



**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF THE NORTHERN TERRITORY**  
11th Assembly  
**Select Committee on Youth Suicides in the NT**

**Public Forum Transcript**  
11.00 am, Thursday 17 November 2011  
The Causeway, Ski Beach, Gove

**Members:** Ms Lynne Walker, MLA, Deputy Chair, Member for Nhulunbuy  
Mr Michael Gunner, MLA, Member for Fannie Bay  
Ms Kezia Purick, MLA, Member for Goyder  
Mr Peter Styles, MLA, Member for Sanderson

**Witnesses:** GALUPA MARNGARR SUICIDE PREVENTION GROUP

**Ms Sharon Yunupingu:**...and she is the main one that gets rung up for all these things usually, plus everybody else.

What happens is these ladies are out there and their waiting to hear, like whether there is a domestic violence or, someone has had a fight in town and their going to come back. And we used to hear is that, when they went to town, or there was a domestic violence that would lead to a threat of suicide or a suicide.

So now we have people on the ground actually waiting to hear for that, so that they are prepared to go and stop it; now we have reduced the rate dramatically, because of this group.

They are not a group that sits down during the day; they work at night. Like, we are talking about everyone knows that when people are suiciding it doesn't happen at day time, so this group works at night and late at night and most of these people are artists, or hunters, or whatever; so during the day they are doing their art-work, so they really don't have much sleep and not much rest either.

But it's been a bit difficult for this group, because we are a voluntary group and we haven't had much funding; Wesley Mission grabbed us thanks to Paul Braddock 18 months ago, whatever it was and they started us off with \$5000 funding and we have tried to get some stuff and some things happening like; some resources and assisting people with fuel and phone re-charge and things like that. Because it doesn't just come from this community that we get asked; "will they get asked for help".

This group has been out to even Galiwinku and Milingimbi because they have heard of this group. So, people are seeing that something is happening here that's working and it is a strong group of people that can deal with people.

I mean, we come across a lot of things that are probably culturally inappropriate as we would see; however this group gets around that and still deals with these people and deals with all their issues.

And they don't just do that, they follow-up and they make sure these people are safe and they just continue to follow-up to ensure that person is back on track.

**Dhayirra:** And we keep an eye on him or her, for that period.

**Ms Sharon Yunupingu:** Galea's community down here Galupa; she has taken a lot of people down to that community and the people in that community help to look after the person and just keep them going and keep their mind strong, you know?

**Dhayirra:** The other thing was we were looking at Mum's Outstation, about establishing and putting a program out there for both men and women – a rehab centre.

**Ms Lynne WALKER:** Which Homeland is that?

**Dhayirra:** Straight across, Gonyangara.

**Ms Sharon Yunupingu:** Murphy has designed a program, he designed six years ago, maybe a bit longer than that now – that he wants to run this program.

Thing is we have not been able to get the funds to be able to help us, so it has been a bit hard.

**Dhayirra:** This one here (in audible)

**Ms Sharon Yunupingu:** We started to do it but it just became really hard.

**Dhayirra:** Yes and Mum's been helping that, as well.

**Ms Sharon Yunupingu:** But when we have been to people for funding what we are getting told is; they won't give us the funding until we start it and we can prove to them that, that is what we are doing.

**Dhayirra:** We can ask this mob here?

**Ms Kezia PURICK:** So are they saying; "Show us your results..."

### **Banter**

**Ms Kezia PURICK:** ...but have they told you what kind of results they want to see?

**Ms Sharon Yunupingu:** They want to see us start it and it happening, before they give us funding. And what they are saying is; "We are sick of people coming and asking us for money and they don't even start the program."

**Dhayirra:** These mob don't see it like that – what your question is, they don't see as you do.

**Ms Sharon Yunupingu:** So they gave us some tents and things like that, a lot of camping equipment.

There was other things that we needed...

**Ms Kezia PURICK:** To get the programs going - training programs.

**Ms Sharon Yunupingu:** We needed money, we can do that...

**Dhayirra:** Yeah, as soon as that's done - handed over to me or Mum that will be out of my way, actually; I will get Mum and sisters to look after that side of it while I am here.

**Ms Lynne WALKER:** So who have your approaches been to, for funding support?

**Ms Sharon Yunupingu:** We have gone RIO, we have done heaps.

**Ms Kezia PURICK:** Commonwealth Government? NT Government?

**Ms Marion SCRYMGOUR (via telephone):** I was just wondering firstly; is it "Dhayirra"

**Dhayirra:** Yes.

**Ms Marion SCRYMGOUR (via telephone):** What support have you had from the Department of Health, the Mental Health people, but also -----05:54

**Dhayirra:** Yes, for me Marion Scrymgour; I have tried them and all they come up with would be ziltch!

**Ms Marion SCRYMGOUR (via telephone):** They have offered no support, whatsoever?

**Dhayirra:** No.

**Witness:** Mental Health and Drug and Alcohol here have come to our meetings and they have been supportive, as in the meetings etcetera. I don't know really what they can do for us as in funding, because they are government.

**Ms Marion SCRYMGOUR (via telephone):** Well if you are dealing with people and you are actually preventing people from going in to the mental health system, there should be preventative mental health funding given to your organisation.

**Witness:** I think our biggest problem is that the group want to keep it more traditional and what they say is; "back to their roots."

Okay, so we do everything along the lines of; it's all culturally...

**Dhayirra:** Connected through Yolngu foundation, yes?

**Ms Marion SCRYMGOUR (via telephone):** Yes.

**Witness:** It's not actually sitting down and doing like a counselling session that we know a counselling session as; it's culturally appropriate, it's hard for me to explain I suppose, maybe you want to explain?

**Dhayirra:** For education, we have our teacher here.

**Witness:** And it's getting people back to their people and getting closer to their people. Because that is what happens a lot with these people, is that they feel that they are not loved, so it's getting them back in to their family members.

**Dhayirra:** Without any conflicts.

**Ms Marion SCRYMGOUR (via telephone):** So it's dealing with wellbeing Yolngu way?

**Dhayirra:** Exactly, that's right!

**Ms Kezia PURICK:** Can I ask a question? When you said about the ski-beach area had the highest, was it mostly older people not Under-17?

**Dhayirra:** Younger.

**Ms Kezia PURICK:** Young ones, boys/girls?

**Dhayirra:** Both.

**Ms Kezia PURICK:** So very young ones?

**Dhayirra:** 20, 25-down.

**Witness:** Probably 25-down.

**Ms Marion SCRYMGOUR (via telephone):** And was alcohol and drugs a major issue?

**Dhayirra:** Involved, yes. That's why I want them out of here and rehabilitated out there.

**Witness:** Yes, get them out of town.

**Ms Kezia PURICK:** Homelands?

**Dhayirra:** Yeah, rehabilitate them there, make them think straight and then take them back.

**Witness:** But he is looking at a longer program, rather than three months

**Witness:** Ongoing project.

**Dhayirra:** Well we look at three months first.

**Witness:** But also what he is looking at, at that program is like teaching people how to hunt again, how to do their art work, all cultural stuff, getting them back to not losing their culture.

**Dhayirra:** It's like introducing cultural awareness to -----09:13. But with Yolngu its natural.

**Ms Kezia PURICK:** So over a period of a couple of weeks or a few weeks, how many families would you be trying to help?

**Dhayirra:** Depending how many families have problem.

**Ms Kezia PURICK:** In need?

**Dhayirra:** Yes. Like I said, we will concentrate from town and back this way. But if there is a need for people out at Yirrkala, we can always take them.

**Witness:** Because we don't just deal with suicide, there are other things that we relate; you know we relate everything to a suicide because that's what the community knows, that's what happens how it starts and that is the end product. So you could probably say it happens on a daily basis, sometimes on most of the weeks.

**Ms Kezia PURICK:** So it's that social and emotional wellbeing issues.

**Dhayirra:** Yes, all in one.

**Witness:** With many issues. And the thing is when you are talking about this group, they know the background of the person that they are dealing with – from when they were born to now. So they know all the in's and out's of what's happened

in their life to be able to deal with things, to go back and say; “maybe it is related to something in their life, let’s deal with that” and that is what they have been doing now. Before it was just more surface, but now they are saying; “well what’s going on with these people?” So they are looking more deep into that area.

**Ms Lynne WALKER:** One of the things; we have been at the East Arnhem Shire Council meeting this morning, talking with the elected counsellors from Groote Eylandt, Ramingining, Gapuwiyak, Yirrkala; and quite tragically as we were about to open the meeting I was advised that a 14-year old girl took her life last night in Angurugu.

So it was a very difficult conversation to have with the counsellors and they did start to open up and it was quite emotional for some people, obviously.

But one of the things a couple of the counsellors talked about was that they didn’t know how to help people in their community, how to see the signs that this was coming, so how do you do that? How do you work around that?

**Dhayirra:** We have family that we put there to keep an eye on them; like at -----11:55; so if there’s a problem there they ring us up straight away.

**Ms Lynne WALKER:** So what are the signs you are looking for?

**Dhayirra:** Threats, threatening themselves.

**Witness:** Domestic violence, or arguing.

**Ms Kezia PURICK:** Going off by themselves.

**Dhayirra:** Just domestic violence, just arguing mainly...

**Witness:** And that’s when we step in!

**Witness:** Whose money, whose payday, things like that, who is going to be affected here...

### **Banter**

**Witness:** Two are based at Ramingining and here we contact each other and other walking around in town contact us.

**Witness:** And say; “Oh it’s getting a bit loud out here” and so they come in and everybody knows they are on the warpath to deal with anything.

**Ms Kezia PURICK:** We heard also this morning, the counsellor from Groote Eylant -Angurugu Keith said that a lot of the time it’s girlfriend and boyfriend fighting and young ones; the girls fighting over young boys...

**Dhayirra:** Jealousy, everywhere.

**Witness:** We never experienced jealousy before here, until the permit system came in.

**Ms Kezia PURICK:** Alcohol?

**Dhayirra:** Yes.

**Ms Kezia PURICK:** That's interesting!

**Dhayirra:** Can I just say, before the intervention everything was cool as, right? True, everything was good and this group wouldn't have been here if it weren't for the intervention, alright?

Because as soon as the intervention came to the Territory, they took every individual's life away – there was not one individual that can do his own thing without the involvement of the intervention.

So what I am asking is either you scrap the intervention or come up with something else. That will be the best way to solve -----14:33. Whereas if they go in to town -----14:52 is at home doing nothing, waiting for the husband or the wife to come back and that starts an argument, as soon as they come back from town.

**Witness:** Mainly happening with wives and husbands and girlfriends and boyfriends.

**Witness:** What have you been up to, coming home late? (laughter)

**Witness:** Or they follow each other to the pub and stay there all afternoon and the kids come back from school and there is no one there to greet them, or feed them.

**Ms Sharon Yunupingu:** Whereas before they could take it home and it's monitored, at home.

But you know, this permit system didn't come in when the intervention came in, this came in before that with the Harmony Group; I know that because I was on the Harmony Group.

And it wasn't intended the way, when Tony Fuller?? was setting it up, it wasn't intended the way it has been set up.

There are people out here that haven't been able to get a permit once! And his thing was, everyone was given a permit then if you stuff up it'll be taken off you. And it hasn't got like that.

So then what happens is people can't get their permits, then other people that have got permits, then people want to come along and drink their beer and they are saying; "no you can't" and then it becomes a thing of 'you don't like me' or 'my family doesn't love me' and then we have them running off the ropes. So that is another thing that happens.

**Dhayirra:** If there is one argument there, then there is another argument here at home.

**Ms Kezia PURICK:** So Sharon, why couldn't a person get a permit in the first place?

**Ms Sharon Yunupingu:** I don't get it myself; out in the communities the Liquor Commission come out and they have a committee of people -----16:40 and they make a decision of what people are allowed; they are allowed alcohol and if they are not.

But at the end of the day...

**Witness:** The police have the last say!

**Ms Sharon Yunupingu:** But at the end of the day the police have the last say, so to me what is the point of that? It's tokenism – it's saying "we are giving you power to say what you can do in your community", but at the end of the day the police really have the power.

**Witness:** When they should go straight to the Police Station and say, "Can you issue me a licence?" That's all it is!

**Ms Sharon Yunupingu:** So I suppose it's from people's criminal history?

**Witness:** Yes, those kinds of things.

**Ms Sharon Yunupingu:** I used to be a corrections officer and I know around here, in town the -----17:23 people in town; I know people that have got really bad criminal histories and they are allowed to go in there!

**Witness:** They have got a permit?

**Witness:** And even the new ones have got no background check-up.

**Ms Kezia PURICK:** It's not consistent.

**Witness:** As soon as they get here, I am talking about -----17:36 right? There's a new job offered at the big smoke, they get off the plane – no background check-up.

**Witness:** It's just written out; permit visa?

**Witness:** Yes.

**Witness:** So to me, it's a bit unfair.

**Witness:** To everybody.

**Mr Peter STYLES:** What's the solution? Have you got any ideas, have you discussed any options for how that might get sorted?

**Dhayirra:** One thing from my point of view is what I said earlier, simple. For me, I should say.

**Witness:** And he gave up drinking! (laughter)

**Mr Peter STYLES:** Good move!

**Ms Lynne WALKER:** That's an interesting perspective on the permit system – the negative side of it.

**Witness:** But even you could see Lynne yourself, if you looked at the court list this town many years ago never had any break-and-enters; you could leave your house open and you'd know that no-one was every going to go in there, now and the only thing they get is grog...

**Conclude: 18:54**