

Communities in Action for Crime Prevention

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Context

East Arnhem covers about 38,000 square kms of the North East top end of Australia. Unlike most of Australia, what is called 'Arnhem Land' has had a special status as an indigenous reserve. The local indigenous people, who call themselves Yolngu, while suffering from the effects of the dominating society have never had their land taken away from them. With the exception of Nhulunbuy with its Aluminium bauxite mine and Alyangula with its Manganese mine there are few non indigenous people living in Arnhem Land.

The Yolngu people of East Arnhem are still attached to a traditional way of life, only speak English as a second or third language and have much stronger and integrated kinship ties than are present in much of Indigenous Australia and a very different culture from that of mainstream Australia. Customary law continues to be the dominant force in structuring social, cultural and economic life for Yolngu. It is important as Homel, Lincoln @ Herd remark " *to keep in mind the enormous variations in Aboriginal ways of life across Australia*" "*one of the reasons that crime prevention programs should be developed at the local level*" (1).

With an Indigenous population of approximately 9,000 spread out among some very remote communities and numerous homelands, where air and sea access is the norm, communication is intermittent at best. Coupled to remoteness is the region's diversity of clan and language groups. There are approximately 26 clan groups in East Arnhem of which 13 have a say about land on the Gove Peninsula.

In East Arnhem it is more useful to think of 'communities' as being amalgamations of families and clans. Historically different families and clans did not live together for extended periods. In Arnhem land many socio-political decisions effecting family and extended family are made at a clan level. A situation strengthened in recent times by the use of clan lands and clan affiliation as a basis for the distribution of royalty payments from mining.

Substance abuse and family violence has been increasing over recent years, particularly among younger families. According to information supplied by Family and Children Service, Mental Health, Police and Crisis Accommodation, approximately 70% of anti-social behaviour, family violence and child abuse reported in the region is related to substance abuse, generally alcohol. Substance abuse constitutes the major challenge facing the health and well-being of people living in the Gove Peninsula area and the communities of East Arnhem.

In the remote communities of this region there are few support structures. With the exception of a few isolated individuals working for Family and Children Services the communities of this region can be characterised as having almost no social and family support structures. In regard to family violence, victims often return home without any counselling or mediation between the parties. This leads to further conflict and violence. Where victims access crisis accommodation in Nhulunbuy, they are generally isolated and some return to their communities before it is safe to do so.

It should come as no surprise that most Yolngu people want to utilise their own customary ways to settle disputes and family problems before turning to mainstream assistance. While there is recognition of the importance customary ways of dealing with family violence can make through clans and extended family ties, little has been done to reinforce and promote Yolngu conflict resolution and Yolngu families and clan groupings as a basis for community intervention and development strategies.

Gove Peninsula: the challenges we face

Unlike other NT Centres such as Tennant Creek or Katherine, the Gove Peninsula can be said to have a local bounded area. The hinterland is composed of some twenty small Laynhapuy Association homelands and two Gumatj Clan Association homelands. These lie to the North, West and South of the regional centre, Nhulunbuy which is connected by sealed road to Yirrkala 12kms South East, and Gunyangara and its satellite community Galupa which are about 14kms North West. This is termed the Gove Peninsula area. While there is a unsealed road that connects Nhulunbuy to Bulman and then on to Katherine there is little traffic on this road, and none during much of the wet, unlike other Northern Territory regional centres linked by the Stuart Highway and other main arterial roads. Most of the problems to do with anti-social and violent behaviour in Nhulunbuy and the local communities arise when people from the local area drink at excessive levels or in a manner harmful to health and well being.

While for outside visitors the streets of Nhulunbuy and the adjacent communities may appear quiet in comparison to Katherine or the Alice, the amount of people who suffer from substance abuse and become involved in anti-social behaviour is proportionally as large.

The local Communities of Yirrkala and Gunyangara plus Galupa are the most affected by domestic, family and clan violence, which results from (mainly) excessive alcohol consumption. As a result of liquor outlets located in the town, Nhulunbuy also suffers from itinerant and anti-social behaviour as well as domestic, family and clan violence in public areas. In addition the 'itinerant' population (about 30-50 in the wet season) with increased numbers in the dry, camp around town. On paydays these numbers are augmented by Yolngu from the local communities and from Laynhapuy homelands, which compounds alcohol-related problems and trouble between different groups.

Such problems include 'humbugging' other Yolngu and non-Aboriginal people for money to buy alcohol in the town centre, littering and sleeping in public areas around town.

Over the last three years the numbers of people taken into protective custody has varied considerably. Recently, the number has been very high due to the effectiveness the Yolngu men of Yirrkala have had in stopping alcohol coming into the community, through the manning a road bloc just outside the community. This has had the effect of displacing these people into Nhulunbuy.

Statistical information currently available to do with the amount of anti-social and related violent behaviour present in the Gove region (2), is that problems associated with alcohol are increasing as are the numbers of people being taken into protective custody. A situation

mirrored by Crisis Accommodation which is having difficulty in meeting the growing number of domestic violence clients they assist (3).

Overview of 'Harmony' development

The Community Harmony Strategy is a program developed out of the previous NT Government's Itinerant Strategy of (July 2002). The Harmony Strategy is supported by the Department of Local Government Housing & Sport who fund the regional Harmony Coordinators' position and provides limited funding for East Arnhem Harmony projects through the Harmony Strategy. The essential aim of this program is to coordinate responses to issues surrounding homelessness and anti-social behaviour.

The range of programs and initiatives that East Arnhem Harmony Māwaya Mala, colloquially known as 'Harmony', is undertaking in East Arnhem to deal with these issues, has focused on preventative and harm minimisation objectives to do with substance abuse, associated anti-social behaviour, family violence and child abuse. Currently our focus is on alcohol restrictions to provide an enabling environment for harm minimisation objectives to be achieved.

There is not a strategic comprehensive approach to addressing alcohol and substance abuse, family violence or child abuse in East Arnhem. However, there are a range of programs and projects funded by various levels of government that could be further developed and integrated.

Problems with 'Itinerant' and anti-social behaviour were also concerning local residents and in March 2003 this organisation (unincorporated at the time) was established following a community forum to consider what could be done about anti-social behaviour in the Gove Peninsula area. From the outset this organisation was designed to elicit a whole of Government whole of community response to dealing with these problems, particularly having regard to scarce resources. All 'Harmony' projects and initiatives have so far been funded by both Federal and NTG Departments along with significant assistance from private enterprise and local communities.

In May 2003 it was agreed that the organisation should also become the East Arnhem Crime Prevention Council. The current name, East Arnhem Harmony Māwaya Mala (Māwaya approximates to Shalom, or peaceful, in Yolngu Matha, Mala means group), was agreed to be changed in April 2005 following the passing of Mr Djerkurra OAM in 2004.

Early in 2005 it was decided that in order to have more direct control over funding, and in order to implement various initiatives, that 'Harmony' needed to become an incorporated Association under the Northern Territory Associations Act 2004. This took place in June 2005 with the election of office bearers. Banambi Wunungmurra was elected Chairperson.

The initial target has been to develop a suite of complementary and cooperative services; a sobering-up and rehabilitation facility and a community patrol along with a Community Safety plan which is just being completed. In the cross-cultural environment, developing and providing adequate communications is an on-going task. The next target is to partner

communities in developing a community based program of restorative justice called Raypirri Rom.

'Harmony', currently, provides a strong and stable foundation for developing flexible, integrated and practical regional programs and services to do with law and order. While the current footprint has been the Gove Peninsula the pilot for the Raypirri Rom program includes Galiwinku, the largest Indigenous community in East Arnhem.

The 'Harmony' Mission is: *working collectively, we will seek Government Commerce and Community support for a safe and harmonious environment for our children and families.*

The objective: *To foster a cooperative and coordinated regional approach to strategies, projects and initiatives with particular emphasis on law & justice development, substance misuse, itinerant issues and crime prevention.*

Yolngu Involvement in Harmony

Of major importance to the success of 'Harmony' has been its ability to be relevant to the Yolngu people of this area. 'Harmony' is partnering the local two Yolngu Communities and Laynhapuy Homelands in developing programs on the Gove Peninsula. The current corporate membership of 'Harmony' has a balance between Yolngu organisations and non-Aboriginal organisations of the Gove peninsula. However it is usual that not all the Yolngu attend the monthly meetings unless they feel there is a particular relevant need for their attendance.

This is because there are only a few decision makers in Yolngu society who make themselves available for the numerous organisational meetings, which result in people such as our Chairman having to attend up to a dozen different committees. It is also the case that Western styled agenda, discussed in technical English, is hard for many people to understand fully.

Because of this language barrier, the need for adequate communication was recognised early on in a draft Communication Strategy approved by 'Harmony' in August 2004. Part of this strategy proposes: *'that as a first stage towards an adequate communication strategy key documents and key discussions be translated and orally taped/recorded and distributed to relevant community organisations/groups and given adequate air-time on Broadcasting Remote Aboriginal Community Service (BRACS) as well as Aboriginal Resource Development Service (ARDS).*

A CD was produced in September 2004 describing what 'Harmony' does in the Gumatj language and our Chairperson has broadcast through ARDS radio last year. Funding has now been made available, through the Government's Harmony Strategy to provide for several programs to be broadcast a number of times through ARDS radio station. Recently, Yolngu members have asked for interpreters at the Harmony meetings, who can explain the context of what is going on, not simply interpret what is being said.

What is important for Yolngu, however, is that they are consulted fully and adequate time is taken to discuss and resolve issues. Considerable time is spent by 'Harmony' members and the Coordinator ensuring that the two communities of the Gove Peninsula, and Laynhapuy Homelands, are adequately engaged, and decisions made through Council meetings, with input from community organisations, clan leaders and strong women. In this respect the

addition of local clan leaders to membership in 2004 reflected the incorporation of an additional layer of Yolngu decision making. The incorporation of additional women representatives, on the other hand, represent Yolngu who are prepared, as in the case of the community patrols, to get up and do something to make their communities safe. A feature of the NT crime prevention landscape, particularly in remote communities has been "*the growing role of women in mobilising opposition to alcohol misuse*"(4)

Membership & Meetings

Many of our members belong to organisations whose role it is to be involved in issues surrounding anti-social behaviour, substance abuse, and family and children violence. Representatives of both tiers of Government are part the membership list. Major Australian Government organisations include the Indigenous Coordination Centre at Nhulunbuy Families, and Community Service and Indigenous Affairs and Department of Employment and Workplace Relations. Major players from the Northern Territory Government include the Department of Local Government Housing and Sport, Police, Department of Health and Community Services, with three major services; Alcohol & other Drugs, Family and Children Services and Mental Health, and the Department of Justice, particularly Crime Prevention and Corrections. Anglicare, as a major NGO, looks after youth services and Mission Australia are now managing the Special Care Centre and Community Patrol. Other local NGO's such as Miwatj Health and Crisis Accommodation are also major players.

Importantly, membership includes a partnership with community leaders and representatives from Nhulunbuy, Gunyangara (Ski Beach), Yirrkala, and Laynhapuy Homelands, which account for most residents of the Gove Peninsula. Alcan Gove Pty, as the major employer in this mining town continues to be an active member and is very supportive of the work Harmony does.

The monthly general members meeting held on the last Friday of each month at the ICC Nhulunbuy Conference room (subject to availability). Attendance generally exceeds 20 members.

Unlike many organisations the 'executive committee of 'Harmony' is not there to do the work of the organisation. The 'Harmony' committee is there to handle Incorporation requirements, banking and correspondence. They are required to meet at least four times a year and occasionally meet for other purposes.

Sub-Committees

Most of the work of 'Harmony' is done through the three sub-committees; the Special Care Centre & Community Patrol, Alcohol Restrictions and the Family Well Being Sub-Committee, plus the youth network that was set up by Anglicare. The Harmony group are currently supporting Anglicare, as the prime deliverer of Youth Services, to develop additional services, particularly those to do with Yolngu diversion programs and those Yolngu youth at risk of alcohol and other drugs.

The major on-going task of these sub-committee's is to streamline and link operations between complementary agencies and programs, ascertain and deal with holes or gaps in

services and manage major project development. For example, the Family Well Being sub-committee decided, in late 2004, that there was a need to support Crisis Accommodation to source a children's worker who could assist with the large numbers of Yolngu children now accompanying their parents into Crisis Accommodation. Through the Australian Government (ICC FACSIA) funding was found for a three year child-worker placement. A similar situation, currently being addressed, relates to a shortfall by Anglicare in staffing for diversionary and other indigenous youth needs.

Sub-committees meet on an ad-hoc basis depending on need and project development, generally once a month, and feed information back into the monthly general meeting through 'Harmony's' agenda that incorporates the sub-committees and major projects as standing items. Key decisions on project development require the assent of the monthly general meeting, along with respective community input and consultation.

'Harmony' handles funding from a variety of Government, commerce and community sources using a local accounting firm. Currently there are no staff directly employed and no physical assets held by 'Harmony.' Fees for the accounting service are funded through the annual administrative grant provided by Crime Prevention for the regional Crime Prevention Council.

Special Care Centre & Community Patrol Sub-Committee.

While these services are now managed by Mission Australia, the Patrol is partly funded by the community, including Alcan, and has a much wider role than that of servicing the Special Care Centre. For this reason the sub-committee includes members from the two adjacent communities as well as Police.

Special Care Centre - First Project

From the outset the facility was developed as a whole-of-government project. Land and services were made available through Nhulunbuy Corporation and Alcan Gove Pty at no cost with funding for construction coming from the Northern Territory Government and the Australian Government. Nhulunbuy Corporation took on the onerous task of Project Managers also at no cost

The SCC contains three distinct services: a sobering up shelter, a short term rehabilitation facility and a base for the community patrol. The capacity of the sobering up shelter is 8 male and 6 female clients. The Rehabilitation facility has four male rooms and four female rooms. Each room can nominally take two people, which gives a capacity of 8 male and 8 female clients. However, there is provision for a third bed in each room. Rehabilitation services are only designed to be short term, less than a month. Longer term community based rehabilitation will be dependant on the development of related 'Harmony' projects, in particular the Raypirri Rom project.

The contract to operate the three service arms of the Special Care Centre was awarded in June 2006 to Mission Australia.

Community Patrols for the Gove Peninsula area.

This is a multi-tasked community patrol service operating out of the SCC. While this service does pick up drunks and takes some to the 'Drying out Shelter', its prime role is in community mediation in issues such as family violence.

Nearly all the Aboriginal people of this region are Yolngu, people who were born here. These close family and clan relationships provide a much higher degree of intervention for the patrol than is possible in large urban centres such as Darwin. In the Gove Peninsula it has been the patrols that have shown the strength of community engagement and community commitment. The Patrol provides role models for Yolngu, employed with the patrol or as volunteers, who are working towards safer communities. The Patrol has build cooperation and mutual respect with the Police who are very supportive of the service.

Our community patrols use and strengthen Yolngu mechanisms for social control and restorative justice, thereby ensuring that traditional methods are afforded a key role in the control of anti-social behaviour, minor criminal matters and potentially serious criminal incidents in our local communities.

In the Gove Peninsula it was the women who had previously carried out patrolling that once again took the lead in developing the Gove Peninsula community patrol. Unlike prior patrols that were constrained by being funded and managed from an individual community, the Gove Peninsula three vehicle patrol, now based from the Special Care Centre at Nhulunbuy serves the communities of Yirrkala, Nhulunbuy and Gunyangara with a robust management team from all communities. These communities, plus Laynhapuy Homelands and Alcan, now provide about half of the funding for the patrols, the rest is provided by the NT. Department of Health and Community Services. Additional assistance is still provided through DEWR'S CDEP program.

In the initial start up of the Patrols the Police remarked 'it was like opening a can of worms'. Much that was going on in the community came to the attention of Police and the number of reported incidents increased. However, according to the Police this has been compensated for by a decrease in more serious cases (5).

In March of this year a group of senior men from Yirrkala, who call themselves the Larrapen Men, decided to assist the Women's patrol by setting up a road blockade at the restricted area signpost just out of Yirrkala to try to deter alcohol coming into Yirrkala. This was a significant milestone for community law & justice development with both the men and women patrolling the streets and approaches to Yirrkala.

This blockage coupled with the patrol has been outstandingly effective in reducing alcohol related problems at Yirrkala but has had the net effect of displacing Yirrkala drinkers into Nhulunbuy.

Data collection and 'Patrol Story'

First hand experience in Yuendumu by some of our senior women with the computer software 'Patrol Story' has led to the funding and current development of a more usable program. 'Patrol Story' can be used to debrief patrollers on a expanded range of encounters and provide

a comprehensive reporting system back to mainstream service and funding organisations through its data base. An adapted data base is being considered for use with the proposed Raypirri Rom program that communities can use for internal purposes as well as reporting to mainstream service providers. While the 'Patrol Story' is incident based, Family and Children Services are developing a 'Family Story' data base which is designed to deal with case work and longer term trauma conditions of their clients. It is hoped both versions will be included in developing a community data-based package.

The lack of a comprehensive data baseline, to do with anti-social and criminal behaviour of the region is a major handicap to determining the net effect of interventions, as is the under-reporting of incidents. Collecting data on what anti-social and violent behaviour goes on in the Gove Peninsula area is no simple process. While the Police with their PROMIS system can provide part of the picture, some statistics may not be contained in the regional data supplied by NT Crime Prevention. A different view is offered by Crisis Accommodation whose statistics go into a Federal data base. There has been little correlation or sharing of data in order to get a more holistic picture of what is going on, something which is now being worked on. It is essential with projects, such as the Alcohol Management Plan, to be able to quantify and qualify the situation before and after the trial is underway in order to provide justification for on-going funding.

Alcohol Restrictions - Sub-Committee

Alcohol Restrictions Plan

This sub-committee has developed an alcohol restrictions proposal for the Gove Peninsula area, which has been approved by all 'Harmony' members. This development has taken place over the last three years and was initially driven by the strong women of Yirrakka and Gunyangara for a major restriction to take-away alcohol. The proposal recommends making the Gove Peninsula area a restricted area under Section eight of the NT Liquor Act combined with a take-away swipe-card permit system. A recent report (February 2006) by Wearne Advisors in conjunction with Charles Darwin University to the Racing Gaming and Licensing Division of the Department of Justice supports the view of 'Harmony' regarding the need for restrictions and a take-away alcohol permit system. Menzies School of Health have been approached regarding a 'before and after' evaluation of the scheme should these restrictions get approval by the Licensing Commission in order to provide justification for the on-going recurrent costs of the permit system.

Family Well-Being Group - Sub-Committee

In terms of cooperative service delivery development, this sub-committee with the support of Harmony successfully acquired funding to employ a youth worker for Crisis Accommodation, a lack of which has been a major concern for Crisis Accommodation given the large number of children accompanying their mother into Crises Accommodation.

Raypirri Rom Pilot Project

Funding is currently being sought to fund the 'Raypirri Rom family-well being pilot program'. While Raypirri Rom denotes 'discipline law' and reflects traditional law practices, the term Raypirri Rom in this pilot program is used generically to describe contemporary Yolngu ways

of sorting out conflict. This project is holistic, addressing the major and generally related social issues facing the clans and families who live in the Yolngu communities of this region; family violence and child abuse, anti-social behaviour and alcohol and other drugs.

While this program is community based, it impacts through clan and extended family groups. This pilot project is based around shared responsibility and community commitment to having safe communities including support for those community people who want to make their community safe. This may mean that communities may need to prioritise community resources to develop this program. The community based HRM structure comprises a community based 'Family Well Being Coordinator', who can provide capacity building to community based Yolngu facilitators wanting to build a harmonious community. The Coordinator reports directly to the Community Council and the Town Clerk in regard to issues surrounding a safe community and provides reports on behalf of the community back to mainstream funding organisations. Work is currently underway on an adequate community based data base which communities can use to report against the social state of the community as well as follow up individuals who need assistance from their family, or mainstream services. A comprehensive brief has been developed with Menzies School of Health regarding evaluation of this program and some of the assumptions which underpin its development.

Other Projects

We have recently received additional funding from the Department of Local Government Housing and Sport for a number of programmes in local languages to be developed. The content of these programs will be based around the Northern Territory Government response to substance abuse and information regarding our local 'Harmony' programs. These are being broadcast to air via the ARDS radio station which has a regional footprint. Much more work needs to be done in this area of cross-cultural communications.

Low Cost Yolngu Accommodation - Nhulunbuy

There is a major lack of low cost short term/temporary accommodation in Nhulunbuy. The Nhulunbuy Aboriginal Hostel, the only low cost Yolngu accommodation in town has a very high occupancy rate. The need for some alternative accommodation will be investigated during 2006/2007.

Summary

In the Yolngu communities of this region it is almost impossible to separate economic from social activity. A precondition for economic development are 'safe' communities, but many of our communities are not safe.

The need to deal in a holistic, coordinated and whole of Government approach to issues of substance abuse and associated violence is, we believe, essential. 'Harmony' is, in effect, trying to make safer and healthier communities. As an incorporated organisation, we are not formally attached to any local or regional structure. While the 'Harmony group' is supported by Governments there is no mandate to be here.

'Harmony' has been strengthening community governance and capacity development in building safer communities on the Gove Peninsula. Importantly we have an inclusive approach to issues surrounding safer communities. While crime prevention is one area we service the other relates to associated health and wellbeing programs carried out by Alcohol and other Drugs and the services provided by Family and Children Services and Mental Health. This approach provides the potential for a holistic and streamlined suite of regional services which can adequately address the challenges posed by substance abuse and anti-social behaviour in this region.

What is sorely needed is a formalised partnership between the major Northern Territory Government stakeholders and the Australian Government. This would provide a mandate for supporting 'Harmony', able to realise the potential of holistic and coordinated serviced, and the development of community based restorative justice programs. This partnership needs to include the indigenous communities, NGO's and private enterprise which form an essential part of 'Harmony' in providing an adequate platform by which to address issues affecting the development of harmonious communities in East Arnhem.

Footnotes

- 1) Homel, Lincoln & Herd. (1999) Risk & Resilience: Crime & Violence Prevention in Aboriginal Communities in *'The Australian & New Zealand journal of Criminology'* Vol 32 No2. pp182-196
- 2) Northern Territory Crime & Justice Stats, Nhulunbuy (2000-2006). Nhulunbuy Police Protective Custody Stats.
- 3) Crisis Accommodation Nhulunbuy Statistics, 2006.
- 4) d'Abbs in Homel, Lincoln & Herd. (1999) Risk & Resilience: Crime & Violence in Aboriginal Communities in *'The Australian & New Zealand journal of Criminology'* Vol 32 No2. pp189.
- 5) Personal correspondence: Nhulunbuy Police 2006.

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