

Communities confronting family violence

... promising practices and valuable lessons

FAMILY VIOLENCE AND ABUSE IS OCCURRING at an unacceptable level in our Indigenous communities. It is a scourge that damages our families and communities, traumatises our women and children and tears at the fabric of our culture.

Over the last 18 months we have seen sustained media coverage of these issues. What we have rarely seen or heard, however, is how Indigenous people and communities across Australia are taking positive steps to respond to family violence, abuse and neglect. Many are trying to stop it from happening in the first place.

Sometimes a program begins because of the passion and commitment of a single person, with little or no government support. Sometimes it happens because communities feel a need to take action themselves.

Other initiatives develop through formal and informal partnerships with individual government agencies, non-government organisations, the courts or police. All are striving to make a lasting difference.

I am proud to share with you seven case studies that show how different communities are

responding to family violence. The initiatives cover community education; healing; alcohol management; men's groups; family support and child protection; safe houses; and offender programs.

Some are well-established, some build on earlier programs and others are in their early stages. They are all examples of 'promising practice' and provide valuable lessons about what approaches work and the reasons why they work.

They demonstrate the critical need to confront family violence, but to do so in a way that reinforces the inherent worth and dignity of Indigenous peoples.

This collection of case studies, taken from the *2007 Social Justice Report* where I cite 19 case studies, is a tribute to the many dedicated Indigenous individuals, organisations and communities across Australia who are working tirelessly to combat family violence and abuse.

It celebrates their success while also acknowledging the difficult challenges they face every day.

Tom Calma

TOM CALMA is the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner.

Tom, an Aboriginal elder from the Kungarakan tribal group and a member of the Iwaidja tribal group of the Northern Territory, commenced his five-year term in July 2004.

As Commissioner he advocates for the recognition of the rights of Indigenous Australians and seeks to promote respect and understanding of these rights among the broader Australian community.

Tom has been involved in Indigenous affairs at a local, community, state, national and international level and has worked in the public sector for over 30 years.



Social Justice Report 2007



Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander
Social Justice Commissioner



Human Rights and Equal
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Community education and development

Mildura Family Violence and Sexual Assault Awareness Campaign

WHERE: Mildura, on the Victorian/NSW border

INDIGENOUS POPULATION: 1,433 - 2.9% of local population

TRADITIONAL OWNERS: Latje Latje People

A STRONG PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN VICTORIA POLICE and Mildura's Indigenous community has resulted in a series of powerful television commercials and posters carrying a strong anti-violence message.

Consultations between police and the community identified a crucial barrier to dealing with sexual assault and family violence: a lack of accessible information. With funding of \$110,000 provided by Victoria Police, a community awareness campaign was developed in collaboration with the six relevant local Indigenous groups.

While there were some initial concerns about the role of police, a relationship of trust was built over the course of the project. Indigenous groups quickly gained confidence when they saw that the police wanted minimal input into the campaign content, with communities encouraged to 'take over the project and run with it'.

The three advertisements were run on Mildura television between October 2006 and December 2007. Each had a different focus. In the first, women were encouraged to report violence. The second showed the impact of family violence on children. The third, featuring AFL star Adam Goodes, sent a strong message to men that violence is not acceptable.

The actual process of developing the ads was as important as the end product. (Victoria Police)

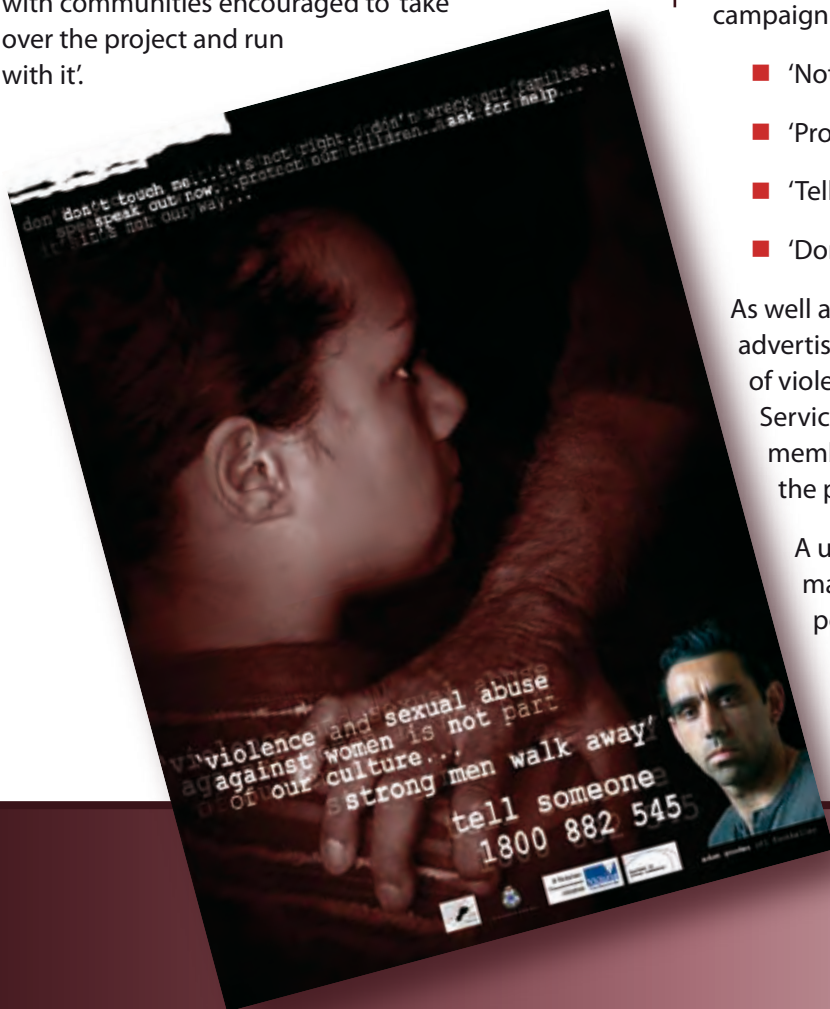
A powerful aspect of the campaign was that local men and women appeared in the advertisements.

Some of the messages promoted through the campaign were:

- 'Not our culture, not our way'
- 'Protect our children – ask for help'
- 'Tell somebody'
- 'Don't wreck our families – speak out now'

As well as their strong anti-violence message, the advertisements included a referral point for victims of violence – the Aboriginal Family Violence Legal Service. This recognised that some community members might be reluctant to report violence to the police.

A unique benefit of the campaign was the marked improvement in community and police relations.



Counselling and healing

Yorgum Aboriginal Family Counselling Service

WHERE: Perth, Western Australia

INDIGENOUS POPULATION: 21,234 - 0.2% of total population

TRADITIONAL OWNERS: Noongar People

YORGUM ABORIGINAL FAMILY COUNSELLING SERVICE is the only Indigenous-run family violence and sexual assault service in Western Australia.

The Aboriginal population in Perth faces significant disadvantage. Yorgum began because a small group of Aboriginal women saw the need for a culturally appropriate counselling service. To enable such a service to be established, these women started the Aboriginal Counselling Course to skill-up local people.

'Yorgum' is a Noongar name for a large red flowering gum tree with healing properties.

Beginning as a volunteer group, Yorgum was incorporated in 1993. Two years later it received funding from the WA Department for Child Protection Services to run a service for child victims of sexual assault.

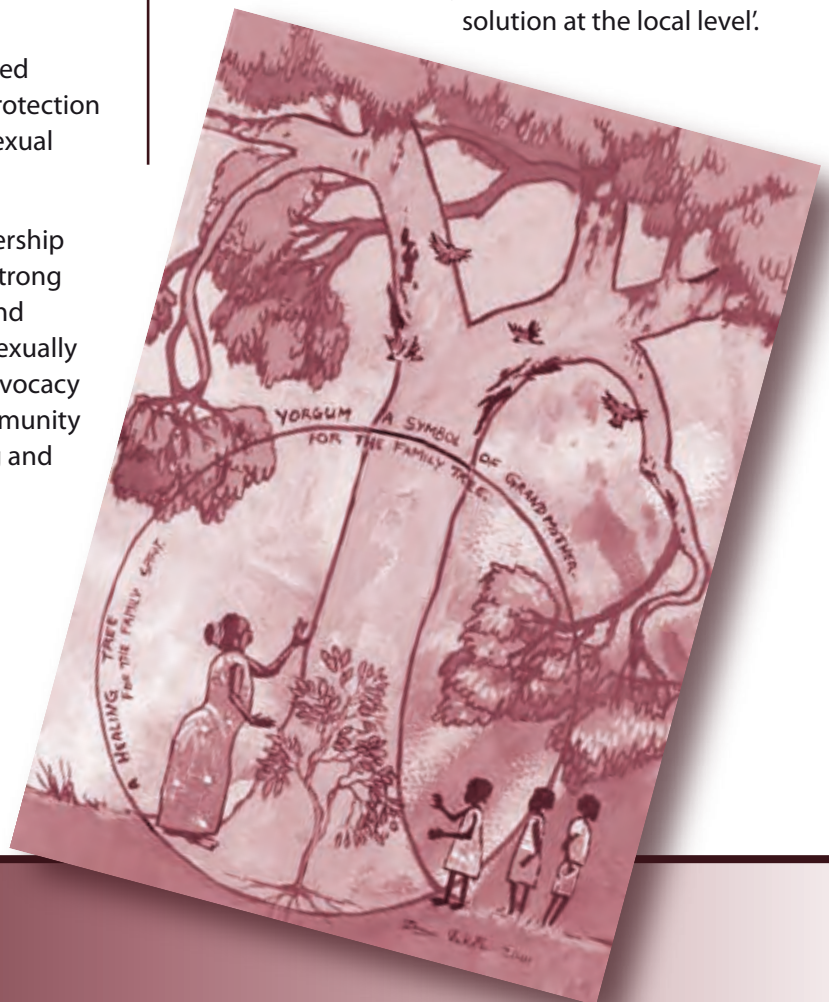
With an expansion of its services and a partnership with Oxfam Australia, Yorgum now has a 16-strong all-Indigenous staff. It provides counselling and healing services to children who have been sexually abused or experienced family violence; an advocacy program to combat family violence; and community development initiatives that focus on healing and family building.

Yorgum has a broad reach in the community. It receives referrals from child protection, sexual assault and health services, as well as people self-referring. In 2006-07 it supported or counselled 1,048 people, including 361 children.

The real success of Yorgum is the way it has developed a service that is accessible and culturally appropriate. All programs are based on a holistic healing philosophy.

An Aboriginal Case Management model has been developed that uses traditional ways of connecting people to culture, such as using sand play and art. Children are linked with the grandmother's group, where Elder women use their wisdom to nurture and counsel the younger generation.

The organisation also works with community members to develop individual and community capacity. Its workshops to prevent family violence, facilitated by Yorgum staff for the Noongar community, are an example of 'a local solution at the local level'.



Alcohol management

Umbakumba Alcohol Management Plan

WHERE: Groote Eylandt, Gulf of Carpentaria

INDIGENOUS POPULATION: 1,541 - just under half of whom are Indigenous

TRADITIONAL OWNERS: Anindilyakwa People

THE THREE MAIN POPULATION centres on Groote Eylandt are the Indigenous communities of Angurugu and Umbakumba and the mining town of Alyangula.

Umbakumba is a dry community today, the result of formal and informal initiatives developed over the past two decades.

Alcohol first became part of life on Groote Eylandt in the early 1960s, at the same time that GEMCO, a subsidiary of BHP, began work in Alyangula to establish what is now the largest Manganese mine in the world. The next 20 years saw escalating violence and social dysfunction and Groote Eylandt became notorious for its high crime rate.

Throughout the 1980s, Umbakumba was the only Aboriginal community to have its own canteen. There was unlimited access to beer. In the 1990s, because of disruption and violence in the community, Umbakumba sought

to reduce the amount of alcohol being consumed through its 'Living with Alcohol' program.

Beer was rationed and stronger alcohol banned. While originally men would order the beer, in 2005 women were handed control. If drinking caused trouble, the ration was suspended. While partially successful, alcohol was still being consumed illegally, through theft or supplied by those able to buy alcohol.

The Groote Eylandt and Bickerton Island Alcohol Management Plan came into force in 2005, after almost 20 years of consultation between land and community councils, health services, the township of Alyangula, liquor license holders and the Northern Territory Government.

Although it had the authority to regulate the sale of alcohol, Umbakumba decided to go a step further and become alcohol-free. Umbakumba women, supported by the Alyangula Police, the Women's Resource Centre and the Community Council, banned alcohol in October 2006.

The flexibility of the Liquor Commission, the good relationship with police and the willingness of local liquor licensees to support the initiative were vital elements in laying the groundwork for this decision.



Men's groups

Yerli Birko

WHERE: Adelaide, South Australia

INDIGENOUS POPULATION: 12,463 - 1.1% of total population

TRADITIONAL OWNERS: Kurna People

INDIGENOUS YOUNG MEN IN ADELAIDE face significant social and economic disadvantage – a situation made worse in recent years by deteriorating relations with the police and negative media stereotypes.

In response, concerned older men in the Indigenous community began to look at ways they could support these young men deal with the pressures they were facing and build their social and emotional well-being.

The result was Yerli Birko, a men's group established by the Nunkuwarrin Yunti of SA Aboriginal Medical Service and the Aboriginal Sobriety Group (ASG).

Pooling their combined experience in health care, counselling, mental health, outreach and drug and alcohol programs, Yerli Birko aims to engage men in a relaxed, informal setting.

Officially launched on National Sorry Day in 2006, the program has a strong emphasis on cultural learning and receives support, advice and guidance from a Cultural Reference Group, made up of Elders and experienced people from health and social services.

Yerli Birko's cultural program includes visits to galleries and

museums with Indigenous collections, Indigenous art classes, didgeridoo making and traditional Indigenous games.

Two fishing trips have been organised, with Elders taking part and sharing stories about the traditions and history of the Adelaide region. Drug and alcohol awareness, as well as education about nutrition and healthy eating, are part of the activities.

Family violence and other issues are addressed through Talking Circles, usually led by an Elder or facilitator.

Therapeutic elements have also begun to enter the program, with the men planning to record their stories on DVD to share with their children.

Now permanently based at 'The Shed', the ASG facility in the northern suburbs of Adelaide, Yerli Birko has begun to take a proactive role in the community, with the men now acting as mentors to

other young Indigenous males and taking steps to assist homeless Indigenous people in the city.



The Yerli Birko group appreciate artwork while discussing issues affecting Indigenous men.

Family support and child protection

Lakidjeka Aboriginal Child Specialist Advice and Support Service

WHERE: Victoria-wide,
except Mildura Local Government Area

THE LAKIDJEKA ABORIGINAL CHILD Specialist Advice and Support Service (ACSASS) is operated by the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA). It is an Indigenous initiative that aims to ensure that statutory child protection services are culturally appropriate for Indigenous children and families.

VACCA established the original Lakidjeka Crisis Service in 1992. In 2001, the Victorian Government provided funding for the service to be delivered on state-wide basis (apart from Mildura, where the Mildura Aboriginal Co-operative operates).

Lakidjeka ACSASS currently employs around 30 staff who provide specialised support and advice to the Department of Human Services on all significant decisions taken about Indigenous children in the child protection system. Their role is set out in protocols developed between the Department and VACCA.

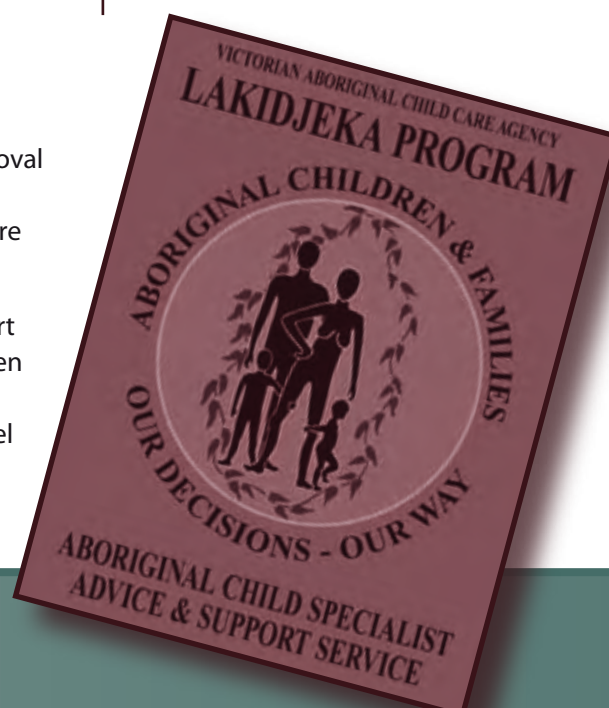
Lakidjeka staff are involved across the entire spectrum of child protection issues, ranging from early questions about whether to investigate a notification, right through to the complexities of court hearings, removal of children, case planning, contact arrangements and health and welfare issues.

Lakidjeka ACSASS also offers support and assistance to Indigenous children and families, helping them to understand the 'legal jargon' and feel supported from their own culture.

VACCA is a respected Indigenous-run service, begun in 1977, and recognised for its effective programs and strong governance.

Starting as a small program that provided ad hoc advice and support, the organisation is now an integrated part of the Victorian child protection system. Between October 2002 and July 2007 its staff provided consultation and advice on 10,136 notifications.

Lakidjeka staff believe that a better understanding of cultural issues, along with referrals to appropriate family support services, have resulted in fewer children needing to be removed from their families. Where children are removed, there seems to be higher compliance with the Aboriginal Child Placement Principle.



Safe houses

Yuendumu Safe House

WHERE: Yuendumu, 290km northwest of Alice Springs, Tanami Desert, Northern Territory

POPULATION: 692 - of which 83.7% is Aboriginal

TRADITIONAL OWNERS: Warlpiri People

FOLLOWING FIVE YEARS OF LOBBYING the NT Government, the Yuendumu Women's Centre received funding in 2003 to establish a safe house to assist women and children experiencing family violence.

The Yuendumu Safe House provides short-term accommodation to local women who have experienced violence or are escaping the threat of violence from husbands or partners. The typical length of stay ranges from one night to one week.

Located next to the police station and close to the Women's Centre, the safe house is surrounded by a three-metre wall with barbed wire. Entry is via a locked gate with an intercom system.

Women can gain access to the safe house at any time of the day or night by contacting known community members who have keys. Children can accompany their mothers, but initiated boys over the age of 14 are not permitted.

Advertised on local radio, it is "a place where women can have peace, quiet, a good sleep and a rest".

Senior Warlpiri men have consistently supported the safe house and its high standing in the community means there is no need for extra security.

The Yuendumu Safe House is guided by both formal and informal policy

and rules. There are signs in Warlpiri and English which set out the rights and responsibilities of the women who use it. The strictest rule is that a woman may not use the Safe House if she is drunk. Alcohol is strictly prohibited.

A central philosophy is the belief that women have the right to make their own choices. This includes the choice of whether or not to report an incident of domestic violence.

The Women's Centre established the Yuendumu Women's Night Patrol in 1991 to stop the grog and reduce family violence in the community. Run by senior Warlpiri women (their average age is 58), it is now the longest serving night patrol in the Northern Territory.



Offender programs

Indigenous Family Violence Offender Program

WHERE: Nguiu, Bathurst Island, Tiwi Islands

POPULATION: 1,500

TRADITIONAL OWNERS: Mantiupwi People

THE INDIGENOUS FAMILY VIOLENCE Offender Program (IFVOP), a community-based initiative run by Northern Territory Community Corrections, began in 2005 and currently runs in six remote communities.

Nguiu was the first community to implement the program and a majority of program participants have been from Nguiu.

Before it started, consultations took place with the community to discuss the issue of family violence, explain the program aims, develop program content and identify suitable local Indigenous people to be trained as facilitators to lead the program.

The program gives the Court an alternative sentencing option to imprisonment. Before the Court decides if the IFVOP is suitable, both the offender and victim are assessed by the trained facilitator. A recommendation is then made to the Court.

The primary aim of the 50 hour program is to reduce Indigenous family violence. It supports offenders to understand and develop ways to deal with the issues that lead to anger and violence, and allows them to actively practice these skills while living in the community.

Run for two days a week over a month, discussion topics include personal values, recognising and responding to anger, resolving conflict and Indigenous

spiritual healing. A key message of the program is that family violence in any form is unacceptable.

Partners of offenders are offered a shorter, modified program. Following their participation in the IFVOP, both offender and victim are formally interviewed at six and 12 monthly intervals.

Since it began in Nguiu, 69 men have completed the program and 12 women have attended the partner program. Feedback from the facilitators, the community and the Elders points to its positive results.

Volunteers are also encouraged to participate in the IFVOP. Most of the volunteers are people who have been banned from the Nguiu Social Club - a requirement of the ban being lifted is that they address problems of violence and alcohol misuse.

Voluntary participation is an effective early intervention because it engages individuals before the problem of family violence has escalated.

Lessons learnt from 'promising practices'

THESE CASE STUDIES HAVE BEEN CHOSEN TO ENCOURAGE INDIVIDUALS AND COMMUNITIES BY SHOWING WHAT can be achieved, often through the dedication of a small number of people; to inspire service providers to think critically about how effectively they are delivering their services; and to challenge governments to be responsive and flexible to innovative programs that deal with family violence and abuse. The case studies share a number of common elements that have contributed to their success.

- 1. COMMUNITY GENERATED:** The most successful programs are those developed by and for the community, which respond to individual community needs.
- 2. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT:** It is crucial to consult the community throughout the program's development, especially when the initiative comes from government.
- 3. COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT:** Communities need to be involved and supported before they can 'own' family violence initiatives. For example, men's groups can help build leadership capacity and spread an anti-violence message.
- 4. PARTNERSHIPS:** Many of the successful case studies were built on partnerships, with both government and non-government agencies.
- 5. HOLISTIC:** Underlying, situational and precipitating factors of violence and abuse need to be addressed, often at the same time.
- 6. CONNECTION TO CULTURE:** Respect for traditional law reinforces anti-violence messages and builds positive community identity.
- 7. INVOLVE MEN:** Most responses to family violence are created by and for women, leaving some men feeling alienated. Men need to be part of the solution.
- 8. EMPOWERING WOMEN:** Women's traditional culture and authority in the community needs to be promoted.
- 9. BUILDING ON COMMUNITY STRENGTHS:** With resources, networks or knowledge in communities, programs have a greater chance of success.
- 10. INDIGENOUS STAFF:** The expertise of Indigenous staff makes a crucial difference in successful services, often at personal cost to staff.

There are a number of other important factors:

- programs have to be sustainable
- they need to be flexible
- the resources and capacity of communities must be taken into account
- long term, stable funding is critical
- non-Indigenous staff play an important role to support initiatives and transfer skills and knowledge to Indigenous people.

We can be proud of what has been achieved so far and celebrate the strong stand taken by so many Indigenous communities to prevent and address family violence.

TO FIND OUT MORE . . .

The *Social Justice Report 2007* contains 19 case studies of 'promising practice' dealing with family violence and abuse.

Call 1300 369 711 to order hard copies and CD-ROMs of the Social Justice Report and for additional copies of this Community Guide.

The *Social Justice Report 2007* is available at www.humanrights.gov.au/social_justice/sjreport07/

If you have comments or feedback please email us at sjreport@humanrights.gov.au