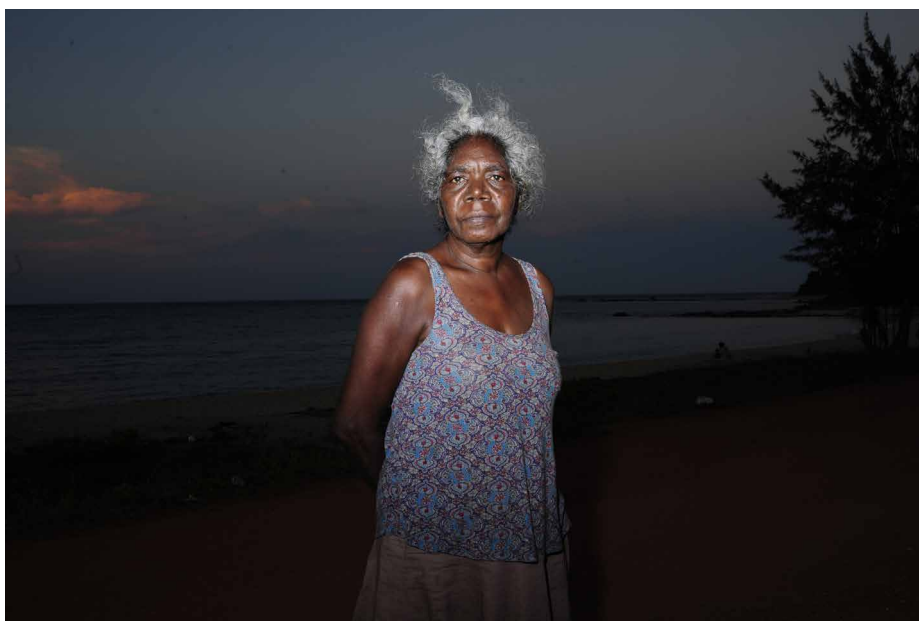


# The Elders' Report into Preventing Indigenous Self-harm & Youth Suicide



Foreword by Mick Gooda  
Introduction by Professor Pat Dudgeon





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Cover photograph : Banduk Marika, Yirrkala NT

This photograph : Caring for country with fire, Cape York Qld



## FOREWORD

The practice of dispossession and assimilation of Indigenous nations in Australia has created many problems for our people. Since first settlement these problems have compounded and fed on each other in ways that have undermined community and cultural strength. Today we are seeing the results of this history lead to a new a destructive phenomena, the loss of our young people to self-harm and suicide.

We have seen a problem that was close to non-existent a generation ago explode into an epidemic that is devastating families and communities right across the top end of Australia. Some of these communities have become places with some of the highest rates of youth suicide and self harm in the world.

This solution based Report holds the experience of Elders from communities from Cape York, to the Kimberley on what needs to be done to address this crisis. These are the words of our Elders who have witnessed firsthand the grief and despair that youth suicide inflicts on families and communities.

What makes this Report different from other mainstream investigations into these issues is that the solutions come from the people. They have not been watered down, marginalised or interpreted by outside

'experts' or governments. What is most striking is that from one side of the country to the other, the speakers in this project share the same views about what is causing the rise in youth suicide and the solutions needed to halt the loss of young lives.

Today our young people are increasingly likely to miss out on their cultural education that directly affects their connection to country. There is a clear imbalance between efforts to provide a westernised education, and access to traditional cultural knowledge. Learning how to live on country and having access to traditional knowledge and culture strengthens and reinforces a positive sense of identity, it provides young people a cultural foundation and helps protect them from feelings of hopelessness, isolation and being lost between two worlds. Giving young people this support is critical to their survival and the survival of our culture.

The speakers in this Report are calling for urgent understanding and action to improve Indigenous wellbeing in Australia. What we know from decades of experience is that bringing in outsiders does not lead to long term solutions - these can only come from within communities, who need to own and control the healing process. Themes such as

community empowerment, the strengthening of cultural identity, maintenance of Indigenous languages, culturally appropriate employment, bi-cultural education and returning to country; these human rights are what our people have been advocating for decades and for good reason.

Government and its many institutions including the courts, police and medical services have a role to play in making this vision a reality, however they have to respond differently than in the past, by listening to the community leaders and fully valuing their experience we can move forward and safe guard our people and our culture.

Mick Gooda

Gangulu (QLD)

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner

Australian Human Rights Commission



## INTRODUCTION

Over the last 30 years, we have witnessed an escalating tragedy in modern Australia with more and more Indigenous Australians, in particular youth, taking or attempting to take their own lives. Almost non-existent before the 1980s, youth suicide across the entire top end of Australia has reached crisis proportions.

There is no single clear diagnosis to this crisis, yet certain factors have been identified as key drivers behind the phenomenon of self-harm amongst our people. The brutal history of colonization, the inter-generational trauma left by Stolen Generations policy, and ongoing racism, combined with the everyday realities in many Aboriginal communities, such as unemployment, poverty, overcrowding, social marginalization, and higher access to alcohol and drugs. Together they have created a very difficult life context in many communities. With muted voice, the pain and hurt being experienced by our young is being turned upon themselves.

While successive Governments have made concerted efforts to improve Aboriginal mental health, little headway has been made in stemming this dark tide of suicide in our communities. We must stop and ask ourselves: why?

In my time as one of Australia's first Indigenous psychologists, and sitting down to listen to my fellow countrymen and women from the cities to the smallest outstations, two things have emerged as clear guides to finding the right solution. Firstly, mainstream Australia needs to recognize that there are

distinct cultural differences between

non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and that these differences must be taken into account in the way help is provided. And secondly, any crisis will not be solved unless partnerships are formed with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, both in identifying the problem and in delivering the solution.

This brings me to the role of Indigenous Elders, and the importance of this publication by the Culture Is Life campaign.

For Indigenous people, cultural identity is the foundation of who we are. Despite years of assimilationist policy, and the loss of so many of our customs and languages, Aboriginal people have demonstrated extraordinary cultural resilience. In my time, I have been privileged to witness what I see as a cultural renaissance of Aboriginal Australia. Culture has become life-giving medicine for our people, closing the wounds of the past and standing us strong to face the future.

Our Elders have been fundamental in this process. They are our wisdom keepers. They have seen the changes, so dramatically incurred in their lifetime. They are the vital bridge between the modern world and Aboriginal culture. They are the leaders of our communities, to whom we continue to rely on for guidance and counseling. There is no more urgent time to sit down and listen to our Elders than now. For any solution to be effective, their guidance must form the foundation of how Governments and service providers work with Aboriginal people. After

so many years of top-down policymaking and funding programs that have not achieved the changes intended on the ground, they are crying out to be heard and to be involved in healing their communities and giving young Indigenous people their inheritance of cultural knowledge, identity and strength.

Therefore I recommend this important collection of Elder's voices to all who wish to understand what is happening in Indigenous communities today and who wish to work in partnership with our people to build a better future.

Professor Pat Dudgeon

Bardi (WA)

Co-chair, Aboriginal Mental Health  
and Suicide Prevention Advisory Group  
Commissioner, National Mental Health  
Commission



## REPORT SUMMARY

The Elders' Report into Preventing Indigenous Self-harm & Youth Suicide was produced between 2012 and 2014 by Indigenous led social justice organisation People Culture Environment in partnership with Our Generation Media. It was developed in response to a massive and unprecedented increase in Indigenous youth self-harm and suicide that has occurred over the past 20 years across Australia's Top End.

Over this 20 year period the incidence of youth suicide in these communities went from being an extremely rare phenomenon, to one where the rate of Indigenous youth suicide is now the highest in the world. The Australian Bureau of Statistics states for young Aboriginal men, the rate is 4 times higher than their non-Indigenous counterparts, whilst for young Aboriginal women the rate is five times higher. In some remote communities in the Kimberley, spates of suicide have reached 100 times the national suicide average. In the Australian Government's own report, *Gone Too Soon*, into youth suicide in the NT, published in 2012 states: "The suicide rate for Indigenous Territorians is particularly disturbing, with 75 per cent of suicides of children from 2007 to 2011 in the Territory being Aboriginal.

The Elders' Report into Preventing Indigenous Self-harm and Youth Suicide brings together the voices of Elders and community leaders from across affected communities that wished to speak publicly about the causes and solutions needed to address this issue.

The reason for creating the Report is that too often, the voices of community leaders are lost amongst the views of professionals, bureaucrats and other people in positions of power who bring their own perspectives to consulting with communities, analysing problems, developing policies and prescribing solutions. In this Report the voices and views of speakers are unaltered.

The Report is a transcription of interviews held with 31 Elders and Community representatives from over 17 communities.

Each speaker was asked two primary questions: why is self-harm and suicide happening?  
what is the solution?

In response to the first question there was a high level of agreement between the speakers about the role culture and loss of cultural connection plays in making young people vulnerable to self-harm.

*"If we lose our culture we are lost, without it we are finished as a people."* Andrew Dowadi, Maningrida, N.T.

*"There is no balance for young people they are more adapted to non-Aboriginal culture than their own. This is happening because we have been forced into one place into towns and away from our traditional homelands our outstations."* Lorna Hudson OAM Derby WA

*"They are forcing our kids to attend school but they got to realise there is another education too and its our old system our culture that our kids are missing out on."* James Gaykamangu Millingimbi, N.T.

*"If they lose language and connection to culture they become a nobody inside and that's enough to put them over the edge."* Joe Brown – Fitzroy Crossing, W.A

*The Elders are the ones that hold on to the culture and the lore, they are the most important aspect of healing our people. And when we lose that, we lose who we are and when you lose who you are what do you have to live for. And many of our people are giving up; many of our people are suffering because of that loss of spirit loss of identity."* David Cole – Central Desert.

In response to the second question there was an equally high level of agreement amongst speakers about the role culture can play in healing and protecting young people. While some details of people's experience differed, the message was unanimous: while most non-Indigenous involvement with the issues in these communities is well meaning, it is not working; give power back to the Elders of each region to build programs that take Indigenous young back to country to reconnect with their land and their spirit; and direct funds and programs for ending suicide and self harm to the Elders and community leaders to lead in the healing process.

*"We haven't been funded because the Government haven't been listening to the people on the ground, they do come and do consultations but they go away and the bureaucracy gets a hold of that document and when it comes back its probably unrecognisable from the interview that was done on the ground. ...So we end up again with ideas, with suicide prevention that come*

*from Canberra that bears no resemblance to what is needed in the community and on the ground. And that is a big frustration that there is funding but the Government says this is how we are going to spend it."* Dean Gooda, Fitzroy Crossing, W.A.

*"Aboriginal people need to be involved in solving our own problems, bringing in outsiders into the Kimberley will not create succession, the legacies of change we need."* Wayne Bergmann, Kimberley, N.T.

*"We want Government to support the Elders so we can teach culture to our young people – when they have culture first they have the very thing that will hold them strong through their lives no matter what they choose to do or where they choose to do it."* Eustice Tipiloura, Tiwi Islands

*"Support us to take our people out on country. All we ask is to help us so we can change things, we are losing our own countrymen, we are losing our lives. What is happening is a Balanda (non Indigenous) problem that gave us the bad things. Stop thinking blackfella doesn't know anything about healing, we living with these problems, we the best informed to deal with it."* Andrew Dowadi, Maningrida, N.T.

*"The only way to stop suicide is to fulfill our cultural obligation to teach our young people because that's what we have been brought up with, strength of character through strength of culture, not by white man's cultural obligation, we need to educate our young ones culturally."* The Government

*doesn't see that we need to build something culturally strong for our people to be healthy and survive." George Gaymarrangi Pascoe, Maningrida N.T.*

## What needs to happen and how you can help

In respect to the actions and next steps that should be taken to address youth self-harm and suicide in Indigenous communities this report calls for Governments, professionals in the health and justice systems and others to acknowledge and accept:

- The links between cultural strength, cultural identity and young Indigenous people's vulnerability to suicide and self-harm;
- That preventing suicide and self-harm involves supporting Elders to maintain and pass on their cultural knowledge to young people - and that this involves taking young people onto country so they can reconnect with who they are as the basis for building self-belief, self-confidence and self-respect;
- That the way forward is to adopt a 'community centred' approach to healing that is led by local Elders and which involves building community and cultural strength as a foundation for helping Indigenous youth be stronger, more resilient and more positive about their future.

For individuals and organisations that wish to help directly, the appendix to the Report contains the details of 21 community

organisations who are at the front line of dealing with these issues. These are the organisations doing the work to reconnect young people with culture and country, and they would value any direct support that can help them maintain and grow their programs.



Max Dulumunmun Harrison

Yuin (NSW)

Chair, People Culture Environment

Director, Culture is Life





**LORNA HUDSON OAM  
DERBY WA**

There is no balance for young people. They are more adapted to non-Aboriginal culture than their own.

We need a balance. We need our old people to come and talk to them in regards to culture. To survive, there has to be balance. When we were young and ready for knowledge, the old people would teach us culture – take us hunting, fishing, all of it – but today that’s not happening.

All of our mob has been pulled into town into somebody else’s country. This makes it difficult to find cultural support. All the support they are getting is from the non-Aboriginal culture. They are not getting cultural support. As a result, our people find it difficult to recognise where our real life is.

The easy way is to turn to drugs and alcohol. That’s the life that they’ve got. I’m talking about Indigenous people.

You got two types of Aboriginal people: highly educated Aboriginal people, and then you have got the illiterate people on the bottom. My concern lies with the illiterate Aboriginal people.

What I see are copycats, young people following each other. A lot of things are happening at night and there is no follow up. Young people who’ve been involved in trouble, whatever that may be, haven’t got a safe place to go to, to feel comfortable and talk to somebody. Not just for one day, but an on going communication, just being real.

People are becoming isolated from culture. For the Government to work better, they need to listen to the cries of our community people. I know a couple of efforts have been made before requesting funding and requesting support, but the Government has turned away.

You can empower our people by supporting them and listening to them, by sitting down with them and talking to them face-to-face, and that’s not happening. Fair enough, we have got Government workers doing field visits and all of that, but it isn’t enough. You’ve got to spend more time with the people and listen to their cry of help. That’s not happening. It’s not being heard and acted upon back in Canberra.

There are some services, but our women have more services than our men. Young men don’t know where to go. There is heaps of money going out to the communities, but they don’t use it the proper way – especially in terms of what’s happening with our young people committing suicide.

You have to go and sit down with the people and learn from them. Most of the services that are in place are not working. You have to get rid of those services. At the end of the day, there is not enough funding going to what is needed. We need the Elders to lead in the healing. As much as we’d like to, nowadays we can’t survive without the funding.

Back in the old times we survived without funding because of our culture. We went out

bush hunting and all of that, we didn’t need funding. Nowadays, you got a motorcar and you need fuel to go out bush to camp and all of that. It’s a different generation now. They have adapted more so to the non-Aboriginal culture than their own.

We are trying to re-introduce the survival experience to them by taking them out to the bush, but without specific funding for this healing, we can’t do much.

It’s a long way to go to get the kids to go out into the bush and teach them about their culture. You can’t see these kids walking a long way to look for food. Everyone wants to jump in the car to get out bush, but nowadays funding is needed to do that and keep our young people balanced with culture.

A lot of young people are still trying to identify themselves as to who they are. They have been cast aside from the mainstream and they see themselves as no good. When you are nobody, what’s the use of living? That’s when our people turn to alcohol and drugs to forget about what has been going on.

There are not enough after-hours services for men. That’s when everything is happening, after hours. Men need support there.

There is no more pride with the men. That has been taken away because they have to live like a white man. Once upon a time, they were hunters and they went out to collect

food. There is no more of that now. Now the only way to provide food for your family is to find a job and get paid or you can receive lazy money from the Government. Lazy money gets spent in lazy ways buying alcohol and drugs. There is no respect coming from the young people towards the Elders and the Elders are tired of what they have to put up with from the young ones.

This is happening because we have been forced into towns and away from our traditional homelands, our outstations. This is where we can hold our culture. It works out there, young people show respect, culture way brings back pride. Young people need to be nurtured and supported to get them back on the right track. Where are the services that can provide our people with the opportunity to go out bush? Culture is still there, but the connection between old and young needs to be supported by Government service providers. To get that connection, you need to go out bush one-on-one.

All you can see here in these towns is non-Aboriginal culture, the grog, the drugs, it is sad.

We need more funding to take the young ones out bush. They’re not getting out there anymore. Even once or twice a week will make a difference. Culture is an ongoing education, just like being at school; you’ve got to keep going out there to get that cultural education.

Fair enough, we have mental health services,



**WAYNE BERGMANN  
KIMBERLEY WA**

but there are not enough of those services that involve going out to the bush, where the community is. They have their offices and staff and all of that, but what's the use of that when you don't go and sit with the people in their communities? That's where it's failing.

Our people feel shame to go to the clinics, hospitals and mental health services. These services have to go out to the people. The services have to come outside to the people. That's what the Government has to realise. These services need to be ongoing and not stop when our people are crying out for help.

The Government has to take how to meet the people's needs seriously. Some services are only there for a limited time. After the funding runs out, they are no more.

The whitefella has still got something over us. We need our own people to be employed on the after-hours services that are required. We need night patrol outside mainstream hospitals, 24-hour patrol run by our own people who understand the problems, not outsiders coming in to fuel tensions. We need our own people on patrol in our communities. We need this now in Derby.

We've got strong people who want to go out and be on patrol day and night, but we need funding to make this work.

Our senior cultural leaders have the difficult task of passing on traditional knowledge to the community. Young people are getting distracted and going off on the wrong track. We are always trying to get them on the right track to ensure they are proud and have a strong identity. This means when they do hit hard times, they have cultural identity to fall back on, that cultural base is really important. It gives them confidence.

The challenge today, is in trying to find a balance between being able to earn some kind of wage, but in also maintaining traditional knowledge, values and customary practices.

During my previous work on the Kimberley land council, we started up a land management program where we had Aboriginal people involved in caring for country and doing projects that reinforced cultural knowledge and values. We engaged Elders to pass on knowledge about places, names, meanings and spiritual significance and we found that getting young people involved was like bees to the honey. These activities gave them meaning in their lives. This reinforced the purpose and strength of traditional knowledge. Those young people have either continued to work in areas of land management or have gone on to participate in mainstream work within the wage economy. I think getting young people involved in land management provided an important base for lifting their self-esteem. It was a stepping-stone for young people to be able to gain more knowledge about their cultural identity and country. It has given them confidence to venture out into the world.

We take for granted the way in which we live in towns, go to shops, to the movies and buy things in a consumer world. To see the world through the eyes of an Indigenous person is something really different. Our priorities may not revolve around having a wage. It lies within our relationships in community, going bush and participating in ceremonies, hunting and gathering and providing food to exchange between other families.

The transition of cultural knowledge is a really critical time for our young people. The challenge today is for Indigenous people to live in two worlds.

I know many senior people who are extremely wealthy in knowledge. They are very proud, strong and healthy people who are poor in a Western material sense. I think we need to find that balance within ourselves. Some of us will find it easier than others and some will have a preference for a strong cultural base and focus less on a wage economy. No matter which way you go, a strong cultural identity is all important for the physical and spiritual benefit of our people.

Aboriginal people need to be involved in solving our own problems. Bringing outsiders into the Kimberley will not create succession, the legacies of change that we need. Outsiders bring in quick fixes, providing there is a level of government funding and resourcing. There are a lot of people running around trying to do good, but it doesn't create inter-generational change. We want to up-skill our own people.

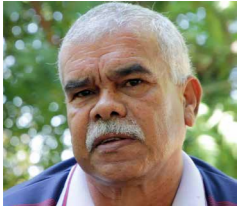
I haven't seen any successful engagement

in youth intervention happen as a result of outsider programs. Yet the system we operate within relies on bringing in outside people all the time. The statistics show that suicide rates in the Kimberley haven't changed. In fact, I am concerned suicide rates are being under reported by the police department. I think they are showing more deaths as accidents, when they know that some Aboriginal people have been psychologically affected and walked onto a road or abused themselves through alcohol or drugs. As a result, the police will code it as death by misadventure or an accident, when it really isn't.

That's why programs, which address these needs, are going to make long-term change.

There are clear examples in Canada where communities as a whole have taken responsibility to address youth self-harm. By taking greater control in decision-making, these communities have less alcohol abuse, less suicide, higher employment, higher rates of school attendance, and a healthier and happier society. That's where the real answers lie, in empowering Aboriginal people to address community issues.





**DEAN GOODA  
FITZROY CROSSING WA**

Our main role is to maintain Aboriginal Lore and culture in the Kimberley. We support kids going on country with the Elders – the right people, on the right country.

Some of the problems that young people face are that they don't see a future. So they get in that hopeless space and some see the only way out is to suicide.

KALAC (Kimberley Aboriginal Lore and Culture) reconnects young people with their culture. We see this as a major initiative to continue operating up here for the wellbeing of our young people. This also is good for the Elders who understand through culture and Lore, the benefits of being on country. When they see more young people involved, they know that our culture will continue.

KALAC sponsored Canadian Professor Michael Chandler to come out and speak about his research on the First Nations mob in Canada. He made that connection between culture and cultural maintenance lessening suicides. Basically the Canadian communities who are connected to culture had very few suicides and some had none.

Our biggest issue is getting Governments to understand where Lore and culture fits into their mainstream funding programs across all levels of government. KALAC has been operating since 1985. We have struggled for every cent we have received. We will continue to promote Lore and culture for healing and hopefully we will one day see it as a mainstream process.

We see young people going out on country and returning as completely changed people.

We particularly see this at cultural festivals. We would like to follow up with young people after they return from culture camps. However we struggle for funding in this area too. We would like to make cultural practices relevant at school, within employment and in addressing drug and alcohol issues.

We want to follow up with our young people when they are away from country in the towns. That's where we would like to have more resources, to do these follow ups and invite them into mainstream programs for education, employment and health. We need long term funding in order to do this.

We have completed surveys with our young people who are not living in towns. When talking cultural governance, they have all said the same thing. They all want to learn the language. They all want to learn the song, the dances and ceremonies from the Elders of their own country. When we survey a town where there are alcohol and drugs available, they are not interested in the cultural pathway.

We haven't been funded because the Government hasn't been listening to the people on the ground. The Government does consultations, but they go away and the bureaucracy gets a hold of those documents and when it comes back, it's probably unrecognisable from the interview that was done on the ground. We have always heard of policy development from the ground up, but in my 25 years working in this area with government and community, I have never seen this happen. I have never seen them take and implement what the community is

asking for if it doesn't fit into the funding guidelines. It's lost.

So again, we end up with ideas on suicide prevention that come from Canberra and bear no resemblance to what is needed in the community and on the ground. That is a big frustration. There is funding, but the Government decides how we are going to spend it.

It is frustrating, because we can see light at the end of the tunnel. We need community-based programs developed in consultation with the Elders. We need to have the right people on country developing their own strategies to overcome this suicide plague that Aboriginal people are suffering from.





**JOE BROWN  
FITZROY CROSSING WA**

One day on country everything changed. Some of them young people said they don't like it, but we kept them out in the home-lands for a few months. I think that's a good idea when you got troubled young fellas. Keep them out there for 2-3 months.

"We're still going to die in the end." That's what young people think, that's how they live in this world, "I might as well bloody kill myself."

Young people still want to learn culture, but they're going in that different way (Western). That's what's happening. They get confused. We're trying to bring them back, make them really strong. Being on country is better. The life is better.

If I kill a kangaroo, I teach young people how to clean it out and cook it and cut it up the proper way. Even a goanna, I cut it the proper way. That's what I show them. When they go their own way, they got to feed themselves. That's what you got to do. It won't cook itself. They got to know how to do it. That's what you've got to do in this country. You've got to know how to help yourself. If you don't go out and do it, you're bloody dead.

We tell these lads their skin group, that's who they are and how they fit together in the community. Language is important. They've got to know this so they know their culture and who they are. If they lose language and connection to culture they become a nobody inside and that's enough to put anyone over the edge.



**DR ANNE POELINA  
BROOME WA**

When I look at suicide and the world that many of these young people live in, it seems to me that we aren't learning from models of best practice. We don't seem to be investing in opportunities to build these young people's capacity.

I think one of the things we can't get away from is the impact of colonisation on Indigenous people.

I wrote my PhD on the impact of colonisation on my family over many generations. As a nation, in terms of intergenerational trauma, we have not learnt from the lessons of the past. The evidence is clear and overwhelming.

Intergenerational trauma is very real and evident. I think it is a national disgrace. There needs to be a way that we, as Australians, can work together to invest in these lives. These young people have so much potential and I think that it is a potential we are losing.

If you were to look at the statistics in the Kimberley, the highest statistics in regard to Aboriginal suicide are with young people between the ages of 15 to 25. This is human capital that we are not investing in. Young people are dying and this is a preventable act.

How do we develop programs to invest in the cost of a life saved?

When I talk about culture, I talk about the country. The country is alive. The river, the land they're all an energy system. I think all of us, whether we are young or old, need to

connect with nature and the environment because it helps build our resilience. It's also a healing mechanism – this relationship between land and people – we need to have this connectivity to country.

In terms of my life over the last 10 years, the opportunity to engage with Elders and other leaders who have been able to reinforce and validate who I am as an Indigenous person has been very, very important. It is very important to have Elders or leaders who can work with young people, who won't judge them, who are there to support them and build their resilience and resourcefulness.

Most of the Elders who are 70+, especially those in the Kimberley, are people who have been able to navigate their way through the mainstream world and their own cultural world. I think that lived experience and those journeys are lessons that need to be passed onto young people. Elders and young people have an important relationship to bring to fruition.



**EDDIE BEAR  
MOWANJUM WA**

The Government doesn't even go into the community and talk with people on the ground. They need to know. They need to come and speak to the people right here. To prevent suicide happening, they should be here listening to us, but nothing is happening.

Alcohol and drugs are the main issue in nearly every community. I think this is pushing young people over the edge.

Those young boys drink so much and then you hear about something happening to them. We need our people trained to speak with young people about alcohol and the many other things that can harm them. We need to get young people to realise what happens to their lives when they drink and smoke drugs.

If you talk to that young boy just once, that won't be enough. You need to continue talking to that boy. They don't talk, they keep it inside. The main issue is to have our people trained so they can keep checking in with the young ones.

Culture is the main thing. Taking young people out there and showing them country, teaching them their culture, showing them how to treat the country, that's the main thing. We want to see our kids growing up to be something good. We are a dry community, but grog still gets in. We are too close to town. We need to get our young people away from town. It's alcohol that's killing people and drugs too.

Homeland is better for our people because out there, they get a clear mind. They've got a lot of cultural things to do out there. They go out fishing. They get things done.

A lot of white people come to this community, but not much happens. They've got to help us save lives. They've got to do something about it. We're waiting. I get calls from some of the young fellas when they're drunk. They want me to go over to their place. I go over and talk to them and settle them down until they fall asleep. Some of them take off into the scrub with a rope. I chase them, sit them down and talk to them. I bring them back. We need support to prevent these things from happening. When it does happen, we get cars after cars coming, but by then it's too late.

The Government needs to come before there's a suicide. They need to get a meeting going and talk to the community, talk to the families, get the teenagers, the people in their twenties and thirties, get them together and talk to them. They need to support us so we can be ready.



**JOHN WATSON  
DJALMADANGA WA**

The Government gave us some money. It wasn't too much money, but it was enough to start Yiriman ([www.yiriman.org.au](http://www.yiriman.org.au))

We take the young people out to the place called Yiriman. Kids that are missing school, going off the rails, drinking and smoking drugs, getting in trouble with the police, stealing, that kind of thing. We take them out there and talk to them, we don't just take people out and walk the leg off them - we talk to them.

I make them sit down and listen to the Elders, the black people, my people, Lore people, we show them how we've been taught.

We try to make them talk their own language, to understand where their grandfathers came from and where their mothers came from. We teach them culture. That's what we do with Yiriman.

We took the last lads out for 3 weeks. Brother and I took them out for camel trip, walked their leg off. We like to do a lot of this.

Sometimes we take them out for one day, but we like to take them out for a week or a couple of weeks. We talk to them and we get the white people (counsellors) involved and our own people to talk to them too.

How are the kids affected? Some of them come out clean, some of them understand what we are talking about, some of them cry - it gets into them very deep. The parents are not really talking to their children and are

not keeping up with cultural people.

We grew up with our Elders. They showed us hunting. We followed them through our culture and language. That's why we talk language. That's why we want our own people to understand that our own young people need to speak their own language.

In my time, we got punished for doing the wrong thing. We got into serious trouble for doing the wrong thing. We talk to our young people about those sort of things.

Sometimes we are short of grant money, so we've got to look around for Lore and culture money. We've got to find money to take these young ones out bush for culture, healing and strengthening. We are trying to do a lot of this.

What we've learnt here on our homelands, we are trying to teach our own children, our way of living. That's what we do here with Yiriman project.

Yiriman has got to find some bloody answer for funding. The Government doesn't listen to us. We got to go begging to the Government. We got to go begging to the people who fund us.

Not only us, but mobs all over Australia need support for culture.



**ANNIE WATSON  
DJALMADANGA WA**

We need our own Aboriginal mental health people. When I try to encourage mob in our community to visit the current mental health people some say, "What do I got to go see mental health for? I'm not silly!" That's why our own people need to be trained in this area, because our people know who they are. We need cultural people trained. Aboriginal, not whitefella, for our healing.

There are a lot of drugs and different things coming in and our young people are into that. We know we got to take the young people back to country. It's like boot camp, not only for young men, but young women too.

We take a lot of young people (12-14 year olds) out onto country. We teach them about country. They say they get a good feeling and they wear their country inside themselves. The country is their life. It is their culture place. It's our place for learning. Taking our young people out onto country is a solution for many things.

It's not working the whitefella way. We want to control this healing.

We want our kids to learn their language and learn their culture. From the little ones up, we want our kids to stay in the community. Outsiders don't understand that. Our people are stronger in themselves when they grow up in community. It gives them a better foundation to go out into the world, if they choose to.

**BERNARD TIPILOURA  
MELVILLE ISLAND (TIWI) NT**

Suicide occurs when young people find themselves in no man's land. I strongly believe that if our young people today join culture with Western style, they will be ok.

Young people today are taking new drugs without understanding the damage that will be done. In my day, all there was, was alcohol. Now there is ice, glue, gunja, you know the rest. There is no education being given as to their harmful effects. That's why these young people take these drugs.

I like to teach them to identify themselves. For example, I follow my mother's skin tribe and I'm small red ochre bird, that's my skin. I also follow my father's dancing. My father would dance the brolga. I can also dance my own cultural dreaming: the coloured reed fish. I want to educate these young people to identify in themselves what tribe they belong to and how they tick as Tiwi people because if you don't have those things it's very difficult to be proud of yourself.

I think it's important to identify. For our young people to know and practice what skin they belong to, what dance they belong to, and what country they belong to. If they know these things, they will stay strong within. This will also set a good example to friends, cousins and family.

We want to take the young people to their country, to show them their land and their boundaries.

We have eight different homelands on the

Tiwi Islands and we have about 16 clans here. We speak one traditional language. We don't intermarry within our family tree. All these things we Elders enjoy teaching our young people and it is important to keep doing this until I say goodbye to this nice world.

I keep telling young people, "Reach my age become an old person too." I have one girl, seven boys, 32 grandchildren and six great-grandchildren. I tell young people; "If you use drugs, you will never reach my age. You will never have a lot of grandchildren like I have. You will never set a good example for our people." I want Tiwi people to survive. While I'm still alive I want to set a good example for our young people.

Today it is very hard because young people are not as strong as our old people were. We had more bush tucker. Today, we have frozen food and shop food and it doesn't make us feel any good. It doesn't make us feel strong.

I want to educate our young people. These islands are full of stones, trees, and creeks that all have name and stories. The islands are full of good, natural foods.

I believe that the only way out for our young people is through connecting with their culture so they become proud of their country and holding knowledge. If we can win some of our young people back, we have a good chance of holding our culture and building a strong community that is physically healthy and in good mind.

We need support from the Government to help us do this. The Government should be working with the people who are living in the communities. We know what works.

The Government is stopping the support that helps us send people to the homelands, but they are wrong. Young people don't suicide in the homelands. They are proud there and know who they are there. Suicides only occur here, where the grog is.

We want the Government to understand that not supporting homelands, not supporting cultural education, and not supporting cultural activities is actually a matter of life and death for us. It's not just a nice little thing to support; it's actually our people's inner soul.





**FRANCIS XAVIER  
MELVILLE ISLAND (TIWI) NT**

We are trying to generate income for our people through what we have here on the islands, especially our young people. We are creating jobs and more activities on the ground here for our young people. We are trying to break the cycle. We have huge problems here with our young people, particularly with drugs and alcohol. It's a big problem in communities here and across the Northern Territory.

At the moment, there is not a lot for young people to do here on the Tiwi Islands. We are trying to co-create jobs to help them get away from their problems.

It's important for our young ones to step up. Culture is the most important thing that we have. We are trying to keep our young ones connected. It's important to keep it continuing on.

If we don't pass our culture to our kids, our culture will get lost. We want to maintain a balance between both cultures. Young people are not getting enough support from the Elders. That's where they learn responsibility, culture and leadership. We need an Elders' cultural program for our young people.

The suicide rate has dropped. We have some youth programs and we have representatives from each clan group and tribe. They meet with our young people and take them out bush for 2 weeks to teach them culture. Slowly we are trying to get our young ones involved in culture.

The Government could help us by delivering

more services and facilities for young people. We need a culture centre or knowledge centre where people can come in and learn how to find a balance between the outside world and our culture.

One of our senior Elder's roles is to help create opportunities here. They are helping young people find their way into real jobs. They are helping Tiwi people access training in literacy and numeracy after they leave school so they can be more skilled and get better jobs. There are young people walking around with no skills. That's why we encourage the young ones to do a lot of training. That way we can fill in those jobs here.

Our senior Elders are concerned about non-Indigenous people holding positions where there could've been an opportunity for Tiwi people to take on those jobs. Non-Indigenous people are working in The Department of Enterprise and in private enterprise here. There is no training provided for our people. If we don't turn things around, the good we have created for our young people in stopping self-harm could fall apart. Somehow we have got to help our people take on more meaningful positions in our own communities in order to break the cycle.



**EUSTICE TIPILOURA  
MELVILLE ISLAND (TIWI) NT**

Culture already is fading away. If no one is interested, in 30 years time, culture will go. When the old people go, it's up to the young people to carry on.

We want the Government to support the Elders so we can teach culture to our young people. When they have culture first, they have the very thing that will hold them strong throughout their lives, no matter what they choose to do or where they choose to do it.



**NOEL PUANTULURA  
BATHURST ISLAND (TIWI) NT**

We've got a place out at Four Mile Beach. A place for healing. It's for both young men and women. You can even camp there. It's a place to teach them culture and dance. Dance identifies who they are, what country (hometown) they belong to, what dance they belong to: crocodile, shark, boat dance or buffalo dance. We do all those different dances in these two islands. They hold their culture through us, the Elders.



**ESTELLE BOWEN**  
**HOPEVALE QLD**

It was our own local boys that took our son to the lock up. They put him in the back of the police van's cage and they never took his belt off. My job was in mental health and I knew what needed to be in place, but it wasn't. So they just left his belt on. No one pulled up to check on him, they just kept on driving from Hopevale to Cooktown. Somewhere along the way, he took his belt off, put it on top of the bar and around his throat.

My daughter took her life in the same year as our son. She really missed her brother. She knew there was no justice for him. The Police Commissioner came up from Brisbane to give his condolences. I said, "It's probably alright for you to say you are sorry, but that will never bring him back. We want something put in place so you don't chuck these young people in a van and drive them so far to a lock up." That's why we then got a new police station and a jail so it doesn't happen to the next child.

I knew one day I'd probably have to identify my daughter.

Our suicide rate is high. Our Elders are finding it hard. The Government is cutting the services that we need to keep. Culture is important. That's when our young people know who they are. On the Western side they lose their way. The cultural way, they don't need their mobiles and gadgets. They can start hunting again, feeding and looking after their families. They can sit down, share culture and food and be with the Elders again.

Taking young people out on the land is healing. Even that is being made difficult now, as they are telling us we have got to have someone with qualifications in cooking. We never died from our cooking! We learnt to survive in the bush, we learnt from our Elders. We never starved out in the bush. We need the Government to help us with funds to end youth suicide. We need funds to help us get back into the cultural ways with the Elders. It's got to be cultural so the kids can learn from these old people. Just give us the funding to take our young people out in the bush and keep them safe with culture.

Culture is the main thing we should bring back into the community. The workers who are coming in, even the police and the hospital staff, they got to know and understand cultural awareness before they come into the community. It's no use coming in and enforcing the Western way.





## DES BOWEN HOPEVALE QLD

I have six children and I have lost two to suicide. I have about 19 grandchildren.

The suicides happened from frustration, stress and boredom. The drugs flow freely. There are people outside our community who come in at night and supply drugs. Our young people know where to go to get them. There's a sense of hopelessness. Many of them still say so today. This sense of hopelessness is from over-crowding, lack of employment and no cultural support programs.

The Pelican catamaran (Pelican Expeditions [www.svpelican.com.au](http://www.svpelican.com.au)) came up to us for a number of years. During the time Pelican was operating in the community there were no suicides. Then funding ran out and Pelican stopped coming. That's when the deaths started again. Pelican Expeditions took people out on country. People were able to sit there; they had someone to talk to. We were also re-immersed in cultural activities.

The young people and us old people were able to open up. Even the Elders we took out there were suffering from their own loss. They were able to get it out and talk. When Pelican took our young kids out to Lizard Island with the Elders, the teachers at school would say there was a positive change in these kids when they returned. Ask these teachers to put it in writing and they won't do it. Why?

Every year we have a rodeo. It's a big event, but when the Pelican came it killed the rodeo, everyone was looking forward to the Pelican it was that successful!

By going out on country, the young people felt relaxed in a different environment to town. They were able to talk freely then. Here in town everyone is busy living their day-to-day lives. People don't just pull up on the street here and see how you're going if you've lost family.

Before Pelican came we had nowhere to go. We had organisations in town to help us, but they don't know who's hurting. That's because they're sitting up there in their office. How would they know?

The only way to find out what's going on with at-risk young people is to take them out fishing or hunting and to sit down with them on country. That's when you will find out who's hurting. Sitting in your office is really no help. When young people feel shame, they are not going to open up, but if they spend time on country, everything can come out.

When you've got young people in a town, they're not interested in culture. They're interested in the shop and what people are up to. On country, there are no distractions. You've got culture and healing. If I can get them on country, they've got just me and the other Elders.

What do we need? We could use a couple of 4WD vehicles and trailers to carry camping gear. We'd use them to take the Elders and young people out on country. We need someone to help us put a program together. To help us write it. With our program all costed and set out, we could get on with applying for funding.

We can show those drop outs, those kids who don't go to school their country and give meaning to their life through culture.

We've got women Elders too, who can show the young women how to weave, what type of grass to get and how to find them. There's a woman here that can do that. But we need someone to set out a program properly so it can be sustainable.

We can empower the young ones on the cultural side, but we need help getting the funding and keeping the funding. Guide us through the bureaucracy so we can be with our culture, with programs that work for our young people.

When we have had projects that work taken away from us, we have lost people through suicide. No one sat down with us and asked how important the programs were, no one evaluated what was working.

Just listen to us on the ground. We are not just talking for the sake of talking. We are talking from experience. We need the Government to listen to us and get behind what is working.

Just when we think we are getting on top of the problems, the program ends or changes. This is frustrating for our young people and for our old people too. We have something that works, and then without consultation, it ends.

We had a Government champion here in Hopevale. But it was his wife who was helping us get our young people on country.

He could have recommended our program to other Government organisations, to state health, the council here, and the state school. This Government champion wasn't bringing these groups together. He could see the value in what his wife was doing off her own back, but he wasn't helpful.



**EDWARD JOHN NAYLOR  
CAPE YORK QLD**

Suicide is happening here in Hopevale. Not every day but during certain times of the week and certain times of the month.

People are stressed, their feeling is not right. We have to take them out of town on a journey. This might be on a boat to feel freedom, to get away from that world.

We've got to get the young ones who feel suicidal, who are talking about hanging themselves, we have to take them and talk to them. We have to talk to them about life. They have to die in a decent way. We let them know they don't have to suicide or stab themselves. We Elderly people hurt for them when they behave in this way.

If we take them out on country and get their minds occupied, we can see where to go from there. From that experience, they can learn to respect their Elders too.

We have to get that feeling into them, that the Elders are here to help them, that they are doing the wrong thing. We have to teach them the right thing, to find a job, to work and feel happy.

Today, I see life is being lived a lot differently to how I have been living. It turned when alcohol came to our community. When the drugs came, it changed our younger ones.

In life, everyone's got to be there to help everyone that's how it's got to be.

Our identity comes from the land. We need to live like our grandparents used to, hunting and fishing and things like that. That's why

I want the young people to be out there on their homeland. To feel that freedom, to feel our ancestors out there, you can feel them when you go there.

When you hunt and feel the freedom of the land, you can feel spirit calling you back.

I want my grandchildren and my great-grandchildren to go back on the land and get the same feeling as I get. I want them to feel safe there. It's where they belong. It's where our culture is from.

Our ancestors are calling us back. Calling us back to the land. The young ones can work out there and build whatever they need upon that land. They can build a home.

I've got a lot of grandchildren here in Hopevale. I'd like to see them go out to our homeland. I'm getting older. I'd like to see them on the land before I go. I'd like to see them be happy on the land.

On the land, in peace, they're away from alcohol and drugs. They are there to do something good. It's a good place to be out on the land, to get away from stress. It's a Lore that belongs to us Aboriginal people to be on the land. It's a very powerful Lore.



**DAVID COLE  
CENTRAL DESERT NT**

The healing circle is where we spend most of our time. It's the place where we do our talking and listening, where the kids can be heard. It's where we sit and express our problems and ourselves. It's where we let things go. It's where we share our knowledge. It's a safe place, a powerful place. The kids respect us when they come and sit here.

Most of the time we create a fun, happy environment. The more they laugh, the better it is for them.

The deeper purpose is cultural connection. We give the kids a chance to deal with their trauma, their pain, their challenges and all the stuff that's happening in their lives. It's also a chance for them to reconnect and remember who they are on a deeper level.

It's a place to let go of problems and pain, to let go of the challenges they have. It's a place to clear their mind so they can work out what's happening in their life, where they are going and how they going to get there.

We offer other services, activities and workshops that empower the kids. We have a sexual health workshop, we offer legal information and information around drug and alcohol abuse. Beyond that, it's about just being here. Offering a place where they can feel comfortable. This is their place and they know when they are here it's theirs. We are here for them.

The kids are caught in two worlds. Many of them understand that culture is important, but they live in this Western world, which is about education, employment, and

monetary things. A lot of the young ones sit in a state of confusion. Then we have the intergenerational trauma. Most of them don't understand why they have to go through this, many of them self-medicate. They turn to gunja and grog to manage the pain or the confusion. At the end of the day, too many of our young people take their lives to escape the pain. That is the sad reality of what we are dealing with.

Here on country, we give them a safe place to let the pain out. We give them a safe place to talk through the problems, to work through the confusion. This way, they can understand where they are, where they want to be and how they can get there. That's what this healing program is all about.

My mother is European, my father is Aboriginal. I grew up without my father. When I was young, I went through many challenges, as my mother's partner was abusive. I grew up with violence and problems and confusion as to who I am as an Indigenous person. I didn't know my culture because my father wasn't there to teach me. My mother brought me up with a sense of Aboriginality, but I still didn't have a connection back to country.

I grew up with these challenges, trauma and loss of identity. I had to go through my own healing journey myself.

My wife also went through a challenging time as a young person. She went through a harder journey than me. Together we have walked a healing pathway. We have four beautiful children. We have broken the cycle for our children.



The Balanu Foundation was created out of our own journey. We wanted to create something that can break the cycle for others. By giving these kids a place to heal, to get strong, to find balance and peace within themselves and most importantly to find and hold on to culture, we hope to create warriors who will build strong families. Through that journey we will break the cycle that has been inflicted upon our people from the past to now.

We have given the kids in our program enough tools and planted enough seeds to have prevented many of them from taking their own lives.

The reality is that 85% of the kids who come through our program have either attempted or wanted to attempt suicide.

In seven years, we have taken over 550 kids into this program. We are talking about a large number of children who are looking to suicide as a means of dealing with their trauma. Previously they didn't have the appropriate support to help them through their challenges.

We as a society should be ashamed about this. Our kids are taking their lives because nobody is there for them, no one can reach them. We have to ask ourselves what we are doing and what we are not doing. We have to ask where are the resources going that are supposed to be reaching these children and keeping them alive?

In 1991, Aboriginal people in the NT represented 5% of the suicide population.

Non-Aboriginal people represented 95% of the suicide population. In 2010, that number had increased from 5% to 50% for Aboriginal people and decreased from 95% to 50% for non-Indigenous people.

The greatest at-risk category is with 10 - 24 year olds who represent 80% of the suicide population. In 2012 and 2013, the numbers have been getting worse not better. The situation is getting worse because support needs to happen at a grass roots level.

Not enough resources are being committed to this area. We need to take action now. Things need to move quickly. We cannot sit around talking for the next 10 years. We will lose too many young people. I think we are seeing a continual rise in suicide rates because we are not seeing community-based solutions being supported adequately in remote and urban areas. We need culturally appropriate suicide prevention programs, which are developed by Indigenous communities. Until we have these programs in place, until Indigenous people are given the right and opportunity to implement the solutions they know will work, we are going to see suicide rates increase.

The Elders are the most critical part of the program for healing - especially the Elders who hold Lore because the greatest healing aspect of our program is culture.

Getting someone to reconnect with who they truly are is the basis for building self-belief, self-confidence and self-respect. The Elders are the most important part of this healing process. Without their knowledge we cannot

reconnect the kids to who they truly are. We cannot give them that link to identity, to culture. The Elders are the ones who hold on to the culture and the Lore. They are the most important part of the healing process for our people.

When we lose that, we lose who we are and when you lose who you are what do you have to live for? And many of our people are giving up; many of our people are suffering because of that loss of spirit loss of identity.

The Elders hold the key to healing our people. There are a lot of jobs created for outsiders, but not our own people. We still have our people signing over 99 year leases for the sake of adequate housing. In our remote areas we are living in overcrowded houses. The Australian Constitution states that we should have equal rights to good housing education and health, but we are forever trading off something just to get the bare minimum. People think that everything is handed out for Indigenous people, but we are disempowered because we are not given the opportunity to take control of the solutions to our problems. Jobs should be created to employ community to strengthen community. Instead jobs are created for outsiders to come in and work for community. They achieve nothing. Until we start employing our people to implement the solutions to problems they understand better than anyone else, healing is never going to work.

When you have people living in poverty and overcrowding and laws saying that if you don't send your kids to school the

Government is going to take them away, these pressures add up and impact the whole family. Children deal with it all in their own way. Many express it in anger. Many turn to substance abuse to escape what's happening. Far too many take their life.

We need to empower the community. We need to empower the people.

Our program is a community based, grass roots developed and culturally appropriate. Some bureaucracies struggle to understand how this fits into their boxes. We need to bridge that misunderstanding. It's the same vision just a different language. Once they can understand the importance of doing this properly through community and through culturally appropriate programs then we can start to move forward together.

Many resources are allocated to address the issues confronted by Indigenous people across this country. The reality is these resources create a whole industry that rides on our suffering and fails to achieve the outcomes required to end our pain.

Until those resources reach the grass roots, the situation is never going to get better. We need ensure accountability for the resources allocated to address the issues we face, because right now they are failing. Right now we are being blamed for that failure when we have no control over the process.

## DARYL KANDUWARA SENIOR HERMANNSBURG NT

Our young people need education and discipline. We need to see more of our young people going back to school. They need to know what's right from wrong. They need to get away from peer pressure. You get the older ones teaching the younger ones (12-13 years old), pressuring them to have a drink, gunja and that goes on and on and gets worse.

It comes down to the parents. There have been a few suicides here, but you got to teach your kid from early childhood. Teach them what's right and what's wrong. Sometimes they're just being inquisitive, try this, try that, but as soon as the older ones grab hold of them, peer pressure will get to them. Parents, that's what it boils down to, they got to teach their young ones. I remember when we were kids, we would be taken to our Elders and shown cultural education. We were shown our dreaming sites, our cultural ways.

You ask any of the kids in their teens now, "What's this place? What's this plant?" They will stand there scratching their heads. They will not know what it is. It's a very sad thing, that's for sure. They are losing their culture bit by bit.

We need to get our young ones out bush. You got to control the young ones, give them a good hiding to discipline them, early childhood disciplining that's the key. Teach them right from wrong early. Teach them the old way so they understand there are consequences in life if they muck up when they are older. We've got to discipline them and that's got to come from family members.

When we were young we went out to stock camp. We got disciplined by working after school and on the weekends. It gave us a taste for work too. We liked riding horses so it was something we enjoyed. It wasn't boring for our young minds so when we left school it became our job.

Every time I'm at a meeting (I chair the meetings here) I am always pushing for the kids to be job ready. My brother is organising a horse program that breaks in horses 40km from here. The program educates the horses until they are nice and quiet to ride. A lot of the young people who will be attending are the young men who have just been through the Lore, but before they do their horse breaking and all that, they got to do school work and catch up on that. They got to be in the classroom first then they can go and do their horse breaking and riding course.

Suicide is recent. It came with gunja, grog, all that. When we were kids we tried to get away from grog in the house. These days, young people just fall into it. When we were young, culture was strong. It was the way. We had culture to turn to, to keep us safe. Everyone helped each other. The kids now, they can't get away. We got to rewind, start from the beginning and start taking them out bush. We got to strengthen them culturally, show them culture, tell them cultural stories about who they are, all that sort of thing.

There's been quite a few suicides. Not only here, but our mob suiciding in town, in Alice. All of this was unheard of when we were growing up.



## BAYDON WILLIAM HERMANNSBURG NT

It's important for young people to listen to the Elders to make their spirit strong. When the Elders speak to you, their words feed your soul and give you strength.

If it weren't for our Elders, we wouldn't be here. We wouldn't be talking about land and land rights. They have seen the past and they can see the future.

We are getting the wrong answers from the Government. We are looking for answers through governments and outside organisations, but for us the answers are with the old people, the Elders. They know the way for us. They know how to help us and how to heal our young people.

We get involved in too much distraction from outside. We jump a long way from our culture for help, but it's here, in our community with the old people, that we can receive the answers.

Our culture is not being respected and supported by outsiders. Our young people get a rope, go to a tree and hang themselves because of this and because of the influence of their peer groups.

Cultural way is the solution to prevent our young people from suiciding. A lot of our young people think about suicide because they are missing culture. What will happen if young people don't take our culture on after us, after we have gone? Our culture will suffer and die too.

Our people are born with culture. The answers are out bush at home on our

motherland. It's there for us. It's that simple, but we need to be supported in a way that holds culture. Elders should be leading the healing of our people and they are being totally forgotten.

A lot of our mob are now always in town. When I can get our young people out bush, a lot of them, they cry. What they feel is a spiritual feeling. They get information from being out there on their homelands. It's their culture healing them, strengthening them, giving them reason to live. The air is sweeter out bush.

The Government needs to support homelands instead of pushing everyone in town. The Government needs to concentrate on the senior Elder men and women. Fund them so they can take young people out to the homelands and teach them the culture to keep them safe so they stop self-harming, it's that simple.



**HARRY NELSON  
YUENDUMU NT**

There is no attention paid to young kids. There is no set program, aside from what is worked out by the community to keep them busy. People are frustrated by what has happened since The Intervention was introduced five years ago.

We have been trying to convince the Government that this was the wrong thing to do. In the opinion of the politicians, they thought they were doing a very good thing, but they have created a lot of damage in the history of assimilation for our people.

The power has to come back to the tribal people living on the land itself. We have been forced into living in two cultures. We must be able to maintain our culture and with that, the responsibility of looking after our country and people.

Knowing culture and country is so important to our people. This is how we can continue to be.

Our community put a stop to suicide by saying, "if you are going to commit suicide, then move away from our community. If you want to run amok, upset your parents, community, and Elders, then go away. If you can't obey the laws of our tribe go somewhere else." Well, that woke them up and suicide stopped.

I'd like to get the Government to recognise the power and wisdom of the Elders.

We need to be supported in healing our young people ourselves.

The Government's ongoing approach is killing our people because the power and responsibility has been taken from the leaders and Elders.



**BANDUK MARIKA  
YIRRKALA NT**

There was no self-harm happening twenty years ago. Young people taking their life is a recent phenomenon. I think from the age of 11 or 12 and into early their 20s, they self-harm. When our young go to town to drink, it brings all that anger, despair and unwantedness out. Domestic arguments are more apparent, petrol sniffing, alcohol, drugs – where does it all stop?

I'm not a doctor or psychologist, but young people think they are not worth it, which can lead them to want to take their life away. A lot of people can't handle the challenge of having a strong culture on one hand and a contemporary culture on the other. A lot of young people can't balance that. There's a lot of cultural abuse when drunks come home cursing, swearing and causing fights. I don't believe they understand right from wrong when they are drunk.

There are two sides up here: Balanda (white people) coming and genuinely supporting and helping Aboriginal people, and there are Balanda's that literally want to come in and make what money they can and then move on for economic purposes.

Cultural introduction is very important for visitors to Aboriginal communities. Cultural inductions should occur for everyone who comes into Aboriginal communities.

The Government of the day is often caught up with their own issues. We know one of their agendas is health and Indigenous health has been a big one for a long time. The Government knows Aboriginal health is poor, very poor, worse than other countries.

But the Government here doesn't look into its own backyards in depth to see how much Indigenous people are suffering, to see the strain on both sides of the community.

All of us are at risk because we are not living the type of life older generations lived. Yolgnu had a history of healthy living, physically and mentally. Today, we go to the shop we buy food that is man made and filled with sugar. We have a bad diet. A lot of us have gotten lazy. In the old days there was always long distance walking. You had to rely on the country to supply water or whatever you wanted to eat, it's there, it's still there. Then we have emotional stress from losing our people. Today old people are burying young people. The women especially have a physical stress because we hurt ourselves to mourn loss.

There are community clinics and the major hospitals in Darwin, Gove and Adelaide, but we don't want our people going under the knife. We want our people to live longer healthier lives with a stability of mind. Their soul needs to be restored.

We've got bush medicine, natural medicine, which is good because we still do use natural medicine. After a funeral we don't want western medication. We don't want pills to kill the pain. You need to go someplace where you can rest, where you can be looked after, fed and sleep. That's the whole point of having a healing centre to heal people. The healing centre we wish to create is not just for Yolgnu, it is for everyone. We want to make it available to all people who need healing.



## RUBY ALDERTON YIRRKALA NT

I haven't lived here for 10 years. Returning recently, it's more noticeable how much has changed and how many people we have lost (19 people) in my lifespan alone. It is way too many.

I have lost a lot of friends and family in all kinds of different ways: to suicide, drugs and alcohol. And then there are those who haven't died, but hurt themselves by sniffing petrol. I know a lot of people who have lost parents at a young age, who don't have parents or who have had parents who have been alcoholics or drug addicts, so they end up doing the same thing as their parents.

A lot of young people don't know how to deal with all their sorrow and pain. It just keeps getting bottled up inside and they release it through self-harm. They need extra support. They need one-on-one support because they don't know who to talk to when they're feeling upset. Quite often young men get upset. Instead of sitting down and talking about it; they turn to violence. They take it out on themselves or other people.

Everything flows through the mining town. Any drug you can think of, it's here – easy and accessible. Anyone can buy alcohol. Yes, there's a liquor permit system, but that's created a black market for alcohol. I lost my brother when I was 16 and my older sister is an alcoholic. So coming back and seeing all of this in your own family is a big influence. I was lucky I didn't take the same path as them. My cousins would be sniffing all night and I would stay with them because I felt I couldn't let them walk home by themselves. I knew how out of it they were.

I saw at a young age how much grief it caused other members of the family. Especially the older members: the mothers, grandmothers and aunts who are dealing with everything. I could have been the same as any young person here, but seeing how much pain my mother was going through because of my own siblings, I didn't want to recreate that. It definitely stopped me from going down that path.

When we are out on our traditional homeland it's a much better and healthier lifestyle. You feel balanced because there's no alcohol, no drugs and it's just peace and quiet. You escape what we deal with at home. Homelands are important for people because they get to learn about their own land and how to look after it. They learn not take from it and abuse it. Our closest homeland would be Bremar Island. We don't have a boat and it is expensive to fly back and forth, getting access is the hardest part.

I know heaps of young people who live in the homelands and go to school there and they're doing way better than the kids who are living in the town community. They are a world away from all the rubbish that's going on here. Sniffing is a rare thing in the homelands. If it happens, the people out there are quick to jump on it and stop it. Here, as soon as one kid starts, everyone follows because it becomes the new fashion. Then they start breaking in, stealing cars and sniffing petrol and drinking because it's the cool thing to do. Whereas in the homelands it's cool to go out fishing, it's cool to be hunting and living a decent life.

Health education, everything from sex education to drugs and alcohol, is not covered as well as it should be in schools. Quite often you see young pregnant women who are smoking. You explain to them that they are harming themselves and the child, but they just laugh and pretend you're talking rubbish. It's the same with petrol sniffers. If you tell a petrol sniffer they are pretty much killing themselves they say, "whatever." If there was a way where young people could actually see the damage being done to their bodies, I think it would wake them up.

People who are coming out of jail back into our community don't have a rehabilitation system nearby. There is support for them. Instead, they come back, reoffend and go straight back in. We see it all the time. From a personal perspective, my brother spent 9 years of his life in and out of jail because there was no healing centre to help him reconnect to a normal lifestyle in the community. It's fair enough to say we can send them off to Darwin or somewhere in NSW for rehab, but they need to be able to reconnect with their own community, not somewhere else. Our people are offending very young. They are being put into the jail system at a very young age and they are learning bad habits at a young age.

I think if people knew where to go, it would make a huge difference to our community. A healing centre would provide all kinds of support for a range of people. Suicide is such a large factor in our everyday lives. Quite often those who suicide haven't shown any outward pain or grief. They have just done it as a random act. I think it's important

for someone to know there is a place they can go if they're feeling unsafe where they can sit and talk to women or men from the community. If a Balanda (white person) walked in and explained to a Yolngu what self-harm was, it would go in one ear and out the other. Just another white person telling us what to do. We need our own community members, our own Yolgnu people seriously educating them in their own language and culture to prevent self-harm and suicide.



**DJALINDA ULAMARI  
YIRRKALA NT**

There are lots of people around here who have lost young people to drugs and alcohol. There is a lot of suicide here. Just when our young people are starting to become a man or woman, we are losing them. It takes time to heal the wounds for the ones we have lost. Sometimes we just want to sit under a tree and cry.

Napaghi (white person) really don't understand our culture and what we are about. Their negative attitude toward Yolgnu is growing and so is our problem.

Instead of thinking about dying, instead of hurting themselves, we want our young people to help themselves, to look at the world with a better worldview. We need some support. We are suffering out here in our remote areas. Help us so we can help our young.

It would be a great privilege for Yolgnu to have and run our own healing centre. We have wanted this for a long time. A place where we can go and sit and do the healing ourselves.

Balanda (white people) can give us medicine from the hospital, but the Yolgnu way of healing is by having family, the whole family and community there for support. This is the right way. Sometimes we need to go out of the community and heal ourselves. We need to go somewhere where we can sit down and learn who we are again. We need to have that confidence in ourselves to start all over again to help our young people.



**MANGATJAY YUNUPINGU  
NORTH EAST ARNHEM LAND NT**

Nowhere in Yolgnu history has there been any suicide. It came with the Balanda (white people) with the invasion of the Balanda.

All kinds of things came with the mining company. One of the main things that pushed our young people over the edge was alcohol and illicit drugs.

We want more things put in place to help people in these positions.

A healing centre is for everyone and everyone would be able to benefit from it.

Yolgnu are the best people for the healing process. We speak our language and know our culture. Our young people need this to feel safe. Professional assistance from the Balanda (white people) doctors is important, but working together teaching us skills, so we can do the healing ourselves would be of the most benefit. It would save young lives.

The Yolgnu has his own knowledge and understanding for healing our Yolgnu. It has always been there with the people. This self-harm thing didn't exist before colonisation. So now both parties should learn from one another.



## MAYATILI MARIKA & DJANAMBI MARIKA NORTH EAST ARNHEM LAND NT

There is more than one answer as to how to help people because everyone's story is different. Everyone has different struggles. A combination of many structures needs to be in place to help people to heal. It's all very well to have outsiders come in with preconceived ideas and notions on how and what Indigenous life and culture is about. But until you sit down and listen to the Elders and put into practice what they are advising, suicide and self-harm will not end.

Outstations (homelands) are really important for young people to return to. This is the traditional life that was lived by all Yolgnu. They get to sit back on country and hunt and fish and go back to the old ways. They get to reconnect with culture, land and spirit. They can get away from the negative outside influences that unfortunately are a daily part of life in our world. They can get away from petrol sniffing, smoking ganja, drinking alcohol – the whole cycle. Otherwise, it goes round and around and is really hard to get away from.

When the young people step out from the town and go back to the homelands, they reconnect with their culture and get away from negative influences. A strengthening is present. A healing takes place.

It's really important to keep funding this. One of the things the Government can do is support the schools so that young people who go out there can stay out there and get a Western education as well as the cultural and traditional links to land and home. The life that is lived in the homelands is a really

good life. It is the answer to many of the problems our people are facing.

Employment gives young people confidence and teaches them about money and living in the outside world, which in turn helps them with their own sense of belief and being.

Taking the time to sit down with community members and Elders to find out what kind of jobs would engage disconnected youth would go a long way in helping the massive levels of unemployment here.

Yolgnu people are very hands on, outdoors people. Most of them struggle in an office environment. It's all too easy to go and drive those large trucks and do all that type of work that has no connection to culture or land. There is no parallel as to where this fits into their daily life. If the big mining companies or other big corporations took the time, there could be a very good exchange of ideas, support, help and employment between big companies and small communities like this one.

Getting more Yolgnu involved in the regeneration of country is a really positive and important thing for future generations. The way it is headed now with the open cut mines, everything will disappear and there will be nothing left for our children, grandchildren and grandchildren's children. To keep things going, Yolgnu people need to keep their connection to the land.

There is a massive divide between the Yolgnu people and the Balanda (white people) who live in town. There is no interaction. No

attempted conversation. It is them and us. It's always been like that. Everything is very separate and segregated and a lot of the time, Yolgnu people and especially young Yolgnu, feel like they are being judged on their appearance, the colour of their skin and the way they speak English. They feel like outcasts in their own traditional country.

A healing centre here in Yirrkala is what is needed. It would help in many ways: on an emotional level, the re-teaching of Yolgnu Lore and how to live our lives the proper way like our fathers and grandfathers did.

A healing centre would work for at-risk youth with drug, alcohol or sniffing problems. They could sit down and be still in the community. They could be taught and listened to. We could explain the whole concept of how one should conduct themselves in daily life. Healing can occur in terms of talking and listening and explaining how you can become a better person, not just for yourself but the impact on your immediate family, your community. The healing centre would be important for the exchange of knowledge between Yolgnu people to keep culture strong and to keep young people alive.

The healing centre will be a strong beacon for young people to get their feet back on the ground. To find their way and be inspired to live life differently. In essence, the healing centre would give them the tools to be better people, to be stronger, to be able to withstand peer pressure and other pressures in life. Like ripples in the pond, one person

sees someone saying, "no I'm going to live my life differently now." And others will follow and change too.

We have strong, articulate, intelligent and very wise Elders who have a dream about how to help not only disconnected youth, but community in general. They want to help and pass on their knowledge before their time on this earth is finished. Then it can be passed on to the next generation and so on.

We have a site for the healing centre. We need support, encouragement and financial assistance to make this happen. There is a great need for it.



## ANDREW DOWADI MANINGRIDA NT

You want to come here? Ok, you support us. I'll show you healing, but no you coming here and saying hello and that's all. You come here for the money. You don't come here for healing us.

We don't have the right support here. Balanda (white people) should listen to us. Walk around, talk to the families and learn from them. People feel sorry, but they need to be guided and directed to help our healing.

We need support – especially for suicide.

Those things that Balanda (white people) bring here are changing us. Little by little, we are growing up, losing our cultural way. The Government is bringing us harder things that we don't understand. They want to teach us Balanda (white people) way. We want to teach them Yolgnu way. Instead our culture is being shattered away.

The kids are fighting, whole families have started fighting, this kind of trouble has never happened before. We have never seen this before.

We are not walking free anymore. We have something in us, a problem that we don't handle within our families.

We have been split in half – Balanda (white people) way and blackfella way – so now we are starting to lose our Aboriginal culture. Grog, suicide, gunja, smoking, it's taking us nowhere. We can't fix our families. We're trying to get our kids to follow culture, trying to keep our culture moving with us, but

nobody is supporting us with this. I'm angry because nobody is helping us with culture. We need to hold this culture until we die and along the way hand it on to our children.

Why don't Balanda (white people) listen to us?

Balanda (white people) come here and they use us.

We got everything here on country for our young people – fish, kangaroo, magpie, geese – we need to be able to teach them to eat and survive. Then they can teach their children to survive through hunting and tradition, through dancing and sharing with other people, sharing with our countrymen. All our kids need is more cultural support. We older ones need the support to wake them up culturally.

Kids are growing up in wrong way. Teenagers are living the wrong ways. Teenagers are not getting the right job. Right now they're just living and walking and maybe getting Centrelink money. But not enough education so they can work and make the community better. They've got to learn Balanda (white people) way and Blackfella way together and keep a strong balance.

The Government should know we are now facing life and death here in the community.

If Balanda (white people) really want to help us, then come to the communities. Come and talk to the parents, go out to outstations. Go to the communities, they will talk to you. Come and find out what we need to heal

our young people. Come and look deeply, not from the outside, but from within. Don't give us things that aren't useful. Right now, we feel that Balanda (white people) are just using us.

What is happening is a Balanda (white people) problem. They gave us the bad things.

There's no support here. There is nothing but rubbish food in the shops. Our kids are buying rubbish food. We like to have shops, but they've got to have something else in them.

There is no men's shelter here. No man's place to talk. The shy ones won't go to the Balanda (white people) to get things off their chest. A men's shelter is a cultural way – it helps our people.

We need to become stronger and build up our community. Give us more power so we can stay on our own land. Support us to take our people out onto country. All we ask is for you to help us, so we can change things. We are losing our own countrymen. We are losing our lives.

Stop thinking blackfella doesn't know anything about healing. We are living with these problems. We are the best informed to deal with them. We tried to become a Balanda (white people), but no, we are black. We are living black and this is how we have to stay. We have to pass this onto our children. Don't use us. If we lose our culture we are lost, without it we are finished as a people.





## GEORGE GAYMARRANGI PASCOE MANINGRIDA NT

Suicide is a big problem for us. We have a diverse culture. It's an old tradition. A lot of our young people are floating away from our culture and the things we teach them about respecting people, living peacefully and enjoying life as much as you can.

Many communities see their kids being assimilated into the system. Assimilation is enormous. All we can do is re-educate them. We see a lot of our children in need of cultural education. We want to bring our children back to re-educate them. Our older customary Lore of 40,000+ years still exists and we want to teach our children this Lore.

The Intervention has brought many problems to the community. We never had this suicide in our lives until recently. It's not the young people's fault. It's the system that destroys our people. And it's the system (I call it assimilation) that creates the problems in the first place.

A white man has his own theory on suicide. How can a white man fix a suicide? Suicide is caused by assimilation (our kids never did this before) when you apply a Western ideology to our culture for healing, it will never work.

The only way to stop suicide is to fulfil our cultural obligation to our young. That's what we have been brought up with, strength of character through strength of culture. Not white man's cultural obligation. White man can never understand why a young kid is being suicidal because he doesn't know our cultural ways. These are ways that are not currently being supported.

When The Intervention began, they took away bilingual and cultural education. Now there is only 20% chance of first language being taught by one of the parents. When they first began to get rid of bilingual education, cultural ways began to sink. It's really hard to re-educate our children back to cultural society.

Before The Intervention when our young people were finishing up their Year 12, they had both ways of knowledge. Now some of our children won't survive. They are accepting this new culture that has come into our society and it is totally destroying our community.

Change is constant and we've got to keep up, but we want our young people to stay in our culture so they can survive. From here within our culture, they can see what the white cultural way is about, by being safe within our cultural way. That's where the danger is, straying too far from our culture.

The Government doesn't see that we need to build something culturally strong for our people to be healthy and survive. They think, "Let's assimilate them and move them into the dysfunctional community and let them rot." That's their mentality.

In our cultural Lore, it says we need to protect our women because she represents the earth. Women are very special in this world and our custom and Lore says that we must protect them. But young people are learning how to be violent. What is the cause of this? It's assimilation - violence, stealing, break in and suicide. The Government is

not giving us an opportunity to try and re-educate our young from our cultural perspective. Our aim is for our children to grow up in a good way, the way we want them to grow.

One of the biggest problems is that young people are growing up thinking that school is very important. That literacy and numeracy is very important. But what about our culture? Our Lore?

We are trying to communicate to them the power of knowledge and wisdom so they can experience the world, nature and community. So they can learn how to survive. We can do it.

Will white people ever mend what they did? It's very difficult for them to give us back what they stole, to give us back what they destroyed.

It's the violence and the technology. It's not our culture. It is damaging us. It is the white way that is causing the deaths of our young Aboriginal people. The white people are introducing changes in culture and assimilating us so we rot and die. We were providing cultural education yet they steal our bilingual education. We were providing self-determination yet they have a policy of no choice. They're creating destruction; grog comes in and destroys our people. Gunja, cava and much more, these are the causes of suicide because the white person has created this.

Get rid of The Intervention. Give us cultural responsibility based on our customary Lore. Let us improve our lives.



**NOELETTA MCKENZIE &  
MARITA WILTON, MANINGRIDA NT**

We are Indigenous and local and we know what the community wants. We work at a grassroots level from the ground up, not the Government way from the top down. Some kids in this community who are at risk or have the potential to be at risk, need support.

Unfortunately it's not only unwell youth who need help. We had a recent suicide, a young girl who unfortunately left a baby. This came from one of the strongest families in the community. She had the support, she had everything around her, but she still committed suicide. I don't know if you can class young people as strong or weak. I think it is often a spur of the moment thing. They can't see that tomorrow is going to be better. Everyone in the community could not believe what happened to this young woman, it was the last person you would expect, she had support from family and friends.

I am angry and that's it. I don't think the kids intend to complete what they're doing. When it's actually happening, it's too late. There are cases, especially with our Indigenous mob, where they have succeeded with suicide, but they have massive scratches on their necks from trying to get the rope off themselves. I don't think the young mob realise what they're doing. That's it the end, there's no coming back.

I think it's a cry for help. They've got to remember who they are culturally, where they come from. They have to learn both ways. First they have to learn from their Elders and then to go to school. Staying close to family and culture, that's what makes us

strong, that's what gives us a future.

Young people have got to have something to look forward to when they leave school. They need hope for a positive future. They need to establish something good in their lives. If they've got no job, some try smoking pot. This makes their lives more depressing. They need something to look forward to.

There are no pathways available to our kids when they leave school. There are not a lot of opportunities. There is pretty much nothing really. There is not much in the way of job training or apprenticeships. There is no career development.

Young people learn marijuana and alcohol from one another. The ones who have bad attitudes show the others. In the community, you can have 30 people sitting down with their heads in a bucket bong. Of course the other kids are going to want to sit down and join in. They want to feel a part of what's going on.

The gunja doesn't come from the community. It comes into the community from outside.

Some young kids, 9/10 years of age, are smoking cigarettes, why? Because they see their parents and family doing it, everyone around them smokes.

Balanda (white people) have been trying to fix Indigenous issues forever, for generations. Maningrida is probably one of the youngest communities and it has been hand fed with government money. If you are hand fed all the time, you're going to sit down and

expect that all the time. You're not going to empower yourself. Balanda (white people) cannot fix community issues. Community issues need to be dealt with at a community level.

This is a confused generation. We can't discipline our kids or someone rings welfare. So how do you discipline your children? What a confused generation we are. We've got to act white and then we've got to act black, and these two worlds they just don't come together.

There are big issues in this community: suicide, smoking, gunja, gambling, jealousy, bullying with Facebook, fighting. Before, young people were taught the proper cultural ways. If they did wrong, they were given discipline in a cultural way. Before there were no mobile phones, they had only radios. Now they go crazy for that phone, iPad and laptop. Before, we were strong and healthy people.

We've got to have both ways of learning to get this right. Not just the white way. The Aboriginal way has got to be supported too. That's who we are. In the Aboriginal way, we are given good discipline, good encouragement and good support. Cultural ways are about being taught respect. A lot of our old people are dying out. We need more strong young people to stand up and offer that discipline to the young people in our communities. Strong culture teaches discipline and respect. It lets us know we are not alone and adrift. To be taught culture is cleansing. It gives us strength.

Going out bush is important. It's our place to practice culture and reinforce our identity. It reminds us who we are. This keeps us healthy and strong. Balanda (white people) can't give us what we need. We already have it. But in this changing world, we need funding to be able to access our cultural ways. We are being pulled away and this is causing our community great pain. It is killing our young people.





**SYLVIA NGULBINDITJ  
MILLINGIMBI NT**

I am from Galpu Clan. I have interests that concern Yolgnu people. I would like to see a better outcome from Government support. Their policy changes year after year and we don't know where we stand.

I remember in the early 70s there weren't these problems with suicide back then. That's because there were positive people raising our children back then. Grandparents, parents, aunties, uncles, sisters, brothers – old people's wisdom made you a better person. That's what was happening back then.

Culture is taught to us to prepare us for challenges and changes. Whether they are from Balanda (white people) or Yolgnu we still struggle with Government changes that affect Yolgnu. Before Balanda (white people) there was no struggle like this.

There needs to be a pathway to employment set up for school leavers, but that's not happening. The Government attempts to force parents to send their children to school. We are charged if they do not attend. We have to pay fines. But after our children graduate the Government are not there to continue with support. They are being monitored at the school, but when they finish Year 12, they are on their own.

The Government provides money to stop suicide, but there's no outcome. There are no changes in what is happening with young people, why?

They have the power and the money to make change, but nothing. They are dealing with

people's lives. They think they are doing things well, but they are not. There is a lack of the right kind of support. Our young people's lives are at stake.

When you have strong cultural support, you feel you have foundation. A painter, a craft maker, a gatherer, a hunter, a dancer, these skills are the Yolgnu discipline for a healthy Yolgnu. That is what young people are missing out on – their cultural identity.

When we are being taught our culture, we are receiving support from our Elders. Not only a family Elder or an Elder from a particular tribe, it's the whole group of Yolgnu tribes that are behind our cultural identity.





## JAMES GAYKAMANGU MILLINGIMBI NT

I am James Gaykamangu. I originally came from Millingimbi. I am a senior leader for Gapapuyngu in North East Arnhem Land. We work together right across Arnhem Land to deal with issues that concern everybody in a proper manner.

I acknowledge mob past and present while talking on their land.

As a role model and as a leader within my tribe, there are issues that need to be discussed. In our system, we train our kids through Aboriginal culture. We train them in discipline, Lore and order, how to live in a society with respect and how to treat others well.

We have been educating and disciplining our kids before our white friend's law infected us. They say it's compulsory to go to school to learn mathematics, literacy, history and whatever else they teach in mainstream education system. We survived 40 000, 100 000 years – whatever time you can measure us by – with our kids. We survived into this 21st century and now there is a government that is not recognising and supporting an Aboriginal system.

We are not a bad people. We are human beings. We know how to live, how to look after our children, our home.

Before, it was an easy life for us. We are not farmers. We are hunters and gatherers, we collect food for the next day then we go hunting again to in order to survive.

With the white person's way, you get

education and learn from it, then you survive because of the money you earn. But after your education, our young people get disillusioned from a loss of cultural identity. Our people are living on the cross roads and the walk is a rough, rugged, cloudy journey to reach what the Government wants us to do. It's not our system, I'll tell you that. Some of us are lucky to learn that. Where do we go after that? We are still a separate people. You are there. We are over here. You don't want to know our way and we are given no choice but to go your way.

That's why the kids are finding it hard to cope, and the parents too, because the system is hard for us.

It was easy when I was growing up, because I was in both worlds. I was mostly in my own culture. I learnt discipline and respect. I learnt cultural dancing, hunting and respect for our society. My parents and my culture were educating me. When I went across to the white man's system to learn mathematics, English came from a faraway place. Luckily our teacher was good, she learnt our language and taught us that way. It made things easy because she taught us the bilingual way.

We were smart kids. I didn't live in a house, I lived in a humpy. I went to the bush, I didn't go to the shop. Now there is not enough money to go around from one pay until the next. A lot of people criticise Indigenous people for not spending money the proper way.

Yolgnu say we need to take our kids to train

cultural ways. White man say, "no you have to go to school." Nowadays if your kids don't go to school, your Centrelink money is cut.

But these two types of education should be available and overlap each other. They are forcing our kids to attend school, but they've got to realise there is another education too. It's our old system, our culture that our kids are missing out on. The Government is not using its brain and seeing who else is living in this world.

To bring our kids back from a suicidal way of thinking, we need to be self-managing our healing and strengthening our culture for those kids.

We never had a suicide during my lifetime through Aboriginal customary Lore. Who brought us this suicide? There was no suicide in the 40s, 50s or 60s.

Return to a system of self-management. That's when our people were very strong and working through a Balanda (white people) system toward an Aboriginal system. Everyone felt strong and comfortable because self-management was running well, until The Intervention was brought in.

We have ceremony. We have Lore. We have leaders who stop bad things from happening and we (Lore men & women) don't do it for the money. We have our Lore people and a system for good things and bad things. These laws and punishments have worked in our communities in the past, they work today and they will work in the future.

So let's work together. If you don't like our system, let's discuss it face-to-face. We don't like this Intervention. Someone not from here is making a law for this community. No, come and talk. Let's work on this together.

## Community-based suicide prevention programs in need of support

### DUMBARTUNG ABORIGINAL CORPORATION

Dumbartung is a Nyoongah grass roots cultural advocacy agency working to alleviate the suffering of trauma and pain associated with past Government policies of dispossession, displacement and religious disinheritance. It strives to empower the healing of Nyoongah people's lives and communities through cultural initiatives that strengthen spiritual identity and create a sense of belonging.

#### PHONE

(08) 9451 4977

#### EMAIL

kyana1@iinet.net.au

#### ADDRESS

295 Manning Road, Waterford WA 6152

#### WEBSITE

[www.dumbartungaboriginalcorporation.org](http://www.dumbartungaboriginalcorporation.org)

### WURLI-WURLINJANG HEALTH SERVICE (STRONGBALA MEN'S HEALTH PROGRAM)

Wurli-Wurlinjang Health Service is the local health organisation owned by and operated for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the Katherine region. The StrongBala Men's Health program provides culturally appropriate support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander males by providing a male-only facility which delivers a broad range of services, including clinical services and health education activities. It has a strong focus on cultural revitalisation by facilitating reconnection or connection with cultural identity and country through interaction between Elders and younger men.

#### PHONE

(08) 8972 9100 / (08) 8972 9123

#### ADDRESS

25 Third St, Katherine PO Box 896  
Katherine NT 0851

#### WEBSITE

[www.wurli.org.au/program-strongbala.htm](http://www.wurli.org.au/program-strongbala.htm)

### AKEYULERRE INC.

The Akeyulerre Healing Centre was developed in 2000 by Arrernte Elders as a place they could come to share and practice their culture and healing in the Alice Springs region. The Angkwerre-Iweme (Traditional Healing) project was developed to assist Elders and healers to maintain and practice Arrernte traditional healing within their community. Arrernte healing is extremely important for many people in Central Australia. There are strong knowledge systems that comprise of an interconnected model of health care for Arrernte people. Healing is linked with the land through bush medicines, healing songs, smoking and Angangkere (healers). The project supports healers to come together and keep strong in their work.

#### PHONE

08 8952 2339

#### EMAIL

[admin@akeyulerre.org.au](mailto:admin@akeyulerre.org.au)

#### ADDRESS

PO Box 3194, Alice Springs, NT 0871

#### WEBSITE

[www.akeyulerre.org.au](http://www.akeyulerre.org.au)

### YANYUN LOTJPAN YAPENYEBAK

Yanyun Lotjpan Yapenyebak means 'Walk and Talk Together' in the local Yorta Yorta language. The program works with Indigenous at-risk youth in a holistic way, reconnecting them with their culture, building their self-respect and respect for others, and helping them develop their sense of identity. The program involves group work and mentoring and provides opportunities for participants to learn about their culture through excursions, spending time on country, creating artefacts and sharing stories. The program works to improve the participants' wellbeing, emotional health, family relationships, cultural knowledge and educational and employment outcomes.

#### CONTACT

Jo Chick, Community Development Worker

#### PHONE

(03) 5831 6157 / 0418 307 745

#### EMAIL

[jo@ucce.org.au](mailto:jo@ucce.org.au)

#### WEBSITE

[www.ucce.org.au/programs/advocacy-justice-services/yanyun-lotjpan-yapenyebak/](http://www.ucce.org.au/programs/advocacy-justice-services/yanyun-lotjpan-yapenyebak/)

## WESLEY LIFEFORCE NATIONAL PROGRAM IN SUICIDE PREVENTION

The Wesley LifeForce Suicide Prevention Program was established in 1995 by Reverend Bob Dunlop of Wesley Mission as a response to the growing number of suicides in Australia. The program was initially known as "Hearing the Cry" and it was aimed at training community members from all walks of life to know what to do appropriately and confidently in a time of suicidal crisis. Aside from running workshops and seminars, Wesley LifeForce works within communities to develop Suicide Prevention Networks. These networks are designed to provide a framework for the development of localised suicide prevention.

There are 21 Networks nationally. Those that particularly focus on suicide prevention in Indigenous communities include:

- Darwin Region Indigenous Suicide Prevention Network (NT)
- Top End Suicide Prevention Network (NT)
- Galupa Marngarr Suicide Prevention Group (NT)
- Life Networks Wambool Aboriginal Team (NSW)

### CONTACT

Desley Tamiano, Secretary, Darwin Region Indigenous Suicide Prevention Network

Jimmy Forrest, Chairperson, Wambool Aboriginal Suicide Prevention Network

### PHONE

(02) 8922 9095

### EMAIL

[lifeforce@wesleymission.org.au](mailto:lifeforce@wesleymission.org.au)

### ADDRESS

Wesley Life Force, 93 Milton Road, PO Box 576, Ashfield NSW 1800

### WEBSITE

[www.wesleymission.org.au](http://www.wesleymission.org.au)

## ANANGU NGANGKARI TJUTAKU ABORIGINAL CORPORATION (ANTAC)

Anangu Ngangkari Tjutaku is the first organisation of Aboriginal traditional healers in Australia, based in the APY Lands. The ngangkari (traditional healers) of Anangu Ngangkari Tjutaku aim to provide healing services to Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in the APY Lands, South Australia, and in the cross border areas of South Australia, Northern Territory and Western Australia. They provide their healing services everywhere they are needed, from hospitals and health care services in remote areas to correctional services and police courts. The ngangkari work hand-in-hand with Western medical practitioners and health professionals to provide holistic two-way health care to their patients.

### CONTACT

[www.antac.org.au/?page\\_id=475](http://www.antac.org.au/?page_id=475)

### WEBSITE

[www.antac.org.au](http://www.antac.org.au)

## YIRIMAN PROJECT

The Yiriman Project is an intergenerational, "on-Country" cultural healing and education program, conceived and developed directly by Elders from four Kimberley language groups: Nyikina, Mangala, Karajarri and Walmajarri. These four language groups form their own culture block, sharing similar cultural, geographical, language and kinship ties across a vast region of traditional lands stretching from the coastline south of Broome, inland to the desert areas south and just east of Fitzroy Crossing, Western Australia. The aim of the project is to "build stories in young people", with Elders taking them out to their traditional homelands for extended periods of time. The Yiriman Project is auspiced by the Kimberly Aboriginal Law and Culture Centre (KALACC).

### CONTACT

Jen Klewitz  
Women's Project Coordinator  
0439 648 020  
[yirimanwomen@westnet.com.au](mailto:yirimanwomen@westnet.com.au)

Scott Herring  
Men's Project Coordinator  
0428 764 269  
[yiriman@westnet.com.au](mailto:yiriman@westnet.com.au)

### ADDRESS

PO Box 110, Fitzroy Crossing, WA 6765

### WEBSITE

[www.yiriman.org.au](http://www.yiriman.org.au)

## **BALUNU FOUNDATION**

The Balunu Foundation (Balunu) is an Indigenous owned and operated, not for profit, registered charity based in Darwin in the Northern Territory. Balunu's vision is to break the cycle of Indigenous disadvantage by targeting the youth of this generation and reconnecting them with their true identity, dealing with the underlying issues they face and equipping them with the necessary tools to make strong choices. Balunu strives to increase the self-esteem, confidence and emotional and spiritual wellbeing of Indigenous youth to assist them to become strong, balanced individuals who will create strong families and positive pathways for future generations.

### **CONTACT**

David Cole, Director

### **PHONE**

(08) 89854400

### **EMAIL**

david.cole@balunu.org.au

### **ADDRESS**

PO Box 40798, Casuarina, NT 0811

### **WEBSITE**

www.balunu.org.au

## **MARUMALI JOURNEY OF HEALING**

The Marumali Journey of Healing was developed by Auntie Lorraine Peeters, a survivor of the Stolen Generations. It is a healing program, rather than a 'therapy' or a 'treatment' and respects the autonomy and strength of survivors and includes the spiritual dimensions of healing. The word 'marumali' is a Kamilaroi word, which means 'to heal' or 'put back together'. The aim of the program is to 'increase the quality of support available to survivors of removal policies (Stolen Generations). The Journey of Healing seeks to reconnect those who were removed from family, community, land, language and ancestors. It affirms that 'disconnection is the disease, reconnection is the cure'.

### **PHONE**

07 40362374

07 56057340

0447767275

### **WEBSITE**

www.marumali.com.au/

## **RED DUST HEALING**

Red Dust Healing is a cultural healing program developed by two experienced Indigenous workers who, through their own journeys of self-discovery, understand the importance of unpacking the issues in men's lives to address what lies at the heart of their problems. The program is delivered through group sessions and individual case management and support systems. The aim of the program is to give Aboriginal men an understanding of identity, to equip them with self-evaluation skills, to develop future role models and fathers, and to restore family relationships.

Red Dust Healing has been offered to a wide range of participants, including young people in juvenile detention, high school students and men's groups. Red Dust Healing has also been adapted for delivery to doctors, police and legal practitioners to increase cultural awareness and explain healing from an Aboriginal perspective.

### **CONTACT**

Randall Ross  
0407 739 685  
randall@thereddust.com

Tom Powell  
0419 489 275  
tom@thereddust.com

### **WEBSITE**

www.thereddust.com

## **YARRABAH FAMILY LIFE PROMOTION PROGRAM, YARRABAH QUEENSLAND**

The Yarrabah Family Life Promotion program in Queensland, established in 1995, has developed a successful set of strategies for suicide prevention, intervention, aftercare and life promotion, including Men's Groups and education and training programs for individuals and families. The Yarrabah community have identified the reclamation of 'spirit' or responding to the experience of hopelessness, as fundamental to the achievement of health improvement. The community reported that what comes with 'healing the spirit' is 'self-determination, the opportunity to be the author of one's destiny and to take responsibility for one's life'.

### **PHONE**

07 4056 9059

### **EMAIL**

info@gyhsac.org.au

### **ADDRESS**

Gurriny Yealamucka Health Service  
1 Bukki Rd  
Yarrabah QLD 4871

### **WEBSITE**

www.gyhsac.org.au/index.php/our-programs/life-promotions/

## **WARRA-WARRA KANYI (MT THEO PROGRAM)**

The Mt Theo Program was established in 1993 by Elders from Yuendumu in response to chronic petrol sniffing issues within the community. An initiative of the Walpiri Youth Development Aboriginal Corporation (WYDAC), the program has developed consisting of a range of sport, cultural, and recreational activities designed to engage Walpiri youth. In 2008, the MT Theo Program established the Warra-Warra Kanyi Counselling and Mentoring service in Yuendumu to target critical youth issues such as alcohol or other substance abuse, suicidal behaviour, sexual health, relationship breakdown, domestic violence, depression and grief, as well as providing services in crisis response, education, group project work and bush trips. Over the past seven years WYDAC has also assisted other Walpiri communities to establish youth diversionary programs.

### **PHONE**

08 89564188

### **EMAIL**

[counsellor@mttheo.org](mailto:counsellor@mttheo.org)

### **ADDRESS**

Mt Theo Program, Yuendumu CMB, via Alice Springs, NT 0872

### **WEBSITE**

[www.mttheo.org/home/warra-warra-kanyi](http://www.mttheo.org/home/warra-warra-kanyi)

## **CENTRAL AUSTRALIAN YOUTH LINK-UP SERVICE (CAYLUS)**

CAYLUS has operated since November 2002 as a division of Tangentyere Council, based in Alice Springs. Its service area spans communities across the bottom half of the Northern Territory. CAYLUS-supported initiatives have included developing rehabilitation services, youth programs, night patrols, policing initiatives, football carnivals and video and radio projects in local languages. The development of these community-based recreation and youth programs have had a myriad of health, substance misuse prevention and community safety outcomes, including the reduction of suicide and self-harm.

### **PHONE**

08 8951 4236

### **EMAIL**

[www.caylus.org.au/contact](http://www.caylus.org.au/contact)

### **ADDRESS**

PO Box 8070  
Alice Springs, NT 0871

### **WEBSITE**

[www.caylus.org.au](http://www.caylus.org.au)

## **AMPE AKWEKE PLACE**

One of the major risk factors for Indigenous youth suicide is unplanned pregnancy. Ampe akweke Place, based in Alice Springs, is a program for young women aged 14 to 21 who are having a baby. Ampe akweke offers both outreach support and residential support, if the young women have nowhere suitable or safe to stay. Young women can stay in the safe house for up to three months. Ampe akweke works with young women to ensure that their needs, and those of their babies, are met. Its family support workers provide parenting education and support, as well as case management to all young women accessing the program.

### **PHONE**

08 8953 4200

### **EMAIL**

[office@asyass.org.au](mailto:office@asyass.org.au)

### **ADDRESS**

12 Undoolya Road (PO Box 9094), Alice Springs, NT 0871

### **WEBSITE**

[www.asyass.org.au/7-ampe-akweke-place.html](http://www.asyass.org.au/7-ampe-akweke-place.html)

## **MARRIN WEEJALI**

Marrin Weejali is a non-residential cultural and spiritual healing centre based in Sydney. It is an Aboriginal community-controlled organisation that has been providing free of charge alcohol and other drug services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients living in the Sydney metropolitan area since 1996. Their aim is to give hope to their clients and help them to change their lives for the better, lifting them out of despair to live healthy and dignified lives. The organisation meets the holistic needs of clients, their families and the broader community through our formal partnerships and informal collaborations with a wide range of service providers who deliver services from our centre in an environment of cultural safety.

### **PHONE**

(02) 9628 3031

### **EMAIL**

[info@marrinweejali.org.au](mailto:info@marrinweejali.org.au)

### **ADDRESS**

Marrin Weejali Aboriginal Corporation 79 - 81 Jers ey Road, Blackett NSW 2770

## **NATIONAL EMPOWERMENT PROJECT**

Through the development of a culturally appropriate and locally responsive empowerment, healing and leadership program, the National Empowerment Project aims to restore the social and emotional wellbeing of communities by enabling communities to regain their resilience and to provide an environment which supports the recovery and healing of community members.

The project is being delivered in 9 sites across Australia, including Perth (WA), Northam (WA), Narrogin (WA), Darwin (NT), Kuranda (QLD), Cherbourg (QLD), Toomelah (NSW), Sydney (NSW) and Mildura (VIC). Each of these sites are being auspiced through an identified local Partner Organisation, and two local Community Consultant Co-Researchers in their local area have been engaged to assist with the development and delivery of a local Empowerment Program.

### **CONTACT**

Carolyn Mascall, Project Coordinator

### **EMAIL**

carolyn.mascall@uwa.edu.au

### **PHONE**

(08) 6488 6926

### **WEBSITE**

www.nationalempowermentproject.org.au

## **PELICAN EXPEDITIONS**

Pelican Expeditions has established a strong reputation for their work with Indigenous communities on sea country in Cape York. Invited by Hopevale Elders to help them address issues of youth suicide and family breakdown, they have run multidisciplinary programs in collaboration with community since 2004. These programs focus on cultural reinforcement, self-esteem, leadership and vocational training with community Elders in the driver's seat. These are all conducted in a community setting "on country" in remote locations on the Cape York coast. Please lend your support to keep us coming back to continue this important work.

### **CONTACT**

Garry McKechnie or Natalie Davey

### **EMAIL**

info@svpelican.com.au

### **PHONE**

0425 727553

### **WEBSITE**

www.svpelican.com.au

## **BACK TO LORE BACK TO COUNTRY**

This is a NSW Elders-led community-driven healing initiative that takes young Aboriginal men from 14 years and upwards through traditional Lore and Initiation.

These camps are vital for strengthening the mind, body and spirit of the young men involved, providing them with a strong cultural identity, connection to country and respect for family and community.

The camps are 10 days long, led by 5 Elders and take up to 25 young men.

### **CONTACT**

Anthony McKnight

### **PHONE**

0448283896

### **EMAIL**

anthonym@uow.edu.au

## **BALGINJIRR CULTURAL AND LIFE PROMOTION CAMPS**

Madjulla Aboriginal Corporation supports the efforts of the Aboriginal people from the Fitzroy River in the Kimberley to preserve and maintain their unique languages and cultures with various programmes focused on the social and cultural wellbeing. One of these programmes is the cultural camps run at Balginjirr community, where Elders take at-risk youth out on country to teach them their culture, language and knowledge of country. The programme has received great support from surrounding communities, and over the years it has been operating it has helped make communities and youth stronger.

### **CONTACT**

Dr Anne Poelina

### **PHONE**

0408 922 155

### **EMAIL**

majala@wn.com.au

### **ADDRESS**

PO Box 2747, Broome WA 6725



## **YIRRKALA HEALING CENTRE NORTH EAST ARNHAM LAND NT**

The Gon Djambutj Healing Centre in Yirrkala is to be a community-owned and operated business directly providing complementary mainstream medical and other allied health and traditional healing services to Yolngu in need - including their carers.

An initial \$300,000 was raised via an art auction, facilitated by the Aboriginal Benefits Foundation (ABF), after a request from the Yirrkala Community. To date money has been expended on moving the project forward including a business feasibility study (Ambrose Solutions), architectural designs (Indyk Architects), and surveys (Cross Survey) and the funding of a temporary onsite traditional healing training program for younger Yolngu Women led by the most senior healing woman.

The site identified by Community enables the Centre design to complement the culturally significant banyan tree. The infrastructure was designed with Community consultation.

The Centre aims to provide a culturally appropriate environment where all aspects of health, including the mental and spiritual are brought together with a focus on diet, relaxation, therapies, counselling and respite. The Centre will also be a place for the perpetuation of healing traditions, training and the education of young people about their cultural responsibilities. Yolngu employment opportunities include: cultural mentors, healers, collectors, researchers, youth workers, client transport, cleaners, builders, administration and management.

Gilbert & Tobin Lawyers in Sydney are providing pro bono legal services with regards to the entity, land lease and intellectual property issues. Bunuwal Investments Pty Ltd has, and Mulga Gidgee Pty Ltd continues to, provide in-kind logistical and project support.

We are seeking assistance to build our Healing Centre within the Yirrkala Community of North East Arnhem Land NT

### **CONTACT**

Gareth Wise

### **PHONE**

0428 621034

### **EMAIL**

castlesaburac@yahoo.com

## **THE GAMARADA HEALING AND LEADERSHIP PROGRAM**

The Gamarada Healing and Leadership Program is a healing and empowering life-skills program to support Aboriginal men at risk of suicide. The 10-week program incorporates healing strategies to restore social and emotional wellbeing following ongoing intergenerational effects of trauma among Indigenous communities. The program focuses on building self-esteem and promoting mental health. An emphasis is placed on strengthening spirituality and culture, identity and relationships, stress and anger management, and health issues that may be a factor in domestic violence. Recently, information about legal issues, rights and services has also been included in the sessions. The workshops/sessions provide participants with an experiential understanding of disempowerment and how to recover from factors that contribute to suicide. Traditional Aboriginal methods and spirituality are central to the process of learning, development and self-healing throughout the program.

### **CONTACT**

Ken

### **PHONE**

0433346645

### **EMAIL**

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### **WEBSITE**

www.gamarada.org.au



Notes

“Not supporting homelands, not supporting cultural education, and not supporting cultural activities is actually a matter of life and death for us. It’s not just a nice little thing to support; it’s our people’s inner soul”

Bernard Tipiloura, Melville Island NT



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For more information and to download this report visit [www.cultureislife.org](http://www.cultureislife.org)