

# Kapululangu

## Aboriginal Women's Association

PMB 308, Balgo, via Halls Creek, WA 6770.

Please direct all correspondence to: Dr Zohl de Ishtar at [z.deishtar@ug.edu.au](mailto:z.deishtar@ug.edu.au)



### Senate Inquiry into Petrol Sniffing

Dear Senate Inquiry into Petrol Sniffing

I am writing this letter in my capacity as the coordinator of the Kapululangu Aboriginal Women's Association (AC) in Wirrimanu / Balgo, in the south-east Kimberley region of Western Australia. I write primarily to support the enclosed letter from the women of the Kapululangu Aboriginal Women's Association who would like to tell the Inquiry something about their initiative to stop petrol sniffing in their community, and to let you know about the problem they face in achieving their goal.

Kapululangu women have long been concerned about petrol sniffing and they would like to see it stopped in their community because it is harming their young women and men, and even the girls and boys. They are happy for Opal fuel but think that it is important to take care of their grandchildren and children by passing their Law and culture knowledge onto their young people.

Although established in 1999, Kapululangu has a history which extends back to 1983 when the women of Balgo first established an organisation which could pass their cultural knowledge onto their youth. The elders' purpose was to raise their younger generations with awareness of their unique culture and pride in their Aboriginality in the hope that this would increase their self-esteem and act as a sometimes traumatic protection against the difficulties of living life in contemporary Balgo.

Kapululangu, as its predecessors before it (the Desert Women's Project and Manungka Manungka), developed and ran a vibrant inter-generational cultural knowledge transmission program consisting to culture classes for girls, culture camps for girls and young boys (taking the male elders with us), took young women hunting, took girls and young women travelling along Dreaming Tracks performing rituals in sacred sites, formed a young women's dance troupe which travelled to other communities in Australia and overseas to Canada and Hawaii, engaged in cultural exchanges with other Aboriginal communities and with other Indigenous peoples overseas. The women often involved the male elders in these projects and always provided logistical support for the male elders to encourage their working with the older boys.

In addition to all of this the Kapululangu women elders established a women's camp or a *Tjilimi* where they lived together on Wirrimanu's Women's Law Ground forming the Kapululangu Women's Law and Culture Centre. From the *Tjilimi* the elders initiated ceremonies and rituals, which younger women participated in, and established a Tjaatjurra Healing Centre where the elders used their *tjaatjurra* (women's healing skills) to heal both women and men. Because the *Tjilimi* was on the women's Law ground and thus men would not come there, the *Tjilimi* also provided a safe house space for women and children attempting to avoid, escape or recover from domestic violence and sexual assault. The *Tjilimi* provided live-in care for two women aged over 90 years and respite care for two women said to be aged over 100 years. Kapululangu women were also instrumental in the early formation of what has now become Balgo's successful Warden's program.

Balgo women, led by their elders, consider themselves to be key providers and protectors of their people. It is women's role to raise both girls and pre-pubescent boys in cultural and customary life-skills. It falls to women to ensure that the girls grow up with respect for themselves as women and knowledge of how to protect themselves from early pregnancies. Women are equally responsible for bringing up the boys prior to them becoming the concern of the male elders. Thus it is women who are primarily positioned to ensure that the children of Balgo grow with pride in themselves through their

Indigenous cultural heritage, such that this might act as a foundation of personal protection against the traumas currently impacting Balgo's youth. Balgo's women are directly concerned with the problems of petrol sniffing, self-harm and suicide among their youth. Further, through their women's organisation they have evidenced a propensity to develop creative strategies which deal with these social problems, which aim to protect and heal their children and young ones.

The "Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage" framework supported by the Council of Australian Governments clearly outlines the "causal pathways" which begin in early childhood and compound over a person's lifetime, and that these indicators direct lead to Indigenous disadvantage, which is expressed in crime, violence and high-risk suicidal behaviours (DIA, 2005). This "causal pathway" is indicated to begin with the unborn child and extend through childhood, and is affected by factors such as substance abuse by the mother, pre-natal nutrition, parenting ability, childhood exposure to violence, schooling experiences, deviant peer pressure, absence of employment, and substance abuse as a young person. Focusing her emphasis on early childhood development and growth, Professor Fiona Stanley has identified three mutually supportive strategies for overcoming these problems: safe and healthy supportive family environments, with strong communities and cultural identity; positive child development; and improved economic sustainability (Stanley, 2004).

These strategies match those motivating the Kapululangu elders and other women in Balgo both in the past and currently. Unfortunately, following a turbulent period of mismanagement within Balgo's administrative levels (which has subsequently seen the Wirrimanu Aboriginal Corporation being placed under administration), Kapululangu collapsed. Now however Balgo women are organising once again. They want to re-establish the successful programs of the past, and to achieve this by providing cultural activities on weekends and after-school for girls and boys and young women.

By this means Kapululangu would complement the vital work being conducted by the local Luurnpa Catholic School and the Palyalatju Maparnpa pre-school, parallel the currently successful sports activities for Balgo's youth being championed by the police and Kutjungka Parish, and indeed support all initiatives of all the local agencies to further the project of tackling the myriad social problems confronting Balgo's residents, particularly the children and youth.

Kapululangu's work with young women, many of whom are young mothers, would include the development of a touring women's dance troupe, thereby furthering young women's cultural leadership training through contact with their peers across Australia and overseas.

Kapululangu would achieve all of this by engaging the participation of the older middle-generation women under the guidance of the women elders as cultural tutors for young women and girls, and young boys. It would also establish two paid employment positions for middle-generation women as cultural events facilitators. Kapululangu is calling this initiative a *Kultja Kuurla* (Culture School).

In addition, the Kapululangu *Tjilimi* (women elders' camp) would be re-established. As in the past this would provide a safe house refuge for women and children attempting to avoid, escape or recover from family violence including sexual assault. Balgo women have been asking for safe house facilities since 1996, and while police presence has resulted in a decrease of incidences local women still feel the need to have somewhere to run to at short notice. We recognise that Balgo is too small to establish a full women's refuge but we do want to have a safe place for women and children.

We are trying to get funding to make our local women's initiative possible because we see that Law and culture must be part of the overall strategy in stopping petrol sniffing and other substance abuse among our children and youth.

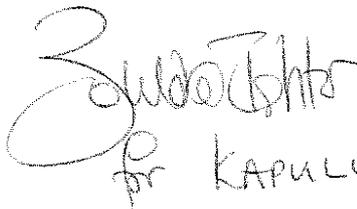
As the only local women's advocacy group Kapululangu forms a significant part of Balgo women's strategy to deal with the multiple impacts of cultural trauma on their children, youth and community. Kapululangu places women within the spectrum of strategies being developed by all of Balgo's agencies to advance the social well-being of Balgo's residents.

For further information I am sending you a copy of my book  *Holding Yawulyu: White Culture and Black Women's Law*  (Spinifex Press, 2005) which will explain in greater detail the work of Kapululangu, the women's purpose and intent, and the difficulties they have faced in the past in having their contribution to the well being of their families and communities taken serious. An investigation into the impact of White culture on the Indigenous Kapululangu initiative, this book is the first sociological study of Balgo, and the first indepth chronicle of its White history since its formation in 1939.

Dr Zohl dé Ishtar  
Kapululangu Aboriginal Women's Association (AC). 5 June 2006.

(NB: Dr Zohl dé Ishtar is a post-doctoral fellow at the Australian Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies, University of Queensland. She was nominated to the Nobel Peace Prize 2005 as part of the 1000 Women for the Nobel Peace Prize global initiative. An Irish-Australian lesbian, she has worked with Indigenous Australian and Pacific women and their communities since 1979 and has written extensively. Her books include  *Daughters of the Pacific*  (Spinifex Press, 1994),  *Pacific Women Speak Out for Independence and Denuclearisation*  (Raven, 1998), and  *Holding Yawulyu: White Culture and Black Women's Law*  (Spinifex Press, 2005). She has worked with Balgo women since 1993 and, in 1999-2001, was the founding coordinator of the Kapululangu Aboriginal Women's Association. She took up the task of re-establishing Kapululangu in November 2005.)

Department of Indigenous Affairs. 2005.  *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage in Western Australia* . Perth: Department of Indigenous Affairs.  
Stanley, Fiona. 2004.  *Universal Prevention Strategies for Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage* . Presentation of Professor Fiona Stanley to the Ministerial Council for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, 7 May.

  
for KAPULULANGU ABORIGINAL WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION (A

Dear Minister

Women is really strong. We worried for petrol sniffing. We women can tell the men to talk to young boys and take them bush for camping. For culture and spear and boomerang and water goanna. Women can take all the young girls and young women. They can go bush for dancing and bush yam and bush tomato and Yawulyu - Women's Law.

When they sit down for one week, they can come for football but they do something wrong they can go back to bush. Women side mother can take them one week all the girls for bush mangarri and for Yawulyu dancing and paintup and for digging stick and luwantja. They might go camping. When they good they can come home. Try em, and if they wrong again take them back to bush.

Women gotta teach everything for all the little girls, secondary girls and all the little kids. When they learning Yawulyu - all that singing and dancing - that will make them strong. We gotta teach them and show them yawulyu. Take em hunting.

Government can help with mangarri food and fuel and motorcar and tilitja worker. So we can learn all the kids.

We gotta hold him, not lose him that culture  
They gotta know that country those kids  
or they might get lost in mind. They  
gotta know law and culture.

Women gotta look after little kids, young boys  
too. Men get boys when they little bit bigger  
Because men is really important for  
hunting and singing for dancing. But men  
only worried for Law Time. Women  
worried in culture all the time. Kapululangu

The men watching us. Women the leader  
really. We can't tell em.

They can do football. After football they  
can take all the big boys bush. Might be  
three ~~or~~ nights in the bush. They can  
camp and dancing. I bin thinking about  
football and dancing. They gotta mix in up.

And women can do tjaatjorra. When they  
get sick one or three women can come  
and tjaatjorra them. Heal them. That man  
or woman or girl or little kid. Palya.

They gotta sit down really strong again —  
this place Kapululangu.

MARGARET

MARGARET ANJULE CHAIR, KAPULULANU. BALSO.

Dear Minister

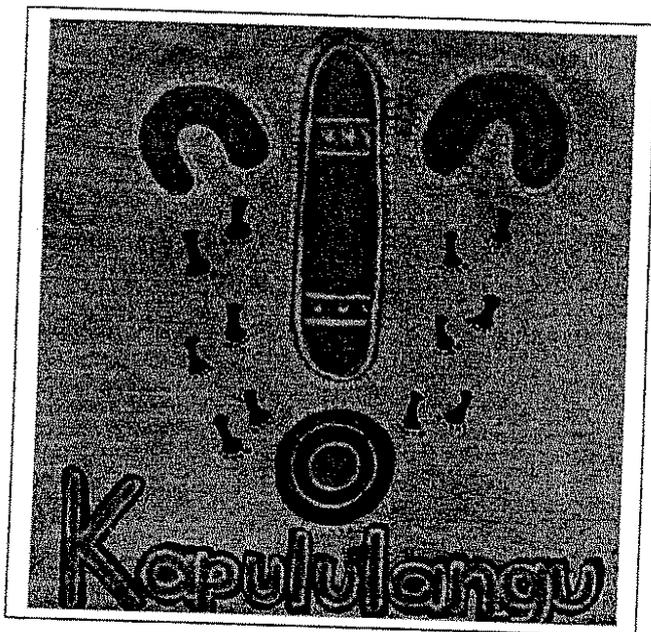
Young women want to learn culture  
Because when they gone all these  
old womens then the young people  
take over. There's a lot of young  
people in Balgo think that.  
It really important for young people  
to know, young women. If we  
don't learn we dont know about  
culture any more. If the old people  
don't show us we won't know  
about it. Petrol sniffers they want  
to know too. They want to do  
culture. Yeah.

CORINIA DARKIE

# Kapululangu

Aboriginal Women's Association

## CIRCLES OF CULTURAL LEARNING PROJECT 2007-2010



Kapululangu Aboriginal  
Women's Association  
PMB 308, Balgo,  
Via Halls Creek, WA 6770  
Australia

Please address all  
correspondence to:

Dr Zohl dé Ishtar  
0429 422 645  
[z.deishtar@uq.edu.au](mailto:z.deishtar@uq.edu.au)

May 2006

# Introducing Kapululangu

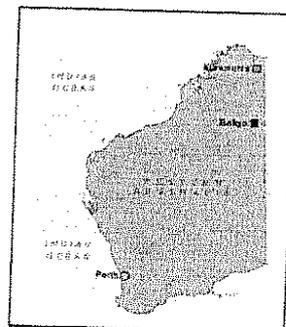
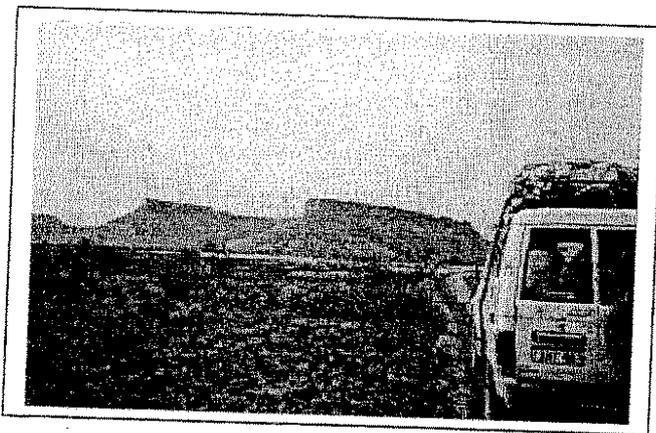
The Kapululangu Aboriginal Women's Association (AC) is Wirrimanu/Balgo's sole women's advocacy organisation. As such it has historically been involved in advancing all issues pertaining to women and children in Wirrimanu, particularly supporting Women's Law (Yawulyu), customary practices and inter-generational cultural knowledge transmission.

Kapululangu was initiated by the Senior Law women in an endeavour to "grow up" their grandchildren and great-grandchildren with knowledge of their cultural heritage and pride in their Aboriginality. This was a strategy to enhancing their physical and emotional safety and well being. The Kapululangu elders have consistently been extremely concerned about the trauma which is evidenced by their family members, and manifests as substance abuse (petrol sniffing and drugs), self-harm and even suicides.

Kapululangu was established by Wirrimanu's Senior Law women in 1999, but has a history which extends back to 1983. Wirrimanu women began organising in 1983 as the Desert Women's Project out of the Kimberley Aboriginal Law and Culture Centre, and after finally receiving funding in 1986 employed a coordinator in 1987. The organisation was so successful that in 1990 it became incorporated in its own right as the Manungka Manungka Women's Association. Unfortunately Manungka Manungka collapsed in January 1994 from a lack of funding and due to alleged mismanagement of its funds by the then administrator of the Wirrimanu Aboriginal Corporation, the local council. Kapululangu was finally (re-)established in 1999 and flourished for two years under it also collapsed under the weight of mismanagement inherent in the Wirrimanu Aboriginal Corporation which has subsequently been put under administration by the Office of the Registrar of Aboriginal Corporations. Between July 2001 and November 2005 Kapululangu suffered from the lack of a skilled coordinator. The organisation was resurrected in November 2005 but we have not as of yet had the funding to rekindle Kapululangu's once vibrant cultural program. Kapululangu's founding-coordinator, Zohl dé Ishtar has subsequently become its coordinator once again.

For two years (1999-2001) Kapululangu provided a dynamic and vibrant intergenerational cultural knowledge transmission program which consisted of culture camps and workshops for young women and children, hunting and trips to country, ceremonies including journeys along Dreaming Tracks, logistical cultural support for men and boys, and cultural exchange with other Indigenous peoples in Australia and overseas. All of this operated out of a Tjilimi or traditional women's camp on the Women's Law Ground on the outskirts of the settlement.

The Kapululangu women elders believe that Law and culture must be a vital element of any strategy for youth in Wirrimanu. With over half of Wirrimanu's population aged under 25 years the challenges facing them need to be met now. Kapululangu is uniquely positioned to contribute to that endeavour.



# Presenting the Kapululangu Argument

The Kapululangu Aboriginal Women's Association (AC) ran a successful cultural program from 1999 through 2001. The Kapululangu Women's Law and Culture Centre was in operation for two years and provided a dynamic inter-generational cultural knowledge transmission program consisting of the programs listed below. This high achievement should stand as testament that Wirrimanu women are more than capable of establishing and running a cultural school – if they are provided with sufficient support and logistical resources.

When it was operating at its full potential (1999 through 2001), the Kapululangu Women's Law and Culture Centre's program included:

- a series of weekly culture classes for girls (with the local Luurnpa school)
- occasional/monthly culture camps for girls and boys (with local Kutjungka parish)
- taking young women on hunting excursions and trips to country
- taking girls and young women on travelling along Dreaming Tracks
- encouraging the participation of young women in ceremonies and dancing at the women's *Tjilimi* (culture centre)
- forming a women's dancing troupe
- taking girls and young women to various locations across the Kimberley (eg First National Indigenous Youth Dance Forum, Broome),
- involving young women in "cultural share" tours (eg the Hands Across the Generations tour to Canada and Hawaii).

All of this was achieved within a context of the Kapululangu women elders living together on the Wirrimanu Women's Law Ground. Thirteen women elders lived together for two years in a tin shed beyond the outskirts of Wirrimanu forming a *Tjilimi* – a traditional women's camp on Wirrimanu's Women's Law Ground. From that dynamic environment they practiced their daily customs, regularly initiated and participated in ceremonies and consistently included their younger generations in all their activities.

In addition to the program listed above, the women elders living together in their *Tjilimi* also provided:

- cultural and religious leadership in Law events – eg. during the annual Law Time ceremonies, during Sorry Time (funerals), and used the *Tjilimi*'s ritualised environment for ongoing ceremonies
- a *Tjaatjurra* Healing Centre where women, and men, would come from the community to receive traditional healing from the *tjaatjurra* (women healers)
- a Safe House (refuge) for women and children avoiding, escaping or recovering from family violence
- an Old Women's House – two of our elders were said to be aged over 90 and we provided respite care for two women said to be aged over 100 years.
- they initiated the first night watch scheme where they patrolled the community (often on foot) attempting to stop their grandchildren from sniffing petrol and to identify grog runners bring alcohol into the community. This program was later taken over by the men and officially became the now successful Balgo Warden Patrol operating out of the police station.
- They also participated in craft workshops in fabric and painted paper products (self-made paper incorporating the local bush and environment) in an attempt to establish a cottage industry.

Not only concerned with the women's side of life, the Kapululangu elders also provided (and continue to provide) ongoing logistical support to the male elders in their work with the young men and boys, and they held regular events (afternoon teas and introduction ceremonies) where women teachers and nurses who were Other-than-Indigenous could connect with the local women's culture.

Unfortunately, Kapululangu's incredible success it is abruptly curtailed in the later part of 2001 as a direct result of corruption and mismanagement within the local council, the Wirrimanu Aboriginal

Corporation (WAC), which was at its height from October 2000 through 2001. WAC was subsequently placed under administration by the Office of the Registrar of Aboriginal Corporations and currently operates through a CEO based in Wirrimanu and an Administrator based in Adelaide. The difficulties of that time impacted on the entire community and all local agencies in various ways. (For an analysis of the impact of WAC's former dysfunction on Kapululangu please see: *Holding Yawulyu: White Culture and Black Women's Law* (Spinifex Press, 2005) by Dr Zohi dé Ishtar, Australian Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies, University of Queensland.)

Given that the Kapululangu women have such a remarkable history of successfully achieving all of the above within a two year period (1999-2001) it would appear possible that, given sufficient support and resources, they would be able to run a cultural program consisting of:

- a series of after school activities twice a week – to fit the school term
- a series of weekend cultural activities and events
- culture camps for girls and boys during school holidays
- participation of Kapululangu culture teachers in the local school program
- participation of Kapululangu culture teachers in cultural programs of other agencies



The activities listed above (and those expand from this nexus) would operate along a locally-inspired "Circles of Cultural Learning"™ model which reflects Kapululangu's earlier cultural program (1999-2001). This model was developed in 2004 in a series of five local consultations conducted during the Sorry Camp for one of our most prominent middle-generation Law women who was killed in a drunk driving accident. The Circles of Cultural Learning™ positions the women elders and middle-generation women leaders as (paid) teachers tutoring four distinct groups in traditional and contemporary cultural knowledge: young women, girls, *tiitji* (school kids), and *lamparnlamparnpa* (toddlers and babies). The Kapululangu teachers would work independently from but alongside and with other agencies in Wirrimanu, for example the Luumpa School, the Kutjungka Parish, the Wirrimanu Adult Education Centre, and the Palyalatju Maparnpa pre-school. The Kapululangu women teachers would be

supported by a circle of *tilitja* (culture workers) who will be culturally trained by the elders and qualified in various aspects of project management/event coordination, cultural curriculum and events coordination, and office administration. The *tilitja* (culture workers) would in turn be supported by a series of volunteers who would bring required skills to the community for short periods of time. The *tilitja* and the volunteers would both be Indigenous Australians (not local) and Other-than-Indigenous. There will be a action research process built into this program as a means of evaluation and ensuring it is keeping on track.

Similar cultural programs aimed at creating an educational program that produces bilingual, biliterate, bicultural children have been successfully established by Indigenous peoples in other countries. As yet there is not, to our knowledge, any equivalent in Australia. Some of the most notable programs are: Cree Way in Quebec, Hualapai in Arizona, Te Kohanga Reo in Aotearoa New Zealand, and Punana Leo in Hawaii. The common components which extend across these programs are: commitment to local Indigenous cultural knowledge principles, conceptual frameworks and ways of working, coupled with curriculum development, community support, parental involvement and government support.

We believe that Kapululangu's earlier history clearly indicated that it has the capacity to provide the commitment to Indigenous cultural knowledge principles, conceptual frameworks and ways of working. It has the capacity to engender community support and parental involvement and thereby to facilitate cultural curriculum development. All that remains lacking from this recipe for success is substantial, ongoing government support.

We are not pretending that Kapululangu is the only answer to the problems facing Wirrimanu's residents. These problems are multidimensional and have many causes and thus need to be tackled on all fronts at the same time by all of Wirrimanu's agencies working in unison. But Kapululangu is uniquely positioned to contribute something very vital to any strategic attempt to rectify the currently traumatic situation facing Wirrimanu residents. It is the Kapululangu elders' belief that their young ones who turn to petrol sniffing, self-harm and suicide are doing so from a diminished self-esteem caused by a loss of pride which has resulted from a rupture in their culture heritage, and their loss of contact with their land-based traditions. The elders are not calling for a nostalgic desire to return to the past, they are keenly interested in the future of their people. But they do believe that all attempts to solve the problem will be impotent unless they are grounded in a strong sense of identity that can only come from having pride in one's Aboriginality. This is the contribution that the elders want to make – to be able to use their skills and knowledge to heal their youth. It is their gift to the future of their families and communities. They know that unless the foundation of Law and culture is strong all of the bricks of education, health and housing will continue to fall down. A wall is only as strong as its foundation, and that foundation is, for Wirrimanu's people, their own Law and culture, their own special knowledge.



## Kultja Kuurla (Culture School)

The Circles of Cultural Learning when taken together form a Kultja Kuurla, or Cultural School, as the program will utilise Indigenous ways of knowing, learning and teaching across generations and is embedded in Indigenous knowledges, both traditional and contemporary.

The plan anchors the Senior Law women – the Nintipuka – as the main teachers of cultural knowledge, assisted by middle-generation-women who will organise activities and events which offer cultural knowledge learning opportunities to young women, girls, tjiitji (school kids), and lamparnlamparnpa (pre-schoolers). The Kultja Kuurla would achieve its goals by also engaging with the cultural work of Wirrimanu's other agencies.

The Kultja Kuurla concept was the outcome of a series of consultative meetings co-facilitated by Dr Zohl de Ishtar and Aboriginal adult-educator Ochre Doyle in October-November 2004. This initiative has been well documented in *Circles of Cultural Learning: Kapululangu Senior Law Women's Cultural Revival Plan* (Wirrimanu Senior Law Women, Ochre Doyle and Zohl de Ishtar, 2004 & 2006) and subsequently replicated on a wall map titled the *Kapululangu elders and Women from Balgo and Yagga Yagga Action Plan Diagram* and published by the Department of Indigenous Affairs, with the assistance of Zohl de Ishtar and Ochre Doyle (2005). (See attachment.) This "Map" was reconfirmed by the Kapululangu women elders and the Kapululangu Aboriginal Women's Association in a series of meetings over November 2005 to February 2006. It has been updated as the "Circles of Cultural Learning Roadmap" (2006).

The Kultja Kuurla would be based at the Kapululangu Women's Law and Culture Centre which has historically formed a learning place for women and girls. It would operate after school and on weekends on a regular basis, with larger events being organised for school holidays. Kapululangu's mothers and grandmothers want to complement the "Kartiya schooling" offered by the local Luurnpa Catholic school with an increased focus on the teaching of their own culture and customs. Kapululangu will restrict its activities to non-school hours so as not to compete with the more formal education. It is important to realise that Indigenous ways of teaching – and for that matter of learning – are distinctly different from those of White/mainstream society and therefore the two programs should not be compared. One spin-off of this parallel education process, however, may be an increased attendance at the "Kartiya school" if it is perceived that only those who attend to their lessons there may participate in (some) of the Kapululangu activities.



# Cultural Leadership Training

One first step towards the attainment of Kapululangu's objective is the development of cultural leadership among Wirrimanu's middle-generation women. To this end, Kapululangu would develop a 12 month Cultural Leadership Skills training package to be run concomitantly with the inter-generational Circles of Cultural Learning programs. The training package's foremost objective would be the incremental development of cultural knowledge, confidence and skills among a wider cross-section of the middle-generation women who were raised in the Christian dormitories and have had limited opportunity (other than through Kapululangu and its predecessors) to accrue the indepth cultural knowledge from their elders. This is increasingly essential as they increasingly move to take up the responsibility of being the elders in their community in their turn.

An aspect of this Cultural Leadership Skills training would be to assist local women to develop the skills necessary to enable them to fully participate in managing their organisation and facilitating its cultural program. To this end Kapululangu could establish a collaboration with the local Wirrimanu Adult Education and Training Centre, making particular use of its commitment to increase the skills and confidence of local residents in preparing them to become involved in the management of their community through such courses as Business Studies. This possibility has already been discussed with the principle and staff of the Centre and they are very supportive and interested.

Thus the Cultural Leadership Skills training would be designed to advance the capacity of local women to fulfil traditional and contemporary responsibilities as the cultural leaders of their community.

The primary objectives of this project are to:

1. increase Wirrimanu women's ability to engage in and enhance their cultural knowledge, while at the same time creating opportunities for younger women and children to similarly benefit.
2. impart administration skills and techniques to a small number of identified cultural workers (*tilitja*), and basic organisational knowledge to women as a group.

This will be facilitated through two training streams. The first stream consisting of a combination of cultural learning opportunities for women by Wirrimanu's Senior Law women elders; the second stream consisting of the provision of an organisational management training package offered by the coordinator and other skilled trainers.

This training package will increase the capacity of local women to undertake organisational, administrative, leadership and representative roles within their community in projects and activities which maintain their cultural heritage.



## **Local Employment Projections**

This project would have the added advantage of improving women's economic status within their community. The aim is to develop Kapululangu as a location of employment for local women, and there is significant scope for its programs to be supported through the CDEP program.

In the first instance Kapululangu would hope to employ.

**Cultural Event Facilitators:** At least two local women to work closely with the Cultural Tutors (elders) to facilitate the cultural events, including organising cultural activities, assisting with the administration of the project, and driving the vehicle/s to take the elders and others hunting or to country.

**Cultural Tutors.** The project would also provide a nominal payment to the Senior Law women for their cultural tutelage as a sign of respect (nominal so as not to impact on elders' pensions).

Ultimately other positions would be developed as the project expanded.

Other employees immediately required are a Project Director and an Office Manager. In the first instance these positions would be filled by external professionals as the required skills are currently lacking in the community. But local training could result in these positions becoming filled locally.

## **Self-Sustaining Business**

In the long-term – working on a five year plan – there is the possibility of Kapululangu developing the Kultja Kuurla as a not-for-profit business by providing cross-cultural studies programs for Indigenous and Other-than-Indigenous individuals and organisations from across Australia. Kapululangu has already received numerous requests to this end, including from Indigenous organisations and communities in more urban regions who perceive that the knowledge held by the Kapululangu women elders is precious and at a premium. It may be possible to extend this to personnel from government departments wishing to obtain increased insight into how to develop safer inter-personal relationships with Indigenous clients in remote areas. Another potential area is in research training for both Indigenous and Other-than-Indigenous Masters and PhD students and this has already been discussed with professors at several universities. Of course the processes and procedures involved in establishing such arrangements with other organisations, businesses, government departments and universities are immense and any development in this area must be seen as being a long way down the track, but the potential is there and needs to be identified from the beginning.

## **Other Agencies**

Other local Wirrimanu agencies have and continue to support the Kapululangu women and their initiative. Kapululangu has always worked closely with the other agencies, particularly the Luurnpa Catholic School and the Kutjungka Catholic Parish. Current negotiations have the potential of leading to mutually beneficial working relations with other agencies such as Wirrimanu Adult Education and Training Centre and the Warlayirti Art and Culture Centre. Indeed Kapululangu provides a unique contribution to a productive, interrelated network of local agencies, each one responsible for a different aspect of the whole picture which makes up Wirrimanu. Kapululangu does not stand alone, nor does it seek to do so because each agency mutually supports and needs the others.

# Community Support

Kapululangu is an Aboriginal initiative which came directly from the women elders and other women of Wirrimanu. They have the support of the male members of their family and community in their endeavour. From discussions held within Kapululangu and Wirrimanu it is anticipated that a Kultja Kuurla would be widely supported in the community, and that it would complement cultural programs run by other local agencies. It is essential that the process of establishing the Kultja Kuurla remains gradual and community-driven – specifically by Wirrimanu's women, and clearly under the direction of their elders. Kapululangu has always worked with the support of and have supported the other elements of their community.

## Target Groups

Girls and Young Boys: In Wirrimanu women are responsible for the cultural upbringing of girls and young pre-pubescent boys before they become the responsibility of the men. Kapululangu provides an avenue for women to engage with their children and grandchildren in safe environments sharing cultural activities and events designed to increase their confidence, self-esteem and pride in their Aboriginality.

Younger Women: Many younger women are increasingly keen to learn from their elders by participating in cultural activities. Many of these younger women participated in the culture classes and camps run by Kapululangu in 1999-2001 and their confidence gained during those experiences is now evident in their community's Law Time ceremonies (2005-2006).

Senior Law women: as the teachers, healers and providers of their families and community, the women elders are anxious to have the logistical support they require to practice their Law ceremonies and other cultural practices such as going hunting. They want support to pass their cultural knowledge to younger women and children.

Middle Generation Women: The women elders are keenly supported by many middle-generation women who, raised in the mission dormitories, also understand the importance for the younger generations to be raised up proud of their cultural heritage. With many of the original elders who founded Kapululangu now deceased their organisation is undergoing fundamental changes so that its future relies on strengthening of its commitment to middle-generation women.

Men and Older Boys: While clearly a woman's organisation, Kapululangu has always logistically supported the cultural work of the men's side.

Neighbouring Communities: Wirrimanu has two close neighbours in the south-eastern Kimberley/Kutjungka/Tjurabalan region: Mulan and Kurrurungku (Billiluna). While Kapululangu is currently constitutionally tied to Wirrimanu its work has regularly supported the cultural work of women from the neighbouring communities. It is possible that this project could be extended to include the other communities, particularly since women from Mulan and Kurrurungku have requested that similar projects be developed in their communities. Ultimately this could become a regional project.

Other Indigenous Women from Other Regions: There is the potential to develop regular Law and culture workshops for Indigenous women from other regions. Many groups have already indicated an interest to learn.

# Linkages

## Other Agencies:

As with its cultural program in 1999 through 2001, Kapululangu will invite other Wirrimanu-based agencies to collaborate in our cultural programs and now that they have developed their own will also participate in their cultural programs. Agencies include:

- BRACS radio is already involved with collaborative work with Kapululangu regarding the recording of stories and songs
- the Wirrimanu Adult Education and Training Centre, which Kapululangu has approached regarding the possibility of the students from their Business Course doing "work experience" at Kapululangu.
- Luurnpa School – which Kapululangu has worked together with in the past running cultural classes for their girl student on the Women's Law Ground
- Kutjungka Catholic Parish – with which Kapululangu also has a collaborative history running cultural camps for girls and boys.
- Warlayirti Art and Culture Centre – is a naturally ally to Kapululangu, although their cultural work is directly related to tourism while Kapululangu is about sustaining Law knowledge and practice in Wirrimanu.

## Other Indigenous Women's Communities

Wirrimanu women are seen to be the custodians of strong religious and cultural knowledge which other Indigenous women in other regions of Australia yearn for. One of the outcomes of this project could be the development of regular residential Culture Workshops for other Indigenous women from other regions. Many Indigenous individuals and groups have already asked the women elders if they could teach their daughters and themselves some of their Law and cultural knowledge. Holding such Workshops in Wirrimanu would increase local pride and confidence in the importance of their contribution to society as a whole.

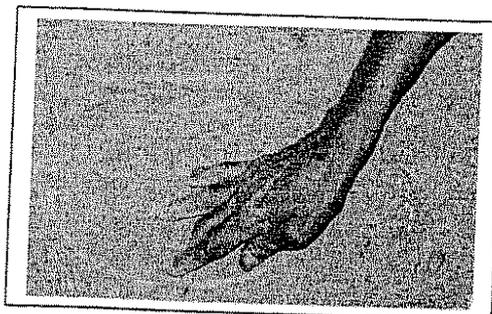
## Academic Linkages

Consultation is currently underway to develop linkages between Kapululangu and the following academic bodies:

- the Australian Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies at the University of Queensland, St Lucia, Brisbane, through Dr Zohi dé Ishtar, and
- the Gnibi College of Indigenous Australian Peoples, Southern Cross University, Lismore NSW, through both adult educator Ochre Doyle and Professor Judy Atkinson (Director of Gnibi College).

## Indigenous Community Volunteer Service

Kapululangu has engaged the Indigenous Community Volunteer Service (ICV) as a potential source of volunteer trainers to provide the specialised skills needs of its training package for prospective staff.



# Implementation

## Staff Requirements:

- Implementing the Cultural Circles of Learning project will require the employment of the following staff:
- Project Director: to oversee the entire project and facilitate the cultural program;
  - Office Manager: to manage the organisational aspects of the association, including the finances – part time position
  - Cultural Events Facilitators (two): local women working closely with the Cultural Tutors (elders) to facilitate the logistical side of the cultural programs
  - Cultural Tutors: ten (10) women elders and other local knowledge custodians
  - Volunteer Specialists will be brought in for short periods to fill skills gaps as identified.

## Kapululangu is Currently Able to Provide:

- the cultural knowledge held within Wirrimanu by the Kapululangu elders and middle-generation women
- Kapululangu's former experience of successfully running a dynamic cultural program in this environment
- the Kapululangu Aboriginal Women's Law and Culture Centre buildings consisting of Kapululangu House (the office-cum-coordinator's residence), Women's House (women's residence/Tjilimi), a large Culture Shed, and a smaller Keeping Place all on the Women's Law Ground
- Women's vehicle (year 2000) as a second vehicle – we would need to obtain a new one
- Kapululangu's long term successful working relationships with other local agencies



# Resource Persons Currently Available

The following skilled professionals are already available to assist in the Kapululangu project, given the required resources:

- Kapululangu's Women. The local women elders who initiated Kapululangu and its vibrant inter-generational cultural knowledge transmission program are still anxious to pass their Law and customary knowledge to their younger generations as a source of strong identity and spiritual sustenance in their contemporary lives. The elders are Nintipuka, or "clever ones", who are leaders, healers, protectors and providers of their families and kinship lines. Tragically, many of the 13 women elders who founded Kapululangu, and its predecessors the Desert Women's Project and Manungka Manungka are no longer with us. Only six elders of the original group remain. This highlights the urgency of the situation. The women in their 40s and 50s are preparing to become the elders in their own time. They hold much knowledge both traditional and contemporary and many are already intimately involved in teaching younger generations. They would be tutors in this program in their own right.
- Dr Zohl de Ishtar. Zohl has been involved with Wirrimanu for 13 years (since 1993) and lives in the community part-time. With over 25 years of experience in cultural and community development with Indigenous communities across Australia and internationally (predominantly the Pacific), she was the founding coordinator of the Kapululangu Aboriginal Women's Association, established and ran the Kapululangu Women's Law and Culture Centre (1999-2001). She is Kapululangu's current coordinator (November 2005 ongoing) and the author of this paper. She has a Masters of Applied Social Research, a Masters of Philosophy Sociology, and a PhD in Women's Studies. She is the author of *Daughters of the Pacific* (Spinifex Press, 1994), *Pacific Women Speak Out for Independence and Denuclearisation* (Raven, 1998), and *Holding Yawulyu: White Culture and Black Women's Law* (Spinifex Press, 2005). She is a postdoctoral research fellow at the Australian Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies, University of Queensland. Zohl was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize 2005 partly as a result of her cross-cultural work with Indigenous women.
- Aboriginal edu-carer Ochre Doyle. Ochre is an adult educator, artist and cultural activist. She has been involved with the Kapululangu Aboriginal Women's Law and Culture Centre since its inception in 1999, and before that with its predecessor *Manungka Manungka Women's Association* since early 1993. She holds a Masters of Australian Indigenous Social Policy (UTS); a BA of Visual Arts in Printmaking (UNE) and a BA of Adult Education in Adult Literacy and Basic Education (Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education NT.) Ochre is currently cross enrolled in the Adult Education Honours program at UTS with elective units from Gnibi's postgraduate program in Indigenous Research Theory and Practice.
- Professor Judy Atkinson. Judy is the Head of College at the Gnibi College of Indigenous Australian Peoples, Southern Cross University, and the Director of CIRCLE (Collaborative Indigenous Research Centre for Learning and Educare). Judy is one of Australia's foremost experts in cultural healing of trauma in Aboriginal communities. She has published widely in the areas of Indigenous Therapies, Health and Healing in Aboriginal Families and Communities, Transgenerational Trauma, Violence in Aboriginal Australia, and Gender Relations in Aboriginal Communities. She has a Bachelor of Arts and a PhD from Queensland University of Technology in the areas of Transgenerational Effects of Trauma in Aboriginal Australia. She is the author of *Trauma Trails: Transgenerational Trauma and Recreating Aboriginal Songlines* (Spinifex Press, 2004).

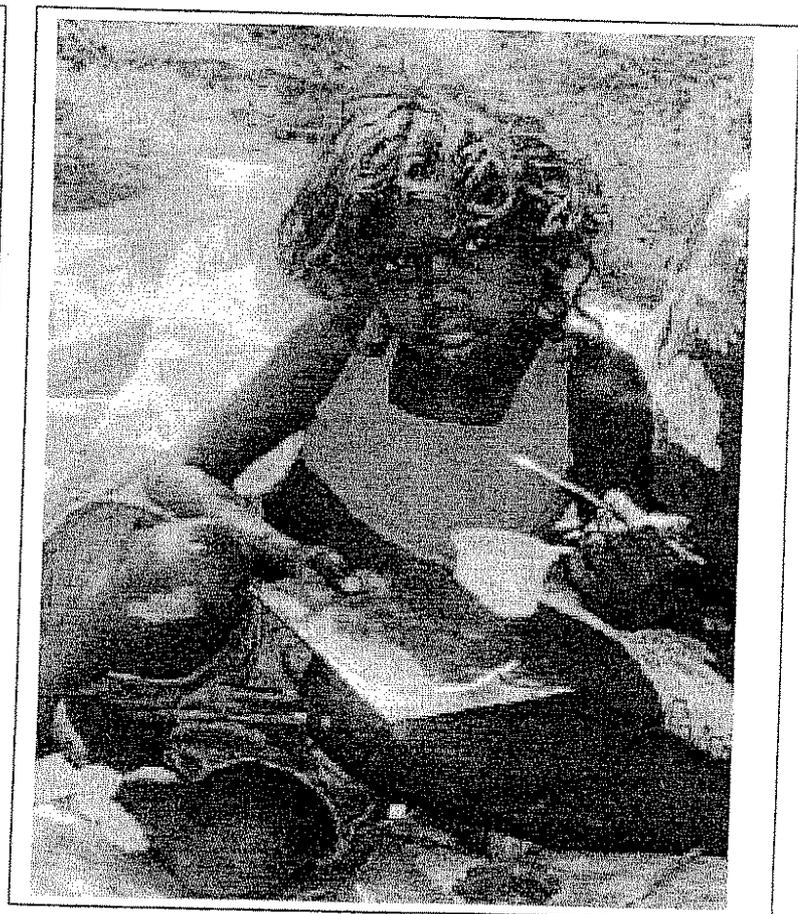
# Summary: Project Outcomes

Outcomes of the Circles of Cultural Learning project would include:

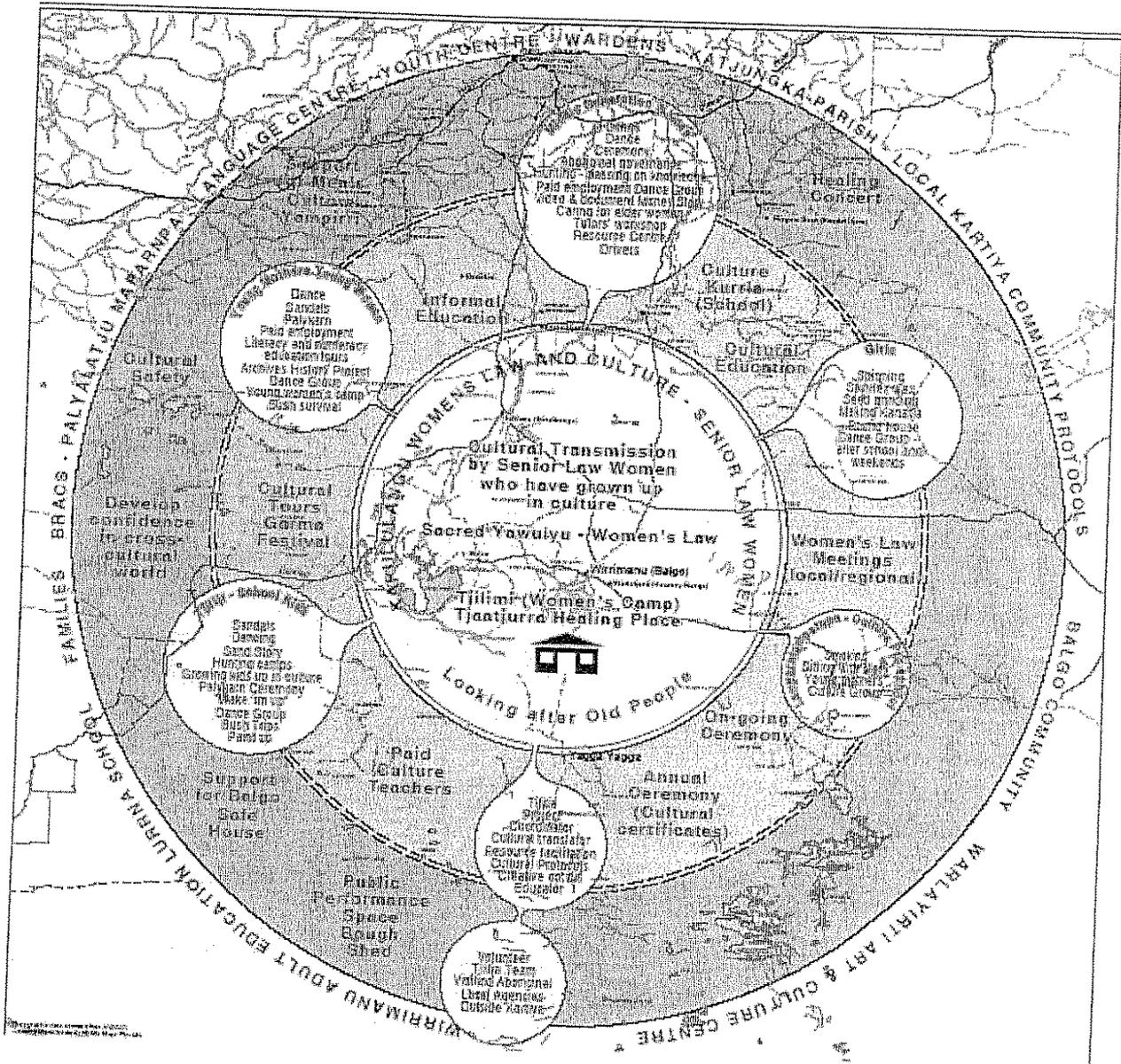
- the transmission of cultural knowledge and skills across generations
- the maintenance of cultural knowledge through community involvement
- draw on a diversity of cultural expressions, both traditional including ceremony, and contemporary
- cultural events which involve all sectors of the community, but predominantly women and girls
- the involvement of skilled culture tutors (Senior Law women) and organisers
- skill development for cultural workers and organisers
- increased employment prospects for Wirrimanu's residents
- enhancement of a local Indigenous initiative – increased confidence and hence motivation
- strengthening of Indigenous teaching and learning practices to complement formal education
- the project will be organised and facilitated by the Indigenous cultural workers in consultation with women elders
- documentation of cultural knowledge using videos and oral history recordings
- Kapululangu will provide adequate physical infrastructure on the Women's Law Ground
- Kapululangu will provide a women's vehicle
- involvement of Indigenous and Other-than-Indigenous resource persons and volunteers
- the interaction of project participants in the cultural activities of other agencies

And most importantly

- raising Wirrimanu's children proud of their unique Indigenous heritage
- raising resilient kids able to withstand the pressures of contemporary Wirrimanu life



# CIRCLES OF CULTURAL LEARNING ROADMAP



© Kapululangu Aboriginal Women's Association, 2004  
Please do not reproduce without written permission

**For more Information about Kapululangu:**

**Zohl de Ishtar's**

*Holding Yawulyu: White Culture and Black Women's Law*  
(Spinifex Press, 2005)

Authored by Zohl de Ishtar

Ordered from: [www.spinifexpress.com.au](http://www.spinifexpress.com.au)

## **Kapululangu Aboriginal Women's Association**

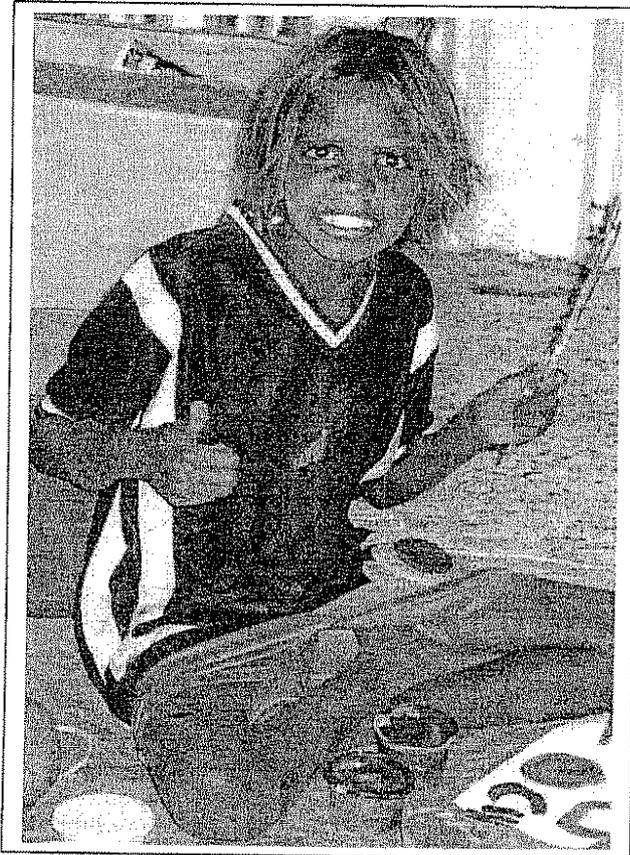
PMB 308, Balgo, via Halls Creek, WA 6770, Australia

Please address all correspondence to:

Dr Zohl de Ishtar

Email: [z.deishtar@uq.edu.au](mailto:z.deishtar@uq.edu.au)

Phone: +61 (0)429 422 645

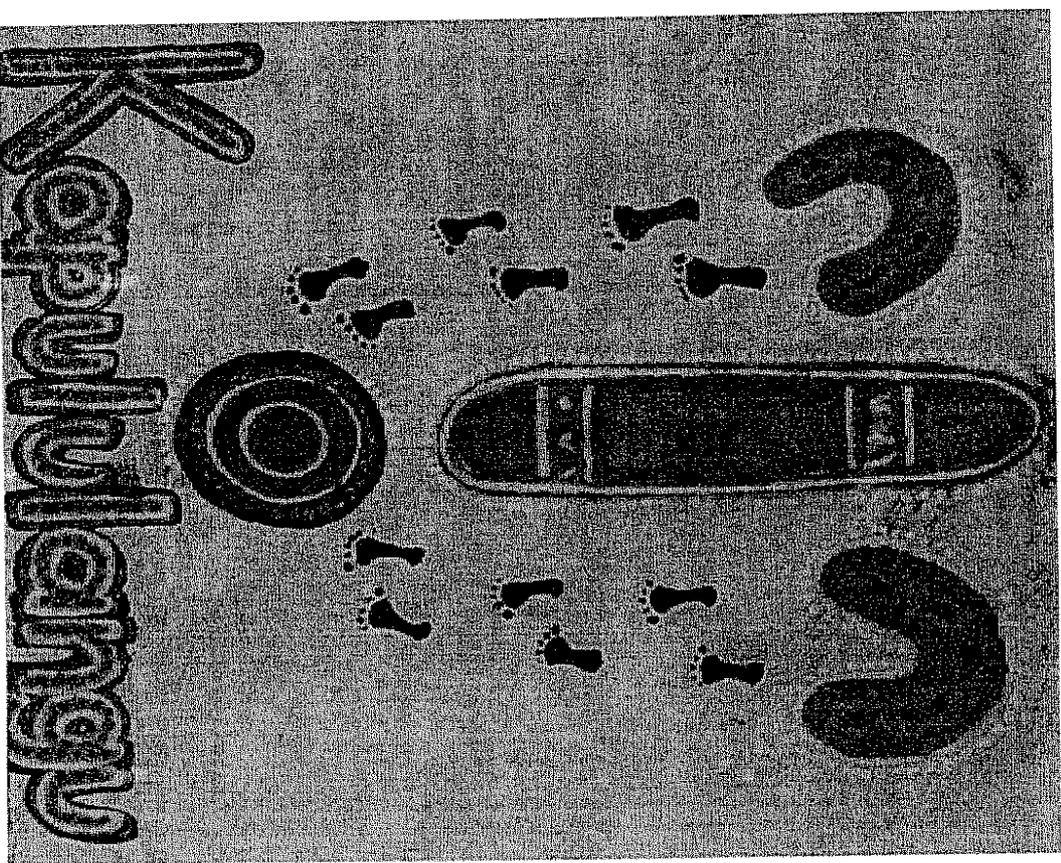


© Zohl de Ishtar for the Kapululangu Aboriginal Women's Association, 2006.

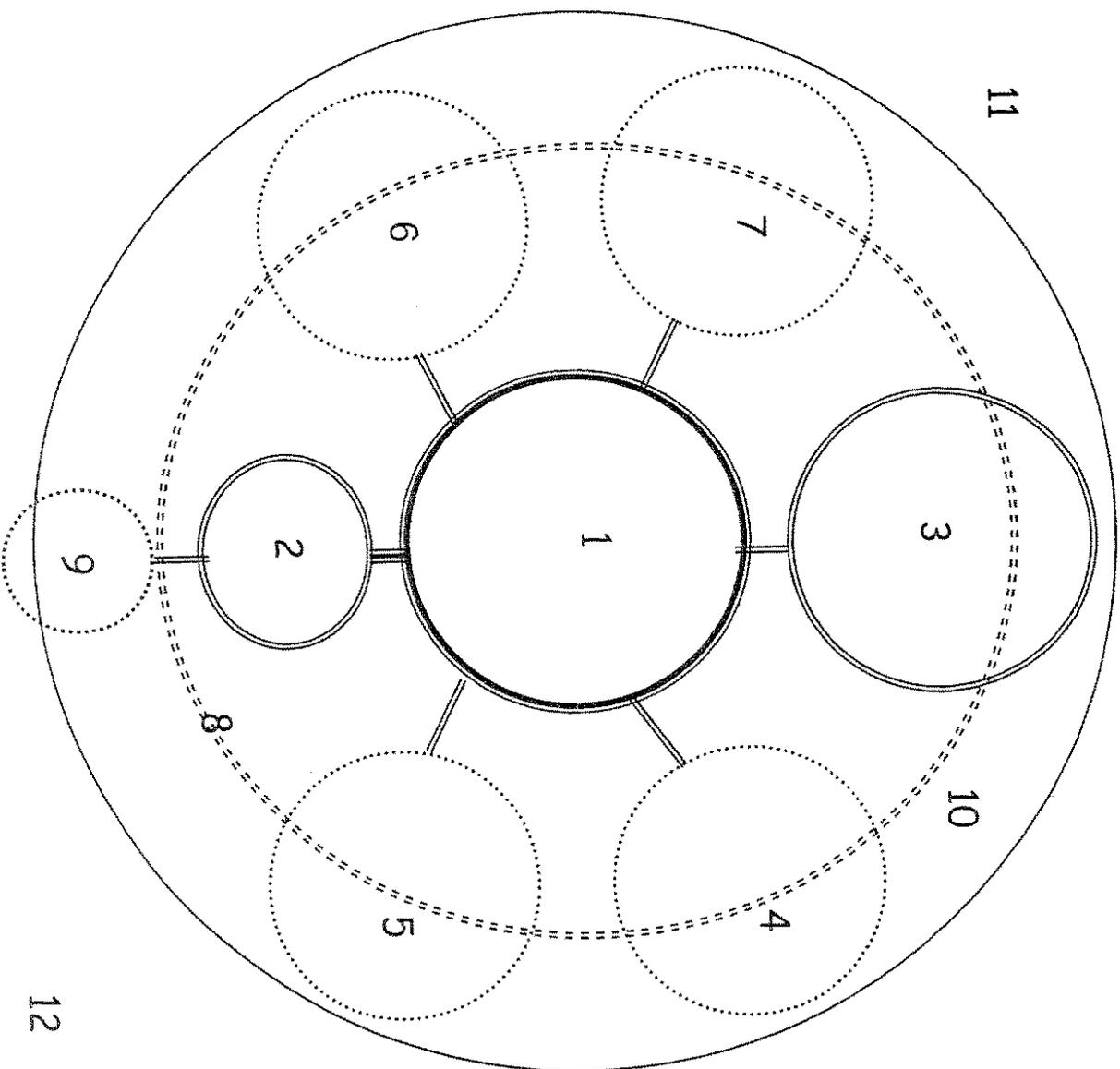


# Kapululangu

## Circles of Cultural Learning



# Circles of Cultural Learning



## KEY

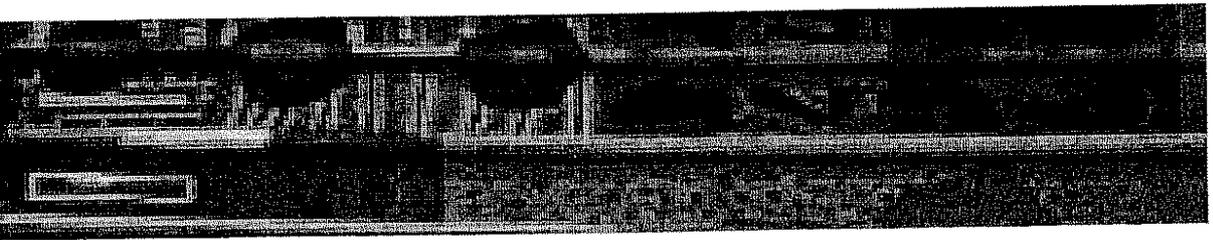
1. Elders - the Kapululangu Senior Law and Culture Women - Nintipuka
2. Kapululangu Tilitja - culture workers
3. Wirrimanu Community Women
4. Young Women
5. Older Girls
6. Tjiitji - school kids
7. Lamparlamparpa - babies and preschool children
8. Cultural education
9. Aboriginal and Kartiya women and proposed visiting Tilitja
10. Wirrimanu Aboriginal community
11. Balgo Kartiya Community
12. Wider community Regional, National and International

## **Circles of Cultural Learning**

The Nintipuka Elders' Circle is surrounded by, works with and supports other circles: Wirrimanu Community Women, Young Women, Girls, Primary Kids, and Lamparlamparpa (Babies and Pre-School Children). This cultural education program responds to the Kapulangu elders' concern about the trauma currently being expressed and experienced by their children and grandchildren. It reflects the elders' historical aspiration to "grow 'em up strong in culture". The activities encased in each circle is graded by age, but includes hunting, ceremony, bush skills, spinning and winnowing, etc. Learning opportunities will be achieved through the staging of culture classes, bush camps, and weekend and after-school activities. The Elders will work with Young Women and Wirrimanu Community Women to establish a dance troupe for touring and cultural exchange with other Indigenous peoples; gain skills in documenting and archiving cultural knowledge, gain skills in Aboriginal empowerment, community responsive organisation, administration and become skilled in dealing with Kartiya structures. Young mothers will be guided by the elders in learning cultural baby care.

" Marlaku manula tjukurrtjanu."

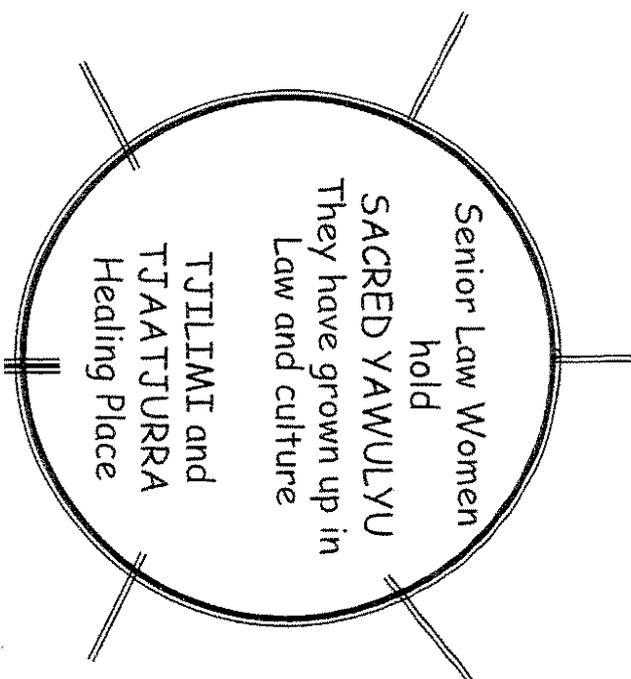
" We have to get 'im back,that culture."



# 1. Kapululangu Senior Law and Culture Women

## Nintipuka Elders' Circle

The Nintipuka Elders' Circle is the core - the heart - of this project. Nintipuka means "clever ones". The women elders want to nurture and enjoy their Yawulyu - Women's Law rites - and to achieve this by living together in a Tjilimi (women's camp) upon Wirrimanu's Women's Law Ground (the current location). The women elders then want to re-create a full and vibrant transgenerational cultural knowledge transmission project through establishing a Kultja Kuurla (Culture School). The elders also want to establish a Tjaatjorra Healing Place to enable Wirrimanu residents to access their healing powers. The elders want to establish a Dancing Troupe, and tour to share their cultural knowledge with other peoples (both in Australia and Internationally). The elders will host and attend Women's Law Meetings and other gatherings with women from the Kutjungka Region, the Kimberley and elsewhere. They will establish the Kapululangu Council of Elders to enable the women elders to oversee the development of the project and to ensure that they remain Kapululangu's paramount governing force.



" Kuwarri kulila wangkanya. "

" We have to start listening to 'em now. "

## **2. Kapululangu Tiitja – Culture Workers**

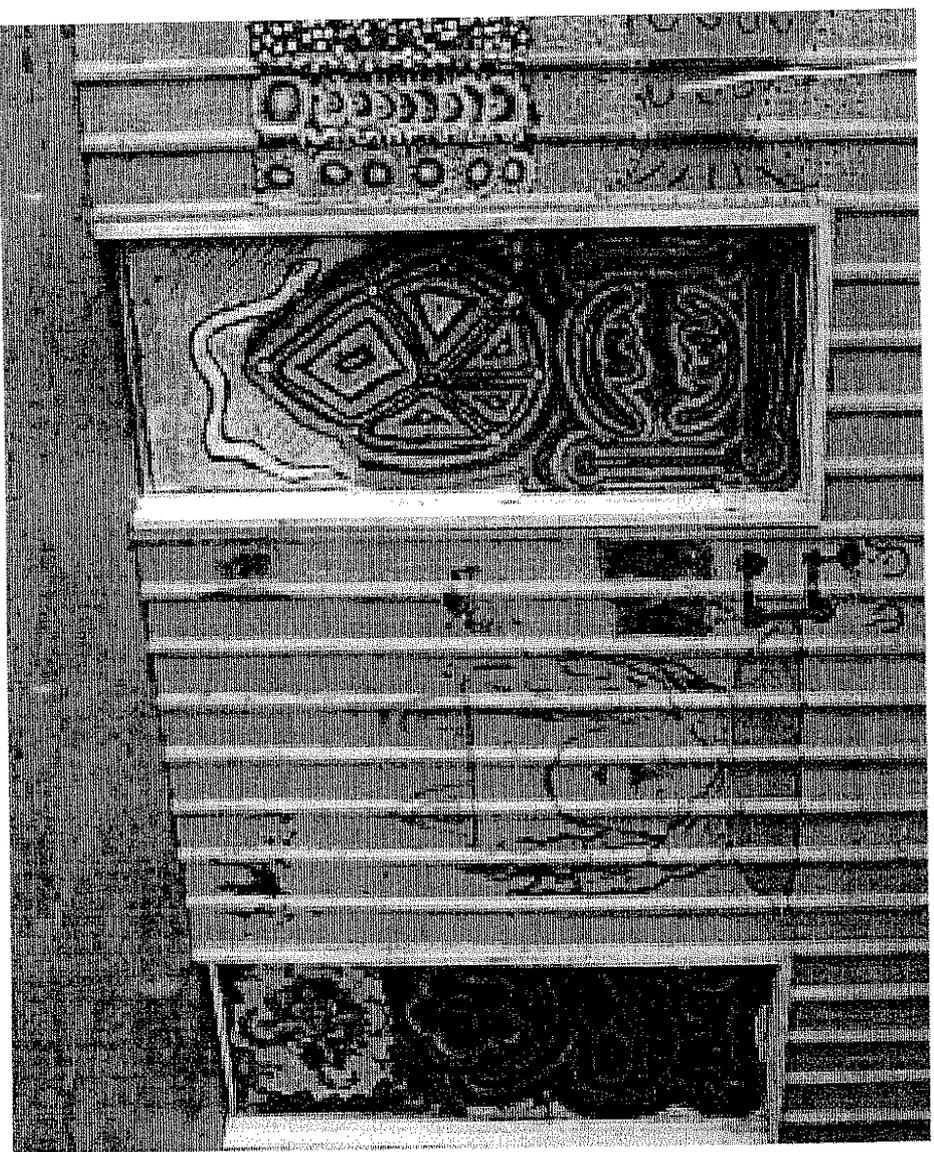
The Senior Law Women sharing their cultural knowledge through the Circles of Cultural Learning program will be supported by local middle-generation and young women fulfilling the traditional role of tiitja (culture workers). External Indigenous and Other-than-Indigenous women will bring specific organisational skills and training to Kapululangu under the direction of the elders to assist local women achieve their cultural aspirations.

Two external women who  
have long been involved with  
Kapululangu are:

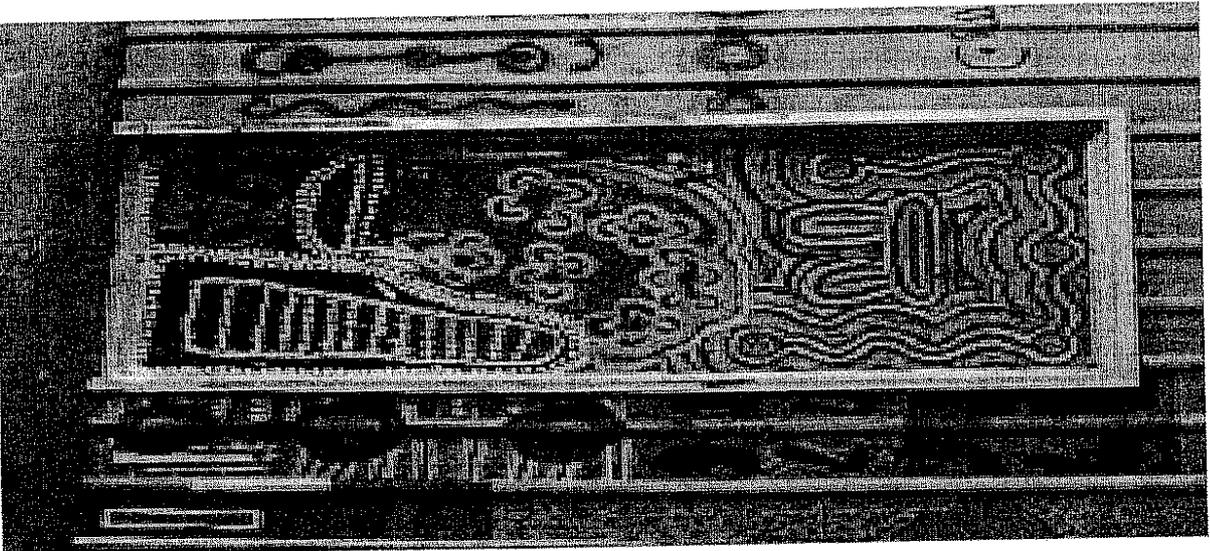
Ochre Doyle,  
An Aboriginal  
Creative Options Educator  
and a Community Artist

and

Dr Zohl de Ishtar  
an Irish-Australian  
Community Cultural  
Development Project Manager.



### 3. Wirrimanu Community Women



- The Kultja Kuurla will create cultural learning opportunities for Middle-generation women who have historically had restricted and/or belated access to their peoples' cultural and religious knowledge, having been raised in the missionary dormitories and schools.
- It will also draw on their skills as Middle Generation women, and encourage them to be teachers for younger women and girls, tjiitji (school kids) and lamparnlamparnpa (babies and pre-school kids).
- It will increase the opportunities for Wirrimanu Community women to be involved in ceremonies (dance, song, paint-up), hunting and bush trips, and other cultural activities under the direction of their elders. It will strengthen respectful relationships between elders and the women who will become the cultural leaders of their community.
- It will involve Wirrimanu Community women in cultural exchange and dance performance tours, designing tour outfits and promotional materials and encouraging pride in cultural heritage.
- Wirrimanu women will be engaged in video and audio documentation, encouraging them to learn more about their peoples' history as told by the women elders.
- It will provide meaningful employment for the women of Wirrimanu community, and strengthen them in Aboriginal responsive and directed organisation and management. It will empower participation and ownership of the Kapulungu Women's Law and Culture Centre and its processes.

## 4. Young Women

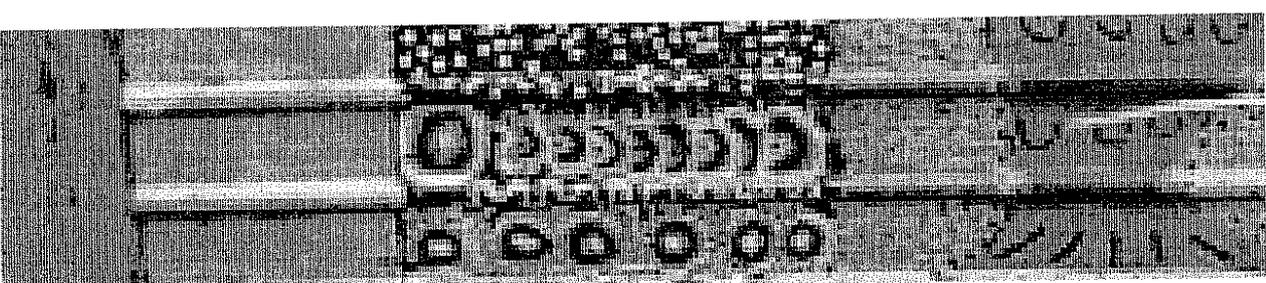
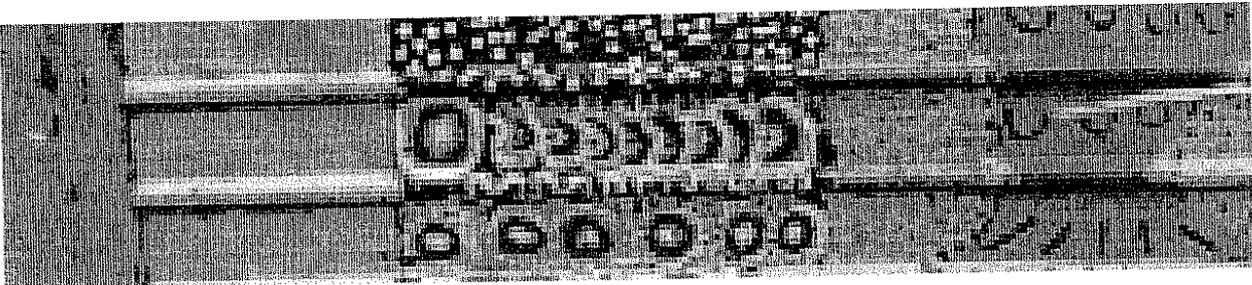
The Kultja Kuurla will increase the opportunities for Young Women to be involved in ceremonies (dance, song, paint-up), hunting and bush trips, and other cultural activities under the direction of their elders.

Enhance inter-generational reconciliation with their elders and mothers through increased involvement with them in shared cultural activities.

Involve young women in organising activities such as a Growing Up Young Women's Camp, education in bilingual organisational, literacy and numeracy skills.

Develop confidence and skills in balancing and bridging both Aboriginal and Kartiya (non-Aboriginal) world views.

Encourage young women's participation in touring, cultural exchange and performance events, building self-esteem and pride in Aboriginality.



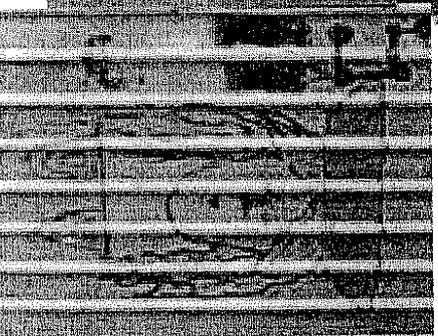
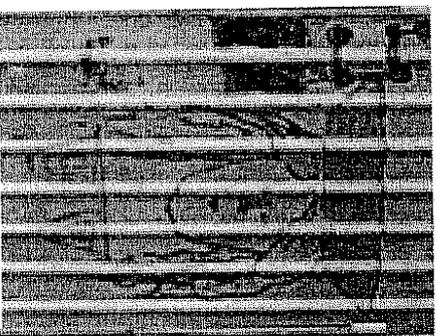
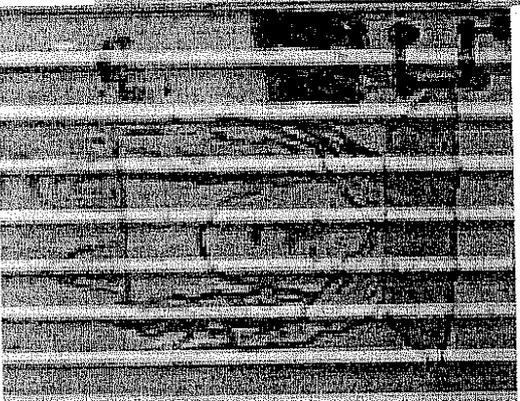
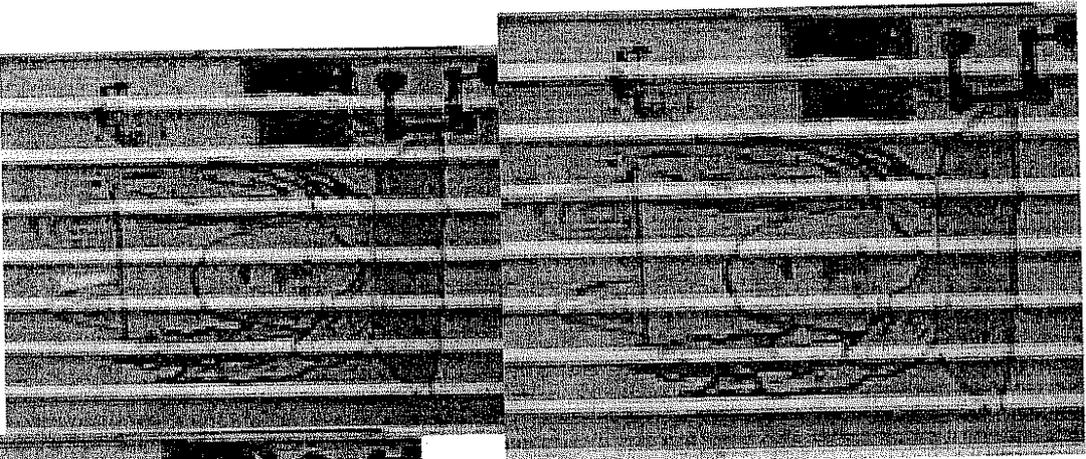
## 5. Older Girls

The Kultja Kuurla will provide a spectrum of activities and event which enhance learning of cultural knowledge for older girls

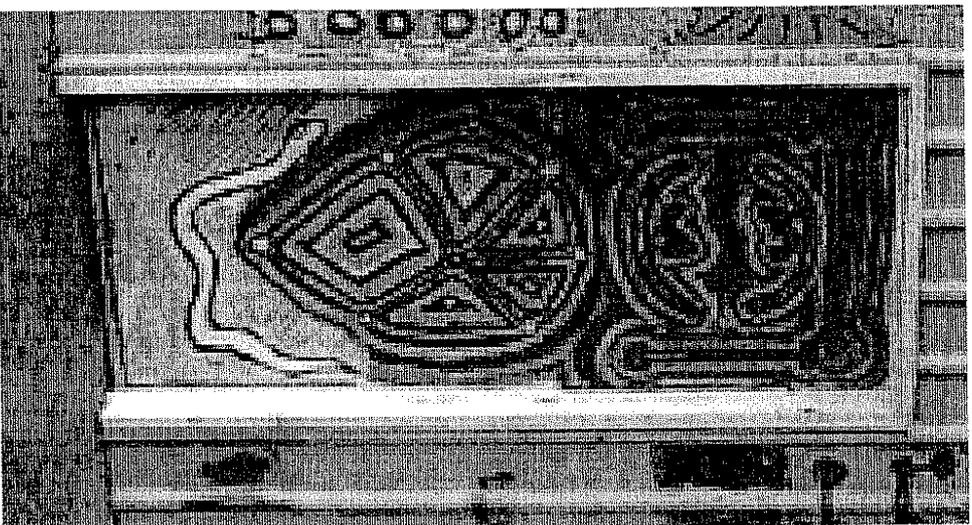
Encourage understanding of the culture (customs) and Law (beliefs and philosophies) of their peoples, heightening pride in their elders, mothers and themselves, using story-telling illustrated with sand-drawing, dances and body designs.

Provide entertainment and recreation through a series of afternoon and week-end activities (eg bush trips, puppetry, computer graphics, sports).

Encourage participation in a dance group and involve girls in cultural exchange tours with their elders, leading them to identify their peoples as custodians of unique cultural knowledge, fostering their pride as the children of Wirrimanu.



## 6. Tjittji – school kids



"Kanalku tjanuku tjittji tjukurpa."

"We have to wake 'im up" ~ grow kids up in culture"

The Kultja Kuurla will provide opportunities for children (young girls and pre-pubescent boys) to learn Tjukurpa stories as told by the women elders.

Invite young girls to participate in the activities of the Kapululangu Tjilimi.

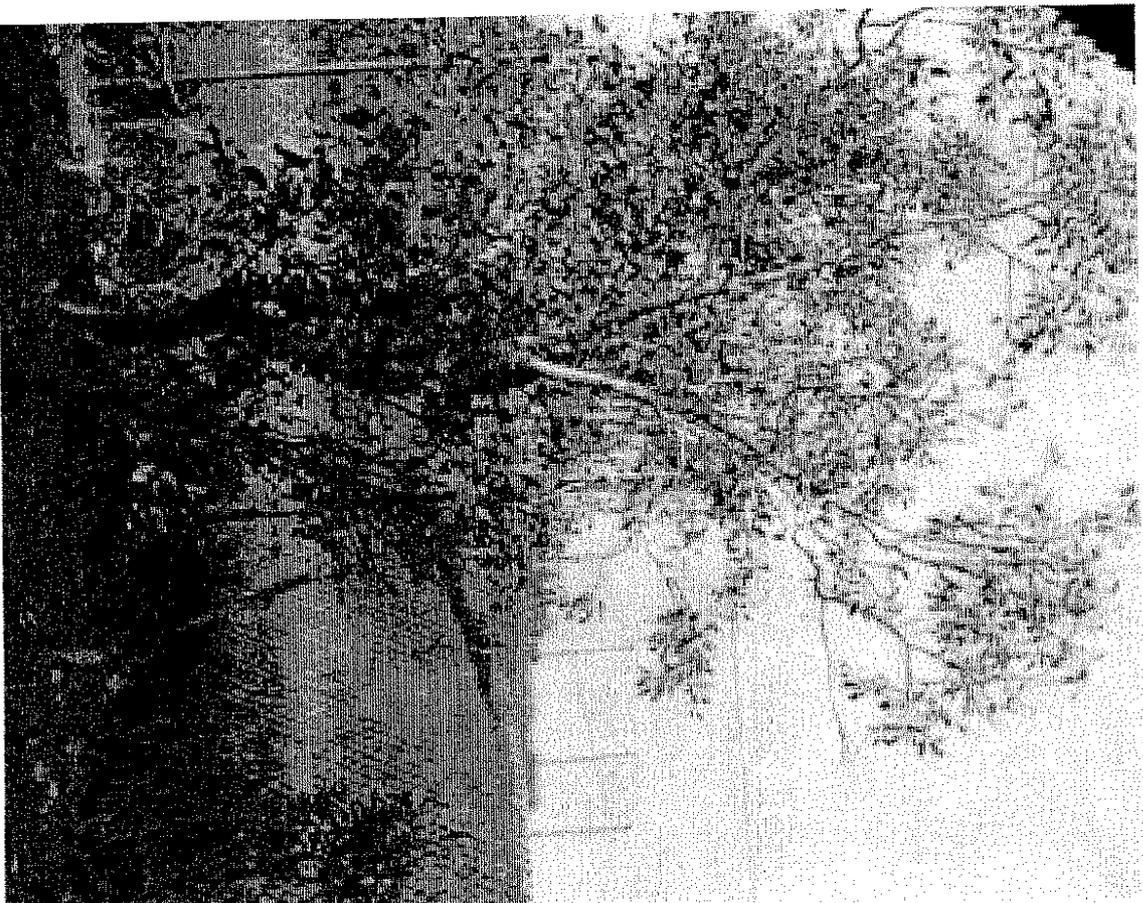
Involve young girls and boys in cultural camps, and after-school and week-end activities.

Help to young people to build pride in their Aboriginality by provide them with cultural opportunities – so as to encourage them not to turn to the petrol sniffing culture as cultural replacement.

"Yulinpayi tjittjilaltu, wiyala nintilu tjukurrtjanu."

" Our kids are crying because they have never been taught. "

## **7. Lamparlamparpa – babies and preschool children**



The Kultja Kuurla will provide increased opportunities for babies and pre-school children to be immersed in the heightened cultural and ceremonial environments of their mothers and grandmothers.

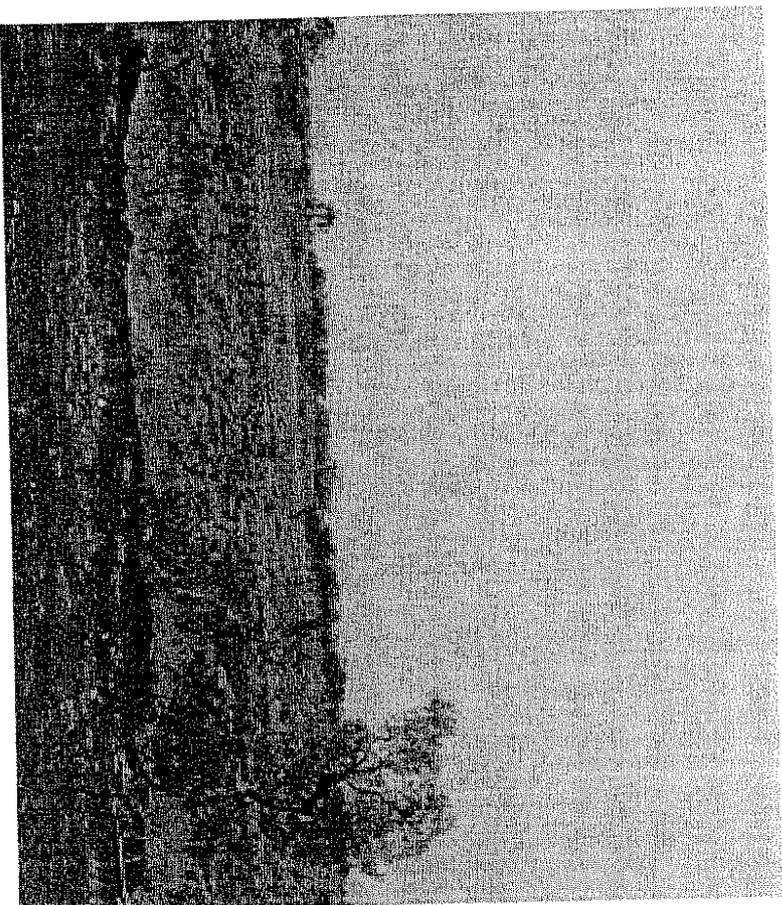
Encourage young mothers to learn cultural child-care practices from their elders.

Restore parenting skills among young mothers by providing a mutually supportive environment and cultural activities as avenues for self-expression and discovery.

## 8. Cultural education

### Kultja Kuurla (Culture School)

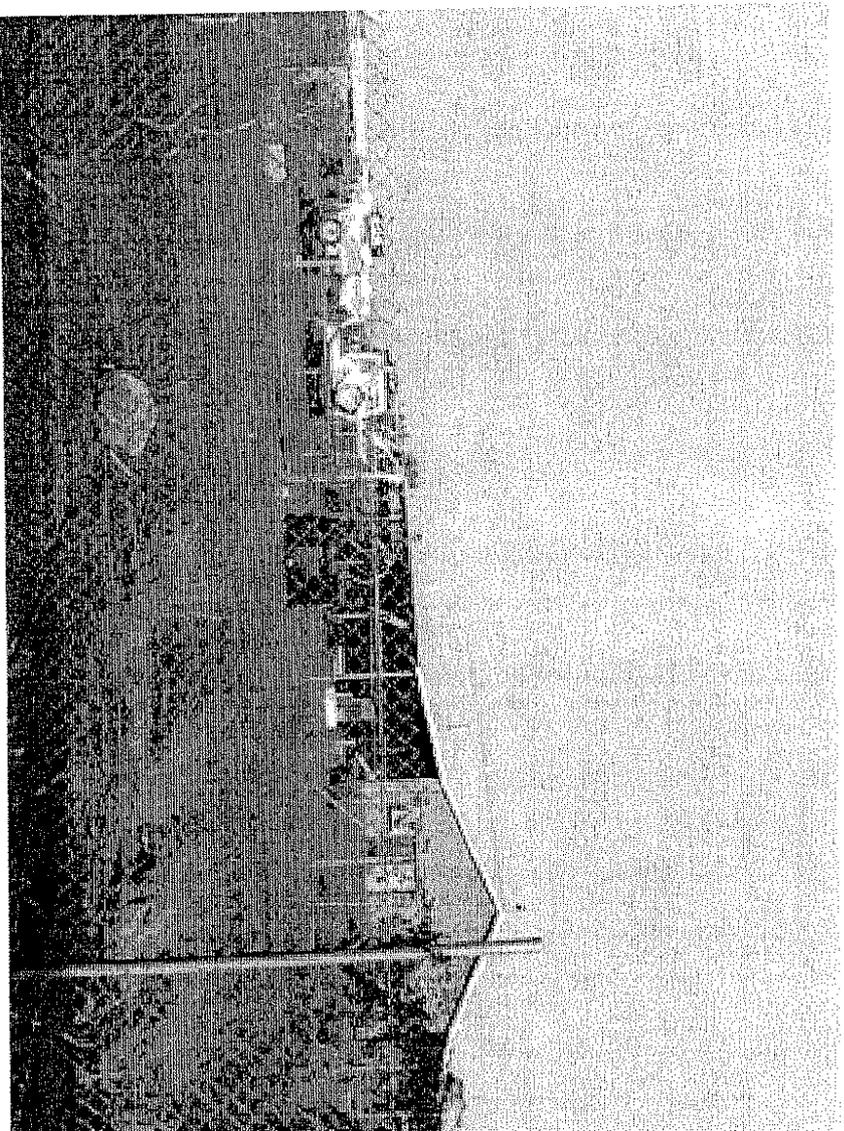
The vast spectrum of activities offered by Kapululangu will rely on the employment of the Elders and the Wirrimanu Community Women as tutors. A community skills audit will be conducted as an immediate priority. A Ceremony of Cultural Celebration will be held at the end of each year in which all Kapululangu participants will perform to the level of the learning they have received: kids, young women, Wirrimanu Community Women, elders. Certificates and prizes will be awarded. The philosophy is to establish a Kultja Kuurla similar to those achieved by Indigenous peoples in Canada, Vanuatu, Aotearoa/New Zealand and other places. The purpose is to build individual capacity in local cultural skills and knowledge, and thus pride in Aboriginality and increased self-esteem.



### Holding double power

Growing up transgenerational cultural education empowers us all to come from our strengths. There is such a richness and unlimited opportunity for us to extend this to bridge the cultural conflict that hurts us all in the cycles of cultural loss, racism and educational damage. Across the generations of women we have all we need to activate our own Aboriginal cycles of learning, teaching and learning. As we learn we teach. On our own terms in both worlds. Aboriginal and Kartiya. Existing models are many, eg Garna festival. We live in both worlds and can make both culturally safe for ourselves, our families, our children, our grandchildren in our own land. This is a strong start... Palya.

## 9. Aboriginal and Kartiya women ~ Visiting Tiltitja

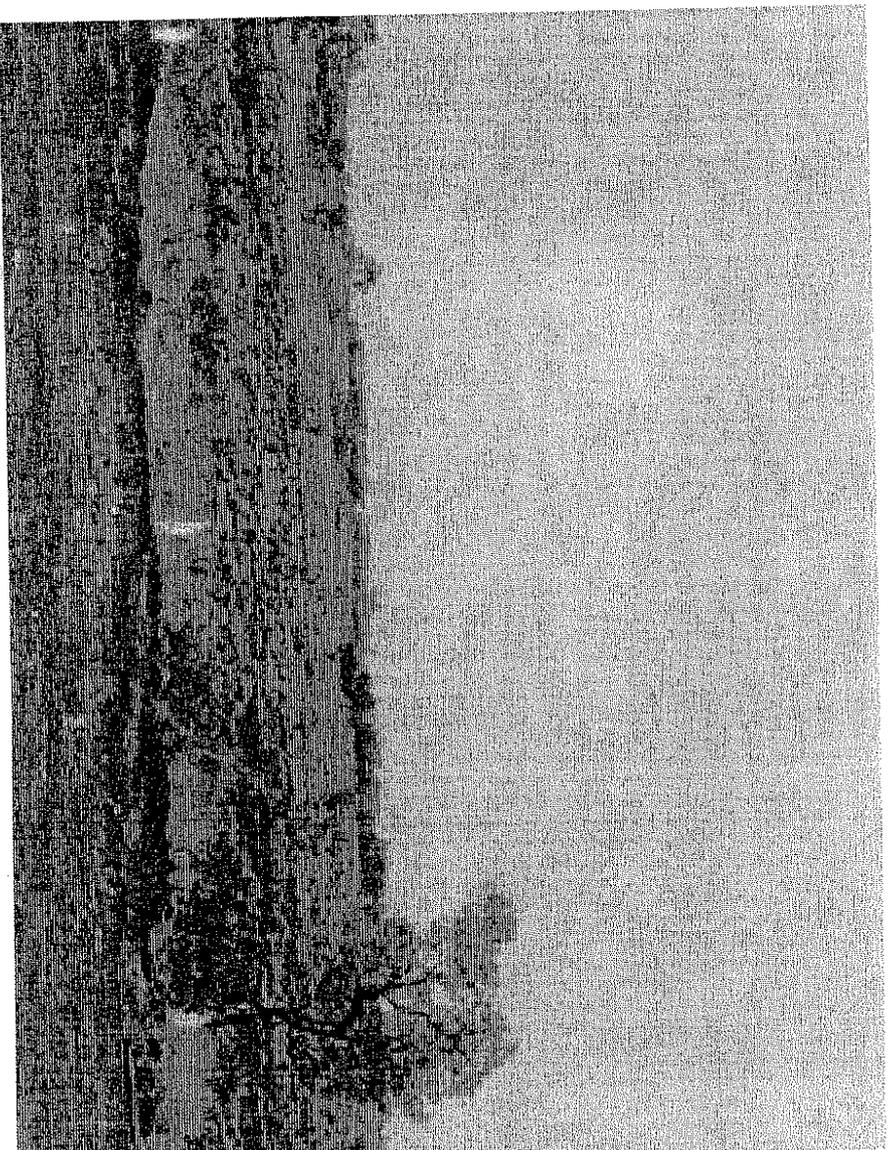


Kapululangu will bring volunteers into community for one month and extended periods to assist with projects, offer workshops in skills/arts/crafts, performance etc. and learn the art of tiltitja and tjilimi life. This will expand Kapululangu's capacity, and provide knowledge requested by the elders not yet available in Wirrimanu. It will secure Kapululangu's future by enabling the women of Wirrimanu to develop skills so that they will be empowered to manage and sustain Kapululangu into the future.

## **10. Wirrimanu's Aboriginal Community**

Kapululangu will hold public events and activities which engage the entire Wirrimanu community. It will continue its work with families - Strong Culture makes Strong Families. It will continue its historical support for Male Elders in their cultural work with young men and boys - through shared activities and in other ways as determined by the women elders in consultation with the male elders.

Kapululangu will seek to re-establish its partnerships with other agencies in Wirrimanu. Kapululangu will encourage the development of a Family Safe House in Wirrimanu.



## 11. Wirrimanu's Kartiya (Whitefella) Community

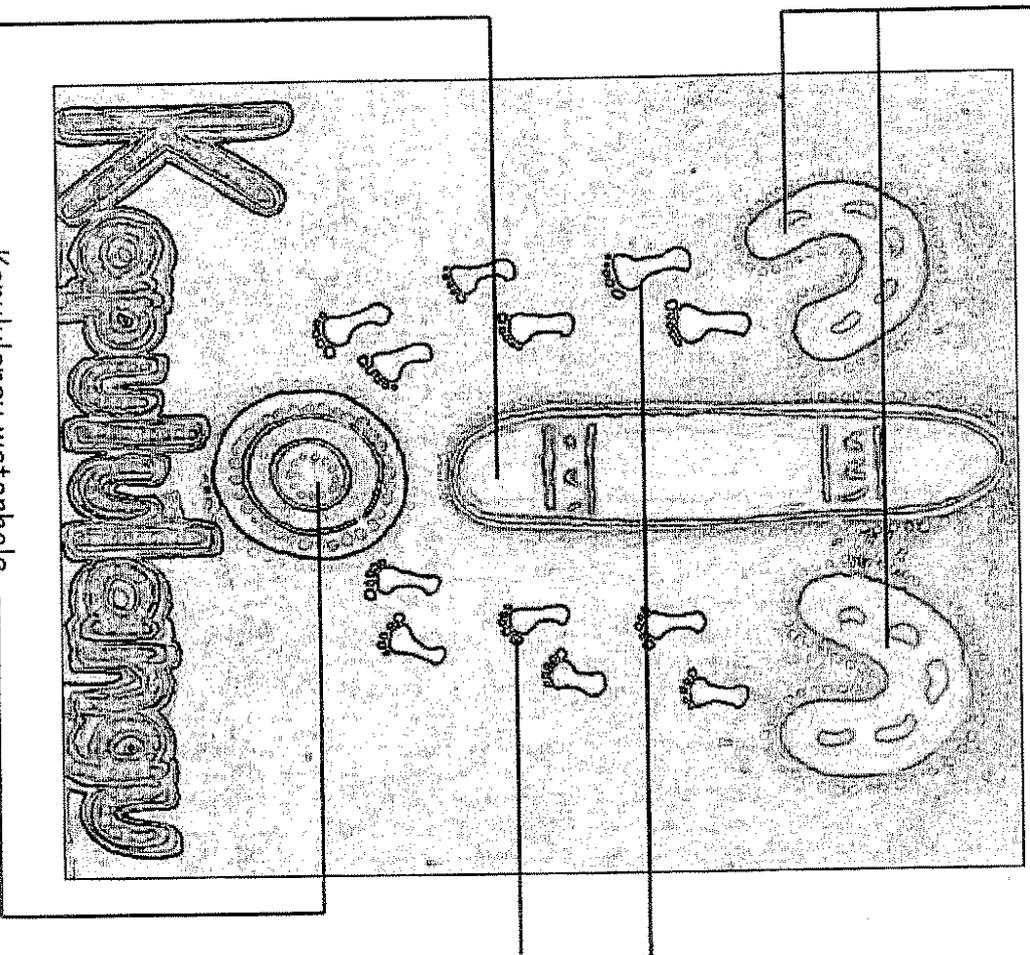


Kapululangu aims to work in collaboration with other agencies in Wirrimanu in shared cultural activities, picking up on the theme of the Strong Culture (makes) Strong Families project of 2001 - a return to Kapululangu's unfinished business.

Kapululangu aims to increase the cultural awareness of Kartiya in Wirrimanu and across Australia, particularly in regard to supporting the cultural imperative of Women's Law or Yawuliyu.

## 12. Wider community Local, Regional, National and International

Nangala Kutjjarra (two Ancestor Nangala women)



Kapulungu waterhole

Kuturu (ceremonial pole)

Tjina (footprints)

Work in collaboration with other women's organisations and agencies in the Kutjungka Region: Mularn, Kurrurungku (Billiluna), Kundat Djaru (Ringer's Soak), and Yakka Yakka. Participate in and co-host shared projects committed to enhancing Women's Law and Culture.

Host and/or participate in Women's Law Meetings across the Kimberley and NT regions.

Re-establish the Kapulungu Women's Dance troupe, and tour and perform nationally and internationally.

Organise opportunities for Indigenous and Kariya women from other communities in Australia and internationally to participate in culture camps with the women of Wirrimanu.

For more Information about Kapululangu:

Zohl de Ishtar's

***Holding Yawulyu: White Culture and Black Women's Law***

(Spinifex Press, 2005)

Can be ordered from: [www.spinifexpress.com.au](http://www.spinifexpress.com.au)

## **Kapululangu Aboriginal Women's Association**

**PMB 308, Balgo, via Halls Creek, WA 6770, Australia**

**Please address all correspondence to**

**Dr Zohl de Ishtar**

**Email: [zdeishtar@uq.edu.au](mailto:zdeishtar@uq.edu.au)**

**Phone: +61 (0)429 422 645**

This Circles of Cultural Learning plan was developed by the Women Elders and other members of the Kapululangu Aboriginal Women's Association in a series of meetings on 4-8 November, 2004. It was written up by Dr Zohl de Ishtar and Ochre Doyle under the elders' direction.

© Zohl de Ishtar for the Kapululangu Aboriginal Women's Association, 2004.