'*We know they healthy cos they on country with old people*": demonstrating the value of the Yiriman Project

2010-2013

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Senior person: The signs that countrymen are getting healthier is that old people are on country. We know young people healthy because they on country with the old people. We know us old people are healthy because we with young people. We know country is healthy because together we on country. That is the sign. We always tell when country is healthy … the old people is there, country been fired, plenty of food on country and jila (water hole) were clean. Then we get taken away from country … it get sick … we get sick … we come back and country come alive … and we come alive … young people come alive.

Introduction

There are fewer more pressing and energetic topics in social policy than the fate of Indigenous young people in remote communities. Scholars, opinion writers, public policy leaders and practitioners are all grappling with understanding the origins of the problems, searching for solutions, and weighing up mechanisms for intervention and proposals for programs and projects. The past decade has seen an increase in the 'heat' of debates, with considerable polarisation, accusation, and hyperbole. On one side are those who oppose what they see as a proliferation since the mid-1970s of the 'homelands' or 'outstation' movement. On the other are those who seek to defend the growth of small communities in remote Australia (Austin-Broos 2011 p. 80). Often those pointing to the negative consequences for Indigenous young people of living in remote locations have been given 'airtime' by the national daily newspaper *The Australian*, as well as publications such as *Quadrant* magazine and think tanks such as the Bennelong Society and the Centre for Independent Studies. Consistently writers such as John Reeves QC, Peter Howson, Peter Sutton, Noel Pearson, Marcia Langton, Helen Hughes, Gary Johns and Bob Gregory have been skeptical of the value of Indigenous people maintaining culture and proximity to traditional country (Austin-Broos 2011, p. 82). The solution favoured by those fitting into this camp is to open up market opportunities and 'mainstream' services to Indigenous people, to shut down passive welfare, and to encourage young people's movement into more 'sustainable' regions for education, work, and modern global opportunities.

In contrast, and often in direct response to these kinds of views, have emerged those who have stood in defence of remote communities and the maintenance of traditional law and culture. Leading this charge has been a number of prominent Australian social scientists, including scholars from the ANU's Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research (CAEPR). A number of Aboriginal leaders such as Patrick and Mick Dodson, Peter Yu, and Larissa Behrendt have rallied behind CAEPR's John Altman, John Taylor, and Melinda Hinkson, pointing to the value of proximity to traditional country, the practice of law and culture, and the increased involvement of Indigenous people in the customary economy, natural resource management and security of the biodiversity of the 'National Estate'. In other words, the solutions proposed by these groups to remote young people's challenges is to have them more actively involved in work connected to 'country', culture and kin.

Arguably the political potency of the first group has been much stronger of recent times, influencing the Howard Government's Northern Territory Intervention and its continuity, and the adoption of national measures to 'normalise' Indigenous Affairs by the Rudd/Gillard Labor Governments.

Adding to this political context has been the adoption of public sector reforms that have seen greater emphasis placed on outcomes-based measures to manage projects. In particular new forms of 'managing out' government activity have been premised on the idea that work should only receive public money if social science can confirm its merits through 'evidence-based research'. This 'mentality' of government starts from the premise that

1) independent research acts as the authorities on what works,

2) theory and deduction are unhelpful,

3) quantitative measures are more reliable indicators of practice

4) direct cause and effect relationships between practice and positive social outcomes can and should be established and

5) evidence and conclusions are derived through the scientific method (formulation of questions and testing of hypotheses against systematic collection of data through observation and experiment).

However, there exists some good evidence of successes with projects that involve young people with the customary or cultural economy.

This report begins with a discussion of research literature concerned with the efficacy of on-country activity, culture, language, art and performance in supporting positive social outcomes for Indigenous people. It concludes that there is solid evidence of a correlation between positive social outcomes and activities that encourage culture, language and 'on-country' contact.

Yiriman and the challenges of demonstrating efficacy

As O'Faircheallaigh (2002, p. 1-3) observes, despite the existence of a massive body of work attempting to evaluate programmes designed for Indigenous groups, there are a number of fundamental problems associated with arriving at conclusions about the efficacy of the work. The first challenge relates to the difficulty of establishing and prioritising programme and policy objectives. Often projects have a diverse range of objectives and outcomes that drive work. This is particularly so in work taken on by Indigenous organisations where work is routinely provided by a number of government instrumentalities, all with their own agendas, funding regimes and strategic guidelines. Indeed, as O'Faircheallaigh (2002, p. 3) reminds us, government and other funding bodies are not monolithic. This means that there is often more than one set of agendas operating in relation to a particular funded project. One could suggest that this results in a lack of coherent translation and co-ordination between the language, culture and objectives of these government bodies. This diversity of funding interests often results in a lack of clarity about whose objectives should form the basis for evaluation.

Nowhere is this more evident than in work that targets change for Indigenous young people where the specialist objectives of individual governments compete for attention. Routinely this results in a 'tunnel vision' approach where funding agencies appear to be single-minded about projects focusing upon such things as literacy development, crime prevention and corrections, suicide prevention, health education, and employment and training. Often this approach contrasts with the agenda of Indigenous groups whose goals are grounded in conceptual ideas shaped in the "Aboriginal cultural and governmental domain" (see Rowse 1992).

Another challenge facing evaluation work is that little attention has been paid to explaining the impact that is often observed. Although funding bodies often seem to want to know about the outcomes, at times demanding to know why programmes exhibit inadequacy, rarely does work turn either to the methods used or the reasons for success (O'Faircheallaigh (2002, p. 3).

Another practical challenge facing useful evaluation is the cost of carrying out research. While funding bodies often expect projects to generate 'data' to convince them of efficacy, there is rarely additional resourcing provided to carry out this work. Additionally, what stands as evidence is most often associated with a particular understanding of the scientific method - bio-medical experimental research and other positivist quantitative approaches. The fact is that this kind of research work is very expensive and time consuming. Research work that has been accepted, peer-reviewed, published, and legitimised through these methods costs in the many hundreds of thousands of dollars. This is often well in excess of the budgets committed to the implementation of the programmes themselves.

A preference for the experimental scientific model of research also results in considerable ontological stock being placed in seeking out 'cause and effect' conclusions. Regularly research design seeks out singular causes rather than explicating or seeking explanations, elaborations or extending knowledge. As a consequence rarely does evaluation turn its attention to the influence of history, political and institutional context, language, cultural practice, and the inter-relationship between outsiders and insiders. Likewise, the emergence of unintended consequences is often also missed.

Carrying out large-scale quantitative surveys, interviews and bio-medical testing is also often highly invasive and time consuming for the subjects of the research. Furthermore, this over-reliance on western and scientific knowledge 'extraction' is often incompatible with Indigenous knowledge practices; at times proving monumentality insensitive to the language, cultural protocols, ideas and methods that exists in Indigenous cultural domain (see Tuhiwai Smith 2012). When this happens explanations offered make little sense to those designing and managing the work. Often research conclusions rarely benefit from local insight and lack the strength of data that has been meaningfully acquired. The result is that evaluation studies stockpile without relevance or practical applicability, adding to the body of research carried out 'upon' Indigenous groups without contributing to policy or practice.

Taken together these challenges often result in the production of work that is disappointing, perfunctory and invasive, and without consequence.

Using multiple methods to test efficacy

Guba and Lincoln (cited in O'Faircheallaigh 2002, p. 16) provide one way of responding to these challenges. The approach they suggest is called a 'mutual simultaneous shaping'. This approach implies that no one approach, research methodology or set of explanations about a project's performance is able to provide depth. For instance, one funding body with an interest in a project's educational outputs may attribute the failure of a programme to Aboriginal people's inadequacies in English literacy. Another may not be the least bit interested in education. Some Aboriginal people may see the programme as a raging success because of the regularity with which young people are exposed to an Indigenous language.

This study took counsel from Guba and Lincoln and adopted an approach to evaluation with the following features:

- An exploration of the multiple goals of 'various stakeholders'
- Consideration of the explanations and views of a range of 'stakeholders'
- Multiple methods of data collection
- Comparison of the varying conclusions from different 'stakeholders' as well as intelligence emerging from the multiple methods of data collection.

The research began with an examination of the various and sometime competing goals of a range of individuals and groups. In the initial stages of the work the views, as expressed in local language and concepts, of senior people were sought. In particular the "cultural bosses" were asked to describe their goals for the project. Other local people, such as participants, family members and representatives from 'partner' organisations were asked to explain Yiriman's objectives and achievements.

Next, records from the project were sought. Much of the work is well documented in reports, funding applications, academic reviews, photo books, films, on-line material, attendance records, audio recordings, video footage, employment/training statistics, meeting minutes and (from 2011) journals and data sheets.

This work formed much of the evidence allowing claims made by Yiriman staff to be checked against their own sources of evidence. This approach is typically described as an 'audit review' and provided a point of comparison with the ideas and goals of Yiriman cultural bosses.

In addition, the following other methodological devices were used to help check, compare and offer contrasting illumination on the performance of Yiriman:

- A review of the literature concerned with youth practice and community development in remote settings to establish features of good practice in order that this could be compared with the approaches taken in the

Yiriman Project.

- An appraisal of media reviews and articles.
- Written and verbal feedback from community members about trips and other project work.
- Direct participation and observation in field trips, bosses meetings, workshops and other activities involving young people and others (Field visits included time spent in Fitzroy Crossing, Derby, Broome and a range of remote communities in the Fitzroy Valley, including extended visits of two months during 2009 and 2010. Visits were timed to allow some firsthand observation of various elements of the project and attendance at a number of key events.)
- Interviews of various Yiriman staff while they were visiting Perth.

During this review process the most important guiding principal for making assessments was to seek evidence from at least three different sources. The well-established social scientific device of 'triangulation' was used to confirm or cast doubt upon the merit of claims made by the range of 'stakeholders'. In this way rhetoric and practice was compared and the work of Yiriman was checked to see how it matches with a range of other sources of evidence.

In addition, the evaluation involved identifying factors contributing to the successful implementation of various projects carried out, factors that may hinder the implementation of the work, and assessment of other outcomes from the work that are unintended but socially productive.

The intention was to help:

i) record the methods and outcomes of the project for future generations of staff, participants and cultural bosses,

ii) articulate the efficacy of the Yiriman Project to outside bodies including governments, philanthropic organisations and the corporate sector,

iii) test the goals and interpretive explanations of funding bodies and other outsiders,

iv) shape future planning of activities and

v) assist staff and bosses to build into their work a cycle of review.

This report is the final report of a three-year research project to evaluate the Yiriman project. The research project involves an arrangement between the Kimberley Aboriginal Law and Cultural Centre (KALACC), Murdoch University (Western Australia) and community members. Part of its aim is to allow the Yiriman Cultural Advisory Body (including Fitzroy Valley elders and cultural bosses) and staff to reflect upon the processes they have developed in their work and to participate in strengthening its structure.

The goals of the Yiriman Project

As explained, the first task of research of this kind is to identify the various goals and aspirations for the project as set out by various individuals and groups. This was no simple feat because there are many 'stories' about Yiriman and what it seeks to do. Cultural bosses, funding bodies, young people, workers, other 'partner' groups, researchers, and media producers all had remarkably different ideas about what Yiriman looks like, sets out to achieve, and manages to do.

For example, the project was variously described as a 'youth diversionary program', a 'cultural maintenance project' and 'a way to heal young people, heal country and heal community'. Some emphasised the project's role in changing the behaviour of young people, particularly in relation to their criminal and anti-social behaviour. Others focused upon the project as a way of improving young people's health, particularly responding to the growing incidence of suicide, alcohol and drug use, sexual health and poor diet. Regularly funding bodies and many community members turned to Yiriman as a way of encouraging community building and intergenerational exchange. For others the project is expected to help prepare young people for the market economy and help direct them into education, training and employment. Important to note is that many of the senior cultural bosses focused upon Yiriman as a way to help maintain culture, language and relationships to country. In addition, many articulate the central importance of 'bringing out stories', building narratives and offering young people a chance to join the currency of traditional culture and law.

Senior people

The first place to start in understanding the work is to turn to what senior people (those who established Yiriman) have had to say. The views of this group are important because they continue to act both as advisers and as those who govern the general plans of the project. They are also important because the project started because these *Karajarri*, *Nyikina*, *Mangala* and *Walmajarri* men and women were concerned about the future of their young. Indeed following long established traditions, it is they who set up the organisation.

Yiriman 'bosses' have a number of ways of describing the work.

> *Going out bush is beautiful … young people find themselves when they're out there ... when they are finally out there (Annette Kogola).*
>
> *You can get all kind of animal out there. You can support your family with them things … you're teaching your kids that knowledge [so that] when they get married … they go back to that country and get animal from there, and really look after their family (Claudie Carter).*
>
> *We got lots of kids not following our culture, they not following mainstream culture, they following lazy culture. We gotta stop this and … this is what Yiriman has been doing for ten years (Anthony Watson).*
>
> *What we been talking about is a role model, give them that confidence, lift them young people up, so they are the next lot to pass this on (Annie Milgen).*
>
> *We got to look at our old people. We got to use a different school. Yiriman is like a school for our young people – learning our duty of care for country (Lloyd Kwilla).*
>
> *Old people do lots of singing, get young people into language group, we tell them what skin we. Get them respecting old people. Cutting boomerang. Drive kids out looking for food, kangaroo, turkey. Learn how to find a feed. Old people been tell story, young people pick up that story. (Mr Joe Brown).*
>
> *There was a mixture of old and young, some from different groups. Good to encourage young people to get away from town. Need kids to learn about culture, language and culture. Respect, that word is what it's all about (Joy Nuggett).*
>
> *In order to find yourself you have to get lost. So best place to get lost is country (William Watson).*
>
> *All you gotta do is chuck away that idea that you got somebody over you, you can overcome that. That's why we bringing you guys out here to clear your brains to think, think, where you gonna go (John Watson).*

We been taking our kids and teaching them, teaching a lot about country, looking after country, looking after the animals, and that how we started our rangers. We now have another organisation that is the rangers and we have got young people that have been through Yiriman then they lead the way in the ranger's job. I am really proud of some of them young people today. They are really leaders today and they do everything with country today.

I been doing my bush medicine through Yiriman which I have been taught by the old people. I said, 'no I don't want to forget my knowledge, my culture, I will start my bush medicine stuff. It is not for me it is for the young so they can carry on. So we did lots. Now that I'm on the workshop side I do my workshop on bush medicine. The ladies from Karrajarri and Walmatjarri they seen what I been doing and they been doing it too, getting those young girls coming in. Now that they are doing their programmes at the school teaching the young ones (Annie Milgin in Reconciliation Australia 2012)

Quite a few years ago. Twelve years ago I was concerned about kids … when people move out of the station and into town a lot of them got into trouble and started drinking … kids often got lost in town. The idea we put together four language groups under Yiriman. That's Karajarri, Nyikina, Mangala and Walmatjarri. We feel for these kids and want to get them out on the country where their mothers and fathers come from out there at the jila. We call the jila the spring … during the year we used to dig it out, to clean it out. We never had backhoes to dig it out. We never had machines. We just had coolaman and the old people used to carry it on their head. And people used to go out and be dancing and singing. That is how they used to look after their country (John Watson in video for Reconciliation Australia 2012)

Staff

Yiriman workers often share the insights of bosses but sometimes put things in slightly different ways. For example, Peter Ljubic, the project's first coordinator, describes the key feature of the Yiriman Project,

> *The key theme, the key objective, the key goal, the key outcome that has gone right through the last decade with the Yiriman Project is simply building stories in our young people (interview with Peter Ljubic, October 2010).*
>
> *I think the simplest explanation of Yiriman would be: providing young people (both with problems and without) the opportunity to reconnect and redevelop relationships with their old people and with country. Yiriman does this by providing the resources to the old people to travel on to country. This creates a space for knowledge of country to be transferred between the old people and the young people (interview with Peter Ljubic, October 2010).*

Hugh Wallace Smith, former men's project coordinator of Yiriman, makes the point that the project draws upon young people as part of the solution. He said that it helps 'resource and advocate for young leaders to develop confidence … they're campaigning for the relevance of these projects to their peers' (Hugh Wallace Smith cited in Taylor 2010, p. 86).

Michelle Coles, describing the importance Yiriman trips have on the physical and spiritual health of young people, said:

> The old people view this as a holistic approach about re-inscribing identity and building resilience. Trips promote exercise, food gathering, eating well, avoiding drugs and alcohol, practicing positive recreational activities, spending intensive and valuable time with family, learning and teaching from each other in respectful ways (Michelle Coles cited in Taylor 2010, p. 88).

According to Hugh Wallace Smith, families come out of a bush trip more united and hopeful about their future.

> They come out talking about where they went, what they did, seeing where their grandparents were. Young people go from seeing the families going out a bit scattered and disconnected, to coming back so tight and connected, having reinforced cultural roles, identities and responsibilities (Hugh Wallace-Smith cited in Taylor 2010, p. 88)

Simon Keenan, one of the Yiriman Men's Coordinators, explains the crucial role of local bosses and mentors.

> We have done trips out on country, which go for two weeks, walking 150 k's through the desert. They have not been compelled to do this, but they have done it because we have had local people act as mentors,

> continuously putting in time and effort. They are like Pied Pipers and young people follow them around (Hansard 2010, p. 53).

Yiriman provides a means through which young people can sit with others and get more actively involved in talk about the future of communities. Michelle Coles explains,

> Everyone sits around the campfire talking: 'How many bush turkeys are out here and can be taken for food?' Government want to put a proposed development or mine through a part of the desert. Yiriman goes to that country so young people are listening to the old people, discussing their concerns. Travelling along that country gives younger people a context: they learn more from Elders with each trip to the area and they come to understand how those Elders are weighing up the complexities of general access to area (Michelle Coles cited in Taylor 2010, p. 87)

The project maintains many of its earlier aspirations and activities. As present Yiriman Coordinator Scott Herring says,

> Believing in the power of their own Culture and of Country to heal their own young people, the Elders began taking young people out on to Country, travelling over Country by foot, camel or vehicle, teaching and speaking in language, visiting ancestral sites, storytelling, engaging in traditional song and dance, preparing young people for ceremony and law practices, teaching traditional crafts, tracking, hunting, and preparing traditional bush tucker, practicing bush medicine, and passing on knowledge to the younger generations. The Yiriman Project continues all of these practices throughout its programs today (Scott Herring cited Laneway 2013)

Coordinator Jen Klewitz explains that this belief in the power of country, family and story is central to the philosophy of Yiriman.

> Beyond the transfer of knowledge and skills, Yiriman trips provide a safe and effective space for relationship to others and to Country to develop, and for communication and decision making to occur by Cultural means. In this way, cultural healing, originating from within the culture and guided by the Elders themselves, occurs. The Elders believed at the start, as they do today, that through this reconnection and the resulting sense of cultural identity and belonging, young people gain strength and resilience, and build positive stories which they then take with them back to their towns and communities. (Jen Klewitz cited Laneway 2013)

Outsiders

Additionally, Yiriman works in league with others who share a stake in land care, youth development, Indigenous lore and custom and community work. Indeed, one of the features of Yiriman's work is that they have been working with others since their inception. These groups include local groups such as pastoralists, fire managers, scientists, medical services, researchers, schools, ranger teams, community service organisations, universities and corrections staff. They also work in conjunction with funding organisations who support the work in relation to justice outcomes, suicide prevention, health and well-being, community building, land management and intergenerational exchange. Therefore it is worth turning to what some of these groups see as the goals of Yiriman. What follows is a set of synopses which outline the key objectives of Yiriman as set out by these groups.

- The **J.T. Reid Trust** has supported the employment of Aboriginal staff as part of the Yiriman team. In this way this philanthropic trust has support the goal of building the capacity of local people to participate in the delivery of the work, carrying out on-country governance and management, community building and communication and skill development across the generations. A key objective under this funding arrangement is the goal of approaching the work local people as key 'drivers', building labour market skills and operating within what has been described as a 'cultural framework'.

- The **Commonwealth Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and indigenous Affairs** has supported Yiriman's work through their Community Investment Program. The goals of this funding arrangement can best be understood as concentrating on building the capacity of women and young people through involvement in cultural knowledge transfer. Specifically they set out to support four objectives:
    - Objective 1: Arrange back to country trips initiated and designed by young women and senior women and cross regional cultural exchanges initiated by women.
    - Objective 2: Arrange back to country trips with families and all generations designed and led by senior elders and workshops focused on cultural mapping and knowledge transfer.
    - Objective 3: Arrange workshops on Indigenous knowledge as a foundation for sustainable economy
    - Objective 4: Develop partnerships with other organisations

- The **Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing** supported Yiriman's work through the 'Suicide Prevention Project'. The goals of this funding arrangement can best be understood as supporting cultural activities to strengthen self-confidence, self-esteem and good health as a way of combating youth suicide. Specifically they set out to support these objectives:
    - Younger participants learn and reconnect with culture, strengthening identity, valuing culture and taking on cultural responsibilities.
    - Building self-esteem and self-confidence in young people.
    - Encouraging strong young adult mentors to take on responsibility and leadership roles.
    - Building community ownership and support.
    - Supporting community members to feel they are able to better respond to the challenges faced by their young people.
    - Increasing awareness and education regarding mental illness, drug/alcohol abuse and suicide.
    - Build relationships between young people, mentors and cultural leaders resulting in greater levels of respect and understanding.
    - Educate and build for individuals 'at risk' and family members the ability to acknowledge problems, know where to seek support and feel more comfortable doing so.
    - Encourage relationships, partnerships and agreements developed between community support networks/professionals, Yiriman Project and young people at risk.
    - Promote positive health messages
    - Provide healthy fun activity involving young people and community in safe space without the use of alcohol and drugs.
    - Create positive and healthy discussions about suicide prevention in a safe environment.
    - Provide young people and family with a break from town and enjoying bush life without the use of alcohol and drugs.

- The **Commonwealth Attorney General's Department** supported Yiriman's work through the 'Indigenous Justice Program'. The goals of this funding arrangement can best be understood as supporting crime prevention work with young people. Specifically they set out to support these objectives:
    - Offe**r advocacy and support to young people. Spe**cifically this means supporting young people to attend school regularly, assisting young people to comply with their court orders (e.g. contacting their Youth Justice Worker on set days by phone) and providing young people with culturally appropriate diversionary activities.
    - Building stronger relationships between young people and family groups
    - Foster networks and relationships between organisations and groups that work with young people and focus on mental health and alcohol and drug abuse
    - Plan and carry out bush trips.
    - People at risk of incarceration are provided with prevention and diversion.
    - Supporting different 'service sites' and locations

- **Woodside Energy** supported Yiriman's work through its Community Sponsorship Program. The goals of this funding arrangement can best be understood as supporting cultural bush camps. Specifically they set out to support these objectives:
    - connect young people and elders,
    - connect young people to country,
    - provide young people with cultural immersion, cultural practices and language,
    - provide opportunities for young people to reflect and evaluate one's own life, and
    - provide guidance and counselling to young people.

There are a number of important observations the goals for the Yiriman Project. The first is that they are many and varied. While it may not be the case that these goals necessarily conflict, it is the case that they are not all the same. The second observation to make is that these various aspirations for the Yiriman Project are set out using a range of conceptual ideas and are framed using different planning approaches. For example, Aboriginal ideas about law and justice are not the same as those working for the Attorney Generals Department. As a consequence it is impossible to articulate these multiple ideals in a way that made sense to all. In addition, what appear to be goals and objectives for some are methods for others. For example, cultural bosses often saw the process of on-country travel as the ultimate goal of their work. For some funding bodies this is much more a mechanism for achieving other outcomes.

This does not have to be a problem, particularly if there is agreement on the range of goals and the weight attributed to each. However, over the past four years there is little evidence that some of the funding bodies are prepared to enter into these kinds of agreements. It seems they prefer instead to resist an approach (one that has been adopted elsewhere) which is directed at consolidating goals and working across jurisdictions and departments in order to build a consistent reporting regime.

Yiriman and the provision of support to young people and community

The following data gives a general sense of the numbers of young people and community members provided with support through their involvement in Yiriman activities over the period from 2008-the present time. It is important to note that this data shifts both in form and numbers over this period. This reflects two main influences:

1) regular changes in the reporting requirements of funding bodies and,
2) the development of reporting templates by Yiriman staff in 2011 in conjunction with the project evaluator.

08-09 – referral and support

Type of support/activity	Numbers
Client support – one on one	124 (37Female)
Client support - family	24
Other workshops	32
Cultural activity (eg. language, skin education, artefact production, visits to sites, traditional knowledge transmission)	110
Intense response (suicide, mental health referral)	3
Referred from family/community	62
Referred through other contacts	47
Referred through police and justice	15

09-10 – referral and support

Type of support/activity	Numbers
Client support – one on one	157 (12 Female)
Other workshops	13
Cultural activity (eg. language, skin education, artefact production, visits to sites, traditional knowledge transmission)	78
Intense response (suicide, mental health referral)	3
Referred from family/community	62
Referred through other contacts	13
Referred through police and justice	17

2011 – referral and support

Type of support/activity	Numbers
Client support – one on one	203 (95 Female)
Other workshops	13
Cultural activity (eg. language, skin education, artefact production, visits to sites, traditional knowledge transmission)	78
Intense response (suicide, mental health referral)	2
Referred from family	203
Direct support	168
Information	35

2012 content of support

Type of support/activity	Numbers
Client support – number of one-on-one sessions	226
Education content	150
Information	76
Female	91
Male	135

2012 NSPS – referral and support

Type of support/activity	Numbers
Client support – one on one	93 (25 Female)
Other workshops	42
Cultural activity (eg. language, skin education, artefact production, visits to sites, traditional knowledge transmission)	61
Participants who have previously been involved	69
New participants	24
Between 1-8 hours of involvement	9
2 days	46
5 days	43
7 or more days	4

2013 NSPS – referral and support (note until March 2013)

Type of support/activity	Numbers
Client support – one on one	32 (12 Female)
Other workshops	42
Cultural activity (eg. language, skin education, artefact production, visits to sites, traditional knowledge transmission)	32
Participants who have previously been involved	22
New participants	10
Between 1-8 hours of involvement	32

What happens on a Yiriman trip?

One way to better understand the achievements of the Yiriman Project is to describe what happens on a Yiriman 'on-country' trip. While this may seem a simple task, it is important to note that there are many different kinds of Yiriman trips. For example, many people who have heard about Yiriman will not know that not every trip involves long walks across country with young people following in the footsteps of elders. Indeed some trips involve traveling to a designated place, setting up camp and carrying out 'wild harvest' work with bush flora, ochre, fruit and vegetables. Other trips have concentrated much more on the filming of senior people's stories using digital cameras and audio equipment. There have been smaller trips where a smaller family group has been supported to travel to a specific place for cultural instruction. Sometimes the work focuses on young men, others times young women. Many trips have both men and women. A number of Kimberley ranger teams have been strongly influenced by the work of Yiriman. As a consequence, sometimes trips will involve 'tagging along' with ranger teams on their field trips and work patrols. Yiriman has hosted a number of trips outside the region, travelling as far afield as Darwin, Perth and even France to give people a chance to experience cultural exchanges.

Typically, a Yiriman trip begins when elders, some young people, and Yiriman workers meet to start planning. Decisions about the destination of the trip and things to do along the way are shaped by a range of factors including who is available to travel, weather conditions, the needs of local young people, local community events, when a place was last visited, the specific country, and opportunities to travel with other groups. Of critical importance at this stage is the direction of the community "bosses" (senior people) who identify where and when to travel, who should go and the activities to be undertaken. For example, at the beginning of trips where traditional fire management occurs, it is customary for Yiriman participants to meet with senior custodians to consider where and when they should carry out the work. Discussions started with elders who passed on their direct knowledge of which areas had not been burnt by Aboriginal fire management for over 30 years.

"Back-to-country" trips can last from a couple of days to a couple of weeks, depending on the area being traveled to, the work being undertaken and the time of year. Anywhere from 12 to almost 100 people participate in the trips. For those involved in walking trips, the physical demands of the walk can be quite arduous. The participants, young and old, often walk between 15 and 20 kilometres a day, regularly combining travel with other tasks such as digging, hunting and collecting firewood. As the following account from the Mowla Bluff 2010 trip demonstrates, the demands of walking country are wide-ranging:

> *Most mornings there was a race to get up but no one ever bettered Mr Watson who always beat the sun. We had breakfast, decamped and met*

to talk a little more about our kin obligations and what the bosses had in mind for us before we started off. We walked south along Geeguly Creek at ambling pace. John had made it clear that 'this was not a running race and the smart ones are those who listen to country, look after their skin groups, find water and get a feed". There was a little bit burning of small areas on a couple of days. Feral pigs, goanna, snake, bush tomato, bush blackcurrant and other foods were hunted out as we went. Because we walked close to the creek there were many opportunities for the men to dig wells for water. It may have appeared that different groups went their separate ways. However, all it would take is for one to yell out 'pigey pigey' (they had spotted a feral pig) and within seconds the whole team would converge in the one place for the hunt. At times there was a bit of humbug about how tough it was but mostly the young fellas got on with it.

The three older men traveled in the support vehicles. They started singing for country first things in the morning. It didn't matter where we were … whether we stopped for a cuppa tea, lunch or to go to the toilet … first thing in the morning and last thing at night … wherever we stopped the old boys would sing out to country. One of the most moving things I saw was the three old fellas sitting down on the ground at the camp in the afternoon singing the young fellas back into the camp, singing for the old people (spirits) to keep them safe and singing out to the boys so they felt nurtured into the last part of each walk. Hearing old men express their love and concern in this way has got to be one of the most powerful memories I have of Yiriman (field notes July 2010).

As part of this experience of traveling through country with their elders, young people take up opportunities to participate in a range of practical activities. These practical activities are often associated with taking care of country and reinvigorating Aboriginal lore and culture. Examples of the kind of activities built into Yiriman trips include work in association with Ranger teams, plant harvesting, fish research, quarantine work, fire management, fine arts work with Mangkaja Arts Centre, dance and song rehearsals for KALACC Festivals, education/training, and suicide prevention 'first aid'.

The evidence of Yiriman's performance

As observed earlier, it is important to review a range of sources in order to build a rich picture of the work of the Yiriman Project. This next element of the report includes an audit review comparing performance against funded objectives; an examination of records of other activities not necessarily funded or part of formal agreements; observations of outsiders (such as researchers, policy people, local magistrates, service providers, parliamentary inquiries and Reconciliation Australia); evidence of individual change in the form of case studies; evidence of community change and a comparison of the methods used, with evidence from elsewhere of the efficacy of cultural maintenance, Indigenous language use and involvement in on-country activity.

An audit review: comparing achievement with plans

In order to make assessments about the success of a program the first and most critical question to ask is: has the program achieved what it set out to achieve? This kind of review is often described as an 'audit review' and involves comparing the evidence of activity with the key objectives as articulated in various funding agreements. Details of the audit review of activities over the past three years are included in Appendix One. What follows is a set of tables with conclusions taken from Appendix One that compares what the organisation claims in its reports with the available evidence. Using a rating scale developed from previous similar evaluations, assessments are made about the extent of positive performance.

Table: Rating scale for performance

Unclear	There is insufficient information to make a judgment about this element of the work.
Inadequate	This element of the work does not meet industry standards and has not met the requirement of the funding contract.
Slow progress	This element of the work has been held up or still to begin
In progress	This element of the work has yet to be completed, is ongoing and/or is going according to plan
Completed and good	This element of the work has adequately met the expected industry standards and expectation of the funding contract
Strong	This element of the work clearly meets industry standards and very solidly meets the requirements of the funding contract. A measure of the quality of this element of the work is that it is consistent with the best standards being applied in similar work elsewhere.
1st Class	This element of the work is impressive and represents an example of practice that is rarely matched in similar work elsewhere. A measure of the quality of this element of the work is that it is capable of featuring in academic literature, winning recognised awards, conference presentations or professional development training.

J.T.Reid Trust

The J.T. Reid Trust has supported the employment of Aboriginal staff as part of the Yiriman team. During 2009 and 2010 four local *Walmajarri* people were employed as Yiriman Project Officers to work in conjunction with the two Project Coordinators. In 2011 four Aboriginal people were employed. This allowed local people to build skills in elements of community service practice, project management and also to maintain and extend their involvement in cultural activities and work within what has been described as a 'cultural framework'. One important feature of this element of the work is the importance of making allowances for family and cultural obligations. Contracts were designed to reflect realistic goals and expectations and build in opportunities for staff to maximise their involvement in activities where knowledge and skills of the Aboriginal cultural domain were exercised. This has allowed younger people with family obligations and more senior people with many leadership obligations to take on these roles. Discrete project-based work has given Aboriginal workers considerable flexibility and allowed the 'right people' to take on the work.

Over the last two years a dozen other Aboriginal staff members have also taken on positions on different projects and in helping organise on-country trips. This element of the Yiriman Project represents one of the more recent successes, particularly when one considers the many challenges faced in recruiting and involving local people in community-based projects (See Table 3: Aboriginal workers supported under J.T.Reid Trust)

Rating: Completed and good

Community Investment Programme - Commonwealth Department of Family, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA)

This element of the work has the objective of supporting women from across the region to travel on country to specific sites for a variety of purposes. A key element of this work has been to maintain the ongoing work in 'Wild Harvest Project', identifying plants throughout various seasons, passing on knowledge from the older to younger people and supporting experimentation with new and diverse economies in the area of bush harvesting and production. The focus of this work has been incorporating bush medicine knowledge into workshops and practicing methods for essential oil extraction and in making soap, ointments, and balms. Women have also worked with bush plants to create natural dyes.

The Yiriman Women's Coordinator has worked in association with senior women, middle-aged women and young women, a trainer and facilitator, and a number of partner organisations to help make it possible for women to practice small-scale seed collection and trial the production of various products; over the past three years over 200 individual women have participated in this element of the work. Approximately 80% of those involved have also received assistance (such as information and referral for health and other social needs) from Yiriman staff and others organisations involved in the work. Over the past three years key features of this work have included:

Objectives	Performance	Evidence of efficacy
Objective 1 Back to country trips initiated and designed by young women and senior women. Cross regional cultural exchanges initiated by women.	An average of six key events carried out per year: (eg. Karajarri women's distillery and soap making trip 2010, Walmatjarri trip to areas south of Wangkajunka 2011, Karajarri women's healing trip September 2011, Introducing the Distillery Workshop Broome 2012, Karajarri shell collecting trip 2012.	Partnerships with other organisations 'Sustainable Wild Harvest' picture book report produced with much photo evidence and description (2011). Yiriman photo and film archive includes much footage of the work. The evaluator has viewed this (2009-2012) Interviews with Sylvia and Mandy Shoveller July 2011, Anthea Nargoodah Nov 2011, Annie Milgen July 2011. Evaluator participation in workshop in August 2011 and September 2011 Involvement in micro-decision making (eg. the kinds of wild harvest products to be produced), project level decision making (eg. senior women driving project ideas, managing project budgets, carefully encouraging community involvement) and policy level planning (eg. individual senior leaders and young women involved in annual strategic planning and governance of other organisations such as native title governance structure).

		Extent of involvement and leadership in the various projects hosted by Yiriman (see earlier discussion of numbers involved)
Objective 2 Back to country trips with families and all generations designed and led by senior elders.	All trips and activities had solid participation of women across at least three generations. All trips have been planned and instituted by at least one senior woman working with Yiriman staff. This is one of the most impressive elements of the work.	Project report details extraordinary involvement of women in leading events. 'Sustainable Wild Harvest' picture book report produced with much photo evidence and description. Interviews with Sylvia and Mandy Shoveller July 2011, Anthea Nargoodah Nov 2011, Annie Milgen July 2011. National winner of Reconciliation Australia's Governance Award 2012 Evaluator participation in workshop in August 2011 and September 2011.
Objective 3 Workshops on Indigenous knowledge as a foundation for sustainable economy	A feature of this work is that training; planning, doing and producing wild harvest products are all rolled into the on-country experience. All the trips have been recorded and presented back to participants in the form of a picture book report.	Project report details these events involvement of women in leading events. Project workers and Coordinator have carefully documented this element in professional diaries. 'Sustainable Wild Harvest' picture book report produced with strong photo evidence of this element of the work. Yiriman photo and film archive includes much footage of the work. The evaluator has viewed this. Interviews with Sylvia and Mandy Shoveller July 2011, Anthea Nargoodah Nov 2011, Annie Milgen July 2011, Robyn Wells August 2011. Evaluator participation in workshops in August 2011 and September 2011.
Objective 4 Partnerships with other organisations	Partners have included the Kimberley Land Council (KLC), STANDBY Suicide Response Service (Kinway), Kimberley TAFE, Environs Kimberley, FASD research, Jarlmadangah Burru, Mulan, Fitzroy Crossing Schools, the Women's Resource Centre, Alive and Kicking Goals, Men's Outreach, Headspace, Kimberley Population Health Unit, Fitzroy Valley Hospital and the Nyikina Mangala, Karajarri, Ngurarra Ranger teams.	All workshops have been carried out in conjunction with at least one other organisation (KLC, local Aboriginal corporations, Health Centres and Arts Centres) 'Sustainable Wild Harvest' picture book report produced with strong photo evidence of partner involvement. Interviews with KLC Women's Ranger Officer, September 2011, STANDBY coordinator November 2011, TAFE Project Officer November 2011, a range of Aboriginal women from across the region throughout 2011. Evaluator participation in Karajarri family trip August 2011, Karajarri Women's trip September 2011 trip that had KLC involvement.

National Suicide Prevention Strategy (Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing)

Over the period the Project has carried out and supported work designed to act as a preventative strategy against young people's attempts at suicide. The main strategies adopted in this regard include providing young people with the chance to:

- spend time with solid adult role models,
- experience alternative and positive activities away from town life, and
- involve themselves in a variety of 'old cultural practices' that promote health and wellbeing.

Part of the focus of this work has been visiting important sites of the forebears, hearing the 'stories', knowledge and insights from elders and middle-aged people, and experiencing first hand the connection between country, family, knowledge and health.

The structure of most days includes morning clean up of camping site, a morning meeting led by elders to plan the day, a morning 'talking culture' session (focus on skin and family systems, language, cultural health and safety, codes of conduct, respect), packing camp, physical activity (ie. walking, artifact production, wild harvest production, ranger activity, fire management work, hunting), trips to a cultural site (including knowledge transmission and other cultural protocols), preparing and cooking meals, and late afternoon and evening meetings (elders lead stories, cultural induction, life lessons, singing and dance). This work is conducted in association with senior men and women, middle-aged men and women, and younger men and women who act as mentors and role models. Often other adults including representatives from partner organisations, trainers and Ranger teams join the trips. While on country, senior people have a very strong role in governing the day-to-day arrangements, educating the young and directing movements. Over the past three years over 400 individuals have participated in these elements of the work. It is estimated that at least 75% of the young people attending have received additional assistance (such as information and referral for health and other social needs) from Yiriman staff either while on the trips or in follow-up contact. Over the past three years performance in relation to formal objectives of this work includes:

Objective	Performance	Evidence of efficacy
Younger participants learn and reconnect with culture, strengthen identity, value culture & take on cultural responsibilities (Younger participants learn and reconnect with culture, strengthen identity, value culture & take on cultural responsibilities, cont.)	Between 10-12 trips per year all of which allow young people to participate in a deep experience of cultural immersion (see above description of daily activities).	Photo archival records from trips are full of evidence of young people's active involvement in this regard. Video footage from *Ngarintjadu*, *Karajarri*, *Goonyandi* and *Yarri Yarri* trips is laden with examples of involvement in cultural activities. Worker reports from all the trips outline very strong youth involvement. Evaluator participated in a range trips and joined young people in the most intense and deep cultural experiences he has witnessed. Interviews with participants in *Ngarintjadu*, *Karajarri* trips. Footage from KALACC festival and festival preparation drew out the importance of the cultural elements of the work.
Build self-esteem & self-confidence in young people.	On all Yiriman trips, young people face significant physical and emotional challenges. Senior people, middle-aged elders and skin-mentors travel with them to support, encourage, mentor and teach. These conditions (particularly success in having completed tasks, long walks and the trip itself) are conducive to develop of positive esteem and confidence.	Footage from KALACC festival and festival preparation is laden with examples of young people demonstrating immense confidence in public. Interviews with participants during the course of their involvement in various trips demonstrate remarkable levels of improvement in confidence and sense of self-esteem. Photo archive from all trips is laden with examples of young people confidently carrying out a range of activities. These also point to the active relationship between the generations. Video footage from *Ngarintjadu*, *Karajarri*, *Goonyandi* and *Yarri Yarri* trips shows young people helping carry out important tasks on country. The 40 case studies demonstrate considerable progression in personal development.
Strong young adult mentors take on responsibility and	On all trips there are on average 1/5 of the participants who expressly	Footage from KALACC festival and festival preparation demonstrates strong young adult mentoring in a very public setting.

leadership roles. (Strong young adult mentors take on responsibility and leadership roles, cont.)	take on the job of cultural mentors. All trips include at least three generations of participants. Furthermore, the respect these workers demonstrate towards senior people acts to bolster younger people learning about the way respect can operate.	Interviews with young people are laden with examples of Yiriman 'alumni' taking on leadership roles as rangers and 'workers' on Yiriman trips. Evaluator's journal entries while on country are full of references to the central role of young adults on every trip. Photo archive from all trips demonstrates solid mentoring by older young people. Video footage from *Ngarintjadu*, *Karajarri*, *Goonyandi* and *Yarri Yarri* trips shows young people carrying out important tasks together on country. Interviews with past participants who are now involved in community work. Evaluator participated in two *Karajarri* trips and joined young people in an intense cultural experience, seeing first hand the strength of the leadership work.
Community ownership and support.	The Yiriman Project continues its long history of being community initiated through, i) solid attendance at whole of *Yiriman* meetings (2 over 3 years) ii) 3-4 reference group meetings each year, iii) pre-trip planning meetings and iv) very strong involvement during on-country activities. Coordinators take regular (at least weekly and often daily) advice from senior Yiriman bosses who live in Fitzroy Crossing. In 2012 this element of the work was recognised by Reconciliation Australia when Yiriman won	Footage from KALACC festival and festival preparation shows senior people giving instruction and direction. Evaluator's notes show a clear directing role of elders. Records of meetings are being more regularly kept. Photo archive from all trips demonstrates a consistent involvement by senior people in 'directing' activities on country. These also point to the active relationship between the generations. Video footage from *Ngarintjadu*, *Karajarri*, *Goonyandi* and *Yarri Yarri* trips shows young people helping carry out important tasks on country at the instruction of senior people. Evaluator participated in a range of trips and saw first hand a very impressive level of Aboriginal control of activities. Judgement and independent evidence provided by of Independent Researcher Fiona Taylor,

	the National Indigenous Governance Award.	Australian Youth Research Centre, 2010. A panel of 10 judges convened by Reconciliation Australia assessed the Yiriman Project as the winner of the national Governance Award for 2012. Judgement and independent evidence provided by of Independent Researcher Fiona Taylor, Australian Youth Research Centre, 2010.
Community members feeling they are able to better respond to the challenges faced by their young people.	Throughout the three-year period the Yiriman Project continued to enjoy high levels of involvement. Although all senior people interviewed expressed considerable concern and worry about the situation facing some young people, all saw Yiriman as one of the most powerful strategies for dealing with youth problems.	The involvement of senior people in a project over thirteen years is very solid evidence that they see Yiriman as a way to respond to what is happening to young people. Senior people regularly articulate this as the key function of Yiriman in interviews. Evaluator's notes while attending meetings shows clearly that senior people take very seriously the health of young people. Video footage from *Ngarintjadu, Karajarri, Goonyandi* and *Yarri Yarri* trips shows senior people spending much time talking with young people about the importance of maintaining culture as a way to keep strong. Evaluator participated in many trips and saw first hand a very impressive level of concern of senior people.
Increased awareness and education regarding mental illness, drug/alcohol abuse and suicide.	Yiriman has achieved good outcomes in the following ways: young people express the view that they feel safe and strong when they are on country; a number of outside 'experts' have participated in trips offering assistance; workshops and training sessions have been arranged while on-country (in conjunction with organisations such as Stand By Me); regular contact with young people from Fitzroy Crossing gives staff an opportunity to pass on information, discuss social problems, and make referrals	Workshop notes and evaluation feedback from Ranger workshop in 2011 were very detailed and demonstrated a remarkable level of impact on over 100 Kimberley rangers. Evaluator participated in a range of trips and saw first hand the way informal discussion often gets gently shifted onto these topics. A Broome-based youth mental health worker attended a number of trips and wrote of the profound opportunities made available for discussion of mental health, substance use and suicide (letter from Tyhe 2011) The evaluator had many opportunities to spend time in the Yiriman office environment and see the regularity with which young people visited for support.

		Interviews with Stand By me staff indicate success with the suicide prevention workshop.
Relationships developed between young people, mentors and cultural leaders resulting in greater levels of respect and understanding. (cont.)	The on-country trips provide a solid context for this work. The structure and form of relationships on country reflects important law and cultural practice, particularly around skin systems, knowledge transfer and the nexus between country, story and family. The concept of respect has become a central element in Yiriman instruction by elders. As a consequence young people are usually very circumspect while in the company of elders. They tend to observe, visit places with reverence, seek guidance and have a go at things when asked.	Independent researcher Fiona Taylor, Australian Youth Research Centre, 2010 cites a number of examples of these relationships. Evaluator participated in many trips and saw first hand the way this kind of intergenerational exchange occurs. Video footage from *Ngarintjadu, Karajarri, Goonyandi* and *Yarri Yarri* trips shows many examples of respectful interchange between the generations. Photo records from throughout the year also show much intergenerational exchange. Various people articulate the theme that on-country trips are one of the few places where different generations can openly interact and build their relationships. Chapter written by the evaluator describes the process used on trips to build Kanyinpa (holding through respect) (Palmer 2012) A Broome-based youth mental health worker attended a number of trips and wrote of the profound opportunities made available for discussion of mental health, substance use and suicide (letter from Tyhe 2011)
Individuals 'at risk' and family members able to better acknowledge problems, know where to seek support and feel more comfortable doing so. Note: Using standard social measures all young people participating in Yiriman activities have been classified as 'at risk'.	There is good evidence that young people are at their most comfortable when on country with older generations. The culture and practice on trips replicates old forms of family and community healing (revitalising people's association with 'country', visiting healing places, 'clean living', use of various smoking practices, use of bush remedies, involvement in singing, ceremony and specialist healing rituals). The fact that so many young people ask Yiriman staff for	Reporting of referrals, discussions, one-on-one assistance, meetings and follow-up work is now being carefully recorded. These records show consistent contact between staff and other support professionals. Interviews with a number of young people indicate that a relationship between Yiriman staff, outside professionals, senior people and other community supports is best enhanced when on country. The evaluator participated in two on-country trips and saw first hand many examples of strong relationships developing between the generations. The evaluator had many opportunities to spend

	support and referral demonstrates the power of country and family in helping young people 'open up' and talk with others.	time in the Yiriman office environment and see the regularity with which young people visited for support. It is clearly the case that the Yiriman office is a critical place where young people from Fitzroy Crossing feel they can get assistance. A Broome-based youth mental health worker attended a number of trips and wrote of the profound opportunities made available for discussion of mental health, substance use and suicide (letter from Tyhe 2011)
Relationships, partnerships and agreements developed between community support networks/ professionals, Yiriman Project and young people at risk.	Representatives from these organisations have participated in trips: KLC, Ngurrurra Rangers, Mangkaja Arts, Kimberley TAFE, Nyikina Mangala Rangers, Centre for Freshwater Fishing Researcher, Stand By Me. In addition, Yiriman has become active in the Fitzroy Valley Youth Services Forum and works in conjunction with Garnduwa, Fitzroy Cultural Health Centre, Department of Justice and Fitzroy School.	Interviews with a number of service providers from 2011-2013 indicate that Yiriman is indeed working closely with a range of important service providers. Photo and film footage of the *Goonyandi* and *Karajarri* trips shows the active involvement of 'visitors' from these organisations. Yiriman records document many of the formal referrals and contacts between young people and service providers. Involvement of Yiriman staff and other partner organisations is most impressive as evidenced by projects such as: the Wild Harvest Work with KLC, Ranger training with Stand By Me, various trips with five ranger teams, work in conjunction with two Arts Centres from 2010-2013.
Promotion of positive messages.	The structure of each day's activities encourages the transmission of positive messages in the following ways: direct instruction from elders, physical activities, modelling of leadership by mentors, recording of activities using digital media and the sharing of stories. Indeed strong health messages are literally built into the act of being on country as the concept of 'health' is strongly linked to country. When people are on country they are 'healing'. As mentioned, Yiriman on-country trips also provide opportunities for external	Interviews with participants confirm many of the strong messages passed on during trips. For example, one participant said, 'We spoke about respect and love (ourselves, our elders and each other). That it is important not to touch each other's stuff, no teasing each other, look after your country, learnt a new dance and a little bit of language.' The evaluator directly observed workshop sessions on-country where young people were told about the importance of respect, skin relationships, knowledge about sites, how to stay healthy using bush products, how to use language to act respectfully. Film footage from the trips is full of evidence of young people being taught respect for country, family and story. Case study details are laden with accounts of

	service providers to develop relationships with participants and deliver their positive messages.	the positive messages associated with Yiriman including 'training' concerned with: respect, family and skin obligation, getting a good name (community service and work), taking care of country and senior people.
Healthy fun activity involving young people and community in safe space without the use of alcohol and drugs.	The vast majority of participants want to participate in further Yiriman camps/activities. This is because it is exciting, fun and enjoyable. Yiriman activities are drug and alcohol free even though this is a challenge for some participants.	All trips are alcohol and drug free events. Yiriman staff have begun to record incidences when young people ask to join another Yiriman bush trip. These records indicate that demand exceeds the frequency of trips. Film and photo footage are full of laughing, smiling and happy young people who are clearly enjoying themselves. The evaluator has regularly observed young people singing, expressing their joy and demonstrating positive feelings while they are on country. Case studies are laden with evidence of young people recollecting Yiriman as positive, fun and healthy.
Positive and healthy discussions in a safe environment.	As mentioned above, during the course of each day there are many opportunities for positive and health discussion through: morning meetings, while carrying out physical activity, through modelling respect, during sites visits and during evening fire-side yarns. In part this reflects longstanding traditions and practices that exist when people are on country.	Interviews with participants confirm they have healthy and positive memories associated with Yiriman trips. The evaluator has himself joined in on many important discussions with young people and elders talking openly about matters of importance. Often this happens at night, around fire and a relaxed environment. A Broome-based youth mental health worker attended a number of trips and wrote of the profound opportunities made available for discussion of mental health, substance use and suicide (letter from Tyhe 2011) Film footage from the trips records some of these discussions, often carried out in Kriol or language. A Broome-based youth justice work remarked that in his experience being on-country with Yiriman prompts some of the most powerful and thought provoking experiences for young people.
Having a break from town and enjoying	All trips and activities are alcohol and drug free events.	All trips are alcohol and drug free events.

the bush without the use of alcohol and drugs		On trips the evaluator directly observed the difficulties young people have 'drying out' from alcohol abuse. While this is happening people are cared for by others on the trips. Yiriman staff have begun to record incidences when young people ask to join another Yiriman bush trip. These records indicate that demand exceeds the frequency of trips. Film and photo footage are full of laughing, smiling and happy young people who are clearly enjoying themselves. The evaluator has regularly observed young people singing out of joy when they are on country.

Indigenous Justice Program (Commonwealth Attorney General's Department)

This element of the work involves responding to the 'challenge of the accelerating rate of Indigenous offending and incarceration, and to support the realisation of safer communities.'
Much of this work has been achieved through the strategy of arranging on-country trips for young people. This being the case, much of the review in relation to the previous funded contracts is relevant here. Over the past three years performance in relation to formal objectives of this work includes:

Intervention	Performance	Evidence of efficacy
Advocacy and support	Both while on-country and in town approximately 75% of young people, some family members, a range of service providers and all of the cultural bosses have approached Yiriman staff to act on behalf of specific young people who have contact with the justice system, are in need of education, training and employment opportunities and 'counselling' in relation to dependency, depression and mental health problems. Indeed, when not on country this happens on a daily basis. During 2011 project staff updated their mechanisms of recording these instances.	Photo archive from all trips demonstrates participation of a number of 'outsiders' from other organisations. Worker reports from all trips document follow up work. Evaluator participated in a number of trips and joined young people in intense cultural experience and saw first hand evidence of young people seeking support from staff and others. In case studies young people cited examples of practical and personal support. The evaluator has himself joined in on many important discussions with young people and elders talking openly about matters of importance. Often this happens at night, around fire and a relaxed environment. Film footage from the trips records some of these discussions, often carried out in Kriol or language. The evaluator had many opportunities to spend time in the Yiriman office environment and see the regularity with which young people visited for support. He has also 'tagged along' with Yiriman staff as they go about 'post' trip follow-up work. It is clearly the case that the Yiriman office is a critical place where young people from Fitzroy Crossing feel they can get assistance.
Build stronger relationships with individuals and family	During 2011 Yiriman maintained a strong involvement of community people. As mentioned previously, this is	Interviews with participants confirm their relationships with others in their community are profoundly strengthened during Yiriman trips.

groups. (cont.)	most evidenced during the on-country trips where senior people, the middle-aged and young people maximise the direction they give to Yiriman activities. It is also strong in and around Fitzroy Crossing where 'cultural bosses' have the most direct access to Yiriman staff and resources. In this way, Yiriman has become a critical part of the overall strategy for family groups involved to maintain and build their internal connections. During the second half of 2011 and in 2012 Yiriman staff took the Yiriman remote office (a large in-built trailer office) to Jarlmadangah and Bidyidanga for two-week periods to provide this kind of intense support to communities.	The evaluator has himself joined in on many important discussions with young people and elders talking openly about matters of importance. He has seen at first hand the development of deep and close relationships between those involved. Film footage from the trips demonstrate the depth of closeness between different generations and show acute sense of care that senior people have for young people. Often interviews and public statements from senior people include stunning expressions of care and love towards their young. This theme is explored with considerable detail in chapter written about Yiriman and education (Palmer 2012) Taylor's study describes the strength of this element of the work (Taylor 2012).

Foster networks and relationships with organisations and groups that work with young people and focus on mental health and alcohol and drug abuse	During the review period Yiriman staff recorded formal and working relationships from representatives of the following organisations: Kinway Standby Suicide; Kimberley Aboriginal Medical Services Council (KAMSC); North West Mental Health; Nindilingarri Cultural Health; Corrective Services and Juvenile Justice Broome; Fitzroy Crossing Police Department; Department of Child Protection; Fitzroy Crossing, Wangkajungka, Jarlmadangah and Bidyidanga schools; Karayilli Adult Education; Marninwarntikura Women Resource Centre; Fitzroy Valley Men's Group; Mangkaja Arts Centre; Kimberley TAFE; Garnduwa; Ngurrura, Karajarri, Goonyandi/Tjilijan and Nyikina Mangala Ranger teams; Aboriginal Legal Service.This contact work supports young people in two ways: 1) young people gaining direct assistance and 2) organisations with their various mandates contacting young people at risk.	The evaluator has carried out interviews with representatives from over a dozen of the organisations who have worked in conjunction with the Yiriman Project. Without exception these individuals have spoken highly of the work. The evaluator has sighted records and reports from other organisations that demonstrate the positive outcomes of this collaborative work. Film and photo footage are full of evidence of the active involvement of others in all of the Yiriman trips from 2009-2013. The evaluator had many opportunities to spend time in the Yiriman office environment and see at first hand staff working in conjunction with other organisations. Records from all of the trips now document the attendance and involvement of 'partners'. The Tyhe letter of support (2011) describes in detail how this works while on trips.
Planning for bush trips	Yiriman planning might best be described as occurring through a broad mix of everyday consultation and direction, meetings of the Reference Group, at least one formal planning meeting before each trip, daily meetings while on-country and constant dialogue and checking between staff and cultural bosses while on a trip. The depth and intensity of direction from 'bosses' is at it most active while 'on-country'. This kind of 'planning' is necessary given the cultural context in which Yiriman	The evaluator has participated in a series of meetings designed to help staff work in conjunction with bosses to plan trips with Nyikina/Mangala and Walmatjarri bosses. He has also directly participated in 'on-country' planning meetings. The evaluator attended Reference Group meetings every year where this work occurred. The evaluator has sighted minutes and other records of planning meetings. Film and photo footage contain strong evidence of active participation in planning meetings. The evaluator had many opportunities to spend

	emerged and the many contingencies impacted decisions.	time in the Yiriman office environment and see at first hand staff consulting with bosses both in person and on the phone. Indeed this is something that happens almost on a daily basis. Records from all of the trips now document the various planning meetings during the trips. According to the panel of judges from Reconciliation Australia this is one of the most impressive elements of the work of Yiriman.
On-country trips	As mentioned, over the review period there was an average of 12 trips planned and carried out per year. This represents both the main objective and the principal strategy for Yiriman bosses.	The evaluator has participated in a range of on-country trips. They have been planned well, attended by a variety of generations, included an array of activities that exposed participants to a combination of talking, doing and sharing activities, and used new technologies and traditional practice. The evaluator interviewed people after a number of other trips. The feedback from participants was excellent. Interviews were carried out with 'outsiders' attending various trips. All have been impressed with the standard of planning, depth of activities and strength of intergenerational involvement. The evaluator has sighted minutes and other records of the trips. Film and photo footage contain strong evidence of active participation in all trips by all present. Records from all of the trips now provide details of various elements of the trips including participation, use of vehicles, activities, meetings, daily movements and any follow up that needs to occur. The evaluator has sighted these records. A digital photo book report and/or movie has been drafted for the Karajarri Jila, Jilji Bore, Ngarantjadu, Ranger Forum, Karajarri Women's Healing, Nyikina, Goonyandi trips. These provide solid evidence of the breadth of good outcomes.

People at risk of incarceration provided with prevention and diversion	Using conventional indicators of 'risk' (see Zubrick and Robson 2003, Telethon Institute nd) all young people participating in Yiriman activities are at risk of incarceration, There is a solid body of evidence in the international literature of a direct correlation between 'on-country' activity and cultural practice, and crime prevention (see Silburn, Glaskin, Henry and Drew 2010, Leenaars et al 2007 Chandler and Lalonde 2008). Yiriman trips provide young people with some of the richest opportunities for deep cultural immersion, knowledge transmission, language instruction and traditional law and culture activity (see earlier description of culture and law on country). Therefore, it follows that participation in Yiriman trips are likely to represent a strong antidote to crime and incarceration.	The evidence is strong If one accepts a) that all young people attending Yiriman activities are 'at risk', b) that there is a direct cause and effect relationship between on-country activity and youth diversion (see discussion of the research) and c) there is often and observable correlation in the case studies of positive social impact and Yiriman activities. The depth and number of 'positive and healthy' opportunities provided for young people is certainly evidenced in project reports, media records, and first hand observation by the evaluator. The panel of judges from Reconciliation Australia concluded that the Yiriman Project be given the national Award for Good Governance in part because of the quality of prevention and diversion activities provided on trips and through contact across the generations. The case studies are laden with examples of 'at risk' young people who have been carrying out leadership roles, involved in employment (such as ranger work) and contributing to community organisations. These kinds of outcomes are unquestionably evidence of work against incarceration.
Supporting different 'service sites' and locations **(cont)**	The number of sites visited and supported during this reporting period included at least 15. These were: • Broome • Fitzroy Crossing (400 km east of Broome) • Wangkatjungka Community (510 km east of Broome) • Ngumban Community (500 km east of Broome) • Bayulu Community (525 km east of Broome) • Ngalingkadji Community (460 km east of Broome) • Djugerari Community (500 km south-east of Broome) • Kupartiya (530 km east of Broome) • Jarlmadangah Community (340 km east of Broome) • One Mile Community (1.6	It should be noted that the geographic reach of the Yiriman Project is across an area approximately the size of Victoria. Clearly the capacity of a small organisation such as Yiriman to equally service this area is severely limited. However, the geographic reach of the trips streches across the region. This represents one of the most impressive examples of on-country work across the country. It should also be noted that Yiriman could not service each community in the same way. There is digital photo, sound and film evidence of work across the region. Reference Group membership comprises of people from Walmatjarri, Nyikina, Mangala and Karajarri people. Staff have been keeping detailed records of vehicle use. These demonstrate enormous coverage of the region. The evaluator has joined staff during trips to the following places: - Broome

	km north of Broome) • Bidyidanga Community (180 km south of Broome) • Mijilamia (185 km south of Broome) • Kitty Well (200 km south of Broome) • Yilyi Community (600 km east of Broome) • Yakanarra Community (430 km south-east of Broome)	- Fitzroy Crossing - Wangkatjungka - Ngumban - Bayulu - Djugerari - Jarlmadangah - Bidyidanga - Mijilamia - Kitty Well - Mulan So this work varies across the region but is 1st class in these communities.

Cultural bush camps 2011-2012 (Woodside Energy)

The objectives of these bush camps were to connect young people, elders and country, provide young people with cultural immersion; cultural practices, language, opportunities to reflect, and guidance and counselling to young people. Central to this work is a strong focus on offering young people a deep experience of culture and law and encouraging cultural transmission between older generations and young people. On each of these trips a mix of the following cultural development occurred:

- Bush tucker gathering (seed collection, songs for different seeds, and types of traditional jewelry, plant names, place names, direction, fishing, collecting rock oysters, tracking and identification of plants and animals, food preparation)
- Looking after country (visit country, walking on country, visiting important sites, locate and map jila - significant water hole, clean up jila, fire management, intergenerational knowledge transfer)
- Other cultural activities (recording language, singing traditional songs, traditional dancing, cultural governance, looking at the seasons and what happens during the different seasons, identifying and collecting materials for artifacts, sharing knowledge about tools, making artifacts, stories and songs about artifacts
- Goal setting (meetings, reflection & plans for achieving personal goals)
- Using technology (Multi-media, GPS mapping, communications equipment, interviewing skills)

Details of the number of people involved in this work include:

Trip	Where	Participants
2011		
Walmatjarri 11-15 July	Ngarintdadu	Elders 13, middle aged 16, young people 22, children 27: Total 78
KALACC Festival Training 17-21 May	Yakanarra	Elders 3, middle aged 3, young people 5, children 18: Total 29
KALACC Festival Training 24-27 August	Ngumpan	Elders 16, middle aged 3, young people 8, children 15: Total 42 Note: participant numbers are the full-time participants only. Many more community members participated in practice performances.
KALACC Festival Training 15-19 Sept	Ngumpan	Elders 13, middle aged 5, young people 14, children 11: Total 43
Karajarri Women Healing 5-10 Sept	Mangkurna (Cork Bark)	Elders 8, middle aged 9, young people 9, children 2, Total 28
Nyikina/Mangala Camel Catching 27-31 Oct	Yarrie Yarrie	Elders 2, middle aged 4, young people 5, children 6: Total 17
2012		
Jalangarti hunting trip February	Roebuck Plains	Elders 4, middle aged 20, young people 13, children 25: Total 62
Kurlku 16th-23rd April	Kurlku, Great Sandy Desert	Elders 15, middle aged 16, young people 12, children 9: Total 52
Corkbark Karajarri 6th-9th April	Mangkurna, near Bidydanga	Elders 8, middle aged 4, young people 5, children 44: Total 61
Jilijan Rangers 11-14 June	Kupartia	Elders 5, middle aged 9, young people 12, children 0: Total 26
Goonyandi trip - late July	Gogo Station	Elders 3, middle aged 6, young people 12, children 10: Total 31
Yarrie Yarrie, 6-9 Aug, 30 Sept – 2 Oct	Yarrie Yarrie	Elders 14, middle aged 18, young people 29, children 12: Total 73
Walmatjarri Seed collection Nov-Dec 5 days	Various locations south of Fitzroy Crossing	Elders 5, middle aged 4, young people 7, children 10: Total 26

Objective	Performance	Evidence of efficacy
Connect young people and elders	As mentioned earlier each trip involved the participation of at least four generations of participants. This process replicates traditional practice when travelling on country. In part this represents the practical need to include those who have the most knowledge and authority (elders), those who can carry put into practice this knowledge and authority (middle ages), those who the knowledge can begin to learn (young people) and those who are represent tomorrow's more active participants (children). This process, sometimes described as 'holding or carrying' young people is critical to Yiriman practice while on country. Elders lead while on country. They make decisions about the country to be visited, the sites to travel to, the activities to carry out and the content of the stories and instruction to be given. The middle-aged people are the mentors and the young people come on the trips to learn. Children sometimes also attend to being the process of learning and experiencing country.	The photo story reports and other media provide provocative evidence of the relationship between young people, the middle-aged and seniors. They are constantly in contact during the four trips. While on trips the evaluator saw at first hand young people listening to the old people 'singing for country' at various places. He also saw different generations worked hand in hand on different activities and jobs ranging from camp setting up, hunting, collecting of bush products, cooking, camel mustering and dancing. There are many hours of people's stories recorded using digital audio devices. These show young people spending considerably more time than they would otherwise enjoy in very close proximity to the old people, sharing intimate moments and much care. The interviews carried out by the evaluator confirm that this process of 'holding' young people is a solid feature of Yiriman trips. The records kept by staff include details of a mix of generations on all trips.
Connect young people to country	Also important is the relationship that young people gain with 'country'. Elders say they gain strength when they are on country. This is because literally and symbolically in law and culture, 'country' is tied up with the health and wellbeing of the community. So by being on country, camping on-country, hunting on country, hearing stories about country, burning and cooking on-country the various generations exercise obligations to keep country alive. This provides young people with an enormous learning opportunity in relation to the Aboriginal customary economy and cultural context. They get to listen and learn from their seniors. Much of this relationship is weakened when people are living in town, with the many distractions.	In interviews with participants it became clear that almost all of the members of the group that visited Ngarintdadu had never before visited the area. However, most had ancestors who had come from the region and who had passed on stories. Audio recordings from various trips show that they provide an evocative chance for the old people to sing some of the old songs for the area. This gives young people a chance to record stories, map out the area and start to help plan subsequent trips. Photos and film footage demonstrates that the trips provide young people with direct and relevant exposure to the home of their great grandparents, also offering them enormous cultural currency as those who

		had joined a historic trip to their homelands. While joining two trips the evaluator noted a huge debt of appreciation from young people in the opportunity to visit the country of the 'old people'. They were attentive, respectful and spoke with gratitude of the chance to be on country. As the trips progressed they often made this manifest in their words, involvement in activities and participation in cultural activities such as dance.
Provide young people with cultural immersion, cultural practices and language	Many different forms of learning took place during these trips. As mentioned, young people on all of the four Yiriman trips were given an opportunity for deep cultural immersion. They were exposed to the routine use of Kriol, Walmatjarri, Wangkajunka, Nyikina, Mangala and Karajarri language in use. They visited important and old sites, hearing the old stories. They also got to hear old songs and participate in dance (sometimes old dances that had been dormant for 40 to 50 years). Also importantly, young people were also exposed to more modern forms of learning, picking up and using video, photo, audio recording devices and the various technologies used by Ranger teams (e.g. ETracker, radio, satellite phones, traps). On the trips young people were surrounded by their history and culture. The elders sang the songs of the specific country; they spoke and taught language in a cultural context. Also importantly, young people were able to learn and be taught in a way that reflects old educational processes, receiving instruction from the 'right people', being on-country, learning through observation and action and showing what they had learned.	Photos and film footage often occurs in language or Kriol. Much of the footage shows cultural immersion and elders teaching young people. The evaluator saw first hand a high degree of language use and Kriol. People interviewed confirmed that the strength of Yiriman trips is in its cultural content and the role it has in passing on knowledge. Much of the footage includes evidence of young people's involvement in hunting, speaking language and Kriol, learning about skin group obligations, use of bush products, cooking, walking and visiting important cultural sites.
Provide opportunities for young people to reflect and evaluate	One of the features of being on country is that it provides young people with space to reflect on what is happening in their lives. By definition, being on country takes young people away from town life geographically, socially, psychologically	In interviews young people and seniors make it clear that they are happy to get away from the distractions of 'town life' (overcrowded living conditions, fighting, drinking, noise).

one's own life	and culturally. In this way, the act of going on a Yiriman trip helps young people imagine and experience how things might be different for them. During these times they are well fed, enjoy a high degree of safety, are active and physically healthy, are involved in much learning and are treated with respect by their elders. This is an ideal environment in which to foster self-reflection. On Yiriman trips the young people are supported and given mentorship by many who are doing well. They often feel strong on country, and are more likely to think about their future, start to set different goals for themselves and get to see how others are living. They can also see and experience more opportunities. There was also a great deal of talking about skin groups and family history. This helped young people to draw upon the past to reflect on the present and think about the future.	Audio recordings show that on all of the trips young people were encouraged by elders to talk about their concerns in town life. There are written and photo records of group sessions that were hosted by the elders. For example, on the Yarrie Yarrie trip one of the senior men arranged daily discussions with those present to discuss their futures and opening talk about their life struggles. During his participation the evaluator noted that often opportunities for talking occurred during the many activities (visits to important sites, while making artefacts, after dark around the camp fires). This is particularly important for young people, who can then grow up in settings where discussions about the future wellbeing of the community happens within the context of a safe and intimate space, often around smoke and fire, often while being active and often with small numbers.
Provide guidance and counselling to young people.	Guidance, support and 'counsel' happened in a number of ways during the various trips 'on country'. Often around food in the morning or after dark the senior people give instruction through stories or by oration to small groups. This system of rhetoric making was highly important before people were forced to live in town life. Now there are few opportunities for this to happen in towns.	In interviews many of the senior people provided examples of how guidance and counsel is opened up while on country. Audio recordings of dance and cultural instruction show many examples of guidance and instruction given through story. There are written and photo records of dance sessions demonstrates the process of learning to perform dance also provides the intimacy necessary for young people to express their concerns, ask for advice and explore important questions for themselves. Interviews with staff show that during the trips to prepare for the KALACC festival there was considerable time spent between young people as dancers, a small number of dance mentors and the senior men who acted as bosses and singers. For example, there are a series of photographs of young, old and middle-aged men working together to dress and prepare

		young dancers for performance of cultural dances. The evaluator saw first hand that important space was provided for women during the Karajarri trip to open up and talk about the challenges facing families in the region. Some of this happened during a coastal walk. Some important counsel was provided by a very senior woman one night at the base camp and during an afternoon visit to a local spring and wetlands area.

Observations of outsiders

During the research work a range of outside organisations have made observations about the positive consequences of the Yiriman Project. Most of what follows represents unsolicited remarks made on the public record.

In 2008 the Western Australian Legislative Assembly Education and Health Standing Committee's 'Inquiry into successful initiatives in remote Indigenous communities in WA' acknowledged the success of the Yiriman Project.

The 2008 Social Justice Report commended the work of Yiriman, highlighting it as amongst the leading national examples of projects integrating industry and philanthropic groups offering educational programs.

In 2009 academic Martin Preaud discussed the deep cultural dimensions of Yiriman on-country trips.

> During a trip, whether on foot or in a car, elders point out salient or meaningful features of the landscape which are all fragments of the living body of country. This hill, which is really a Dog, this tree under which we camped last time we were here, this old windmill where your uncle used to work. All these fragments are part of a multiple history that gradually builds the young people as country themselves, that is as *experiences of movement* through a known landscape. Thus Yiriman opens up new horizons, both personal and professional and densifies the consciousnesses of participants in which stories build upon one another into a living memory (Preaud, 2009, p. 9).

In 2009 the then WA Member for Mining and Pastoral, Shelly Archer committed a full Adjournment Speech to articulate her regard for the Yiriman Project.

> Amongst the many services (that I have seen in my travels) there is one that is exceptional, considering the spotlight that has been cast on Indigenous youth and the problems that they face through the Coronial Inquires that have been lead by Alistair Hope. The program is a youth diversionary program known as 'Yiriman'.
>
> The objectives of Yiriman are twofold. One is diversionary through immersing young people in a cultural framework and the other is to build community relationships and capacity (Hansard 2009).

In 2010 Mr Jefferies, the Principal of the Fitzroy Crossing School, had the following to say about the value of Yiriman to young people:

> As the principal of the school I do not believe that you can support Yiriman enough … I have seen the young men, particularly, return from their Yiriman experience as changed people, without a doubt (Hansard 2010, p. 34).

In 2010 the project again featured in a national study of youth practice. The study concluded that the project is a success because elders and others in the

community want to be involved and have developed 'ownership' of the project. 'It also works because a middle generation acts as bridges, translators, mediators and role models between young people and their elders. Finally, the project works because 'all partners are experiencing benefits from the Yiriman partnerships' (Taylor 2010, p. 90–93).

In 2012 Yiriman was recognised when it was nominated and won Reconciliation Australia's national Indigenous governance award. In making its determination that Yiriman was the country's strongest example of governing by an Indigenous organisation the judges concluded that:

> Yiriman's governance works because there is and always has been a very clear sense of who established the project, why they established the project and what they want the project to achieve.
>
> Yiriman is a cultural program which operates on a cultural governance model. Indeed, one of the main purposes of the overall governance structure is to coordinate the allocation of resources to each of the language groups and to coordinate the timing and annual calendar for the project i.e. which groups will undertake which activities, where and when.
>
> Throughout these processes, cultural bosses make the decisions about the projects, unlike a Board of Directors who requires the approval of members; their decisions are based purely on community and cultural knowledge and discussions between elders and cultural bosses. It also means that the elders and cultural bosses can focus on helping their young people, without worrying about the logistics of the project.

In a radio interview where he talked about the various elements of Yiriman's work Professor Mick Dodson, the Chair of the Board of Judges for the Award had this to say about Yiriman's focus on output, its focus on community led solutions and its success at a time when few can point to solutions that are working.

> Interviewer (GM): Was Yiriman a unique project?
>
> Mick Dodson (MD): In one way it was not unique. When you look at what Yiriman does it is not new. It is ancient actually. Elders have been taking young people on country, teaching them how to survive and telling them where to find water and how to use plants and animals to survive, dance, sing the country and telling them stories for country … that has been happening for thousands of years. So there is nothing unique about that. I guess what makes it unique in a modern context is that his is the only group that I know about, that has deliberately set out to do what people have been doing for thousands of years as a way to try and address problems associated with troubled youth and also to deal with what has been a shocking rate of suicide in young people. That is new in a sense.

But what they are doing on country they have been doing for thousands of generations in the Fitzroy Valley.

GM: Is it true that it is a project that has received no government funding?

MD: It is not true to say that they do not get any government funding. What we have been told is that the funding is inadequate for what they do.

Unlike government it does not produce instant gratification. It doesn't produce a sound bite or a ribbon-cutting event … This is a community project. It is entirely owned by them. They decide what happens, when it happens and who it happens with. We think they have demonstrated great leadership in what they have done.

The other thing is that it is transportable. It is something that could be adapted to other localities around the country and be successful.

There has always been a huge body of evidence that locally initiated action is the best way to go rather than top-down approach. I was disappointed this morning to hear the Western Australian minister announce that he is going to pour money into Psychiatric services. Well hullo, here is something that a dozen Psychiatrists couldn't fix, something that appears to be working. These kids are the grandkids of people who were taken off pastoral leases. They grew up in town. They have lost their connection … lost their identity to country and sense of who they are and where they fit into society. Yiriman gets them connected to that deep relationship to country.

GM: I guess for that relationship to continue you really are asking the youth of today to carry this into the future for the youth of tomorrow.

MD: It is already evidenced that they are stepping up. The wisdom of the leadership here doesn't just confine it to young kids. There are people in their late 30s and 40s and even in their 50s who are going out that have never been out. They are getting out for the first time. A lot of those young ones are stepping up and taking leadership. This is a huge education exercise and they are transmitting knowledge, skills and values and understanding and grounding their identity. These are the people who are the future leaders by the old people today, people who are becoming fewer and fewer as they pass away. Their knowledge that they have about the landscape and that it offers to them spiritually, emotionally and materially, is being passed on. Otherwise it will be lost.

And it is a community initiative. I don't know why we have an absolute aversion to supporting things that the community think of. Is there some rule that says only the government can think these things up?

I think it is time that we stop thinking that way. Government isn't the answer. Government is part of the problem actually and because of their focus on outcomes everything has to be measured against a three-year political cycle. That doesn't make for good policy. What makes for good policy are things like Yiriman. It is a powerful testament to community action and should be supported because what else can the government point to that is working, I'd like to know, if they say well lets put the money into Psychiatrists then show me how that works?

Evidence of positive impact on young people (case studies)

Investigating the merits of 'on-country' trips and other cultural activities also benefits from an examination of the relationship between the work and the 'impact' on individuals, groups or community.

Of course, as with any social program, evidence of its impact upon individuals is always partial. There is never a direct, linear, or cause and effect relationship between an individual's development and their involvement in a project of this kind. Neither is it easy to establish whether a community has improved, built capacity, or set off in new directions because of the project's interventions, or whether positive change is attributable to other influences as well.

It is also worth noting that many of the achievements of individuals and communities are often because of their own tenacity, resilience and hard work. Even before their involvement in the Yiriman Project, many members of the community had well-developed skills, previous achievements, and were strong, autonomous and successful, particularly in relation to the maintenance of culture, language, and family. Therefore to attribute all of the achievements of the community to the work of Yiriman would be remiss, perhaps even unhelpful.

On the other hand, there is good evidence that Yiriman activities and Yiriman people often worked in such a way as to seek, draw out, and build upon the aptitude, flair, and dexterity of young people and others involved. That is to say, it would be a mistake to underestimate the many and varied achievements and the countless opportunities created by 'on-country' trips.

As was argued earlier, there is also impressive evidence from elsewhere of a very positive correlation between on-country activities, cultural maintenance and healthy social outcomes for Aboriginal people. This is most definitely the view of all senior people who have been interviewed as part of this evaluation. Indeed for them there is a definitive relationship between travelling on country and staying healthy. As the following exchange shows, for many senior people, to go on country *is* the healthy outcome. Travelling on country is the objective, the method and the outcome. As one senior put it (as articulated in the Preface), "when country is healthy, we are healthy."

> *Dave: How can you tell young people are benefitting from Yiriman?*
>
> *Senior person: They going on country!*
>
> *Dave: Yes, but what are the signs that people are getting good things out of Yiriman?*
>
> *Senior person: The signs are they are on country with they families.*
>
> *Dave: Yes, but what good things happen to them when they go on country?*
>
> *Senior person: The signs that countrymen (Indigenous people) are getting healthier is that old people (senior people) are on country. We know they*

healthy because they on country with the old people. We know us old people are healthy because we with young people. We know country is healthy because together we on country. That is the sign. In the old days we could always tell when country was healthy … the old people was there, country had been fired, plenty of food on country and jila (water hole) were clean. Then we get taken away from country … it get sick … we get sick … we come back and country come alive … and we come alive.

What follows is a brief summary of some of the stories of the impact on the lives of young people. It is worth noting that these vignettes provide only part of the story of positive social impact. Indeed there is considerable evidence already noted that demonstrates that many, if not all, of the young people who participate in Yiriman activities benefit. However, the following accounts provide particularly vivid evidence of the most successful stories.

First young person

This young woman has been involved with Yiriman for the last five years, from when she was 19 until the present time. As well as attending a number of 'on-country' trips she has consistently received 'mentoring' support from the Women's Coordinator. She has grown up in an environment where, since she was ten years old, her mother has been unable to care for her because of addictions. When struggling with difficult situations in her personal life she also took to the use of alcohol and substances and participated in high-risk activities in town.

As a consequence of receiving personal support from Yiriman staff she decided to participate in project trips to her family's country. This helped create a pause in the destructive elements of her life. Through this involvement casual employment with Yiriman was made available. This assisted in helping her structure her days and become involved in something constructive. Her work with Yiriman also provided her with opportunities to exercise her abilities and skills, assert her cultural knowledge in front of others and extend her work-related repertoires. After she moved away from town her relationship with Yiriman staff continued so that when she settled in a nearby town she was able to find work in a job that recognised her Aboriginality and supported her in developing her cultural skills and knowledge. At this point she stopped drinking and all the risk behaviours, found new friends, found new mentors and met a young man. This young woman made judicious decisions about her future and her relationship. After two years she became engaged and set about saving financially for another year. She sought out Yiriman staff and others who had supported her and asked them to be present at her wedding. She and her partner paid for this event themselves. She continues to live with her partner and maintain some contact with Yiriman staff (Sources: Interview with Yiriman staff 2011, FaCSIA Report 2011).

Second young person

This young woman has received support and mentoring from Yiriman for four years. She first had contact with Yiriman when she was 14 years old. At that time she was not attending school, having been expelled for anger issues. She also expressed frustration and difficulty living with either of her parents, who had separated. Her father was drinking heavily. They had no family home and were forced to move from place to place. At this time she was beginning to demonstrate risk behaviours, using alcohol and fighting. During this time of major unrest Yiriman staff were able to maintain contact, involve her in on-country trips and other activities over a year. They also worked in conjunction with other with family and supported a residential school application for the young woman to move to another area within the region. They also referred her to youth counselors and psychologists though the Headspace service. After two terms the young women again began to experience problems, struggled with her peers and becoming non compliant at school and the boarding house. She was subsequently asked to leave.

When she returned to her community Yiriman staff invited her to participate in on-country and town activities. In particular she was invited to help work with a group of younger girls who were not attending school, mentoring them during sessions and activities. Staff offered her administrative work, allowing her independent finance to support herself. This also helped orient her to workplace behaviours and expectations. At the same time, staff worked with her family to look at other training and educational options. At this time the young woman met a young man who had a promising career in Perth and was about to return there. She decided to join him. To assist in this regard Yiriman staff arranged a referral for her to an Indigenous employment and training agency. She then accepted a position in a training program, made living arrangements and moved to Perth.

The young woman spent nine months in Perth and completed a Certificate 2 in Business at TAFE. However, she struggled with the discipline of continued study, returning home. However, while back in the region she participated in Yiriman supported cultural activities and introduced her partner to her language group and family. They both undertook casual work and saved money. They have since returned to Perth for work. The young woman is now in the process of applying for further training and work. She continues to maintain contact and seek advice from Yiriman staff, something that offers a consistent ‘backstop’ for her when this is lacking. She maintains the view that some of the experiences she had ‘out on country brought her back to old people and the value and culture’ (sources: Interview with Yiriman staff 2011, evaluation notes 2011, FACSIA Report 2011).

Third young person

This young man has 'graduated' from many Yiriman trips. Indeed he was in his early teens when the Yiriman Project was established. Since his early childhood this young man had experienced serious family neglect. In the words of one Yiriman staff person, this young man 'had been left by his family and was pretty much on his own and dropped with the old people'. As a consequence of his connection to Yiriman he was taken up by some of the senior people and given many opportunities to attend on-country trips. During these trips he was singled out as someone who needed 'country to take care of him'. He was nurtured often and taught many bush skills, knowledge of the old place and learnt much about land management. At this time Yiriman worked closely with the Kimberley Fire Management Teams set up a pilot Ranger team, operated in conjunction with the Murdoch Freshwater Fisheries Team, and travelled with a number of Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service (AQIS) sponsored feral animal testing teams. This young man was one of a number who regularly participated in these events. As a consequence he began to develop a high degree of skill in land management, considerable knowledge of bush survival and important cultural currency as a young leader. At one point an opportunity emerged for this young man to spend a year in Perth as part of a land management traineeship with one of Yiriman's ongoing partners. This he did, completing the requirements and following through on a disciplined work regime. When a local Ranger Team was finally funded as a trial he was offered a position. All throughout this 12-year period this young man has continued to attend Yiriman events, acting as an older mentor for the next generation of young people. Today he is a Senior Ranger, recently receiving an award for being one of the longest serving rangers in the region (Sources: Interview with young person 2011, interview with Yiriman staff 2011, evaluation notes of trips on-country 2010, and various films).

Fourth young person

Like a number of his contemporaries this young man has 'graduated' from the Yiriman Project, having been one of the early participants. He too was in his early teens when the Yiriman Project was established. Like all young people attending Yiriman trips this young man has grown up with multiple challenges, such as living in an overcrowded environment, receiving sporadic schooling, having limited employment opportunities and being subjected to family violence. However, like many others he has also had strong support and mentoring from senior people from his community in matters to do with culture and law. He has also grown up with much time spent on country. In the words of one senior person, 'These boys might not have the same schooling as *gardiyas* but they know who they are and you can send them out on-country and they be right.'

As a consequence of his connection to Yiriman he has had many, many opportunities to 'go back to country with the old people'. Indeed at a number of public events he has expressed his gratitude to senior people for setting up Yiriman and taking him along on trips. During these trips he too was singled out as someone who was prepared to 'learn from the old people and learn from country'. He is now one of the most accomplished bushmen in the region, now routinely passing on the skills he has learned to younger people. During his involvement with Yiriman he has also taken up work with the Kimberley Fire Management Teams, Ranger teams, the Murdoch Freshwater Fisheries Team and AQIS. Today he is a Head Ranger. During this time he has also fulfilled the role of Chairperson of his community (Sources: Interview with young person 2010, interview with Yiriman staff 2010, evaluation notes of trips on-country 2006, and various films).

Fifth young person

This young woman is a resident of one of the town communities. As a consequence she is constantly living in overcrowded housing with all its profound social challenges. She was continuously responsible for the health of family members and had obligations for the care of her mother and two children.

Earlier in the life of the Yiriman Project she participated in a couple of on-country trips, helping with arrangements, planning and taking care of senior people. However, soon she expressed a desire to take on work in office administration. This was able to do and worked in conjunction with Yiriman Coordinators to complete some training in a certificate course. She remained in her role for a year and has since moved to other employment.

Due to her childcare and other family obligations she had found it difficult to maintain a work commitment without breaks. Yiriman staff were able to work to negotiate her arrangements, supporting childcare needs and allowing her to make some adjustments to her work timetable. This, she said, would not have been possible in other work contexts. Today she is an active member of the community, continuing to work and raise her children (Sources: Interview with young person 2009, interviews with Yiriman staff 2009, and evaluation notes of visits to region 2010).

Sixth young person

This young man is now in his early twenties and is a resident in one of the region's towns. He has attended many Yiriman events over the past five years. As a consequence of living in a town community he is constantly living in overcrowded housing, with all its profound social challenges. He also left school early.

During his time on Yiriman trips this young man has demonstrated considerable leadership, taking on various roles until he was invited to attend as a leader and young mentor. In particular he has also taken on a role in supporting skill

development in digital storytelling while on country, supporting other young people to learn sound, framing, filming and editing records of trips. Unlike many young people who have only attended on-country trips within their own cultural block or area, this young man asked to attend trips across Yiriman country, visiting people and places from as far as Balgo to Bidyidanga. This has meant that he has been introduced to the breadth of social contacts across a geographic region that is over 700 kilometres and encompassed four language groups.

When he is on trips this young man is visibly effervescent, often singing, taking part in dance and regularly adding jocularity to activities. He often articulates his desire to spend time on country:

> *I love coming on country. It makes me happy and it lets me get away from town life. It is much healthier out here. I like showing these boys how important it is to listen to the old people.*

This person's efforts have been rewarded over the past year by being offered a job as a Ranger in one of the Kimberley teams (Sources: Interviews with young person 2009, 2010, 2011; interviews with Yiriman staff 2010 and 2011; evaluation notes of visits to region 2009–11; photos of the Ngarintjadu trip 2011).

Seventh young person

This young man has been involved in a number of Yiriman trips from 2007–10. According to members of his family, he began his involvement during a time when he was particularly vulnerable to anxiety and depression, having lost several family members in a short space of time. He was also suffering from a lack of opportunities as he had reached the end of involvement in school and was confronted with limited work and future in a remote community. During this time he got into trouble with the law and had to face charges as he moved to adulthood. This would have had considerable impact on his future prospects.

In association with Yiriman staff, the magistrate made arrangement for this young man to fulfill some of the obligations of a community service order by attending Yiriman activities, which he did successfully. Subsequently this young man continued to be supported by Yiriman staff as he acquired his license, fulfilled cultural obligations, pursued cultural dancing and sought to finish the requirements of a traineeship. The traineeship became a problem when he was unable to travel to his work. This was made difficult because of a range of factors including his new obligations as a father, a suspended license, inadequate housing and distance from his work. Together with further support from Yiriman and, according to his relation, confidence gained through carrying out cultural activities he was able to secure a job in the resource industry.

There is a clear correlation in this instance between involvement in the Yiriman Project and this young man's positive negotiation of difficulties. One of his parents said,

> *Yiriman has been really good for #####. It was there at the right time. I am so proud of my son's achievements. He now has a number of tickets [work related training] that have set him up for life. He has a beautiful family and has very good work habits. I put down some of this to Yiriman and the discipline that comes from the old people.*

(Sources: Interviews with parent 2010, interviews with Yiriman staff 2009–2011, project photos 2005–09)

Eighth young person

This young man grew up in a remote community and a town and was of school age during his involvement with the project. It appears he has had considerable support from his parents who are consistent workers and leaders in the community. However, he had ceased to attend school and found himself involved in a criminal incident that resulted in arrest, charges, and being found guilty by the magistrate. As a consequence of negotiations between Yiriman staff and the Children's Court magistrate this young man joined a small group of offenders on a Yiriman camp. While on the camp his levels of participation were impressive. When asked to talk about each other's involvement all the other young men and the senior people cited him as the most active. During morning sessions he carried out, unsolicited, raking of the area, cleaning of the overgrown grass, weeding, building of an ablution area, and collecting of firewood for the old men. Although he had previously done little in the way of traditional dance and language he took up this activity with gusto. He was clearly the most talented cook and showed considerable respect for the old men, preparing them a 'cuppatea', seeing to it that they received food first and sitting with them in the evenings as they sung.

His parents were very appreciative of Yiriman staff. They had much to say about its impact on their son's life.

> *The young fella learnt to make bread; he is now a good bread maker. He made artifacts. Reckon they should make some to help them keep going. Taking them boys out into the desert was a good thing. Make the boys pull up their socks. Helps them graduate to the next level of manhood. Helps them learn respect. Our son has since got a white card [a ticket for workers to beginning work in the building industry]. We support Yiriman 100 per cent. What they do at Yiriman is a very early days method. It is an ancient method. It was done at the right time of the year when animals are at their peak. You can tell them old men down there [John and Harry] that we thank them.*

(Sources: Interviews with parents 2010, interview with young person 2010, interviews with Yiriman staff 2010, evaluation notes of on-country trip 2010)

Although there is good evidence (including claims made by himself) that Yiriman has been an important opportunity it is also important to note that this young man still suffers from a number of problems. For example, he has since attempted suicide, made threats to self-harm and had problems with his family. Yiriman was approached by his girlfriend and arranged meetings with his carer and extended family to develop a plan to support him: finding family members to stay. Yiriman staff have also helped to get him out to a small community where family can support him. Yiriman also worked in conjunction with two suicide prevention support organisations to provide additional support.

Ninth young person

This young man also attended a Yiriman trip designed to provide a diversionary option for young men who had gone before the Children's Court magistrate. Unlike the previous person this young man had consistently been in trouble because of his offending behaviour. He had grown up in a remote community and had attended school infrequently since he was in his early teens. Like many young people in the region, after going through the first stage of law it had been assumed that he was an adult and capable of independence and autonomy. However, apart from school and a few Community Development Employment Program (CDEP) jobs there are few employment and other opportunities available in this community. As a consequence he had become involved with a group of young men who consistently did things that were illegal and a menace to other members of the community. This further isolated this young man.

During his early involvement in Yiriman trips this young man had been chastised a number of times for 'too much disrespect and mucking around'. In other words, in his early involvement there was a problem with his behaviour and treatment of senior people. However, as the first trip progressed he became more involved with activities, particularly when invited to join the senior men in their storytelling and singing. During subsequent trips he began to express his interest in Yiriman and has since requested to attend a number of other trips. While trouble with the law and 'anti-social behaviour' ('too much robbin and drinking') may still be a challenge for this young man he is now more actively involved in community activities, regularly playing in the community football team, taking up some land management work and going back to school.

When asked for signs of the changes in this young man after he had been involved in Yiriman one local community member said:

> *I think we see changes in their level of respect. For example, one night the bloke who runs the store he left his keys on one of them fence posts outside the store. That young fella found it. Now in the past he has broken into the store. Well this time, after being with Yiriman and coming back, well he picked up them keys and walked all the way around to that bloke's place, knocked on his door and handed him them keys. You might not*

think this is much but I'm telling you that here in the community we see this as a big step.

(Sources: Interview with parent 2010, interview with young person 2010, interviews with Yiriman staff 2010, evaluation notes of on-country trip 2010, interview with community member 2010.)

Tenth young person

This young woman is a member of a group who have been variously described as 'troubled girls', 'bad girls' and 'the school non-attenders'. For two years the Yiriman Women's Coordinator has experimented with supporting this group of young women who live in two town-based communities. This group have been aged between 12–18 years and include those who do not attend school. They are also often on the streets late at night. They are smoking marijuana and, according to several sources including some of the young girls themselves, they are sniffing petrol. Recently this young woman has been involved in a number of suicide attempts, the latest where she and her friends all threatened together and walked out of town and into the bush together. Earlier one member of the group (a young woman aged 16) suicided and left her nine-month-old baby-sitting at her feet.

Over the last year this young woman has been participating in activities carried out in conjunction with the Yiriman Women's Coordinator and a staff member from Kimberley TAFE. She has maintained consistent attendance in these activities that have attempted to build a 'culturally modeled response'. Although she has not decided to attend school she has maintained her involvement in the recently established 'GATE' course at the local TAFE (Sources: Interview with teacher 2011, interviews with Yiriman staff 2011, project report 2011).

Eleventh young person

This young woman is also a member of the group who have been the target for the last two years of the Yiriman Women's Coordinator. She is also regularly seen on the streets late at night, continues to smoke and drink in excess and has been involved in a number of suicide attempts. However, she has also maintained consistent involvement in the project that involves a partnership between Yiriman and Kimberley TAFE. In particular she has taken interest in the element of the project that encourages the young women to spend time with and family and elders.

While there is little sign that this young person is yet to move beyond her problems in any major way it is important to note a number of things. The first is that she is a member of the most vulnerable group of young people in the town, perhaps the region. Other professionals, including teachers and child protection workers, have attempted without success to work with her. However, over the past six months she has maintained good contact and involvement with project hosted by the Yiriman Women's Coordinator and the GATE teacher. This is

critical and represents an important point of hope for her (Sources: Interview with teacher 2011, interviews with Yiriman staff 2011, project report 2011).

Twelfth young person

This young man is now in his late teens and is a resident in one of the small remote communities. As a consequence of living in this small remote community he has limited social and educational opportunities. Mostly he lives with his mother and grandmother. He is presently completing Year 12 and is considered to be educationally talented. He has won a range of educational awards and has already been identified for a scholarship or apprenticeship.

He has attended a number of Yiriman events over the past two years, always acting as someone more like a parent of the younger people than someone in need of support and attention himself. Indeed he is regularly involved in overseeing children, seeing to it that they are not in any danger and providing for many of their physical needs. Although he is not yet in his late teens he acts as one who is well into his twenties. He is also known throughout the region as being a 'one in a million' kid. As one local teacher puts it, 'If I had a daughter I'd be wanting him to be my son-in-law … he is the best kid.'

It would be disingenuous to claim that the Yiriman Project is responsible for the excellent achievements of this young man. It is obvious that he has achieved so much because of a combination of his own strength and tenacity and the love and care of his mother and grandmother. However, the Yiriman Project also offers him a chance to spend time with other generations (younger brothers and sisters, mother and grandmother, aunties and uncles). Without this he would have fewer opportunities to exercise his responsibilities, extend his leadership and, in association with his work at school, experience another environment where his socially responsible demeanour and habits are reinforced (Sources: Interview with parent 2011, interview with young person 2011, interviews with Yiriman staff 2011, interview with local teacher 2011, evaluation notes of on-country trip 2011).

Thirteenth young person

This young woman is twelve and is a resident in one of the small remote communities. She suffers from attention difficulties at school, regularly gets into trouble for losing control and 'flying off the handle' and is often known as 'one of the biggest handfuls in the community'. On the other hand she is clearly intelligent and also has been described as 'very bright'. She is under the management of a specialist education team. Her parents live over 15 kilometres from the region and she is under the guardianship of her aunty.

While on a Yiriman trip this young woman was the most active and involved of all participants. She embraced the opportunity to help set up camp, cook and fish, pass on knowledge about her family, and learn to use digital cameras and recording devices. She regularly sang, danced and acted as teacher and

translator for non-Aboriginal people. Her performance skills and ability were demonstrated many times throughout the trip on film, telling stories around the fire and in teaching others local fishing knowledge. One of those present described her involvement in this way:

> *### is alive and with every breath she adds a little bit of magic to the whole trip. She is constantly smiling, adding an effervescence to everything that happens. She has an infectious giggle and this one time we could hear her screaming with joy down on the rocks at the other end of the beach. She is just so alive here. She is cheeky and so very, very helpful. She is the real joy of the trip.*

Indeed when this person returned to the community and reported her delight at spending time with the young woman she was confronted with shock and disbelief by the teachers present. Clearly they had not seen this in the young woman's classroom behaviour. While she did appear to lose control and become angry at one point on the trip one of those present spent one-on-one time with her and she regained composure.

It is fair to say that the trip provided a very different environment and experience for the young woman. She received very close and positive attention while on the trip. She was able to exercise considerable autonomy, handle equipment and carry out fishing and hunting with freedom. She was able to enjoy the company of family, people she could trust, and spend time outside the physical confines of classrooms and buildings. While on the trip she was able to demonstrate considerable expertise; indeed, she was the most successful at fishing. This prompted her to share her knowledge and give generous lessons to some of the visitors on the trip. In short, while on the trip this young woman was able to be a 'different person' (Sources: Interview with parent 2011, interview with young person 2011, interviews with Yiriman staff 2011, interview with local teacher 2011, evaluation notes of on-country trip 2011).

Fourteenth young person

This young man is thirteen and is also resident in one of the small remote communities. He also has been diagnosed as suffering from attention difficulties at school, also regularly gets into trouble for fighting and has other 'disciplinary' problems. He too has considerable skill in hunting and fishing. His parents live outside the region and he under the foster care of a family in the community where he lives.

This young man has been included in a number of Yiriman trips, travelling a considerable distance from his community on one journey. While on the trips others have also noted that he presents less behavioural problems for those around him. He too is very active in hunting and fishing, often providing much of the food for his grandparents while on the trip. Indeed one of the most noticeable achievements on the trip was the variety of saltwater foods that this young man caught. He had success in providing: whiting, coral trout, blue bone,

mud crabs, oysters, a turtle, shark, cockles, a kangaroo and a goanna. These Yiriman trips provided the young man with important developmental experiences, enjoyment and success in providing for others. According to local teachers, it is often only when the school offers out-of-community activities that this young man is able to excel and learn (Sources: Interview with parent 2011, interview with young person 2011, interviews with Yiriman staff 2011, interview with local teacher 2011, evaluation notes of on-country trip 2011).

Fifteenth young person

This young man is another of the Yiriman 'graduates', having been one of the participants in trips during the early 2000s. At this time he was in his early teens and describes himself as 'one of the naughty boys'. Like most young people from the region he grew up with many challenges such as living in an overcrowded environment, receiving sporadic schooling, and having limited employment opportunities. However, like many others he has also had strong support and mentoring from senior people from his community in matters to do with culture and law. He has also grown up with much time spent on country.

As a consequence of his connection to the Yiriman Project he has progressed through the ranks. He began as one of the younger participants and experienced the Yiriman practice of being mentored by senior people, middle-aged people and also young adults. He then was invited to take on the role of young mentor or 'worker' on a number of trips. His early experiences of travelling to some of the more remote and important Yiriman locations gave him important currency among his peers and led to him taking on more important roles in later trips. At a number of public events he has expressed his gratitude to senior people for setting up Yiriman and taking him along on trips. He said, 'I was one of them troubled young fellas and if it wasn't for Yiriman I would not be where I am today.' He is now one of the most well respected young bushmen in the region and is often involved in activities that allow him to pass on his skills to others.

Since his early involvement he has also taken up work with the Kimberley Fire Management Teams, Ranger teams, the Murdoch Freshwater Fisheries Team and AQIS. Today he is employed as a Ranger (Sources: Interview with young person 2009 and 2010, interview with Yiriman staff 2010, evaluation notes of trips on-country 2006–09, various films).

Sixteenth young person

This young man is another of the Yiriman 'graduates', having been one of the participants on trips since the mid 2000s. At this time he was in his early teens and was described by one of the senior people as 'one of the boys who is going off the rails'. Like others he has had to confront challenges such as living in an overcrowded environment, receiving sporadic schooling and having limited employment opportunities. However, he has also had strong support and mentoring from his community and spent much time on country.

As a consequence he moved from being a young participant to acting as a mentor and is now employed as a Ranger. He is now one of the most well respected rangers and skilled land managers in the region. He still contributes to Yiriman trips (Sources: Interview with young person 2009 and 2010, interview with Yiriman staff 2010, evaluation notes of trips on-country 2006–09, various films).

Seventeenth young person

This young woman is another of the Yiriman 'graduates', having been one of the participants in activities since Yiriman's inception. At this time she was in her teens and was described by one of the senior people as 'one of the young leaders in this community … she is showing people that she comes from Kimberley royalty and is taking up her responsibilities'. Like others she has had to confront the many challenges associated with living in a remote community. However she has also had strong support and mentoring from her community, particularly the senior women who have taken her on as an important 'middle-aged' leader from when she was quite young.

As a consequence she has moved from being a young participant to a young mentor and is now is taking on many responsibilities in parenting, schooling, cultural education, wild harvest of bush products, and care for senior women. She is one of the most well respected women in her broader community. She has managed a number of Yiriman trips, taking on the role of key staff member. She has also managed the catering of many Yiriman activities. She as worked in the local school, and health clinic and has managed the community store (Sources: Interviews with Yiriman staff 2005–2010, evaluation notes of visits to the region 2006–11, various films).

Eighteenth young person

This young man is another of the Yiriman 'graduates', having been involved since the early 2000s. Like others he has had to confront challenges such as living in an overcrowded environment, receiving sporadic schooling and having limited employment opportunities. He also suffers from significant bouts of depression and anxiety. However, he has also had strong support and mentoring from his community and spent much time on country.

Since his early involvement this young man has progressed into work in the resource industry, moving from his home in the region to rostered work in the Pilbara. He has a young family and, with his partner, maintains a family home in one of the region's towns (Sources: Interview with young person 2010, interviews with Yiriman staff 2010 and 2011, various films).

Nineteenth young person

This young man is another of the Yiriman 'graduates', having been involved since the early 2000s. Like others he has had to confront challenges such as living in an overcrowded environment, receiving sporadic schooling and having limited employment opportunities. However, he has also had strong support and mentoring from his community and spent much time on country.

Since his early involvement this young man has progressed into work in the tourism industry, managing a successful local Indigenous tourism enterprise. He has a young family and, with his partner, maintains a family home in a remote community. He also has progressed through the Yiriman 'pathway', from young participant to young worker/mentor. A number of people have now observed that he has taken on the role of the early middle-aged leader of two Yiriman trips (Sources: Interviews with young person 2009 and 2010, interview with Yiriman staff 2010 and 2011, various films).

Twentieth young person

Although he has not been able to attend many of the on-country trips because of physical difficulties this young man has worked in conjunction with Yiriman staff for the past four years. As well as having to deal with the many challenges facing all young people in the region he has an incredible story of tenaciously overcoming many physical and social barriers since birth.

This young man has become known throughout the region and the state as a talented filmmaker. Indeed he received a national award for one of his films. He has also hosted an exhibition of some of his other work. One reviewer of the work said,

> In the film ### draws on his personal experience of Australia with rare openness. He also reflects upon wider notions of Australian identity and culture. For him the essence is to celebrate and respect the diversity of cultures, and to care for country and for all the people who live side by side on this land.

Again, it would unreasonable to attribute the success of this young man wholly to the influence of the Yiriman Project. As well as working hard himself there have been a number of committed organisations that have been part of his life. However, over the past three years in particular he has worked regularly in the Yiriman editing suite space and received the practical training support of Yiriman staff, in particular Michael Allen who acted as filmmaking mentor. Together they worked on many projects including recording KALACC and Yiriman events, creating a film that won a national award. He now provides consulting advice to others working on Yiriman filmmaking ventures (Sources: Interview with young person 2010 and 2011, interviews with Yiriman staff 2010 and 2011, various films).

Twenty-first young person

This young woman has attended a number of Yiriman on-country trips over the past five years. While on these trips she has been able to visit places that inspire an expression of her love of country in art. She has also been able to paint alongside senior artists from her community, learning important conventions for painting and some of the stories for the country she paints.

As well as having to deal with the many challenges facing all young people in the region, this young woman also has an incredible story of resilience, overcoming profound physical and social barriers since birth.

This young woman has become known throughout the region and the state as a talented painter hosting an exhibition in Perth and the Kimberley of some of her work. She has won a major regional art prize for her work as an emerging artist.

One reviewer of the work said that, '###'s colours in her paintings explode off the page ... they really draw people in, and give a great impression of the country around ####.' Another describes her work as 'creating an atmospheric rhythm, which speaks of the humidity and expanse' (Sources: Interview with young person 2010, interviews with Yiriman staff 2010 and 2011).

Twenty-second young person

This young man moved from his involvement in a number of Yiriman trips to taking up a job as a Ranger. This occurred in reasonably rapid time. One of his uncles recounts:

> *He was in trouble with the police when he first went on that Yiriman trip. He is a good boy but he got in trouble for robbing. We was really worried for him so we sent him with Yiriman. He was a very good boy on that trip, helping the old people, getting involved, hunting and doing all them things. At the end of the trip he said he wanted to turn things around and follow his uncles into working as a Ranger. We sat him down and talked with him about this. There was a position coming up and we had to choose between him and another bloke who was older and more experienced. But we seen in him a future so he got the job.*

By his and his uncle's account, involvement in the Yiriman trips was a critical influence on his decision to take on work as a Ranger. He said,

> *It was that first trip that made me stop and think … that's when I decided that I was going to put my hand up for a Ranger's job … Yiriman was the turning point.*

(Sources: Interviews with relations 2010, interview with young man 2010, evaluation notes of visits to the region and trip with Ranger team 2010, various films).

Twenty-third young person

This young woman is another of the Yiriman 'graduates', having been one of the participants in activities since Yiriman's inception. Even at this time she had been identified by senior people as 'a young leader'. Over the past twelve years she has graduated to become one of the younger middle-aged leaders who act in the important roles of cultural interpreter, linguist, manager, educator and mediator between the generations.

Since the early years of Yiriman she has taken on many responsibilities in the community such as childcare, schooling, cultural education, wild harvest of bush products, and care for senior women. She is also a well-respected woman in her community and is active in community business. She has also managed a number of Yiriman trips, taking on the role of key staff member. She has also managed the catering of many Yiriman activities (Sources: Interviews with Yiriman staff 2005–2010, evaluation notes of visits to the region 2006–11, various films).

Twenty-fourth and twenty-fifth young people

These two young men participated in one of the early Yiriman trips. The trips involved spending many weeks in very remote locations with senior people. Prior to the trip they had been in trouble with the justice system. One of these young men had also attempted suicide and was considered to be very vulnerable both to himself and his community. As one worker described it, 'they were on the outer from their communities, they were on the outer from all communities. They were just delinquents and no one wanted to have anything to do with them because their lives were so negative.' Both had also been drinking heavily and sniffing petrol. The trip was seen as a 'desperate last attempt to save these boys'.

Through their experience of Yiriman they were able to form relationships with senior people from whom they had previously felt very disconnected. In part this was because the trip offered them a chance to better understand their relationship with the people involved, the country, the old stories and the law. This had a profound effect. As one ex-worker put it,

> *From that experience of two weeks or a month, when you look back ten years to now, they have had a total life turnaround. Now they are quite stable members in their community both as individuals and as family men. Like any individuals they have their ups and downs. But they have been quite consistent. And they have been embraced and accepted back into the community and have been strong for their families.*

One senior man recounts his version of events in relation to the same young man. He said, '… then at the footy a few years later this young bloke came up to me. "Do you remember me?" I couldn't quite place him. This young bloke

says to me said, “I am one of those boys that went to Jarlmadangah.” I remembered him, and he was a real good footballer and a good family man. (Sources: Interview with ex-Yiriman staff 2010, interview with senior person 2010).

Twenty-sixth young person

This young man is now 22 years old and has been involved with Yiriman since he was 17. He has just become a parent for the first time and has been working as a ‘casual ranger with the Jilajin team. His relation with Yiriman extends over the last five years and began when he first started attending some of the larger trips out at places such as Jilji Bore. He has been on five trips in the last three years and is now involved in one ranger team taking on casual employment helping with the preparation of a site management plan. He has been employed to be a young leader on four Yiriman trips.

Like all young people growing up in the region this young man has many challenges facing him. For example, he has poor English literacy, limited involvement in formal schooling, struggles with his mental health and wellbeing and, as a consequence, has limited employment opportunities. However, he comes from a rather stable family. He was raised in a remote community and has recently moved with his partner to a different remote community.

Over the past two years this young man has demonstrated a keenness to look for opportunities for work and get involved with cultural activities. Clearly there is not much available in the formal labour market for a young man with his background. However, he has managed to combine casual work as a ranger with Yiriman trips, involving himself in visiting country, working on country, being with elders and participating in ‘culture side’. Also important to him has been the chance to gain non-accredited training both in land management and ‘cultural heritage’ and getting work on country. This training has occurred because the ranger team has accompanied Yiriman trips on several occasions. Through his casual involvement with this ranger team he has had experience doing fire management work, vehicle maintenance, using multimedia, trip preparation and vehicle loading.

He has expressed that he enjoys working with senior people while on Yiriman, taking care of their daily personal needs, listening to traditional stories and being instructed on what to do on country to follow cultural protocols. He articulates the importance of this to his education in matters of culture and law, his preparation for the formal labour market and for his life as a parent.

> *To be a parent you need to provide for your child, work to create a future and part of that is to go out on country and to learn from the old people to pass on to his child. It gives me a job to provide food and be there for my kid. It also gives me a chance to provide culturally for my girl, passing on the stories and language about country.*

Like all young people who participate in Yiriman activities, when he is out on country, he is not using drink and drugs. This is in contrast to his life in town and allows him to spend time talking and thinking about his dreams and aspirations and some of his problems back in town. As one of the Coordinators observes, he is very motivated and genuinely interested in being involved in activities. "You don't have to drag him into activities. He chooses to be involved." (Source: Interview with Yiriman staff 2013).

Twenty-seventh young person

This young man is 19 and has been involved in Yiriman activities since he was 14. During the last three years he has been on six trips, taking on casual work as a range for three trips. Like many young people from the region this young man has a number of close family members who are currently in prison. He has been in trouble for driving without a license but has had no other contact with the justice system.

Through his grandfather he has attended Yiriman trips as a young teenager. At 16 he left school after his attendance dropped off. Following this he then started looking for work, finding it very difficult given the limited options available in the remote community where he resides. He is keen to take on work following his grandfather's longstanding message that to be "a good man with a good name you need to be a hard worker."

This young man comes from a background where a number of his family has worked consistently in the pastoral industry. However, there are no longer employment prospects in this industry, and nor are there great training and employment opportunities in the local economy. He has low literacy rates, so employment and training is made more difficult.

He is particularly interested in working with his old people, supporting his grandfather. He is keen to visit his grandfather's country and be in a position to hear and pass on the stories. According to one Coordinator:

> *He has developed as one of Yiriman's great self-starters, is self motivated and likes learning about culture and the western skills of planning, maintaining vehicles, in chainsaw training. He has been consistently working with the local ranger team. While on trips he has made good use of the chance to start to articulate and put into practice his dream of becoming a full-time ranger. On country he carries himself a lot like he does on the footy field, stepping in to get a kick at every opportunity* (Source: Interview with Yiriman staff 2013).

Twenty-eighth young person

This young man is presently 17 and has been a participant on Yiriman trips for the past three years. He has also been a consistent casually employed ranger for the last two years. According to one of the Coordinators "he is a little more of a troubled soul." He has a juvenile justice record and still suffers with anger related problems.

According to one of the Coordinators, while he is out on a Yiriman trip with Rangers he has taken a leadership role in "looking after senior people, sitting with them and listening to what they say, making sure they are fed and taken care of. Importantly this gives him a chance to work on some of his anger problems, taking counsel from senior people and drawing upon the encouragement they give him to find alternatives to losing control of his temper. He is another young man who is looking for something to be involved with, gain some training and "get himself a good name". This is particularly relevant given his anger management troubles. 'Lacks a bit of focus and needs guidance while in town. According to a Coordinator "being on country and with old people helps give him focus and confidence".

According to his own assessment, Yiriman is something that can assist with giving him direction, practical opportunities for training and way to combine his work aspirations with cultural obligations. He says, "Yiriman is for us. It is there for my community and for me. I know Scott and Jen (Coordinators) and when I see them I ask what we can do next. It is for us to go out on country with old people to learn about culture-side" (Source: Interview with Yiriman staff 2013, interview with young person 2013).

Twenty-ninth young person

This young man is now 18 and has been involved in Yiriman work since he was 17. During his involvement with Yiriman he was staying at one of the remote communities and attended two Yiriman trips as part of his bail conditions for an offence committed in town. This was because the magistrate made it a condition that he stay with one of the Yiriman bosses for a series of months. His family is from elsewhere but is related to one of the main Yiriman families. He grew up in one of the towns and had received more formal education than many who are involved in Yiriman.

While on his bail order he participated in two trips to very remote locations. These trips were specifically arranged so that a few young people involved could spend quality time with senior people. This allowed those involved to spend much time talking about this young person's family and giving him a chance to share stories and consider his future. As the circumstances of his crime had resulted in family retribution, the young man had felt considerable stress and anxiety. As a consequence of this and the fact that he had previously

little opportunity to reflect upon his behaviour he expressed his view that the trips had been very powerful. As he put it,

> *I felt awake for the first time in my life being in contact with my culture. I listened to the old man and his stories about what my family has gone through in the old days, no pay and that sort of thing and to be where they are now. That made me realise that I have been sitting around wasting my time smoking and drinking.*

According to those present on the trips, while away this young man had an impressive work ethic and was open to sit down and talk about his problems. This is unlikely to have been possible had it not been for the remoteness of the trip from his daily life and the openness of the senior cultural boss and his willingness in sharing his story. Presently this young man is living away from town, working in a remote community (Source: Interview with Yiriman staff 2013, interview with young person 2013).

Thirtieth young person

This young woman is 16 years old and has participated on several of the trips. She has struggled with violence and anger management. On her initial trip she literally came out of her front yard swinging at difficult and intoxicated relatives when the Yiriman troop carrier came to pick her up. She hopped in the vehicle where she then slept the whole several hour ride out to the on-country location relieved to get out of the community to go out bush. In her words, "there were no dogs barking and it was quiet". While on the trip she felt taken care of by the senior women and Yiriman staff.

While at first a little resistant, once in camp with the old women she set about joining the women's bush medicine work, applying herself with great focus into the business of burning and sorting the beads. This young woman has since participated on several trips and on occasion has come in to do casual work with the program (Source: Interview with Yiriman staff 2013).

Thirty-first young person

This young woman is the 16-year-old grand daughter of one of the senior elder women. The personal circumstances confronting this young woman are common amongst Yiriman participants. She feels she has completed her time at school (she was the oldest at the school and only person of her age in classes). However, she is also not old enough to realistically compete for full time work, also lacking a work ethic and job training experience. She has a desire to become a ranger with one of the local ranger groups, but is unable to be paid on a roster until she turns 17. Like many of her age she is not quite an adult in the eyes of the labour market but also not quite a child in the eyes of culture and the community. In Yiriman she has found a good place for herself where she is able to get out of the town situation for extended periods of time. Being in town presents a constant challenge for vulnerable young women like her; to not to

get sucked into drugs, avoid pregnancy, and manage other social pressures. While on country and being involved in the wild harvest work with older women, she is able to take instruction from women she respects, learn a work ethic, carry out unpaid work, participate in trip activities with cultural peers, help out with logistics and cooking, at times paid casual work packing and cleaning up after trips, and hence extend her repertoire for a future in both the labour market and cultural economy. Compared to the opportunities available outside of Yiriman, being on country is much more likely to help with her aspirations of entering the ranger program with a range relevant skills (Source: Interview with Yiriman staff 2013).

Thirty-second young person

This young woman is 17 going on 18. This means that she is able to work as a paid casual ranger. However, she has a history of family problems and emotional illness, and struggles socially and emotionally with others, particularly young men her age. However, on Yiriman trips, surrounded by elder and middle aged women, and in a remote, out of town setting, she becomes visibly relaxed, calm and introspective. She is respectful of the old woman and helpful around camp.

She has combined Yiriman trips with some work with the rangers to help her build a safe path to become a successful member of her community and maintain her mental health. Like a number of other young people this young woman is in what might be described as an in-between and betwixt time where she has limited opportunities to participate in either school, work, training, or cultural life. During this time young women have a great need for additional cultural, emotional and practical support from the community as well as a sense of work ethic. This is something the elder women, raised in the bush or on stations, find of utmost importance to teach their young women. According to this young woman Yiriman is helping her bridge that gap. She says that she feels "much less stressed out" in the Yiriman setting surrounded by other young women like herself, and older generations of women who guide the work out on country (Source: Interview with Yiriman staff 2013).

Thirty-third and fourth young people

These two young women are 17 years of age and have been involved in three Yiriman activities. As mentioned earlier, one of the hallmarks of a Yiriman trip is that it is documented by young people who take on the role of recording, using digital cameras, videos and audio devices. They audio and video record elements of the journey, interview family and elders talking about certain areas, the song lines, dance and the stories ‘for country’. These two young women have taken a particular interest in recording the stories of older women. They have been involved through all stages of development, particularly in dedicated editing work shopping to encourage construction of stories. Through storytelling they are building critical thinking skills, something that many young women have

missed by not completing school. Through this involvement they have begun to consider the ways that storytelling happens and how narratives are constructed. They have learned about representation of people through the media and can begin to question the ways they are represented. They are becoming aware that they can have a voice in reconfiguring stories about them, their lives. Through this they have also become active in determining representations of young Aboriginal women (Source: Interview with Yiriman staff 2012).

Thirty-fifth and sixth young people

These two young women were involved in a series of trips on country and forums aimed to bring groups of women together within language groups and across the region. One of the major requests from women in communities is for more opportunities to connect with other women within the region and for more experiences across region. An important element of this desire on the part of more senior women is to bring along young women to share in this work. They want to pass onto young women the chance of seeing what other women are doing beyond their own communities. They want to them share experiences about relevant social issues and be exposed to new possibilities for economic futures.

These two young women participated in a regional women's gathering inspired by the traditional medicine products that the young women were developing alongside their elders.

One of the strong elements of this work is that these young women could join other women in seeing the relevance of plant work as both an end in itself and an important cultural and educational modality for other objectives. These young women also got to see and participate in projects where community members drive the work, govern decisions and how older women strengthen and support young women, build cohesion amongst family groups, build and transfer skills and carry themselves in a culturally appropriate way (Source: Interview with Yiriman staff 2012 and report 2011).

Thirty-seventh and eighth young people

These two young men were involved in a series of justice camps in 2009. One was 16 and the other 17. As a consequence of directions received from the local magistrate both attended a remote justice camp hosted by Yiriman, expressly designed for a group of young men until they were sentenced. During this trip the young men carried out cleaning up duties, building, and work associated with a pastoral station, at the same time as receiving cultural instruction from a group of elders and middle aged leaders. According to the magistrate, one manifestation of the impact the camp on these young men was their subsequence response in court. His observations capture some of this:

> *It was a long day, but I must say I have never seen young offenders in court remain so attentive and engaged. Even those who were called to appear in court late in the day remained alert and listened carefully. I was told that during the long wait to be called in to court, none of the boys expressed any rancour or impatience. The respect for the elders was evident as was the compassion and care held by the elders towards the young men. I was also pleased to see that parents and family for the boys were all in attendance, which does not always happen. As well as hearing from the parents in court, I have been told anecdotally that the parents are delighted that their boys had the opportunity to take part in the camp and each parent reported seeing positive changes in their child at its conclusion.* (source: letter from magistrate 2009)

Thirty-ninth and Fortieth young people

These two young men were aged 17 and 16 when they attended a Yiriman trip where the focus was upon mental health and suicide prevention. Like most other young people attending Yiriman trips these two young men struggle with their mental health and are particularly vulnerable to depression, anxiety, and other life threatening mental health conditions. They were able to participate in a range of activities that offered them a chance to reflect on their life, talk about their troubles, and be offered practical strategies for supporting and being supported during difficult times. The following statements are from a youth mental health worker who joined the trip specifically to see how Yiriman trips could offer suicide prevention strategies. These remarks also offer independent observations about the impact of this trip on these two young people.

> On this walk I witnessed youth from the Fitzroy Valley leave their region and come to the coast to meet with elders and youth from a different region. As the days progressed and relationships were formed I witnessed these youth overcoming the challenges that these walks and days presented. Most importantly it was evident that the youth were growing in their cultural knowledge and in their appreciation of the strength of indigenous culture from a different region.
>
> I observed the young men make their own fishing spears, then successfully use them to hunt fish, stingray, and mud crabs. It was clear their confidence and self-esteem was growing as the days passed and their skills increased.
>
> The format of the daily walks also allowed time for private discussions around suicide, grief and loss, and suicide prevention. One of the participants disclosed to me that he “had buried all my best friends” (through suicide). The walk provided a culturally appropriate setting for these young men to share their grief and as a result to support them in

their healing and grieving journeys. We believe this is crucial in preventing further suicides.

Some of the more challenging moments on the walks prompted excellent group discussion in the evenings and analogies were easily drawn between these moments and the general challenges we face in life.

As the walk was alcohol and drug free it also gave participants the opportunity to reflect on how healthy they felt without substances and to provide them with a healthy alternative to an unhealthy lifestyle. It was clear that this challenging walk had helped the participants to consider their own resilience and no doubt their successful completion of the walk will have increased their general resilience to the challenges in life.

Relationships were formed with participants on this walk that are still growing today. These relationships allow our service to better engage with our service users. It reduces the risk of people "falling through the cracks" and not receiving support. Our service will fully support Yiriman in the future. In a culturally diverse and culturally strong region Yiriman are doing the right work, the right way (source: letter of support from non-government mental health organisation 2010).

Overview of case studies

It is clear from an examination of these case studies that there is good evidence that the project has provided important opportunities for young people. It is unreasonable to claim a direct cause and effect relationship between profound and dramatic personal development and their involvement in Yiriman trips. However, there is most definitely a correlation between young people's involvement in Yiriman and many positive outcomes for individuals. It is certainly the case that all who featured as part of these case studies have experienced many important and healthy outcomes.

In particular, there is along history of Yiriman 'alumni' moving from involvement in Yiriman trips to participation in five Ranger teams. Indeed, the Yiriman project has been instrumental in helping shape the emergence of ranger teams in the Kimberley. Not only has Yiriman been an important 'parent' organisation in building ranger teams it has continued to nurture this work by feeding young people into roles as rangers, co-sponsoring many on-country trips with Rangers and offering specialist development support in the form of cultural heritage recording, training in trip management and on the ground equipment and vehicles.

Another consistent theme running through these case studies is the important part that Yiriman has played in providing young people with justice diversionary opportunities for those who have offended or at risk of moving down a pathway of offending. Many, if not most of those young people who are included in these case studies are also at risk of alcohol and substance abuse, mental health

damage and suicide. As the case studies demonstrate, many of the young people are taking up leadership roles in their communities as parents, Yiriman mentors, rangers and cultural custodians. When one considers the limited opportunities that exist for young people this becomes all the more significant.

Perhaps the most important feature of young people's involvement in the case studies has been the extent to which they have moved into the next level of cultural leadership. If one were to seek out the names of young people who are now moving into being middle aged cultural leaders in the region then many would be those who feature in the case studies. This is most definitely the 'outcome' of consequence to senior cultural bosses who look to encourage young people to 'get themselves a good name.' If we were to accept the evidence form the international literature then we would conclude that it will be these young people who will more likely find themselves enjoying success in the market economy, have better cardio-vascular function, do better with formal education and training and have improved mental health and well-being.

Evidence of positive impact on others

There is also solid evidence that the Yiriman Project has had an important impact on the **life of the community**. This has happened on a number of levels. Young people gain from Yiriman activity, particularly in relation to learning about culture, language and country. Often when asked to talk about their experiences on Yiriman trips young people respond with short but instructive and positive remarks about their exposure to culture. During 2011 trips young people usually chose to attend Yiriman trips. In other words, there was no compunction on their part to attend. Having made this observation, there continues to be strong participation from young people who have a history of getting into trouble with the justice system. Others continue to attend trips at the invitation of family.

As **workers, bosses, community** and representatives from other organisations testified, there is good evidence that Yiriman has had long-term benefits for young people. A number of those who have spent time on trips over the last ten years have been interviewed during the course of the research. Likewise, family and community members have been asked to provide commentary on the pathways of particular young people. This has been supported by the remarks of a number of professionals who have also tracked young people's growth. This provides impressive evidence of the profound value of Yiriman on young men and women who have been involved.

As outlined earlier, a considerable number of young adults ('Yiriman graduates') are now members of at least five **Kimberley ranger teams**. Some are employed in other community-based ventures such as Indigenous cultural tours, community health centres, and schools. Some now have traineeships and at least one is employed in an apprenticeship.

Parents continue to speak highly of Yiriman trips, particularly the impact of their children's involvement. This was most often expressed in their gratitude towards those who set up the organisation and made it possible for work to be carried out with their children.

As has been noted, during Yiriman trips a range of very **practical learning and personal development outcomes** occur for young people. A clear strength of Yiriman is that young people routinely learn much about culture, survival, cooking, relationships, and how to progress into adulthood in a healthy way. Evidence of the efficacy of the work is the extent to which young people continue to willingly participate in a range of activities (particularly education, language learning and cultural development). Community members certainly make this observation.

There also continues to be some evidence of a connection between Yiriman trips and a **change in the behaviour** of young people, particularly young

people with a previous track record of crime and anti-social behaviour. This is not to suggest that Yiriman is a panacea nor that young people experience a consistent or linear and straightforward transition into adulthood. There is certainly evidence that the problem of drugs and alcohol draws some young people back into use and addiction. However, it would unfair to see evidence of young people's oscillation backward and forward into good health as a failing of Yiriman. Rather it is a reality of the experience of many young people who live in the region and a challenge that confronts communities dealing with a multitude of disadvantages and social ill health. In many ways, the trajectory of many young people that sees them move from involvement in Yiriman in and out of social distress, is, in fact, a solid reason to maintain and extend the opportunities offered through Yiriman.

There continues to be a clear impact of Yiriman trips upon **older generations**. Returning to country, camping in proximity to their traditional lands, being able to tell stories about their past, singing for country, and sharing a journey of story telling and reconnection with young people is something of critical importance to old people. Mrs Silvia Shovellor had this to say:

> *My mother is the last of her generation. She is old but coming on these trips still means everything to her. You saw how she loves to sit down while all the family listen to her talking about what it was like in the old days and how the old people did things on this country. You seen it, she might be old but she can still keep all the kids sitting there listening to her yarn. She loves it and so do we (Interview, August 2011).*

The importance of Yiriman's work across **three or four generations** has been noted elsewhere. Taylor (2010) makes a point of discussing the important role and the impact of Yiriman on middle generations. She reminds us that trips do not simply involve relationships between young people and the old people. During 2011 the trips maintained the practice of 14–17 year olds being mentored by Yiriman leaders in their 20s and 30s. These two generations are joined by the 'middle-aged ones' who provide oversight, often taking part in the more physical activities, and often carrying out the instructions of the senior people.

This **'intergenerational' exchange** is well articulated by Mandy Shovellor who said:

> *The middle ones [generations] have always been important. They help bring the young ones into things and are fit enough to do the things [physical activities]. We also show the young ones that you got to listen to the old people and take their word.*

The following evaluation journal entry offers another observation about the complex involvement of different generations this in the work of Yiriman.

One of the really important things to note from this trip is the role #### [middle-aged person] has in holding things together. Mum ### [senior woman] is really active but her daughter is like a trooper, driving, setting up the camp, cooking, brining the younger kids along with things. She is like the hub around which the whole trip is held together. But it's all done so that Mum ### can lead and the younger ones can have the experience (Journal from the Karajarri family trip August 2011).

Comparing the work with 'good practice': evidence from elsewhere of the efficacy of cultural maintenance, Indigenous language use and involvement in on-country activity

Other evidence of the social value of the Yiriman Project can be found by turning out attention to the international literature. Research carried out elsewhere allows us to compare the methods used by Yiriman with the approaches taken by other work that has had a measurable impact on such things as employment, training and education outcomes, health and wellbeing, suicide prevention, crime diversion, and community building.

This section reviews a body of international research, particularly more 'hard' and statistical comparative work concerned with the correlation between 'on country activity', language maintenance, culture, art and performance and positive social consequences. This research demonstrates a direct correlation between the practice of culture and 'on-country' activities and improvement in

i) employment, education and training participation (Chandler et al. 2003; Dockery 2007, 2009a and 2009b; Halloran 2004),

ii) improved physical health such as cardiovascular and renal function, alcohol and smoking related illness and diet (Burgess et al. 2009; Brook et al. 1998; McDermott et al. 1998, O'Dea 1984, Scrimgeour 2007 and Dockery 2009a and 2009b),

iii) suicide prevention (Chandler et al. 2003, Kinnane 2010) and

iv) reductions in crime and justice related activities (Chandler et al. 2003).

This work provides an important deductive means of testing the usefulness of the work undertaken by Yiriman. Based on the evidence from elsewhere we can deduce that if Yiriman is using practice that has been established to be successful it follows that they will see similar success in social outcomes. In particular, using this research we can say with confidence that there is a positive correlation between Yiriman's work and social consequences such as physical health and wellbeing, education, training and employment outcomes, language and cultural maintenance, community building, suicide prevention, land management, and crime prevention. Furthermore convincing evidence exists that these elements of work are intricately tied up together. Success in any one element is most likely when the others are also present.

Culture

Before discussing it is also important to make some remarks about the way culture and tradition will be treated. As Austin-Broos (2011) reminds us, it is a fruitless exercise to deal with culture and tradition as something that is fixed, pristine or unencumbered by influences. Indeed, reifying culture in this way ignores the emphasis of this report in understanding the value of carrying out certain cultural practices so as to support young people's future as modern

subjects; subjects who are necessarily negotiating their way in a global economy as sophisticated citizens in an ever-changing world. It is important to recognise that culture is a mix of practices, symbols, languages, ideas and codes of conduct. There has never been a moment when a single, bounded, internally consistent or homogenous 'Aboriginal culture' has existed. On the contrary 'culture' involves an assortment of often-conflicting orientations among individuals, family groups and regional blocks.

In the recent debate about the future of remote communities 'culture' has often been treated in this way, leading to a polemic of either/or, for and against, good versus bad, arguments about culture. For example, many commentators seem to posit that remote communities have to choose between either kin-based systems economies and forms of governance (often assumed to be pathological) or the total embracing of market-based values and behaviour.

Rather than perpetuating these simple ideas about 'Aboriginal culture' this section will treat it and the problem of disadvantage and inequality as tied up together. There may well be some practices from yesteryear that perpetuate inequality and suffering. However, those keen to see Indigenous young people enjoy more market success can also carry out community-led cultural maintenance and regeneration. As *Nyikina* man Anthony Watson explains, projects such as Yiriman involve combining old and new ways of building opportunities for young people:

> *We got lots of kids not following our culture, they not following mainstream culture, they following lazy culture. So bad things are going on. We gotta stop the bad things and concentrate on the good things. Over the last ten years we support them in every way we can – further learning or schooling. We try and meet their needs, help them find jobs. We have work-based projects, we try and find contracts for them. We linking people up with educational institutions, we network, we organise agencies to go out to communities and run programs, like the swordfish tagging project. All of this happens while we go back to country, learning from the old people about culture, skin and the old stories. We grateful for leadership that does all these things and this is what* Yiriman *has been doing for ten years (Anthony Watson, Yiriman Bosses Meeting 2010).*

Extent of involvement in cultural and customary economy

The first convincing argument for the value of exposure to what has been called 'on-country cultural immersion' is that this often forms part of people's everyday lives in contemporary times. Indeed, despite claims that Aboriginal culture has diminished considerably, the evidence is that modern Aboriginal Australians have managed to maintain lives with distinct cultural forms. According to the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey (NATSISS), Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language and culture continues to have great influence. For example, in 2008 19% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait

Islander people aged 15 years and over and 13% of children (3–14 years) spoke an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander language. There is also evidence that more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are identifying with a clan, tribal or language group, increasing from 54% in 2002 to 62% in 2008. Furthermore, in 2008 72% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 15 years or over reported that they recognised a particular area as their homelands or traditional country. According to this study 70% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and 63% of people aged 15 years or over were involved in cultural events, ceremonies or organisations in 2008. In 2008, almost one-third (31%) of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children spent at least one day a week with an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leader or elder (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2010).

This has been so during a period where there is some evidence of improvement in social and economic status for Aboriginal people. The NATSISS has demonstrated that more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people completed Year 12: 22% (of people aged 15 years and over) in 2008, up from 18% in 2002. As well, more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people completed non-school qualifications: 40% (of people aged 25–64 years) in 2008, up from 32% in 2002. Based on the 2008 study, 54% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 15–64 years were employed in 2008, an increase from 48% in 2002. The unemployment rate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians fell from 23% in 2002 to 17% in 2008, but remained more than three times higher than the rate for non-Indigenous Australians (5% in 2008). In addition the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who lived in households that had run out of money for basic living expenses in the previous 12 months decreased from 44% in 2002 to 28% in 2008. Nearly one-third (31%) of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children aged 0–14 years lived in dwellings that required at least one extra bedroom in 2008. Rates were higher in remote areas (57%) and lower in regional areas (26%) and major cities (19%) (ABS 2010).

The NATSISS has also shown that Aboriginal people (particularly in remote areas) are very active in what is often described as the customary or cultural economy. For example, 82% of adults in remote community areas hunted and fished in the three months prior to the study. In the Northern Territory over 70% of the Aboriginal population live on land managed and owned by Aboriginal organisations. The vast majority of adults living in these areas consistently participate in cultural activities. In their study of customary activity with the Community Development Employment Program, ANU scholars Altman, Buchanan and Biddle, found that over 90% of participants in the CDEP scheme were able to meet their cultural responsibilities (cited in Altman 2005). Furthermore the NATSISS data indicates that Aboriginal participation rates in hunting, fishing and the production of art for sale are very high. Indeed Altman's work (for example, 2005 and 2009) demonstrates that the customary economy

is very much part of the 'real economy' for Indigenous people in remote and very remote Australia. In addition, over the past five years there is a clear field of opportunities for increased Aboriginal involvement in new customary related economies such the Indigenous ranger sector, other environmental and natural resource management and cultural heritage and safety work in the mining sector (Altman 2009). In this way Aboriginal culture is a serious and real element in the remote Australian economic and social landscape. Evidence from the NATSISS data shows that culture and customary activity is alive and well in the lives of contemporary remote people. In addition, it is 'heavily integrated with the modern capitalist economy' (Altman 2005, p. 4).

Evidence offered by Altman and Hinkson (2010) is that this involvement in culture, the customary economy and regular presence in remote areas (particularly in Australia's north) all have significant benefits associated with the national interest. Firstly, it provides diversification of economy in regions where there are a number of risks associated with poor labour market opportunity. Often risk to biodiversity is at its premium in these regions. Many other risks, according to Dillon and Westbury (2007 pp. 30–49), threaten 'national security' on a number of levels. This includes threats associated with human and species security including the import of avian flu, HIV and SARS; disease to the agricultural industry; and various feral and introduced weeds species. Unregulated visits, unmanaged biodiversity and uncontrolled fire in many of these regions pose risks of global proportions. Commercial, food and drug security has increasingly impacted on the Australian national interest. Coastal security, customs breaches and national defence all still rate as high risk concerns, particular in northern coastal regions.

In these regions Aboriginal presence and involvement in culture, the customary economy and 'caring for country' activities provides part of a creative solution to many of these national risks. Involvement by Aboriginal people in productive activities such as hunting and art reduce risk, in that a population can be sustained in areas that would simply not support people reliant on conventional or one-sector market economies. Altman stressed that these forms of 'hybrid economic' activity are beginning to invite various forms of local, regional, resources and government partnerships (Altman and Hinkson 2010). This includes work deeply dependent upon culture on work on country, including wildlife harvesting, fire management, species management, quarantine work, coastal management and surveillance, joint management of national parks, Aboriginal art, cultural tourism, and natural resource management and risk assessment around coastlines and environments both on and off Aboriginal land (cited in Austin-Broos 2011).

A second reason to recognise the importance of culture is that many Aboriginal communities and organisations have consistently called for others to recognise the role it plays in maintaining the lives of people living in contemporary times. There is no shortage of work that cites these calls for culture and connection to

country. For example, the recently produced 'Caring for Country Plan' developed in conjunction with people across the Kimberley region and supported by the key Aboriginal regional organisations makes it clear that:

> People across the region emphasised that caring for Country projects must include opportunities for the use and transmission of language, and for old people to pass on their cultural knowledge to younger generations. They hoped to increase opportunities for people to get out on Country.
>
> Being on Country means that young people learn the right way: the right people, right place, right names, and the cultural protocols and stories. They learn to understand the places they are responsible for and the way they should care for these places. Being on Country supports the maintenance of language and Law (cited in Griffiths and Kinnane, 2010).

Furthermore, in regions such as the Kimberley senior people have continued to express their desire to pass on cultural knowledge to young people. Indeed, if there is such a thing as a generational legacy plan it is that culture and knowledge associated with country is the most valuable inheritance to pass on to future generations.

Evidence of nexus between culture, country and wellbeing

There is also mounting and solid evidence of an important nexus between the health of individuals and communities and practicing culture and being on and caring for country. This evidence exists in both international and national work.

A solid body of international work has shown that 'culture' can act as a mechanism for building better health. Indeed there exists much evidence of the value of traditional healing practices. For example, in the 1970s Bob Tonkinson described cures carried out by Aboriginal healers. During a similar period Dianne Bell revealed the way women's healing ceremonies brought about significant and immediate improvements in health conditions. Similarly Scarlett, White and Reid's work documents many 'bush medicines' still used by people from northern and central Australia. Indeed so useful have been many traditional healing and medicinal practices that they are now being researched and 'exploited' by Western scientists (cited in Grieves 2009).

It has also been well documented that work similar to that carried out by Yiriman has been instrumental in helping form and reform people's identity and sense of how they function within their communities. Often work such as this helps young people test out and try on new identities and test out how others think they should behave.

In similar work involving Indigenous Australians the connection between people and country is paramount. Largely this reflects the fact that in traditional law and culture there exists an irrepressible link between people, family, and country. Indeed to think about the future of a community without reference to country is akin to talking about the future of a child without reference to its mother (Bird

Rose 2004, p. 153). As Edwards (1988) further explains, for Anangu, country is an extension of family, the place where present living family, ancestors and as yet unborn children dwell. This means that Anangu would see that, as a member of one's family, country demands care. In turn, country offers care. To visit country, to travel through it, hunt on it, make fire on it and sing to it is much like visiting an older relative. In both acts one maintains relationships, obligations and 'keeps alive' one's family. In this way, keeping country healthy (by visiting it, dancing on it and warming its soul by fire) also involves the act of keeping community healthy (Collard 2008).

As mentioned earlier, Yiriman clearly helps people communicate and express their family and personal connections to 'old' cultural practices, relationships, language forms of social expression. Almost all involved in Yiriman said it provided people with a chance to reacquaint themselves with their 'country'. In part this is because over the generations 'country' is literally and symbolically an extension of family and self. This reflects long-established ontological traditions that connect the health of country to the health of persons. Bird Rose puts it beautifully when she says:

> In Aboriginal English, the word 'country' is both a common noun and a proper noun. People talk about country in the same way that they would talk about a person: they speak to country, sing to country, visit country, worry about country, and grieve for country and long for country. People say that country knows, hears, smells, takes notice, takes care, and feels sorry or happy. Country is a living entity with a yesterday, a today and tomorrow, with consciousness, action, and a will toward life (Bird Rose et al. 2002, p. 14).

In another place Bird Rose (2004) observes that the process of travelling to country not only involves people sharing stories and 'going along together', it also animates their relationship with specific places and spaces. As many of the older cultural bosses acknowledged, going back to country allowed them to maintain their relationship with elders and ancestors long passed away but still living as spirits. Important here is the conception for many 'old people' that the dead are an integral part of the maintenance of life and experience of the young and living. In other words, the practice of walking on-country and telling stories (often about their ancestors) implicitly involves communion between the young (the living) and the old (the dead). It involves 'paying dues' to the ancestors, respecting the cycle of life in death and death in life and learning about their obligations to pass this on to those who 'come behind' (Muecke 1997 and 2004). This opportunity to 'return to the old people and reconnect with country' has become all the more urgent in the last one hundred years because many people have become truncated and removed from their traditional lands. Distance from country has equated to distance from culture. This in turn equates with distance from health and wellbeing. So the symbolic act of visiting, spending time and nurturing country is fundamental to healing. Indeed for many

senior people it is axiomatic that country is tied up with healing and healing is tied up with country.

Healing, caring for one another and making comfort

As well as the intrinsic value of encouraging cultural practice there is mounting evidence that involvement in the 'cultural economy' itself supports the health of individuals and communities.

As mentioned earlier, there was an important connection between the act of travelling on country and talking about the day-to-day struggles going on in places like Fitzroy Crossing. For example, as they collected wild harvests and learnt about how to produce them for use, women talked about important matters associated with the health of individuals and various families.

Elsewhere the act of being on country in this way has been associated with healing and community solidarity. As the sociologist Norbett Elias pointed out, a close and tight community requires a healthy flow of local gossip and storytelling to keep relationships strong. His classic study of the formation of social solidarity in a 1950s British village established that more 'closely-knit' communities relied on gossip to create 'ready-made channels through which news of public interest could flow' (Elias, 1994, pp. 89–90). In particular supportive forms of gossip, what Elias described as 'praise gossip', is instrumental in helping communities reinforce social cohesion (Van Krieken 1998, p. 144).

Sociological work has long demonstrated that a recipe for social disaster and ill health is to strip groups of their capacity to maintain language, customs and traditional cultural practices (Brady 1995; Spicer 2001). For example, Spicer (2001) carried out a study of abstinence among First Nation Americans. He concluded that there is a correlation between drinking and cultural loss. Likewise, in his analysis of African-American health, Williams' (1999) research demonstrates that negative conception of one's cultural group is linked with higher levels of psychological distress, alcohol use and poor physical and mental health.

Medical anthropology has also long established that the reinvigoration of traditional cultural practices have been successful in remedying certain health conditions (Brady 1995; Spicer 2001). For example, Spicer's (2001) work clearly established that the most common feature amongst abstainers was a strong sense of cultural identity. Social psychologists have established that strength in one's own cultural identity helps protect against and treat negative health behaviours (Chandler et al. 2003; Miller 1999; Williams 1999a; Yancey et al. 2002; Williams R. 1999). Research among Hispanic, Mexican, and Asian communities in the USA demonstrates a strong correlation between the practice of culture and identity and positive health outcomes. This work has shown that the practice of buttressing one's cultural identity is conducive to better health

outcomes (Williams et al. 2003). For example, using language development and cultural practice as treatment has regularly been demonstrated to be positive in the drug and alcohol literature concerned with Indigenous people (Spicer 2001). Increased immunisation rates and decreased drug use correlate with evidence of strong cultural identity (Anderson et al. 1997; Salant and Lauderdale 2003, Brook et al. 1998).

Many, such as Miller (1999) and Yancey et al. (2002) have highlighted the link between positive and cultural socialisation and the improved health of communities. This is because identity and culture are important individual and community resources for healthy communities. Indeed, it has routinely been demonstrated by social researchers that maintaining practice and experience in one's parent cultural setting/s is essential to effective and coordinated human interaction and development. As Halloran (2004, pp. 2–3) points out, for individuals culture provides 'collectively validated ways to think about and value oneself, and ultimately behave towards the physical and social world'.

Culture also functions to help us contend with the vast array of uncertainties and anxieties confronting us, factors that contribute to the sense of isolation. In other words, cultural practice allows one to give meaning and value to individual existence, tying the individual and social into meaningful relationship. In this way culture provides order, structure, meaning, and purpose to social interaction. So by definition, to live as an individual abstracted from culture is to live as one in a constant state of anxiety. Or as Halloran (2004, p. 3–7) puts it, '*Cultural trauma* is a state wherein cultural knowledge and practices have been weakened to the extent that they fail in their capacity to imbue individual existence with meaning and value.'

There are two likely long-term effects of cultural trauma. The first is that those individuals suffering these effects, those in constant state of anxiety, will be maladjusted and unable to cope with the daily rigours of life. The second is that this will result in endemic suffering, carried into the successive generations (Halloran 2004, p. 4).

A weakening of cultural practice in this way is likely to produce similar symptomatology to that experienced by sufferers of Post-Traumatic Stress Syndrome. Not surprisingly there are disturbingly higher reported proportions of conditions associated with this lack of cultural health amongst many Aboriginal Australians. They are disproportionately represented in prisons, infant mortality, suicide, drug dependence and substance abuse, and general medical conditions, as well as lower life expectancies. They also have higher rates of self-reported hopelessness, helplessness, and disorientation as well as anxiety, irritability and insomnia, and are much more likely to die from the consequences of a mental disorder. By implication then, cultural reinvigoration and opportunities for exposure to cultural practice represent an important step towards restoring social and psychological health (Halloran 2004, pp. 6–7).

There exist a number of specific Australian studies of community-based projects that support these conclusions. For example, the Aboriginal initiated *We Al-Li* program sought out to heal pain and trauma of Aboriginal participants through the use of traditional ceremonies of healing. Participants from the *We Al-Li* (the *Woppaburra* term for 'fire and water') reported 'deep emotional healing and a shift from victim self-perceptions to those of a survivor' (Atkinson and Ober 1995). In a similar fashion participants of the family wellbeing 'Aboriginal Empowerment Program' in the Northern Territory, also reported promising indications of improved health and wellbeing (Tsey and Every 2000). A study of the work of the *Belyuen* Health Centre showed significant improvements in health outcomes of Indigenous people. This Aboriginal health project built into its program elements of experience in aspects of Aboriginality, such as social kin relationships and responsibilities, methods of traditional time-keeping, gender issues, and the use of traditional healers and language (cited in Halloran 2004, p. 10).

Another project to become the subject of research was the 'Strong Women, Strong Babies, Strong Culture Program'. This project involved participants being invited to undertake traditional food collection to increase exercise, and traditional pregnancy practices, such as the smoking ceremony. The program also had positive effects on the baby of these women with a marked decrease in the rate of low birth weights and pre-term births (Fejo and Rae 1996). Culture, language maintenance and arts practice was also shown to have a range of important social benefits in a study of the work of the group Big hART in their *Ngapartji Ngapartji* project with *Anangu* in Central Australia. Providing opportunities for music, performance, fine arts design, filmmaking, language resource development and other digital recorded work had enormous positive consequences for the Pitjantjatjara communities involved. This includes crime prevention, literacy development, intergenerational exchange, and improvements in school attendance, employment, involving in the creative arts industry, and physical health (Palmer 2010).

A range of medical studies of the impact of working on country on Aboriginal health have consistently found a correlation between good health outcomes and culture. For example, one study found a significant improvement in carbohydrate and lipid metabolism amongst diabetic suffers after a short return to culture and a traditional life (O'Dea 1984). Similarly, an investigation of nutrition related risks in Aboriginal people's diets found that there was vast improvement in those who maintained culture and tradition (O'Dea et al. 1988). Another study found clearly that people who reported engaging in land management practices had a lower risk of heart disease (Burgess et al. 2009). A two-year study carried out in conjunction with a remote Arnhem Land township and surrounding homelands tested the correlation between core activities in caring for country (time visiting country, burning, gathering of food and medicinal resources, ceremony, protecting sacred areas, and producing

artwork) with measurable health outcomes. This work found that these activities were significantly associated with: marginally higher income, lower educational attainment, less consumption of takeaway foods, more frequent consumption of bush foods, more frequent exercise and greater participation in caring for country activities. Furthermore, 'caring-for-country' activities were associated with: more frequent exercise and bush food consumption, lower BMI, less abdominal obesity, less diabetes, lower blood pressure, lower HbA1c level, higher HDL cholesterol level, normal ACR, lower psychological distress and lower CVD risk. On the other hand, the same activities were not associated with smoking, alcohol use or frequent consumption of store produce or takeaway foods (cited in Burgess et al. 2009). Another study similarly found that work associated with land management in the south of Australia led to good health (Kingsley et al. 2009). Another found that more remote living Aboriginal Australians and the more 'in touch with culture' are people more likely to enjoy their health (Scrimgeour 2007). An earlier study had confirmed the positive impact the Aboriginal homelands movement had on people's health status (McDermott et al. 1998). Ten years later a follow-up study found that there existed a lower than expected morbidity and mortality rate for those who lived in this remote area (Rowley et al. 2008).

Dockery's (2009a, p. 3) study of the connection between Aboriginal cultural attachment and health found that those with strong involvement in culture have significantly better self-assessed health. The study also found that Aboriginal people with weak or moderate 'cultural attachment' that are more likely to have been arrested in the past five years. Furthermore people with strong cultural attachment are less likely to involve themselves in 'risky' alcohol consumption (Dockery 2009, p. 19).

This work is important for a number of reasons. It provides empirical confirmation that there are negative impacts on wellbeing if employment, economic and social outcomes are pursued in the absence or at the expense of culture. It also strongly supports the conclusion that community-based and culturally driven solutions to health and wellbeing are positioned solidly to succeed. At the very least it demonstrates that projects that include elements of Aboriginal cultural practice are likely to be an integral part of solutions to ill health. It clearly demonstrates a statistical correlation between cultural practice and better health outcomes (Dockery 2009a, p. 20).

Particularly sobering is the evidence that involvement in the practice of culture serves as a strong elixir to mental illness. In particular, the work of Chandler et al. (2003) demonstrates that persistence of a sense of self and culture through time guards against youth suicide. Data from this study generated solid evidence that there is a correlation between lower suicide rates and a commitment to cultural continuity and use of Indigenous languages.

Coming together, dialogue and social contact across generations

Another feature of success in social programs in Aboriginal communities is the presence of opportunity for those involved to fulfill their obligations to maintain contact across family and generations.

Partly this reflects the fact that in the Kimberley people are divided by birth into sub-section or skin groups. One's place in the skin system, automatically established by one's parent's group, allows people to know how to relate to others across an extended family network. Within this system, some groups are considered 'straight skins', able to marry or be close to each other. In addition, this system orders relationships across generations using genealogical connections to determine the conduct of important ceremonies, particularly during what is called law time or the period when cultural business is carried out.

This system means that children and young people are 'grown up' by a range of people acting as parents. It also means that all have large sets of obligations to many brothers and sisters, uncles, aunties, nephews and nieces. Importantly this system allows outsiders and those new to a community to be instantly recognised, assigned particular responsibilities, and to enjoy support and certain rights (see Myers 1991, Folds 2001, Meggit 1987, Karrayili nd, Glass 2002). As Doohan (2008, p. 46) puts it, this represented a 'powerful and pervasive aspect of people's lives, providing a kind of map or blueprint of an individual's connections to others and to country.'

There is much evidence that while some of the detail of these systems has changed considerably, many contemporary Kimberley families continue to take seriously the importance of reinforcing young people's knowledge of identity and social obligations. This happens in different ways, regularly involving a combination of instruction, proximity with certain people, loyalty in times of feuding and tension, and activities carried out across family groups.

During Yiriman trips the expression of deep care for children and young people is often very evident. The middle-aged and senior people are often beautifully encouraging of those younger, regularly making public their views that young people's leadership is a priority. As Annie Milgen said, 'We want to see or young people coming out as leaders and as role models. They got to step up because tomorrow we going to be gone and they going to be the old ones.' Particularly important here is the obligations that come with age to nurture those who 'come along after' (Myers 1991, p. 211). As a consequence Yiriman trips usually aim to involve three or four generations.

This work across the generations makes it possible for children and young people to be 'held' by their seniors. McCoy (2008, p. 22) discusses this in his

book based on fieldwork in the Western Desert region, describing the importance of the *Kukatja* idea of *Kanyirninpa*. *Kanyirninpa* is 'expressed in a number of interconnected ways. It includes nurturance but it also involves older people taking responsibility and offering protection for those they hold. This relationship between the generations is named as "respect". *Kanyirninpa* is also expressed in relationships that involve teaching and learning where older people help young people "grow up the right way".'

McCoy (2008, p. 28) claims that this business of 'holding' young people, this practice of exercising 'respect' towards others, creates social bonds and social obligations to reciprocate. In response when they get older young people will adopt the same practice and attitude towards their children. As one *Kukatja* woman puts it (cited in McCoy 2008, p. 28), 'They'll respect you back, as they grow up. They won't just leave you.' As another puts it, 'If you hold that person, that person will return that respect to you' (cited in McCoy 2008, p. 18).

This practice of 'holding' does not simple target young people's educational growth; it is also tied up with the education, training and health of other generations. Indeed this process of nurturing young people while on country seems to have a tremendous impact on all involved, giving them energy and enthusiasm as they see young people respond to the rich experience of making and storytelling. As Myers (1991, p. 213) says, this is because this style of passing on knowledge is 'rooted less in command than in responsibility, the relationship of "holding" not only defines the juniors, but it is the very basis of the status of seniors.'

In this case Yiriman trips provide a direct way to maintain family and connection. This is similar to the way *Anangu* women's craft group *Tjanpi* work with spinifex and other desert grass.

> At its core *Tjanpi* is about family and community. While out collecting grass women take time to hunt, gather food, visit sacred sites and teach their children about country. *Tjanpi* work is work that more than accommodates social and cultural obligations; it encourages them (*Tjanpi* Desert Weavers, Fernand, Cardoso and Clouston 2009).

In much the same way Yiriman does not simply compliment skin and family relationships and community building, it also makes skin and family relationships strong, allowing people to work in a way that encourages high levels of autonomy, working in groups of like-minded people, and able to fit in their child-care and other family obligations. In a way it allows people to maintain the role of being 'bosses for themselves and their families' (Purich cited in Nicholls 2007, p. 43).

Through this work, on country stories about the relationship with older generations comes to life. It create social connections and perpetuates a way of how social connecting can occur (Ganambarr 2007, p. 57). In this way an

intergenerational practice from the past becomes a story available to be handed down again and again, every time Yiriman trips occur.

Stories, remembering and imagination

One of the key reasons for the original establishment of the Yiriman Project was to encourage the people of the region to find ways to retell old stories and create new ones about their future. This experience of storytelling, the raison d'être for Yiriman, gives people both the chance to bring to the present the elders of the past and at the same time helps to create the elders for the future. In part this reflects longstanding Aboriginal traditions of educating their young, transmitting culture, building leaders and managing decision through the act of storytelling.

'Bringing out old stories' is important for encouraging healthy communities in a number of ways. Combining storytelling with tactile and active work (for example making boomerangs or carrying out wild harvest work) both helps people recall their lives and give life to the audience of the storytelling. This kind of work demands people exercise a range of sensory tools. During trips and around camp fires, at different sites, and in the cars as the groups travel, people listened to each other while they told stories. Much of the tacit learning and retention that takes place in this environment is very powerful. People's imagination about the old days and the stories is enriched by the opportunity to see, touch, smell, and indeed feel the stories. In this way storytelling combined with travelling on country acts as a form of mnemonics, improving and bringing to a more public forum people's memory of life as Kimberley people. At the same time, the trips help stimulate people's imagination for how things might be different, creating for them a sense of possibilities, stretching their minds to take on new insights and new ways of configuring a future.

Storytelling combined with being on country is also an important practical way of overcoming people's tendency to recoil from social interaction with each other. By creating spaces for people to tell their stories, the trips help people extend the depth of their relationships, build their repertoire for communication, and make new contacts. In other settings people might describe this act as network building.

Narrative work and storytelling is also important because of its ability to call forth and help people contend with emotions, trauma and difficult situations in a safe and non-threatening way. At times it also allows people to grapple with some of the difficulties associated with family conflict, community violence and profound challenges such as suicides and early death among family.

Critical in this environment is that people are free to use distinct Aboriginal and Kriol language forms that are familiar to them. The stories are littered with Aboriginal English, *Walmatjarri*, *Karajarri*, *Nyikina* and *Mangala* words and grammatical expressions. As a consequence, the language and cultural content

used during the storytelling is often evocative, in part because it is 'authentic' and relevant to the experiences of people, in part because it allow people to inject into their discourse 'in-house' humour, phrasing, meaning and much figurative speaking (see CANWA 2011 for an example of similar work).

The storytelling opportunities that emerge from this project are reminiscent of similar work carried out by Aboriginal women in Central Australia. As Anangu elder and artist Josephine Mick observes, mixing up textile work with storytelling often has multiple consequences for a number of different generations. Describing some of the *Tjanpi* (spinifex grass) artistry work she said,

> A woman keeps so many memories in her head, about where she has travelled to … where she grew up, the stories she was taught. So it is very good when she goes back to her own country to collect Tjanpi to make baskets from her our country and when children make baskets from Tjanpi which has been collected on their own country and their mother's country … Tjanpi has Tjukurpa [story] too (Josephine Mick in Tjanpi Desert Weavers, Fernand, Cardoso and Clouston 2009).

Others have recognised the social and educative benefits of communal story making. As Aristotle says in his *Poetics*, storytelling is an important ingredient in the formation of solidarity and community. It is what allows humans to enjoy a shareable world (cited in Kearney 2002, p. 3). Telling a story demands that at least two people join in conversation (Kearney 2002, p. 45). It is, as Kant noted, a useful way of identifying with as many fellow humans as possible, to participate in a shared sense of ideas and values (Kearney 2002, p. 63).

As Carson (cited in Kearney 2002 p. 125) says, a story creates conditions for a cycle of social contact. 'There are three points about stories: if told, they like to be heard; if heard, they like to be taken in; and if taken in, they like to be told.' The story also sets up relationships amongst a triad (which according to Simmel is the beginning of community). Every story involves someone (a storyteller who is the first person) telling something (a story about a second person) to someone (a listener who becomes the third person) about something (a real or imaginary world that connects all three to another place) (Kearney 2002, p. 150).

There is also much evidence that stories can be helpful in healing and therapy, contending with pain and helping sufferers purge and divest their old histories (Parkinson 2009, p. 45). Storytelling also helps spark imagination and encourages people to think about their world in different ways to be in the world. As Kearney (2002, p. 5) puts it, 'Someone, somewhere, sometime, took it into his head to utter the words "once upon a time"; and, so doing, lit bonfires in the imaginations of the his listeners.' One of the most important achievements of a story is that it, 'communicates new possibilities, illustrates new perspectives, takes people to new places in imagination, and connects imaginatively and metaphorically with a sense of new meaning and purpose' (Parkinson 2009, pp.

19–20). Erikson understood this when he observed that story and images often revealed things about his subjects that they might not otherwise have wanted to show (cited in Kearney 2002, p. 74).

Stories also have an important part to play in the transmission of community values, ideas and culture. The Greeks understood this, often using mythology and storytelling as a way to teach lessons about virtues and ideas about the moral good. In part this is because stories can get across abstract principles. In part it is because a story can establish patterns in human behaviour and evocatively convey an idea without appearing to dictate or moralise (Kearney 2002, p.. This is a powerful means of education, particularly when combined with other forms of story activities such as dance, song, ritual, walking, and performing (Kearney 2002, p. 36).

Stalling (cited in Kearney 2002, p. 37) describes as trance the state that one enters as a storyteller and listener. An unusually deep form of active stillness can fall upon people during story. This can lead to a true altered state of consciousness that makes one highly susceptible to profound learning and development. Larkoff (2004) makes the point that using story in this way is much more powerful than using logic and reason to stimulate learning. As Parkinson (2009, p. 301) reminds us, 'say worthwhile things in a logical way and they may disappear into the ether. Use an image, tell a story, make an analogy and it wakes people up.'

Creativity, flow and joy

Also important was the multiple benefits the trips offer in encouraging people's creativity and 'flow'. When asked to describe their experiences of being on-country a number of people offered similar descriptions to those which feature in psychologist Mihaly Csíkszentmihályi's research on the state of being 'in flow' (see Steen 2010).

According to Csíkszentmihályi, flow is the state of being that a person enters when they are involved in an activity that has them fully immersed, feeling focused, and successfully achieving what it is they set out to do. Flow involves being single-minded in relation to the task at hand, harnessing the attention, emotions, and energy, in the service of performing and learning particular aspects of that task. A combination of focus, concentration and skill hold the key to achieving 'flow' (Csíkszentmihályi and Nakamura 2002, Csíkszentmihályi 1988).

Csíkszentmihályi's work has demonstrated a clear correlation between 'flow' states and a range of positive social consequences. This includes a connection between 'flow' and increased:

- involvement, both in the activity that prompts flow and in the general act of complete focus and concentration;
- delight, a sense of bliss and positive detachment from those everyday

realities that are debilitating;

- clarity and understanding about the state of one's affairs;
- confidence, particularly the sense that one can achieve success and that one's skills are up to a range of tasks;
- serenity and a sense of peace;
- sense of timeliness thorough a focus on the present; and
- motivation; building people's general ability to get things done.

At the same time 'flow' helps people contend with their feelings of anxiety, stress and trauma.

For many of those involved in this project, being on-country allowed them to be completely absorbed in a task that was challenging but not to the extent that they felt stressed or stretched beyond their skill level or point of frustration. Walking, hunting, traveling and making artefacts instituted a state of being absorbed in the work, so much so that that a great deal of time elapsed without people being necessarily aware of this. For example, one man said, 'I often find myself staying up all night listening to the old people tell stories, practicing dancing with the young ones. We don't want to come back to town and when we do it seems like the week has gone quick.'

Trips also often prompt a state of being where people get lost in experience, unaware of little else than sitting, visiting important sites or filming others. Another middle-aged man said, 'Every time I bring out that old man he doesn't want to come back. He is always saying, "What now?" or "What next?" when we come back. All the worries of Fitzroy leave him. He don't think about anything else and all of the problems slip away.'

This is not surprising when we compare being on country with what Csíkszentmihályi observes as the conditions for 'flow'. Csíkszentmihályi (Csíkszentmihályi and Rathunde 1993, p. 60) identifies the following nine factors as accompanying experiences of flow:

- Clear goals (expectations and rules are discernible and goals are attainable and align appropriately with one's skill set and abilities). Moreover, the challenge level and skill level should both be high.
- A high degree of concentration on a limited field of attention (a person engaged in the activity will have the opportunity to focus and to delve deeply into it).
- A loss of the feeling of self-consciousness and the merging of action and awareness.
- Distorted sense of time.
- Direct and immediate feedback (successes and failures in the course of the activity are apparent, so that behavior can be adjusted as needed).
- Balance between ability level and challenge (the activity is neither too easy

nor too difficult).

- A sense of personal control over the situation or activity.
- The activity is intrinsically rewarding, so there is an effortlessness of action.
- People become absorbed in their activity, and focus of awareness is narrowed down to the activity itself, action awareness merging.

For most of those involved on a Yiriman trip, the dual goals of being on-country and building relationships were clear and consistently practiced. As one woman said, 'Yiriman trips are a big chance to meet up … this is why they are so popular.' While the tasks associated with traveling, setting up and getting the work done, usually stretch young people's skills, nothing is too demanding and all draws on what people already know. Aboriginal styles of learning and doing are much more evident on these trips. Another said, 'Yiriman gets you to learn in the old ways where them young ones get showed the way someone else did it, it is easy this way.' The working environment is very comfortable, particularly given the safety of mixing with family and others from people's community.

Csíkszentmihályi also suggested that the process of 'flow' could make itself manifest in groups as well as individuals. In a way he described conditions that make possible the 'communal' experience of 'flow' in which people share moving together. These conditions include:

- Creative spatial arrangements where people can move and share work together.
- Workplaces designed so that people feel safe and open to experiment and come up with 'crazy design'.
- Parallel, organised working arrangements so people can exchange ideas and see the work of others.
- A shared and group focus so that people could work with independence while feeling they are contributing to a larger project.
- The existence of models and prototypes so that people have confidence to build on and advance ideas offered by others.
- Close proximity so people can create efficiently through visual stimulation.
- Existence of differences in style, experience, level of skill, and story among participants, to stimulate sharing, interaction and creativity (Csíkszentmihályi cited in Steen 2010).

The shared camping settings on Yiriman trips make possible many of these features. People routinely worked, travelled, ate and slept in close proximity, around open camp settings. This makes it possible for people to enjoy considerable personal space and autonomy, share food, knowledge, experiences, see each other, and assist each other to learn and experiment.

There is also considerable evidence from elsewhere of the value that comes from exercising creativity by participating in contemporary cultural activities. For example, recent empirical work has identified a crucial link between involvement in cultural activity and positive outcomes in formal education and vocational training. This is particularly illuminating research for three reasons. It is important 'given the claims afforded to education as a means to addressing Indigenous disadvantage' (Dockery 2009b, p. 7). In their research Dockery and Milsom (2007, pp. 3–8), established that:

- in non-remote areas, cultural attachment is complementary with 'mainstream' educational success and participation in vocational education and training;
- cultural attachment itself is having an enabling effect on Indigenous people's involvement in education and training;
- people with stronger cultural attachment are more likely to make use of VET training;
- for those living in both remote and non-remote Australia there is not a trade-off between maintenance of Indigenous culture and achievement in education and training; and
- both education and training are often pursued together to enhance objectives relating to cultural maintenance.

This research puts paid to the claim by some commentators that Aboriginal communities need to make a choice between either maintaining culture or providing educational opportunities for their young. The research concludes that 'whether individuals are living in remote or non-remote Australia, we can reject the view that there is a trade-off between maintenance of Indigenous culture and achievement in education and training' (Dockery 2009b, p. 3). This work also demonstrates the coexistence and mutual interdependence between formal education and training and traditional Aboriginal forms of 'schooling'. Where education opportunities are available, 'those with stronger cultural attachment are more likely to make use of it' (Dockery 2009b p. 9). This work found that involvement in cultural activity had 'a pervasive effect upon VET participation and outcomes'. The data strongly suggests that those with a stronger attachment to elements of traditional culture achieve higher levels of 'educational attainment and are more likely to have participated in a vocational training course in the year prior to the survey than those with weaker attachment' (Dockery 2009b, p. 37). This research provides a good indication that cultural practice and cultural education has an enabling effect across all forms of education, strengthening rather than jeopardizing young people's future educational options (Dockery 2009b, p. 40).

Similar evidence has been found elsewhere in the world. For example, Li, D'Angiulli and Kendall (2007, p. 230) cite research from Canada and elsewhere in Australia that when Indigenous and communities exercise control and cultural

influence over their children's education, this often results in changes that make the school's educational programmes fit the needs of children and hence succeed. Chandler, Lalonde, Sokol and Hallett (2003) present Canadian evidence that a more active involvement of Indigenous community and cultural content in local schools produced impressive results, even reducing the rates of youth suicide. This kind of evidence of improved outcomes from engaging with Indigenous culture in school and vocational education and training can also be found in reviews of the Australian literature (Mellor and Corrigan 2004). In his study, Hunter provides evidence that Indigenous 13–17 year olds are substantially more likely to attend school if they speak an Indigenous language (2007). Miller identifies Aboriginal community involvement as well as the incorporation of Indigenous language, culture, knowledge and values as key factors leading to better educational outcomes (2005, p.50). This work also found that 'culture' has a pervasive impact upon VET participation and outcomes.

Taken together this work demonstrates that Indigenous people with a stronger attachment to their traditional culture are more likely to achieve higher levels of educational attainment as well as being more likely to participate in vocational training opportunities. As Dockery (2009b, p. 40) puts it, the fact that stronger cultural attachment is associated with a greater likelihood of completing school, indicates the enabling impact of culture.

Connected with the regular presence of 'flow' and creativity, was the regularity with which humour, laughter, fun and joy occurs on Yiriman trips. As one Coordinator noted,

> *I can't remember a single Yiriman trip without people in fits of laughter. It might be because the boys are doing an impersonation of Richard Attenborough on camera. There is always someone singing a country song in an American accent. There is always lots of humour in the old stories after dark. Old people are always laughing or making fun at the white fellas on the trips, and competing with each other over the silliest* gadeyas *they have met. Old people are often taking the heat out of young people's fears and worries by having a laugh. There is so much joy and laughter on a Yiriman trip.*

In part this reflects the longstanding importance of laughter and frivolity for Kimberley people. In part it reflects the part that humour plays more generally in the art of healing and contending with incongruence. In both cases, humour serves to help people contend with difficulties and deeply ambivalent challenges that confront communities. Jokes, banter, humour and making fun of certain people and certain situations can often help us all deal with grief, embarrassment, discomfort with formality and threats to social norms. As Stanner (1982) points out, it is embarrassing and uncomfortable to express publicly our feelings, particularly if this is open to outsiders, adversaries or those

whose status is different. On the other hand deep feelings, whether they are anger, jealousy, sadness and grief, are more likely to make manifest in uncontrolled ways if repressed. Often this psychological pushing and pulling in two different directions can be resolved well with humour, a social convention that is often much more safe than direct expression of feelings.

There is also good evidence of the 'formalisation' of humour in Aboriginal social organisation. In this instance, jokes, fun and laughter were critical in the everyday lives of people with a need to maintain social bonds across distance, adversity and uncertainty. Stanner (1982) provides a number of examples of how Aboriginal men dealt with their avoidance relationships with brothers-in-law through the use of mockery.

> Not uncommonly, men solve this little social problem by a very patent conversion. They praise, but they praise mockingly, they show affection, but tinge it with malice, they make use of what we may call the venomous endearments, they may use bad even indecent language. Everyone knows and understands the convention and few take it amiss … It is a symbolic way of dealing with ambivalence (Stanner 1982, p. 272).

Digital technology, music, art and performance

It is likely that part of the success of Yiriman can be attributable to the central role that singing, music, art and performance play in the community. In part this is because of the strength of music in Aboriginal history and tradition. In addition it is also because contemporary music forms are so important to young people. Therefore, it is worth understanding a little about music and Indigenous Australian culture. As many have observed, singing, dancing, painting, and performing ceremony, has long been used to help maintain and build Indigenous people's connection to country and to each other. Indeed for many of the senior people, country, community and 'singing' are inseparable. The practice of singing is literally a way of life, a way of bringing country to life and in turn the way one comes to life in country (Muecke 1997). As Catherine Ellis (1985) so clearly put it, for those Anangu old people she worked with 'music is the central repository of knowledge'. Ellis's mentor Ted Strehlow made similar observations about Aranda. Outlining Strehlow's poetics on song in Central Australia, Hill (2002, p. 44) said,

> The whole life of the region was, in a sense, conducted according to song, the secrets of which were central to the laws of the culture ... the whole region was animated by song that gave almost everything – fauna, flora, much of the topography – meanings. The terrain was a narrative, and song, like rain, united the sky with the earth, and day with the stars of the night ... The songs were important among the deeds of the land. To sing the song was to transmit proprietorial responsibilities to others. A song served to locate men and women in totemic terms, and this in turn mapped individuals with regard to birth place and place of conception. A man or

> woman, and the clan to which they belonged, owned the song as they owned the land ... they belonged to the song and its country, as much as the singer's voice belonged to his or her body.

In this way, one's status, one's identity, one's being in the world is ultimately linked to one's ability to sing. Attempting to explain the pivotal role of music for Anangu, long-time friend and advocate Bill Edwards explained that:

> If Descartes were a western desert man he would not have said 'Cogito ergo sum' ('I think therefore I am'), rather he would have said, 'Canto ergo sum' ('I sing therefore I am') (cited in Palmer 2010).

To separate the practice of looking after the health of community from singing, dancing and performing is an abstraction that often does not help to explain life in places such as Central Australia (see Langton 1994, Bird Rose 2004, Richards et al. 2002, Marshall 2001, Turner 1982). This caring for country and community building through performance happens a number of important ways. Not only do Indigenous understandings of country see people as being brought into being by country, but their 'daily and yearly interactions with country are communicative events' (Bird Rose 2002, p. 43). When travelling through country Indigenous people often call or 'sing out' to country to announce themselves. Music literally becomes the way of addressing country (Dunbar-Hall and Gibson 2004, p. 26). Through the performance of practices such as lighting fires, cooking food, walking, dancing, telling stories and singing, Indigenous people 'communicate their presence to country' (Bird Rose 2002, p. 43).

This also happens because singing about a place (or singing about country) involves 'singing a place'. As Dunbar-Hall and Gibson (2004, p. 220) put it, 'By performing a song about a place, the events of the past, through which that place came into being, are re-created in the present.' Through the performance of a song about a place the place comes again into existence, being reborn through the act of singing.

In part this works because country is seen as something that moves, that creates rhythms, that maintains a (heart) beat. Like a large yet variable orchestral texture, country holds a communicative system rich in rhythms and beats, as well as cycles and returns. Such a communicative domain then demands that one learns how to work with 'beat and interval, presence and absence, departure and return, actions and connections ... (linking the body) with its heartbeat and other rhythms' (Bird Rose 2002, pp. 45–46). This process reflects longstanding cultural practices that link the act of 'singing' and making music with being on-country and maintaining spiritual, economic, and familial ties (Bird Rose et al. 2002). Operating in this cultural time and space asks that one finds the beat, paying attention to the tempo of country. It requests the embodiment of a musical sensibility.

In this way performing songs and dancing about places act as a critical part of Aboriginal cultural practice; it emphasises the maintenance of places as well as the important cultural affiliations between people and those places. In other words, singing about a place is important in traditional law and custom as it allows people to both maintain the spirit of that place ('sing up' a place) and reinscribe certain places with meaning and importance.

'Singing for country' also works because it offers a means of young people sharing the experience with elders. This is more profound than at first it may appear. Deborah Bird Rose (2004) observes that the process of being on-country and singing for country not only involves the young and their living elders 'going along together', but it also demands a shared relationship with elders and ancestors long passed away. She recounts the guidance received from her friend and teacher Jessie Wirrpa, who taught her the practice of calling out to the 'old people for country' – those guardians of country who had returned to their country upon dying. Wirrpa taught Bird Rose about the need for those walking on country to be guided by the presence of ancestors who, if respected and asked for guidance, would lead and care for the living walkers. Bird Rose (2004) describes 'singing out to country' in this way:

> When she took me walkabout she called out to the ancestors. She told them who we were and what we were doing, and she told them to help us. 'Give us fish', she would call out, 'The children are hungry'. When she was walking through country she was always with a group, and that group included the dead as well as the living (p. 167).

Important here is the conception that the 'old people' (including those who have passed away) are an integral part of the maintenance of Aboriginal life and the education and experience of the young and living. Also important here is that the Aboriginal practice of singing out to country implicitly involves communion between the young (the living) and the old (the dead). There is nothing morbid about this. On the contrary, it involves what Muecke (1997, p. 228) describes as 'paying dues' to the ancestors and respecting the cycle of life in death and death in life.

In this way, singing out to country becomes a means by which Aboriginal people can recognise that their place in the world is shaped by the prior existence of other beings. This practice introduces to children and young people the importance of respecting the legacy that has been left by those (human, non-human, and inanimate) who came before them (Muecke 2004, p. 69).

Using music, arts and other cultural practice is also powerful because there has long been a desire on the part of non-Indigenous audiences to draw upon Indigenous styles and cultural forms. Through the inspiration of their symbols, images and signs Indigenous people have contributed much to both the national economy and the marketing of Australia to the world. Aboriginal imagery, motifs and music are now 'strewn thickly around the modern Australian landscape'

(Rothwell 1996, p. 1), so much so that it is now impossible to walk into a tourist agency or pick up brochures promoting Australia as a destination and not see the face and hear the music of Indigenous Australia.

The contributions of Indigenous people in culture and the arts have most certainly been enormous. For over a century Indigenous imagery and the artistic work of Indigenous people has been appropriated consistently as a 'marker of Australian identity' (Langton 1998, p. 106; Fry and Willis 1996, p. 199). Particularly in the past 30 years Indigenous Australians have generated an enormous output of visual art, film and television, music and other performing arts (Langton 1994, p. 13). It is certainly the case that Indigenous art is a major economic force. According to Fink and Perkins (1997, p. 60), 'Aboriginal art is now Sotheby's second highest growth market'. Rothwell (1996, p. 1) cites work postulating that 100 million dollars are spent annually on Aboriginal art produced in rural Australia. Similar trends have occurred within the cultural domain of music and music making. Johnson (1997, pp. 148–149) claims that part of the success of the emerging original and popular Australian music genre is the distinct influence of Indigenous musicians and musical styles.

At the same time Indigenous music and Indigenous musicians have long been formative in shaping Australian styles of music. For example, from the late 1930s until the 1950s the composer Clive Douglas set out to encourage the formation of distinctly Australian style of music by drawing upon Aboriginal legend, language and music. In a similar fashion and during a similar period, John Antill was moved by Aboriginal rhythms from the La Perouse community and collected recordings of Aboriginal music, creating works such as the famous piece called 'Corroboree'. Throughout the 1970s many musicians saw Aboriginal music as a way of creating a distance between Australian music and its European roots; more recently, 'the timbres of Aboriginal music have also been highly influential, with the drone of the didgeridoo assuming a widespread significance' (Richards 2007, pp. 4–10).

Another important observation to make about music and performance for Indigenous people is that consistently throughout the history of colonial encounter, music and arts practice has been central to attempts by Indigenous people to give expression to their political aspirations. In particular, music, dance, and performance, has regularly been used in the campaign to reclaim land tenure lost through colonial conquest and governmental acquisition of Indigenous land title. As Aboriginal band Blekbala Mujik's songwriter Apaak Juperrula has said,

> Music is perhaps one of the few positive ways to communicate a message to the wider community. Take, for example, politicians. They address an issue but people will only listen if they share those particular political views. Music has universal appeal. Even if you have your critics, people will still give you a hearing (cited in Dunbar-Hall and Gibson 2004, p. 214).

Others, such as Reynolds (1998), Haebich (2000), Attwood and Marcus (1998), Mickler (1998), and Magowan and Neuenfeldt (2005), have suggested that Indigenous people, their film, theatre and music has been active in changing the course of politics and public policy in Australia. Particularly since such events as the Gurindji, Yirrkala and Noonkanbah, struggles for rights to land, the 1960s lobby for citizenship rights and the Aboriginal tent embassy outside Parliament House in early 1970s, Aboriginal music, art and performance has had considerable political influence on public affairs (Magowan 2007; Stubington 2007; Peterson and Sanders 1998, p. 24). According to Mulgan (1998, p. 190) a regular political weapon in this regard has been has been to draw on Indigenous protest music that holds a rhetoric and politics of shame and embarrassment to 'disturb the conscience of the nation' and 'unsettle its governments'. Indigenous groups have also been able to exploit international trends towards self-government and developed alliances with previously colonised peoples, progressive political organisations, and international bodies, in part through their deploying unique musical interventions.

As has been suggested, critical to the maintenance of the customary economy, language, stories and culture are what the West often calls arts and creative production. The central and most recognised feature of Yiriman is that it is first and foremost a project committed to encouraging young people to maintain culture, language and custom. In this way Yiriman's main business might be called 'community cultural development' (Sonn, Drew and Kasat 2002 p. 12; Adams and Goldbard 2002 p. 33). The intention with this style of work is to use various art and creative forms to help draw out people's taken-for-granted, or tacit, knowledge (Polanyi 1967) and thus help them take action for a better future (Kins and Peddie 1996). Sometimes the work attempts to shift the routines, perspectives and responses of individuals so that from the 'traps of habit, help [them] see things from a different perspective, suggest connections between varied subjects and transform communities and the way in which government agencies operate' (Mills 2007, p. 36). Often the work seeks to help enliven the imagination at the level of community and provide opportunities for people to 'rehearse' what might be possible. In other words, this approach can help individuals and groups take on the character of the person or community they could become (Boal 2007, p. 13).

The maintenance and practice of Aboriginal culture is also critical for remote Aboriginal young people because of the important role it plays in spawning the rise of the use of digital technology and the recent uptake of new forms of creative expression, music, art and performance. The connection between this use of the new technologies, alternative pathways in education, economic development, development of literacies, intergenerational contact, work on-country, and the recording, production and transmission of cultural and language, has been carefully researched by ANU researcher Inge Kral (2010a and 2010b).

As Kral (2010a) notes, the impact of modernity on Aboriginal communities has been most dramatically felt in the relationships across generations. For example, many grandparents from Western Desert communities were born into a nomadic life where cultural production and reproduction was linked to hunting, gathering and traditional life. They were raised into family systems and taught to reproduce culture, language and knowledge through dance, song and ceremony that had been passed down in disciplined ways. Often these senior people have expected young people will maintain these old practices and use traditional means of transmitting knowledge. However the life of young people is increasingly connected to western practices, new technology and forms of cultural transmission that are dynamic and globally shaped. Their remoteness no longer isolates them in the way it did for previous generations. New technologies are opening up their social and cultural networks. As a consequence they are fast becoming familiar with new ways of expressing culture, in ways that often drawing upon previous Aboriginal cultural forms but expressed using new tools and with contemporary finesse. Kral (2010a) demonstrates that many are successfully mediating between old knowledge and new technologies to create new (but none-the-less Aboriginal) forms of cultural production. Although they are rapidly acquiring digital media skills and using mobile digital media hardware such as MP3 players, mobile phones, iPods, digital cameras, many are still highly reliant on distinctly Aboriginal expressions of culture, language and creativity.

Despite the moral panic of both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal older generations, there is mounting evidence that this is leading to a surge of cultural production. Kral's (2010a, p. 10) research shows that the growth in availability of new technology is helping young people to,

> …enter young adulthood as bilingual, bicultural beings, drawing on the language and culture transmitted by their elders, but also transforming it. They are choosing to participate in these projects because the cultural production roles are in the domains of knowledge that matter to them – culture, arts, country, and new technologies – all within a framework of social relatedness. Significantly, they are doing this outside school or post-school training and so often remain invisible to many policy makers and government officials. The research indicates that when learning opportunities are provided … successful outcomes are being attained and young people are projecting positive futures.

Part of the reason for this is that the new technologies are becoming more accessible and available. Another reason for this revolution in cultural production is that music, video and other recording and editing is no longer an arduous process requiring the expertise and involvement of outside 'experts' and professionals. As Kral (2010b) shows in her study of five projects in remote Australia, it is now much easier for all of us to self-learn software such as iPhoto, Garage Band and Final Cut Pro. This allows us to generate our own

post-production work as musicians, songwriters, filmmakers, photographers and multimedia artists. As Karl (2010b, p. 7) observes, this 'software is relatively indestructible and lends itself to fearless experimentation. Youth participation is not contingent upon prior literacy or technological competence, but on a desperation to read the symbols on the computer screen in order to record'. Remarking on the fearlessness of Aboriginal young people who are embracing this technology, she says,

> … this fearlessness allows people to stretch the boundaries of what is possible, and to find myriad ways of achieving the oral/aural outcome that they have visualised in their minds long before entering the studio. These young musicians are seeking perfection; they rework the tracks over many hours and days of improvisation, practice, recording, re-recording and re-editing. There is no such thing as a mistake, as everything can be deleted and reworked and it doesn't matter. The Garage Band process provides an opportunity for young men in particular to privately focus on something that really matters and to do it well. It is a collaborative endeavour that also allows individuals the space to excel. In turn these new local young producers are training musicians in other communities: here they demonstrate their skill to others and their peers aspire to rise to the same high level (Daniel Featherstone, pers. comm. 2009). Some musicians have progressed onto recording and producing music using the more advanced Pro Tools editing suite, and uploading video clips to social networking sites such as YouTube (Kral 2010b, p. 9).

Slater's description of this process of digital production in Aurukun offers a sense of how young people have begun to move from passive consumer of global culture to active producer of distinctly (but none-the-less reconfigured) Aboriginal forms of culture. Film, as a way of 'framing' culture, is being used as a weapon to combat the idea that they are a curse on others. Perceptions of Aboriginal dysfunction, which stand in the way of people seeing more healthy aspects of people's lives, values, aspirations, are being countered by young people's use of film (Martin 2006, p. 13). She shows that making films allows Aurukun students to take part in the important work of generating their vision(s) of and for Aurukun. In this way, Aboriginal culture, mediated and made available through new technologies, is used to allow Aboriginal young people to promote and receive positive, active and nuanced visions of what it means to be Aboriginal in a world that otherwise has rendered them absent, silent, dysfunctional and bereft. Here culture is used by young people to invite others to see them differently (Slater 2008, p. 11).

Yiriman, 'good practice' and markers of quality

There is clearly very convincing evidence of success provided up to this point in the report. To assist in further testing the efficacy of the project it is also important to draw inferences about its quality by comparing it to what works elsewhere. Using the previous discussion the following table provides an overview of what stands in the international literature as 'markers of success' in projects designed to help build healthy Indigenous communities, particularly in settings similar to the West Kimberley. In discussion that follows, these markers will be compared with the methods and approaches used by Yiriman. From this we can deduce that if Yiriman is using practice that has been established to be successful elsewhere, it follows that they will see success.

Markers of success in Indigenous community work	**Source**
Feature one: Connecting the health of people with the health of 'country'	Walsh et al. 2002, Nesbit et al. 2001, Cummins et al. 2008
Feature two: Having involvement in the cultural and customary economy	Austin-Broos 2011, Altman & Hinkson 2010, Altman 2005
Feature three: Using a reciprocal approach (i.e. 'give and take'), involvement of local people in governing, accountability and decision-making.	Foster 2007, Woods et al. 2002, Cummins 2008
Feature four: Having local (Karajarri, Nyikina, Mangala, Walmatjarri and Kriol) language, narrative and conceptual ideas shape program planning, content and methodology	Stanner 2009, Collard and Palmer 2006, Trudgen 2000
Feature five: Creating opportunities for contact and work between families and different generations in the community	Cummins at al 2008, MacCallum et al. 2006, Kaplan et al. 2002
Feature six: Using novel and active methods including arts and culture	MacCallum et al. 2006, O'Malley and Sutton 1997
Feature seven: Providing opportunities for fun and joy	Stanner 1982, Dockery 2009b, Steen 2010
Feature eight: Moving beyond one-off programs, spending an time in community and creating a constellation of programs to cater to a wide variety of interests and needs	Taylor et al. 2008, Sutton 1997, Palmer 2006 and 2009, White 1998
Feature nine: Going along with others, adopting multi-agency involvement, creating long-term solutions and connecting local people's challenges with broader regional, national and global influences	Foster 2007, Palmer 2006, White 1998, Sutton 1997, Ife and Tesorio 2009
Feature ten: Employing competent staff (including local people), in particular those who possess a combination of skills and experience in working with local community	Taylor et al. 2008, Cummins et al. 2008
Feature eleven: Incorporating evaluation and recording of the work	Taylor et al. 2008, Palmer 2009, McMurray 1999

Feature one: Connecting the health of people with the health of 'country'

One of the key features of Yiriman has been the extent to which 'country' and place constantly shape how things get done. The project took as inspiration a set of stories about a place called Yirimanhere, in earlier times, different groups and different generations travelled to Yirimanhere for the joint purposes of cultural maintenance, social regeneration, ceremony and economic activity. This place represents a geographical site of significant importance, a landmark seen from very long distances, a metaphoric lighthouse that acts to guide people towards an area of fertility and sustenance. In this way the word Yiriman provides a symbol of the act of pilgrimage where young people and other generations travel to meet up with the old people or spirits from the past. William Watson described it in this way when talking about one trip,

> *This trip ... it was a pilgrimage ... we actually took them to Yiriman itself ... it has never been done before ... so that was one of the most memorable trips that I have. Explaining to them why that logo of Yiriman and where it comes from and they were actually standing right on Yiriman, that's our country. So that was one of the most memorable experiences I have had ... it was like a pilgrimage. Yiriman is like a lighthouse for the people from the desert when they come through ... that is a landmark (Interview with William Watson 2010).*

Often a central theme during trips is the relationship between country and people often dispossessed as a consequence of contact with an alien cultural influence. Most of the substantive work of Yiriman takes place on country in a variety of locations that have long-term cultural significance and meaning to people. This was so during 2011 when senior people hosted visits where young people and others from community hunted and looked for food, visited places and paid respect to people of importance. The approach taken contrasted with conventional education and training work (with its reliance upon classroom-based learning), cultural production work (which is often town- or centre-based) and community work (which is often limited to meetings in office blocks or board rooms). One of the project's striking features was its ability to take the work 'to country', packing equipment, people and other material into one of the Toyota Troopies or the Nissan Trayback. This allowed young people and others to exercise their obligations to country, film on it, sing on it, dance on it, swim in it, and sustain themselves on it.

In some ways one could say that 'country' is the central actor in the project, the trip venues, the social settings, the stage on which the project was set and performed, and the means through which people can build and maintain their relationships with each other.

Feature two: Having involvement in the cultural and customary economy

According to Altman (2005), evidence from elsewhere demonstrates that improvements in the health of remote communities are more likely if local people are involved in a combination of activities in the market economy, the governmental economy and the customary economy. Altman (2005) describes this kind of mixed participation in a range of domains as the 'hybrid economy'. As mentioned, the project had measurable success in getting different age groups of people to come together and work on an array of customary or cultural activities. This it did by providing people with a chance to participate in an array of workshops and activities, create and maintain culture, act as mentors for others, provide training and take on training, get paid work, travel to new places, visit adjacent communities, and carry out their cultural and family obligations. Indeed, as has been described in the audit review section of the report, the magnitude of the cultural opportunities offered was significant.

According to local sources, there is good evidence that some young people have improved their involvement in schooling since their participation in the project. This is certainly the case in relation to the partnership between Kimberley TAFE and Yiriman to work with a group of young women who had been poor school attenders. The worker in this project had this to say about the partnership:

> *A lot of people from outside don't understand how critical country is for people here in Fitzroy. People learn, play and do business best on country. This is because culture and language and law are at the heart of their way of life. So for me to engage young women who had not been attending school I must be able to get them involved in culture and country. I don't know how I could have done this without Yiriman. It just would not work at all.*

As this person attests, there is good evidence that the cultural elements of the work are important in sustaining young people's interest in more formal training and the economy. As one staff member from the Fitzroy Crossing High School noted, 'There is no doubt that on-country activities help many of our students maintain an interest in learning.' One representative from a local arts centre said, 'The future for arts in the Kimberley is in the hands of young people … this trip [a Yiriman hosted event] has given young people a chance to sit down with artists and have some formal lessons in their style and medium. We will definitively try and do this more often because it gives us a tangible way to engage young people.' Furthermore, there was some indirect links between the project and senior people's involvement in other arts production. For example, one arts centre worker made the point that 'the old people work best on country and when their grannies are around. This trip really sparked up their productivity levels.'

The various Yiriman activities in 2011 provided many opportunities for people to participate in the customary economy. Many of these opportunities also provided people with the chance to move from the customary to the market economy. For example, those participating in Yiriman's new 'Wantu Warlu' project have been able to work on jobs that both allow them to earn some money and fulfill some of their cultural obligations to look after senior people. This project involves small teams of young people periodically using Yiriman vehicles to go out on wood collecting trips close to Fitzroy Crossing with the objective of returning to town to restock firewood for pensioners. While they are Yiriman trips senior people are paid for the role their play as cultural teachers. Often others, such as Rangers, young leaders and mentors and Yiriman staff, are paid a stipend for their work helping to run the trips. In this way people are able to supplement their other income while carrying out duties in the customary economy. During on-country trips there is much work that is directly related to culture and law business. This includes hunting, dancing, singing, setting up camp, walking while burning country, artifact production, painting and driving senior people. During preparation for the KALACC festival, Yiriman hosted a series of practice sessions. All teachers and dancers were paid a small stipend while participating directly in this important region-wide cultural event.

Feature three: Having a reciprocal approach (i.e. 'give and take') involvement of local people in governing, accountability, decision-making, workshops and other activities.

In a range of ways Yiriman has continued to take seriously the importance of building its work mechanisms to encourage active community involvement in governing, planning, and decision-making. Indeed, evidence of this has been discussed previously as it forms part of the objectives of funding contracts. Indeed in adopting the conceptual idea of Yiriman as the project name, the cultural bosses have symbolised and made obligatory their intentions to carry out its work under the direction of cultural bosses. In 2011 this happened in many ways. One key practice that continued to be adopted by Yiriman staff was that they commit considerable attention to seeking direction and ideas from,

i) members of the project Reference Group,

ii) key 'law bosses' from the four language groups,

iii) senior people when on country, and

iv) Members of the KALACC executive and management.

This is most active when on country so that during various trips staff and senior people maintain a vigilant approach to checking back with each other. During trips there is an almost constant process of to-ing and fro-ing that went on between staff and senior people.

Feature four: Having local (*Karajarri, Nyikina, Mangala, Walmatjarri* and Kriol) language, narrative and conceptual ideas shape program planning, content and methodology

Another stand out feature of Yiriman during 2011 is the extent to which local languages shape the work. When on country the languages used for communication are most often Kriol and Aboriginal English. Frequently, the senior people speak in *Karajarri*, *Nyikina*, *Mangala* and *Walmatjarri*. During meetings and on-country workshops the focus of attention is on teaching young people 'language'. When moving from place to place old people sing out in language, announcing the group's arrival and intentions. Routinely translating language and identifying traditional words happens during activities such as hunting, bush product collection, in storytelling sessions, during song and dance instruction, the recording of knowledge, and in work with scientists and outsiders. People's individual and collective stories in language are often the topic of workshops, recording and dance performances. The photo books and trip films involve a constant weaving in of 'language'. Senior Indigenous people gave directions on all manner of content including locations, stories, people, and themes to be included in trips.

Critical here was the fact that people who are skilled in language interpreting are always present on trips. Indeed, a number of key cultural advisers are formally trained and regularly work as language translators. During Reference Group meetings and other public gatherings of Yiriman bosses at least one of these people acts in the role of translator.

Often this language draws on metaphors, synonyms, and other picture painting poetics. During 2011 this has been beautifully added to some of the film and footage work to literally and metaphorically take Aboriginal voices to others. This is a powerful element of Yiriman's contact with outsiders, making it possible to demonstrate the importance of local people's culture to the work. As Grehan (2010) points out, language makes possible new kinds of cultural proximity, reminding people of their alienation from Aboriginal communities while also providing people with a means through which to combat social isolation.

As a consequence, the language used on-country is often highly evocative, in part because it is 'authentic' to the experiences of people, but also in part because it contrasts enormously with the language and conceptual ideas normally available to community members when they are working with others (such as school teachers, social workers and government officials) to try and improve their lives. It is this simple decision to choose local language terminology over alien, professional, and often highly abstract conceptual tools, that reminds one of the tradition inspired by the work of Paulo Freire (1972). According to this tradition, any attempt at development with a community must begin by community workers bracketing their own, often reductive, conceptual

devices; instead spending time noting what Freire called the 'generative themes' and language forms of a community.

Feature five: Creating opportunities for contact and work between families and different generations in the community

As has been articulated earlier, in a range of ways in 2011 Yiriman continued the practice of bringing young people and other age groups together. This kind of work is what in the USA and Britain people have described as 'intergenerational exchange'. The asserted benefits of intergenerational exchange are many and varied and include the idea that they help instill important civic values (Woffard 1999, p. 92), strengthen mutual understanding (Berns 1997), rebuild social networks and create inclusive communities (Granville and Hatton-Yeo 2002, p. 197), increase tolerance, and promote a level of comfort and intimacy between the old and young, dispelling clichés and myths about the ageing process (Manheimer 1997).

As outlined earlier, from its outset this project was motivated by the desire on the part of a number of key senior people to encourage young people to better understand their history and language. One senior woman put it this way,

> *Young people got to learn the stories for their grandfather and grandmother. We missing this time with the young ones nowadays. They on school, in towns far away and in that American culture business. We miss them and want them back with us and their mothers and fathers. Yiriman helping them remember to learn their culture and law.*

Earlier sections of the report outline the benefits to young people of this contact with others in the community. However, there is also much evidence that contact between the generations had an important recharging effect on senior people. Explaining his reaction to Yiriman trips, William Watson describes with gusto the impact this is having upon the spirit of senior people. In this poetic and metaphoric response he signals just how critical young people are to the process of cultural regeneration:

> *To me Yiriman is a vehicle that is used in healing for our old people and our young people. Our young people are very much distracted nowadays and by going back to country with our old people they give them an identity, they know exactly where their country is, where their grandfather country is. And also it gives the old people a chance to open up and be kings and queens of their country ... which they are. They are not left one side, they have something to give, you know, back in their country (Interview with William Watson 2010).*

As was discussed in a number of places in the audit review section of the report, from its inception this project took seriously the need to work in conjunction with family, find ways to encourage contact across the generations and build opportunities to reconnect young people with local social systems and

family networks. Indeed, one of the project funding contracts was designed to see that this became an instrumental element in the project. For example, project activity statements include plans to use: 'Back to country trips with families and all generations designed and led by senior elders', 'Relationships developed between young people, mentors and cultural leaders resulting in greater levels of respect and understanding', and 'Connect young people and elders'.

The project put into practice the task of encouraging contact across the generations in a number of ways. As outlined, senior people took on important roles in storytelling, offering accounts of what it was like to grow up in earlier times. Young people used cameras, sound equipment and notes to record these stories. Senior people provided advice about elements of local cultural protocols that needed to be maintained. Young adults also took on the role of mentors or younger people.

Feature six: Using novel and active methods including arts, creativity and 'Indigenous cultural forms'

Particularly critical in Yiriman's work to maintain and pass along culture is the importance of using a variety of creative, artistic and relevant forms and styles. During 2011 Yiriman set up opportunities for people to sing, make music, perform dance, paint, produce film, use digital software to record, make instruments (boomerangs and tapping sticks), create costumes, learn how to use makeup, hold cameras, operate sound equipment, and further their skills in the production process and design. In keeping with Yiriman's previous work those involved in trips were able to combine traditional or old forms of art and performance with more contemporary technologies and styles. As one person observed, this often gave young people a chance to get up close and personal by using cameras that helped them 'focus right in while keeping a comfortable distance.'

As mentioned earlier, this helped create in people a sense of shared pride in community activities such as dance and song and celebrate recordings using new technology.

It is important to note that 2011 was a year to celebrate Kimberley culture through the KALACC festival (an event held every two or three years). Yiriman had a very important role to play in the preparation of this festival. In the lead-up to the festival Yiriman was asked to host a number of dance rehearsal events, providing infrastructure, vehicles, and equipment to allow senior people to teach young dancers important songs that they would then go on to perform during the festival. Earlier, Yiriman had supported a number of short trips to help in the preparation of instruments, such as boomerangs and tapping sticks, and various bush products used in the 'painting up' of dancers. Some Yiriman Aboriginal staff also acted as dance mentors and instructors. Also important in the long-term preparation for this festival was the fact that a range of young

people had been given earlier opportunities on various Yiriman trips to learn the dances for the country they visited. At least two of these songs were performed at the festival.

During the festival a number of young people were asked to record various activities and performances as part of the entourage of film and sound teams recording the event. This work added to an impressive stock of preproduction material recorded throughout 2011 trips and activities. For all of these trips a picture book report or film has been produced and made available to both community and funding bodies.

The process of producing these digital resources has been important to Yiriman in a number of ways. Recording the stories of old people has been very active on 2011 trips. Each of the recordings are now archived in a structured way, having been guided by a process designed by Michael Allen who spent time in Fitzroy Crossing in early 2011. Using audio recorders and video cameras on trips has also been used as a 'personal development' tool, encouraging young people to build their confidence in speaking in front of others, to practice expressing themselves to their senior people, as a discussion starter and stimulator, and as a way to help them learn language, increase their knowledge of bush use, and experiment with creative production.

Cameras and audio recorders have also been used as a way to help young people learn various skills such as car maintenance, changing tyres, distilling of oils, soap making, artifact making, and safety on country. By making short instructional videos young people have better learned various processes associated with these tasks.

Finally video production has also been fun for young people. Often they will use digital technology to 'play' and experiment with new characters. During one trip it was noted that,

> These young fellas are the best mimics of whitefellas. One of them will film while the other acts like a news reporter or journalist. They put on the best whitefella accents while they mock mainstream media reporting. At the same time this allows them to publicly get into the heads and character of people who are very different to them culturally, linguistically and educationally. I have seen some of those boys doing the best impersonation of David Attenborough, pretending to be a white Englishmen who himself is pretending to be an authority of the desert. They have the accent down to a tee. It's sly and clever. It's mischievous. It's great fun. It's all a very powerful way to play with identity and authority (Journal notes of Yiriman trip to Jilgi Bore 2010).

Feature seven: Providing opportunities for fun and joy

Many of the things associated with town life for young people are serious and taxing. These constant pressures and a lack of opportunities to 'get way' make it difficult for them to enjoy relaxed fun and a good time. There is much evidence that on-country trips provide an environment that is free of many of these demands, getting away from the problems and pressures in town. There is little question that young people love this opportunity. Almost without exception community people want to participate in further Yiriman camps and activities. Regularly Yiriman staff are asked 'What now?' (When are we going again?), 'When we got that next trip on-country?' and 'When Yiriman coming back?' This is because trips are exciting, fun and enjoyable.

Connected with the regular presence of 'serious' cultural activities while on country was the regular expression of humour, laughter, fun and joy. As one Yiriman worker noted, there is much joy and fun associated with being together.

> *Being involved in this Wild Harvest work is so lovely. The women enjoy each other's company so much. This doesn't mean they are not doing anything. On the contrary they are at their most productive when they are sitting together working. It is not uncommon for the women to be laughing right through the day. They will share stories about 'so and so', recollect old stories about their mothers and aunties and crack jokes all the time.*

In part this reflects the longstanding importance of laughter and frivolity in culture and law work. In part it reflects how useful humour is in bringing people together, healing, learning, and allowing people to work together. It also helps lighten the self-consciousness often associated with meeting up with new people and trying new things.

As one person observed,

> *When Yiriman get together we always have lots of laughs, even in meetings we make jokes. I remember them two old fellas sitting at one meeting. They musta been getting bored cos they just sitting there and then one starts poking the other one. The other one starts poking him back like two little kids. They was laughing and playing like two little kids and we all started laughing with them. We was getting important Yiriman business done but we was still having fun.*

Much of the recording of senior people's stories is laced with humour. Often the structure of the story includes opportunities for laughter, often using a combination of mocking and humour to make important points. Indeed, after eleven years Yiriman has now created its own legends that are recounted on trips. Almost always these legends are full of humour, often at the expense of those who made mistakes while hunting, driving, walking or carrying out activities. One such story went like this:

> *Them blokes from AQIS they came out to that Policeman's Camp with all this gear for a pig shoot. They had two troopies with a trailer full of gear just for the two of them. They rolled up to Jarlmadangah two hours late and said to Hughie, 'How quick can you get them boys organised?' Big Will sung out, 'Them boys already out at the camp making you a cuppadea.' They waltzed out there like they was bosses who wouldn't take any direction from no one. Young Tracker was out there and they wouldn't listen to him about where them pigs were. Well two days later Uncle Johnnie comes out and asked em how many pigs they caught. Well they got nuddin. He sweared them up, told one to follow him and the other one to follow Tracker. Within 15 minutes we had two big ol pigs.*

Young people have lots of fun on Yiriman trips. For example, it is not unusual to see young people singing and dancing on top of one of the troopies, mimicking local Kimberley musicians, playing with sexy dance styles or whistling tunes as they travel. As mentioned earlier, often the filming work is carried out with much frivolity, laughter and lightness helping people be more confident in the task of recording their travels.

One person recollected from his early years that this style of combining serious work with humour and fun played a critical role in the maintenance of healthy community life.

> *When we were young fellas those old people were tough. But we always bin laughing a lot. When you work hard its good to joke around together. We want to keep this going for young people today in Yiriman. They got to take Yiriman serious but we like to see them enjoying themselves too.*

Feature eight: Moving beyond one-off programs, spending an extended amount of time in community and creating a constellation of programs to cater to a wide variety of interests and needs

Yiriman is now over eleven years old. Its presence in the region has extended from 2000 until the present time. This represents an attempt on their part to signal their difference from many other organisations offering support to young people in regional Australia. Indeed this kind of presence stands in contrast to the conventional approach of many non-government youth organisations 'touring' through regions and remote areas for days or weeks.

However, it would be disingenuous to claim that the project team has sustained contact with a single community over an extended period of time. It needs to be recognised that the project is based in Fitzroy Crossing, with workers spending time in key communities such as Jarlmadangah and Bidyidanga and on country during trips. It should also be noted that during 2011 workers spent extended blocks of time (up to a month at a time) relocating the Yiriman mobile office (a trailer with a large office space). While this put considerable pressure on staff to move around it is important for the ongoing involvement of community people.

In addition key Aboriginal staff members are based in Jarlmadangah, Bidyidanga, Mijilamia and Kitty Well.

Clear feedback from cultural bosses and others in the community is that one of the critical ingredients for the project's ongoing survival will be that substantial and consistent contact is maintained between key staff and remote communities. For example, one person from a remote community said, 'Yiriman gotta keep in touch and come back to see us. We don't want to see them get lost by just staying in one place.'

Another important feature of the work in 2011 is that Yiriman staff used a multi-dimensional approach, maintaining on-country trips, supporting a number of smaller family-led trips, supporting the employment of Aboriginal workers in three sites away from Fitzroy Crossing, helping build the Wantu Warlu project in Fitzroy Crossing, supporting dance work for the KALACC festival, working with the TAFE young women's project, supporting a trip to Goonyandi country, working with justice officials, hosting ranger training, and resourcing the Kimberley Wild Harvest Project. This has given them the opportunity to work with a diversity of ages and incorporate people from many different areas. As outlined in the audit review section, this shows how the project has been multifaceted in its methodology, encouraged intergenerational and intercultural exchange responded across social needs and catered to a number of interests.

Feature nine: Going along with others, adopting multi-agency involvement, creating long-term solutions and connecting local people's challenges with broader regional, national and global influences

Another clear feature of the way the project was managed in 2011 was the way Yiriman staff maintained close contact with a range of service providers, schools, local community workers, art centres, youth workers, Aboriginal organisations, and local families. A number of representatives from these organisations made very positive remarks about the extent to which they received support, good information, and practical assistance from Yiriman. For example, one representative from a remote area school said, 'They are among the best stories in the Kimberley ... they spend good amounts of time here, I can tell you many good stories about kids that have been on their trips, they have been around for a good while and, importantly they come from here with the elders having set the whole thing up.' Others had the following to say about the project's ability to work in association with others:

> *They were good to work with because they are here in Fitzroy.*
>
> *They understand the importance of country to the community. I can say that about very few groups working on country.*
>
> *I think the value of Yiriman is its work in the area of culture.*

[one worker] is always there for me. I came into this job pretty green and on my own.

I am based in Broome and only in the Fitzroy Valley once a month. They are very important for me in keeping in contact with young people who I have to see that are on orders [community service justice orders].

They are there at KALACC, which I see at the heartbeat of Fitzroy Crossing. It is where everyone goes through.

We need to get out more often on country but we don't have the equipment or know how. I have wanted to get out since I've been here but would not have the confidence without them.

They are excellent for helping us to make connections between people in town and the remote communities.

(Source: Interviews with community workers in 2011).

Another important highlight of Yiriman's work during 2010 and 2011 was the role that it played in advocating on behalf of community and youth issues to various government inquiries, standing committees and national bodies. Indeed, while they visited Fitzroy Crossing many different groups visit the KALACC office and seek input from Yiriman staff. These included:

- Parliamentary Standing Committee on Education and Health
- Senate Committee on Youth Justice
- Senate Committee on Indigenous Affairs
- various ministers and visiting delegations of State and Commonwealth politicians
- State Coroner
- various journalists
- Woodside Energy

There is also good evidence that Yiriman has provided other youth and community practitioners with considerable intellectual and practice inspiration. Routinely, staff have received emails from organisations that are interested in the work and keen for advice on various elements of the work. There is also good evidence that those studying at tertiary institutions value the work. According to Murdoch student evaluations the story of the Yiriman Project, has been an important instrument for both inspiring undergraduate and postgraduate Community Development students and taking the struggles of Aboriginal young people to a broader policy stage. Indeed up to 600 students are introduced to the work of Yiriman each year. This represents a significant impact on future generations of community workers, government officials, managers and social policy people.

Feature ten: Employing competent staff (including local people), in particular those who possess a combination of skills and experience in working with local community

To a large extent the success of programs of this kind rests on the skills, experience, and commitment of staff (see Palmer 2009). According to many people, during its eleven years the organisation has been able to attract and retain some talented and committed people. There continues to be is good evidence that Yiriman has recruited good people, resulting in the project's ability to achieve a range of things.

However, over the last twelve months there has been a turnover of both Coordinators. In late 2010 Scott Herring replaced Simon Keenan. Simon had been with Yiriman for nearly three years. In late 2011 Michelle Coles left for a period of at least twelve months. She had been with the project for over six years. Her replacement has yet to take up work.

During the past year the staff have shown solid strengths in building local contacts, supporting cultural bosses in their active involvement, managing trips with confidence, and following up with young people. All up, staff have been able to maintain a consistent and regular presence in the region and working in remote settings. Over much of the last year one Aboriginal staff member has maintained a consistent involvement, helping staff the office, assisting with planning trips and attending all of the main on-country activities. This has been crucial both in maintaining local relationships and carrying part of the load when Coordinators have been on leave and elsewhere on Yiriman business.

Another feature of the work in 2011 was the creation of Yiriman Aboriginal staff positions in Jarlmadangah (Annie Milgren), Bidyidanga, Kitty Well (Mr Hopiga and Julie Bangu) and Mijilamia (Mandy Shovellor). Although these positions have been part-time they add to the presence of Yiriman across the region. In addition, these people have made it possible to extend the work in relation to the Wild Harvest project and on-country trips in and around Karajarri country.

There is good evidence that many community people were satisfied with the quality of staff. This is particularly impressive given that staff have to travel the vast distances across the region and between communities. However, it must be noted that during much of 2011 there was considerable professional conflict between the two Coordinators and at least one of the Aboriginal staff members. This resulted in serious communication problems and the elimination of staff meetings and cooperation. Unfortunately this was not resolved through any formal grievance process and continued until the Women's Coordinator took leave in early 2012. This had a considerable impact on the ability for good coordination of activities. However, it must also be noted that the Men's Coordinator and the principal Aboriginal worker continued to work together during this time.

It should be noted that staff obligations and duties are complex. There are many pressures upon Coordinators living in relative isolation, travelling long distances in vehicles, working across four cultural blocks, having to maintain contact with people who often have multiple demands on their time, as well as working in a cultural context where they are often 'outsiders'. Likewise the demands on Aboriginal staff are many and varied. Often they have many obligations to family, work and culture. Sometimes the work takes them out of their 'country' and into other areas. Housing shortages mean that they are often living in overcrowded environments and negotiations with Yiriman bosses can involve competing family interests. Often it has been these people who are active in a range of activities as well as taking on community leadership and family obligations. It is also the case that different 'leadership' domains are associated with different cultural domains. For example, state and federal government driven agendas are often carried out in 'high' English, demand technical knowledge of Western governmental processes and are structured around concepts and values that are incompatible with Kimberley culture.

It is also worth making the observation that, compared with many other organisations operating in similar situations, Yiriman has been able to keep staff for relatively long periods. However, the necessary changeover of staff does put the organisation at risk during times when people move on or need to end their involvement. This is particularly so during the second part of 2011 when,

i) the Men's Coordinator was still in his first six months of the project and

ii) the Women's Coordinator was making preparations to take leave.

At the present moment the replacement Women's Coordinator has been appointed but has yet to start.

As outlined earlier in the report, the daily lives of the Yiriman staff can be very full. They cover a vast array of activities with many different dimensions, work with a diversity of people across generations and cultures, and are often confronted by considerable challenges in local personnel. They have to contend with a number of divergent planning regimes and reporting demands. The project plans often need to be 'morphed' and reconfigured to contend with the many contingent influences of life in the Kimberley.

Staff roles demanded a considerable breadth in skills. For example, the Coordinators must be capable of alternating between working 'on the ground' with Aboriginal young people in Fitzroy Crossing and generating reports for Commonwealth funding bodies. They need to reconfigure the way they speak on a daily basis between the Aboriginal 'cultural domain' and Western governmental domains. This means they need to constantly shift language codes between Kriol and Aboriginal English to 'technocrat' and policy language. As mentioned, staff were routinely on the road, moving across country, community, and housing situations. Since the inception of two Coordinators

there have not been any clear supervision, management, or support structures in place. Clearly articulated roles, functions and lines of reporting have not been set out in such a way as to resolve differences and disputes between Coordinators. Although new staff contracts stipulate that Coordinators are required to report to KALACC management, this seems to have rarely been exercised and staff meetings, supervision sessions and reporting mechanisms have rarely been convened.

One consequence of these demands is that many people begin to experience some of the signs of professional 'burnout' after three or four years in the role. It would not be appropriate to elaborate on the details of these conflicts in this report. However, the author of this report has made his observations and recommendations known in verbal discussions with Coordinators and the KALACC Business Manager. Nevertheless, it is important to make the point that during 2011 these problems have had a significant impact on the project's ability to operate at full capacity.

Feature eleven: Incorporating evaluation and recording of the work

It has been an important part of Yiriman's obligations to funding bodies and cultural bosses to establish a range of mechanisms for reviewing and documenting the work. From its inception in 2000 this has been done in a creative way using new and emerging digital technology. Over the past year and a half many of the processes used have been reviewed and updated. For example, in 2011 the project's first Coordinator, Peter Ljubic, returned to assist in reviewing and redesigning the policy and procedures manual. This includes new processes for vehicle use and maintenance, on-country safety, communications and payment for various duties. In late 2010 and early 2011 Michael Allen helped establish protocols and systems for archiving and managing digital film and audio recordings, and produced master copies of all Yiriman post-production work. In conjunction with the evaluator, the Coordinators have consolidated the various funded objectives into a single plan and developed a series of templates for reporting various Yiriman activities.

Due to leave arrangements, problems with management systems and a breakdown in working relationships between the Coordinators in 2011 the project suffered from a lack of regular team meetings at which people could verbally report on activities, canvas ideas, and arrive at shared decisions. These meetings should have a standard procedural structure and include reports of activities; staff should note action to be taken and set out work plans for the immediate future. Similarly, a regular schedule of meetings between KALACC management and Yiriman staff did not take place during 2011. Both sets of meetings should have occurred and both should have been minuted.

These new systems of record keeping are now providing more detailed accounts of the work in journals, diaries and workshop reports. In addition the archiving of photos, film and audio sound provide an easily accessible vast

collection of visual records of the work. These digital files provide a very helpful record of the activities, offering evidence in a way that is more evocative, reliable and accessible to community than written accounts. There are now many of thousands of photographs in the collection including pictures of Aboriginal young people active in workshops, on-country trips, during the filmmaking process, at festivals, during cultural work, having fun and experiencing joy, doing literacy work, caring for each other, and caring for country.

Furthermore, the project website is almost ready to be uploaded. A collection of Yiriman information material is also being compiled. This includes solicited and unsolicited letters and emails of support, a range of published academic reports of the work, selected photos, various Yiriman documentaries and films, and copies of photo book reports of trips.

In keeping with this culture of action-based evaluation and in order to comply with the requirements of funding agreements and assist with its internal review processes, Yiriman has also commissioned this evaluation study. Part of the methodology adopted has been for the evaluator to maintain regular contact with staff, visiting the region and involving people in a cycle of review.

Conclusion

This report represents the findings of a three-year research project examining the work of the Yiriman Project. The report has established solid evidence of the efficacy of the Yiriman project. Yiriman is well respected by members of the community. It has consistently carried out on-country trips and supported the cultural maintenance aspirations of communities across four language group areas. Part of its history involves the creative trialing of new technologies to help in the work of cultural maintenance and youth development.

Last year it was nationally recognised when it won Reconciliation Australia's Indigenous Governance Award. In his observations echoing the decision of the 10-member panel Professor Mick Dodson said:

> What makes for good policy are things like Yiriman. It is a powerful testament to community action and should be supported because what else can the government point to that is working, I'd like to know. If they say well let's put the money into psychiatrists or other government led programmes then show me how that works?
>
> When you look at what Yiriman does it is not new. It is ancient actually. Elders have been taking young people on country, teaching them how to survive and telling them where to find water and how to use plants and animals to survive, dance, sing the country and telling them stories for country … that has been happening for thousands of years. So there is nothing unique about that. I guess what makes it unique in a modern context is that his is the only group that I know about, that has deliberately set out to do what people have been doing for thousands of years as a way to try and address problems associated with troubled youth and also to deal with what has been a shocking rate of suicide in young people. That is new in a sense.

One ought not expect that the project can be a panacea for the range of difficulties confronting communities in the Kimberley. However, there is good evidence that taking young people and other generations on country is important for their health. There are definitely immediate healthy effects of taking young people away from their poor diets and living conditions that create depression and despair. There is also evidence that Yiriman has assisted in the campaign to minimise young people's involvement in the justice system. Indeed, some, including a magistrate, conclude that Yiriman is more capable in this regard than most other diversionary and sentencing options. There is certainly evidence (tracked through case studies) that a range of young people have been nurtured through their involvement in Yiriman. Many young people have used Yiriman as a stepping-stone, moving into positions of leadership in community. They and others claim that Yiriman has been of central importance in this regard. There is also good evidence that Yiriman helps bolster the health of old people and other generations. This is the way that senior people talk

about Yiriman and this is what one can see firsthand if you are fortunate enough to participate in a trip. Perhaps of most importance is that Yiriman continues to achieve what the old people set it up to achieve, helping people to visit country, maintain connections and bring out stories. Throughout the region people regard Yiriman as a vehicle to maintain culture and law.

Yiriman's longevity puts it in a good position to consolidate and consider extending its reach. Its achievements demand the attention of government, philanthropic organisations and the broader community.

As Pete Ljubic (founding Coordinator of Yiriman) remarks,

> *The real influence of Yiriman has been in the hundreds of stories that have been created … told and retold. These stories hold the essence of what Yiriman is there to do. They give people a way to share in each other's lives, a way to imagine a future that might be better in a world that has often been brutal, and they give people currency, cultural, social, and even economic currency to exchange. These stories are about country, from country, and they drag people back to country. They give guidance to young people trying to find their way, a way for the middle generation to keep things going, and the milk and honey that sustains old people and keeps them sparked up and keeping going (Peter Ljubic interview 2010).*

As well as having a noticeable 'impact' on young people's lives Yiriman is one way that communities are holding themselves together. One 'Yiriman story' demonstrates how powerful this is across the generations. It is recorded in the evaluation journal:

> I noticed that as the trip progresses young people are increasingly drawn in to the intimacy of old people's company. This has a tremendous impact on the old people, giving them energy and enthusiasm as they see young people responding to the rich experience of being on country. In this way, there is a deep interconnected relationship between each of the generations.
>
> What has become evident is that a Yiriman trip is designed to achieve a range of things. It's been noted before that it is intended to build on the cultural knowledge of the young people, providing a chance for them to receive instruction from old people, better understand their relationship to social and kin-based (skin) systems, exercise their cultural judgment while carrying out the task of walking through country, visiting important places of significance, and maintain their obligations to family and country. It is also designed to divert their attention to positive cultural development and away from crime, antisocial behaviour and drugs and alcohol. But it is the carefully planned intergenerational structure of the walk that has not been noticed as much by outsiders in the past. Often trips provide at least four generational groups with a chance to work together and share important

knowledge.

On many of these trips people from 14 to their 80s travel together, exposing younger people to the profound knowledge of senior people who provide instruction. In return the trips provide the old people with a tremendous sense of hope for the future and a critical sense of what young people think and say about their lives.

Often on these trips the union between young, middle-aged and old is at its most full. Having walked or carried out travel together for the day the group often finish at an important campsite and sit around a fire sharing a meal and stories. At various stages of the camp, slowly but surely, young people are invited to sit down with old people to do things together and share their songs and stories. During the course of these trips young people often shift in their relationship and proximity to old people.

This event reflects the magic that comes when people go back to country in this way. Their principal job as old people is to 'hold' young people, see that they are drawn in a company of family, into the knowledge of language and culture. Their most important responsibility is to pass on the opportunity to show young people country, have them build their obligations to each other and bring out stories for the future.

The author is presently involved in reviewing six community-based projects across Western Australia. In his view the Yiriman Project represents one of the country's most impressive stories of local people's attempts to deal with the central and pressing public policy challenge of securing the future for Indigenous young people living in remote communities.

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