the hair belt throughout their ceremonial life however women are responsible for making the belt.

### 5.3.2.3 Cultural Activities 3: *Overlanding*

*Overlanding* is the slaughter and butchering of a bullock on the open range. Much of the knowledge associated with *overlanding* is around safe use of the equipment and the safety of those around you when performing this ritual. Robert Watson, a Nyikina cattleman like his father, Ivan Watson and grandfather, William Watson before him, is a skilled and experienced station manager. In the *Nyikina Cultural Activities* Robert talks about *overlanding*, saying:

‘Overlanding is boning out an animal. On a cattle station everyone eats meat, so you go through a killer [bullock] every two weeks’.

He continues:

Always look after your equipment ... lock your rifle away it’s a very dangerous weapon, guns are not for playing around with ... its important to look after your knives, your axe ... put the axe away when you are not using it so that it does not get used for other purposes and is sharp and available to you when you need it for this. Look who’s behind you, make sure the head of the axe will not come loose when using the axe. Check your axe, feel it, look at it. Don’t just go at it with no coordination. Preparation is essential. Preparation is hard, but it is important so I can manoeuvre it [the bullock] as I need too. Whatever you are doing always think about it [safety]. You can get seriously hurt from a knife. It can take you one

second to cut yourself and [can] take [you] five months to heal.

(Robert Watson in Madjulla Inc. 2004d)

Robert Watson has a proven track record of being a pastoral industry trainer and mentor for Aboriginal men interested in pursuing the dream of working on a cattle station in the Kimberley. More recently Robert has taken on the role of cultural mentor for young marginalised people who want to make a connection with Nyikina *kandri* and culture.

#### 5.3.2.4 Cultural Activity 4: *Cooking Kangaroo Tails*

Kangaroo tails are purchased locally; however, they come from outside the region because past culling programs to eradicate this Australian native fauna have had an enduring impact on reducing local bush tucker including kangaroos and other wild life in the Kimberley. Over the past century, the pastoralists worked with the government to cull kangaroos and other native species to ensure the growth of grazing lands and use of watering holes for stock. The traditional hunting activities connected individuals and families to culture by developing strong ties between the environment and Indigenous responsibility for caring for the land.

These days cultural mentors like Robert Watson, talk to the young people about taking care of the environment and how the environment will take care of the people. In the *Nyikina Cultural Activities* Robert tells of this ancient practice:

When you are cooking tails, only dig a hole for the size of what you're cooking. Because the cooking occurs near the billabong and waterway you don't want to cause a wash-a-way [erosion].

... light the fire in the hole and clear all the leaves away from the fire [to ensure you have control of the fire and prevent any bush fires]. Burn the hair on one side and scrape it off then turn it [the kangaroo tail] around and do the other side ... don't let the hair burn too much on one side otherwise the dirt will get in [to the flesh on the tail]. Lay the tails in the hole and cover with the hot coals and sand [leaving the tails to cook for approximately half an hour depending on their size]. When you take the tails out [of the fire] be careful not to drop any hot coals as usually there are young kids walking around here [and they could be burnt]. Lay the cooked tails on the leaves [which are used to rest the hot tails on to cool off. The tails are then cut into sections and shared among visitors and family members]. (Robert Watson in Madjulla Inc. 2004d)

This demonstration by Robert Watson was captured on film to preserve cultural knowledge and practice. I captured on film a range of other cultural activities to demonstrate new and different ways of thinking about Nyikina cultural identity to ensure that Nyikina practices are continued into the future. Braziel and Mannur (2003:236) describe these types of images as 'resources of resistance and identity,' stating 'Crucially, such images offer a way of imposing imagery coherence on the experience of dispersal and fragmentation (Braziel and Mannur 2003:236). The opportunity for Nyikina people to come together to develop this cultural knowledge base is helping to strengthen their personal and collective cultural identity. Nyikina people are internalising culture by focusing on individual, family and community



regeneration and renewal as a deep motivating force for cultural action. These cultural activities connect contemporary Nyikina people with their heritage and historical events by teaching new generations of Nyikina the cultural protocol.

I produced the cultural resources as a means to communicate an understanding of the strength of cultural identity and heritage. Using modern technology to document is an effective way to increase awareness about cultural knowledge and practices within the Nyikina community. Nyikina people living in Derby are able to increase their cultural capital through the documentation and promotion of these cultural activities by locating them in a positive contemporary Australian context.

### *5.3.3 Public Launch of Nyikina Language and Cultural Resource Kit*

The Nyikina Language and Cultural Resource Kit was launched in Derby on the 29 September 2004. In her address at the launch, June Oscar, the Chair of the Kimberley Language Resource Centre, a Bunuba woman from a neighbouring Indigenous nation said:

It is great to be here today to share with you in your excitement and your pride with developing this very important tool, which will contribute to keeping this language strong and alive for many, many people in the future.

So this is really a proud day and an exciting time because look at all the young people here. You've got a really good chance for Nyikina continuing on for a long time because of these people here and because they have access to these types of resources. So for

everyone, the older speakers and the new speakers of the Nyikina language, we take our hats off to you all.

Maybe you might be able to share some of your secrets of how you got this many people involved because this is the same thing that other language groups face. How can we get our young people involved to be proud of language and interested in wanting to take part in the process? And some of you will be the language workers of the future for your language. And definitely the speakers will keep Nyikina alive for a long, long, long time yet.

Finally, in acknowledging the people that are here, the Nyikina speakers, I also want to acknowledge the speakers who have gone before. The people that contributed to today by handing on that knowledge, by passing it on to the speakers now and we'll always remember them when we speak this language. Always remember the ones who have gone before. It's your responsibility now to keep it going for the next mob. So, good on you. (Oscar 2004)

June publicly acknowledged the contribution arising from the research and development of the Nyikina Culture and Language Resource Kit. As the Chairperson for the Kimberley Language Resource Centre, June is a strong advocate for the preservation and maintenance required for keeping Indigenous languages alive and was encouraging in her remarks to young Nyikina people. She reinforced the need for young people to continue to be responsible for keeping language strong, with an emphasis on remembering the work begun by others who have died.

#### *5.3.4 Nyikina Language and Culture Course*

Following the development Nyikina Language and Culture Kit the participants decided this valuable teaching resource could be used to develop and deliver a Nyikina Language and Culture Course. The Elders supported the view that the course could be taught to and be delivered by Nyikina people who have been trained to present the course and use the resources. The course was not seen as an independent cultural action project. Rather, it was perceived by the Committee of Elders as a natural progression of the Nyikina Language and Culture Project, typical of action research models, whereby one project leads to another and there are advantageous spin offs from each project.

The planning and the development of funding applications to fund the Nyikina Language and Culture Course occurred from September 2004 through to January 2005. The funding process took five months to develop and was funded as a collaborative project between the Commonwealth Department of Communication Information Technology and the Arts and a philanthropic organisation from the United States of America, known as The Christensen Fund, resulting in the development and delivery of the very first Nyikina Language and Culture Course.

The funding paid for consultancy fees for travel, accommodation and meals for the consultant linguist and a professional training consultant. The funding covered the costs associated with field trips into remote areas for culture immersion programs, as well as paying Elders for their role as cultural

consultants to assist in developing the Nyikina Language and Culture Course.

The Christensen Fund Submission included the following course objectives:

Enhancing concepts of group identity and self esteem,

Building pride in generational history, language and culture,

Recognising skills and knowledge of community elders and encouraging respect for senior community members,

Creating an understanding of how people arrived at the situation they are in today,

Developing cultural and technical competencies,

Creating supportive cultural and workplace environments,

Generating mutually rewarding relationships which enhance reciprocity,

Creating a harmonious environment in which to share the diversity of rich cultural lived experiences,

Focus on the principles of self-determination and self-management.

(Madjulla Inc. 2005:4)

The course was conducted at the Kimberley College of TAFE; Derby Campus in 3-hour sessions, 3 nights a week over 6 weeks. The youngest participant was 10 years of age, with the oldest being in her late 60s. The course contributed to building the human, social and cultural capital of Nyikina people by increasing their language and cultural skills. The course focused on learning the relationships between land, people, culture and nature to build a healthy spirit for the survival of Nyikina language, culture and people.

Twelve people enrolled and completed the Nyikina Language and Culture Course. Ten of the graduates went on to enrol in a train the trainer program to develop the skills to deliver the course to their own family and cultural networks as well as in school settings. These same Nyikina people are becoming recognised for their cultural awareness and training which demonstrates how the course was able to increase their human, social and cultural capital around language and culture knowledge.

Nyikina people who undertook the training believe they have shown that endangered languages can be saved and that Aboriginal cultural knowledge does not have to disappear. These participants believe the success of the course will encourage other groups both nationally and internationally to follow this lead in resurrecting an almost extinct language. The following statement includes sections of the evaluation by the linguist/trainer on the course delivery and outcomes:

There is a sense of urgency amongst a range of Nyikina people who want to keep their language alive, who want children to learn their heritage language and who are keen to share it with all who are interested and will approach knowledge about the language with respect. They believe that if members of the wider community learn to express themselves in the language of the country, there will be a greater respect for that country and the people who belong there.

Feedback by one participant and informal comments indicate that members of the heritage community who may have known each other in passing, have now developed closer personal relationships. Thus, the classes have provided an avenue for strengthening unity within the heritage community as well as a sharing of knowledge

and encouragement ... Reinforcing identity through revitalising and maintaining language and culture can be a major element in developing social capital within the Aboriginal community. At the moment careful, gentle and reliable nurturing is required to ensure that the potential is realised.

Personal development, particularly of older participants, was encouraged by the requirement to make presentations to the class. From youngest to oldest, everyone's personal experience and contribution was acknowledged and valued through the provision of immediate constructive feedback. Participants were also encouraged by the generous contribution of language/culture consultants.  
(Hattersley 2006:9)

The enthusiasm with which Nyikina people embraced this course, and the interest shown by the wider community clearly illustrate that Nyikina people have not lost our language. The research demonstrates that Nyikina people are proactively trying to ensure its survival for future generations. We have used the opportunities of this research to preserve, maintain and develop our language as our social circumstances have changed.

#### **5.4 Cultural Action Project 2: *Nyikina Incorporated***

Early in 2004, Nyikina community members requested I formalise their meetings by developing a governance system to ensure the protection and sharing of the cultural materials. Lucy Marshall worked directly with me to involve other Nyikina people in a partnership to establish a committee to guide the establishment of an organisation to continue the work of revitalising Nyikina language and culture. On 22 March 2004, Lucy and I met with Elders who agreed to meet over the next few months to guide the establishment of

Nyikina Inc. Planning and action around the development and registration of an Indigenous community organisation occurred between June and July 2004 which resulted in the registration of Nyikina Inc.

The establishment of Nyikina Inc. was a cultural action project to build the capacity of Nyikina people living in Derby by forming an organisational structure to facilitate community cultural development. I grounded this approach on understandings derived from formally interviewing and casual conversation while working closely with Nyikina people. Informants identified the need to acquire new skills to adapt to their changing circumstances to enable them to cope with living in Derby.

Nyikina informants acknowledged the resilience of many Nyikina people living in Derby to survive the destruction and genocide of their nation. Turner (1985:159) asserts that ‘culture is a changing entity, influenced by root paradigms ... that propel and transform people and groups at critical moments’. The cultural actions associated with Cultural Action Project 1: *Nyikina Language and Culture Project* revealed a strong sense of urgency regarding the need for immediate action.

The investigation into Nyikina people’s colonial experience revealed the historical construction of disadvantage that has left many Nyikina people ill-equipped to function in contemporary Australia. Nyikina people in Derby witnessed Nyikina values being lost and cultural practices being changed. The skills required for Nyikina leadership have altered over time. The culture has been dissipated by outside agencies and that has resulted in the

current state of poverty, dis-ease and disadvantage. Indigenous leaders have struggled to be effective in the rapidly changing technological, social and political world. Through the development of Nyikina Inc. people saw a way of turning the tide, and creating a new future.

My researcher/ facilitator role was central to the establishment and the subsequent meetings and business of Nyikina Inc. Nyikina Inc. was registered as a not-for-profit organisation under the Western Australian Incorporations Act (1987) in August 2004. The association was established to increase social cohesion and foster participation in community life for Nyikina people through contemporary Nyikina cultural activities.

The Objects of the Association are:

To provide direct relief from poverty, sickness, suffering, destitution, misfortune, distress and helplessness to Nyikina Aborigine people and their families living in Western Australia without discrimination and to include, but without limiting the generality of the above, the following:

To support the social and cultural development of its members in all ways.

To support the education, training, research, evaluation of cultural and language maintenance in the survival of Nyikina knowledge and practices.

To bring about the self-support and advocacy of its members by the development of economic projects and industries.



To help and encourage its members to keep and renew their affairs upon their own lands.

To help and encourage its members to keep and renew their traditional culture and spiritual values.

To help build trust and friendship between its members and other people.

To participate in a partnership with others in projects of mutual benefit. (Nyikina Inc. 2004a:2)

The first meeting of the Association was held on 28 September 2004. Lucy Marshall welcomed community members to the meeting. Lucy's words were captured in the minutes:

That's the reason why we got this Nyikina [Inc.] association going. You got your own law. You working in your own law, own rules really. You got the *kardiya*, [white or European] rules, and Nyikina rules. You still got your rules from your four generations. You just think to yourselves, who you are.

What we are doing here, we are identifying as Nyikina right now. This table now is starting up to bring the whole family back together where they have been left behind. We know your grandmothers and where they come from, we are all related through our ancestors.

We want the Elders who can sing songs ... Songs are everything and I know the people who can sing who know the songs ... That's what I want to teach these leaders, in the family rules, not in the whiteman Western rules. This lot of people sitting in the meeting have got rules too. (Lucy Marshall in Nyikina Inc. 2004b:2)

The minutes of the first meeting identified Nyikina Inc. as a cultural action strategy for building personal and community Nyikina identity. The association provided a foundation for identifying new rules and codes of conduct on which to build and strengthen Nyikina ethic, cultural knowledge and practices:

Nyikina Incorporated was established in 2004 to practice, maintain and preserve Nyikina cultural heritage. During 2004 the Association developed an extensive language and culture program, which is available to be delivered in schools by qualified Nyikina people. The outcome of this and similar projects planned by the Association has the potential to impact on cultural and educational tourism in the region as well as building the cultural capacity of Nyikina people. (DIA 2005a:13)

Since the association was established in 2004 there have been several changes in the constitution to progress the objectives of the organisation. A logo has been adopted which is representative of Nyikina people and which symbolises their relationship with *kandri* along the *Mardoowarra*. The symbolism of the *Mardoowarra* has progressed to be the major design focus of the Nyikina Culture Centre, described in Chapter 7. Nyikina Inc. continues to be promoted through local and national newspapers as well as regular reports to keep the broader public updated through radio interviews and information sessions.

In the absence of any direct measures of governance, new indicators need to measure of the capacity of Indigenous people to govern so that they can be supported to bridge the gaps and learn the processes for sustainability. Accredited training in fields such as leadership,

finance and management can build individuals' knowledge and skills, which is likely to be transferred to their employment and living environment. (DIA 2005b:239)

The establishment of Nyikina Inc. and the role of cultural Elders as mentors received recognition by other local community and government agencies who view this as a revitalised cultural identity for Nyikina people. The Chairperson and Deputy Chair person are cultural mentors, and I have responsibility for the administrative responsibilities, holding the executive committee positions of Secretary and Public Officer. I have been responsible for organising meetings, functions and administration as well as developing position papers to promote cultural projects and influence policy. I also write grant applications, lobby and negotiate with Indigenous and wider community members, funding agencies, three levels of government and technical experts to develop and manage community cultural development. Nyikina Inc. is now online and can be contacted through the world wide web: [www.nyikinainc.com](http://www.nyikinainc.com).

## **5.5 Discussion**

### *5.5.1 Discussion Cultural Action Project 1: Nyikina Language and Culture Project*

The Nyikina Language and Culture Project produced and published an extensive Nyikina cultural data base in books, video/DVD and CD ROM formats. I provided the project management and financial reporting of all outcomes associated with the Nyikina Language and Culture Project. Ongoing reflection, planning and cultural action around the community cultural

development of the Nyikina Language and Culture Kit identified the need to ensure the cultural knowledge and practices collected, documented and published in 2004 would remain of cultural value. Nyikina elders continue to be involved in reviewing and updating the cultural database which has increased the human, social and cultural capital of Nyikina people in Derby.

#### 5.5.1.1 Nyikina Language and Culture Course Discussion

The ongoing reflection, planning and cultural action around the community cultural development of the Nyikina Language and Culture Course provided the opportunity to build the social, human and cultural capital of Nyikina participants by learning language. The course has increased social cohesion amongst Nyikina people as they worked together to strengthen their personal and community identity. There is a high level of interest amongst these participants in producing books and multi-media resources in Nyikina language as well as developing better oral skills. To achieve this, it is necessary to nurture a literate language community. Literate in the sense of reading and writing, but also in the sense of familiarity with the stories, attitudes, values and worldview contained in Nyikina culture, which is best understood and expressed by Nyikina language and cultural practices.

#### 5.5.2 *Discussion Cultural Action Project 2: Nyikina Inc.*

The establishment of Nyikina Inc. is an example of Indigenous community members mobilising the necessary resources to conduct cultural actions to promote wider life outcomes for Nyikina people. Responsible

governance is the basic foundation on which organisations and communities develop and become sustainable. These cultural actions, such as the establishment of Nyikina Inc., mark out major life transitions for Nyikina people away from oppression towards a collective ethical vision (Freire 2001) which requires civic courage and strategies to build a sense of liberation or freedom from the dominant and alienating mainstream Australian society.

The Nyikina Language and Culture Project, the formation of Nyikina Inc. and the development and delivery of the Nyikina language and culture course are examples of how Nyikina people are strengthening their capacity for sustaining cultural action through community development activities. Through a unified response Nyikina people in Derby are developing a sound body of evidence to continue their efforts towards building sustainable community cultural development in a town based setting.

The efforts of people in Derby are being noticed throughout the region and it is clear that the leadership of Elders and the Nyikina Inc. will continue to grow as they are willing to incorporate the lessons of other Indigenous people. It is on the basis of this need to learn from others that I was encouraged to move outside of Derby and look at local solutions that are having an effect other Indigenous groups in the West Kimberley region.

This chapter has presented two cultural action projects that have been very successful in developing Nyikina people's sense of self through empowerment; learning their traditional language and customs to regain ownership of their culture. This chapter presents projects that were undertaken

with Nyikina people who reside in the town of Derby. However, many Nyikina people are now living across the region in towns, communities and out bush. I recognised that I needed to also examine their experience of being Nyikina, from a broader regional perspective. Chapter 6 explores in detail what I found out from this experience.

Chapter 6 grounds the regional macro context of the West Kimberley in order to better understand the area involved in the Cultural Action Project 3: *Saying No Way to Family and Community Violence*. In Chapter 6, I present the opportunity to explore how local Indigenous people in the Kimberley region of Western Australia were engaging in community action from their own perspectives and how this information would influence the development of the cultural action projects in and around Derby.

## Chapter 6

### DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS PART C

#### **Cultural Action Project 3: *Saying No Way to Family and Community Violence***

##### **6.1 Introduction**

Family violence is having a devastating effect on Indigenous people living in and around Fitzroy Crossing, Derby and the remote communities in the West Kimberley. Violence is destroying Indigenous families and communities, and it is destroying the fabric of Indigenous culture and society. Violence issues are grounded in a colonial framework where violence has been acculturated from successive lived experiences of intergenerational trauma.

This chapter presents an analysis of the information from video recordings I conducted with Indigenous people living in Derby, Fitzroy Crossing and Gibb River Road communities in the West Kimberley region. A deeper analysis is presented in Appendix 7: Further Discussion of Data in DVD *Saying No Way to Family and Community Violence* (Madjulla Inc. 2004b).

The informants in Cultural Action Project 3: *Saying No Way to Family and Community Violence*, came from a wide range of language and cultural groups. I used video recording to generate evidence about locally developed community solutions in the region. I produced, directed and analysed the DVD *Saying No Way to Family and Community Violence* (Madjulla Inc.

2004b) (Appendix 6) and I would encourage the reader to view this DVD prior to reading this chapter to see how filmmaking can be used as a culturally appropriate medium for both collecting and analysing this data in this cultural action project.

This chapter including the DVD contributed as a body of Indigenous knowledge that identify two key points. Firstly, that there was an unacceptable level of personal, family and systemic violence in Indigenous communities in the West Kimberley region. The second point is to present examples of Indigenous community solutions that are being attempted in Derby, Fitzroy Crossing and the Gibb River Road communities.

This project started after Cultural Action Projects 1 and 2 and this information has contributed to the ongoing development of further projects for Nyikina people living in Derby. This data provided insight into ways Indigenous communities have been creative and resourceful in responding to multiple risks in a culturally appropriate way. In this chapter, I have incorporated personal and community stories; narratives to show lived experiences of Aboriginal people which are grounded in their social context and in turn their capacity to influence community negotiated solutions. The chapter concludes with a summary discussion of Cultural Action Project 3: *Saying No Way to Family and Community Violence* in relation to informing the Nyikina Cultural Action Projects discussed in Chapter 7.



## **6.2 Social Context**

In July 2004 the ATSIC Malarabah Regional Council received funding to promote awareness of family and community violence in Indigenous communities throughout the West Kimberley region. ATSIC staff approached me to consider the project. I spoke with the Nyikina Elders about the scope and value of the project. Elders encouraged and supported the idea as an important opportunity to hear and see what other Aboriginal people in the region were doing in their communities. ATSIC staff then engaged me to manage the campaign. I agreed to organise the 'usual' printed calico bag stocked full of information pamphlet's and goods such as logoed T-shirts, caps and fans as well as talk with community groups to promote community awareness. Furthermore, I was able to negotiate with the Malarabah Regional Council to produce a video recording to inform Indigenous people and policy directors about the high incidence of violence, and local community solutions developed to respond to violence.

The DVD *Saying No Way to Family and Community Violence* (Madjulla Inc.2004b) documents the views of family, community and systemic violence and how this is impacting negatively on the lives of Indigenous people in the West Kimberley region. The images and voice of Aboriginal people were critical to building a picture of both, social context and the community solutions. The Chairperson of the Malarabah ATSIC, Chairman Dicky Bedford (Indigenous) reports on current local community solutions:

Strategies that have been put in place ... to address family and domestic [violence] have included Numbud Patrol, in picking up

people who are drunk and taking them to a safer place, [such as] the sobering up shelters ... which run in partnership with the police, the family violence centres and the women's refuge centres. These strategies have come about mainly from women wanting to make a change and wanting to break the cycle of family violence. Just of late the [ATSIC] Malarabah [Regional] Council have gone out into the communities to lay out similar sorts of plans, to get feedback from the community about how best they want to address those problems in their region. Some of the feedback goes back to taking away of the child, the substance abuse and even playing cards, so the strategies are far and wide ... about what it is we need to do or where we can assist in terms of development strategies to combat these sorts of problems, family violence in our communities.

Indigenous communities in the Kimberley were looking for radical approaches to modify Indigenous family practices to reduce violence. They were concerned about the lack of open and honest dialogue between government and Indigenous people in the region. Dicky Bedford identified the need to develop and implement government policy and funding to target the needs of specific Indigenous settings:

The government can do their work better in these sort of areas, well in particular family and domestic violence, by listening to the community, to the Aboriginal people of the region and taking note of what is really going on and about doing something about it. Either changing their policy about how they go about addressing the problem or developing programs, which fits what happens in our region. Communities have different problems and sort them out in different ways, but one thing that they [governments] have to do is provide the funds for these things to happen. I guess by way of listening, assisting and being a part of a whole of government

approach where the community takes the leading role. (Dicky Bedford)

These interviews revealed a strong community view that governments in Australia need to engage in genuine dialogue with Indigenous people to ensure shared responsibility for policy development and planning. This project was funded through a ‘one off’ small ATSIC grant to reduce the negative impacts such as violence in Indigenous communities. However, ‘one off’ funding such as this is only suitable for a pilot program, but is not a reasonable strategy for building sustainable Indigenous community cultural development. This cultural action project identified programs that must be properly resourced to target the particular needs of each community because Indigenous communities have many variables such as size, location, experience in leadership and period of establishment, which create different capacities for change.

#### *6.2.1 Partnerships*

A key initiative in this third project is that Aboriginal people throughout the West Kimberley have taken the initiative to respond to violence and this has involved forming partnerships with the police, government and Indigenous community services. Indigenous leaders viewed community consultation as an essential ingredient to building sustainable partnerships by including local Indigenous communities throughout their wider planning processes. In 2004 the Premier of Western Australia initiated the Western Australian Aboriginal Justice Agreement (DOJ 2004) in response to the Putting

the Picture Together: Inquiry into Response by Government Agencies to Complaints of Family Violence and Child Abuse in Aboriginal Communities (Gordon, Hallahan and Henry 2002) referred to as the Gordon Inquiry.

The Gordon Inquiry (2002) was established to investigate the high incidence of violence in Indigenous communities in Western Australia, in particular to respond to the needs of young Indigenous people and their families. The Western Australian Aboriginal Justice Reference Group Committee was established in 2005 to guide the implementation and evaluation of the Gordon Inquiry (2002) through local, regional and state negotiated Aboriginal justice agreements. The state government has supported local groups of Indigenous community members to work in partnership with Indigenous and government service providers to develop the Derby Aboriginal Justice Plan (Poelina & Perdrisat 2005). The Derby Aboriginal Justice Plan has been ready for implementation for over a year; however, the state government officers with the Western Australian Attorney General's Department, formerly known as the Department of Justice (DOJ), have indicated that no funding has been allocated for the implementation of the plan. As the co-chair of the AJA my participation at the state level has confirmed that when the funding from the State Treasury was being negotiated and committed to operationalise the State Aboriginal Justice Agreement no consideration was given to identify the cost of establishing local justice and regional justice plans throughout the state. In my effort to secure funding I have presented the Derby Local Justice Plan to the Kimberley Inter-agency Working Group (KWIG) to seek their endorsement of the plan at a local and regional level. Government processes recommend

strategies such as the Derby Local Justice Plan must be endorsed by KWIG in order to move up the bureaucratic chain of command to the various Director Generals' who have responsibility for servicing Aboriginal families. Unfortunately all of the Regional Managers claim to be resource poor, with no capacity to identify flexible funding dollars to trial and evaluate the local justice plans. The process has stalled, signalling another act of bureaucratic dysfunction. This dysfunction has a ripple effect outwards onto and in communities and this inaction appears to keep a lid on the dysfunction as opposed to resourcing the Derby Local Justice Plan to develop mechanism to monitor and respond to family, community and systemic levels of violence. The Gordon Inquiry presented the challenge for governments and the community to try more inclusive ways of doing business together to get better results. So far Indigenous organisations are not getting the level of support from government partners to be able to provide the services required by the Indigenous community.

In Derby the Jayida Burru Abuse & Violence Prevention Forum (JBA&VPF) involved considerable interagency collaboration which generated cooperative partnerships between local government, service providers and community representatives working together to reduce levels of family and community violence in Derby. Community cultural development projects in Derby, established by the JBV&APF, have raised wider understandings of the need for individual healing in combating family violence.

The JBA&VPF has provided an opportunity for joint planning and problem solving, however. Kaye Wilson (Indigenous) is the Coordinator of the Marnin Bowa Dumbara-Family Healing Centre and a member of the JBA&VPF said:

Communities and government can work together by being more involved with family violence. They can improve and make it better, by everyone working together, such as the [Recommendations] set [out] through the Sue Gordon Inquiry that was happening here in Derby. I feel that [it would be] a good thing if everyone worked together, network together. (Kaye Wilson)

Blagg (2005) supports the view that Indigenous communities require government, corporate and community investment of resources in a way that empowers them to resolve problems particular to their situation.

### *6.2.2 Status of Violence*

West Kimberley Indigenous leaders believed an important aspect for developing community solutions to reduce violence was acknowledging the extent of the problem as the first step to effecting change, as Dicky Bedford explains:

Domestic violence and family violence in our community is rife at the moment, it's destroying our families, it's destroying our communities, and it's destroying the fabric of our society. It's destroying our culture; it just doesn't have a place in the Aboriginal community. (Dicky Bedford)

Shelley Kneebone (Indigenous) was the Coordinator of the JBA&VPF. She described the status of family and community violence in Derby:

The status of family violence in Derby is at an extremely positive stage for Derby and some of the surrounding communities, with some of the government and non-government agencies sitting down at a table and working together to develop and implement local strategies to combat domestic violence for Derby. A lot of this work has been happening over the last two and a half years. This [JBA&VPF] project has developed two men's, two women's and a youth centre. These centres are looking at increasing the level of life skills and educational levels of those people from Indigenous backgrounds with domestic violence. By helping them to heal what's inside themselves first before they start to look at the issues of domestic violence, by increasing self-esteem people are becoming stronger in combating domestic violence. (Shelley Kneebone)

Shelley Kneebone suggests there are positive effects that have come out of these community cultural actions. Local centres are helping to build greater self esteem and motivation with traumatised individuals who normally wouldn't get out of their own environment but are now coming together in one place. Increasing this level of social cohesion is an important response to reducing violence.

Suzanne Rigney (non-Indigenous) was the Executive Manager for Community Cultural Development with the Shire of Derby-West Kimberley

when the research was undertaken. The Shire of Derby-West Kimberley was the auspicing agency for the JBA&VPF, she commented:

I think there is still a question mark over the status of violence in Derby. I think there is still a lot of work that has to be done in getting agencies to keep and collate good data on the actual levels and the implications of violence to get into a position where we are effectively measuring the levels of family violence and the amount of family violence that is prevented. Having said that, I think we are in a lot better position than we were two or three years ago. I think there are people doing great work in terms of individuals increasing people's ability to deal with family violence, increasing community awareness and willingness to deal with family violence. We are in a better position to respond to the violence itself whether that be through agencies that are running the Family Healing Centre, the great work the Numbud Patrol people do, and I guess individuals' own ability to respond to individual incidences. (Suzanne Rigney)

Rigney affirms the JBA&VPF has sorted through a complexity of issues over the past three years to collect a body of evidence regarding community solutions for building individual life skills of Indigenous community members. Rigney advocates the need for agencies responsible for servicing Indigenous people to collaborate with each other and the Indigenous community to develop local community solutions to collect and interpret both qualitative and quantitative data for building a case for recurrent funding. Services that receive funding need to develop service agreements which are outcome based to ensure they are in a position to effectively measure and track the levels of violence, in particular the level of family and community violence, that can be reduced, through cultural action.



### *6.2.3 Cultural Action to Stem Violence*

Cultural Action Project 3: *Saying No Way to Family and Community Violence* visually and textually shows different ways cultural action promotes a climate of creativity to overcome Indigenous disadvantage. Examples identified in this study shows cultural action can be a change in the way Indigenous people communicate with the police that contributes to building trust and cooperation. Cultural action can be the action of a Department of Community Development officer working in partnership with the community and other government departments to provide marginalised Indigenous youth with skills and knowledge they can use to assume a greater sense of empowerment over their lives.

Another example of a cultural action refers to the action Indigenous leaders have taken by relocating their families into remote communities where they have a greater sense of control over the education and life experiences to guide the development of their children's Indigenous culture and identity. Other examples of cultural action include the agencies established by Indigenous people to provide human services such as the JBA&VPF which brings together a wide range of government, non-government and community representatives together in a partnership to generate and support local community solutions.

### *6.2.4 Systemic Violence*

Indigenous communities in the region are developing a cultural action approach to build the personal and community capacity of local

community solutions to respond to this holistic sense of dis-ease. The content from the interviews influenced the *Saying No Way to Family Violence* Report (Poelina & Perdrisat 2004b) revealed there was a collective view from West Kimberley leaders that government policies and practice identified in Chapter 2 continue in a contemporary form. The data revealed governments should focus on addressing the underlying cause of individual, family and community disadvantage rather than the symptoms of dysfunction experienced by Indigenous people in their daily lives. Current government policies perpetuate contraindicated practices such as institutionalised racism and systemic violence which diminish the human rights of Indigenous Australians (Blagg 2005; Sanderson 2006).

Systemic violence for many Indigenous people in this region is experienced at the individual human level. This extension of violence upon Indigenous people is perpetrated through the policies and practices of local, state and federal governments. Blagg (2005:22) asserts, 'holistic strategies are premised on the assumption that systemic problems require systemic solutions rather than piece-meal reforms'. This holistic approach attempts manage life-changing events and traumas and was important for improving emotional, spiritual and mental wellbeing.

The Federal Government decommissioned the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission at the end of June 2005, which in turn meant the disbanding of the ATSIC Malarabah Regional Council in the West Kimberley. Blagg (2005:21) is concerned such changes to this form of

Indigenous governance will continue to foster institutionalised racism, stating that ‘there is a real danger that future regional structures that replace ATSIC regional councils will bear little relation to the traditional groupings of Aboriginal people,’ and are therefore less likely to experience any level of success. This anti-dialogic approach demonstrates that governments continue to develop policy and practice which reduces opportunities for Aboriginal people to reach their full potential. These imposed governance models value ‘western ways’ of decision making with little opportunity for incorporating Indigenous ‘ways of working’. This approach maintains systemic violence. According to Blagg (2005:5) systemic violence; ‘reflects organisational, rather than individual, failure to understand the impact of policies and procedures on marginal and excluded groups in society.’ Jonas and Dick (2004:4) raise concerns regarding the political motivation behind the change in the Federal Government’s Indigenous policy, stating:

When the federal opposition ‘trumped’ the government by announcing in March 2004 that it would abolish ATSIC and replace it with a new representative body, the stakes were raised. The government’s response was not entirely unexpected – it too would abolish ATSIC but it would not replace it with a new body. The days of ‘separatism’, as the Prime Minister and Minister for Indigenous Affairs described it, were over and a new way of mainstream service delivery to Indigenous people would soon commence. The announcement by the federal government that it intends to abolish ATSIC scapegoats it for the failure of successive Australian governments. The government’s announcement reveals no plans for addressing the crisis in Indigenous communities and

will further reduce the level of scrutiny of the government's performance on Indigenous issues from the eyes of the nation.

The federal government has replaced ATSIC with the National Indigenous Council (NIC) to advise the Federal Government about national Indigenous policy. The NIC membership is appointed by government. This is in stark contrast to the previous ATSIC Indigenous leadership which was elected by Indigenous people. The federal government had already separated the bureaucratic arm from the elected representatives and renamed the bureaucracy The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Services (ATSIS). When the federal government decommissioned ATSIC, the bureaucracy was devolved into mainstream agencies. The various departments continued to work from a single Indigenous Coordination Centre in Derby, however since that time there has been no identifiable Indigenous leadership in the region to focus and coordinate services for Indigenous communities groups.

Government Indigenous policy, funding and administration for the region have been insufficient to make any lasting improvements in life experiences of Indigenous people (DIA 2005a; Sanderson 2006). The day to day life outcomes many Indigenous people experience, such as significantly shorter life expectancy, lower levels of health and education continue to show that not enough is being done to change the disadvantaged situation (Beresford & Partington 2003). These real life experiences captured in this study provide information to increase an understanding about a number of important features that maintain endemic institutionalised racism and systemic violence from a community perspective.

This experience is not isolated to Indigenous people of the Kimberley, with Cape York Indigenous leader Noel Pearson (2000:21) arguing:

the bureaucracy views [Indigenous] people on the ground as incapable, irresponsible, disorganised, without expertise, imbecilic, pitiful ... and therefore acts to circumscribe decision making in a range of areas.

Furthermore, this type of injustice is rooted in inappropriate Indigenous policy and practices which are tied to inadequate funding at all levels. These inappropriate practices refer to the ways in which racist beliefs or values have been built into the operations of social institutions in such a way as to discriminate against, control, oppress and continue to violate Indigenous people in this region, as Henry and her colleagues report:

In this Australia this divisive, racist, socially unjust society that we have built; we now need institutions and polices that will un-build it. We need to acknowledge that the 'fair go' is struggling to survive, if not already dead. Fairness and compassion need to be once again the guiding principles of our leaders and our democracy (Henry, Houston & Mooney 2004:517).

Despite broad support from the local community to maintain the operations of the ATSIC Malarabah Regional Council, state and federal governments did not respond to the regional needs and interests of Indigenous people. There is no process from state and commonwealth governments to replace the Indigenous regional advice, planning and consultation once provided by the ATSIC Malarabah Regional Council in the West Kimberley.

## **6.3 Community Solutions**

This cultural action project revealed a great deal of data regarding the development of local Indigenous community solutions trialled throughout the West Kimberley region. A brief discussion regarding this information is reported below. For an extensive review of this information see 7: Further Discussion of Data in DVD *Saying No Way to Family and Community Violence* (Madjulla Inc. 2004b).

### *6.3.1 Informing Policy*

The views and perceptions of community leaders revealed in the DVD *Saying No Way to Family and Community Violence* (Madjulla Inc. 2004b) were endorsed by Indigenous leader Dr Sue Gordon principal author of the ‘Gordon Inquiry’ (2002), when I communicated with her about the projects included in the video. In a letter to me, Dr Gordon remarked:

While you wrote to me as a Magistrate, I will wear two hats to respond, that is, also as the Chairperson of the National Indigenous Council (NIC). The substance of the video, which I have watched, is very good and having been a few times to Derby region, I could relate very well to what the speakers were putting across.

The Western Australian Police Service [Derby] and the Shire [Derby-West Kimberley] acknowledge loud and clear, that only by all agencies and individuals working together has such a marked decrease in violence related offences been achieved. At the same time it was interesting to see that more individuals are now actually reporting violent offences against them, that is, family violence is not being tolerated. (Sue Gordon 2005, pers. comm., 11 January)

Dr Gordon's comments affirmed the voices of informants regarding the need to increase dialogic action to develop meaningful Indigenous social policy and practice. She proposes the newly established National Indigenous Council, of which she is Chair, should seek models of better practice to inform national Indigenous policy, saying:

The DVD [*Saying No Way to Family and Community Violence* (Madjulla Inc 2004b)] and the original of the Final Report I am sending to the Secretariat of the National Indigenous Council with my instructions that it go to the Departmental Secretary who is responsible for overseeing/funding of Family Violence and Child Abuse programs. I feel that this could be a good model to show to other regions around Australia, through the commonwealth officers who service those regions. (Sue Gordon 2005, pers. comm., 11 January)

The recognition of the work being done by communities in the Kimberley is an important benchmark for best practice models. This dialogic model has also been validated by prominent Indigenous health advocate, Professor Fiona Stanley. Professor Stanley is a non-Indigenous Professor of the Western Australian Institute of Child Health based in Perth in her letter to me, said the following:

Thank you for sending me the video and final report of *Saying No Way to Family and Community Violence*. The work you have done is so important to building Aboriginal capacity and I commend you on the way in which you have promoted this project ... There is so much to be done to investigate the pathways to disparity of health outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. The

challenge is then to use this information to formulate effective and appropriate policy. (Fiona Stanley 2005, pers. comm., 5 February)

Professor Stanley confirms the need to develop the capacity of Indigenous people to reduce the inequality of health outcomes for Indigenous people living in the region. The greatest challenge is to use the evidence to formulate effective and appropriate policy and practice. Given the level of disadvantage experienced by many Indigenous Australians in the Kimberley region of Western Australia, the evidence from the people themselves in this project confirmed that the mainstream services were not able to meet the needs of Indigenous people in the region. Government officers appeared frustrated with their inability to offer sustainable strategies on a recurrent basis. This was evident in the number of community solutions, which were at risk of imploding because of the oncost required to deliver the programs on the ground in such a remote and vast geographical distance. This research, and the views of Professor Stanley, support the need for government funding to be accessed more equitably by Indigenous people in the West Kimberley region. Systemic change must be a serious consideration in any effort to build sustainable community cultural development.

### *6.3.2 Sustainability of Community Solutions*

The information presented and analysed in relation to Cultural Action Project 3: *Saying No Way To Family and Community Violence*, identified a range of community cultural development projects established as pilot studies, with short term competitive grants or without funding throughout



the West Kimberley area. The information provided indicates that any measure of success in addressing the overwhelming disadvantage experienced by Indigenous people in the West Kimberley requires governments and Indigenous people to become equal partners in sharing responsibility for planning and development to generate sustainable outcomes. The Federal Government has created Shared Responsibility Agreements (SRAs) to generate partnerships between the various levels of government and Indigenous people. Whereby, state and federal 'Government[s] invest in the priority needs of communities, clans and families to take steps to implement local solutions consistent with good health, family stability, community safety, education and economic wellbeing' (SCRGPS 2005:9).

These community cultural development projects identified in Cultural Action Project 3 were developed and implemented by community leaders. These local projects have produced positive outcomes that have contributed towards building the capacity of marginalised and oppressed Indigenous people in the West Kimberley region. These community cultural development projects have fostered participation in community life through strengthening Indigenous culture and life skills and are achieving community building outcomes.

Similar to all funded organisations, Indigenous agencies require long term recurrent funding commitments that recognise the services to Indigenous people are core business and that the Indigenous agencies perform an integral contribution to making Indigenous communities in this region a

safer place. This must be acknowledged with state and federal governments to ensure the long term survival and evolution of these programs that have proven to have positive outcomes for the Indigenous people they service. Without such ongoing funding such programs remain at risk of closure. Ongoing funding is reliant on effective evaluation of community programs, and as such evaluation is vital for the long term survival of the community cultural development programs listed.

### *6.3.3 Evaluation*

Evaluation of community solutions or projects, such as those described in this chapter, can be defined in terms of ‘worth, effectiveness or efficiency, but in each case it still involves somebody making a value judgement of its value’ (Ife 1995:225). An important role of evaluators is to facilitate the process of working with communities to include them in identifying what information or documentation will be collected and how. Feeding back information to the community is important to allow community people to have a degree of ownership regarding the type of evaluation conducted and in particular the interpretation of the data collected. Undertaking evaluation through a collaborative approach with the community will allow the community to determine the way they wish to be represented.

In the case of the West Kimberley community solutions explored in this study Indigenous people and local leaders believe the opportunity to collect both quantitative and qualitative data has the potential to demonstrate evidence

of better local practice. This data represents value for money and justifies continued investment into community solutions for the long term sustainability.

Blagg's (2005) research into Indigenous community solutions focused on building the local community's capacity to divert Aboriginal people from a pathway to crime, reports:

Sustainability, sound governance, capacity building and a respect for traditional practices are now widely acknowledged as key factors in achieving long-term success (Blagg 2005:9).

Despite such documented evaluation of local projects demonstrating the benefits from collaboration between local Indigenous and government agencies, the sustainability of violence prevention and intervention programs are placed at risk because of inadequate recurrent funding, as previously discussed.

The road to justice reform in Aboriginal Australia is littered with the wreckage of promising one-off initiatives, pilot projects and local strategies that have failed to be financed, nurtured and maintained by all levels of government (Blagg 2005:9).

Blagg (2005:9) further states that government policy and practice is responsible for the failure of Indigenous community attempts to respond to disadvantage:

Despite the energies of both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people involved in running programs in Aboriginal communities, they eventually fail, leaving bitterness and disillusionment in their wake.

Governments need to be mindful that the risk of these community cultural development projects collapsing through insecure funding arrangements creates a pervasive sense of hopelessness, and the continuum of the cycle of disadvantage. Governments need to fund evaluation to provide genuine feedback to improve the quality of services to Indigenous people. Data collection needs to incorporate both qualitative and quantitative methods to capture, count and evaluate the cost-benefits of funding these types of community solutions.

#### **6.4 Discussion**

Cultural Action Project 3: *Saying No Way to Family and Community Violence* Project describes the social context derived from the views of the project informants to build a picture of the social processes that have influenced the status of violence in the West Kimberley region of Western Australia. Indigenous people living in the Shire of Derby-West Kimberley experience high levels of family, community and systemic violence. Indigenous people in the region have limited access to educational and employment opportunities. Fragile social and community relationships are at risk from limited social, emotional, cultural and spiritual connections frayed over time since colonisation. The wellbeing of Aboriginal people in this region is reflected in the DVD *Saying No Way to Family Violence* (Madjulla Inc. 2004b) by the people themselves and presented and interpreted here. This reveals a social context which is linked to Aboriginal peoples overwhelming disadvantage throughout communities in the region. The DVD also reveals that

despite their position of disadvantage Aboriginal people and their communities are working against great odds to build sustainable community solutions.

Evidence from this chapter highlights the successes of community developed solutions to local problems stemming from the identification and acknowledgement of the pervasive way in which violence was fragmenting the community. However, difficulties with ongoing funding bring the sustainability of these programs into questions. These programs show the extent to which Indigenous people are able to rely on their own resources and/or the support of others to overcome social and environmental adversity. This process must be planned and developed in partnership with a wide range of stakeholders within and external to the community. It must combine human, social and cultural capital to foster greater social cohesion and the sustainability of local community solutions which will break the cycle of violence. The sustainability of local community solutions is dependent on two issues; firstly the need for community cultural development projects to be sustainable. Secondly, the importance of sound evaluation to build a body of evidence of better practice that justifies recurrent funding. Indigenous community cultural development projects must be seen and resourced as core business of governments.

This chapter identified how I collaborated with the ATSIC Malarabah Regional Council and Indigenous communities to promote awareness about violence in the West Kimberley region through services that exist and what they can offer to reduce the status and impact of violence in the region. A wide range of community solutions to reduce the impact of violence

were reported through personal and community cultural actions. Indigenous and other civic leaders revealed opportunities for consolidation and development as well as systemic barriers to change.

This research revealed concern throughout the region that locally generated community solutions were unable to obtain adequate or secure recurrent funding to ensure the continuity of Indigenous services to help communities and individuals improve their health and wellbeing. Locally determined community solutions are at perpetual risk of collapsing because their sustainability is reliant on marginalised funding often in the form of one off pilot studies and short term competitive grants. Genuine change requires recognition from governments that in order for them to be part of the solution to overcome Indigenous disadvantage they must see Indigenous people as core business recognising that Indigenous agencies in the region perform an integral contribution to making communities safer. Governments need to commit recurrent funding tied to sound monitoring and evaluation.

This chapter informs this research by providing examples of cultural actions which generated community solutions to reduce violence in Indigenous communities in the West Kimberley region of Western Australia. These community cultural development projects have demonstrated positive outcomes by promoting community cultural development as a means to reducing family violence and supporting those who have been subjected to violence.

The analysis of these programs supports a partnership approach to improve dialogic action to further empower the people of these communities. Indigenous community leaders confirmed the importance of this approach. Government and non-government representatives need to spend time talking with Indigenous leaders in the process of collecting information and constructing solutions to family, community and systemic violence. Reform such as this requires government and non-government services to move towards more open accountability of service delivery to Indigenous people to improve social policy and practice in human and community services if they are to reduce the gap witnessed in the poor life outcomes of Aboriginal people in the region.

This analysis of West Kimberley community cultural development projects has contributed to informing the planning and development of Nyikina cultural actions in Derby, by building a picture of the social contexts and community solutions. The outcomes and issues discussed in relation to the projects presenting in this chapter have been used to guide the development of the Cultural Action Projects discussed in Chapter 7. Once again, the lessons learned in the project just described were used to develop the next and the last projects in this research. The imperative was to use the collaborative efforts of engagement of Nyikina and other Indigenous people living in Derby and within the traditional Nyikina homelands of the *Mardoowarra* in further self-development, self-management and self-determination processes.

## **Chapter 7**

### **DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS PART D**

#### **Cultural Action Project 4: *Nyikina Cultural Centre***

#### **Cultural Action Project 5: *Indigenous Governance of Nyikina Kandri***

##### **7.1 Introduction**

This chapter presents cultural actions projects 4 and 5, which were undertaken by Nyikina people living in and around Derby. From the earlier Nyikina cultural projects discussed in Chapter 5 this research moved laterally outside the Nyikina culture to other Indigenous arenas in Chapter 6. As a final research strategy the projects returned to the Nyikina people and context. In the second section of this chapter I explore a range of strategies being undertaken by Nyikina people to improve local and regional leadership and sound governance to promote community cultural development in Derby and with nearby Nyikina communities along the *Mardoowarra*, Fitzroy River.

The community cultural developments discussed throughout this thesis occurred as a consequence of the collaboration between Nyikina people living in Derby, including me as the facilitator. The first cultural action I became involved with was the Nyikina Language and Culture Project, as presented in Chapter 5. The project generated human, social and cultural capital



which was harnessed to form the association Nyikina Inc. (Chapter 5), further related projects were undertaken by a variety of groups to assist in bettering Nyikina people's lives throughout the West Kimberley (Chapter 6) and this has resulted in the commencement of planning and funding negotiations for the construction of the Nyikina Cultural Centre.

While developing the Nyikina Inc. and the necessary infrastructure to operationalise its objectives, Nyikina people, through their own self reflective enquiries, started to focus on developing community governance and leadership. These cultural action projects focused on building language and culture, organisation and infrastructure, and governance and leadership as necessary to build social, human and cultural capital for sustainable community cultural development. The following section describes and analyses two cultural action projects undertaken by Nyikina people that were facilitated by me and was directed at the individual, community and organisational levels. I provided professional and administrative support to draw together cultural, technical and financial resources to plan and advocate the development of these two projects and they are a direct outcome of the projects described in Chapter 5.

## **7.2 Cultural Action Project 4: *Nyikina Cultural Centre***

In 2004, several Nyikina Elders involved with the establishment of Nyikina Inc. participated in the Derby Revitalisation Project conducted by the Shire of Derby-West Kimberley. Elders and other Nyikina Inc. members participated in planning discussions and advocated for the development of a

Nyikina Cultural Centre. I submitted an expression of interest to the Shire of Derby-West Kimberley to acquire crown land on the Derby Common to build the Nyikina Cultural Centre for the benefit of Nyikina people. The Derby Revitalisation Project validated the importance of participation by Traditional Owners in community planning processes and identified the need to 'support Nyikina Inc. to explore accessing and developing Holman House as a Nyikina language and culture interpretive centre' (Kenyan 2004:34).

Then early in 2006, on behalf of Nyikina Inc. I negotiated with Indigenous Community Volunteers (ICV) to bring an appropriately qualified person as a volunteer to Derby to begin negotiations with the Shire of Derby-West Kimberley to excise 25 acres of land from the Derby town commonage, for the purpose of planning and development of the Nyikina Cultural Centre. Executive committee members met with Shire Councillors and staff in April 2006 to commence discussions on how to secure land for the Cultural Centre with the support of the Shire Council. The Shire Council recommended developing a proposal and concept site plan to support the excision and the establishment of the Cultural Centre (Appendix 9: Discussion Paper - Nyikina Cultural Centre). In regard to the Deposited Plan 49875 depicting reserve 1326, Nyikina Inc. was informed in an email communication, that:

Section 83 would be the best option for you. Please note however section 83 requires the Minister's personal approval, as there is no delegated authority. Accordingly I must seek comments from all relevant agencies and ascertain what impact if any there is on native title. I will also need further details of the incorporated body to hold the land and a detailed proposal to put to the Minister. I have called

for the file and if you can provide further details as outlined above we will commence the process. (Regional Manager – Kimberley Region, Department of Planning and Infrastructure 2006, pers. comm., 2 May)

The Derby Chamber of Commerce provided funding to Madjulla Inc. through the Derby Revitalisation Project to engage architect Douglas Sanger to develop a concept plan. The site plan below illustrates how Nyikina Inc. intends to use the land for the benefit of Nyikina and other people.

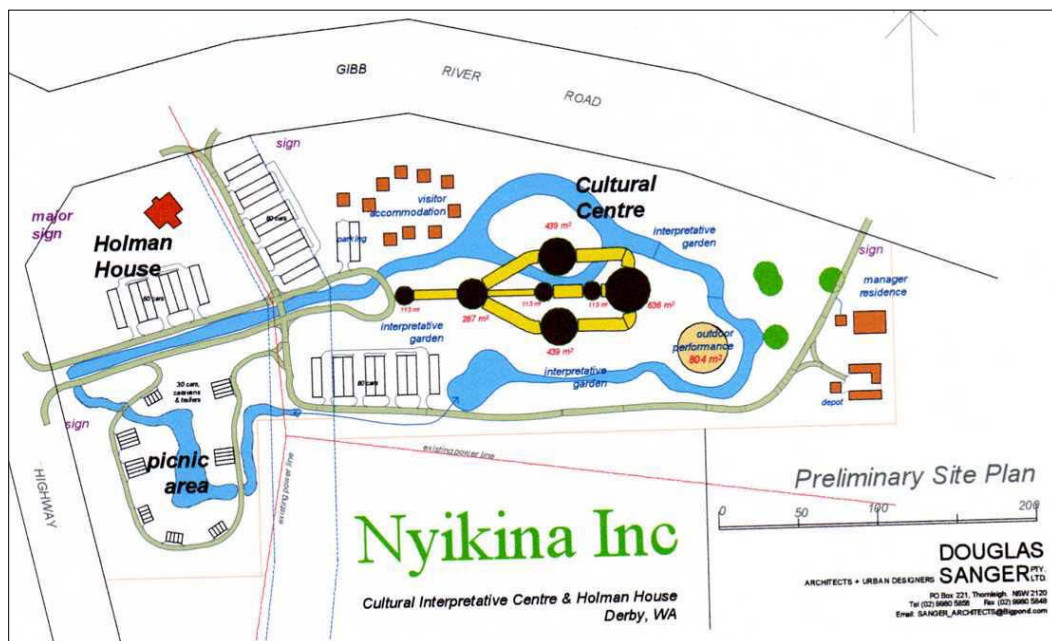


Figure 3. Concept Plan of the Nyikina Cultural Centre (Sanger 2007).

The proposal was sent to the Shire Planner and on 29 June 2006 at the Shire of Derby West-Kimberley Council meeting a decision was made, with the outcome made known to me via email communication, with the following recommendation endorsed:

[Shire of Derby-West Kimberley] Council provides their “in principal” support to the excision of a portion of land surround

Holman House located on Reserve 1326 (as per the concept plan dated 23 May 2006) and supports the creation of a new Reserve to be vested in the management of Nyikina Inc. (Shire Planner, 2006, pers.com., 30 June)

I continued to progress the establishment of the Nyikina Cultural Centre by acquiring funding from the State Department of Employment and Work Place Relations to have two independent consultants commence and complete a Feasibility Study (Nyikina Inc. 2006) and Business Plan (Nyikina Inc. 2007). This evidence continues to be used to inform new potential partners about the sustainability of a new cultural education and tourism industry in the West Kimberley region when gathering resources to develop the Nyikina Cultural Centre.

Furthermore, I have met directly with the Minister for Planning and Infrastructure at two separate regional cabinet meetings conducted in Broome and the Minister continues to support our efforts, as stated in her letter of 21 February 2007:

Your enthusiasm and commitment to achieve wealth creation and provide a focus for your social, cultural, spiritual and intellectual development for the Nyikina people will, I am sure help you to achieve your aims....The Government is committed to assisting Indigenous people to overcome the challenging disadvantage that face them and it is refreshing to receive a proposal that I believe will assist in not only delivering wealth creation for the Nyikina people, but also provide a centre where Nyikina culture can be widely promoted to all people .... I fully support your proposal and advise with pleasure that I have approved the granting of a perpetual lease

under section 83 of the Land Administration Act. (Western Australian Minister Planning and Infrastructure, Alana MacTiernan. pers.com 21<sup>st</sup> February 2007)

This support from the Minister assisted me to work directly with the Regional Manager for the Kimberley in the State Department of Planning and Infrastructure to progress the proposal to excise the land to create a new reserve for the purpose and benefit of Nyikina people. With the Minister's support and the commitment from the Shire of Derby-West Kimberley I was able to secure funding from the Commonwealth Department of Employment and Work Relations through the Indigenous Business Australia (IBA) program. The funding supported the engagement of three independent consultants under the guidance of the Nyikina Inc. Executive Committee. This Committee, with my support, guided the completion of the Nyikina Inc. Cultural Centre Feasibility Study (Nyikina Inc. 2006) and the Nyikina Inc. Business Plan (Nyikina Inc. 2007) as well as the production of the *Nyikina Cultural Centre DVD* (Madjulla Inc. 2007). The *Nyikina Cultural Centre DVD* has been inserted into the study as (Appendix 10) the DVD was revised in 2007. Furthermore, I was able to get a letter of support from the Nyikina Mangala Working Group (now Nyikina Mangala Aboriginal Corporation). This group of Indigenous people are the Native Title group established to represent our Native Title rights and claim for *Mardoowarra kandri*. A letter of support from the Chair of this group identified the group's position, stating that:

The Nyikina Mangala Native Title Working Group was established to promote the acquisition, protection and responsible management of Nyikina land, language and culture. This group recognises

Nyikina Inc. as the appropriate organisation to manage the above land. We applaud the planning and development of the Nyikina Cultural Centre in Derby because it will contribute to the cultural, social, environmental and economic development of Nyikina people, other Indigenous people and the wider community. (Anthony Watson 2007, pers. com., 23rd March)

The position of the Nyikina Mangala Working Group supported the excision of the land to build the Nyikina Cultural Centre. The letter demonstrated the coming together of Nyikina people inside and outside of Derby to begin a process which we believe is a mechanism for holding and managing Nyikina land, language and culture. I continued to lobby local and regional leaders and I have received a series of letters from prominent Indigenous and non-Indigenous leaders, as well as government service providers to support this cause. An important advocate in this process was the Chief Executive Officer for the Shire of Derby-West Kimberley in a letter to me stated:

When the Concept Plan for the Nyikina Cultural Centre came before Council in June 2006 it was unanimously supported as the benefits would accrue to the community and the Derby region.....Additionally, our support of the proposal is consistent with the ...promotion of the region's heritage and culture to visitors, assisting with the development of people's skills base, providing hope for young people and assisting with the development of the region....The proposed design is unique and inspiring and its is particularly pleasing to note the construction over the 4 year period so that local Indigenous people can obtain qualifications and experience in trade and service skills throughout the life of the project. (John Pearson 2007, pers. com., 13<sup>th</sup> March)

The support of the CEO was provided on the basis that Council believed the proposal for the Nyikina Cultural Centre would assist in building the local social, cultural, economic and human capacity of the community, particularly the support that would be afforded to Indigenous people. The endorsement from Council assisted Nyikina Inc.'s planning and negotiations which continue to be progressed through local and state planning approvals. One of the letters which carries considerable cultural capital was provided by the Kimberley Law and Culture Centre (KALACC) Executive Committee, signed by the Chairman a senior lawman Joe Brown and the Coordinator Wes Morris stating:

KALACC exists to serve and to support the cultural needs of people across the Kimberley and we certainly endorse and support the current proposal by Nyikina Inc. ... KALACC recognises the strength of leadership which exist with the Nyikina people. Nyikina Elders are key advisors of KALACC and we support the ongoing traditional law and culture activities of Nyikina people. The Nyikina Inc. Project is a model of best practice for improving remote Indigenous life outcomes by providing cultural solutions to promoting social harmony and creating real employment through sustainable cultural industries...The project is a natural and essential development for improving and sustaining social, cultural and economic outcomes of Indigenous people and others in the West Kimberley region. (KALACC 2007, pers. comm., 16<sup>th</sup> March)

The planning and development of the Nyikina Cultural Centre is building a collaborative regional spirit between governments, local and regional Indigenous cultural groups and bosses. The numerous letters of support and the Architect Douglas Sangers's costing and staged developments I have received

have been provided in the Nyikina Cultural Centre's Project Description (Sanger 2007).

Nyikina Inc. has been granted a two year licence from the State Minister for Planning and Infrastructure to occupy the site and to start assessment and development of the project and to care take the building and land. I continue to seek funding to engage a Community Cultural Development Officer to progress the formation of the committee to advise on the planning and sustainable development of the Nyikina Cultural Centre.

The Nyikina Cultural Centre and the previous cultural actions of Nyikina people in Derby demonstrate cultural mapping in action. Nyikina people in Derby have been mapping culture by identifying and documenting Nyikina cultural networks and resources. According to the Commonwealth Department of Communication and the Arts (1995:5) 'cultural mapping is a way of defining what culture means to the community, identifying the elements of culture that add value [both social and economic] recording, preserving or building on these elements in new and creative ways.' An important part of this research included initiating a range of community activities to record, conserve and use this cultural knowledge to build a sense of cohesion between Nyikina people living in Derby, the wider Derby community and Nyikina people throughout the region. As a researcher, I have recorded and analysed this so that other communities might learn from our experiences.



After several decades of living in Derby, these Nyikina people are confident they have a new collective identity based on a retrieval of their land and their 'Nyikina-ness,' as reported by Cowlshaw (2004:53):

The nation has legitimised a distinct and separate identity and community in the last thirty years for Aborigines with a celebration of cultural difference and an emphasis on the tragedy of dispossession.

Nyikina people in Derby are using their unified approach of establishing a culture centre to determine how they are sharing in this new celebration. Through engaging in cultural actions they are initiating sustainable Nyikina community cultural developments.

The following section is the final cultural action project which commenced in March 2006 and is ongoing involving several workshops conducted in Derby. This project involved people living on Nyikina *kandri* who collaborated to build leadership and Indigenous governance on Nyikina *kandri*.

### **7.3 Cultural Action Project 5: Indigenous Governance of Nyikina *Kandri***

Nyikina Inc. through their planning and self-reflective inquiries began to focus on developing stronger links with Nyikina communities along the *Mardoowarra*, Fitzroy River. Nyikina Inc. focused on the importance of strengthening Indigenous governance of Nyikina *kandri* as the critical link to cultural sustainability. The Elders suggested this could be achieved by connecting the remote communities along the *Mardoowarra* with each other

and with Derby. I was requested by the Nyikina Inc. Committee to extend the opportunity to build a collective ethical vision with and for all Nyikina people living within the Shire of Derby-West Kimberley region. In order to respond to this request I developed a submission and was successful in acquiring the resources from the State Department of Indigenous Affairs and the Derby office of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Services.

This funding partnership made it possible to strategically respond to government changes in regards to the loss of the Malarabah ATSIC Regional Council. I engaged an independent consultant who reported to the community at a formal meeting with a view to develop the leadership and governance capacity of local Indigenous people to manage their affairs. The Project Terms of Reference for the Planning and Development of *Mardoowarra* Council are:

To build safe and secure Riverside Communities by strengthening Leadership, Governance and Economic Capacity Building in the formation of a Riverside Council by:

Assisting in the co-ordination of services by government and non-government agencies to Riverside Communities.

Developing greater transparency and accountability between government and non-government agencies responsibility for servicing Riverside Communities.

The Terms of Reference for the project are based on the principles of cultural safety. It requires the validity of Indigenous cultural values be recognised especially as they relate to the perceptions of the holistic nature of individual and community well being.

(Goddard 2006)

Within these terms of reference, I facilitated four community workshops over a period of twelve months to bring together Indigenous community leaders throughout the Nyikina lands to negotiate, plan and develop a new governance and advocacy body. This unified approach was focused on improving the social, emotional, cultural, intellectual and economic wellbeing of Nyikina people in this region of Western Australia; additionally it was undertaken to develop a proactive response to the federal government's decision to terminate the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Services and the Commission nationally. Jonas and Dick (2004:13-14) expressed concerns regarding the risk to Indigenous outcomes from the lack of planning in the government's decision to terminate ATSIC:

This lack of substantive action plans and processes for overcoming disadvantage will no doubt be obscured by the emphasis on reconfiguring government service delivery through mainstream government departments over the next twelve months. There is very little in the government's announcement to suggest they are seriously addressing this major deficiency of their current approach. This will need to be addressed if we are to make substantive progress in key areas of well-being for Indigenous people into the future.

As the researcher I took responsibility for facilitating this process and recorded and reported the views of Nyikina leaders who came together for a large well attended strategic planning workshop on 12 June 2006. The workshop brought leaders together to discuss how the new Indigenous governance model for Nyikina *kandri* could become an effective mechanism to advocate systemic change to all levels of government. These leaders believed

the new organisation to be formed would have the potential to influence change in the development of policy and programs to advance their interests towards true self-determination and self-management. This was in line with the views of my uncle, John Watson, Nyikina Elder and Chairman of the Kimberley Land Council in 1993, who said:

Aboriginal people in the Kimberley have been consistent about what we mean by self determination. It means to us the right to own our land, to control what happens on our land, to practise our culture freely with the certainty of passing on to our children our culture and law, and the ability to control through our own organisations those services that are provided to us by governments. The colonial structure of the Kimberley retards the region's economic progress and keeps Aboriginal people in poverty ... we want to develop local economic initiatives so that we can free ourselves from the dependence and control of governments. (John Watson in Crough & Christophersen 1993:1)

Leaders living in Nyikina communities close to, and in Derby, through their active participation and conversations around this project, agreed with Uncle John's vision of freedom and economic sustainability for Nyikina and other Indigenous people in the region. Their views were reported by Goddard (2006), the consultant facilitating the planning meeting:

At that time, it is envisaged the Mardoowarra Council would be the over-arching body for all entities in the *Mardoowarra* region related to land, culture and social and economic development. It was not envisaged that the Mardoowarra Council would undertake the tasks of these entities, but rather, act as a "one-stop shop" for River Community peoples and for government and private enterprise

seeking development capacity or the opportunity to partner and work with or in the River Communities.

In effect, the Mardoowarra Council was to become the umbrella organisation and single voice for each of these areas or ‘clusters of responsibility’ across the different communities, with Goddard (2006:3) proposing the following strategies:

cultural development through local language recording and preservation and by teaching younger people their cultural responsibilities in terms of the River and its environs (cultural).

tourism based on the regenerated River and through controlled access to the River by Tourists (economic).

“managed access” to the River to help prevent further degradation and removing noxious plants and weeds through employment of local people (environmental/economic).

social development based on providing the health, education and training needs to develop employees in all areas (social). Goddard (2006:3)

It was agreed by the Nyikina leaders involved that each of these strategies identified in the report would contribute towards building safe and sustainable Nyikina communities. As the insider, my understanding was that if Nyikina people could see a future involving working on or with their country to improve and sustain it, they were far more likely to seek the skills and knowledge (improved literacy, numeracy, specific training, cultural background and knowledge) to manage these areas. This approach is supported by prominent advocate of Indigenous rights Hal Wooten (2004:16) who states:

self determination is not something governments can bestow, by creating institutions or otherwise. It must be grown upwards from Aboriginal people themselves. It is a question of what Aboriginals want to do and are prepared to do.

The demise of ATSIC and ATSI nationally as discussed in Chapter 5 and the outcomes of this political decision are now being experienced on the ground by communities. The federal government is bringing a range of government services together and with policy and funding changes to form Indigenous Coordination Centre's (ICC) nationally.

Nyikina people were unsuccessful in gaining federal or state government resources to support Mardoowarra Council fill the advocacy, coordination and management gap created by the demise of ATSIC/ATSI. The government bureaucrats who had supported the initial consultancy soon moved away from the region to take up more senior government positions at the state level. The corporate memory of this investment soon faded within the bureaucracy and despite my constant lobbying with the newly established ICC in Derby no funding to establish the Mardoowarra Council was forthcoming.

Despite the lack of support by government departments to fund the proposed governance model, I was directed by the Nyikina Inc. Committee to shift my efforts towards working with the Nyikina Mangala Native Title Working Group. Through my participation with this group I was able to work with the Kimberley Land Council (KLC), the peak body established to represent the legal land rights of traditional owners. Through the KLC legal representative I was able to review and have input into the draft constitution for

the Nyikina and Mangala Aboriginal Corporation (NMAC). I was able to guide the NMAC's registration as the first Indigenous Organisation nationally to be registered under the new 2007 Act of the Office of the Registrar of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Corporations (ORATSIC). The planning and registration process took a further fourteen months to eventuate. The NMAC has evolved from the earlier model of the Mardoowarra Council and it is now well placed to become the Prescribed Body Corporate, (PBC). The PBC will become the legal and administrative body to manage sustainable development of our Nyikina Native Title rights and responsibilities in Derby and along the *Mardoowarra*, the Fitzroy River. The Constitution is reflective of this vision, with the objectives of the corporations being to:

relieve the poverty, misfortune, disadvantage and suffering of its members;

advance the cultural, social, political, economic and legal interests of its members; and

achieve security and well-being for present and future generations of Nyikina and Mangala people.

Without limiting the foregoing, the Corporation shall advance its objects by:

bringing together Nyikina Mangala Traditional Owners for the purpose of making decisions and acting on any matters affecting their Aboriginal law, customs, culture and traditional rights and interests;

seeking social, economic and political justice for its members;

ascertaining aspirations, promoting fulfilment of those aspirations and obtaining consent of Nyikina Mangala Traditional Owners for the involvement of third parties in the management, use and control of Nyikina Mangala Land and Waters;

supporting social, economic and capacity building development programs and promoting opportunities in those fields to assist Nyikina Mangala Traditional Owners advance and secure their community well-being, health, welfare, sustainable economic means, and self-determination in any manner agreed by the members;

assisting members to overcome their significant community and economic disadvantage by promoting training, skills development, employment, enterprise and investment opportunities, in particular to gain benefit from use of natural and traditional resources that exist in Nyikina Mangala Lands and Waters including through the holding of interest in land and conducting activities thereon;

promoting preservation, maintenance, propagation and enhancement of Nyikina Mangala traditional laws and customs, language and culture; and

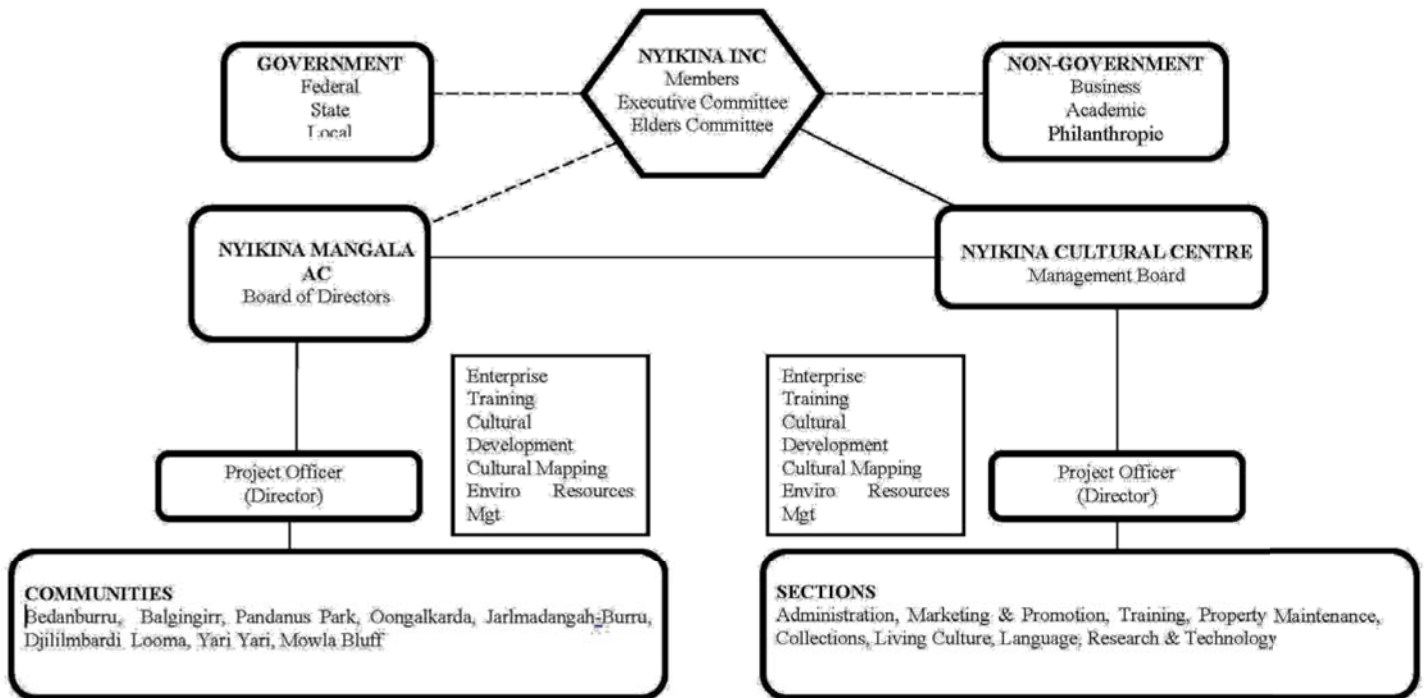
liaising and creating relationships with other groups and organizations for mutual benefit including neighbouring groups of Aboriginal people in relation to native title. (Nyikina Mangala Aboriginal Corporation 2007)

The NMAC presents the opportunity to develop a new governance model, which will be the primary vehicle to build safe and sustainable Nyikina communities along the Fitzroy River in a true partnership to meet the diverse needs of each situation.



Measures to address Indigenous disadvantage require the efforts of Indigenous organisations and individuals, together with a collaborative and cooperative approach at all levels of government ... no 'one size fits all' solutions, and ... measures to address Indigenous disadvantage transcend political cycles and require long term commitment and cooperation. (House of Representative Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs 2004:4)

I continue to build strategic relationships and make recommendations to Heads of State Government Human Services Departments to ensure the ongoing success of this project. The responsibility for addressing the disadvantage of Nyikina people must be equally shared between and across governments as well as with Nyikina people in order to create and sustain change. This research emphasises the importance of reconciling values associated with ecological, economic, socio-cultural and political dimensions of the mainstream culture with the Nyikina world view. This requires a whole-of-government and community response to planning and development.



**Figure 4.** *Proposed Nyikina Inc. Organisational Structures*

Figure 4 is a diagrammatic representation of the partnerships which are central to the process of sustainability of the NMAC. Government, business and nearby Nyikina communities will need to work together to develop new ways of working:

The fundamental principle ... is one of a cycle of whole-of-government and across-sector engagement, collaborative planning, policy development, service delivery and evaluation ... while certain government agencies may have a greater level of responsibility for certain interventions, no single agency or sector has the capacity to implement sustainable change in isolation from the participation of others. (DIA 2005a:19)

This type of collaborative partnership with Indigenous people will need to demonstrate targeting negotiated goals within defined timeframes. The

responsibility is on governments to ensure every effort will be made to adequately invest in local community solutions in order to justify the partnership as a matter of priority, in producing just outcomes for Nyikina people in the region. It is on the basis of facilitating the establishment of the NMAC that I was able to exit this study confident of satisfying my responsibility and reciprocity to my family, community and the academic world. My commitment to the cultural action commenced in this study continues beyond the life of this research. My involvement continues in the many roles I continue to play in supporting Indigenous community development through cultural action to finish the projects that have commenced and start new projects in response to community need. These roles currently include but not limited to: Co-Chair WA Aboriginal Justice Congress, Co-Chair of the West-Kimberley (regional) and Derby (local) Aboriginal Justice Forums, Nyikina representative (1 of 4) on the Kimberley Land Council Kimberley Futures Committee, Deputy Chair Nyikina Mangala Aboriginal Corporation, Secretary Nyikina Inc., Managing Director of Madjulla Inc.

## **7.4 Discussion**

This chapter demonstrates how the successful cultural actions of Nyikina people living in and outside of Derby have laid the foundation for generating hope and optimism through open and honest dialogic processes leading into new projects that expand Nyikina people's cultural regeneration. This hope and collective action has given rise to the establishment of a new Indigenous governance model which is the foundation of a Nyikina future

based on the understanding that Nyikina people are serious about building strong leadership and sustainable development.

As Nyikina people we can say we have a new collective identity based on a celebration of Nyikina culture, which was once at threat is now being revived and strengthened. This sense of empowerment and emancipation has come about by Nyikina people rebuilding their cultural identity of Nyikina-ness. It is a celebration of our personal community and cultural identity achieved through a collective ethical vision, civic courage and sense of liberation brought about by building a new shared future.

The next and final chapter, Chapter 8, provides a brief description of the procedures, major findings and how these findings relate to the research objectives. It concludes with a discussion on the directions for future research to promote health and wellbeing among the Nyikina and other Indigenous Australians.

## Chapter 8

### SUMMARY, FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

#### 8.1 Summary

This chapter presents an overview of the issues raised in this thesis in regards to the future of Nyikina culture and communities. It further provides a brief discussion on the directions for future research to promote health and wellbeing among Nyikina people and other Indigenous Australians.

The opportunity to undertake a research project to understand the construction of disadvantage for Indigenous people in the West Kimberley region of Western Australia has been a deep personal journey. I explored State Government Native Welfare files, text and film of my immediate and extended family. I filmed local Indigenous leaders and conducted formal interviews with Nyikina community members. The richest part of the research experience has been the opportunity to work in partnership with extended family members. The opportunity to engage in cultural actions to generate community cultural development as community solutions was critical to the research process. Reducing disadvantage and building personal and community capacity for sustainable development on Nyikina *kandri* and along the *Mardoowarra* was a key factor in this research. This demonstrated that the processes of structural violence established during the early colonial period have evolved to maintain an endemic state of overwhelming disadvantage for Indigenous people in the West Kimberley. Yet, promisingly I have been able to work with Indigenous

community members to undertake projects that show new hope for regenerating culture and language among Nyikina people.

In Cultural Action Project 1: *Nyikina Language and Culture Project* and Cultural Action Project 2: *Nyikina Incorporated*, I mapped the process of cultural action to demonstrate how the community cultural development of marginalised Nyikina people living in Derby contributed to a sense of empowerment by establishing for the first time an extensive cultural data base and methods for language immersion which is sustained through a Nyikina cultural organisation.

In Cultural Action Project 3: *Saying No Way to Family and Community Violence*, I investigated the regional Indigenous social and cultural context by interviewing leaders from the West Kimberley region. This included analysing key community cultural development projects non-Nyikina Indigenous people have undertaken, to deal with family, community and systemic violence. This information continues to inform local and state government policy and practice in the region.

In Cultural Action Project 4: *Nyikina Cultural Centre & Cultural Action Project 5: Indigenous Governance of Nyikina Kandri*, were facilitated through my community engagement with Nyikina people in Derby. These cultural actions developed a strategy for establishing the Nyikina Cultural Centre. This cultural action was extended to include broad community dialogue and participation towards strengthening Nyikina governance and leadership on Nyikina *kandri*.

Nyikina people in the West Kimberley region of Australia are transforming our position of oppression and disadvantage through a unified approach. This transformation has given rise to the emergence of a new identity that fulfils the needs of Nyikina people in this region. This new identity provides a sense of being Nyikina; a sense of autonomy and dignity. This unified approach has been critical to building a collective vision for unity amongst Nyikina people. Nyikina people are strengthening resilience and resourcefulness, and through cultural actions, we are working with young people and leaders to improve our life circumstances. We are strengthening and documenting our methods and procedures in a culturally appropriate and technically competent way.

#### *8.1.1 Methods and Procedures*

The methods and procedures of this study are presented to demonstrate how the outcomes were produced. The wide range of sources built a greater understanding of the historical influence of the European invasion, conquest and occupation in the initial construction of Indigenous disadvantage in this region of Australia.

The application of multiple data collection procedures to collect information from a range of perspectives strengthened the research findings. Investigation into the micro and macro context of the West Kimberley region identified that successive generations of Indigenous Australians living under oppressed conditions has resulted in acculturated negative life styles collectively referred to as Indigenous disadvantage. An action research

approach was adopted to generate Indigenous community involvement in exploring community cultural development as community solutions for overcoming disadvantage. The study identified how I, as the insider researcher, presented, analysed and interpreted the evidence through the lens of my experience and understanding of the research context.

Data presentation and analysis was enriched by a narrative approach to describe Indigenous understandings of culture in relation to individual, family and community wellbeing. Bringing information together from a variety of sources and including results from different perspectives was crucial; as no one source of information was sufficient. My role as insider researcher was significant as I was able to interpret the data from my lived experiences which was strengthened from my undergraduate and postgraduate academic as well as technical training. I made a purposeful, fundamental shift from focusing on the deficits to facilitating community determined solutions. It was essential that I looked for strengths within the people and our communities that could assist in fostering individual and community resilience.

This multi-method approach demonstrated how meaning is defined in the actions of Nyikina and other Indigenous people in this region and the processes I used to assist Nyikina people to determine their own quality and continuity of individual and community life. A descriptive picture of the Nyikina social world was included by constructing multiple and alternative approaches to inquiry. I extended the view of what constitutes evidence by including a range of community-generated data. From my insider view with my



participatory observations and experiences I looked for logical connections working with and talking to a wider range of community and civic leaders who were all focused on overcoming Indigenous disadvantage in the West Kimberley region of Western Australia.

### *8.1.2 Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage*

In building this evidence base for Nyikina people to overcome a position of disadvantage, I exercised caution not to restrict the definition of individual and community wellbeing by concentrating too much attention on any single construct of disadvantage. In order to provide balance, the study identified the participation of Indigenous people as a vital part of creating our own community solutions to build social, human and cultural capital to improve their social, emotional, spiritual, cultural, intellectual and economic disadvantage.

There is ample evidence to indicate that Indigenous disadvantaged has been deliberately controlled by government policies and laws since the invasion, conquest and occupation of Australia leading to longstanding oppression. This has been witnessed by past government policy and practice where systems and laws actively discriminated against Indigenous people in an effort to subdue, control and obliterate our societies. The history of maintaining a social underclass based on race, even for people exempt from the Native Welfare Protection Act (1905), confirms the dehumanising of Indigenous Australians by state and federal governments through institutional racism and systemic violence.

Indigenous people have known the root cause of their disadvantage for a long time but have not been able to effectively advocate our position to non-Indigenous people. The inability of government to resolve the overwhelming disadvantage and community dysfunction is a product of the anti-dialogic protocols and programs governments continue to engage in which effectively marginalise Indigenous community cultural development.

In order for governments to contribute towards Indigenous disadvantage they must see Indigenous people as core business recognising that Indigenous agencies in the region perform an integral contribution to making communities safe and sustainable. Governments need to commit recurrent funding tied to sound monitoring and evaluation. Clearly there needs to be a substantially greater investment by government into building the capacity of Indigenous communities to engage in processes to build human, social, cultural and economic capital to overcome disadvantage.

The social and physical environment that shapes the world view of far too many Indigenous people's daily life experience is located within a milieu of overwhelming disadvantage. Living with extreme disadvantage has become the norm for many Indigenous people with little ability to connect the wrongs of the past with the situations of the present. To this end, effective responses to overcoming disadvantage must include building cultural capital to nurture the *liyan* (life spirit) of Indigenous Australians. This research identifies the clear need for Nyikina people to determine our own needs in relation to improving our quality and continuity of life as well as our aspirations for the

common good. This understanding was critical to the Nyikina cultural actions projects.

The information provided in this research reveals Nyikina people living in Derby identify their contemporary experiences of disadvantage is associated with not maintaining their cultural practices throughout the traditional lands. Nyikina Elders were concerned that without maintaining a connection to *kandri*, Nyikina cultural heritage would not be passed on across generations, resulting in a continued loss and deprivation in the construction of Nyikina identity and wellbeing.

The Nyikina Elders who guided the projects believed it was important for cultural stories to be told and captured in a contemporary medium so that Indigenous knowledge about Nyikina history and cultural heritage would be maintained and celebrated. It is on this basis that Nyikina people living in Derby worked with me to capture this knowledge and we used it to build community cultural development to ensure the survival of our unique and valuable culture. These cultural action projects are building the capacity of Nyikina people in Derby and within Nyikina *kandri* to withstand disadvantage, discrimination and marginalisation for the long term.

### *8.1.3 Responding to Trauma Needs a Fresh Approach*

The political actions of state and federal governments have been traumatic, disordering the lives and behaviours of Indigenous Australians over many generations and continues into contemporary Indigenous settings in the

twenty-first century. The imposition of successive Australian government policies for determining Indigenous decision making continues to reduce Indigenous Australians' life choices. A new way of thinking about the quality and continuity of Indigenous Australian lives requires the acknowledgement of the extent of inter-generational trauma impacting on the daily life activities of individuals living in stressful settings.

The experience of one hundred and twenty eight years of colonisation of the *Mardoowarra*, Fitzroy River since 1880 has left Nyikina people in extremely disadvantaged circumstances. The statistical evidence confirms poverty, poor health, high levels of incarceration (particularly of young people), unemployment, inadequate housing and high levels of family, community and systemic violence are endemic in Derby and throughout the West Kimberley region. That Indigenous people continue to suffer suggests that not enough is happening to halt the cultural genocide. This study has identified the pathway to overcoming Indigenous social disadvantage requires investments into Indigenous Australian health, education, housing, employment, and access to land. Furthermore, justice through a human rights based approach is fundamental for changing the disparities in Indigenous levels of economic and social development.

In order to become a more just society governments need to develop social and economic policies and practices that are grounded in ethical principles of participation, self-management and self-determination. Without

investing in these ethical principles the opportunities to build social, human and cultural capital, overcoming Nyikina disadvantage is not sustainable.

## **8.2 Findings**

This research developed, implemented and analysed cultural action research projects that facilitated community participation for building the capacity of Nyikina people to respond to and overcome disadvantage. The aim of this research was realised through a number of Cultural Action and related projects involving the community and me. The Research Objectives for the study were to:

Develop an understanding of the historical impact of colonisation on Nyikina people.

Analyse other non-Nyikina West Kimberley community solutions that may be relevant for building the capacity of Nyikina people.

Identify, implement and analyse a process for a holistic response to generate sustainable community cultural development for Nyikina people in Derby.

The findings are discussed in relation to how the Cultural Action Projects contributed to meeting the research objectives below.

### *8.2.1 The historical impact of colonisation on the construction of contemporary Indigenous disadvantage.*

The literature review introduced the history of the impact of colonisation on Indigenous Australians with particular reference to Nyikina people in the West Kimberley region of Western Australia. Contemporary

Indigenous Australians continue to be marginalised by government policy, practice and funding decisions. The impact of this continued anti-dialogic behaviour from governments maintains a colonial relationship where the invaders continue to rule over the invaded.

The research confirmed that Indigenous family and kinship structures and communities' relationships have changed due to colonial experiences. The experience of invasion, dispossession, slavery and continued poverty is evidenced through inter-generational trauma, witnessed as family, community and systemic violence. Successive generations of colonial oppression have entrenched racist practice within the systems of government and the wider society. Investigation into the broad regional level of Indigenous violence prevention in the West Kimberley region found that historical systemic barriers were a major disadvantage to reducing family and community violence.

These systemic barriers flow on to affect the quality and continuity of life of many Indigenous people in the region. The social policies introduced by successive Australian governments and institutions are largely responsible for determining Indigenous behaviours over the past one hundred and twenty eight years and have reduced choices for Indigenous people living in this region. Indigenous affairs remains polarised around political interests. Contemporary local, state and national evidence is overwhelming and highlights that governments are slow to respond to engaging a paradigm shift to remove the social disadvantage of Nyikina people and other Indigenous people

in the region. The issues of social disadvantage faced by Indigenous people in the region demonstrate Australia has not found the political courage to redress the history of injustice that continues in contemporary Australian society.

The evidence from this study shows Nyikina people, through our cultural actions, are focused on building and sustaining a new process which acknowledges past and current government policies, and the impact this continues to have on personal, family and community disadvantage in contemporary Australian life. The outcomes from this research identify how Nyikina people have taken the first step towards building a positive cultural identity and positive self-image. Nyikina people living in Derby have begun the process of redefining who we are as members of the Nyikina community by establishing organisations such as Nyikina Inc. to promote social cohesion. Nyikina Inc. was established as a vehicle for managing the promotion and revitalisation of Nyikina language and culture. In a period of three years Nyikina Inc. has influenced building the capacity of Nyikina people in research and resource production, education programs. Nyikina people championed the establishment of new institutions such as the Nyikina Cultural Centre and the Nyikina Mangala Aboriginal Corporation (NMAC). The collaboration has extended outwards into Nyikina *kandri* and together with riverside people and communities Nyikina people in Derby are investing in sound leadership and governance by working together with the development of the new body corporate the NMAC to collectively manage our native title, land and water rights to protect and develop our social, cultural, spiritual and economic resource base.

*8.2.2 Rationale and process for engaging cultural action to strengthen community cultural development.*

The research into Nyikina community cultural development in Derby demonstrates that building social, human and cultural capital through creative cultural industries is a way of exploring and expressing Nyikina culture and values. The cultural actions of Nyikina people in Derby are helping to build a strong foundation for strengthening social cohesion. This exploration and experimentation is beginning to develop resilience and a willingness to try new strategies as well as take risks in the face of adversity. Strengthening personal and community wellbeing has become a major focus for these Nyikina people. The research is showing that Nyikina people in Derby have increased local participation in community and cultural activities, indicated through increased levels of civic engagement. The research is beginning to demonstrate a correlation between the wellbeing of these Nyikina people and their sense of Nyikinaness, which is contributing towards sustainable community cultural development.

The findings confirm the need for a holistic response to generate sustainable community cultural development for Nyikina people in Derby. The macro investigation into Indigenous community solutions by non-Nyikina Aboriginal people revealed the need to strengthen new partnerships. New partnerships would adopt a regional approach to improve dialogic action in securing investments to build the social, human and cultural capital of Indigenous people in this region. This type of investment is directed at



improving Indigenous governance around cultural industries that can provide the opportunity to shift from welfare to wealth creation as prerequisites for self-determination and self-management.

To reform Indigenous social policy and practice in human and community services; government and non-government services need to move towards a more open and accountable service delivery model. The findings confirmed that a paradigm shift is required in the relationship between Indigenous people and government at all phases of planning, policy and service delivery. State and Commonwealth government agencies responsible for services to Indigenous people have had limited success in responding to Indigenous needs in this region. The evidence for justice related health outcomes in this region demonstrates that government agencies at the state and commonwealth levels are failing to respond to the Gordon Inquiry's (2002) call to do business differently for the better for Indigenous people living in the Shire of Derby-West Kimberley. Nyikina people in Derby have started to organise their identities in relation to both Indigenous and non-Indigenous structures. This research identified that Nyikina people in Derby are building evidence to justify further investment into cultural industries. They want to use their rich cultural heritage to generate an economic base. Examples of cultural industries are conservation rangers, tour guides, cultural education teachers and researchers. Furthermore they have begun the process necessary to become self-determining and truly self-managing by participating in cultural action to generate self governance for sustainable community cultural development.

*8.2.3 Cultural action to build community cultural development in partnership with Nyikina people in the West Kimberley region of Western Australia*

The findings in relation to Nyikina people living in Derby exemplify how cultural action is building sustainable community cultural development. Nyikina people are demonstrating that the presence and continuity of an established cultural system is necessary for our; social, emotional, spiritual, intellectual and economic wellbeing. The findings indicate that Nyikina people living in Derby are working in partnership with cultural mentors to establish and maintain a cultural system which is guiding us through Nyikina Elders and cultural mentors who are defining cultural norms and expectations for living in a contemporary global milieu.

The findings confirm the cultural action and community cultural development being engaged in by these Nyikina people is beginning to lay the foundation for generating hope and optimism through dialogic action. The findings revealed that after living for several decades in Derby, Nyikina people can say we have a new collective identity based on a celebration of our Nyikina-ness. A Nyikina identity which was previously suppressed, and is now available to share with others. The findings confirm this as a celebration of our personal, community and cultural identity which has been achieved through a collective ethical vision, civic courage and the strategies to build a sense of liberation and freedom from the dominant and alienating mainstream Australian society.

*8.2.4 Increase social cohesion and civic participation to provide the conditions for genuine partnerships for overcoming disadvantage*

The process for developing a holistic response to building healthy public policy to inform and generate sustainable community cultural development for Nyikina people in Derby requires dialogic relationships between the local, state and federal systems servicing Indigenous people, their families and their communities. Research findings identified the need to move the construction of Indigenous policy towards a genuine partnership arrangement where Nyikina and other Indigenous people in Derby negotiate funding and service agreements as well as managing participatory evaluation projects. The development of self-governance is integral to building internal structures and external partnerships. Furthermore, individual capacity building of key life skills is required to build personal and community resilience. Indigenous community cultural development requires development, planning and evaluation to build personal organisational skills to manage life choices and create supportive environments. The findings report that the cultural action projects I facilitated have generated community cultural development and the effect produced a sense of emancipation and empowerment for Indigenous people in the region.

### **8.3 Conclusion**

This research involved the development, implementation and analysis of five Cultural Action Projects to inform and facilitate community participation of Nyikina people. Nyikina people engaged in community cultural

development in an effort to develop holistic responses to reducing the impact of disadvantage on their families and communities. The research was guided by the level of community participation in the projects. Indigenous community formal and informal feedback was incorporated by the Elders who guided the process. Nyikina Elders initiated the projects and received strong support from community members as well as Indigenous and mainstream civic leaders throughout the region and nationally. Wider community support for the research process and outcomes have been demonstrated by participation and contributions from non-Nyikina people and institutions. This included funding from local, state and federal government departments and international philanthropic institutions. Other outcomes include an excision of ten hectares of prime tourism land from the local and state governments as well as an increased understanding by the wider community about the activities and aspirations of the active Nyikina people in Derby.

The research commenced with an ethical vision to contribute as much back to the research community as I, the researcher, took for the purposes of this research. The research has resulted in the production of a Nyikina Language and Culture Program, an extensive Nyikina course and multi-media cultural resource materials, the establishment of Nyikina Incorporated, and well advanced plans for a Nyikina Culture Centre and the Nyikina Mangala Aboriginal Corporation governance model.

The evidence from engaging multiple data collecting methods in this action research has increased an understanding of Indigenous disadvantage

and how to overcome it in one particular Indigenous setting, that of the Nyikina people in the Kimberley region of Western Australia. Nyikina people require governments to adopt ethical principles, practice and relationships to build Nyikina people's capacity to shift from welfare to wealth creation by investing in community solutions for building safe and sustainable communities free from disadvantage. The cultural action employed in this research initiated a community cultural development process for Nyikina emancipation and empowerment.

Indigenous emancipatory development theory informed the study about the need for: government and Aboriginal people to participate in open and honest dialogue to create a genuine partnership; the importance of building a strong cultural identity; and understanding and negotiating the cultural, political and ideological dimensions of government policies and practices which ranged from segregation, protection, assimilation, through to self-determination and more recently mainstreaming.

This research identified much can be achieved to reduce the level of Indigenous disadvantage by Australian governments letting go of control and allowing more autonomy of Indigenous people over our own affairs. In 2008 the newly elected Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd, opened his first sitting of the 2008 Parliament with a national apology to Aboriginal people for the past injustices and in particular the policies and practices that resulted in the intergenerational trauma of the 'Stolen Generations'. While this is a milestone in itself, it is unfortunate that this gesture of 'sorry' was not supported by any

debate on compensating Aboriginal people for their personal and family traumas. This national act could have been aligned to the concept of investment, changing the national Indigenous affairs debate from a position of weakness to a position of strength. Shifting the concept of a hand out, to a hand up and how in fact building the capacity of Indigenous Australians to shift from welfare to a wealth creation paradigm will create the opportunity to contribute towards a creative and productive Australia in 2008 and beyond.

The findings of this study confirm that governments need to resource Indigenous people to develop holistic community solutions around their specific circumstances of disadvantage. The study confirms self-determination and self-management must be grounded in cultural action and community cultural development as the founding principles for overcoming disadvantage and promoting sustainable change.

The study allowed me to reflect on my own journey of deconstruction through reconstruction; a journey based around a cultural heritage grounded in the worldviews of Nyikina people; a journey of coming to understand oppression, and importantly collective opportunities; a journey of freedom to invest in cultural capital, which is contributing towards increasing social cohesion and sustainable Nyikina communities in the global milieu of contemporary Australia.

In Nyikina I close with *Kaliya, malina nganka*, stop talking, end of story, finish, and goodbye.

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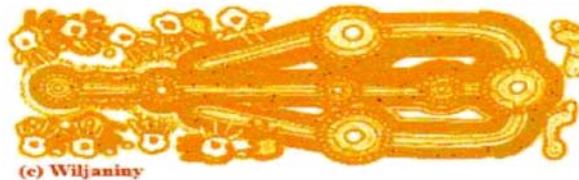
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## **Appendices**

Appendix 1:	Letter of Support: Nyikina Inc.....	295
Appendix 2:	Participant Information Sheet A.....	296
Appendix 3:	Participant Information Sheet B.....	299
Appendix 4:	Consent Form.....	300
Appendix 5:	Copy of Fax: Introduction to Communities.....	301
Appendix 6:	DVD <i>Saying No Way to Family and Community Violence</i> .....	303
Appendix 7:	Further Discussion of Data in DVD <i>Saying No Way to Family and Community Violence</i> .....	304
Appendix 8:	Copy of Letter: JBA&VPF Coordinator.....	335
Appendix 9:	Discussion Paper: Nyikina Cultural Centre.....	336
Appendix 10:	DVD: <i>Nyikina Cultural Centre</i> .....	324
Appendix 11:	Brochure: Nyikina Language and Culture Resource Kit 2004.....	343

## Appendix 1

**Nyikina People are 'Yimardoowarra People'.**  
Traditional Custodians Of The Lower Fitzroy River From The Beginning Of Time.



**Nyikina Inc.**  
POST BOX 1194, DERBY, WA 6728

ABN:31853 864 645

Research Services  
University of New England  
Armidale NSW 2351

30<sup>th</sup> August 2004

Re: 'Come from Black go back to Black': Engaging Action Research Projects to Build the Capacity of Nyikina Indigenous Australians – UNE Research Ethics Clearance Number HE01/239

In keeping with the NHMRC Guidelines on Ethical Matters in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Research the Nyikina Inc. Executive Committee fully endorse the cultural action being facilitated by Anne Poelina,

The Executive Committee believe the collaborative partnership of Nyikina Inc. with Anne Poelina has the potential to contributed towards developing local evidence to ensure the protection and revitalisation of Nyikina language and cultural practices for generations to come.

The Executive Committee will be responsible for guiding the research and will be involved in collection of data (cultural knowledge), working with the researcher to understand the information and to determine how the information will be documented in order to ensure Nyikina people through the Nyikina Inc. will be accurately represented in any private and public documentation.

The Executive Committee will meet with the researcher on a monthly basis to review all work. This revision will assist in monitoring the research as well as advising on any revision required to progress the community cultural developments of Nyikina Inc. which will be actioned through the quarterly committee meetings.

Yours truly,

Lucy Marshall  
Chair

## Appendix 2



School of Health  
University of New England  
Armidale NSW 2351

### **Participant Information Sheet -**

**Principal Researcher:** Anne Poelina

**Principal Supervisor:** Dr David Plummer

**Title of the study:** 'Come from Black go back to Black': Engaging Action Research Projects to Build the Capacity of Nyikina Indigenous Australians UNE Research Ethics Clearance Number HE01/239

The research I am doing builds on the work the Nyikina people are doing in Derby. In order to make this work it is important to look at what other people are doing both in Australian and overseas and how we might be able to use some of their ideas to help us to develop our own community wellbeing. The research being undertaken by me is for the award of a Doctorate of Philosophy degree under the supervision of Dr David Plummer of the School of Health with the University of New England, Armidale NSW.

#### *About The Researcher*

My name is Anne Poelina I am a Nyikina woman living at Balginjirr Community. I am doing my research studies at the School of Health. The research, which I am doing, is looking for ways to keep Nyikina families and communities strong.

#### *What the research is about*

My research is about understanding events in our everyday living. If we work together to learn about these things, we may be able use this information to heal problems of our spirit (liyan) and help to make our lives stronger. I hope that my research will assist the process of social justice and I believe Nyikina people have a wealth of knowledge and expertise in creating community solutions, which could help many Aboriginal people throughout Australia. At the completion of my research I will complete a thesis, which will be available for our community to be used as part of mapping our culture and community planning.



To carry out the research successfully, I will work with the community for the next three years to collect information to learn from our people. I will also spend time with the community checking the stories with community members to make sure I write your story down in the right way. A major part of my work is to live and work with community members and to conduct meetings. I am hoping to interview Nyikina people living in Derby. The interviews will take as long as people want and may last up to 60 minutes each. *Provided you agree, I would like to record the interview on audio tape. I will make sure that what is written down is correct and you are happy with the story.* The interviews will need to take place in a location, which ensures your privacy, and where you feel comfortable. With your permission the stories will be written down.

The stories will be used to write down your comments for my final report to help me learn more about Nyikina peoples' views of living in Derby.

I hope to build and strengthen relationship of trust and respect with you, which would include your input and suggestion on the research. I am no expert and I am just starting out on my journey, I seek your guidance and support in teaching me. I wish to respect the community and act in accordance with our cultural protocols. Confidentiality is very important in research. I cannot guarantee it but I will aim to uphold your confidentiality by leaving out names, ages and other information, which might identify you. The personal comments you might share in your stories are confidential. This is limited to the requirements of the law. I am happy to explain how this may affect you in more detail.

When the stories are typed, hopefully no person will be able to be identified. If any person wants a copy of their story they will be given a copy to keep. Your names will not be used but there could be other information you might want to delete that you feel

identifies you or your family in the report. Security /confidentiality of all the information and in particular the original information of the stories will be of utmost consideration throughout the research. It will be necessary to use made up names in any information, which is put in report for the public to read to stop people from recognising you. I will show you the information and talk with you about it in case you want to make any changes to the stories. Your participation in the research is totally voluntary. You can pull out of the research at any time. There will be no sorry feelings about this and will you not be disadvantaged for doing so. When I am writing down your story you can stop, correct or change any of your comments at any time.

If you agree to the research going ahead, I would like to set up an initial meeting with you as soon as possible to discuss the research and to establish a partnership, which involves your equal input, knowledge and guidance.

**Should you have any questions about the research you should contact the Research Ethics Officer at the following address; Research Services, University of New England, Armidale, NSW 2351 or phone (02) 6773 3449 or fax: (02) 6773 3543, email: [Ethics@metz.une.edu.au](mailto:Ethics@metz.une.edu.au)**

## Appendix 3



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School of Professional Development and Leadership

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**School of Health  
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**Participant Information Sheet –  
Principal Researcher: Anne Poelina  
Principal Supervisor: Dr David Plummer**

**Title of the study: ‘Come from Black go back to Black’: Engaging Action Research Projects to Build the Capacity of Nyikina Indigenous Australians UNE Research Ethics Clearance Number HE01/239**

The project is being done for the ATSIC Malarabah Regional Council for the project Saying No Way to Family and Community Violence Project. This project will be interviewing community people and leaders working in community cultural development projects in Derby, Fitzroy Crossing and Gibb River Road Communities. The project is using information collected from participants to make a video to promote the work being done in these communities to combat violence.

The researcher and Regional Council believe this information can be used to inform government agencies about the strengths and barriers to keeping these community projects going. The researcher believes this information can also inform other people nationally about the work being done in Aboriginal communities in this region.

It is on this basis that I agree to participate in this project. I request all information collected and interpreted by the researcher is provided to all participants to make sure the researcher is not presented participants in a bad or negative way. The researcher has agreed to provide a copy of the draft report and draft video to all participants. It is on this agreement that the research will take place. It is on this basis the researcher will present the information back to all participants for their feedback. This action will make certain all participants are in agreement with how they are seen and talked about. All participants will be made aware of how this information will be made public in the video, the report to ATSIC Malarabah Regional Council and in the researcher’s doctoral research. Participants are aware they will be publicly identified.

**Should you have any questions about the research you should contact the Research Ethics Officer at the following address; Research Services, University of New England, Armidale, NSW 2351 or phone (02) 6773 3449 or fax: (02) 6773 3543, email: [Ethics@metz.une.edu.au](mailto:Ethics@metz.une.edu.au)**



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## SCHOOL OF HEALTH

Principal Researcher: **Anne Poelina**

Principal Supervisor: Dr David Plummer

**Title of the study: ‘Come from Black go back to Black’: Engaging Action Research Projects to Build the Capacity of Nyikina Indigenous Australians UNE Research Ethics Clearance Number HE01/239**

The interview is looking for information on how Nyikina people have built their personal and family: resistance, survival and recovery.

### CONSENT FORM FOR KEY INFORMANTS

I give my permission freely and I understand that the research will be carried out as outlined above. I realise that whether or not I decide to participate my decision will not affect me in any way, which is harmful. I also understand that I can withdraw from the interview at any time and do not have to give any reasons. In the case where I do not wish to sign this consent form I give verbal permission for a community representative to do so on my behalf. I have had all questions answered to my satisfaction and I feel comfortable in being involved in Anne Poelina’s doctoral research.

Print name: .....

Signature..... Date.....

Signature of community representative.....

Date.....

## **Appendix 5**



Madjulla Incorporated  
Balginjirr Community (via  
Derby WA6728  
Box 753 Derby WA 672  
Box 2747 Broome WA 6725  
Email: [madjulla@wn.com.au](mailto:madjulla@wn.com.au)  
Phone/fax: 0891922155  
Mobile: 0408922155

### **URGENT FAX MAIL**

2 pages

**To:**

**Fax:**

**From:** Anne Poelina

**Date:** August 2004

**Subject:** Family And Community Violence Awareness Campaign

**PLEASE CONFIRM THAT YOU HAVE RECEIVED THIS FAX**

#### **Who are We?**

Madjulla is an Indigenous not for profit community organisation with Cultural Education Research Training and Evaluation expertise. We are based at Balginjirr community (Lower Liveringa) and have an office in Broome. We have broad national experience working with individuals, families and communities towards actioning sustainable change. We have an extensive track record in the area of family and community violence prevention and promotion work.

**PS.** The filmmaker is Gwen Sputore from Campdog Productions who has been working with us on a range of video projects.

**What are we Doing?**

We are working with the Malarabah ATSIC Regional Council on a family and community violence awareness campaign. Part of this campaign is to make a video to look at local projects addressing this issue by working to build strong women, men, young people and families. We are interviewing Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal service providers as well as outlying communities working in the area to see what is happening in the region but also to identify the gaps.

**Would you like to be involved?**

We would like to offer your community the opportunity to have your say on the video and to show case the work you are doing in the Gibb River area. We are coming to the **Name of the community or organisation** between August 13<sup>th</sup> and Wednesday 25<sup>th</sup> August please **contact us by mobile or email** if you are interested in meeting with us. We would send some questions before we come so that you can begin to think about what we might talk about.

## **Appendix 6**

**DVD: *Saying No Way to Family and Community*  
*Violence***

**Warning this DVD contains images of people  
who have passed away since the film was made.**

### Further Discussion of Data in DVD *Saying No Way to Family and Community Violence*

#### 1. Introduction

Indigenous leaders in the West Kimberley region have developed a range of local community solutions to respond to the multiple sources of risk. The DVD *Saying No Way to Family and Community Violence* (Madjulla Inc. 2004b) demonstrated a reasonable level of success yet community initiated projects remain at risk of collapsing. These projects require an increased level of investment to ensure community cultural development is sustainable. Many of the community solutions demonstrate how resources could be invested into cultural action projects at the local community level in ways that empower local Indigenous people to respond more effectively to issues of violence.

#### 2. Freedom from Violence

An Indigenous woman, Lorna Hudson, from Derby who held the position of ATSIIC Malarabah Regional Councillor responsible for women's issues acknowledged:

People working in those places [government agencies] need to be oriented so they have a better understanding of the culture and the lifestyle of the people in the community, because they are the main people, they are the leaders, they are the spokespeople for the grass roots level. They [the service providers] have to have that knowledge on cultural side of things as well.

I reckon people who are working in the departments and organisations should go down to the grass root level people, make a time and sit down with them and start talking and collecting information, and from there, go back to



the government departments and start reporting on their views. I think that's where a lot of the problem lies because they don't even go down and do the consultation with the community groups ... to get their views on what the problem is in the community. (Lorna Hudson)

Government and non-government human service workers should be required to complete cultural awareness programs to have a better understanding of the culture and lifestyle of Indigenous people in remote communities. This type of training is intended to raise the cultural awareness of public servants so they are better able to influence government policy and practice to influence their work practices. Cultural awareness training is directed at influencing the government worker to become aware of the social and cultural context in which many Aboriginal people live. This type of training is directed at getting government workers to 'think differently' about working with Indigenous people and their families in an attempt to develop strategies which are outcome based and modelled on best practice principles. There is a lack of effective communication between the people who require services and those responsible for delivering services. Governments and service delivery agencies need to better communicate with the full spectrum of Indigenous people so that they will have a greater appreciation for the circumstances and views of the people so that they can more effectively advocate within the systems to create systemic change.

An Indigenous woman, Iris Prouse, Shire of Derby-West Kimberley Councillor and public health officer stated:

The agencies can work better on the ground to produce better outcomes for clients ... because they are more aware of how best to get services out to the

community people. Move from not only focusing on changing people's awareness about what community violence is all about, to changing people's mindset that work within the services as well. (Iris Prouse)

There is a need to extend the change process from raising awareness about family violence to improving the service delivery of agencies responsible for reducing family and systemic violence in Derby by changing the working culture of these services. Systemic change requires that agencies change the way they do business by increasing dialogue with Indigenous people. The non-Indigenous Officer in Charge of the Derby Police Service, Sergeant Clay, discussed how the Police Service has responded to family and community violence issues:

One of the things I'm very strong about is talking to the community and expressing to them that we have a good alliance of government and other agencies all working for the same common goal. Sometimes community groups and government agencies can be split in what our objective is. We are all chasing the same thing; we all want to help this community get better. We all have children who are going to grow up in the Kimberley, particularly the Derby area, who are going to have a good life, who are not going to be hindered people through domestic violence, by child sexual offences. We are all striving to change that. (Tom Clay)

Sergeant Clay raises the importance of opening up constructive dialogue so that the government and community partners can focus on their common interests or goals, continuing to say:

Derby Police have put some strategies together. One of the key strategies has been our communication, our ability to talk to people, to treat them with respect and develop strong relationships. I think the fact that we talk to the

people more about their rights, so that they feel free in their ability to talk to us, that's one phase of what we're dealing with. If we are not going to get the trust of the people, and we're not going to get it alone, we can only get it by the support of the people who are treated by trusted community members and that is what we have, and people understand the needs particularly of their own Indigenous group. (Tom Clay)

Government and non-government agencies need to increase their level of collaboration in efforts towards the common goal of addressing family and community violence. Projects and processes that promote dialogue with Indigenous community people are important for building trust and respect. Informing Indigenous people of their rights and responsibilities builds mutual respect and trust of service providers among Indigenous community members.

The right to live in a safe environment, free of violence, is a fundamental human right enjoyed by most Australians, and yet this is not the common experience of many members of Indigenous communities in the West Kimberley. However, some individuals are trying to redress this issue, as violence is tearing their communities apart. A senior Aboriginal Community member took direct action to reduce violence by stopping drinking in her community, which she recalls as:

We always watch all the drunkards at the gates, watching them, telling them not to bring the grog in to Bayulu, because we have a lot of old people, and some young kids so we always lock the gate and we tell them [drunkards] to drink outside. (Margaret Smith)

Senior Indigenous women in Bayulu took the initiative to lock intoxicated people out of the community to ensure the safety of the community. This action

demonstrated the power of a collective of women and others in the community who have had enough of the negative influence of alcohol. There are many risks from reprisals from disgruntled drinkers, however, women like Mrs. Smith have taken a stand because they are concerned about their right to be safe and free from violence.

Kaye Wilson the Coordinator of the Marnin Bowa Dumbara Family Healing Centre (Centre) discussed the community's vision for holistic services to address violence within families from across the region:

The people of Derby wanted a family healing centre, not to see it as [just] a refuge [but rather a place] where they can help all the family, like their husband. Women accessing the service made the point, everything is here for us ladies, but there is nothing out there for our partners. (Kaye Wilson)

The community's vision for this Centre was to provide a wide range of services to bring families together to work out ways for families to live without violence. Insufficient funding has limited the Centre's function to a refuge and a few basic support services. Changing the government's and wider community perception of the Centre from that of a refuge focusing on crisis accommodation for victims of violence to a more holistic approach, which has the capacity to address the needs of the whole family in responding to violence is a slow process. However, this broader vision of the Centre is being worked towards.

The Family Healing Centre is an example of an Indigenous community project that is producing positive outcomes however it is undermined by unreliable government funding commitments, as Mrs. Kneebone describes:

The greatest challenge to the achievement of the centre has been the short term funding cycles. In order for these programs to reach greater sustainability within the community, governments need to provide funding to realise long-term plans. (Shelly Kneebone)

Shelly Kneebone sees short term funding as a major challenge to projects and programs continuing. Without recurrent funding many of the community cultural development programs were struggling to operate placing community safety at risk.

### **3. Community Safety**

Garl Garl Walbu: Sobering Up Shelter is another example of an Indigenous response to family and community violence. The shelter provides refuge to any person who is under the influence of alcohol to reduce the risks associated with intoxication, such as family and community violence. The Indigenous Coordinator of the shelter confirmed:

This program was set up to stop family violence in the home. Clients can come here instead of having to go home and cause trouble with the family. One of the gaps in this service is the need to offer education programs. While the Sobering Up Shelter is important we do need more programs ... we are here to keep the clients strong and sober. (Margie D'Antoine)

Sobering up shelters provide temporary accommodation aimed at reducing the level of family violence in the home by encouraging Indigenous community

members under the influence of alcohol to come to the shelter rather than going home to cause trouble with the family. Gaps in the service delivery of the shelter in Derby include:

- i) a limit on the number of consecutive nights a client may stay as beds need to be made available to allow other clients to use the service;
- ii) inability to offer education or counselling programs to support the rehabilitation of people suffering substance misuse and or living with or perpetrating violence; and
- iii) lack of funding to provide a reasonable wage and career path for staff working under stressful conditions managing intoxicated and sometime violent clients. (Greg Spinks)

Another example of a community response to reducing family violence is the Numbud Patrol. The Numbud Patrol promotes Indigenous community safety by transporting intoxicated people away from risky locations:

The [sobering up] shelter works in partnership with the Numbud Patrol, a bus service which transports people away from risky situations to a safe place. The Numbud Patrol is very important here in Derby, we find that we get a lot of clients who want to be taken home, want to be brought here and we do need a lot of help in getting more workers [to work with the Patrol]. (Margie D'Antoine)

The shelter and the patrol work closely together to pool their resources to maintain this service. A non-Indigenous man who was the Coordinator of Numbud Patrol described the importance of the service to Derby:

Numbud Patrol works at night. It's there to look after people with alcohol problems, domestic violence, it sort of does everything. If you want a lift home they're there to take you home. It's just trying to help people, with kids, which is pretty hard these days, with kids but we're trying. From the end of June last year to the 1<sup>st</sup> July this year we shifted 9,963 people and the population of Derby is only 5,000, so that's how much work we do and that's only three nights a week, but if we worked more nights you could probably double that so it's a lot of people being helped. (Greg Spinks)

Aboriginal community patrols provide local risk reduction initiatives by Aboriginal people. They intervene in situations where Indigenous people are at risk of criminal behaviour or where they face multiple hazards associated with community disorder, alcohol, drugs and violence. The Numbud Patrol was an important intervention project for addressing family violence by limiting the number of people found drunk and disorderly in public places, as Sergeant Clay reports:

One of the key successes [for addressing family and community violence] has been the Numbud Patrol and from the Police perspective we know that every time we see that bus go by, we know there is going to be some violence, some community problem that is going to be stopped. We are well aware they are constantly taking people to hospital and as I say, back to their community where they're out of trouble's way ... And for us, you can't get a better way to prevent crime, to prevent family violence. And for us it's a good way of protecting the community if you have a system like that. (Tom Clay)

The Derby Police Service support for Numbud Patrol is an important part of the process for building trust, respect and genuine partnership that works for a common goal. The Numbud Patrol workers have numerous encounters with community members

who are drunk, disorderly and sometimes violent. Derby needs the Numbud Patrol to operate on a more regular basis, however, it is financially limited to three nights a week even though the demand is for seven.

We need funding to help us get workers, they only work for CDEP they get [equivalent to welfare payment and] top up [a small additional payment], but that's not enough. (Margie D'Antoine)

Margie D'Antoine advocates employment equity by paying workers a salary tied to industry conditions and remuneration for the work performed in highly risky situations. There is a disparity between the types of services the Indigenous community requires and the corresponding policy and funding commitment from governments. A lack of government financial commitment is a continuous theme for Indigenous community projects; as Mr. Spinks explained:

The only problem is finance. Numbud needs two new buses, these buses are old and just about had it. These workers, they work for practically nothing. These workers want proper wages, that's one thing they really need, where they get holiday pay, sickness pay and all that ... it's a very stressful job and it is hard, you have to put up with a lot of things. We can't do it without financial backing; we can't do it at the moment, now a bloke gotta go begging for money to keep going. (Greg Spinks)

Mr. Spinks agrees projects such as the Numbud Patrol require serious investment of funds to sustain and increase the current level of service. The specific threat to the Numbud Patrol's sustainability is funding. There is strong acknowledgement from government and Indigenous services of the need for appropriate levels of resources to provide sufficient services, pay staff a reasonable wage and



operate as a sustainable enterprise. Despite providing an important community service under difficult conditions and working late hours, the workers have a low sense of value as their pay and conditions are equivalent to unemployment allowance. 'To participate in the scheme, unemployed members of a community or group voluntarily forego their Centrelink [welfare] entitlements' (SCRGSP 2005:11-12). The type of employment that people are engaged in has an impact on their wellbeing, in terms of how well they are remunerated and the level of job satisfaction.

The current system where Indigenous people are required to apply for competitive grants to develop pilot programs for basic human services and infrastructure is an example of government systems inability to support community projects. While this is experienced across the nation by community health and welfare agencies, the evidence from this research identifies the insecurity of competitive grants and pilot programs promote risk to the effectiveness and sustainability of Indigenous development. The competitive grant system is reasonable for non-essential services; however, the government perpetuates systemic violence against Indigenous people by using a competitive grant process to make Indigenous people compete for essential services. The competitive process means that many basic needs will not be met, effectively denying fundamental human rights which in turn limits the potential of the community to reduce violence, as Rigney reports:

I believe one of the key problems we keep coming up against is sustainability. It costs money to do this work, it costs money to put people on the ground, and it's not something we can keep handing off to volunteer committees to do. Especially in small communities, you have a limited pool

of really wonderful passionate people but if we are putting the same pressures on them again and again, we are just going to run out of time and energy. We really need to get sustainable positions and programs funded.

(Suzanne Rigney)

Recurrent funding is required to adequately resource existing and future programs to reduce family violence that are viable and sustainable in the long term. The high level of risk to the sustainability of the JBA&VPF and other community solutions, which address family, community and systemic violence requires a long-term commitment of recurrent funding to sustain change.

The Family Healing Centre provides a safe haven to women and their children experiencing violence, often caused through alcohol misuse. The scope of the Centre has been limited by lack of government funding which has funded only the crisis accommodation and some basic services to women who are victims of violence. Tellingly, no funding exists for the other services that aim to address these issues in a preventative manner, *before* women and children are exposed to violence. There is a gap in funding long term programs which focus on building the capacity of individuals in the family as well as ways for families to work together. Indigenous leaders have identified the whole of family approach is required to appropriately respond to the myriad impacts on Indigenous families. Indigenous service agency managers such as Mrs. Wilson struggle to build infrastructure, programs, staff and running costs over many years, as she explains:

At the present moment we're only getting funding through DCD [Department of Community Development] to operate this centre. Funding is

very scarce and so we may have to work out other ways to keep those funds to run those centres. How communities and government can work together is by being more involved with family violence. What they can do, how they can improve and make it better, by everyone working together, such as the [Recommendations] set [out] through the Sue Gordon Inquiry that was happening here in Derby. I feel that [it would be] a good thing if everyone worked together, networked together. (Kaye Wilson)

Progress is slow and sustainability is limited by the short term project-based funding. This is in contrast to the demonstrated need and utilisation of such services; to the point where widespread family dysfunction is endemic in the Indigenous community.

#### **4. Legal and Cultural Support for Women**

Marinwarntikura Women's Resource Centre provides a wide range of services for Indigenous women in Fitzroy Crossing and surrounding remote Indigenous communities. An Indigenous woman from the Fitzroy Valley is a key link for women accessing this service:

I'm a Family Violence Education Worker in the Women's Resource Centre. I work to my community for the women's strength for building their energy and building their family together. I work as a family violence worker to strengthen women to be together not to separate one another, but to help them. When they come to the shelter we always encourage them. Some of the women we represent in the court and always explain that there's a lot of paper work in *kardiya* [non-Indigenous] side, but in our cultural side we give them a chance because we know where they stand, and we know how they feel. We talk to them first before they go see the lawyers or legal aid, so we do our part. (Gail Smiler)

Mrs. Smiler's lived experience suggests the ability for Indigenous women to fully engage in life and to improve health and wellbeing is often limited by access to justice. The Marinwarntikura Women's Resource Centre provides Indigenous women access to a refuge and legal support to deal with complicated matters arising from family and community violence. The Women's Resource Centre has incorporated cultural practices and protocols to support women to achieve justice through the legal process. The Women's Resource Centre incorporates the voices of disadvantaged women into the wider discussion regarding appropriate community behaviour.

Indigenous women are critical to maintaining strong families. Mrs. Smiler identified the need for Indigenous women to develop cultural skills and share learning experiences as key cultural action for building women's capacity for looking after *kandri* and their families.

We just want to share between the river and the desert side, together, how we can stand up strong and hold the country, hold the future for our children. There are so many things happening for our children, but then there is cultural stuff that needs to be taught too. (Gail Smiler)

The Outreach Worker servicing the Gibb River Road Communities for Marnin Bowa Dumbara Family Healing Centre is an indigenous woman from New Guinea who has developed rapport with the women in remote Aboriginal communities having spent a considerable amount of time working to develop community solutions to combat violence, in her words:

If they want to stay with their partners, a lot of them say they still love their husbands or their partners, then we work in ways of how to keep the family

together, but work with the problem. That's when I sort of look around [to identify] the other relevant services in town that deal with men's issues. The impact is the information that they get about family violence, and also the education that they've had through family violence, the workshops that we've done and they can now identify the different kinds of abuses that they are going through or if they see a family they can identify what kinds of abuse that is. I think the main impact that we've had is that they have the knowledge now. They just have to speak out against it and it's a slow process, but eventually, hopefully we will get there. (Kathleen Hendrick)

Gibb River Road communities are looking for opportunities to open up dialogue on how they can collectively develop community solutions to keep their young people, families and communities strong. Community members are learning to reject violence through educational workshops to build personal and family relationships. Mrs. Hendrick confirms the process is slow but is hopeful the communities will be able to develop their capacity to support community people living with violence to improve their circumstances.

## **5. Social Connectedness**

Wombagarri Buru Derby Men's Centre (Men's Centre) was established by JBA&VPF to provide a range of services to Indigenous men. Some of the men are victims of violence, some are perpetrators of violence, many are both and all the men have been subjected to a lifetime of racism, discrimination and systemic violence. The service caters for the immediate needs of marginalised Indigenous men while at the same time taking the opportunity to increase their understanding of the issues around violence. Mr. Nona is Indigenous and was the Coordinator for the Men's Centre:

We help them, like, for financial problems, family problems, drugs and alcohol. We talk to them every day. That's why we help them everyday, so they can understand where they go wrong and where the right way is.

One person talking for them is very hard, you need to have a team to help those areas. One person doing it is very hard, if I had more workers it would be better, they would communicate with their own people. I need help from communities. I need drug and alcohol [service people] to visit and medical [visits]. (Paul Nona)

There is a great deal of support required for marginalised Indigenous men in Derby. The men have a myriad of chronic issues that require assistance from a range of social services. Mr. Nona felt isolated from the other services because many of the men attending the Men's Centre were difficult to service, that is, in the 'too hard basket'. Mr. Nona spoke of the need to have a range of services provided at the Centre:

Aboriginal people and the government people should look back, because they [Indigenous men] are people just like all of us. They need to be taught well and they need that lifestyle to be shown to them. They're the men, our people; we need to help them, they're the people we need to support and love them, if they have no love they think no one cares for them, but if the love is there we need to show it to them and they will feel comfortable. (Paul Nona)

Indigenous and mainstream service providers need to show more compassion for marginalised Indigenous men. Improving communication and advocacy skills for men will support their personal and life skills development. Mr. Nona makes the point that everybody needs to have their humanity validated as an essential part of wellbeing. However, the colonial process denied many of the men who are extremely disadvantaged in Derby, a sense of connection that is acquired through expressions of

love and caring. Nona concludes by emphasising love is an essential component of social connectedness. When looking at the social connectedness of young Indigenous people, youth alienation was identified as a key ingredient to understanding their personal and community wellbeing.

## **6. Youth Alienation**

A local Indigenous woman who held the position of Senior Policy Officer, ATSIC Malarabah Regional Council said:

I think it [cultural education and life skills for Indigenous children] should start in the schools, because we have a lot of young people there who are at that teenage age where they are lost, they need help and I guess it's really important at schools and in the community as well. I just feel for the young people today because they just have no scope in life ... It's really hard for young kids today because, as I said, they just don't know where to go or what to do, so their way of getting over their problem is by drinking or not caring about themselves and not giving a damn. So once again to remedy that problem we have to push that issues out there, whether it's through our government organisations or support groups or even our self as community people. (Colleen O'Meara)

Indigenous family violence is a serious issue and is linked to wider issues of identity and disadvantage particularly for Indigenous youth. Indigenous community cultural development projects need to include young people; to build their capacity to improve quality and continuity of life. Youth alienation within community settings is often expressed through young people's substance misuse, self abuse and suicide. Indigenous leaders need to improve dialogue between elders and young people to effectively respond to the issues confronting young Indigenous people.

A non-Indigenous Field Officer with the Department of Community Development, who worked with Indigenous school students by providing key life skills programs to raise knowledge and awareness to better prepare young people to engage in family and community life said:

The [Derby] Enterprise Class [DEC] students are kids who are disadvantaged. They've dropped out of school; they are the more at risk kids in the Derby community. If it wasn't for the DEC they'd be out there on the streets, which is an incredible thing to get them to connect to some sort of education system. From my years in Derby, kids drop out of school, they're on the streets; they don't start work or anything, maybe from 12, 13, 14 so obviously they are at risk. They are not prepared for what happens next. They are not prepared for relationships; there is a lot of teenage pregnancy. They are not prepared for parenthood, things like that. There are a lot of basic messages, because they have dropped out of mainstream school that they do not receive. I've developed a few packages, one on domestic violence, one on becoming a parent, one on relationships, one called, 'It's my choice'. To go into the DEC and work with that class and give them those basic messages like relationships, what do you expect, make them think about things that they haven't had a chance to think about before ... I guess that's the direction I'm taking to get them to explore in their minds a bit of the concepts of relationships, the issues of family violence and things like that. (Geoff Hendrick)

Derby Enterprise Class (DEC) was an important strategy for capturing and retaining marginalised young Indigenous people who experienced a high level of truancy. Prior to the establishment of the DEC many of these young people were wandering the streets and exposed to multiple levels of risk. The DEC diverted young Indigenous people from violence and crime by engaging them in a learning environment



that was meaningful to them by exploring their identity through culture and the arts. Strategies that promote discussion around issues such as jealousy are important to encourage young people build a positive identity around relationship skills and to assist them to develop a sense of connection and personal value. Young Indigenous people need to learn how to respond to relationships which encourage open and honest dialogue to prevent misunderstanding between young couples and other friends and relatives. This open and honest communication is a key ingredient for assisting young people to reach their full potential especially as most of these young people live in small remote communities with limited resources and multiple risks.

## **7. Connection through Culture**

The Kimberley Aboriginal Law and Culture Centre (KALACC) is a cultural agency for Indigenous people based in Fitzroy Crossing. KALACC plays an important role in taking young people and their families *out bush* to engage in cultural immersion programs as a strategy to build a sense of social and cultural wellbeing in young people in the Fitzroy Valley. The Indigenous Coordinator of KALACC youth programs, describes the importance of the cultural immersion programs for building key life skills in young people:

Well the main program we have here is the youth program; we look after the youth, kids in this town. The elders from the community take them out on trips, hunting trips, and fishing trips, mainly teach them culture. You've got four different language groups who take the kids out, teach them the stories and language. We give them [a local purchase] order for fuel and food, and they go out, and they come back with a report on what they did. We keep that for the next mob [to show how], they did this and that. We give them a

camera and they take photos or [provide] written report, or some people they just come in and talk to us. (Tom Lawford)

Support for young people in Fitzroy Crossing to *go bush* with elders is a valuable investment for teaching Indigenous culture. Learning culture is about learning social protocols and technical skills for interacting with others and living in the wilderness. This builds a strong sense of personal identity and social cohesion within the community. Poverty is a key barrier preventing young people and their families from having the resources to *go bush* to practice their culture.

They learn respect and how to be in a group, to live in a group you know. They go hunting in the bush, bring back [the] meat, cook'm [cook the meat], they share it out, they share it. That's what they do they're sharing and caring, you know ... but you won't get that very often, only once a month or something, every school holidays, but, I'd like to see it happen more you know, because the kids they come back and they feel more, inside they feel more good you know, in themself. (Tom Lawford)

Cultural camps provide young Indigenous people with the opportunity to learn skills and values that connect them with their family, culture and identity. The camps provide positive cultural experiences that help young Indigenous people feel an improved sense of wellbeing, as Mr. Lawford describes:

I reckon people need to start working together as one, you can't get one mob working and another mob doing something else, you all gotta come as one, and start talking together as one with the community agencies. This mob here [KALACC], the Shire [of Derby-West Kimberley], DCD [Department of Community Development] and other agencies around need to come in as one and work things out. It's no use only one group of people doing something,

you gotta be all in there, and you all work together ... It'll take long time, so you need somebody out there to keep talking, you know, get them people all in, all in together. What you're talking about here is community people, mainly kids and parents, all the family and violence to fix up, we all have to work as one, one voice and it will be all right. (Tom Lawford)

Connecting young people to culture through access to land, hunting and sharing food was a cultural action for building identity and self-esteem. Opportunities for families to interact in a positive culturally safe environment are needed to help families resolve violence-related issues. A young Indigenous leader in Fitzroy Crossing is extending cultural action by making the connection through art, as described in the following section.

## **8. Connection through Art**

Mangkaja Arts is an art and culture resource agency in Fitzroy Crossing working with local artists to build social, cultural, spiritual and economic capital. A young Indigenous man, Terry Murray, working with Mangkaja Arts talked about the meaning of art to Indigenous people in the Fitzroy Valley:

Mangkaja Arts is trying to promote ... getting the good feeling about families that are trying to keep their stories alive, like strong, about connecting to the younger generation.

I'd like to say something real powerful that I learnt; you must sit down with your old people and talk to them and ask questions about the land and how they've been raised and the knowledge that is hidden inside their heads. You've got to ask questions to get all the information out before all our old people, grandmothers, grandfathers, our tribe, all are gone.

Looking at art, it's not just paint and colours; it's about the story and the old people that tell the story. If you get a painting and go back to that country, each circle and each paint means something about that country. That's got a strong feeling, you can feel it, it's got power, (Terry Murray)

Art, stories, family and land all link together to build social and cultural wellbeing. Murray's observations support the need to invest in community solutions, which articulate traditional art and cultural expression as critical elements for grounding spiritual, emotional and physical aspects of wellbeing in a contemporary Indigenous context, particularly as many Aboriginal people live and work in small remote communities.

## **9. Benefits from Living in Small Remote Communities**

The Chairman of Ngalapita Aboriginal Community, Mr McPhee, is an Indigenous leader striving to improve the circumstances of Indigenous people in Fitzroy Crossing, particularly young people, he said:

We are doing a lot of things for our families to make it better for all of us, because we all know that alcohol and drugs is trying to pull everyone down. Some of the reasons we are going back to our land, to our little blocks [small remote communities] out there is we are trying to get away from these drugs and alcohol to make it better for us. We are trying to educate our kids that there are better things to learn. That's why we have schools, and communities out in the bush, there are better ways of doing things. (Ivan McPhee)

Ngalapita is a small remote Indigenous community in the West Kimberley, whose leaders have returned to the bush to provide a better life for their families. There

are two direct benefits from living in a remote bush setting. Firstly the opportunity to limit the impact of risk factors such as drugs, alcohol, gambling, anomie and violence. Secondly, there are benefits from living in the traditional *kandri* such as positive family interaction from spending time together, access to hunting, fishing and gathering bush foods, medicines and firewood. In terms of ongoing cultural regeneration, living in their remote traditional *kandri* also means children learn more positive aspects about themselves and their Indigenous culture, as Mr McPhee indicates:

Men, we can be better by teaching our kids language, land, and what culture really means to us; taking them out bush; hunting, fishing, telling them about dreamtime stories. We pass them on to our kids and how they can practise that thing for us. It is a good thing that can happen for us, take them out bush and the men can lead the way and also the ladies can lead the way too. There are both ways of learning and teaching one another, and also to pass [information] onto the kids because in the future they are going to be our leaders. (Ivan McPhee)

Mr. McPhee is firm in his belief that Indigenous men and women must work together to promote Indigenous language and culture to improve the circumstances of their children. This involves adults stepping forward to demonstrate collaborative leadership processes so that others can learn positive ways to promote dialogue, he says:

At the moment not only in my community but there are a few of us leaders getting stronger. Whether it is a by-law working with the police, working with other organisations on how we can deal with these drug and alcohol and how we can control them. In our community where we come from we don't like drugs and alcohol coming into the community. We gotta work together to get our strength together, and work together to achieve the goal better for our kids. (Ivan McPhee)

Indigenous leaders in Fitzroy Crossing are starting to come together to focus support to build personal and community capacity to reduce violence in Indigenous communities. Indigenous men and women need to work together to build leadership and good governance by developing and implementing strong policy and by-laws to combat substance misuse. Further effort is required to improve communication between Indigenous people, the police service and other government agencies to create a genuine dialogic approach. Mr. McPhee's leadership has identified the need for rules and a code of practice for working together to build positive life and community outcomes, which is further discussed below.

## **10. Leadership**

Ivan McPhee is one of the Indigenous leaders in Fitzroy Crossing who has championed the establishment of the Fitzroy Valley Action Group (FVAG). The FVAG has been established to increase dialogue towards developing collective approaches to reducing violence:

The Action Group will need the support of government and local agencies and believe that individuals working together can change a society's circumstance for the better.

Taking the first step of coming together as a community has been an aspiration of many people in the Fitzroy Valley. The recent alcohol abuse public forum, where many people spoke about the breakdown of cultural values, dysfunctional families and the effects of alcohol and drugs on the youth of the Fitzroy Valley was very distressing.

When a community such as Fitzroy Valley is at the cross roads of its destiny, it is time for leaders of the community to take responsibility for the plan of action to improve the social and economic wellbeing of the people.

(Beckingham 2004:1)

The Action Group, through Indigenous leaders, is responding to the crisis of substance misuse among local Indigenous families in Fitzroy Crossing. Alcohol and drugs were cited as contributing to the disintegration of families and cultural values. Community solutions, such as the Action Group, are focused on improving the social, cultural, economic and intellectual wellbeing of all people living in and around Fitzroy Crossing. Leaders coming together to plan and advocate for change demonstrates a cultural action that promotes ‘a collective ethical vision, civic courage and freedom’ of dialogic action as described by Freire (2001).

In Derby, Indigenous leaders have taken on the challenge of coordinating local community cultural development projects, as described earlier. Indigenous leaders have increased dialogic action within their immediate settings to create a greater sense of democracy and participation of the Indigenous people in their affairs. The collective voices of participants in this chapter were focused on shifting the emotional dis-ease of Indigenous people in the region towards more positive mental health outcomes by strengthening human qualities and life skills such as effective communication, positive self-esteem and problem solving skills.

Indigenous people have actively participated in the development, implementation and evaluation of the community solutions described in this chapter. Indigenous people played a pivotal role in the success of all community solutions reported in this research. Indigenous leaders such as Mr. Bedford, Mrs. Prouse and Mr. McPhee have advocated for investment from all levels of governance need to direct

further investment into the community solutions that are able to demonstrate how they are assisting Indigenous people in the region to overcome their disadvantage.

The leadership role of the Chief Executive Officer, Shire President and Councillors of the Shire of Derby-West Kimberley in responding to violence at a local government level has received local, regional, state and national recognition for their effort in developing a model of better practice in violence prevention. The evidence suggests the policy Shire of Derby-West Kimberley local government has introduced to auspice these types of projects has contributed to achieving community-building outcomes and should be encouraged and adequately resourced. Furthermore these types of community actions identified in this region advocate accountable and transparent processes. These activities are thought to be unique in Australia and offer a method of community cultural development that other communities could benefit from, as [this report] from the Department of Indigenous Affairs details:

The range and quality of family and social services in Derby is buttressed by the energetic participation of the Shire in supporting the Jayida Burru family violence committee comprising almost all key service providers in Derby. As far as is known, this is the only Shire-supported family violence committee in Australia. (DIA 2005a:16)

Long term investment in established community solutions will continue to generate goodwill between the local government, service providers and Indigenous community interests at the local level. While some improvement appears to be taking place at the local level; state and federal government policies and practices continue to expose Indigenous people in the region to continuing risks and the inability to reach



their full potential. This constant ambient level of violence is punctuated with incidences which cause a rippling effect from the individual and their extended families spilling over to affect community members in wider community settings who are disrupted and distracted from working to build a positive community spirit.

## **11. Building Community Spirit**

The Indigenous Vice Chairperson of Bayulu Aboriginal community talked about community solutions to build the capacity of the community:

In the community we are trying to keep this place strong, and trying to keep our workers working together as a team. We have women working here in the HACC (Home and Community Care Program) and at the clinic. They work from morning until 11.00am and run the workshop there. We have some women in the shop there doing [check out] tills, helping out in the shop, and some of the men are doing the rubbish run in the community, keeping the community tidy and clean. That's how we want our community to be. (Nola Rogers)

Bayulu community leaders have strengthened their community by developing dialogic processes to create a shared vision with other community members. Bayulu community members are taking control of their own affairs to build a sense of individual and community wellbeing. Mrs. Rogers highlights the importance of community members working together as a team to build community spirit to improve social cohesion.

A Bayulu Aboriginal community member commented on how living in a community free of alcohol-related stress has changed her life:

I've been living here and I feel that it's really good for me. I've been too much on drink and I feel now that I'm getting away from drink for a while, alcohol, and I feel really free. I'm looking after my husband's family, and I feel really happy about it. Plus there is a lot of family here for me and I feel safe. We like to visit other communities and women's groups and find out what sort of activities they are doing and learn from them so they can learn from us. To make family strong you have to help each other and support each other all the way. Be together and share things, and help educate [about] violence. As for violence, you know we have to stop this violence and share things and be equal as one. (Gemma Chaquebor)

Ms. Chaquebor describes the improved quality of life she now enjoys from living without violence. She reports feeling valued and experiencing a heightened sense of personal safety, happiness, wellbeing and freedom. Ms. Chaquebor expresses a strong sense of connection with others within the community and highlights the need to visit Indigenous women in other communities to share their stories of how families can be made strong by helping and supporting one another. Such moves may help other members of the community feel more connected within their own communities as well as the local region.

## **12. Holistic Community Solutions**

Mowanjum Aboriginal community is located nine kilometres east of Derby. The population of Mowanjum community of approximately 300 Indigenous people fluctuates depending on cultural or recreational events and seasonal variations. The community is connected to several remote homeland outstations with family and community associations in neighbouring communities linked with Derby. The non-

Indigenous community Coordinator worked with the community to build the capacity of community members to manage a range of services on site to promote positive personal and family life outcomes:

Mowanjum has worked really hard to put strategies in place that will have a positive effect on family violence. We have a lot of programs connected with sport, connected with men, women and youth around the community. This has involved things like computer programming; activities for kids where kids are encouraged to go to school so that their education is affected positively. They are given things to do around the community that have a positive outcome rather than the negative things they get up to when they're at a loose end and have nothing else to do.

I think the most important thing that has come out of it is that there is awareness on the community that family violence is an issue. I think that's far more across the community than it ever was before. Individual groups of people like the men's health group who go to the clinic for consultations there, women's groups dealing in the women's centre with a whole range of different issues demonstrates an awareness that family violence is a fundamental issue on the community. The second thing is that there has been a process of engagement here in a whole lot of more productive activities on the community. There are kids programs in holidays, there is a successful football team, the programs have provided positive activities so there are computer courses and things like that going on and that's been important. (John Oster)

Mowanjum community has taken an active role in addressing family violence. Community engagement stemmed from increased awareness about the impact of violence on the whole community and focused towards building personal and community capacity to better respond to violence. Local community solutions target

strengths within the community. This is a new approach, in the past perceived deficits have been the focus. These community solutions attempt a more dialogic approach involving young people, their families and the entire community.

At the same time there are things that we look at that are still problems. There is still family violence on this community, even though there is a greater awareness of the impact of violence and there are things in place to try to reduce it. Substance abuse, particularly alcohol abuse here is still rampant and we will hope that they are reduced as the by-laws come into effect. (John Oster)

Family violence remains a problem; however the community is planning to reduce violence through the introduction of community by-laws to limit the consumption and hence negative impact of alcohol. The Aboriginal Communities Act 1979 (WA) created the opportunity for Indigenous communities to declare local by-laws to regulate such matters as traffic, damage, alcohol consumption and supply, disorderly conduct and admission to land (Law Reform Commission of Western Australia 2005). This strategy has come under some criticism in the past with Blagg (2005:26) advocating caution in regard to by-laws, ‘unfortunately they [by-laws] have been sold as a panacea for a host of law and order and security issues on remote communities and have been over-sold as a solution’. Caution is urged by Blagg (2005) as evaluation of by-laws suggests a tendency for coercive powers to be misused unless restrained by transparent accountability to the immediate family, administration and governing council, however these rules may have a role to play in enforcing community regulations.

### **13. Strengthening Community Governance**

Community members at Ngallagunda remote Aboriginal community provided information about how family violence issues are dealt with in their community. Similarly, the Project Officer at Imintji remote Aboriginal community as well as community members of Imintji and Kupangarri remote Aboriginal communities spoke about an increased awareness of family violence and other issues related to wellbeing and the need for positive community solutions involving community cultural development.

A Ngallagunda Indigenous community member, Mr Copely, identified the isolation and lack of services on the ground created particular issues specific to their community:

Because of our remoteness here, any major issues with violence that comes up, we have to handle it ourselves before anything else because we're a long way from Derby. Police won't come up you know within the next couple of hours, so we gotta sit down and try to handle it ourselves first. Because that's what the police would say, you know you got a Council there, try and handle it yourself because we [are] a long way from town. (Wayne Copley)

As Mr. Copely points out, the community's remoteness is a major issue in ensuring the security and protection of the community members. The Derby and Wyndham Police Services are both 3 hours away and are not able to respond quickly to violence issues. The community is aware their remoteness means they have to take an active role in promoting wellbeing to reduce violence. They have developed strong leadership and good local governance by the community council to deal with

community issues when the situation arises, as Indigenous community Elder Mr White explains:

You know other people say, that's husband and wife, well that's none of our business, but it's in the community. You have to do something, so someone don't get killed or badly hurt I reckon. You gotta help stop them ... like it affects the whole community because family fighting family, and then no one is happy in the community and it takes months and months before it can settle down. (Alfie White)

Local Indigenous community councils are beginning to develop dialogic processes, such as this to provide community members the opportunity to participate in developing effective community solutions to minimise family and community violence. Locally negotiated strategies help families resolve conflict and prevent violence escalating to involve others in the community, especially in situations where formal law enforcement is not available.

Further to this Mr. White raises the matter of the residual disharmony following a violent incident that reduces communication, trust and collaboration and, perpetuates anti-dialogic practice within the community. Mr White like many other community members confirmed, without strong leadership, accountable governance, resourceful and resilient communities are not sustainable. Identifying and documenting this type of evidence is important for building a knowledge base about the strengths and weakness in service delivery to Aboriginal people. This type of evidence is critical to informing and improving Indigenous policy and practice.

## Appendix 8



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17<sup>th</sup> October 2004

Shelley Kneebone - Coordinator  
Jayida Burru Family Violence Program  
Derby WA 6728

Thank you for agreeing to circulate this draft video, "Saying No Way To Family and Community Violence" which is being made as part of the ATSIIC Malarabah Regional Council strategy to develop an awareness campaign about family and community violence. The purpose of the video is to capture the strengths of local agencies and leaders who are working to build the capacity of Aboriginal people, their families and communities to promote positive life outcomes.

The video is strictly confidential and is not for public viewing, as it has not been cleared by all the people who participated in the making of it. Would you firstly show it to the Mowanjum community council/or relevant community people to seek permission to show John Oster talking about what is happening in the Mowanjum community and the way the community is portrayed in the video. A final copy of the video will be provided to the community.

Once you have seen the video can you circulate, which will mean picking up and delivering the video amongst these people, to ensure it is circulated and gets to everyone who needs to see it would you use the attached form and return to me. Would you also request they contact me direct with any queries or feedback before the end of October. I will collect the video from the DEC if they are the last ones to view it.

Kind regards, Anne Poelina

***DISCUSSION PAPER  
CONCEPT PLAN FOR THE NYIKINA CULTURAL CENTRE***

*INDIGENOUS HOUSE OF LEARNING & KNOWLEDGE*

**A Boost for Derby's Economy**

The Nyikina Inc. proposes to establish the Nyikina Cultural Centre incorporating Holman House and a surrounding excise of land. The Cultural Centre will be developed in partnership with the Shire of Derby West Kimberley (SDWK) and other government, community and industry interests to provide the opportunity for local Indigenous people to generate meaningful employment with real wages and conditions while teaching others about the region associated with the mighty Fitzroy River. The Fitzroy River is one of Australia's last wild rivers, its' history, ecology and geography will be told from an Indigenous perspective. This new industry initiative will create a boost for Derby's economy.

The preferred site for the Cultural Centre is a curtilage of (10) hectares surrounding Holman House, to be excised from the present Crown Reserve situated at the intersection of Derby Highway and Gibb River Road. This is strategically placed to attract tourists who might otherwise by-pass Derby, and to become a tourist destination in its own right. Heritage listed Holman House will be appropriately restored and become the public face and hub of the Cultural Centre.

Members of the Nyikina Inc. have had a long association with Dr Holman and believe it is important to preserve Holman House as a centre of excellence for National Heritage. A heritage collection showcasing Dr Holman's time in Derby and the surrounding region will be a feature of the Nyikina Cultural Centre. It will house an exhibit commemorating Dr Lawson Holman's contribution to the people of Derby and the region as Flying Doctor, and in many other ways as a widely respected public-spirited citizen. This collection together with Nyikina people's contribution to the pastoral industry will combine both Indigenous and non-Indigenous worldviews to create a unique interactive historical and cultural experience to the region.

The Cultural Centre will contribute to the wider economic growth of Derby by providing another reason for people to come to Derby and spend "one more night". Local people will directly benefit from increased employment through the Cultural Centre's activities and more widely from the impact from the investment of their wages back into the local economy.

**Lease Proposal**

Nyikina Inc. is seeking a lease option for a curtilage of (10) hectares surrounding Holman House, to be excised from the present Crown Reserve situated at the intersection of Derby Highway and Gibb River Road.



Under Section 83 of the Land Administration Act, the Minister may grant a lease of Crown Land in perpetuity for benefit of Aboriginal persons, which would be determined by the Kimberley Regional Manager for the Department of Land Administration (DOLA). We are requesting the Shire of Derby West Kimberley support this option to the Regional Manager of DOLA and recommend the new reserve be vested directly to Nyikina Inc.

### **Supported by Local Evidence**

The Nyikina Cultural Centre use of Holman House is supported by local evidence such as the Shire of Derby West Kimberley Strategic Plan, Shire of Derby West Kimberley Indigenous Land Use Agreement with Nyikina-Mangala Native Title Claimants, Department of Indigenous Affairs - Mapping and Gapping Report, the Derby Revitalisation Project and the Derby Aboriginal Justice Plan, as a priority to build cultural perspectives to the tourism industry as an economic strategy to increase the enterprise participation of Indigenous people in the region.

The partnership aims to move Indigenous people from welfare dependency to wealth creation. It is envisaged the Nyikina Cultural Centre will initially increase employment to the region for the following positions: Director, Manager/ Administrator, Caretaker/ Maintenance Officer, Information Technologist, Linguist, Indigenous Cultural Consultants x 6 on fee for service basis, Indigenous Cross Cultural Trainer x 6 on a fee for service basis. Longer-term training and employment strategies are being considered for tour guides and other cultural industry workers.

The Nyikina Cultural Centre will provide a unique opportunity for visitors to the region and the general public to access an exciting and unique remote Australian cultural experience. The West Kimberley region has a rapidly expanding tourism industry with a demonstrated need for Indigenous cultural education and cultural tourism.

The Nyikina Cultural Centre will provide a model for Community Cultural Development through Indigenous Cross Cultural Training & Cultural Tourism to strengthen local, regional and national partnerships with and between Aboriginal people, government, education providers, the business and international community.

Programs and products will be tailored to the specific requirements of clients ranging from schools, universities, local service providers and tourism markets.

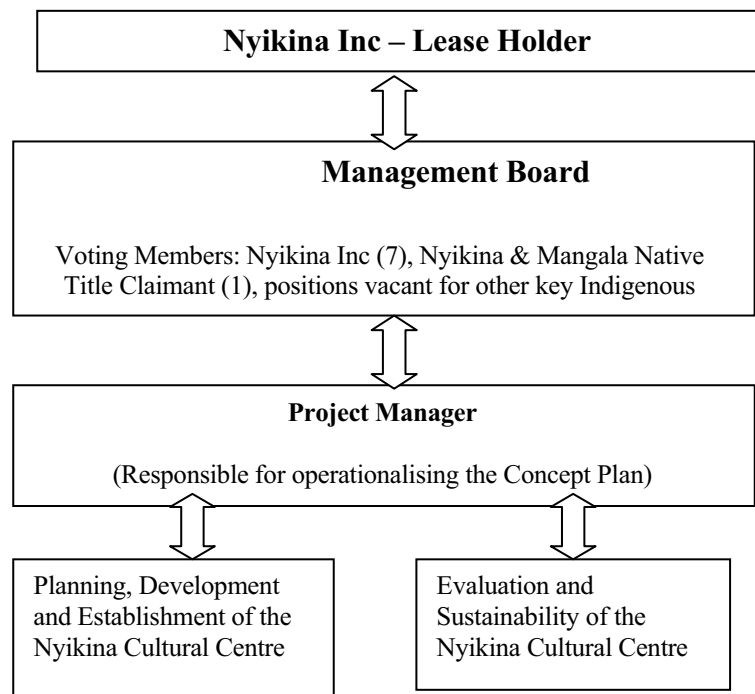
### **Management Plan**

The primary responsibility for the development and management of the Cultural Centre will rest with Nyikina Inc. Nyikina Inc. will enlist the support of government, business and community organisations and individual citizens to form a partnership of diverse stakeholders and interest groups. Nyikina Inc. proposes to establish a Management Board comprising representatives of such organisations and individuals as a medium for public consultation, development and evaluation of policies and programs.

A Central Governing Committee comprised of seven (7) members from Nyikina Inc., one (1) from the Nyikina-Mangala Native Title Group and two (2) from key Indigenous stakeholders will have decision-making responsibility for managing the Centre.

Other Governing Committee members to participate in an ex-officio non-voting advisory capacity to be draw from community, government and industry partners; one (1) from Shire of Derby West Kimberley (SDWK), one (1) from the WA Department of Indigenous Affairs (DIA), one (1) from the Commonwealth Indigenous Coordination Centre (ICC), one (1) from the Kimberley Development Committee (KDC) and one (1) from the Chamber of Commerce.

**Figure 1: Management Plan**



**Scope of partnership between Nyikina Inc and Shire of Derby West Kimberley:**

- Mobilise the resources and partnerships necessary to identify the most suitable location for the Nyikina Cultural Centre in Derby.
- Mobilise the resources and partnerships necessary to plan and develop the Nyikina Cultural Centre in Derby.
- Work in partnership with the Derby Chamber of Commerce, Shire of Derby/West Kimberley, Derby BEC, Kimberley Development Commission, Kimberley ACC and other key stakeholders to establish the Centre to provide a positive cultural education and tourism experience for the region in Derby.

- Work in partnership with the Derby Chamber of Commerce, Shire of Derby/West Kimberley, Derby BEC, Kimberley Development Commission, Kimberley ACC and other key stakeholders to establish the Nyikina Cultural Centre as a new business initiative in the Shire of Derby West Kimberley.

### **Timeline 2006**

#### **Stage One May-July 2006**

- Engage consultant to work with Nyikina Inc. Executive Committee to develop Business and Operational Plans.
- Establish partnership with the Shire of Derby West Kimberley to negotiate access to Holman House and surrounding excise.
- Establish partnership with the Derby Chamber of Commerce, Shire of Derby/West Kimberley, Derby BEC, Kimberley Development Commission, Kimberley ACC and other key stakeholders to identify suitable location and establishment of the Nyikina Cultural Interpretive Centre in Derby.
- Commence Business Plan.
- Identify funding to operationalise the Nyikina Cultural Centre.

#### **Stage Two Aug-Sep 2006**

- Expression of interest to develop site and building plans for the Nyikina Cultural Centre.
- Engage Planner to develop site and building plans.
- ***Complete Business and Operational Plans.***
- Submit site and building Plans to Shire of Derby West Kimberley for planning approval and building permits.
- Submit Business and Operational Plans to state and federal governments and other key stakeholders to fund establishment and operational costs.

#### **Stage Three Oct-Dec 2006**

- Negotiate time line for completion of Nyikina Cultural Centre and commence infrastructure and capital developments through tender process.
- Develop promotional material brochures.
- Promote and market the Nyikina Cultural Centre.

### **Scope and Function of the Nyikina Cultural Centre**

Nyikina people in Derby are not content to stand by and watch their language and culture disappear before their eyes. They have produced a range of learning materials to ensure their knowledge and that of the earlier language consultants is preserved, not only on university bookshelves, but also in the minds, ears and on the tongues of generations of Nyikina people to come.

Over the past twenty-five years a lot of work has been done in pursuit of these objectives, and teaching materials relating to both language and culture have been produced. The need for a permanent home for the continuation and expansion of this work has led to this proposal for the establishment of the Nyikina Cultural Centre. This will not only house facilities for research and teaching, but also for the display and interpretation of art and cultural materials to the wider community.

A primary function of the Centre will be to provide suitable accommodation for the storage and display of historic non-sensitive Indigenous artefacts and contemporary arts and crafts. These will be

accompanied by interpretive information dealing with the history of Aboriginal land management practices and their relationship to the geography, geology, environment and ecology of the Lower Fitzroy Basin, and the impact of European and Asian settlement on Aboriginal society and economy.

There will be facilities for the storage and display of artefacts, written and pictorial material relating to colonisation and the history and future of economic development, physical and social infrastructure, and government administration in the region.

Over the past century and a half the growing impact of European colonisation of the Kimberley has greatly altered the lifestyle of Nyikina people, who have become increasingly integrated into the European economy. It is therefore important that the Centre should house historical and interpretive material relating to the development of the pastoral and mining industries and to the growth and decline of Derby as a port and administrative and business hub for the West Kimberley. The Centre will thus be able to present a comprehensive view of the history and present status of Derby and the region from both the Indigenous and non-Indigenous points of view. It will also be a place for the collection, recording, study and analysis of new material.

Other functions which will be dependent on the above will be provision for classes, workshops, study groups and the like related to the stored material, facilities for the sale of locally produced arts and crafts to visitors and tourists, and a visitor information centre. This will particularly highlight features of interest in Derby and district so as to persuade tourists to extend their stay. Further encouragement will be given by the construction of a landscaped parking and picnic area within the curtilage of the Centre.

Other proposed inclusions include multi media production facilities to enable on site preparation of publications and audio-visual material publicising the Centre's exhibits and activities and promoting Derby and the region. A well-equipped kitchen will allow local businesses or community groups to provide on-site catering for meetings, conferences, and social events.

Subsidiary buildings will include a residence for an on-site manager and caretaker and accommodation for visitors. These will include linguists, archaeologists, environmental scientists, historians and the like who are conducting courses or contributing to the development of the Centre, and students who require access to material for study and research.

Funding for the Centre will initially be sought from the Western Australian Government's Community Cultural and Arts Facilities Fund. This Fund gives priority to applications that support infrastructure for regional and rural arts, community museums and Indigenous arts. Applications require comprehensive documentation and must be lodged with the support of local government.

Applications for ongoing funding will follow, and the restoration of Holman House should attract funding from heritage related sources. Once development is complete, the Centre should be self-funding.

### **Benefits**

The benefits that will accrue to the community and region of Derby will include:

- ✓ Nyikina language and culture will be preserved and made accessible to Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians;
- ✓ Indigenous youth will gain an appreciation of and pride in their own culture, which will better equip them to enter the mainstream community and economy on equal terms;

**Culturally sensitive and confidential material not to be reproduced without permission of the author.**

- ✓ Non-Indigenous people will gain a better understanding and respect for Nyikina culture and of the history of black/white relationships, thus advancing the cause of reconciliation;
- ✓ Derby will become a place for the study of the materials and records that the Centre houses, and a location for conferences, seminars and academic courses;
- ✓ New jobs will be created during the development of the Centre and its subsequent management and operation;
- ✓ The Centre will become a tourist attraction itself, and will help to draw tourists to other points of interest in Derby and the district;
- ✓ The activities that the Centre will house will generate a significant increase in economic activity in the town.

Nyikina Inc invites the support and participation of the Council, government, business and community organisations and members of the public in the realisation of this ambitious project.

## **Appendix 10**

**Madjulla Incorporated 2004c., *Saying No Way To Family and Community Violence*, VHS, Broome, W.A.**

**Warning this DVD contains images of people who have passed away since the film was made.**

## Appendix 11

### What's in the kit?

**Historical document** – The 1980 Nyikina Wordlist. This is the foundation of the program and is included in the kit component *Mandjagara Nyikina*. It is the first comprehensive written list of Nyikina vocabulary. It was collected and documented by Bronwyn Stokes during 1978-79 as part of her PhD thesis studies and edited by her in 2004 for public access. There are still some queries in the list and it is hoped that these may be answered as Nyikina speakers become familiar with the processes involved in language documentation and preservation. It is intended that this list will form the basis of an eventual Nyikina Dialectary which will also incorporate entries offered by course participants.

**Leaven Nyikina** – Written by Dr Bronwyn Stokes in 1989 as a non-technical introduction to a method of writing the Nyikina language. It contains pronunciation and spelling guidance and 25 segments of notes about particular grammatical features. Vocabulary samples recorded in 1998 by two Nyikina speakers, Lucy Marshall and Jeanne Warby are included on two audio tapes. The set indicates that it was published by the Kimberley Language Resource Centre in 1999.

**Nganyin Nyikina** – Extracted from the 1980 Wordlist as an introductory vocabulary reference for the Nyikina Mangala School at Jumbacungah-Burni Community. Vocabulary is organized in themes such as Animals, Colours, Action Words, Describing Words, People, Plants and other topics. The sections are colour coded by means of a stripe on the outside edge of section pages and the matching colour next to the entry in the Contents page. Each entry is also retrievable from a Nyikina-English as well as an English-Nyikina finder list. Complex verbs and sensitive cultural information have been omitted from this introductory list.

**Student Workbook** – Contains outlines of modules 1, 2 and 3 for both Nyikina Language and Nyikina Culture. The Nyikina Language component consists of worksheets and activities based on the original lessons written by Dr Stokes and published in *Leaven Nyikina* described above. Lessons 1-10 are represented here. 11-25 are in production.

**Mandjagara Nyikina** – Contains essential cultural information on practices and protocols as well as much of the associated language as recorded in The 1980 Nyikina Wordlist. Main topics cover Greetings, Protocols and Procedures, Kin System, Maps and Place Names. Dr Stokes' original research formed the basis of several workshops held in 2004 with senior Nyikina speakers. The information in this book represents the consensus obtained at those workshops.

**LOTE Guide** (Languages other than English) – Contains guidance for teachers on LOTE curriculum outcomes, teaching and learning strategies, assessment of the LOTE and information about available resources. It also contains teaching instructions for using the stories on CD-ROM that are included in the kit and ideas about teaching songs – some samples of which are on the CD-ROM *Mabonkaga*.

### Nyikina danyji nganka

**Nyikina Stories** – Consists of a book and CD-ROM containing five well-known traditional stories. The text is modified from that collected in the original research by Dr Stokes. These are the same stories used in the grammar lessons and discussed in the LOTE Guide. Essential information about the creation of the Fitzroy River, food acquisition and use, and manifestation of geographical features is imparted by these stories.

Presenting the stories in CD-ROM interactive format provides pronunciation models and the opportunity for students to write their own version of the stories in Nyikina or English. These attempts can be saved to computer and reviewed as part of lesson activities.

**Xatani Nyikina** – An interactive CD-ROM developed during a series of workshops in 2000/1 by the Kimberley Language Resource Centre and senior Nyikina women (most of whom had never touched a computer before the first workshop). The theme, bush medicine, imparts cultural information while giving insight into the sounds and structure of the language. It contains a variety of graded activities with encouraging feedback and culminates in an enjoyable game.

**Mabonkaga** – A CD-ROM containing segments of traditional songs recorded by senior lawman Darby Narngarr. These songs need immediate follow-up with Darby to explain their content and application. If such follow-up is not carried out in the near future the songs will become archival curios. The last song, *Nganyin marini* is a contemporary song presented in a traditional format. It is hoped this song will form the genesis of a collection of such songs yet to be written by Nyikina students as they become more familiar with their language.

The CD also contains samples of two other languages for use with the Nyikina Language 1 module assessment task 1.1 where students are required to recognize spoken Nyikina among a number of oral samples.

**Nyikina Resources** – Additional resources for teachers composed of a useful database of plants including photographs and cultural information, The 1980 Wordlist (so that it may be loaded onto computers), the Nyikina songs as separate documents, maps of Nyikina country, language samples for assessment tasks and worksheets.

**Reflections of a Kimberley Woman** – By one of the original language consultants, Lucy Marshall, this book tells of the transition time from station living where traditional culture could still be practiced, to town existence where cultural practices became modified but still exist. It puts Nyikina culture into the contemporary framework and shows that *nganyin danyji nganka* (strong Nyikina language) is indeed possible.

**Nyikina Cultural Activities** – Shows various protocols and practices, some of which are included in *Mandjagara Nyikina* and discussed in the LOTE Guide. Segments include sign language, protocols for visiting the billabong, spinning hair, overlarding (getting a killer) and how to cook kangaroo tails in the ground.

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## Nyikina Language and Culture Resource Kit