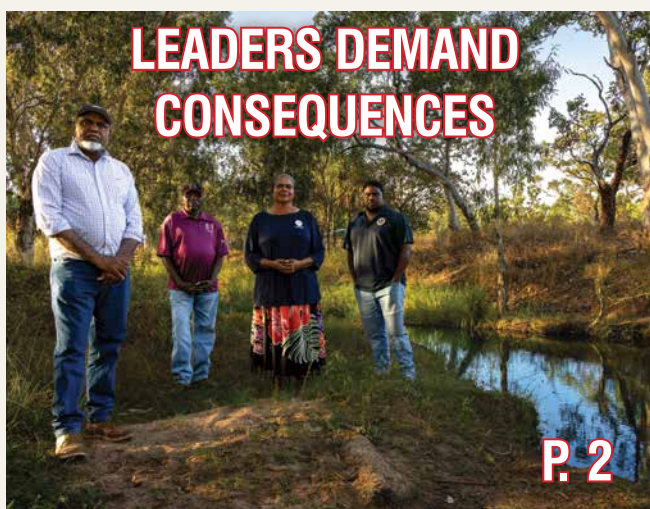






EDITORIAL

Land Rights News Central Australia is published by the Central Land Council.

The Central Land Council
27 Stuart Hwy
Alice Springs
NT 0870

tel 08 8951 6211
www.clc.org.au
email media@clc.org.au

Contributions are welcome

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It is distributed free of charge to Aboriginal organisations and communities in Central Australia.

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Next publication date:
October 2026

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COVER



The new generation of rangers: Fiona Donnelly, Cornelia Mulladad, and Joanne Hayes join the Central Land Council's first Women's Ranger Camp.

Photo by Anna Miers

CLC MEETINGS

5-6 August 2026
Executive
Alice Springs

18-20 August 2026
Council
Kalkaringi

16-17 September 2026
Executive
Alice Springs

Land councils call for consequences for the Territory's Closing the Gap failures



Northern Territory land council leaders Matthew Ryan, Warren Williams, Cherelle Wurrawilya and deputy chair Austin Wonaeamirri at the joint meeting of their executive committees at Barunga in June.

"Like all Territorians we have hopes and dreams for our children. We want a good life on our traditional lands, yet despite years of advocacy, remote housing is poorly maintained and poorly designed, education is failing our children, and the high cost of living makes us vulnerable to preventable diseases that are cutting our lives short."

Central Land Council chair, Warren Williams

THE Northern Territory's four land councils want the federal government to bring in real consequences for the NT government's failure to meet its targets under the Closing the Gap policy.

The land councils asked the federal government to stop funding the NT government until it does more to meet the targets. They also want it to directly fund trusted Aboriginal community-controlled organisations.

The call is part of a statement the Central, Northern, Tiwi and Anindilyakwa land councils released after a meeting at Barunga, in June.

In 1988, the Northern and Central

land councils met in the community to present the Barunga Statement to then-Prime Minister Bob Hawke and listened to him promise a treaty.

The joint executives meeting marked the 50th anniversary of the Aboriginal Land Rights Act, the landmark federal law that allowed land councils to claim back much of the Territory.

While the NT has the strongest land rights laws in the country, many of the other Barunga Statement demands – basic rights such as housing – have not seen such progress. **Continued on p. 5**

"I'm still pushing that": Minister raises hope for higher remote area allowance

REMOTE residents suffering under extreme fuel and grocery prices out bush have been given fresh hope that the Albanese government may be listening to their calls for an increase in the remote area allowance.

The Central Land Council was disappointed the federal government failed to lift the small cost-of-living relief payment in the federal budget in May, despite repeated calls from the council.

"People on fixed incomes out bush are at breaking point and simply can't pay more for life's essentials."

Meeting at Woolanger (Gemtree) ahead of the budget, CLC delegates urged the government to use an increase in the allowance to take the sting out of rising fuel prices.

They said diesel price increases affect every aspect of their lives.

"We completely depend on diesel for power, food, water supply, transport and access to health services," CLC chair Warren Williams said.

"People on fixed incomes out bush are at breaking point and simply can't pay more for life's essentials," he said. "We're struggling like never before and it's only going to get worse."

"We need this Labor government to help us when we are really hurting."

Indigenous Australians Minister Malarndirri McCarthy encouraged the council to keep speaking up for a lift in the allowance.

"It is an issue that we have not left behind," she said after the budget. "It is still a very live issue and I'm still pushing that. We're not leaving it behind. It is certainly an ongoing conversation."

She told the ABC the government is watching the fuel crisis triggered by the American and Israeli war on Iran.

"If we move to stage three [of the government's fuel security plan], we will be looking at further changes."

The CLC needs no encouragement to keep pressing its case for a higher allowance with Minister McCarthy and the Minister for Social Services Tanya Plibersek.

The CLC is concerned rising fuel costs will wipe out the benefits of Labor's very welcome low-cost essentials subsidy scheme. **Continued on p. 7**

How are you making ends meet out bush?

Everything is getting more expensive – fuel, food, electricity – and nowhere more than in remote communities. We asked council members how people are coping.



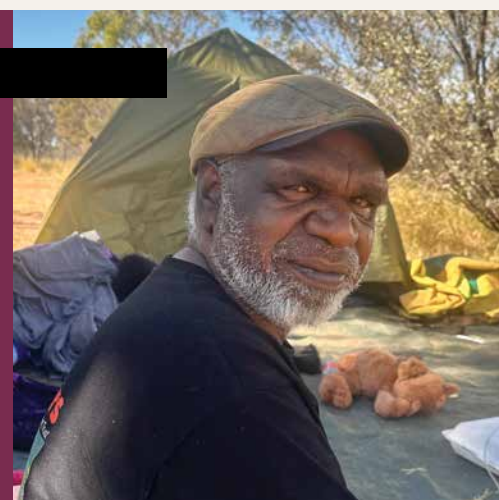
Maria Ross, Atitjere

Fuel is really high for us and groceries too. That's all we think about. We just have milk, sugar, tea, butter, margarine and some oil. We struggle sometimes for healthy things to eat. That's why everybody always goes to Alice Springs for shopping, but then you have to pay for fuel. We should have more stuff in the community and healthy food for the young ones. We have problem with [our local] shop. Too expensive for our mob to come for the fuel. If we want to take kids hunting, bush tucker, fuel is too expensive for us to travel. We only doing all the things in the communities right now, not going anywhere because we need fuel to take young people to country visit. And we really want to do this while all the kids are still in school, before they walk away from us. When they walk away, they do their own things. You can see all these young people in town. Yeah, troubles and all that. It's a good idea to put [the remote area allowance] up, mostly for young people, when they go to school from outstations. Higher allowance would help with that.

Hamilton Morris, Lajamanu

We find it hard day to day. There's a lot of families we have to feed, and our grandchildren. It's really hard to save money in communities. Nowadays, you really got to rely on the shops to eat or drink, you know, the price is ridiculous. Same with fuel. Families come and ask if there's any food left over, like bread or whatever because they really can't afford buying these. Sometimes you have to scratch around for family members, to go and ask, you know, which is sometimes embarrassing.

There's good tuckers being sold at the store at Lajamanu, but it's just the price. It's way up. It's important to sort out a way of lowering the prices or whatever. The freight cost, it cost too much. We try to budget our money, but the fuel ... it's very, very hard. You seem to be getting worse this year. I don't know what's gonna happen next year. New government, new rules? We need to challenge the government about living conditions in communities.



Belinda Wayne, Yuendumu

The government should look at the remote communities first because we get more higher prices. Sometimes we struggle, sometimes we share food. You just can't afford them. Important stuff like power. We just wait till we have money, for two, three days. Sometimes we talk to our families to help with power. We have problems with the fridge. Sometimes we throw out food. Sometimes my family goes hungry. Everything changes with our rent and power. I share my money with my mum and my family so we can get both power and food. Sometimes I can have money from friends. Everybody was alright [a year ago]. We had our money, we had our power, but it pretty much changed this year. It is really frustrating for Yapa. We don't know the economic things happening at all. There should be more education happening in remote communities about food and other things.



Dalton McDonald, Papunya

In our community, we had about \$3 a litre [fuel price] before, and it's gone up since then. We have to go to Alice Springs to get clothes and car stuff – we haven't got it in community. We go to Alice Springs, take the kids as well, to Kmart, Supercheap, Repco, Mitre 10, Bunnings, do the shopping out there, but we should have something like that out in community. The Outback Store – we've got feeds and stuff like that, but we need clothing, car parts, motor vehicle things, you know.

Everybody's talked about it, they're all worried about the prices going up. 'Too expensive', that's what they're saying. Our people, we share our money. We share our feed and stuff like that as well. That's why we lost our money that quick: shopping, sharing, caring, sick kids.



Patrick Collins, Amundurmgu homelands

Roadhouse fuel prices are a bit high, it can be \$200 when you travel to another community. Family ringing from other communities, especially kids ringing up, 'oh can you try and find money for me?' We share [our money] everywhere. We're trying to make the prices come down, because our kids start stealing, breaking in. We're not rich like that, our money's coming with Centrelink, and going quick we run out of money.





How Arulte Atwatye got its name back



Gerard Rice Angale with the ilwemp (gum tree) that guards the entrance of the reserve. He said it embodies the song of the arntetherrke (carpet snake), and youngfellas from Napperby still use it ceremonially today. "They worship that tree. That tree is the song itself."

WHAT'S in a name? Turns out a lot more than meets the eye: persistence, pride, powerful love magic and a sad story about water.

Arulte Atwatye is a registered sacred site near the Stuart Highway, about an hour's drive north of Mparntwe (Alice Springs). The conservation reserve was known for far too long as Native Gap.

Thanks to the determined efforts of the area's apmerek-artwey (traditional owners) it is now officially called the Arulte Atwatye Conservation Reserve.

They decided to ask the NT government to recognise the site's real name at a joint management meeting in May 2023. The government, they reasoned, should drop the European name altogether – no dual naming, unlike most parks and reserves in the Territory.

Three months later, apmerek-artwey Charmaine Rice and Cameron Furber met with the NT's place names committee to set out why the name

"They get dressed up as a cowboy, clean shave, hair oil and they look in the mirror and they sing that song, my grandfather's song."

change was overdue. It was about valuing and protecting the site's spiritual significance.

They explained that arulte (back of the shoulder) refers to the shape of the nearby Hann Range, named by John Ross after fellow overland telegraph line explorers Frank and William Hann. And that atwatye means a gap in a mountain range.

The range divides the Arrernte and Anmatyerr language regions, with speakers of both languages using the area's original name.

Ms Rice said it was time for a name change. "All other places have a name in their language."

The committee was supportive. Native Gap had to go. In time, folks

would learn how to say ar-OOL-ta art-WAT-cha.

"There's strength there in that name," apmerek-artwey Veronica Lynch told the joint management meeting. A fitting name for a place that's part of the much-loved arntetherrke (carpet snake) songline.

"A giant carpet snake ancestor came out of a soak or small waterhole near this gap," a new sign now informs visitors. "He sang a song which was so full of feeling that the throats of the young maidens felt as though they were tightly bound with grass. The snake travelled northwest to the foot of the range where fig trees grow. Again, he sang and again the young women were witchelka (choked with

emotion and love). The great snake rested his head on the range. Then he went up into the sky to return to the earth at the Glen Helen waterhole, 150 kilometres to the southwest. Taking the shape of a man, he then walked back to the soak at Arulte Atwatye, where he remains today."

Senior apmerek-artwey Gerard Rice hopes sharing the story will promote respect and make visitors understand that the powerful love song of arntetherrke is still on everyone's lips.

"They like that song and they sing that song to charm the women. It's too deadly! Everybody knows, right up to Alice Springs. They get dressed up as a cowboy, clean shave, hair oil and they look in the mirror and they sing that song, my grandfather's song."

The soakage where the snake ancestor came to rest was an important source of water for Aboriginal people since time immemorial, a gathering place that meant shelter, company and survival.

"Having destroyed the rock which dammed the water back, it escaped through the porous rocks underneath and there was no longer a soakage."

In the early 1870s, workers on the telegraph line also relied on the water, calling it Native Well Gap. Surveyor William Whitfield Mills recorded a "native well situated in a gap in Hann's Range".

After sustaining the people of the land for tens of thousands of years the soakage didn't survive the telegraph line. In 1891, stopping over where it used to be, Alice Springs postmaster Francis Gillen recorded in his diary how the workers, "thinking to improve the [water] supply deepened it by blasting".

"Having destroyed the rock which dammed the water back, it escaped through the porous rocks underneath and there was no longer a soakage," he wrote.

Mr Rice shook his head just thinking about it.

"It was a terrible thing to do to our old people. Makes me sad! White men didn't know nothing about the country. They just went past."

After the blast people simply shortened the name to Native Gap. A Country Liberal Party government made the new name official in 1981 by declaring the area the Native Gap Conservation Reserve.

Mr Rice is glad those days are history. Not only is the name change "very, very, very important", he said. "It's the law".

"I reckon it is right to put the traditional law name for that country, so we know what it means to us. It was the name before all of us. It's still the same name all the time – Arulte Atwatye."

"I'm happy for it," added his daughter Charmaine Rice. "The whole family is happy."

Diphtheria is in our communities: get checked and get vaccinated



Central Land Council general manager Dr Josie Douglas had her booster shot at one of the Congress clinics, keeping her and her community safe from diphtheria.

WHEN people get a sore throat or skin sores, they might not think too much about it.

Skin sores are common in many communities. Sore throats are common too. Kids get them. Adults get them. People often wait to see if they get better.

But while diphtheria is spreading across the Northern Territory, people need to pay extra attention to these common symptoms.

Diphtheria is a serious sickness caused by bacteria. It can affect the throat, nose and tonsils, making it hard to swallow or breathe. This is called respiratory diphtheria.

It can also affect the skin and show up as sores that do not heal properly, which is called cutaneous diphtheria.

Central Australian Aboriginal Congress chief medical officer Dr John Boffa said this is not a time for people to ignore symptoms.

"We know a lot of people get sore throats and skin sores, and most of the time it will not be diphtheria," Dr Boffa said.

"But while diphtheria is in our communities, we need people to be more careful. If you have a sore throat, swollen neck, fever, trouble swallowing, trouble breathing, or skin sores that are not getting

better, please go to your clinic and get checked."

Dr Boffa said getting checked early can make a big difference.

"Diphtheria can be treated, but people need to come in early," he said.

"The clinic can check you, give you the right medicine if you need it, and help stop the sickness spreading to other people

"And if you're given antibiotics to treat your diphtheria, it's very important that you take the full course of medicine."

Congress has already vaccinated more than 2,000 people in Central Australia as part of the diphtheria response.

All Aboriginal people aged 10 and older need to have a booster only five years after their last dose.

The diphtheria vaccine is not new. It is one of the vaccines people get when they are little and adults often get it with the tetanus needle. But protection can wear off as people get older, and some young people and adults may need a booster.

Dr Boffa said many people may not know when they last had a diphtheria needle.

"You do not need to remember your whole vaccine history," he said.

"Just go to the clinic and ask, 'Am I due for my diphtheria vaccine?' The clinic can check your record and give you the vaccine if you need it."

All Aboriginal people aged 10 and older need to have a booster only five years after their last dose. This is a new recommendation because of this outbreak.

Diphtheria is spread through coughing and sneezing, as well as being exposed to skin sores. That means it is important to cough and sneeze into your elbow, keep wounds clean and covered, and wash clothes and bedsheets regularly.

Central Land Council chair Warren Williams said people should listen to health advice and look after themselves, their families and their communities.

"We know that sickness can spread quickly, especially when people live close together or travel between communities," Mr Williams said.

Mr Williams said people should not wait if they are worried.

"If you have symptoms, go to the clinic. If your child has symptoms, take them to the clinic. If you are not sure about your vaccine, ask the clinic to check," he said.

"Do not feel shame about going to the clinic. That is what the clinic is there for. It is better to get checked early than to wait until you are very sick."

Land councils call for consequences for the Territory's Closing the Gap failures

Continued from p. 2

"Almost half of the land mass in the Northern Territory and 85 per cent of our Territory coastlines are Aboriginal owned. We have our land and sea rights but our people are still fighting an endless battle for our very existence," said Northern Land Council chair Matthew Ryan.

At this year's Barunga meeting, the land councils published a new statement. It asks the federal government to hold the NT government accountable for failing Aboriginal people.

Only one of the 19 Closing the Gap targets are on track in the Territory – the worst performance in the country.

"Politicians need to ask themselves if the policies that apply to Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory would be good enough for any other Australian," the statement said.

The councils said the main reason for this is structural racism.

"We see it in public housing, which is overcrowded, poorly maintained, hot in summer and cold in winter. Conditions that would not be accepted anywhere else.

"We see it in remote communities where the cost of living is 40 per cent higher than in cities. Yet the remote area allowance has not seen a meaningful increase in 25 years.

"We see it in the incarceration of our people. The Northern Territory has the highest rate of imprisonment in the country, where over 95 per cent of the prison population is Indigenous. The number has leapt by 26 per cent under the Country Liberal Party. There is something



Executive committees of the four Northern Territory land councils met at Barunga in June.

"Politicians need to ask themselves if the policies that apply to Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory would be good enough for any other Australian."

seriously wrong in the Northern Territory.

"We see it in the silence that meets our calls for independent investigations into police conduct and deaths in custody.

"We see it in the cases of diphtheria and rheumatic heart disease sweeping our communities. In one of the richest countries on earth, the prevalence of preventable diseases reveals persistent political neglect.

"We see it in the decades of

inquiries and royal commissions, which draw on the painful lived experience of Aboriginal people only to produce recommendations that sit on the shelf."

The land council executives are tired of raising the same issues again and again with a Territory government that ignores them.

"We know the solutions," said Tiwi Land Council deputy chair Austin Wonaeamirri. "We need a government that listens to us and

respects that we know what will work for our people and communities."

"We are not asking for much: safe housing, healthy communities, a justice system we can trust. The basic rights that every person in Australia should enjoy," Anindilyakwa Land Council chair Cherelle Wurrawilya said.

The land councils said they will continue to fight against governments that fail Aboriginal people and make decisions about Aboriginal people, without them.

"All legislation, federal and Territory, must not disregard our rights, our knowledge, our contributions and our dignity. The NT government must stop standing in the way of a better future for our people."

Voice from Nyirrpri reveals true cost of remote living

MICHAELINE Gallagher lives in Nyirrpri. She teaches at the local school and rents a three-bedroom house with her partner and three children. She represents Nyirrpri on the community's Granites Mine Affected Area Aboriginal Corporation committee, the Walpiri Education and Training Trust's advisory committee, and chairs the board of the local Outback Store. Ms Gallagher is a pillar of her community, and she is worried.

Walking through her home, Ms Gallagher points to cracks in the walls where light shines through, to the leaking roof, to the air conditioner that sits in a hole in the wall, unsealed and supported by a 44-gallon drum.

"Even our doors don't have locks," she says, worrying about break-ins. "When it rains, it drips down from the ceiling and some of our lights and fans are not working at the moment."

The Territory government last renovated the house nine years ago and hasn't maintained it well. They haven't had a visit from Territory Housing in more than eight months. "When we call, they do come out, but they don't do proper work," Ms Gallagher says.

She has heard about the Central Land Council's calls for regular, scheduled checks and repairs, also known as cyclical maintenance. "I would like that, someone to come out every month, once a month, just to check on every house. We would like that for the community."

Ms Gallagher pays around \$300 a week in rent. The besser block house faces south, lacks insulation and costs a lot to heat and cool.

"When it's really hot, like summer, when we have a heat wave, we can feel it inside the house, and everything in the house gets hot. It's really cold in the winter." Without proper insulation or sealing, the house is very difficult to heat or cool. "At first when the summer started, I had three aircons, but it was still hot," says Ms Gallagher, who now has four box aircons to keep the house at a liveable temperature. Her electricity bill costs more than rent. Add to that the high price of groceries and fuel out bush, and extreme cost of living pressure remote residents are under becomes clear.

"We don't know what's happening. We need answers as a community. Safety for our kids."

"It's really expensive and it's really hard for me to manage all of that," Ms Gallagher says. "It's just not good for the community and everyone nowadays struggles. It's not just me, it's everyone in the community."

While a government subsidy recently made a range of essential grocery items in the store cheaper, Ms Gallagher says the community is still struggling. "They did reduce the price down on 30 items, but it's still not enough, because there's so many other things that aren't on the list. The prices are always going up and it worries me."



"Even our doors don't have locks." Michaeline Gallagher and her family invited *Land Rights News* into their home.

The February and March floods have added to the community's troubles. Ms Gallagher hasn't had a water delivery in about two months. Like many remote communities, Nyirrpri's water is unsafe to drink. Here, the high levels of fluoride in the tap water means that children and pregnant women must rely on weekly deliveries of boxed drinking water. "They [usually] do it every week. Four boxes, five boxes each for each house. It's been two months. We don't know what's happening. We need answers as a community. Safety for our kids. Because they're just running

around and drinking water from the tap. Some of them get bugs in their tummies and it's really not good. It saddens us Yapa when we see them. I look out for these kids so much, I want to help them, so they can grow into a good leader in the future."

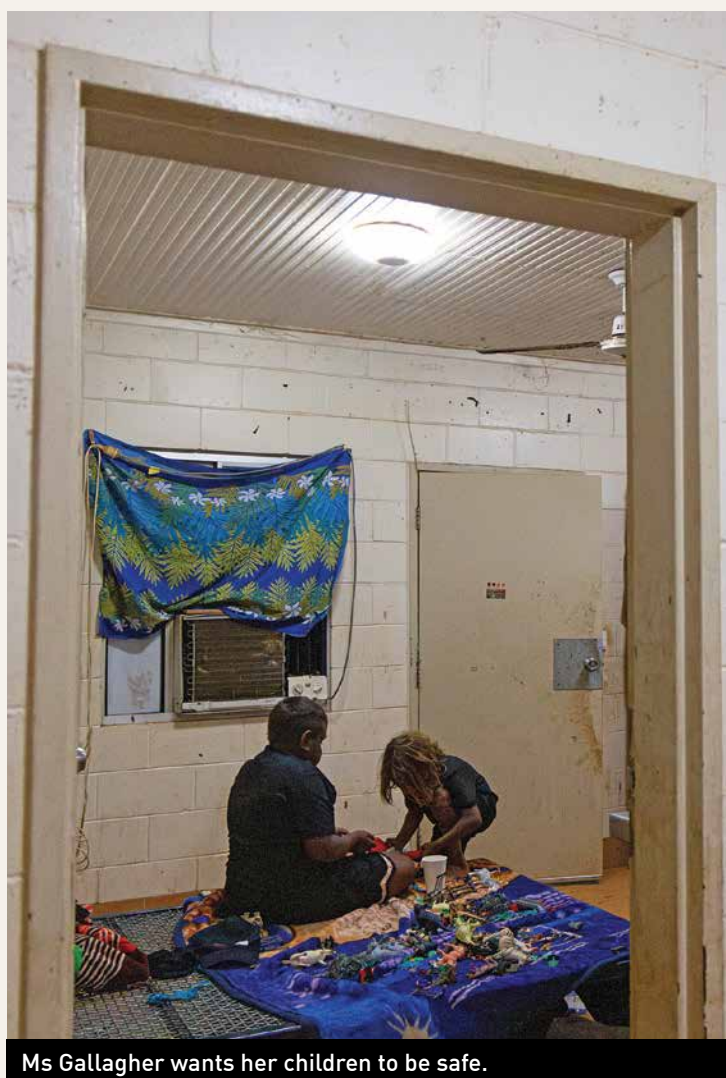
Ms Gallagher's nine-year-old son has autism and rheumatic heart disease – a preventable condition that is common in remote communities with overcrowded houses.

"I'm just worried about these kids and our houses. No one ever came to visit us, gave us answer about housing, about water, power, the prices at the

shop. We don't know what's going on. Someone should come."

Ms Gallagher is determined to keep fighting for better conditions for Nyirrpri. "I know it's my responsibility to take care of my community."

The problems she faces are issues that are seen in every remote Aboriginal community in Central Australia. Ms Gallagher wants the government to take notice. "They haven't been listening to us, we need them to listen to us now."



Ms Gallagher wants her children to be safe.



"It's my responsibility to take care of my community," said Ms Gallagher, a strong voice for Nyirrpri.

How are you making ends meet out bush?

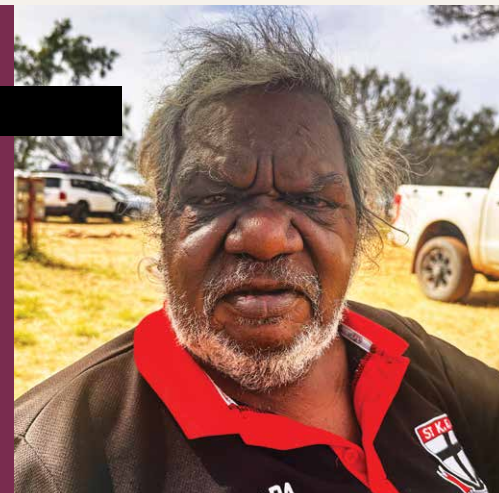


Edward Jones, Arlparra

Without proper housing you cannot get proper education for your little ones. You have to pay rent and the same time pay a power card as well. It just costs lots. Everything is just rising that we can see and people need enough for food. Then if you have to go to Alice Springs you still have to pay for the Bush Bus. Not a cheap way. Some people they miss out. It's hard for them to get into town for appointments, hospital, to see loved ones which may be unwell. The fuel is so expensive now. If we want to drive into Alice Springs you have to get a full tank of fuel. It's probably about \$400. The next steps I'm gonna be walking back home. We're 15 kilometres away from our local store. Cost in store is too much. How could you buy the fresh food? Healthy items like fruit and stuff like that need to be dropped down. I hunt for my family. I'm the only one in the family who hunts out bush, and my three sons. That's what I do for my little family. It's my culture. To save up my payment. I keep my family strong. Good for myself as well, when there's family trouble, you go out bush, you feel free. It's really hard for some other families. I don't know how they cope.

People go around to ask family for something for the kids to eat. They are hungry. What I do is save some [age pension] money for the kids. They can't cover that food, all the kids. They come back from school, they still hungry, so we get noodles and all that sort of thing. It's a problem everywhere. We need to go into town for shopping and everything like that. I gotta go three, four times a week because I gotta couple of girls that are playing for the town team, for Pioneers, and I gotta take them back. They representing not only the Pioneers but they all are representing Hermannsburg. We need more money, I suppose, for fuel.

Patrick Oliver, Ntaria



Desley Rogers, Brumby Plains



Desley: All this, what's happening now in the world, we see with the food. At the moment, it's really hard living.

I'm talking to my mob, we are worried because we got car repairs and maintenance – look my car now, car falling to bits – and bills. And then just talking about it to a friend of mine at the community, that we got to cut down and go in [one car] one fortnight where everyone get money – to cut the petrol costs. Just go and do one shop, but it's a little hard because of the different payments [schedules].

J R: And low income, it's a low-income [community].

You have to put some groceries back. [Or all] chuck in.

We used to buy a bag of potatoes for less than \$3 dollars, now you're paying \$8 dollars for a bag.

Desley: You get a bottle of Coke for \$8, \$9 in Timber Creek.

For community, it is hard and we don't have a shop, you know? And then looking at Halls Creek town, they have

an IGA there, that's the only shop they've got and things are sky high.

I said, we'll be collecting all the donkeys or camels and start breaking them in and build a wagon to go into town.

It is hard, we won't be able to go out visiting sites and doing what we want to do.

It's going to get harder than how it is now. We're lucky we live on community, to go hunting and things.

If this fuel gonna end, we'll be suffering, really, with everything. With getting to town to get food, for hospital.

I'm thinking about the whole Aboriginal community, Centre to the Top End. The very remote, we'll be buggered.

J R: And we are very remote. We got to travel two and half hours just to get to hospital or food.

“I’m still pushing that”: Minister raises hope for higher remote area allowance

Continued from p. 2

It is hearing from freight companies that can no longer absorb increased fuel costs. That means even higher prices for fresh food.

“Rising fuel costs will keep pushing up the price of fresh food and other essentials. The subsidy helps, but rising fuel prices will quickly erode any savings,” Mr Williams said.

Substantially increasing the remote area allowance is the most straightforward and targeted way to compensate people for the extreme cost of living out bush.

The 42-year-old allowance adds very little to peoples' incomes in remote communities, where groceries cost an estimated 40 per cent more than in towns.

“Australians everywhere may feel cost of living pressures, but rising prices are hitting poor families in remote communities the hardest,” Mr Williams said.

He first called on the government to increase the allowance last August, before the war and the fuel crisis.

What is the remote area allowance? It's a small extra payment to people on income support in remote communities. It helps compensate for the higher costs of living out bush since 1984.

How much is it? Single people get just \$9.10 a week and couples \$15.60. Parents or carers get \$3.65 extra per child.

When did it last go up? The federal government last raised it 25 years ago – for only the second time in more than four decades.



Almost 20 years after the NT intervention, governments are making the same mistakes – and failing Aboriginal children

By Fiona Stanley and Marcia Langton.

We have clear evidence that community-controlled family and children's services are trusted and used. When they are administered by non-Aboriginal bureaucrats, they fail:

THE Northern Territory government's response to the tragic death of Kumanjayi Little Baby in Alice Springs is deeply alarming. The weight of evidence is unambiguous: supportive services for the health and wellbeing of mothers, carers and children are what best ensure the safety, healthy growth and socialisation of Aboriginal children. Yet the NT government has chosen an inquiry headed by a former police commissioner, with no Aboriginal involvement, and is simultaneously eradicating child protection officers.

Widespread criticism of the inquiry's terms of reference has done nothing to change course.

The statistics demand attention. Aboriginal children make up only about 20 per cent of the NT's child population, yet they represent 90 per cent of children in the child "protection" system and 95 percent of children detained. As the Uluru Statement from the Heart puts it plainly, it is not because they are not loved.

Too often, media, columnists, leaders and politicians reach for the law-and-order response, demanding approaches that cause more harm than good. Understanding the social determinants of children's health and safety requires a different lens altogether.

Supportive services for the health and wellbeing of mothers, carers and children are what best ensure the safety, healthy growth and socialisation of Aboriginal children.

The evidence for what works is not new. In 2015, there were 75 Aboriginal community-controlled family and children's services across the nation, successfully helping Aboriginal children find pathways to participation in Australian society. The Abbott, Turnbull and Morrison governments axed them. The children who depended on those services are now teenagers. They missed out on the nurturing environments that help young people avoid out-of-home care, suicide, truancy and detention. The consequences are visible in the town camps around Alice Springs and across many NT communities.

The Howard government's NT intervention offers an even starker lesson. Ostensibly aimed at reducing child sexual abuse following the Little Children are Sacred report, it was hugely costly, opposed by virtually

every Aboriginal organisation, and by any measure a disaster. Child sexual abuse increased every year after the intervention. No lesson appears to have been learned.

We have clear and consistent evidence that when Aboriginal people are engaged in service provision, those services are trusted and used. When they are administered by non-Aboriginal bureaucrats, typically remote from the communities they serve, they fail. Robin Granites, the grandfather of Kumanjayi Little Baby, has put it directly: "We understand the language, the culture, the lived experience."

Two patterns explain successive government failures. First, most Aboriginal-controlled welfare services – in early childhood, health, child protection, education, diversionary programs and justice – are either chronically under-funded or have had their funding cut entirely. Second, services developed and implemented without Aboriginal input consistently fail to deliver.

AbSec, the Aboriginal child, family and community peak organisation in New South Wales, has documented this clearly. Despite decades of reviews and policy commitments to shift investment, the NSW child protection system remains overwhelmingly crisis-driven. The majority of funding continues to flow to out-of-home care, with only a modest proportion directed to early intervention and family support. As AbSec has reported, the failure to meaningfully shift funding toward earlier supports and Aboriginal community-controlled organisation (ACCO)-led services perpetuates the overrepresentation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children at every stage of the child protection system. It fails to acknowledge the deep strengths that Aboriginal families bring to raising children strong in culture.

The same finding has been replicated across every Australian jurisdiction. We need early family support interventions rather than the criminalisation and institutionalisation of children. The latter dehumanises children, leads to social dislocation, and in too many cases to prison. A growing number of Aboriginal children have spent their entire lives cycling through institutional systems.

Some communities have built their own responses to this injustice. For more than 30 years, the Maari Ma Health Aboriginal Corporation has supported Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and children across Wilyakali and Barkindji country in far west NSW, including Broken Hill and surrounding communities. These models exist – but there are far too few of them to meet the accelerating levels of need.

The Secretariat of National



Marcia Langton said the NT government's response to the tragic death of Kumanjayi Little Baby is deeply alarming. Photo (detail) by Oliver Eclipse

Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC) made the case plainly in its 2025 Family Matters report, recommending that the Australian government commit to a national, systematic and sustainable approach to funding ACCO-led integrated early years services. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander early years sector, SNAICC argues, offers one of the most powerful opportunities for changing trajectories for children and families – providing support that is culturally grounded, holistic, trauma-informed and responsive to complex needs. If only such services existed at the scale required.

Large-scale reform and sustained investment in healing and strengthening families are what is needed to reverse current rates of

child removal. Such reforms must be developed in full partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

The NT inquiry should have invited Catherine Liddle, CEO of SNAICC, to sit on its panel. It should have invited Robin Granites to share his wisdom about the interactions between Aboriginal people and the justice system. If those conducting the inquiry were willing to listen, they might yet get some of this right.

Prof Fiona Stanley is a patron of The Kids Research Institute Australia.

Marcia Langton is a Yiman and Bidjara woman from Queensland. She is a laureate professor of Australian Indigenous studies at the University of Melbourne.

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The Mparntwe community came together, as vigils were held in every state and territory across the nation to mourn the tragic loss of Kumanjayi Little Baby. Photos by Anna Miers

Updated Uluru lease promises Anangu more jobs, more say, more income

THE traditional owners of the Uluru – Kata Tjuta National Park and the federal government have agreed to change the park's 99-year lease.

In April they agreed on changes that mean more jobs on country for Anangu and a greater say about how the park is managed.

Half of the jointly managed park's annual revenue will now flow to the traditional owners. This money will be welcome help with the extreme cost of living out bush and allow Anangu to invest more in community-driven development projects.

For two decades the Central Land Council has supported the traditional owners and their communities to use income from the park for Anangu initiatives.

Through the CLC's Uluru rent money project Anangu fund their own education, recreation, homeland and other projects.

Since 2006 they have invested almost \$21 million in 102 projects in their communities.

Among them are the Mutitjulu pool, now patrolled by Anangu lifeguards, and support for Anangu secondary boarding school students.

The additional income under the updated agreement will fund the long-standing partnership between the Utju school and Unity College in Murray Bridge. It will pay for better classroom support for 15 boarding school students from Utju, as well as tailored learning materials, health and wellbeing education, and more cultural activities.

The funds will also pay for at least seven bush camps, where Kings Narrative will help male elders transfer traditional knowledge to younger men, and support them to be strong and healthy in their culture.

CLC delegate and Uluru community development working group member Kathleen Luckey welcomed the extra funds.

"We've been spending our money wisely for many years and want to keep using it to make our communities stronger. For example, we'd like to put a roof over the basketball court in Imanpa so we can play, meet and celebrate there even when it's hot," she said.

"Palya, the projects are helping us," said Uluru working group and park board of management member, Alison Carroll. "We want more of them to happen now. We have been speaking up strongly for our young people and we need them to become leaders like us and get jobs."

"We've been spending our money wisely for many years and want to keep using it to make our communities stronger."

By 2030 half the park's workforce needs to be Anangu, and Parks Australia must do more to help Anangu businesses win contracts.

The agreement strengthens on-the-job training and aims to adapt working conditions to allow Anangu to carry out their cultural responsibilities.

This is only the second time since the 1985 hand-back of the park to its traditional owners that their lease with the federal government has been updated.

Thirteen years in the making, the changes are the result of Anangu calls to reshape how joint management works.

"The new agreement delivers stronger protection for sacred sites and songlines, tougher consequences for damage and more robust joint management principles informed by tjukurpa," CLC chief executive Les Turner said.

"That may mean accepting guidance from Anangu about where and when to undertake traditional burning or when to close the park for cultural reasons."

Mr Turner said Parks Australia also agreed to recognise the traditional owners' cultural and intellectual property, such as songs, dances, stories and cultural knowledge, and to seek their permission to use it.



Kathleen Luckey, with Jennifer Breaden and Rita Jingo, said Anangu were spending their rent income from the park wisely.



Mutitjulu elder Reggie Uluru and his grandson Andre enjoyed a dip in the pool Anangu operate with their rent income from the park.

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Anangu and Yarnangu prepare for the waru season



Warakurna ranger Devon Yates, Warburton ranger coordinator Nik Hammond, Kaltukatjara ranger Tony Connelly, Tjakura ranger group facilitator Shaun Nickholds and Kaltukatjara ranger Ruby James mapped where they plan to burn.



Rangers Tanisha Fox and Yangi Yangi Fox planned burns around Pipalyatjara, near South Australia's North-West border.

THIS year's fire management efforts are off to a great start, thanks to our rangers.

Rangers and traditional owners from three desert organisations met in the Watarrka National Park to plan for the current waru (fire) season.

Jacob McKenzie, a senior traditional owner from the APY lands said the annual planning meeting is "a good idea... like teamwork. The rangers come together and be one".

In March around 40 participants from the Central Land Council, Anangu Pitjantjatjara

Yangkuntjatjara and the Ngaanyatjarra Council spoke about the country they look after and the waru work they've been doing.

They also planned collaborative fire management with neighbouring ranger teams and worked out what resources they need.

"Fire is very important for us mob here and especially right way fire, so it was good to get lots of delegates together from ranger groups to discuss that issue and to work together and be with each other and share ideas, share our problems, share new concepts," Watarrka traditional owner and Indigenous Desert Alliance community liaison officer, John Liddle, said.

Participants talked about what good fire management looks like on their country and identified significant species and the

type of fire management that could be good for them. They also taught each other.

current field season and bring more waru palya (good fire) to the whole desert region.

"Fire is very important for us mob here and especially right way fire, so it was good to get lots of delegates together to work together, be with each other and share ideas, share our problems, share new concepts."

"Some of them, they know how to burn, but some of them, they're this new ranger and they're learning from us, so we are talking to them and they can learn," said Mr McKenzie.

Joint planning allows rangers and traditional owners to prepare for the

John Liddle said, "[I'm] very proud to see them all here. I think people enjoyed coming here but apart from that, getting to know each other a bit and we've got those links now. I think we all got something out of it and learnt a lot, so that's pretty good."

MEET OUR RANGERS



Cornelia Mulladad

How long have you worked as a ranger?

Four years.

What made you want to become a ranger?

I used to go out for the excursion to the springs with the school mob at first, and then I decided to become a ranger because I've always wanted to clean the springs and look after that area.

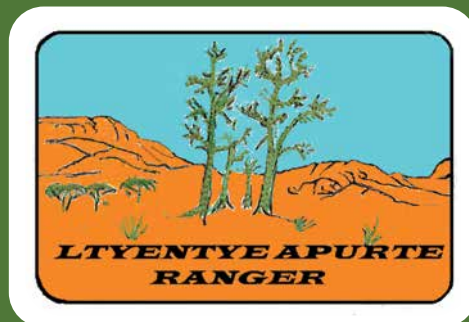
My dad is one of the rangers, so I grew up watching him, waking up early, getting us up, taking us to the school and he's going to work. He would take us out on trips sometimes.

What's the best part of being a ranger?

As a ranger, I like to do whippersnipping. We whippersnip buffel – that's a big challenge. I like to go out and clean the yards as well, or out in the springs.

What's your favourite part of being a ranger?

I like getting up early and going out to look after the country. That's just all I've wanted to do. Just look after the country. It's hard work but very worthwhile.



What work would you like to see more of in the future?

I'd like to do more planning for women's trips. To learn from other women about looking after country the right way and doing women's work in a way that's culturally safe.

Do you have any advice for younger women wanting to become rangers?

I work a lot with young girls, and I encourage them to come work. If they've got nothing to do, if they want to come and watch me, how I do my work, they can. If they think about it more, they can come and see us if they want jobs as well. It's a really good job.



Rangers recharge and share at first women's ranger camp

"I BECAME a ranger to look after my country and animals because they're a part of us," says North Tanami ranger Matrina Robertson as she carves wood to make clapping sticks.

Across from her sit Ltyentye Apurte rangers Cornelia Mulladad and Andrina Williams, who are pounding arrethe (rock fuchsia) with a stone, grinding the leaves down to make bush medicine.

They are part of more than 30 female rangers and facilitators from across the Central Land Council's nine regions who have travelled to the camp at the Ross River resort east of Mparntwe (Alice Springs).

Gathered among the ironwoods, vibrant spinifex and epic cliffs of N'Dhala Gorge, they are taking part in the CLC's first women's ranger camp, a week of sharing knowledge, skills and support.

Traditional owner of N'Dhala Gorge, Helena Buzzacott, welcomed the women. Ms Buzzacott is proud to host them, saying it's important "to sit down and do bush medicine, to watch and learn from the elders".

"This is actually a woman's job to do the bush medicine," says Ms Mulladad. "My grandma taught me, and my mum. We all know how to make bush medicines, so it's nice to do it all together."

In the past, ranger teams have been mostly men, but this is changing. "It's important because not only men can look after country," says Ms Robertson, "a lot of us missed out [on ranger jobs] before, but we had our grandmothers, mothers, to teach us. Country is more important to us."

"We go out to the sacred sites that are only for the women."

Of the CLC's 105 rangers, 45 are women, and 12 of the 14 ranger groups have female staff. These women are an important part of the land council's environmental and cultural conservation work. "We go out to the sacred sites that are only for the women," Ms Mulladad explains. "It's really important to have women so that they can do that kind of work."



Helena Buzzacott was proud to welcome the female rangers to "watch and learn from the elders" on her country.

The camp's goal is to support women rangers. It's a chance to meet and share skills with other rangers, and importantly, to recharge. "Our women hold a lot of family, community and cultural responsibilities, and having time to learn, share and grow together helps women continue to care for country," women's land management facilitator Lille Madden says.

The week-long camp offers workshops, cultural and self-care activities. Rangers present about their work, take part in digital storytelling and learn about camera traps, sound recorders, data collection, carving and making bush medicine. They also enjoy self-care activities and have healthcare providers on site for advice and support.

The camp furthers the CLC's goal of women forming half of its staff. The land council knows that supporting female rangers makes them stay longer and encourages more women to join.

It also supports women in ranger group facilitator positions. Josephine Grant, who attended the camp as a consultant, became the CLC's first female ranger group facilitator in 2017. Beginning as a Muru-warinyi

Ankkul ranger in 2014, progressing to lead ranger, then ranger support officer and finally Anmatyerr ranger group facilitator, Ms Grant has paved the way for other women.

Today the CLC has four female ranger group facilitators. Ltyentye Apurte rangers' Clarissa Tipene and Muru-warinyi Ankkul rangers' Stephanie Rogers fill two recently created female facilitator positions. Kati Wiltshire facilitates the Aputula

ranger team and Orain Valentine is the Anmatyerr ranger team facilitator.

Ms Robertson hopes the future of women rangers will be bright. "I hope to see more new recruits next year," she says. "It's good to share our knowledge with new recruits. We want more rangers to come in and work with us. We can share where they come from, show them and support them, and encourage them to come to work."



Aputula ranger Dora Doolan with trail blazer Josephine Grant, from Tennant Creek.



North Tanami ranger Matrina Robertson, Walungurru ranger Danisha Gallagher and N'Dhala Gorge traditional owner Helena Buzzacott hiked through N'Dhala Gorge to see the rock art.



Andrina Williams crushed arrethe (rock fuchsia) leaves for bush medicine.



Matrina Robertson made clapping sticks.



Matrina Robertson hopes to pass on her skills to more women rangers at the next camp.



Fiona Donnelly is one of the newest North Tanami rangers.



Joanne Hayes is one of Ltyentye Apurte's six women rangers.



The women who started it all: CLC celebrates 20 years of community development program

COMMUNITIES across Central Australia are celebrating 20 years of the community development program. The program's success started with the women who have worked for more than two decades to build the Warlpiri Education and Training Trust (WETT). "These were women with big vision," Central Land Council chair Warren Williams said at the Mparntwe (Alice Springs) celebrations. "None of us knew at the time just how big this work would get today."

Early WETT advisory committee member Valerie Patterson said it's a very exciting time for the trust. "It's also a sad time because we are missing and remembering our WETT members who have left us, passing on," she said. "WETT has come a very long way on its journey and it's succeeded. I'm very proud of being part of making WETT come this far."

At the celebrations in Nyirripi, after the yawulyu and purlapa (ceremony), long service awards and cake, WETT founder FM looked back at the work she's done over the years. "I think it'll be forever that I'll be a member. I'm so very happy and proud of myself. I want to help my community."

FM is particularly proud of the bilingual teaching materials she and the other founding members of the trust have created for schools in Nyirripi, Yuendumu, Lajamanu and Willowra.

Kurra Aboriginal Corporation director VJ gave a speech about the founders at the Nyirripi celebrations that touched FM. "She said 'these are our mothers', you know? 'We grow from them, we learn from them. They are our mentors. That's how we learn, from them,'" recalled FM.

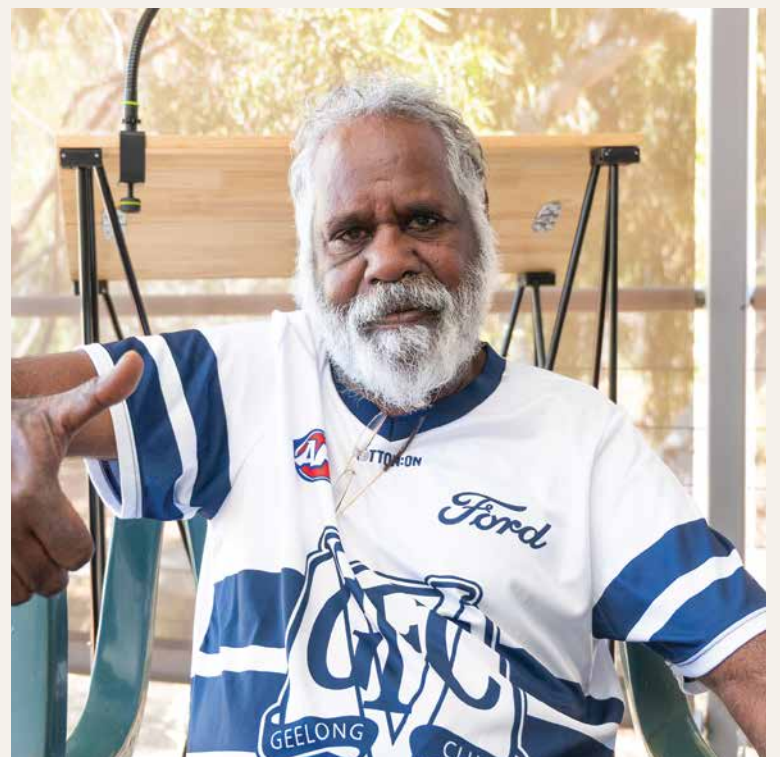
VJ also thanked all the women who came before her. "These founding mothers, they've been fighting for funding," VJ said. "It was a really tough times that we go through. I'm really grateful for the founding mothers and what they did."



Nyirripi celebrated with a yawulyu ceremony. Lee Wayne, Sharoline, Nikisha, Coral, Judy and Joy Michaels danced as Michaeline Gallagher watched on.



Beth, Mildred and Hilda Inkamala enjoyed the Mparntwe celebrations.



Graham Long from Utopia joined the party.

**"We are the ones that are going to step up.
We need more workers with us,
committee members, to support our
communities and to speak up strong."**

Mr Williams said the CLC's community development program created a "groundbreaking way of working," because it "invests Yapa funds in programs for Yapa, by Yapa." The WETT founders paved the way not only for other income streams of the program, but for the Northern Land Council to start its own community development programs.

Former CLC director David Ross said the community development program's success is largely because of these women. "It was very difficult, very difficult getting people to change that mindset from how they received

and spent royalty money," Mr Ross said. "Once people started looking at how WETT was doing things and what they were doing, that seed started growing. People started seeing this and thinking, 'Well, what can we do? What do we need?'"

The trust's founding mothers have mentored a new generation of leaders who are now doing the same. FM showed advisory committee member Michaeline Gallagher the ropes when Nyirripi first elected her at 27 years of age. "In the future that will be my job, mentoring younger ones," said Ms Gallagher, now 34. "I would like to get



WETT founding mother Maisie Kitson cut the cake to celebrate 20 years of the community development unit alongside Freda Jurrah, Helen Morton, Michaeline Gallagher, Kathleen Luckey and Michael Jones.

more younger members to join us. It's really important because we are losing our founding members and we are the ones that are going to step up. We need more workers with us, committee members, to support our communities

and to speak up strong in our meetings because we want to keep on doing this for our kids."

At the celebrations in Mparntwe, CLC general manager Mischa Cartwright said that speaking up

strong is a key part of the community development program. “All of our Aboriginal community leaders, champions, are at the front of raising things with government — being the spokespeople, involving government, doing that advocacy work to really be the changemakers for their mob. They’re leading that.”

Mr Williams added, “like myself, many of our CD committee members go on to become council delegates, bringing their knowledge to keep the CLC strong and fighting for our rights.

“We want to give the chance for younger generations to come up and be part of these committees, to work for the community and see how

much you can learn from this sort of organisation.”

Emerging leaders are up to the challenge, Ms Gallagher said, recalling a young girl who asked her about the trust.

“She told me ‘I want to become a committee member for WETT,’ and I said, ‘Yeah, but you have to stay in school for that. Finish school and graduate, come back to the community and you can be our next leader’, that’s what I told her.”

With strong women at its foundation, 20 years under its belt and new faces on the horizon, the CLC’s community development program has a bright future.

“Many of our CD committee members go on to become council delegates, bringing their knowledge to keep the CLC strong and fighting for our rights.”



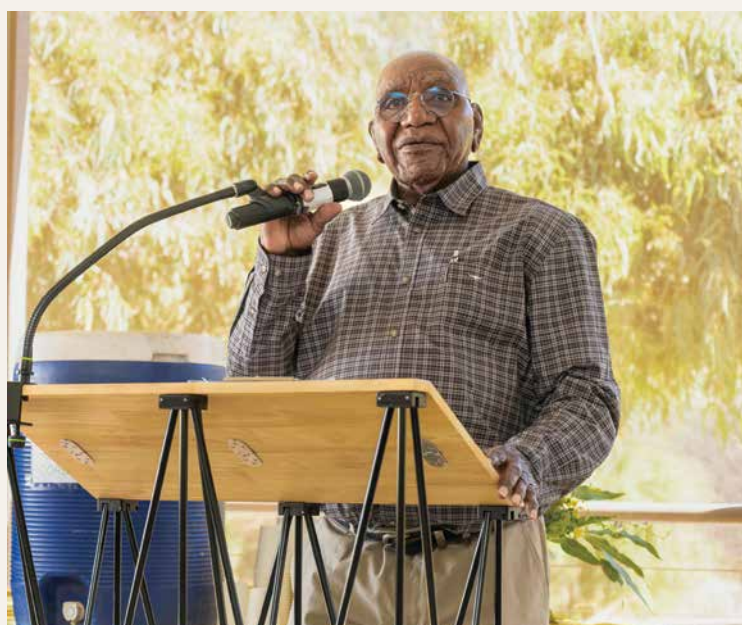
Jeffrey joined the purlapa in Nyirrpi.



Nikisha was painted for the celebration.



Jeffrey, Ishmael, Frankie and Kazeem were excited to perform at the Nyirrpi celebrations.



CLC chair Warren Williams praised the “groundbreaking” program.



Yuendumu assistant principal Yurnma Oldfield spoke up for bilingual and bicultural education. She was joined on the panel by WETT founders Maisie Kitson and FM, and the CLC’s Mischa Cartwright.

Yes you can control your community clinic

SOME delegates of the Central Land Council have been asking how their communities can have a stronger say about what happens in their local health clinic. In April, the council heard from the Aboriginal Medical Services Alliance Northern Territory (AMSANT) about the Pathways to Community Control program and wanted to know more.

What is Pathways to Community Control?

The program helps communities take steps towards community control. It helps them move from having government clinics to community-controlled clinics. These steps strengthen local leadership, make sure community voices are heard and aim to make people healthy and feeling well.

There is strong proof that community-controlled health services provide high-quality care that is culturally safe and better meets the needs of Aboriginal people.

How does the program work?

Every community is different, so there is no single way to do this. But there are some common steps:

Talking and planning together

Residents, local leaders and health organisations discuss whether community control is right for them and what it could look like.

Working out the best way

If a community wants to control their health service AMSANT can help to choose the best way. This might mean an existing Aboriginal community-controlled health service takes on the NT government clinic, or it might mean developing a new health service.



Singita Campion and AMSANT chief executive Donna Ah Chee at the opening of Red Lily Health Centre in Jabiru.

Expressing an interest

Communities work with an Aboriginal community-controlled health service or AMSANT to prepare an expression of interest. The expression of interest explains the community's needs, current health services, who has been consulted about the change and how the community would like the clinic to be run.

The community sends the expression of interest to the NT Aboriginal Health Forum. The forum brings together the NT government, the Australian government and the community-controlled sector. It checks if the service is ready to take the next step.

Developing a business case

If the forum supports the expression of interest, the community works with the Aboriginal community-controlled health service or AMSANT on a detailed business case.

This sets out what services the community-controlled clinic would deliver, how they would care for people, which people would work there, who would govern the clinic, what buildings and equipment it would need, how much money it would cost, what could go wrong and how to stop things from going wrong.

If the forum does not support the expression of interest, it will explain what the community needs to do to get ready. Communities can keep working with the Aboriginal community-controlled health service or AMSANT to build the skills needed for community control and get ready.

Why does it matter?

Pathways to Community Control is about more than who runs a clinic. It is about communities having a real say in their own health care.

Moving to community control is a big step. It takes time, planning and strong partnerships. Most importantly, it is led by the community.

“This program is not just about changing who runs services — it’s about strengthening community leadership, building local capability, and creating a stronger, more responsive primary health care system for our people.”

Donna Ah Chee,
AMSANT chief executive

Want to know more?

Call AMSANT on (08) 8944 666 or email transition@amsant.org.au



Donna Ah Chee and her team told the CLC delegates at their council meeting in April how they can move from government-controlled to community-controlled clinics.

Stronger community relationships needed to protect ambos

ST JOHN Ambulance is making some big changes. The push comes as paramedics continue to face regular abuse and assault, especially in Mparntwe (Alice Springs).

In the first four months of this year, there were 30 attacks on paramedics in Mparntwe. Most happened between late afternoon and midnight, in the middle of town. The attackers were often bystanders, and most were women.

Senior paramedic Matthew Cowie said it wasn't always like this, and that violence against paramedics has only seen an uptick in the past five years.

Mr Cowie oversees the service's new occupational violence campaign 'Protect Our Ambos' which aims to keep paramedics safe as they save lives. Improving cultural safety and building stronger relationships with the community are key parts of this.

St John Ambulance plans to hire five Aboriginal liaison officers by September. The role is new to the ambulance service and means officers will ride in the ambulance with paramedics. "Their role will be to help provide cultural safety and awareness to our crews and to our staff, but also to the community," Mr Cowie said.

He said this model has seen great success in other sectors, such as the Mparntwe Hospital, with patients visibly relaxing when Aboriginal liaison officers explain medical terms with a familiar language and cultural lens. Mr Cowie hopes the officers can help avoid misunderstandings, especially when people are anxious or unfamiliar with ambulance treatment.

Paramedics are also seeking to make stronger connections with communities in town and out bush, to improve relationships between ambos and potential patients, and increase trust in the service.

St John is also considering changes to the look of ambulances and uniforms, and working with Aboriginal organisations including the Central Land Council, Tangentyere Council, Congress, Lhere Artepe, Central Desert Council and the National Indigenous Australians Agency to improve culturally safe care. "We're asking, how can we improve to make us more inclusive to our Indigenous community? Ninety per cent of our clients are Aboriginal. So really, if that's your majority, you should move towards the majority that you're servicing," said Mr Cowie.

A quarter of Mparntwe's paramedics leave every year. Replacing them is hard. Keeping experienced paramedics is important, said Mr Cowie, "there is that bit more community standing with people who have been here for a while. There is that cultural awareness, that cultural respect, and mutual respect."

Around half of the town's paramedics are newly graduated interns. "We're getting quite junior staff and they're not from Alice Springs the majority of the time. The majority are from capital cities," Mr Cowie commented. He said these new staff have less cultural awareness and this affects peoples' trust in



At a meeting with CLC executives, deputy chair Barbara Shaw got her pulse checked by paramedic Abbey Studley as senior paramedic Matthew Cowie watched on.

the service. Keeping paramedics safe leads to more experienced, culturally aware staff. "We've got a lot of paramedics who love what they do and want to help the community," Mr Cowie said, "but if they don't feel safe, they're not going to stay around."

Negative media coverage of violence also stops paramedics from applying to work in Mparntwe. On 30 April, the town's ambulance service shut down for four hours when rioters outside the hospital attacked paramedics and damaged ambulances. Mr Cowie said the service had no other choice. "We had to, for the safety of our paramedics. If we're injured, we can't help anyone." He says he has never seen this happen in his two decades as a paramedic and doesn't want it to happen again.

Amid the chaos of that night, CLC chair Warren Williams stood between the paramedics and rioters, calling for calm. He is now asking the community to protect paramedics.

"We need to protect our people and get them to hospital as quickly as possible," he said. "Paramedics are there to do a service to their community."

"If we're injured, we can't help anyone."

He said bystanders who hinder or attack paramedics risk patient lives.

"You can't hold them back. That person is at risk, they need attention. The paramedics are there to do a job. They need space, and it's your call if they can do their work."

Luckily during the shutdown only two emergency calls came in: a woman in labour who was able to be escorted through the crowd into the hospital, and a baby sick with croup, whose parents managed to bring him through a separate entrance. Their car was destroyed in the riot.

Mparntwe only has three ambulances running at any one time. Each costs \$300,000. When one is damaged, there are limited backups. Repairs take a long time as specialist parts must be ordered. On the night of the riot, four Mparntwe ambulances were damaged.

For paramedics, the violence can have lasting effects. "The unfortunate events that happened on the 30 April took one of our paramedics out for two weeks," said Mr Cowie, "April brought back trauma from a previous incident where rocks were thrown at their ambulance, and just the banging and the noise and the yelling and the screaming – they had to take some time off. You do have that PTSD [post-traumatic stress disorder] that can develop, same as the military."

Mr Cowie said the message from the ambos is simple. "We are here for the community, and we are part of your community, but we can't help you if we are not safe."



The CLC's executive committee stands with St John Ambulance in their mission to improve the safety of paramedics in Central Australia.



Papunya residents take NT government to court over hot houses



Ashley Robertson is one of the lead tenants in the court case. Photo by Tash Khan, Human Rights Law Centre



Garrard Anderson said it's impossible to live in Papunya's poorly maintained and overcrowded houses in summer. Photo by Laura Murphy-Oates, Human Rights Law Centre

THE Central Land Council has backed tenants in Papunya who are taking their landlord, the Northern Territory government, to court over unsafe houses.

Four residents, Candy Nelson, Ashley Robertson, Stanley Roberts and Nereda Roberts are suing the government because their houses get dangerously hot during heat waves.

Mr Robertson said climate change has made living in Papunya increasingly dangerous.

"Climate change means when it gets hot, it's really hot," he said. "In the middle of summer, the houses are like an oven or microwave, cooking you from the inside."

Many houses in Papunya lack insulation, shading and reliable air conditioning. During summer, heat builds up inside, making them unsafe, especially for the young, old and sick.

"I'm a father and a grandfather, and when you're living in a house with a lot of people, we're going into hundreds of dollars of debt just to

keep the house cool for a few days," Mr Robertson said.

"There are major issues with housing in Papunya," said resident Garrard Anderson, commenting that overcrowding and poor maintenance make the heat even harder to cope with. "In the summer when it's hot, it's just impossible to live in these conditions."

The Human Rights Law Centre is representing the tenants and said the case could set a precedent for remote communities across Central Australia, where most tenants face the same issues.

Their case argues that as the landlord, the government has a legal responsibility to provide housing that is safe during heatwaves.

It is the first case in Australia asking a court to rule that a government must make sure public housing is liveable when it's hot.

If successful, the case could force the government to upgrade dangerously hot houses in Papunya and other remote communities.

It could do so by providing and maintaining air conditioning, insulation and shading.

The case could also influence how new homes are designed and built across the Territory.

"In the middle of summer, the houses are like an oven or microwave, cooking you from the inside."

"Many of our existing houses across our region haven't been properly repaired or maintained. They don't have insulation, are orientated in the wrong direction, and are overcrowded. This will only get worse as climate change accelerates," CLC general manager Mischa Cartwright said.

She said the CLC has been campaigning for better housing across Central Australia.

"We've been calling on the government to fix up the older houses and start building new houses that meet high energy efficiency standards. These are basic things that every landlord should provide. They're the bare essentials that make houses liveable. Communities are not asking for much, just houses that they can keep at a safe and healthy temperature within their means."

Mr Anderson hopes the court case will encourage the government to start listening to communities.

"We're fighting for the next generation who deserve to live on country in housing that is safe, long-lasting and fit for the climate here in Papunya," he said. "We know what works for our community, and the government needs to work with us on Aboriginal-led efforts for innovative, culturally appropriate and sustainable housing."



"Climate change means when it gets hot it gets really hot." Human Rights Law Centre staff interviewed Ashley Robertson about the house his family rents from the NT government. Photo by Tash Khan, Human Rights Law Centre

“More than just a game”: the case for a Territory AFL team

AN AUSTRALIAN Football League team based in the Northern Territory could help more young footy players in remote communities make it to the big time.

A passionate group of industry experts called the AFL Team Northern Territory Taskforce has been making a case for the first Territory team in the national league. If they're successful, a new team based in Darwin could form by 2032.

Central Land Council general manager Dr Josie Douglas is part of this push alongside former AFL chief executive Andrew Demetriou, ex-players Andrew McLeod and Nathan Buckley, AFLNT chair Sean Bowden and other committed locals.

Dr Douglas brings her policy expertise and advocacy experience to the taskforce.

“It would be a dream come true for the Northern Territory to have a team in the AFL competition,” she said. “Most people in the Northern Territory, and certainly Aboriginal Territorians, live and breathe football. For me, being on the taskforce was a real opportunity to try and achieve something positive for remote communities and players.”

The NT has a very high number of people playing footy – the highest in Australia when you compare it to the NT's small population size. It also has the highest share of women and girls playing.

Many NT players have gone on to become champions in the AFL. Norm Smith medallists Andrew McLeod and Michael Long, Darryl White, Michael McLean, the McAdam brothers and the long line of Riolis are just a few examples.

There is no shortage of talent in the Territory, just opportunity. This is especially true for players living remotely.

“There's so much talent that's overlooked,” said Dr Douglas.

Young players in remote communities would not only benefit from a home team at the top level, but more youth leagues, stronger pathways and high-level coaching.

A Territory team would also allow players to take part in the league and stay close to home and family. Joining the AFL and moving to a city has been really challenging for some players, whereas a home base offers better access to bush life, hunting and going fishing – “all those things Aboriginal families do together”, Dr Douglas said. It allows people to fulfil responsibilities to care for land and sea country, and spend time with old people and extended families.

Family support is especially important in the time between being drafted and making the final team, when players have to be very disciplined about their training and routines.

“It is really tough. It's a new experience that can be hard to adapt to.”

Above all, Dr Douglas believes a Northern Territory team could bring about strong social benefits.

“I think young people need something,” she said. “There's such high disengagement from education and schooling, which is in large part a failure of policy and service delivery over many decades. An example of this is that most of our remote communities only offer classes up to year seven. Beyond this, there's very limited secondary education delivered in remote communities. Boarding schools can be very difficult to navigate and do not replace solid program delivery at a local level.”

“It would be a dream come true for the Northern Territory to have a team in the AFL competition.”

Dr Douglas feels a lot of things have been cut off for young people because of a lack of services.

“Remote communities also have thin labour markets and this means that jobs for young people are almost non-existent,” she says. “There is no part-time employment at Coles or Woolies, or going to TAFE because there is no equivalent in remote communities. This can be particularly tough for kids returning from boarding schools.”

She said young people face other challenges, such as the loss of their grandparents or parents.

“Those genealogical gaps create a grief and a space in young people that's really hard to fill.”

While a Territory football team won't fix all problems, Dr Douglas believes it could “fill lots of gaps” for young people. It would give hope and most of all build confidence in a way that opens doors to other opportunities.

“You really have to work with the passions and the interests of young people and football is one of them. For me, the beauty of football is the social connections it provides and the safety net for young people in terms of social cohesiveness and a sense of belonging.”

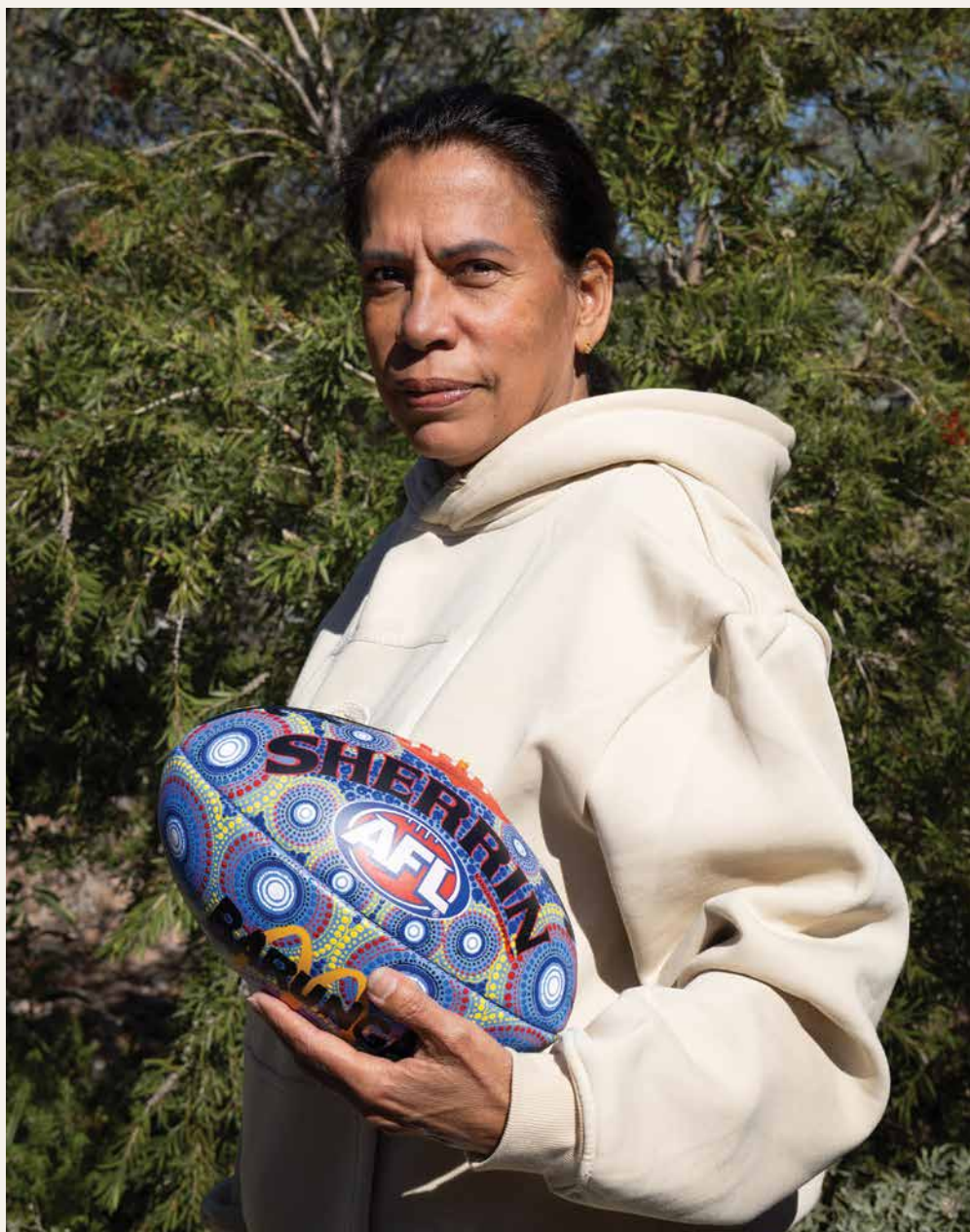
For Dr Douglas, AFL is “more than just a game”.

“I know how much young people love football,” she said. “It's their identity. It's who they are. It's who they're connected to. It means so much to people.”

The taskforce knows getting a Territory team won't be easy.

“It is a huge aspiration,” she explained. “We're a small population and geographically distant, so there are a lot of challenges.”

If the taskforce is successful, the NT will become the twentieth team to join the league.



CLC general manager Dr Josie Douglas believes an AFL team for the Northern Territory could have social benefits for young people in remote communities.

COMMUNITY QUICK RESPONSE GRANTS

Aboriginal Investment NT is pleased to announce that a new round of Community Quick Response Grants opened on 1 July 2026. Designed to support one-off projects in urban, regional and remote Aboriginal communities and homelands across the NT, these grants feature a simple application process and minimal administrative requirements.

Projects that are eligible for a Community Quick Response Grant include cultural or community celebration days, community barbeques, the purchase of local sports team uniforms and equipment, community training or skills workshops, art, cooking, music or dance classes and small community infrastructure.

For more information about Aboriginal Investment NT, including Community Quick Response Grants, visit www.aboriginalinvestment.org.au

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT - BLAK JOBS EXPO

The Aboriginal Investment NT engagement team recently attended the NTIBN Blak Jobs Expo in Alice Springs, connecting with job seekers, organisations and community members from across the Northern Territory. The expo was a great opportunity to share more about Aboriginal Investment NT's work, hear directly from Community and connect with people passionate about creating opportunities for Aboriginal Territorians.



Images: Aboriginal Investment NT at the Blak Jobs Expo



“Aboriginal Territorians live and breathe football.”

Ltyentye Apurte rangers teach Sadadeen students

THE LTYENTYE Apurte rangers are teaching a new generation of students about their work on visits to schools in town and at their home base.

Their most recent trip was with the kids from Sadadeen Primary School. They met at Anthwerrke (Emily Gap), east of Mparntwe (Alice Springs), for a sunny lunchtime scavenger hunt through the creek. The kids raced to find and identify both native and feral plants. “It was great to see the kids outside, running around having fun, learning about the country and what it takes to look after it,” lead ranger Keith Gorey said.

The students learnt about controlling weeds, such as buffel grass, Mexican poppy, bullrush, rubber bush and prickly pear. They also heard how feral horses, camels, donkeys, cats and foxes damage country.



Sadadeen Primary staff Bruce Steen and Mohini Brij join William, Karen, Seb and Nyiesha on their scavenger hunt, led by Ltyentye Apurte ranger facilitator Luke Horsfall.

“I enjoyed teaching the youth and getting out on country, seeing lots of water too which is lovely. Buffel is pretty sparse, but cooch grass is everywhere,” ranger Joe Palmer said. The day was a great opportunity to teach kids about the natural world.

“It was good for us to come and interact with the kids, especially with the new women’s rangers joining the group,” ranger Charles Lechleitner said.

The students also found out about how the rangers protect the slater’s skink, an endangered native lizard the Ltyentye Apurte rangers monitor near Arltunga. They learnt about what slater’s skinks look like, why they’re protected and how to recognise their burrows and poo.

Ranger Anton McMillian said it was a much-needed joyful day. “It’s good to give back to the community, especially after everything that’s gone on in the last month. Good to show that we’re one community overall and it’s best to live and work together. It’s sad it takes something like that to come together but this shows the very positive side of the Alice Springs community.”

The team plans to teach more students in the months ahead. Their next trip will take Ltyentye Apurte students east to show them how to look after the natural springs there.

“It was good for us to come and interact with the kids, especially with the new women’s rangers joining the group.”



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		6. TENNANT CREEK Jackson Cole 8951 0543
		7. EASTERN SANDOVER Cyril Kunoth 8951 0606
		8. EASTERN PLENTY Richard Dodd 8951 0622



Nyiesha found a cicada and its shell in the Anthwerrke creek.



Karen gathered bush figs during the scavenger hunt.



William and Bruce Steen enjoyed their time outdoors.

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A true Arrernte gentleman: remembering Brian Stirling

BRIAN Stirling was a man committed to his family, community and his work. Born 21 June 1960 in Mparntwe (Alice Springs), he was the third child of Paddy and Dorothy Stirling.

Mr Stirling grew up with his family in Ltyentye Apurte (Santa Teresa).

His father worked as a stockman and drover on The Garden Station, with men from the Ryder, Drover and Mulladad families. Mr Stirling remembered these years fondly and delighted in telling his children and grandchildren stories of travelling across the desert with his family for his father's work.

After his father retired, the family returned to Ltyentye Apurte and settled there. When visiting family in Mparntwe, Mr Stirling, his parents and siblings often hitched lifts on the back of the store truck returning to the Santa Teresa Mission.

Following in his father's footsteps, Mr Stirling became a stockman. He spoke of work at Marqua Station near the border of the Northern Territory and Queensland, staying at Alpurrurulam (Lake Nash) with Minnie McDonald and her husband. He also stayed around the Three Bore area near Utopia when it was known as One Camp.

When Mr Stirling returned to Ltyentye Apurte he worked at the garage with close friend Brother Max from the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart. Mr Stirling was close to many of the brothers. Father David Riley visited him in hospital and they had long conversations about life at the mission.

Living in a tidy house at the end of the old village, the Stirling family would often make trips to visit family and camp all over Mparntwe. The Stirling, Golder and Campbell families were always together.



When his mother grew sick, Margaret Liddle helped them move to East Side. It was around this time that Mr Stirling met his wife, Stephanie. The couple soon had a daughter, Anna-Lisa, and shortly after, a son, Brian Junior.

At one point, Mr Stirling's parents moved into an old army tent at Ilpeye Ilpeye. His father and Keith Campbell got Ilpeye Ilpeye registered as a town camp. This allowed them to build houses and for the whole family to settle down with his other mothers and uncles.

He worked as a bus driver for the Central Australian Aboriginal Congress with close friend Jack Campbell. He also worked at the Alice

Springs Town Council with Donald St Clair and Franky Burns.

Mr Stirling joined the Central Land Council in the late 1980s and worked there for more than 25 years. He started as a field officer at the first CLC office at 75 Hartley Street and became part of the regional services section.

**He will be truly missed by all.
His famous hat and his favourite pannikin.
A true Arrernte gentleman.**

A valued staff member, he contributed to the Simpson Desert, Tempe Downs, Loves Creek, Mount Wedge, Mistake Creek and Brumby Plains and Alcoota land claims and many others.

He supported native title claim research in many places, for example the Mparntwe, Davenport Murchison, Victory Downs and Mount Doreen claims.

He also worked on the survey of the Mparntwe to Darwin railway line, and participated in the Kalkaringi and Batchelor NT statehood conventions, the 25th anniversary celebration of the Aboriginal land rights act and the Reeves review of the act.

"Mr Stirling was a constant and calming presence during council meetings," CLC chair Warren Williams said. "He prepared hearty meals, and supported land management and other staff in progressing the rights and wishes of traditional owners."

He brought cultural knowledge and language skills to his work and he was a warm addition to any room.

"His communication style and ability to engage with anyone were uniquely him," Mr Williams said.

Mr Stirling's time with the CLC involved driving many thousands of kilometres to large communities or one-house homelands all over Central Australia. This was one way he stayed

connected to the people and the land.

His legacy lives on in the CLC's land rights work, his lifelong friendships and in his nephew Shane Stirling who continues his work with the regional services team.

Mr Stirling chaired the Lhere Artepe Aboriginal Corporation which represents the Mparntwe native title holders.

He cherished the opportunity to work with and fight for his people's native title claim. The Mparntwe native title determination in May 2000 was the first successful claim over an Australian town.

His calm nature gave steady guidance to the corporation in its early years.

He signed agreements between Lhere Artepe and the Alice Springs Town Council to develop Stirling Heights, Mount Johns and the Desert Knowledge Precinct, and played a key role in Lhere Artepe's purchase of the town's three IGA supermarkets.

Later he worked at the Aboriginal Interpreter Service. He made sure Arrernte-speaking families attended and understood what was being said.

Mr Stirling spent lots of time with his family, travelling to Brisbane to visit in-laws or hunting and camping out bush. He was a caring father to Anna-Lisa, Brian (Astro) Junior, Shauna and Chantelle, and a devoted grandfather to Jamieka, Jilaysha, Jahkyia, Jeremyus, Jezayla, Jeziah, Trison, Bryan, Tyshawyn, Taylani, Brycias and Tarihyez.

He never missed a birthday party or a football match at Traeger Park.

As a proud coach, he led the Souths Alice Springs B-grade footy team to win back-to-back grand finals over three years. In a project very special to him, Mr Stirling also coached his own small team, the Central Arrernte Football Team.

Mr Stirling's contributions are still felt throughout Central Australia. He lives on in the lives he touched, the community he brought together and family he leaves behind.



Mr Stirling prepared hearty meals at council meetings and was a "constant calming presence".



Remembering Rod Hagen, the Central Land Council's first anthropologist

IN LATE October 1975 Rod Hagen arrived in Mparntwe (Alice Springs) to take up a job as anthropologist at the Central Land Council. He was a youngfeller, only 23 years old, and fresh out of Sydney. He smoked a pipe and was fond of French motorcars, Peugeots in particular. CLC deputy chair Wenten Rubuntja and field officer Ben Clyne collected Hagen from the airport. His introduction to the peoples and politics of Central Australia began right there.

In those early days the CLC was a very small organisation, operating from a room in Stott Terrace. It later moved to an old house in Hartley Street. There was only a handful of staff, including lawyer Geoff Eames, who had been seconded from the Aboriginal Legal Aid Service to assist with the campaign to get the federal land rights legislation passed. Also on board were Keith Smith as administrator and Duncan Rubuntja as field officer, both seconded from the Department of Aboriginal Affairs. Charlie Perkins was the chair.

Hagen's first job was to prepare anthropological reports for the Alice Springs town camp claims, and there were only three weeks to do this before the planned hearing before the Interim Aboriginal Land Commissioner, Justice Ward. Hagen recalled conditions in the town camps at the time:

"There were no buildings on any of the places other than Charles Creek where there were a couple of little brick sheds, so everybody was living in humpies at the camps in those days. But these amazing town land claims were going on where people were hoping to get some sort of title so that at least that sort of stuff would be sorted out."

In the first month he also conducted research for the Alpururulam (Lake Nash) living areas claim. For Hagen, the long road trip to Alpururulam with Wenten Rubuntja was the first time he had driven a Toyota 4WD or slept in a swag.

When the Governor General sacked the Whitlam government in November 1975 the Land Rights Bill was put on hold. An intense



Ross Howie, Meredith Rowell and Rod Hagen (wearing a Utopia batik shirt) at the Utopia land claim hearings (detail), 1979.
Photo by Toly Sawenko

political campaign followed. Wenten Rubuntja and Rod Hagen travelled to many places, including Ntaria (Hermannsburg), where the Finke River Mission was actively opposed to the land rights legislation. They also went to Santa Teresa, Murray Downs, Alekarenge (then called Warrabri), Yuendumu, Ikuntji (Haasts Bluff), and Tennant Creek, talking to people about the legislation and enrolling them to vote in the upcoming federal elections. Hagen estimated that they had driven around 100,000 kilometres between 1975-76.

In the first six months he lived in a demountable at Amoonguna. Rubuntja also lived at Amoonguna and juggled his work at the CLC and his life as an artist, supporting a large extended family. Hagen regarded Rubuntja as a valued mentor: "You know I think Wenten taught me more about the value of patience and timing ... and more about diplomacy than any other person that I have ever met."

Hagen was an anthropologist at the CLC until 1980, and then for five more years he spent a week each month in Central Australia. Between 1978-1985 he worked with traditional owners and teams of anthropologists, lawyers, linguists and other CLC staff on land claims in the CLC region. He also surveyed sacred sites in the Mparntwe town area. Meredith Rowell, the CLC's first female anthropologist, provided much support.

"I think Wenten taught me more about the value of patience and timing ... and more about diplomacy than any other person that I have ever met."

The Warlpiri and Kartangarurrur-Kurintji (Gurindji) claim was the first that Hagen had a major role in. This was followed by the Alyawarr and Kaytetye, and the Uluru – Kata Tjuta claims, the Anmatyerr and Alyawarr

claim to Utopia, the Gurindji claim to Daguragu Station, the Warumungu claim and then the Anmatyerr claim to Ti Tree. Although there were some roadblocks along the way, eventually all these claims were successful, and freehold title was granted to the traditional owners – a total of almost 200,000 square kilometres of country.

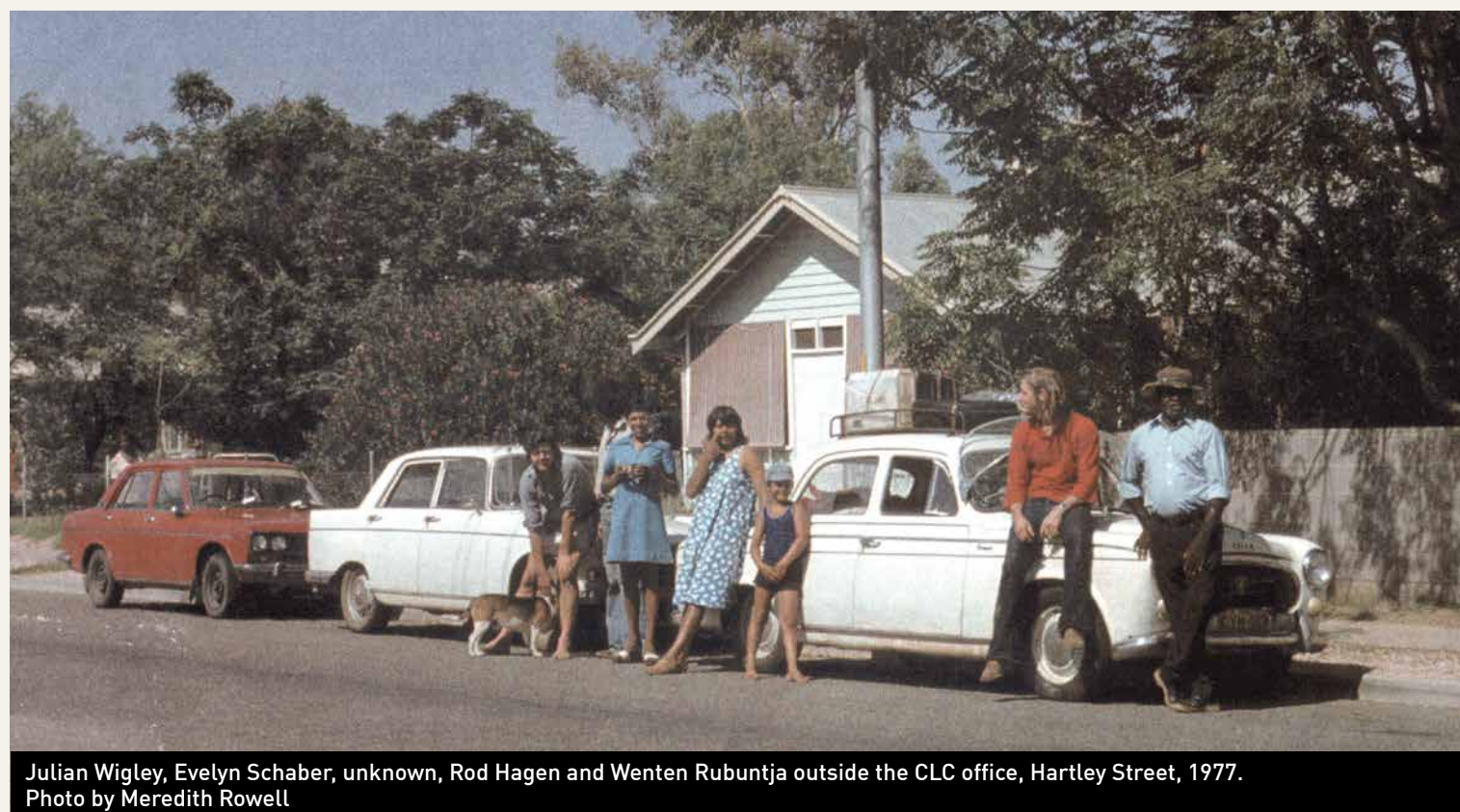
After his work in Central Australia Hagen went back down south, but he continued working for Indigenous

Australians in Victoria, South Australia, Queensland and New South Wales. For example, he worked with the Yorta Yorta native title claimants in Victoria and NSW and documented the impact of the Olympic Dam uranium development at Roxby Downs in SA with Kokatha peoples. Later he went back to study at Monash University's Castan Centre for Human Rights Law. In 2017 he was awarded a PhD which investigated the problems Aboriginal people sometimes faced due to lack of official forms of identification, such as birth certificates.

Hagen worked for more than 40 years with Aboriginal people and was one of Australia's most experienced researchers of the links between Indigenous rights, social science and law. He passed away in December 2025. His family, friends and colleagues miss him greatly and remember him for his hard work, enthusiasm and his dedication to the early processes of getting traditional lands back for Aboriginal peoples.

By Jenny Green

[Direct quotes are from Ms Green's 2001 interview with Rod Hagen]



Julian Wigley, Evelyn Schaber, unknown, Rod Hagen and Wenten Rubuntja outside the CLC office, Hartley Street, 1977.
Photo by Meredith Rowell



A beloved teacher who was always there for her people



IN 2001, a small group of determined Yapa educators sat down in Lajamanu with former Central Land Council director David Ross.

One of them was Barbara Napanangka Martin.

The women were strong in their culture and qualified as teachers. They knew that bilingual education was what their children needed for a good future where they could walk strong in both worlds.

They laid out their big vision for their children, for two-way education and life-long learning in their communities.

They convinced Mr Ross to negotiate for additional mining royalties with Newmont to fund lifelong learning. In doing so, they took a big step forward in Aboriginal-driven development.

It led the CLC to set up the Warlpiri Education and Training Trust (WETT) in 2005. Napanangka passed away last October, during WETT's 20th anniversary year.

She was one of the first four Yapa advisory committee members of the trust and helped the CLC to found a groundbreaking way of working that invests Yapa funds in education programs for Yapa, designed by Yapa.

Assistant Yuendumu school principal Yamurna Napurrurla Oldfield said Napanangka's life began at Loves Creek, east of Mparntwe (Alice Springs), where her parents Maggie Napaljarri Dickson and Tommy Japangardi Martin worked.

"She was born at the Telegraph Station on the creek. Little yimpijirri (gully) there. So she's an Arrernte woman too. Her parents brought her back to Warlpiri country and she grew up at Yuendumu and became a Warlpiri woman."

Napanangka's maternal grandmother's country is Pirrpapakarnu, around Floodout Bore on Mount Doreen Station. Her father was a traditional owner for Janyinki, around Mount Farewell near Ngayurru (Lake Mackay). Napanangka was their only daughter and she had a brother, Nathan Jupurrurla White.

Ms Oldfield was one of her earliest friends.

"We grew up together, me, Napanangka, Helen Morton, Rosalie, Janet and Erica Ross. She was raised by the White family. Her stepfather was Jakamarra, and that's why she walked around with us. We used to go to Yinilkimpi, walking. We got yakajirri (bush berries) and other bush tuckers," Ms Oldfield wrote.

In the early 1970s, anthropologist Nicolas Peterson and his wife Ros became good friends with Napanangka and her family.

The Petersons took her family on interstate holidays and stayed in touch.

"As a highly accomplished bi-cultural person she played a vital role as an adviser explaining Warlpiri culture to outsiders, teaching Warlpiri to Kardiya and collaborating with researchers in translating stories and songs," the couple wrote in a booklet for her memorial service in April 2026 at the Mparntwe Convention Centre.

Napanangka's road to becoming one of the greats of Warlpiri education began at the Yuendumu school, where she loved singing and "learned a lot about rules".

At 13 or 14 years of age, the shy teenager became one of the youngest boarders at Mparntwe's Yirara College.

She continued her studies at the Alice Springs High School in 1977, "getting frightened of the Kardiya kids" who made up most of the students.

Napanangka completed year 11 and returned to Yuendumu where Ms Oldfield was working at the school.

She thought about following her example but gave birth to her daughter Glenda when she was only 17. Her second daughter Mildred was born in Lajamanu.

In the early 1980s Napanangka began to work at the community's literacy centre, translating, transcribing and producing books in Warlpiri for the Lajamanu school's bilingual program.

She and her colleague Erica Ross brought in their daughters because there was no childcare.

"I didn't know anything about writing Warlpiri, but I learned through trying and having a go. We learned to write our own language," she said.

She also took courses at the School of Australian Linguistics with Napurrurla Ross, Napaljarri Rose and Gracie Napaljarri Rankin.

In 1985 Napanangka got a job at the Yuendumu school's literacy centre and bilingual resource development unit. There she met Kardiya teachers Wendy Baarda and Mary Laughren.

"They used to help us with writing,

with sounds, syllables, and with breaking up words and sounding them out," she remembered.

"We used to produce lots of books in Warlpiri. We made lots of bingo games and also used to do lots of sitting one to one with a child, or with three kids, and we read a book or I read to the child and child reads back to me."

Promoted to assistant teacher, she quickly moved from "sharpening the coloured pencils" to teaching in English and Warlpiri with supervision.

Her own teaching career took off when she enrolled in the Batchelor College's Remote Area Teacher Education (RATE) program joining students from remote communities all over the CLC region.

"Napanangka was so strong and she spoke really well. It was really hard the study, but us mob helped each other," Ms Oldfield wrote.

Both women feature in *We Always Stay*, Lisa Hall's collection of stories about the professional journeys of seven Central Australian Aboriginal teachers.

The book took its title from Napanangka's comment: "Kardiya teachers, they come and go, but us Yapa teachers, we always stay!"

The RATE program helped her learn and practice teaching in the classroom, building her confidence "little by little".

In the mid-1980s she continued her studies at Batchelor, returning to Yuendumu for two-week teaching stints.

"Then they told us that we were qualified teachers, ready to take our own class."

Napanangka was one of five Yapa graduates of the RATE program who started fulltime at the Yuendumu school in 1996, joining long-time teacher and former CLC delegate Nungarrayi Egan.

Almost overnight the school's staff changed from mainly Kardiya to mainly Yapa.

This led to an "amazing social and educational transformation", according to former principal Andrew Mirtschin.

"The children now had mothers, grandmothers, uncles [and] aunties



Napanangka taught lots of children at the Yuendumu school. Photo courtesy of Phoebe Dixon



Napanangka at the 2009 Warlpiri Triangle meeting in Yuendumu. Photo taken as part of the Indigenous Teacher Upgrade Program (ITUP)

as their teachers, teaching in Warlpiri and English, which brought new depth and meaning to bilingual education at Yuendumu.”

Over the years Napanangka and her Yapa colleagues lacked support for meeting their cultural and family obligations and dealt with health and social issues.

“It is different for Yapa teachers. There are lots of challenges that are slowing us down and even though we have medical problems we still need to work because a lot of people are depending on us.”

They also dealt with plenty of discrimination.

“We had to go to work the same as the other Kardiya teachers, but we didn’t get the same houses as them,” she said. “We told them we needed better houses because we are all teachers with equal qualifications. We are all public servants.”

“Kardiya teachers are just visitors. We are the ones who will always be here teaching our kids.”

Sometimes Napanangka felt downright invisible.

“When education department people come from the ‘office’ they are talking only to the Kardiya staff. They would come in and talk to the Kardiya teachers about new programs. That’s very important. Even though we are Yapa teachers, we want to learn the same as them.”

She said she would have gained more ideas had she been included.

“Kardiya teachers are just visitors. We are the ones who will always be here teaching our kids.”

Napanangka joined other Yapa teachers from four Tanami Desert communities for regular workshops with Kardiya linguists and teachers.

At these Warlpiri Triangle workshops

they learned to record, transcribe and write stories for Warlpiri books and teaching materials. Their shared dream was a bilingual and bicultural curriculum for the Tanami.

These were the beginnings of the *Warlpiri Theme Cycle*, the curriculum the Warlpiri Education and Training Trust funds and advocates for, among many other life-long learning programs.

Napanangka’s powers of persuasion helped break down the resistance to the trust by Kurra, the Aboriginal Corporation which receives gold mining royalties from Newmont.

“They were upset with us,” said Ms Oldfield, remembering the Kurra members’ initial reluctance to set aside extra royalties for education and training.

“But these WETT members were really strong – Napanangka, Maisie [Kitson], FM [Fiona Gibson]. We showed [Kurra] video about what we teach. ‘You know when we get money from you mob we use it wisely.’

“When they saw that they were happy and said ‘we will support you’. That was their promise, which they are doing now. Ngurrju-nyayirni.”

While Napanangka’s vision stayed the same, principals and politicians came and went. Not many backed bilingual education.

She often recalled the day federal member for Lingiari, Marion Scrymgour, then NT education minister, dropped a bombshell at a Warlpiri Triangle meeting.

“She said bilingual was finished, we were not going to be a bilingual school anymore. She changed the policy to the first four hours of English every day and one hour of Warlpiri after that. That was heartbreaking for us.”

Undeterred, Napanangka continued to advocate with WETT.

Later she reflected: “We see lot of good principals go away, but we don’t have a Yapa principal. We don’t make it to the top. Lawa (no). If I would become our principal I would like to work with a mentor to help me along with my leadership, to run the school.”

After Napanangka retired from teaching she returned to the bilingual resource development unit to mentor the next generation of teachers and

WETT advisory committee members, achieving her dream to mentor other Yapa staff.

She kept her hand in even after she had to move to Mparntwe for dialysis treatment.

“She was still travelling and working, still teaching us Yapa way and Kardiya way,” Nancy Nungarrayi Collins wrote in Napanangka’s memorial booklet.

“She was a lively woman. Even when she was using a walking frame she never gave up.”

One of the many she inspired to follow in her footsteps is her daughter Glenda Napaljarri Wayne.

“I really learned a lot from her,” she wrote.

“I used to follow her around to meetings, workshops and conferences. As a child, I didn’t know what she was doing in that area until I started working for WETT as a researcher a few years ago. She really encouraged me and she would have been really proud of where I am now.”

Daughter Mildred Napaljarri Spencer remembered how Napanangka inspired non-Aboriginal teachers and the CLC’s community development staff “to learn culturally”.

“Country visits were the best thing for all of us. That’s where we learned on country, Kardiya and Yapa together.”

Soon after her mother passed away, Ms Wayne travelled with other WETT advisory committee members and CLC staff to New Zealand for the World Indigenous Peoples Conference on Education.

“I wanted to follow in her footsteps as she had also been there before. When we marched through the crowd, me and Belinda Napaljarri started crying thinking of her.

“Some of the other ladies in New Zealand were really proud talking of her. So many people, young and old, Yapa and Kardiya, come up to me and say ‘your mum was my teacher’. I’m also proud of what she achieved for Warlpiri education, for the next generations.”



Napanangka received her Bachelor of Education (Primary) at the Batchelor Institute graduation ceremony in Mparntwe, 2011.



Coral and Lee Wayne got painted up for the yawulyu to celebrate 20 years of the community development program in Nyirrpri.



Agnes Brown and Aysia Rodgers at the CD 20th celebrations in Nyirrpri.



Nikisha greeted the sunset at Nyirrpri with a big smile.



Michaeline Gallagher welcomed new WETT advisory committee member Antonia Wilson from Nyirrpri.



Tjakuṛa ranger Peter Norman burned spinifex at Piltardi rockhole near Kaltukatjara.



Jamie Gorman, Aysia Rodgers, Agnes Brown, Antonia Wilson, Jeresha Morris, Michaeline Gallagher and Ella Graham gathered around WETT founding mother FM (seated) after the trust's elections in Nyirrpri.



Land council leaders Cherelle Wurrawilya, Matthew Ryan, Warren Williams and Austin Woneeamirri spoke at the opening of the Barunga Festival.



The CLC's Ltyentye Apurte rangers taught a new generation of land managers at Anthwerrke (Emily Gap).



Eric Braedon, Peter Kenny Junior and Reggie Kenny attended a fire planning working group meeting at Rainbow Valley.



Singleton Station native title holders Valerie Curtis and Dawn Swan and the CLC's Tom Dews and Evie Rose presented at the AIATSIS summit on the Gold Coast.



Keianna and Sherena read the last issue of Land Rights News.



Joyce Taylor, Neville Petrick, Mischa Cartwright and Gina Lillico in Barunga for the four NT land councils' joint executive meeting in June.

Everybody is mixed up like tea and sugar



Alcohol started [at Santa Teresa] during Father Clancy's time. Father Clancy must have thought, 'Oh, after all the hard work, they can have a drink.' He opened a canteen, and people got two cans or so after work. Everybody at the mission was myall [wild] for grog. They only drank a little bit, and the women learnt to do it as well.

At that time I had no experience with alcohol. Once I had a drink, at the mission. My husband brought back one of those old-time flagons for me and my sister. Those two forced me. 'Why don't you just have a little drink?' So I drank a little bit. The next morning when I got up I was still drunk.

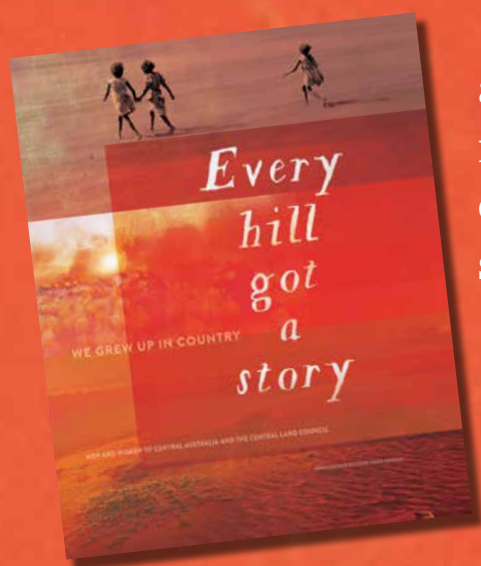
I had a drink of water, I was still drunk – and the walls were heaving. I said to myself, 'Oh that's it. That's enough for me. Finish. I am not going to drink anymore.' And here I am today. I don't get sick. I've got a healthy life.

Nowadays this grog has spoiled everything, and everybody is mixed up like tea and sugar. They just marry anyone they like. They don't know where they come from; they don't know their culture.

AGNES ABBOTT

Excerpt from *Every hill got a story*

For more information go to clc.org.au/every-hill-got-a-story



GET PAID TO STUDY

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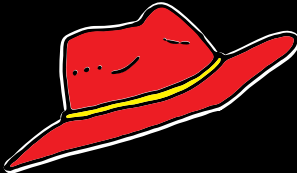
The Central Land Council is offering cadetships for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students who are studying at a university or are planning to do so.

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