

**Helping People To Help Themselves:  
a study of training issues for Aboriginal women  
and their remote communities in Central  
Australia**



WALTJA TJUTANGKU PALYAPAYI (WALTJA) and WOMEN in ADULT & VOCATIONAL EDUCATION (WAVE)  
Report for SECURITY4WOMEN

June 2005

WALTJA TJUTANGKU PALYAPAYI (WALTJA) and WOMEN in ADULT & VOCATIONAL EDUCATION (WAVE)  
REPORT for SECURITY4WOMEN on  
TRAINING ISSUES FOR ABORIGINAL WOMEN IN REMOTE COMMUNITIES IN CENTRAL AUSTRALIA

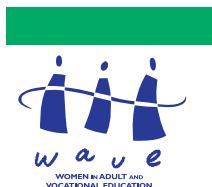
This report was prepared by;

**Kate Lawrence, Training Support Worker  
Waltja Tjutangku Palyapayi Aboriginal Corporation (Waltja)**



Waltja Tjutangku Palyapayi Aboriginal Corporation (Waltja)  
PO Box 8274, Alice Springs 0871  
Phone: 08 8953 4488  
Email: [manager@waltja.org.au](mailto:manager@waltja.org.au)  
Website: [www.waltja.org.au](http://www.waltja.org.au)

and **Women in Adult and Vocational Education (WAVE)**



Women in Adult and Vocational Education (WAVE Inc)  
PO Box 3, Carlton North VIC 3054  
Phone: 02 9448 4429  
Email:  
Website: [www.converse.com.au](http://www.converse.com.au)

This report was prepared for;  
**Security4Women (S4W)**



Security4Women (S4W)  
9/2 Redan Street, St Kilda, VIC 3182  
Phone: 03 95291850  
Email: [alex@security4women.com](mailto:alex@security4women.com)  
Website: [www.security4women.com](http://www.security4women.com)

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Title: "Anangu alpa-milala palya waltja-lu alpa-milantjaku": Luritja language for "Help people to help themselves". Anangu talk about Waltja. P2 Waltja Tjutangku Palyapayi Aboriginal Association Strategic Plan 1999-2001

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## 1. OVERVIEW OF THE PROJECT

This reports presents research findings into the knowledge and aspirations of vocational education and training (VET) held by Central Australian Indigenous women leaders. It identifies and reviews some current initiatives to improve access and participation for women in remote Aboriginal communities in the region.

The project is based upon the perceptions of women in Central Australia who are:

- **Training participants:** Aboriginal women undertaking training in a unit of the Certificate IV Training and Assessment in order to gain employment as *Training Nintiringtjaku* (community training facilitators)
- **Advocates and decision-makers:** Aboriginal women on the Management Committee of Waltja Tjutangku Palyapayi Aboriginal Association, representing their remote community and the concerns of communities across the Central Australian region
- **Training providers:** Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal staff of two Aboriginal Registered Training Organisations: Waltja Tjutangku Palyapayi (Waltja) and the Centre for Appropriate Technology (CAT).

The research data comprises publications and interview texts on training needs and issues for Aboriginal women in Central Australia, compiled from 1993 to the present. Commentary is also provided upon the implementation of the National Strategy for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in vocational education and training, and upon other policies and initiatives by the Commonwealth and Northern Territory governments. The report is accompanied by a Power Point presentation which provides a visual representation of the key points.

The consistent concerns of research participants are for training which supports employment access for adult Aboriginal people within existing community jobs, and training which supports traineeships and new job opportunities for their young people. They talk about why there are so few Aboriginal people holding manager and senior worker positions, and how to address the English literacy and qualification barriers and recognition of prior learning. They worry for their young people if there is no good start for them at school and in teenage years. They hope for a learning pathway for them, to get confidence, competence and employment. They hope that their young women can get work within their own communities, in the store, the Council office, the clinic, the school, the art centre, aged care and child care, living in their own country and working confidently both in their own language and in English.

The Aboriginal women who participated in this project have a clear appreciation of the value of accredited training, and a critical appreciation of the efforts of government and Registered Training Organisations to provide VET services for remote Aboriginal communities. They assert a strong commitment to the principles of life long learning within traditional Aboriginal societies as well as within their Aboriginal organisations.

The training needs and priorities identified by research participants have been categorised in the following way:

- **Community self-determination:** This refers to governance issues for remote and disadvantaged communities: planning and making decisions together, working to maintain culture and language, managing community events, running local government and community services, making submissions and administering funding.
- **Training and qualifications for community-based employment:** Research participants want improved Aboriginal access to existing jobs on their communities, such as governance, administration, services, community care work, education and health, which are generally taken up by non-Indigenous workers. They also need professional development and accreditation opportunities as volunteers or hourly paid workers within these services.

They need access to training in technical trades, and in the maintenance of houses and essential services. Aboriginal women also advocate for young people and men to gain similar access.

- **Functional literacies:** Research participants stress the problems of low levels of English literacy, numeracy, experience with computer technologies, and the impact of this upon further education or employment opportunities. The functional literacies of documentation, governance, financial management and contractual compliance are required by community council members and by the boards and managers of community services.
- **Crisis management:** addressing the immediate and long-term problems and effects of physical and mental ill-health, violence, alcohol and inhalant misuse, family breakdown. A direct link is drawn by research participants between the lack of good education opportunities and anti social/self-destructive activities, particularly for young people at risk.

The report therefore makes broad statements about good practice in linking VET to remote community needs, and specific statements about training needs in relation to the four priority areas listed above.

## 2. THE CONTEXT

### 2.1 Organisational context

This project has been driven by the priorities of Waltja Tjutangku Palyapayi Aboriginal Association (Waltja) to address:

- the profound disadvantage experienced by Aboriginal women and their families in remote communities, and support community self-determination
- the problems of limited education, training or employment opportunities for women on remote communities.

Waltja is a community- based organisation, working with Aboriginal families in remote Central Australia. Waltja Tjutangku Palyapayi is Luritja (Western Desert) language for Waltja's role as 'doing good work for families'. Waltja provides services across Central Australia including the cross-border region of NT, SA and WA. The estimated population of Aboriginal people in this area is 13,000 spread over 900,000 square kilometres. The following are the main language groups spoken in this area: Warlpiri, Luritja, Western Arrernte, Eastern Arrernte, Pintupi, Kaytej, Anmatyerre, Alyawarre and Pitjantjatjara. Waltja is governed by a Management Committee and Executive of senior women from remote communities across this region.

Waltja's core operating principles are that:

- The family is the foundation of the Aboriginal community and Indigenous identity. Service delivery is most effective when it occurs in the context of the broad family as understood by Aboriginal people.
- Direct service delivery is most effective when provided by local community people who have access to training and support to ensure quality service outcomes. Waltja therefore emphasises the building of partnerships with Aboriginal communities as the most effective way of providing services to respond to identified needs.
- Direct services need to be located within and supported by local communities. Waltja works in the communities it services. Waltja promotes self-reliance and dignity.

Waltja has had a long-standing concern with training issues for Central Australian Aboriginal women and their communities. Waltja Management Committee and Executive meetings regularly identify training needs and issues for Aboriginal communities for action by Waltja on these communities' behalf. These are followed up with field work within Waltja's existing programs.

Waltja always uses a community development approach, supporting the community to determine its own future. Training may be provided within Waltja's scope as a Registered Training Organisation or through collaboration with other training organisations. Waltja seeks funding and improved services for community projects, and advocates on behalf of Aboriginal women in the region.

*Waltja's Management Committee of senior Aboriginal women have deep knowledge of the communities. The nutrition program was based on community-identified needs and the nutrition workers in communities who received professional development were supported during the project life as they developed their skill. Continuing employment in the new role added the essential element for sustainability. (RTO1)*

Waltja publications relevant to education, training and employment are documented in the Bibliography for this report.

Senior women such as those on Waltja's Management Committee spend a lot of their time, while also caring for their own families, in meetings and voluntary work to maintain essential community services which urban dwellers take for granted. Community health clinics, schools, childcare services, shops all have community management committees. Each community has a Community Council which manages local government functions including essential services and works programs. While Community Council members are predominantly men, there are an increasing number of women attaining Council membership and leadership.

Waltja Tjutangku Palyapayi Aboriginal Association has undertaken a new job creation initiative to establish employment for Aboriginal Community Training Facilitators in remote communities in Central Australia. The name given by Waltja Management Committee for this for this new job is *Training Nintiringjaku* (Pitjantjatjara for purposeful learning about training).

Training Nintiringjaku workers will gain casual or contract employment with Registered Training Organisations, as facilitators of training delivery in their communities. They will provide negotiation and planning support, interpretation, and mentoring, thus supporting their community to access relevant accredited training while supporting training providers to deliver effectively in remote communities.

Through Training Nintiringtjaku projects Waltja supports participants to develop expertise about the VET system, and expertise in training and assessment. Training Nintiringjaku workers will assist RTOs to overcome culture and language barriers in the planning, delivery and evaluation of training.

## 2.2 The VET policy context

*Partners in a Learning Culture* is the National Strategy for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in vocational education and training 2000-2005. The four objectives of *Partners in a Learning Culture* are:

- Objective 1 Increasing the Involvement of Indigenous people in decision making about policy, planning, resources and delivery.
- Objective 2 Achieving participation in VET for Indigenous people equal to those of the rest of the Australian community
- Objective 3 Achieving increased, culturally appropriate and flexibly delivered training, including use of information technology, for Indigenous people.
- Objective 4 Developing closer links between VET outcomes for indigenous people and industry and development

*Partners in a Learning Culture* documents the serious inequities for Indigenous students in access to, and successful completion of vocational education (p12). Indigenous students comprise a high proportion of VET students living in remote areas: 26% compared to three percent non-Indigenous. 64% of indigenous people living in rural areas live more than fifty kilometres from the nearest TAFE college.

The report makes key points which support the claims made in Waltja publications, eg:  
The dispersal of Aboriginal people requires the delivery of VET which is both culturally appropriate and flexible. While learning in remote areas through new information technologies offers significant potential, it will not, by itself, provide solutions without addressing issues of inequitable access (of both students and communities) for use of and support for those technologies;

and

Vocational education and training provides a means for Indigenous people to gain valuable skills that contribute to community development and address serious issues of health and justice, as well as to facilitate the growth of community governance, the preservation and promotion of Indigenous culture and environment and the development of businesses that will provide sustainable futures.

The Mid Term Review of Partners in a Learning Culture: Blueprint for Implementation made the following findings in answer to the question 'What do Indigenous people want from VET?':

Indigenous informants indicated that aspects of the VET system needed to change to be more responsive to the needs, interests and circumstances of Indigenous people and communities.

Aspects in which change might be needed included:

- funding and administration
- teacher preparation and professional development
- Training Package development and endorsement
- the delivery of training
- workplaces that are not characterised by recognition, respect and responsiveness to Indigenous people and communities

The VET system as a whole needs to respond to the aims of Indigenous people seeking training.

They want VET and a VET system that will help:

- secure and strengthen Indigenous identity
- maintain and develop capability - both the capability of individuals and the capacities of particular communities
- maintain and develop the social arrangements and social groupings including family life, that sustain indigenous society in particular communities and circumstances
- maintain and develop Indigenous culture in particular communities - including the maintenance and development of languages, systems of belief and a wide variety of cultural practices central to being an indigenous person and community in this or that particular place and time
- maintain and develop participation in the economy - including training in skills that lead to valued work and careers and in the economic development of communities
- maintain and develop care for, and obligations to, country and to nature and the environment in particular localities

(Partners in a Learning Culture 2004)

These findings are consistent with the findings from this research project, particularly in the emphasis upon community needs as well as individual needs, and the maintenance of cultural responsibilities as well as the economic development of communities and training that contributes to employment and careers.

The NT Department of Employment Education and Training (DEET) has developed specific program funding for training delivery of accredited and non-accredited training to Indigenous students on site in their communities. Flexible Response Funding and the Community Response Program are linked to employment or work ready outcomes for training, and Training for Remote Youth (TRY) is aimed at providing structured training and learning experiences for young people in their own communities, that will enable them to prepare for employment in the community or re-engage in further learning.



New Apprenticeships are promoted extensively in the NT, yet the take-up of New Apprenticeships for Aboriginal people in remote communities remains disappointingly low. The NT Workforce Employment and Training Strategy 2002-2005 notes that of 2700 people undertaking accredited vocational training, only 760 are Indigenous. The NT Workforce Employment and Training Strategy commits the government to investigate and implement best practice models for literacy, numeracy, oracy and mentor support for Indigenous Territorians undertaking apprenticeships and traineeships (p11).

#### Flexible Learning Framework

The three components of the Australian Flexible Learning Framework are:

- Client Engagement: To strengthen the role of enterprises, individuals and communities in shaping VET provision by increasing their capacity to make informed choices about e-learning
- Provider Flexibility and Innovation: To improve the capacity of VET providers to use ICT creatively to offer more flexible and client-focussed services
- Systemic Support: To work collaboratively to shape the policy, regulatory and system environment and the business models and services that support e-learning in VET

Each of these components has relevance to the issues identified in this report in regard to equitable access, participation, flexible delivery and systemic environment for VET in remote Aboriginal communities.

The *Evaluation of the Australian Flexible Learning Framework 2000-2004* notes that e-learning resources and services are considered 'more relevant or targeted to urban areas and to big industry, with small to medium enterprises and niche markets' not catered for.

Training Packages and Toolboxes (e-learning resources matched to Training Package units of competency) are not adequately addressing needs of small businesses, small Registered Training Organisations, and indigenous communities. They note that the most effective training resources are drawn from outside the VET system, and provide this illustrative quote about the value of learning resources specifically developed for local Aboriginal community contexts:

*An issue for indigenous communities is the level of English required by Toolboxes. Other resources from Alice Springs are more relevant for us ... (and) we are seeing amazing emergence of relevant material from Broome. (2000: 14).*

#### The Australian Quality Training Framework

All Registered Training Organisations are required to be compliant with the Australian Quality Training Framework (AQTF) *Standards for Registered Training Organisations*. These Standards include the requirement to apply access and equity principles and provide timely and appropriate information, advice and support services which assist clients to identify and achieve their desired outcomes.

#### NT DEET Workforce NT Report 2004

This report can be accessed on the DEET NT website <http://www.deet.nt.gov.au/>

This report provides a statistical analysis of Aboriginal employment and training participation, and highlights the importance of training for employment access, noting that:

*...the odds of indigenous people getting jobs improves greatly with education, and that education has a greater effect on employment prospects for Indigenous people than for non-Indigenous people.*

### 3. WALTJA PRIOR RESEARCH 1993-2002

*There must have been a great body of literature out there that's already been done, a whole set of principles about Aboriginal learning styles. None of it is new, it's actually all there, it doesn't need to be researched it just needs to be implemented". (RTO1S)*

Historical context for this research into training issues for Central Australian Aboriginal women is provided through these prior studies conducted by Waltja:

- Report on the Training Needs of Remote Aboriginal Women (1993) conducted in 1993 by the Aboriginal Development Unit, Employment and Training Branch of the Department of Education, in collaboration with the Central Australian Family Resource Centre (the Family Resource Centre was incorporated in 1997 as Waltja Tjutangku Palyapayi Aboriginal Association).
- Women's Workshop Report: Women's Centre Workers Management Training, Hamilton Downs NT October 1996, conducted by Waltja.
- Report on Training Needs Assessment Workshops conducted in 2001 by Waltja Tjutangku Palyapayi Aboriginal Association
- Culture and Careers Workshops for Young Women conducted by Waltja in May 2002

#### 3.1 Report on the Training Needs of Remote Aboriginal Women (1993) Conducted by the Aboriginal Development Unit, Employment and Training Branch of the Department of Education, in collaboration with the Central Australian Family Resource Centre in 1993

This report documented the need for training, and the limited recognition of the real training needs of Aboriginal women, and the need for government support for community based formal and informal training programs, and acknowledged the problems of distance, limited population, lack of educational facilities, high cost of training delivery. This research was primarily conducted through workshops for Aboriginal women only, in community languages, on twenty six remote Aboriginal communities.

Research findings showed that while the issues of training on remote Aboriginal communities were complex, there were a number of consistently highlighted issues:

- the need for skills development in numeracy and English literacy and 'theory education' (understanding the 'why' as well as the 'how' of vocational education, and of employment practices)
- the need for training support for community self-determination (particularly skills in supervision, operation and management of community services and programs).
- the perceived barriers to training, particularly the lack of employment and workplace learning opportunities for Aboriginal people, and a consequent lack of motivation for participation in training.

The data produced from community surveys demonstrated that while employment opportunities for remote Aboriginal women were limited, community based jobs did exist in schools and community education centres, language and literacy centres, retail outlets, women's centres, art and craft centres, clinics, community offices and communications. However the labour force participation of Aboriginal women in the communities surveyed was extremely low even compared to the low national participation rates for Aboriginal women. Professional and full-time positions were predominantly held by non-Aboriginal employees.

	Part-time	% of total female Aboriginal labour force	Full-time	% of total female Aboriginal labour force	Casual	% of total female Aboriginal labour force
National (Total 20,350)	1527	7.5	1417	7.0	N/A	N/A
Remote Central Australia (total 1,452)	15	1.0	57	3.9	30	2.1

Table: Labour force participation rates of Aboriginal women in Central Australian remote communities compared to national participation rates for Aboriginal women, ADU/Waltja 1993.

Approximately 30% of the women potentially available for paid work in the remote communities surveyed wanted training, with one third of this number specifying that they sought formal (accredited) training courses. Participants wanted training linked directly with job skills. Two key areas of potential employment for Aboriginal women identified in the survey and workshops were education and health services.

The research found that the Aboriginal women recognised the need for professional educational support and formal training programs, but they emphasised the value of having their own experienced people as trainers, and the development of resource materials for, and from, their own communities.

### **3.2 Women's Workshop Report: Women's Centre Workers Management Training Hamilton Downs NT, conducted by Waltja in October 1996**

This workshop was developed to respond to continual requests for information, funding options and training from women's centre workers. The workshop delivered training in five most requested areas: LandCare, Licences and vehicle maintenance, How to run a meeting, how to set up a program, and making money for Women's Centres.

The workshop brief included training the remote community women in problem-solving skills to address identified training needs for use in their workplace and communities. The workshop design was culturally and environmentally appropriate, took into account the different language and literacy skills of participants and made use of existing resources. The workshop demonstrated the value of training Aboriginal women facilitators prior to the workshop who were then the leaders in planning and running the sessions. The workshop report provides a good practice guide to effective and culturally appropriate training delivery, and discusses the benefits of large group workshops, cluster workshops, and individual and small group training.

Workshop recommendations noted that the most difficult area to organise was accredited training with Registered Training Organisations because of 'a range of limitations on their training funds' which 'change the direction and ownership of training'.

These limitations included:

- must be accredited
- funds only for instructors and materials
- cannot support travel
- cannot support childcare
- cannot support living expenses during training

### **3.3 Report on Training Needs Assessment Workshops Conducted by Waltja in 2001**

Training Needs Assessment Workshops were conducted in 2001 at Hamilton Downs and in Alice Springs and with women from 16 participating communities.

Participants asserted the need for training in:

- Community governance and administration: support to work more assertively and effectively within the governance structures of Community Councils and community services, set up new community services and community enterprises.
- Functional literacies: Aboriginal people are generally blocked from employment in the few properly paid employment positions on the communities - in administration and management of services - due to low levels of English literacy and numeracy and limited experience with office technologies and financial management systems.
- Home management skills training. This includes training in basic home management skills: budgeting, food preparation and storage, household maintenance and repairs, sewing, etc (for people who have had to adapt within one or two generations to living in western-design homes often unsuited to desert conditions and cultural life), and also training to equip women to apply these skills in voluntary and paid work in community services such as Meals on Wheels, lunches for school children, Aged Care, etc.
- Art and craft skills training, particularly how to build on traditional craft skills to generate income.
- Nutrition and healthy living, particularly for carers of children, the elderly and the disabled.

### **3.4 Culture and Careers Workshops for Young Women Conducted by Waltja in May 2002**

The workshop brought together 46 young women accompanied by senior women from seven remote communities in Central Australia. While the main focus of this workshop was in the provision of information, the main findings about training issues were that training support needs to be aimed towards enabling young Aboriginal women to gain skills and qualifications for the existing jobs on communities. In addition to equipping them to work on their own communities, training is encouraged which 'opens their eyes': providing them with a wider range of training and employment options than are presently available on their communities. Work experience opportunities in Alice Springs, and Career Expos on the communities were suggested as good ways to introduce young women to potential career paths.

#### 4. METHODOLOGY

The particular concerns addressed by this research are:

- How do women talk about their own aspirations for paid work, and their community's needs/aims?
- How do they see education and training contributing to these needs/aims?
- What are their experiences in this regard?
- What policy directions and programs would best support them in the interlinking areas of employment, education and training?

The research methodology for this project includes:

- Review of data from selected previously published documents which identify the views of Central Australian Aboriginal women about vocational education and training
- Reference to selected national and TN government policy papers
- Interviews with/recorded statements by:
  - a. Participants in August 2004 and May 2005 Training Nintiringtjaku workshops in Alice Springs and Hamilton Downs for women intending to become community training facilitators; (TN:13 women)
  - b. Waltja Management Committee meeting November 2004 in which members speak about the training needs on their communities and the Training Nintiringtjaku model, and the Waltja Management Committee Mentor to this project (WM: 7 women);
  - c. the current Chairperson of Waltja about her experiences in education and training on her community since it was established in 1981 (WC);
  - d. participants in 'Plan and Promote Training' a unit of the Certificate IV in Assessment and Workplace training offered for Training Nintiringtjaku participants by Centre for Appropriate Technology (CAT) in May 2005 (TN2: 6 women, 3 were also participants in TN1 workshop);
  - e. Manager (Waltja) and senior staff members of three Aboriginal-controlled Registered Training Organisations: Waltja (RTO1), Centre for Appropriate Technology(CAT) RTO2) and the Central Australian Remote Health Development Service (CARHDS) (RTO3).

Waltja Executive delegated a past chairperson Margaret Orr to be a mentor to this project. Margaret has supported the project officer in all stages of the research. The process for collecting data conforms in all respects to Waltja policy on informed consent, confidentiality, intellectual property and cultural protocols. All interviews have been translated (where recorded in community language), transcribed, and copies of audiotapes and transcripts returned to participants.

Given that Waltja has as its primary objective the self-determination of Aboriginal women and their communities, it is important that the research provides tangible benefits to the participants. The research documents with photographs and sound files will be made available on CD/DVD to Women's Centres on communities to support their members to address training issues. A full copy will be held by Waltja and by Women in Adult and Vocational Education (WAVE) as resource material for future research or public presentations, according to provisos and cultural protocols to be determined by Waltja Executive.

## 5. RESULTS

Thirty three women were research participants in this project, as noted in the previous section. These women are from different positions in relation to the national VET system: community advocates, trainees, trainers, senior staff of Registered Training Organisations.

Interviews have been translated into English where necessary, and transcribed. Interviews at workshops were conducted by participants working together in pairs: this was found to be a useful device for getting women talking, however shyness prevented some women from recording more than basic answers to the interview questions. Some large-group statements were unrecorded but have contributed to the organisation of themes in the writing up of this research. Longer semi-structured interviews with individual participants proved effective for gaining statements quoted in this report. Individual interviews were conducted with three training Nintiringtjaku participants, three Registered Training Organisation senior staff members, and two Waltja Executive members.

This section documents the data from recorded interviews and participant statements on the following questions:

- How do women talk about their own aspirations for paid work, and their community's needs/aims?
- How do they see education and training contributing to these needs/aims?
- What are their own experiences of training in regard to their aims?

Women started by talking about their current and prior training experiences.

Those currently participating in VET training were doing nutrition, teacher's aide, Aboriginal Health Worker and interpreter training. They did not talk about training in terms of their individual aspirations for paid work, but rather in terms of:

- becoming better equipped for the work they were currently doing within their community:  
*I'm a health worker and it's important to look after the people in our Community and to look after our environment. I'd like to work together and look after kids in each Community and learn different work skills (TN10);  
When I finish my training ... I will be going back to my community to work with all the young people (TN7).*
- or their enjoyment of study and their desire to put their study to practical use:  
*I am training to be a nutrition worker. I have [previously done]...some training at Batchelor, teaching assistant and health workers training. I'm doing a Diploma in Nutrition. I like studying to become a nutrition worker. It's very good. I do not want to sit down. I like to work, do more training (TN12);*

Several participants expressed a preference for training in the workplace, where they could learn by working alongside senior workers. The following participant makes reference to Waltja's training support for early childhood workers in their own community workplaces:

*I did ... training with Batchelor College in Alice Springs. And that training was about hygiene. I would like to do some more training with Waltja about Aged Care and Childcare, and to work with good teachers (TN11).*

Questions about their aspirations for training for their community brought up wide-ranging answers, indicating the level of responsibility that these women take on for their community as a whole:

*I'd like to see my community getting better and people to get jobs to do some work. ....I'm interested in training and learning more about Nutrition, how to run a meeting and hold a workshop, support people in their Communities like writing letters to Government People for help (TN12).*

*We came for meeting to talk about our place at [home community] ....And we are Council members for [community health service] and we are helping, which is why we are getting together. So we can look after our sick family, and to get strong Anangu, young ones and Council help one another... Yes, [TN2] and I want to help Anangu. That is why I am talking so all the families can listen... that's why I am working, to try to help people. I am working at the clinic too, and I work for everything. (TN1).*

*Communities - [three communities named] help them to have a strong meeting about sniffers...teach them to have a community meeting to run the program (TN5).*

Participants described their own training experiences as an often circuitous path, involving many years of working without formal training before the opportunity arose to study and gain qualifications. Training for qualifications generally meant extended periods away from their home community:

*In 1993 I did work experience at the Alice Springs Hospital. In 1995 I worked with the school, I worked with the children for a long time, doing health work and nutrition, helping women and all the mothers look after them proper way, good food, and give them bath. Worked a long time. Work experience at the Alice Springs Hospital looking after children in the Children's ward and I use to feed the little ones. In 1995 I shifted back to [home community] stayed there along time and worked in the office and clinic. I stayed there a long time and then went back to Batchelor College [for Aboriginal Health Worker studies] (TN10); I did most of my courses in Alice Springs and now I go to Darwin to study for a fortnight and I do the other fortnight in Alice Springs. In 2 weeks time I will be coming into Alice Springs for my workshop at Batchelor College (TN12).*

Participants were asked what constitutes good training. Most answered in concrete terms referring to particular workshops or training courses that had been offered in their communities or that they had attended in Alice Springs, Darwin or at the Batchelor College campus in Katherine. Those who provided further information referred to:

- learning support provided on their community:  
*Help people to train in the community (TN5).*  
*We get our tutors from Alice to come out and tutor us in health promotion. They come out and give us a helping hand, to my community...(TN12)*
- workshops and other opportunities to get together and learn with women from other communities:  
*Good training is working with different communities... Helping and sharing ideas with each other and working together I'd like to work with different Communities and get lots of other ideas...(TN14)*  
*I'd like to work together and look after kids in each Community and learn different work skills(TN10)*
- The quality of individual teachers/trainers:  
*having a good teacher, and having respect for that person...I'd like to work with teachers and get good training and learn about medicine for the people in the Community (TN12).*

Research participants appreciate the VET and further education training that they or their community members have been able to access in Alice Springs or Batchelor campuses. However many family and community responsibilities, including ceremonial and sorry business, as well as the cost of travel and living away from home, impact upon and can limit the ability of Aboriginal women to train away from their communities. The research demonstrates yet again that Aboriginal women want the VET system to work with and on the remote traditional communities, to recognise that workplace learning and accreditation opportunities exist on even the poorest Aboriginal community, to equip Aboriginal people to manage their own services and to create career entry-points and pathways for their young people.

## 6. DISCUSSION

This section is organised in the following way:

- summary statements of the issues identified through this research project;
- illustrative quotes from Aboriginal Training Nintiringtjaku research participants,
- (followed where relevant by) Waltja Management Committee member quote
- (followed where relevant by) quotes from staff of Aboriginal-managed Registered Training Organisations;
- comments on VET qualifications, resources and current government initiatives.

Quotes are followed by either (TN ...) for Training Nintiringtjaku participants, (WM) for Waltja Management Committee, or (RTO1 ...) (RTO2) or RTO3 for the three Registered Training Organisations.

### 6.1 Community Self-determination

Remote Aboriginal communities want increased self-determination. Any measures to support community self-determination at a governance/leadership level need to go side by side with measures to address the extreme poverty and disadvantage of remote Aboriginal communities on all socio-economic indicators including education and basic infrastructure.

In the NT government's Building Healthier Communities framework for health and community services, community management and control is seen as a key priority:

*Support pathways to local community decision-making, participation and control that ensure health services for Aboriginal communities are provided in a holistic and culturally sensitive way (DH&CS 2004:16)*

In an address to the Communities in Control conference Sir Gustav Nossel said of Indigenous community leaders that

*the most consistent thing they have said is the involvement of communities themselves in the process of not only determining what is the best thing for their local communities but how it can best be put into practice. If the communities don't have some "ownership" over the so-called solution, then it will fall down. (2003: 10)*

Community capacity refers to 'the networks, organisation, attitudes, leadership and skills that allow communities to manage change and sustain community-led development' (Cavaye, 2000).

*The other area that we found of interest was decision-making, the interest the women have in community development, community planning, and having a say in the health areas, community technologies, childrens services and old people's services, carers of people with disabilities. We seem to be blocked out of that, for what reason is beyond me, because it's obvious that women need to be involved (RTO2).*

*I would like to see other training at our communities...like how to run a meeting and how to talk to government people to help our community. ...Some people don't like to speak up, and they shame, they might think they going to say something wrong, like I do [laughter]... [Now] we can run our own meeting and speak up for our place, maybe also talk to government people for help. It is a really good thing, what we are learning. It is good for people to be able to speak up for their communities. (TN14).*



The lack of infrastructure and facilities for training also has an impact upon delivery:

*Most of the people we talk to want training to be delivered on the communities but there's a real problem with facilities to do that or a place for a trainer to stay. Even if you could teach under a tree you still need to be out of the weather and to have a shower sometimes and that's the main thing that stops a lot of trainers staying out bush for extended lengths of time to deliver meaningful training. (RTO1M)*

As Cavaye points out, Government can and does influence community capacity.

*Social and economic changes are transforming rural and regional communities. Government has sought to respond by emphasising service delivery, supporting infrastructure, increasing training opportunities and altering policy. An additional response is needed where government agencies develop a greater role in helping communities build their capacity. A 'technical assistance' approach where services and programs are 'delivered' into communities can limit local capacity. Yet, government can also develop community partnerships that foster community capacity. (Cavaye, Executive Summary, 2000)*

The VET system has the capacity to assist through governance training for community leaders, members of Council and boards of management, so that Council and Board members can become effective managers of community services, and so that they can access their corporate institutional power. Training could include planning and decision-making, maintenance of culture and language, management of community events, administration of local government and community services, making submissions and administering funding. This should also be seen as training for professional employment in management positions in the existing local services and in potential community enterprises.

The VET system has the capacity to support the development of community enterprises and employment initiatives. In particular there is scope for the New Enterprise Incentive Scheme, and for JET employment preparation programs for single parents, to work collaboratively with VET providers to support new enterprises, or Aboriginal management of existing enterprises on remote communities.

The Certificate IV in Business (Governance) BSB40901 (developed jointly by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) and the Office of the Registrar of Aboriginal Corporations) provides a good framework for recognition and further training in the competencies of governance. ORAC has run one very successful training workshop accredited against this qualification, but to be effective this qualification requires a policy and funding commitment by DEET NT to prioritise Indigenous governance, and to acknowledge the essential link between governance training, management training, community sustainability and employment opportunities for Aboriginal people.

Recognition of Prior Learning Packages able to incorporate competencies related to a range of Training Packages (to recognise the variety of skills and knowledges held by senior Aboriginal people) could be developed for and delivered to Aboriginal people who have served on Community Councils, and boards of management of community-based services. This resource development would require ANTA/DEST funding, and funding commitment from DEET NT to support RTO delivery.

Similarly, national or NT VET funding could be allocated to long-term support for the RPL accreditation and professional development of Aboriginal people, and particularly women, towards their winning professional paid management positions. The competencies include planning and decision-making, participation in boards and committees, preparing submissions, maintenance of culture and language, management of community events, administration of local government and community services, managing finances, and contractual compliance.

The Training Nintiringtjaku initiative has been taken up as a model for collaboration between training providers and communities, and has generated new employment options for women on remote communities, as community research facilitators to work with the Desert Knowledge Collaborative Research Centre, and as training mentors for Aboriginal Health Workers.

*Training Nintiringtjaku .... Was a very successful example of the development of communities of practice that develop not only the training provider but importantly Aboriginal people who can undertake future employment in their communities that will ensure that training and education is delivered appropriately(RTO3).*

Registered Training Organisations in Central Australia are keen to improve their delivery of training to Aboriginal communities, and aware that the engagement of Training Nintiringtjaku workers will improve the take up of training and will minimise the costs and risks associated with remote delivery.

## 6.2 Skills and qualifications for community-based work

Research participants want improved Aboriginal access to existing paid jobs on their communities, such as governance, administration, services, community care work, education and health, positions which are generally taken up by non-Indigenous workers. They also need professional development and accreditation opportunities as volunteers or hourly paid workers within these services. They need access to training in technical trades, and in the maintenance of houses and essential services, so that jobs in these services can be provided on the community rather than being provided by external contractors.

As both Indigenous and non-Indigenous contributors note in a recent book on cross-cultural approaches to decision-making on Aboriginal lands,

*People do need to know...That kind of information and knowledge should have been given to Aboriginal people a long time ago. As soon as they were self-managed...there should have been a couple of years where all those different things were taught to people, like meeting procedures, administration and money, and all that. But it wasn't done (Walsh and Mitchell 2002:180).*

*There are many examples of people who are expected to manage enterprises, council finances and grants, but who have never trained in written English or mathematics and do not comprehend Western financial management systems. Such people are continually vulnerable to financial mismanagement and a passing parade of unscrupulous traders (ibid: 136)*

Participants note training needs for their community in the practical skills and knowledge in the technologies of remote living. This includes first aid, driving licence training (training that women always ask for), and household repairs and maintenance. These competencies increase people's ability to live well but are not likely to nor necessarily intended to lead to employment. Funding for this training can be difficult to justify if it is not linked to employment outcomes.

One training provider described national consultations with indigenous women who wanted to learn home maintenance skills:

*Women said yeah lets go for it. They talked about training in making things, in constructions, fixing things, fixing leaking taps, usually the man isn't there when it breaks down, it's often the woman of the house who has to fix it. If you don't know how to fix it all sorts of issues arise(RTO2)*

This interest in home-maker maintenance training is supported by prior Waltja research into training needs for women in Central Australian remote communities (see section 2: context).

The Centre for Appropriate Technology survey into Women's attitudes and perceptions concerning technical issues in rural and remote indigenous communities (CAT 2000) found that a majority of indigenous women (91%) wanted more involvement in discussion and decision-making about technical issues and the majority expressed concerns about lack of inclusion. The top four reasons given for women not getting more involved in technical issues were:

- A lack of opportunity to get involved
- Not enough training in technical matters
- Not enough information about technical issues, and
- A shortage of funds and resources. (CAT August 2000)

While women are concerned for their own employment within these services, they also want trainee opportunities for their young people within community services, and exposure to alternative options for enterprise and employment.

Remote Aboriginal communities have demonstrated their ability to generate world-class and globally renowned industries, Western Desert paintings, innovative indigenous NT multimedia producers, and Central Australian cultural tourism being just three examples. In spite of the wealth generated through 'culture industries', communities have faced considerable difficulty in maintaining ownership or control over their artists and cultural copyright, or of having a role in the commercial marketing process.

Concerns were expressed by participants, however, that old people with big names for selling art were becoming sick from constant painting work in order to bring in income for their families.

*Old people are sitting down with canvas, working on the canvas. They are not moving around, doing canvas, painting start 9 o'clock, maybe finish at 4 o'clock. They are working, big work they are doing .... That's not right for old people, doing the canvas. Canvas and paint [fumes], paint is going inside the body, killing kidney. And back, Anangu, that's why them old people can't walk properly.... Old people, poor things. When they die you can't buy them back...Doing painting, getting sick, end up in hospital (TN1)*

It is necessary therefore if communities are to continue to develop their own art as enterprise, that both the traditional knowledge and skills, and also the commercial skills and responsibilities are passed on to younger family members.

Many remote communities have acquired art centres as their culture industry has developed. Art Centres, health centres, community stores, and if they exist, the school, child care and aged care all provide opportunities for trainee positions for young Aboriginal women. The lack of appropriate supervision is one reason given anecdotally for the low number of New Apprenticeships taken up by Aboriginal people on remote communities. Training and accrediting senior community members for mentoring or supervision provides another opportunity for VET intervention.

The VET system has the capacity to target training toward Aboriginal art and culture enterprises. Training is required for Aboriginal people at all stages of the commercial processes, and assistance with business establishment. Aboriginal enterprise is an issue that the national and NT government have taken positive initiatives on recently.

The demographics of the age structure of the Indigenous population (15% of national ATSI population is under the age of five compared to seven percent of whole population under age of five) place additional demands upon Aboriginal women for care of children, and have serious implications for an education system which is currently inadequate to the task of providing basic education for remote community children.

*A lot of women in the communities like to do childcare training to learn to look after their little ones and even for aged care, also learning how to give the old people medicines, how to look after them properly and goodtucker, give them good vegetables and stuff.(TN2)*

*Another way we can tell if we're doing a good job with training is that we can see over time when people return for training that their skills have improved and they're working in a higher level in workplaces or they're getting real wages instead of CDEP wages or no wages. Greater control over areas of community management. They tend to question things a lot more. Their confidence and self-esteem generally increases and they take on more responsibility in their workplaces or actively seek more meaningful activities and work. (RTO1M)*

There are a range of Training Packages which could equip Aboriginal people to take on community employment opportunities on communities. Similarly, there are a range of training options for supporting the development of new enterprises. The main new lesson from this research project is that such training and capacity building needs to be supported by Aboriginal people becoming equipped to manage their own services, to be employed in those services, to access RPL for exiting knowledge and skills, and to provide training opportunities which enhance personal development and confidence as well as the acquisition of competencies. Art centres, women's centres and youth, aged and other community services on communities are good sites for women's participation.

### 6.3 Functional literacies

Research participants stress the problems of low levels of literacy, numeracy, and experience with computer technologies, and the impact of this upon further education or employment opportunities. The functional literacies of documentation, governance, financial management and contractual compliance are required by community council members and by the boards and managers of community services. English language literacy, numeracy, and computer literacy are needed by individuals if they are to gain access to or participate effectively in training or employment.

Research participants note that the functional literacies held by non-Aboriginal people are more highly valued for employment positions than the alternative literacies of Aboriginal people living on their own communities. English is the third, fourth or fifth language of the clients of community services, yet non-Aboriginal people are consistently appointed to professional positions with no competence in the local language.

Remote communities want English literacy and numeracy training. As the following quote from one research participant makes clear, this is needed for basic health and well-being:

*Our people are getting sick, nobody is talking strong to the white people, in the canteen, for good food and good meat, every Anangu at [name of community] is getting shame they are not talking face to face, for food and meat and vegetable in the shop. They are eating no-good meat, drinking different different [a lot of different] sweet drinks. They get the same drinks from here every year same drink, meat same too, the old people drinking the wrong way they are not getting diet drink. They don't know how to read [the labels for] diet drinks and good drinks. That's why our people are dying (TN1).*

One research participant pointed out that if young people are literate in English they can operate more effectively in the world and give support to their old people:

*I'd like more people to learn English and writing, if they learn English and writing then they can help the old people. Old people, they might help us if they learn everything. Teach all the girls and boys. Take all the boys and teach them to learn what they have got to do. And young girls, teach them to work, education, learning for work, what they do in the communities. People want to learn. Waltja MC*

One aspect of functional literacy is knowing the 'big words' of government and how to use them. This is a necessary learning if Aboriginal people are to gain improved services and programs for their communities: *I want to talk to white fellas to help Aboriginal people. (TN10)*

One research participant working at a team leader position described how a community-based Aboriginal co-worker, after attending her first conference, asked if she would teach her

*"that hard English.... All of those big words, even the words that you use....*

*she's really smart about how she wants to learn, and she's really clear about why she wants that....it's really simple and practical, it's so that she can understand properly what's going on in Council meetings, this woman is a Council representative in her local community. It's wanting to know how to fill in forms, it's wanting to understand funding proposals. We've been involving her more in developing funding proposals for her community based on her ideas and our ideas gathered, and talking with a bunch of young women.*

The national Workplace English Language and Literacy program provides funded literacy support linked to employment within workplaces. This program could be fruitfully extended to remote community services, but at present it only applies to employees and not to Council or board members.

Research participants place high stress upon the need for training for their young women in gaining functional literacies necessary for paid work in their communities. They also want more information provided to young women through workshops and community career expos so that they can gain motivation and encouragement to work toward 'real jobs'. Training support therefore needs to be aimed towards:

- enabling young women to gain skills and qualifications for jobs currently available on their communities
- Encouraging young Aboriginal women to aim for higher level service administration and management positions generally held by non-Aboriginal workers on their communities
- opening their eyes to a wider range of training and employment options than are presently available on their communities, and to support them to pursue this training.

Women also ask for training in practical skills applicable to daily life: first aid, obtaining driving licences, sewing, art and craft techniques and household repairs and maintenance. These competencies are not likely to nor necessarily intended to lead to employment. DEET funding for this training can be difficult to justify if it is not able to be linked to job-readiness or employment outcomes.

These literacies can be addressed through existing government programs, for example the Cert IV Business (Governance) and the Workplace English Language and Literacy programs. The new Parent Schools Partnership framework (which replaces ASSPA funding for schools) has the capacity to fund parent literacy training.

The implication of functional literacies as gatekeeping competencies with the potential to further exclude Aboriginal people from qualified employment also needs to be addressed. The new Aboriginal Health Worker accreditation requirements are just one example:

*The new TAA package will be part of the new Aboriginal Health Worker competencies (to be endorsed by the end of 2005). Approximately one third (25) of the AHW that we currently work with in Central Australia will be identified by their employers to become trainers and assessors in 2006-2007 to assist new Aboriginal Health Workers and Registered Training Providers under the New Apprenticeship scheme. We need to be able to come together with other trainers of remote Aboriginal participants to consider the implications of perhaps an increased need for English language and also the application of the competencies in a culturally appropriate manner. (RTO3)*

Registered Training organisations must find a balance between the literacy requirements of particular Training Packages and other VET qualifications, and the literacy capabilities of their clients. The Centre for Appropriate Technology focuses primarily on practical hands-on training, to increase the participant's opportunities for successful learning:

*When we provide training for Indigenous remote communities we often find that English is a second third fourth language and our methodology of teaching is really focussed on practical hands on experience. I guess we learn better by doing things through applied technology (practical hands-on), which supports general basic literacy and learning. You learn faster that way. (RTO2)*

#### 6.4 Crisis Management

A particular concern emerging through the research data is that communities need support and action to address crisis issues for remote communities, eg the long-term problems and effects of violence, alcohol and inhalant misuse, stolen generations, poverty and social dislocation. Training in this aspect is linked to community education and community action, and accredited VET training as a strategy for addressing this issue is rarely mentioned by the research participants. However there are opportunities for the VET system to make a big contribution, both to the professional capacity of paid workers on communities to address these issues, and to the accreditation of the skills and knowledge that community members develop through dealing with crisis issues within their community.

Health is one such crisis management issue. The life expectancy of Aboriginal people remains approximately 14 to 20 years shorter than their non Aboriginal counterparts. In the age group 50-64 years Aboriginal people tend to be dying from the major causes of death that are fatal 10-30 years later in life for non Aboriginal people. Both diabetes and renal disease have a consistently greater prevalence and occur at a younger age in the Aboriginal population. Aboriginal people experiencing an injury mortality rate up to 2.9 times higher than the national average. Aboriginal people have a higher prevalence of disability than the rest of the Australian population, especially when barriers to Aboriginal people accessing disability services (such as a lack of indigenous health workers are taken into account. (Maher n/d)

Waltja Management Committee members and Training Nintiringtjaku participants were adamant that training needs to equip concerned community members to work together to provide and/or access appropriate support.

*We came for meeting to talk about our place at [home community] from Women's Centre, Council. We've got to help one another. Not just making out you are working, help one another, help one another, not hate one another. Yes, family, [home community] is our place, we gotta be strong. And look after old people, young people, sniffers, drunks and little kids, look after them properly. Fathers drinking and only mothers looking after kids. Look after the mother too. And grandkids and grandmother, elders' story (TN1)*

A direct link is drawn by research participants between the lack of good education opportunities for the young people at risk, and anti social/self-destructive activities.

*They sniffing petrol. Someone might teach our children to learn and work and think properly. Learn, they don't understand. They are not going to school, that's why they are sniffing petrol. They need to learn more. (WM)*

A letter to the Editor in a local Alice Springs newspaper, written by a local educator in the Certificate in Spoken and Written English, responded to the negative publicity about one remote community by pointing out that enrolments from this community in the Certificate had increased ninefold in the past five years.

She pointed out that not only were the women she taught regular and dedicated students, but they *...encourage their petrol sniffing younger relatives to study as well to try to get them off the petrol.... These women aren't fools, they know it is a long process for their children to give up the drug called petrol. But they are also aware that improvements in self-esteem and education go a long way towards the individual making a choice to kick the habit... These proud, resourceful, resilient women are supporting and encouraging their children and others' children to take their place as active and contributing members of their community. (Barnett 2005)*

The importance placed upon the social effects of training is also asserted by one of the Registered Training Organisations in this project:

*... if a young person who has been engaged in a lot of anti-social behaviour comes to training then goes back and demonstrates a real interest in culture again and wanting to know culture activities, the things that they would be doing we would consider real work and real skills and while that's not accredited it's a very important step towards better learning outcomes generally and greater employment opportunities because it's looking at the bigger picture of that person's learning.*

*...If people go away feeling better after training there's a lot of other things that happen and for an Aboriginal organisation that's your measure of success and not the piece of paper at the end. It's their general outlook on life, their general wellbeing is the measure of success". (RTO1)*

The statement by a Waltja Management Committee member quoted above (“*They are not going to school, that's why they are sniffing petrol. They need to learn more*”) continues with an explanation of how the learning needs of these young people must be met not only by school but also by traditional learning, and teaching and supervision by adults in the community:

*Some people should take them to the bush, we got Night Patrol, they should help with the sniffers, take them hunting out bush and teach all the boys. And the women might take the girls and teach what they do. They might keep their eye on them, witchetty grubs, teach about collecting bush tucker. That's what we need. (WM)*

One research participant from a RTO pointed out that building education upon local traditional knowledge could strengthen community sustainability:

*One of the strengths in remote communities - we often hear about the disadvantages and the problems, and they are certainly there, but one of the strengths actually is culture. ...Education or opportunities that are built on local knowledge and could ensure that that was continuing to be learned and passed on, would be brilliant (RTO1).*

There are opportunities for VET programs to support the maintenance of culture through accredited training on the communities. One example was given of how training for young women on a remote community in building and construction skills (under the ATWORK Aboriginal Technical Skills qualification developed by Centre for Appropriate Technology) contributed to the maintenance of culture in building a safe place for women's cultural items, and at the same time improved the young women's self-esteem and motivation for further training.

This was particularly important because the young women no longer attended school, had no access to paid employment, and were seen by the community proponents of the training program as being 'at risk'. The young women chose to do the training, and more joined in as the training program progressed.

*Yeah when they see Robyn [teacher] there and they ask them "Uwa (yes) we want do that job" you know that's what they ask and I think the girls do good work with ... fixing houses and museum, museum is for the old ladies to put their things in, like nulla nulla or [for] dancing yea they got to put law business things in that museum it's a safe place for them to give their things... (WM)*

This training was valued by the whole community for the skills and self-esteem that the young women gained, and by their work to build something that showed care and respect for the old women, and the cultural traditions of the community. The community's Women's Centre Coordinator, speaking a year later to one of the young women involved, was told that that one of the reasons she used to sniff petrol was because she had nothing much to do. Looking back on the Women's Museum project she reflected that she stopped sniffing petrol during and since the project because *"the young women were busy every day and involved in paid work. They loved that time working and learning together"*. (RT01)

Vocational education and training strategies for training community-based staff and volunteers to address 'crisis management' on communities is almost non-existent. The Certificate III and IV Youth Work in the Community Services Training Package is not offered by the Alice Springs TAFE campus of Charles Darwin University.

The bulk of professional development training for addressing community crisis issues such as alcohol and substance misuse, domestic violence, critical health issues is provided through workshops and visits by health professionals. Waltja, for example, is conducting a Youth Workers Training Workshop at Hamilton Downs in June which youth workers, youth service providers and concerned community members will attend. Registered Training Organisations have been invited to attend and to promote relevant programs to participants. In the future, Waltja hopes to make VET funding, enrolment and accreditation more integral to the planning of training workshops within the youth sector, and for training for individual youth workers.

The training that research participants identified as being helpful to support communities address crisis issues include both the practical and immediate, such as Senior First Aid, Driver's Licence training for women (to equip more women to cope with emergencies), and longer-term skills development such as literacy, computer and multimedia training. Training is wanted which provides opportunities for young people to learn and to contribute to the community, especially through community services and programs such as child care, health work, youth work and teaching. Participants also stressed the need for training which supports community harmony, stronger families, and intergenerational learning.

## 7. CONCLUSIONS

This project has brought together national policy statements about Indigenous access, equity and participation in VET, and the 'on-the-ground' research conducted by Waltja with Aboriginal women in remote semi-traditional communities in Central Australia. The project report identifies training needs of women in remote communities and outlines the context and challenges for effective delivery.

Remote Aboriginal communities pose particular challenges for access and equity in vocational education and training: locational disadvantage, limited public access to computers and other basic technologies, English not being a first language and low levels of English literacy and numeracy, the difficulty for Aboriginal communities to access secondary education and post-school transitional education opportunities for young people.

When addressing these challenges it is important to acknowledge the cultural strengths of Aboriginal communities, and not just to see the challenges as negatives. English literacy is low because in remote Aboriginal communities people are multilingual, with English a fourth, fifth or sixth language learned for school and other official settings. Living in remote communities is, for many Aboriginal people, living in appropriate relationship to land, family and tradition, with associated responsibilities for the work of maintaining traditional culture.



While employment opportunities may be limited, people give their time and effort freely to culture work, as well as to the development of essential services, community services and local governance.

Aboriginal culture work has led to the development of new enterprises and industries in art, multimedia, publications. Culture work contributes to innovative industry development in, for example, children's services, youth work, and aged care in Central Australia (see Waltja website [www.waltja.org.au](http://www.waltja.org.au) for examples).

Aboriginal people living in remote communities are strongly supportive of the concept of life-long learning, as it is entirely consistent with traditional culture, and also with the intergenerational learning needs of communities. Maintenance of community is important so that the young can learn from the old, and fulfill their responsibilities as adults. Waltja's core operating principles (p6 of this Report) stress the importance of family, Aboriginal employment in and management of local services, and a partnership relationship with Aboriginal communities. This approach is not exclusive to Waltja, but is embedded in best practice principles of cross-cultural work.

The key training needs and priorities identified through this project are;

- **Community self-determination:** skills, knowledge, and experience in governance for remote and disadvantaged communities. Two policy/government strategies are needed: extended delivery of governance training, and accreditation of the existing skills, knowledge and experience of Indigenous leaders through Prior Learning. The Certificate IV in Business (Governance) is a relevant qualification for both strategies: pitched at indigenous community Councils and Boards of Management.
- **Training and accreditation** that supports Aboriginal people to access existing jobs and professional development opportunities on their communities: in community services, technical trades, essential services. One policy strategy to assist this would be a concerted campaign to encourage greater take-up of New Apprenticeships on remote communities, and support for supervisors and employers.
- **Functional Literacies:** the low levels of English literacy, numeracy, and experience with computer technologies have a big impact upon employment and further education opportunities. Government funding submissions, contract compliance and program management also require the afore-mentioned functional literacies, as well as knowledge of the 'big words' of government. Government could encourage and support literacy training available to all remote community members through local schools and learning centres. The innovations in IT and flexible delivery need correlating innovations and initiatives in training and delivery of functional literacies.
- **Crisis management:** addressing the immediate and long-term problems and effects of social, economic and cultural disadvantage. A direct link is drawn by research participants between the lack of good education opportunities and anti social/self-destructive activities, particularly for young people at risk. Communities need VET support to deal with the serious health problems suffered, and a flexible system to accommodate disruptions to training due to illness, treatment, funerals and sorry business.

None of these issues are new, as the review of prior research shows. Each of these areas of need/concern has training implications and can be linked to one or more existing Training Package and programs. Each issue is being addressed to some extent through current Commonwealth and state and territory government programs and initiatives.

However, the impression gained through this research is that the issues identified have generally been addressed by the government only in pilot or short-term projects. When these issues are addressed by training organisations it is generally in a metrocentric way, requiring town campus attendance rather than offered at the worksite or meeting place on the community.

Remote Aboriginal communities require training provision that is geared towards the development of employment opportunities for Aboriginal residents and the governance and maintenance of community services. They hope and expect that the VET system will provide training within their home community which is also their workplace and their culture place, rather than locating the pathways to accredited training and employment in urban centres. Research participants want the VET system to work with and on the remote traditional communities, to recognise that workplace learning and accreditation opportunities exist on even the poorest Aboriginal community, to equip Aboriginal people to manage their own services and to create career entry-points and pathways for their young people.

The access and equity issue of locational disadvantage has been addressed in other contexts by the VET initiatives to provide access through flexible learning/distance education/e-learning (with equity generally conflated into access provisions). However given the minimal levels of functional literacy in English and in computer technologies on remote communities, and the minimal access of Aboriginal people on communities to computers and internet services, the intended benefit of national policy initiatives to increase access for remote students through e-learning will not be experienced by many Central Australian Aboriginal communities. Innovations in VET e-learning resources need to be matched by strategies to engage learners who lack the technological infrastructure, and the functional literacies to access these innovations.

There are no short-term solutions. Aboriginal people and their communities need training and accreditation to manage their own governance, services and enterprises. Research participants have the reasonable hope that their young people can access VET learning and qualifications without having to leave their family home or their community, or without the family having to relocate to support students living in urban centres. Vocational education and training leads to the demand for jobs, especially as learners come to believe that they are suitable candidates for training and for employment.

Thus training opportunities should always offer new employment pathways for learners, and open up the possibility of new enterprise development, even on remote communities where current options for Aboriginal people seem limited.

As well as providing a research report, the project has created some real outcomes for Aboriginal women. Participants in the Training Nintiringtjaku workshops have received training toward qualifications in the Certificate IV Training and Assessment, and they are to be promoted as Training Nintiringtjaku workers for their communities. The research participants in this project assert a strong commitment to the principles of life long learning within traditional Aboriginal societies as well as within their Aboriginal organisations. As senior women for their communities they have not just focused on their own training needs, or the needs of women, but on 'whole of community' issues, and the importance of long-term approaches which support community development and maintenance of culture.

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