

Ali-Curung, Lajamanu,
Yuendumu and Willowra
Communities

***Ali-Curung Community Women's
Safe House and Family Violence
Awareness Workshop Report***

October 2002

Background

The success of the Ali-Curung Community and more recently Lajamanu Community in developing community law and justice strategies over the past six years is well known amongst central Australian bush communities, particularly among the Warlpiri Communities. From this knowledge a number of communities have requested assistance from Ali-Curung and Lajamanu in providing advice and information on the development of a range of initiatives, such as safe houses, night patrols and particularly a process that encourages dispute resolution techniques incorporating elders and the traditional owners, that are supported by mainstream processes.

As part of the Aboriginal Law and Justice Strategy, Ali-Curung Community members have travelled extensively to other communities with their dot paintings and stories and have hosted a number of meeting and workshops at Ali-Curung for visiting communities. The technique of utilising presenters from more experienced communities such as Ali-Curung and Lajamanu in workshops as part of the Aboriginal Law and Justice Strategy has proven particularly effective among aboriginal communities. Perhaps so effective because a critical component in communities developing their own community justice strategy is the effort invested in awareness raising exercises, discussion, debate and self- help problem solving.

Peer Modelling can be described as:

“... a powerful form of learning because it uses peer familiarity to promote confidence and goal relevance (“if they can do it, so can we”) and existing relationships between peers help provide mutual learning and support”.

(Morrison Associates, Ways Forward, An Evaluation of the Aboriginal Family Violence Strategy).

The Workshop

Demand for Ali-Curung presenters is high, particularly as they have devised a set of clear educational tools, namely a series of dot paintings. Requests from around ten aboriginal communities have been made directly to Ali-Curung to speak on justice issues. Particularly from the neighbouring Warramungu, Kaiditch and Alyawarra Communities.

Meeting this demand presents logistical problems for Ali-Curung and highlighted a need to develop of a more structured method for disseminating information to respond effectively to requests. It is currently beyond the scope of the Aboriginal Law and Justice Strategy to provide significant resources to provide workshops with Ali-Curung presenters on communities where the Strategy is not being implemented.

The law and justice committee and safe house staff at Ali-Curung are mindful of the lack of training directed to younger and less confident community members in the presentation of the community justice processes, the necessity being *“to carry on telling the story”*.

At the September 2002 Kurduju Committee Meeting, Ali-Curung members decided to trial a community based workshop supported by the Department of Community Development Sport and Cultural Affairs (DCDSCA). Issues topical on three key communities would be the focus. It was agreed a workshop specifically concentrating on issues of community justice coordination, the development and management safe houses and the problem of family violence within a remote aboriginal community.

The workshop was facilitated by key community members (with assistance from DCDSCA) but largely managed and delivered by Ali-Curung Community residents with guest presenters from relevant principle agencies.

The workshop therefore had a dual purpose:

1. To capitalise on and take the experience of Ali-Curung’s peer modelling skills a step further, by bringing together presenters and the expertise of local staff together into a logical and structured workshop setting, designed specifically for an aboriginal audience.

This would also provide an opportunity for more experienced presenters to involve young residents (up-and-coming presenters) and staff from local organisations in presenting and workshopping techniques.

2. To disseminate information and provoke discussion among interested communities in promoting the development of pro active community

based solutions to social problems, by demonstrating a method for achieving such objectives.

The workshop was conducted over four half (½) day sessions, ensuring the coverage of topics and information was not onerous or too confusing for participants. Workshop participants are often (and were in this case) senior ladies, some with poor English language skills and a lack of familiarity with contemporary program management concepts. The workshop was not designed to be comprehensive of the issues, but as a forum that would instigate (particularly for Willowra and Yuendumu) further investigation and discussion.

It is a constant theme that successfully operated, managed and sustainable community based programs rely heavily on community residents that tend to be stronger, senior ladies rather than the more eloquent younger generation. It is therefore important workshops of this nature cater to this group so they are not excluded due to communication issues between themselves and presenters or government officers.

Community Participation and Theme

The Communities of Lajamanu, Yuendumu and Borroloola have or about to establish their own community safe houses, which like the Ali-Curung Safe House are locally operated and managed (Lajamanu) or are intended to be once they are constructed (Borroloola and Yuendumu).

Representatives from Lajamanu and Borroloola have participated in workshops conducted at Ali-Curung Community over the past few years as part of the Aboriginal Law and Justice Strategy and both are familiar with the facilities and staff from Ali-Curung. Lajamanu in particular have developed a close working relationship over the past few years with Ali-Curung as they have hosted many workshops for Lajamanu representatives covering a broad range of issues.

Borroloola is not a participating community in Aboriginal Law and Justice Strategy. However in lieu of the fact that the Community is awaiting the construction of a safe house, and limited awareness and preparation training of aboriginal community safe house operations and management has been conducted with the ladies from Borroloola, it was considered the participation

of Borroloola representatives in a workshop of this kind would be nevertheless be valuable.

Lajamanu Community Safe House was officially opened in June 2002. Since the opening of the Lajamanu Safe House new staff have become involved and consequently the Lajamanu Council considered additional training and exposure to remote area safe house operations was necessary.

Yuendumu Community has been participating in the Aboriginal Law and Justice Strategy for about eighteen months and has commenced a number of initiatives as a result. Yuendumu Community Council has an application with NT Housing for the establishment of a women's safe house and has been actively involved in awareness and training on family violence and safe house issues through their membership on the Kurduju Committee and Yuendumu Law and Justice Committee.

Willowra Community has recently commenced participation in the Aboriginal Law and Justice Strategy. Community workshops were conducted at Willowra with officers working on the Strategy and significant support shown for the implementation of similar initiatives at Willowra as those commenced on the other three communities. At these workshops men and women met separately, both strongly identified family and community violence as a problem at Willowra. Consistently emphasised was the need for the development of community based responses that recognised and promoted collective responsibility.

It was also necessary to initiate the involvement of Willowra in joint workshopping forums to facilitate greater understanding about how 'whole of community' and 'whole of government' concepts may operate effectively.

All four communities were invited and express keen interest in attending.

Unfortunately, the day Borroloola representatives were scheduled to travel, vehicle trouble developed which left them without transport to attend the workshop.

In summing up, the workshop did generate considerable discussion about the issues over the four day period and highlighted areas requiring further effort

(by various agencies and the community) to secure progress of community based family violence and community justice initiatives.

The Report outlines the content covered over the four days with an emphasis on the critical features that facilitated success in developing a 'community justice system' that suited the Ali-Curung Community. Ali-Curung presenters viewed these features as pertinent to other remote area aboriginal communities in the Territory.

Ali-Curung Community and workshop coordinators would like to thank particularly for their contributions: Paula Tropeano (Tennant Creek Crisis Centre), Joyce Murray (ATSIC), Nick Nicholas (Principal, Ali-Curung Education Centre), Nicole Rozmen (Coordinator, Ali-Curung Women Centre), Kevin Diflo (CEO, Ali-Curung Council), Ali-Curung CEDP and Peter Heintze, CDEP Coordinator, Gwen Brown, Council President and the Ali-Curung Community Presenters and Elders.

Jackie Antoun
Aboriginal Law and Justice Strategy

and Marjorie Hayes
Ali-Curung Workshop Coordinator/Facilitator

DAY 1

How do community organisations contribute to the Ali-Curung law and justice Plan?

The importance of a whole of community effort at Ali-Curung.



Lionel James (Ali-Curung Council Vice President) opened the workshop with a presentation of the *Ali-Curung Yapa Patu* painting (above) and a discussion about the 'early days' at Ali-Curung. As the former Council President at a time when law and order issues, particularly family violence were emerging as wide spread problems within the community, Lionel emphasised the role of the community council as the central body in progressing the issue during the early days (mid 1990's). The relationship and discussion on law and order issues between the local police and council developed during this time.

The idea of a safe house as a possible solution was discussed with Council. Men dominated Council at the time. An investigation into how a safe house could be incorporated into the community culture without causing additional divisions within the community was the most important factor in Council's deliberations on whether to progress with an Ali-Curung community safe house as a solution to the problems occurring at the time. Consensus would

Ali-Curung Community Safe House and Family Violence Awareness Workshop, October 2002

Report drafted from notes taken by the Department of Community Development Sport and Cultural Affairs 19/09/03

need to be achieved among all groups within the community (not just those directly impacted upon by the safe house).

Talk within the community about the social problems grew as the issue was taken out of the Council meeting forums into the community for wider discussion. All groups within the community, particularly the men, (including drinkers) were involved in community meetings to find out community views for a ladies safe house and proper management of social and law and order problems. Social responses, that provided a means for rehabilitation were favoured and are considered appropriate by the community as opposed to complete reliance on a policing and mainstream punitive responses. The same views on law and order solutions are evident at Lajamanu, Yuendumu and Willowra.

Lionel identified the following key elements of the process that was undertaken as:

1. Safe House is for whole community, not just women
2. Council became involved from the start and were crucial in instigating a 'proper' process
3. The men had a 'big say' in safe house
4. Council is at the centre of facilitating the process, so council needs to recognise the level of the problem before the process is progressed.
5. Council linked in with other community organisation to discuss feasibility ie housing availability, night patrol
6. Council needs to be 'strong', supports and listens to the community.
7. Not all men were supportive, but they did come around to the women's views and this was part of the process of debating the solution at community meetings
8. A Whole of Community Effort to Community Justice includes:
 - Council
 - Women's centre
 - Sport and Recreation
 - School
 - Safe House
 - Night Patrol/ Police
 - Law and Order Committee
 - Elders – men – women

Lionel described the role of the community council as being central to the 'health' of all other community groups and organisations. A 'strong' council gives strength to all other organisations. This is shown in the painting, Yap Patu. Council is located in the centre with all other key organisations on the periphery, which have clear and strong linkages to the community council.

Presentations were then given by:

- **Sports and Recreation Officer:** The role of youth sport and recreation programs in the community altered considerably after Council prioritised problems with youth, through recreation and sport and as a key issue in the justice plan and accordingly invested (time, effort and financially) over a number of years.

Council had invested a considerable amount of its money into facilities at the community level, including providing considerable support to structured and regular program, that included weekly discos in a newly built recreation hall, basketball court and an after school activities program.

The growth of sporting activities involved the night patrol, law and justice committee and school as well. The night patrol assists with drunks during disco evenings and sporting events, both at and away from Ali-Curung. School attendance is conditional to entry to the discos by arrangement with the school.

- **School Principal:** He spoke about the role of parents at the school and the level of success in achieving attendance levels at the school. He spoke about the need for (aboriginal community schools to invest) a higher level of trust in parents in decisions about the school.

He noted fighting between kids at school (identified by the Yuendumu ladies as a problem in their community) did not occur because there were clear rules developed by the parents (school parents board) through and with the support of the school staff in dealing with this issue (such as it is to be taken out of school grounds and resolved if the problems were spreading to families members). It is no longer an issue at Ali-Curung. The principal could not recall any problems between kids at school in recent times.

The focus of the school over the past 6 years has been:

- Trust. The one area in which the school has changed significantly.
- The school puts a lot of trust in the parent committee and teachers aides and the decision they make
- The building of meaningful partnerships
- developed relationship with all community organisations
- regular meeting with Law & Order/ Council, Clinics, Police
- joint partnership in the Sport and Recreation program
- after school program developed between sport and recreation, where school provides facilities for after school activities
- use of facilities is conditional on school attendance
- use of excursions with families
- problems at school between kids because parents, Elders are brought in to help sort out problems – rules have developed
- school employs many community people and CDEP

➤ **Council Clerk:** A general discussion about the administrative role of council and its linkages to other community groups including the law and justice committee.

➤ **Women's Centre Coordinator:** The newly appointed women's centre coordinator spoke about the activities managed by the Centre.

DAY 2 and DAY 3

Aboriginal Community Safe House: Dealing with community culture and family violence.

Operating and managing a remote aboriginal community safe house

The purpose of these sessions were to encourage discussion and explore culturally appropriate forms of intervention and responses to aboriginal community and family violence. The experience of Ali-Curung and Lajamanu Communities and information from the Kurduju Committee has highlighted a difference between conventional mainstream (non indigenous) responses to family violence and the techniques that have emerged where communities control and are responsible for resolving the violence. The Kurduju Committee has further suggested the consequences of non indigenous responses for aboriginal people, particularly in cases of family violence may be linked to underlying issues of self-harm including even suicide among aboriginal men. There are a number of cultural issues and explanations for the reluctance of aboriginal community ladies in pursuing a predominantly mainstream supported course of action for dealing with violence (such as restraining orders).

Two guest speakers participated in this session, Paula Tropeano, from the Tennant Creek Women's Refuge and Joyce Murray, Women's Policy Officer, ATSIC.

Paula Tropeano provided an explanation of the 'Cycle of Violence' and 'Alcohol Violence' story as depicted by Marjorie Hayes in her dot painting, below.



There was a significant amount of time spent on this issue. Yuendumu and Willowra communities identified strongly with a similar cycle of violence occurring on their communities.

The cycle of violence is common across both cultures. Resolution techniques across cultures however are dissimilar.

Tennant Creek Refuge vis-à-vis the Ali-Curung Safe House

There was a discussion about the differences and commonalities between the service provided by the Refuge in Tennant Creek and the Ali-Curung Community Safe House. Paula Tropeano led this session with the assistance of Marjorie Hayes.

Tennant Creek Women's Refuge

- Functions as a shelter from violence for women rather than a 'safe house'. The Refuge can only provide a service for ladies who are in immediate danger from violence; it can only be used by ladies in crises.
- This is very different from the service provided by the Ali-Curung Safe House which is designed to cater for ladies long before they are in crises, such as when they are aware their husbands are drinking or are likely to lose their temper and become violent.

- The use of the court system was discussed along with the use of restraining and trespass orders as a means for assisting ladies to escape their (usually) husbands and distance themselves from the violent relationship.
- The Refuge does not deal with men in any capacity and accordingly does not allow men on to the grounds.
- Refuge policy allows clients to make their own choices about seeking court supported orders against their aggressors. Staff at the Refuge will assist ladies with taking out a court order if required. Most clients do not take out such orders. Paula spoke about ladies visiting the Refuge for many years before they were 'strong enough' to take out restraining orders.

Staff from the Ali-Curung Safe House spoke about how the safe house was established in the early days, the role of the safe house, how it operates at a day to day level, the relationship between it and other community organisations and their role as staff and volunteers.

Visiting communities visited and toured the safe house.

Key safe house issues raised by the ladies included:

Operation

Access

- The safe house operates on a 24 hour basis. Staff and volunteers are available to open the safe house for ladies any time of the day. One person is on call at all times;
- Night Patrol and Police let staff know when they are needed at the safe house if it is closed;
- The night patrol and safe house staff maintain a close working relationship and the night patrol staff utilise the safe house as a base.

Staffing

- Volunteers are provided with power tokens
- Staff are paid by CDEP

- Staff are non drinkers and a code of conduct applies to staff

Role of council

- Council supplies amenities (tea coffee, cleaning gear etc) on a weekly basis for staff to collect.
- Council provides administrative support
- Copies of day journals are supplied to Council office
- The Safe House Coordinator reports to Community Council on the work of the safe house at council meeting.

Clients

- Drunk ladies are not allowed in the safe house. When ladies arrive drunk they are taken to the police cells to sober up and then are allowed to utilise the safe house
- ½ way meet policy arrangements between the Tennant Creek and Ali-Curung safe House exist for clients use.
- Clients and their children are supplied with a meal while they are in the safe house
- House cleaning rules apply for to all clients
- Wives come to the safe house when their husbands are at the pub
- Murray Downs Community ladies also utilise the Safe House (30 km away), and ladies from other communities are welcome.

Husbands and Men

- Husbands are welcome to come and sit outside the fence and speak to their wives and see their kids
- Strict rules are maintained by the elders (men and women) and the staff in ensuring standards of behaviour are observed for husbands in dealing with the safe house, especially when their wives are clients. Elders immediately deal with breaches the next day with staff and family.
- Men respect the role and presence of the safe house

Management

Joyce Murray from ATSIC gave a talk about the role of ATSIC and other government and non government agencies in assisting the Ali-Curung Safe House Management Committee. ATSIC is the lead agency and coordinates all other agencies and is the first contact agency for the Management Committee.

Regular meetings are held with staff from the safe house and agencies supporting the safe house, they include officers from:

- ATSIIC
- Local Government
- Former Office of Aboriginal Development
- Family Court
- Ali-Curung Police
- Tennant Creek Refuge Coordinator
- Domestic Councillor Tennant Creek
- Family and Community Services
- Ali-Curung Health Clinic
- BRAADAG

The purpose of holding regular management meetings is for agencies to provide the administrative and planning assistance to staff as well as to training for staff in areas, which they identify they require. Regular meetings, usually once a month is considered an important forum for staff and agencies. Over the past six years there has been a high turn over of staff at the safe house. This has been coupled with a conscious continual process of encouraging young ladies to familiarise themselves with the operation and management of the safe house and many have taken on staffing duties throughout the six year life of the safe house.

The Role of the Night Patrol

Gwen Brown, former Coordinator of the Ali-Curung Night Patrol and present Aboriginal Community Police Officer (ACPO), spoke about the role of the night patrol at Ali-Curung. She utilised the same dot painting that was used for the talk on the role of the elders, the next day, shown below.

Gwen Brown previously described for the Kurduju Committee the same story about the role of the night patrol and its linkages with elders and their role as facilitators in the resolution process

“...during the day people go out to drink. They are out all day and come back a bit late. They cause problems on the

community. When Night Patrol finally stops them they won't listen because they're all drunk and want to fight. And maybe there can be jealous fights too you know – maybe husband might be drunk, wants to fight his wife but she's not home and all that, but they won't listen.

Then the next day the families come over to the Night Patrol, going to sort this problem out. So they get together in the community meeting, just the family members for that person, the Elders and the Night Patrol.

We use the Elders to come in and support Night Patrol in the community. If it gets worse and the person won't listen to the Elders, well we call in traditional owners then. They come and talk with the Elders and the Night Patrol about this person who's causing too much trouble. They then decide, the Elders and the traditional owners, what to do with the troublemaker. So this is just sorting out problems in this community meeting. It's like that's the highest people (the traditional owners) because we live on other people's land, they're traditional owners. But we never want to use that. (We use it) when trouble keeps going higher and higher.

DAY 4

The role of Elders and Aboriginal Dispute Resolution: How does it work, why does it work at Ali-Curung?



The presenters for the final session were Lionel James and Joe Marshall, facilitated by Marjorie Hayes. The session was conducted predominantly in language.

Joe and Lionel as senior men spoke at length about the importance of the elders in the overall justice strategy for the community.

The process of establishing a structure for utilising community meetings at Ali-Curung, where organisations, such as the safe house, night patrol and council are able to have social issues raised in cooperation with elders, is the single most crucial element in sustaining community justice processes.

Conversely, by arrangement in the process of developing the community justice system, a clear role for the elders developed. Through a process of using community meetings, precedence on acceptable and unacceptable standards of behaviour have been publicly reinforced. The work of the night

patrol and the safe house is reinforced by elders and builds the authority of staff to intervene in social problems where in the past they would not have.

There is a distinction by Ali-Curung residents between Traditional owners and Elders. Traditional Owners at Ali-Curung are Kaiditch. In disputes they are utilised as a last resort (their role is compared to that of the High Court). It is the Warlpiri Elders who make decisions, or rather adjudicate (their role is compared to that of a jury in a trial) about social behaviour at these community meetings.

CLOSE OF WORKSHOP



Willowra Community participants: (L to R) Dora Kittson, Molly Presley Naparrula, Peggy Nampajimba Martin and Julie Kittson with Marjorie Hayes (second from left).