

LONG TERM APPROACH TO CAPACITY BUILDING AND EMPOWERMENT

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Good morning ladies and gentlemen, I am pleased to make this presentation as a contribution to the conference on behalf of my family group. However before going any further I wish to acknowledge and thank the traditional owners of this land that we are meeting at today. My name is Alwyn Mckenzie; I am of Luritja and Adnyamathanha decent. My mother a Luritja person from central Australia was stolen from her family and country in 1926. She was raised in the Colebrook Children's Home in Quorn.

In her late teens my mother left Colebrook and went to work at Nepabunna Mission, an Aboriginal settlement, run by the United Aboriginal Mission on behalf of the Adnyamathanha people, the traditional owners of the northern Flinders Ranges region.

It was whilst at Nepabunna that my Mother met and eventually married my father a traditional man of the Adnyamathanha. The marriage produced thirteen children.

The term Adnyamathanha, which in English translates to rock people, today refers to all of the traditional owners of the northern Flinders ranges area. However before the invasion of the non-Aboriginal and before the establishment of Nepabunna, the Adnyamathanha were made up of the Kuyani, Yadliaura, Walpi and Pilitapa. All of these named Aboriginal groups shared language, social structure and kinship, as well as Dreaming stories and ceremonies.

Prior to invasion, all of the material and spiritual needs of the Adnyamathanaha could be found in the local environment Ochre for ceremonial purposes, stone and wood for implements, brush for shelter, skins for clothing and bags, food and water could all be obtained in the North Flinders Ranges. As is the case with Aboriginal peoples around Australia, the invasion of non-Aboriginal people had a horrific and tragic effect on the lives of the Adnyamathanha peoples.

Following the massacres, the illegal land taking, the introduced diseases and the destruction to flora and fauna etc, the Adnyamathanha people were then expected to endure a subservient existence, while the non Aboriginal developed and progressed in the areas of pastoralism, mining and other traditional non-Aboriginal business practices of the day. By the end of the nineteenth century, the once numerous Adnyamathanha population had been reduced to a few family groups.

As the pastoral industry developed in the Northern Flinders Ranges, so eventually did the Adnyamathanha people's involvement and requirement in the industry increase as well. The Adnyamathanha were used as a cheap labour force for several decades. The pastoral industry although at times cruel and

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unfair to the Adnyamathanha did however allow many of my people to exist away from the ration depots and the missions. The pastoral industry also allowed the Adnyamathanha people to maintain much of our culture. Parents were able to still teach their children about traditional food gathering and important areas could be visited and maintained.

With the advent of non-Aboriginal intervention into Adnyamathanha life, the pure traditional culture that was known 150 years ago began to change from that time. Today Adnyamathanha people have evolved from a totally traditional people into a group that confronts the modern Australia but still hold strong links with our cultural customs.

My family, the McKenzie family, who are of the Adnyamathanha people, are the direct descendants of my parents. With spouses included, my family population numbers one hundred and sixty people. The profile of my family includes stolen generation qualifiers, medical workers, tradespersons, bureaucrats, law enforcement officers, managers, labourers, stockmen, miners, CDEP participants, the unemployed, the healthy, the sick, I can go on, in fact like most big families we are made up of people with all types of attributes and experiences whether good or bad. Unfortunately there are no filthy rich members in our family.

In July 1998, my family formed an Aboriginal Corporation, called Viliwarinha Yura Aboriginal Corporation. Set up under the Aboriginal Councils and Association Act 1996, the main reason why my family formed an Aboriginal Corporation was to try as a family group to reduce the impact that history had bestowed on each of our family members. The challenge set for Viliwarinha was to try and alleviate the continued effects of loss of land, low self esteem, interference with family and culture, lack of education and opportunities, poor health outcomes, poor incomes.

The first action that Viliwarinha pursued following incorporation was to apply to the Indigenous Land Corporation for a property that was being sold in the Flinders Ranges. The Indigenous Land Corporation (ILC) is a Commonwealth Authority set up in 1995 to help Indigenous groups throughout Australia to acquire and manage land. The Indigenous Land Corporation purchased the property known as Yappala in late 1999. In September 2001 the Indigenous land Corporation divested the title of Yappala to the Viliwarinha Yura Aboriginal Corporation.

From the time of the proposed Yappala purchase, the workload and stress on members of Viliwarinha has been unrelenting. Yappala was an old struggling pastoral property that was eventually sold to the ILC with its assortment of assets such as homesteads, a tourist complex, farm sheds, fencing and essential infrastructure in various states of condition. Upon gaining responsibility of management for Yappala, Viliwarinha members needed to aggressively pursue support from various groups to help make Yappala a successful base for the McKenzie family.

In the past two years Viliwarinha has developed a community strategic plan, members have worked on a property management plan, gained a Community Development Employment Program (CDEP) at Yappala and

convinced ATSIIC and the ILC into upgrading much of the essential infrastructure such as power, water and sewerage on Yappala. A couple of short-term employment programs, utilising the small Viliwarinha labour force have also been implemented at Yappala. Many of these notable achievements have been due to good planning, much hard work, and lots of good will, great timing and a lot of luck.

However it has been not all plain sailing. Within Viliwarinha there has been many conflicts and arguments. Conflict resolution strategies are hard to put into place when issues such as unemployment, lack of housing, substance misuse, low income, anxiety and poor health are linked with an indigenous family group. Good management practices are also seriously challenged when the previous issues, along with statutory requirements such as land rates and levies, confront an Aboriginal organisation.

Whilst Viliwarinha acknowledges these mentioned negative issues exist and will continue to exist for some time yet, we as a family will continue to strive to achieve the aims and objectives that prompted us to form the incorporated body in 1998. Viliwarinha, though frustrated at times through repeating the same sad stories to countless agencies and groups, will continue to achieve our social mission. Our continued efforts to equip family members with sustainable incomes, skills and access to job opportunities will be our primary focus at Yappala over the next few years.

Viliwarinha has planned for the obtaining and management of a small herd of beef cattle on Yappala. Viliwarinha will also assess the feasibility of other enterprise ventures on Yappala such as tourism and cultural education opportunities. There is an important reason why our family is pursuing these enterprise ventures and that is to decrease the reliance on government and other types of support funding. Many times while Viliwarinha members have been negotiating issues with government and non-government bodies, the ongoing saga of asking for program funds and services often makes us feel like second class citizens, even though we manage our own property for the benefit of many people.

I sometimes think that Viliwarinha may never be totally self sufficient, but there is the real opportunity for family groups such as mine to become less reliant on supplicant funding. For this to happen governments and philanthropic groups must start respecting and adhering to the visions and plans of Aboriginal groups and individuals.

Whenever Aboriginal people declare that we need support with business planning, start up funding, salary support, training and supervisory costs and equipment purchases then these declared issues need to be addressed and supported properly. Unfortunately many of the groups that have the ability to help Aboriginal people, reject or ignore Aboriginal people needs, based on the groups' or agencies' own narrow set of criteria.

Funding support for achieving real outcomes for Aboriginal people and for assisting groups such as Viliwarinha to become less reliant on government needs to be flexible and suitable to the various needs of Indigenous peoples around Australia.

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In other words, the support should be tailor made to suit the needs of Aboriginal people. Program support providers to Aboriginal groups need to be patient and aware of the complex issues that are linked with Aboriginal people. Many of the desired outcomes required by the philanthropic and corporate community may not become apparent for several years. However, the outcomes will eventuate if adequate support and respect for Aboriginal people is maintained.

I belong to a people that has been pushed and shoved, disrespected and trampled on, but we have survived and we continue to celebrate the fact that we are still living in our traditional country where we will always belong.