

Title: 'Positive Ways: An Indigenous Say'
Theme: Victims and Justice Issues in an Indigenous Context:
Larrakia Nation Aboriginal Corporation's, *Community Harmony Outreach Project*.

CHOP Background

Larrakia Nation Aboriginal Corporation's **Community Harmony Outreach Project (CHOP)** is an extension of the successful Northern Territory Community Harmony Strategy begun in 2003. Funded through the Federal Attorney-General's Department's National Community Crime Prevention Program, **CHOP** complements the existing Larrakia **Information and Referrals Office (IRO)** where local Indigenous staff deliver the key service of Proof of Identification (POI), Return To Home and referrals to crisis and short term accommodation.

Aligned to this service is the newly evolved **Larrakia Intervention and Transport Service (LITS)**, which provides intensive case management for Indigenous people trying to get into medium and long term accommodation, as well as referrals and assistance to access the full range of services available in Darwin. These three components of the Larrakia Nation's service delivery to Indigenous Territorians living rough, or, "in the Long-Grass" represents, in our view, Darwin's most progressive and comprehensive approach by one Indigenous organisation to the Territory's most marginalized and disadvantaged.

The NT Government continues to fund the IRO and LITS mainly because these services provide a harm minimization approach in reducing what is colloquially known as "anti-social behavior". For anyone who's visiting from interstate, when we mention "Long-grass" it's the name used locally in the Territory for our people who live in the bush around the city's boundaries or suburbs. You might have another name for Long-grassers or homeless people in your state. In Queensland for example, the local term for Long-grassers is "Parkies" or in the larger cities, white Long-grassers are known as "hobos".

CHOP delivers the IRO's Proof of ID service to six remote communities and inmates of Berrimah Gaol just prior to their release, in an effort designed to reduce the incidence of Indigenous people from remote regions getting stranded in Darwin and possibly drifting into a destructive and dangerous lifestyle which, due to abject poverty, lack of access and ever-changing laws, can easily lead to criminal activity and, frequently, prison. Providing Proof Of Identification **before** people leave communities for the city or are released from prison, enables people to access Centrelink services, financial institutions and remote travel while they're away from the support provided by their families and communities.

Long-grass lifestyle – Is it really by Choice?

For a lot of visitors to the Territory, it can be quite a confronting issue to be approached by Long-grassers. It's natural to be frightened of what you don't understand. In the Territory, a local term you may hear is "humbug". This is basically when someone "hassles" others for money, food, cigarettes or even a lift somewhere. So if you hear someone say, "don't humbug me" it means to leave that person alone. Humbug is also used to describe a situation where if you don't want to do anything for someone, the request is just a "humbug".

Many Long-grassers end up where they are by choice. For others, the reasons are complex and not by choice. We deal everyday with clients who are in town for medical reasons or education and employment. Some are seeking refuge from domestic violence, some have been banished from their communities for cultural reasons while others may be observing their traditional protocols by staying away from home because of "Payback" or "Sorry Business".

It's little wonder that non-Indigenous people don't understand or comprehend the humbug our Indigenous brothers and sisters experience. Most non-Indigenous Australians simply don't have the complex cultural background and knowledge to even begin to conceive Indigenous belief systems and practises. In any case, greater numbers of Indigenous people, voluntarily and involuntarily, are heading into carefree but highly dangerous lives in the Long-grass where they can expect daily humbug from Police and the City Council.

The Significance of Proof of ID

Those of us who have carried around our birth certificate all our adult lives and have had a driver's licence since the age of 17 find it hard to conceive how difficult it must be for someone who cannot spell or write their birth name. For a lot of our Aboriginal and Islander clients, most won't be able to name their deceased parents because of cultural reasons, and most won't even know their correct birth date or sometimes what their official birth name is.

It's hard for educated non-indigenous people to know the existence of or to understand what the office of Births, Deaths and Marriages does. Try and explain this to someone who doesn't understand English because they have three other Aboriginal languages to communicate with.

Photographic Identification, as provided by the IRO and now CHOP, enables an ease of access never before available to the majority of Indigenous Territorians. New Security legislation makes the need for this ID even more acute. Most Indigenous people don't possess passports yet it is now impossible to board a plane or long distance bus without photo ID.

And speaking of travel, achieving a Driver's Licence is particularly difficult for those with limited grasp of written (and spoken) English, no passport or Birth Certificate and the added impediment of living on a remote community where the local police station, if there even is one, is open for licence renewals half a day a week, maybe. I heard of one example where an elderly man, and the only man in possession of a licence at a particular outstation for which the nearest service centre was Maningrida, spent \$5000 on charter flights over 3 trips to Maningrida to renew his licence.

The first two trips were unsuccessful as the half day for licence renewals at the local police station were cancelled at short notice because the Police Officers were "too busy". Yet statistics showing incarceration rates for driving offences are very high in the NT and a major reason why part of rehabilitation programs in the prisons and a key training component in remote and urban CDEP delivery is driver training and attaining driver's licences.

CHOP – The Service

CHOP's client groups consist of six remote communities, Maningrida, Elcho Island, Groote Eylandt, Wadeye, the Tiwi Islands in addition to Darwin's Indigenous prison population. These particular communities were chosen partly because of requests for the service, partly because of the statistics we painstakingly and consistently gather outlining the communities of origin of people living rough in Darwin and represented in the prisons.

As well as delivering ID, the community education component of the project means that we can enable prospective Indigenous visitors to Darwin to be aware of the services available to them, let them know of existing and relevant laws, assist with arranging their travel back home (we pay their fares in advance, they repay us in instalments through Centrelink payments) and help them find safe, appropriate and affordable accommodation. So the overriding aim of delivering POI to people **before** leaving their communities or prison is to reduce the incidence of remote visitors to Darwin becoming "stranded".

CHOP is staffed by two Outreach Officers tasked with the role of delivering POI to the above client groups along with the development and delivery of educational resources addressing the Larrakia Protocols and the Northern Territory Government's new antisocial behaviour legislation (Alcohol Court Act 2005 and Antisocial Behaviour (Miscellaneous Amendments) Act 2005).

Memorandums of Understanding

The signing of MOU's was considered a necessary prerequisite to delivering this outreach service so that both service providers and clients were fully aware of the process and it's benefits and so that service delivery proceeds in an atmosphere of cooperation and mutual benefit.

More than that, successful delivery of the ID system requires a level of community-based assistance to our program, such as broadband internet access and the availability of respected community authority figures to ensure the ID verification process. We also want to ensure our service delivery is convenient to the client communities.

For example, trying to deliver ID during funeral or other important ceremonies would be both disrespectful and inconvenient for all parties. So the MOUs spell out clear lines of communication, cooperation, mutual benefit and respect as well as provide a vehicle to ensure key people in the client community i.e. the elders, are fully aware of the service. There are no hidden agendas. We strive very hard not to be another "mob from Darwin" here on business (read; Humbug).

It hasn't been easy to achieve MOU's with all communities. Galiwinku and Groote are signed. Maningrida has been dealing with the aftermath of a profoundly destructive cyclone and has had difficulties with the functionality of the Community Government Council. The Tiwi Islands and Wadeye are similarly fraught and while we have consistent feedback that they want our service as soon as possible, we are preparing to travel to those communities to personally address the Elders on the Councils so that we absolutely know that our authority to proceed comes from them, not their non-Indigenous employees.

We are also reaching the final stages of preparedness for the ID database to be ready for remote access and expect to have provided the first stage of delivery of service to all communities before the wet season begins. Meanwhile, we have been visiting Berrimah Gaol every week since April providing an average of 10 ID's per visit.

Our ID services will soon be operating on a smaller scale in Katherine and Alice Springs.

We provided 850 IDs last year, a lower than usual figure given that in 4 years operation, our database represents in excess of 7,500 individuals. We returned more than 2000 people to their home communities. We also provided accommodation for 550 visiting Indigenous families. We are the service of choice amongst this client group because our services are provided with cultural sensitivity and from a position of authority. From a Traditional Indigenous perspective, only Larrakia have the right to speak for this country, on this country. Consequently, as the representative organisation of the Traditional Owners of the Greater Darwin Region, Indigenous people from other parts of the NT feel that it is the right way, Aboriginal way, to receive support and assistance from Larrakia.

Conclusion

It's still early days in this project. I cannot provide proof that this service reduces crime. Our purpose-built evaluation process may be able to provide statistical trends further into the life of the project. But I am very sure that the sum total of the services Larrakia Nation provides offers a level of access to resources and services which previously wasn't easily available.

Our services give a great number of people the ability to interact far more easily in an alien mainstream class-structured system. People want to comply with laws – if only they knew what they were and if only they didn't keep changing, unlike Aboriginal Law. We will continue providing POI, Return to Home and Accommodation services with integrity, with cultural sensitivity and for as long as they remain useful.

On behalf of the Larrakia Nation, I thank you for your time and your attention.