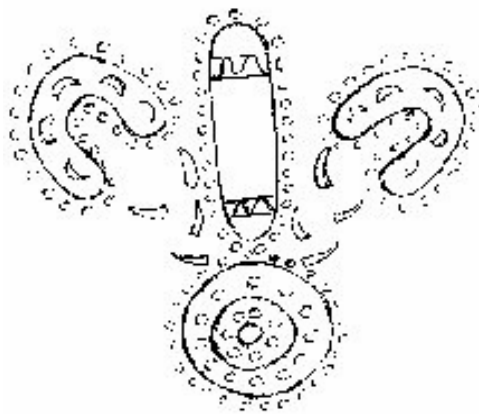


“Aboriginal Women
Have Answers Themselves”

**Report of the
Balgo Women’s Law Camp**

Blue Hill (Tanami Track)

24-27 August 2007



Kapululangu

Aboriginal Women’s Association

REVITALISING WOMEN’S CULTURE
CARING FOR WOMEN & COMMUNITY

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SUMMARY

The Balgo Women's Law Camp held at Blue Hill (on the Tanami Track) from 24 through 27 August 2007 drew together 100 women and girls to engage in Women's Law ceremony. They came from across the Kimberley, and as far away as Perth and Lismore/Sydney.

During the Camp the women held a meeting to discuss issues that concerned them about their communities. They called on the governments to fund the Kapululangu Aboriginal Women's Association and its Circles of Cultural Learning education program.

The main concerns raised were violence against women and children (including child sexual abuse) and the alienation of children and youth from their Aboriginality.

Other concerns included: inappropriate behaviour between girls and boys; neglect of children by some parents; marginalisation of elders; poor health factors; alcohol and drugs causing tensions in the community; children and youth disadvantaged by an extreme level of truancy; limited community identity undermining Balgo's future; and high level of violence and crimes impacting negatively on children and youth.

The leading identity strategy was the need to support local "Law and Culture" initiatives which teach cultural knowledge and encourage pride in Aboriginality. This to be achieved through the funding of Kapululangu Aboriginal Women's Association (AC) and its "Circles of Cultural Learning" whole-of-life, whole-of-community cultural education framework.

Other strategies included: provide a Safe House for women and children; improve the Child Protection System; involve traditional healing methods attempts to improve health; improve policing and increase community involvement in crime prevention through a wardens' program; strengthen parenting skills, elders' authority and respect for Law; decrease childhood truancy through increasing employment for youth; and build pride in Aboriginality through community cultural development.

The Law Camp's core statement was "Aboriginal Women Have Answers Themselves".

INTRODUCING KAPULULANGU

Chairwoman: Manaya Sarah Daniels Napanangka
Law Camp Initiator: Yintjurru Margaret Anjule Napurrula
Coordinator: Dr Zohl dé Ishtar
Kapululangu Aboriginal Women's Association
c/- Australian Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies
University of Queensland, St Lucia, QLD 4072, Australia
Phone: 0429 422 645 Email: z.deishtar@uq.edu.au

Location:

The Kapululangu Aboriginal Women's Association is the sole women's organisation for Balgo (aka Wirrimanu) community in the Kutjungka/Tjurabalan region of the South-East Kimberley, Western Australia. Balgo is 30 km from the Northern Territory border, on the northern end of the Tanami Track which runs north-west of Alice Springs to Halls Creek.

Kapululangu Membership and Management:

Kapululangu is an initiative of the women elders of Balgo and was established by them to assist them to exercise and teach their Indigenous Law (philosophy) and Culture (customs/practices). Its commitment is to "Revitalise Women's Culture, [and] Care for Women and Community".

Established in April 1999, Kapululangu became incorporated as an independent organisation on 3 August that same year.

Kapululangu is run by a committee consisting of nine women, most of whom are women elders, and has a membership of over 30 women representing all age groups including young women. As Balgo's sole women's organisation, Kapululangu caters for all Aboriginal women and girls. It is managed by a coordinator operating under the direction of the committee, working closely with the women elders.

Kapululangu's Assets and Resources:

- Kapululangu's greatest strength is the Law and Culture knowledge and skills of its women elders. Kapululangu's chairwoman is Manaya Sarah Daniels Napanangka, and vice-chair is Ruby Darkie Nangala. The previous chairwoman and the founder of the Kapululangu *Tjilimi* (Women's Centre) was Yintjurru Margaret Anjule Napurrula.
- Kapululangu's coordinator is Dr Zohl dé Ishtar, from the Australian Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies, University of Queensland. She assisted the elders to form Kapululangu in 1999 and was its founding coordinator from 1999 through 2001, and has been its coordinator from 2005-2007. She is a Nobel Peace Prize nominee and author of *Holding Yawulyu: White Culture and Black Women's Law* (Spinifex Press, 2005).
- Located on the Balgo Women's Law Ground Kapululangu has three main buildings: the "Tutjuku Tjilimi" (Women's House), "Kapululangu House" (office and coordinator's residence); and the Culture Shed which is a Keeping Place for women's *tarruku* (sacred ritual items).

Services Offered by Kapululangu in 2007:

Despite being unable to employ a permanent coordinator, Kapululangu has provided the following services throughout 2007:

- Support for women's Law and Culture activities, including annual Law Time cycle
- Ceremonies on the Balgo Women's Law Ground
- Logistical support for the Balgo Women's Law Camp at Blue Hill, 24-27 August
- *Tjarrtjurra* – Women's Healing Sessions for women, men and children
- Weekly hunting and bush medicine gathering trips
- *Tjilimi* (Women's House) women elders living together on the Balgo Women's Law Ground
- Documentation and film making
- Daily assistance to the women elders – shopping and attending the clinic, etc.
- Advocacy for local women and liaising with government departments
- Coordination, administration and grant writing service

Services Offered by Kapululangu in the Past:

Kapululangu has provided the following services in the past :

- *Tjilimi* (Women's House) women elders living together on the Balgo Women's Law Ground
- Support for women's Law and Culture activities, including annual Law Time cycle
- Culture Classes for Girls on the Women's Law Group
- Culture Camps for girls and boys with the male elders – teaching bush skills
- Dancing Troupe – touring regionally, nationally and internationally (Hawaii and Canada)
- Travelling along Dreaming Tracks performing rituals
- Documentation and film making and women painting stories
- Safe House refuge for women and children
- Daily assistance to the women elders – shopping and attending the clinic, etc.
- Advocacy for local women and liaising with government departments
- Coordination, administration and grant writing service

Services Kapululangu Intends to Offer in the Future:

Given appropriate funding, Kapululangu intends to provide the following services:

- *Tjilimi* (Women's House) women elders living together on the Balgo Women's Law Ground
- Law and Culture activities, including annual Law Time cycle
- Circles of Cultural Learning Program – a whole-of-life cultural education program
- *Tjarrtjurra* Healing Service (Traditional Healing)
- Safe House management (to be separate from the *Tjilimi*)
- Cultural Training for Kartiya and others
- Daily assistance to the women elders – shopping and attending the clinic, etc.
- Coordination and Advocacy for local women and liaising with government departments

“Aboriginal Women Have Answers Themselves”

BALGO WOMEN’S LAW CAMP BLUE HILL (Tanami Track) 24-27 August 2007

*Kapululangu Women’s Objectives in Running the Women’s Law Camp**

Over 100 women and girls joined in the Balgo Women’s Law Camp at Blue Hill from 24-27 August. For four days they celebrated women’s Law ceremonies. It was an opportunity for women elders to “mend” (revitalise) their Women’s Law (*Yawulyu*) through engaging with the *Tjukurrpa* (cosmos/Dreaming) and passing their knowledge on to their younger generations.

The women elders and “middle-aged” women were concerned for the well-being of all members of their families and community but particularly the children and youth. They were upset about recent the events in their community which had highlighted the issue of child sexual abuse and they wanted to do something to stop it. They felt that the problems were occurring because their younger generations had lost connection with their cultural heritage, with their land and thus with themselves.

From the Kapululangu elders’ perspective the only thing that could heal the rift between *Tjukurrpa* and self was the practice of Law. Custodians of strong Law, the Kapululangu elders are the *tjarrtjurra* (healers) and *nintipuka* (teachers) of their communities. The well-being of their families and communities weighs heavily on their shoulders. They wanted to “grow up” their younger generations: “strong for Law, strong for Culture”. They would achieve this through ceremony.

The elders also wanted to talk about the problems in their communities, with the aim of identifying strategies to eradicate those problems. The Law Camp was a response to recent government – State (Perth) and Federal (Canberra) – interventions in Aboriginal communities in Western Australia and the Northern Territory. The elders wanted to show the governments that “Aboriginal Women Have Answers Themselves”.

As one Kapululangu elders Yintjurr Margaret Anjule Napurrula said, “We have to show this government that we have strong Law here. They can’t rubbish it. We have got strong Law ourselves”.

There were three main reasons for calling the Law Camp:

- 1) to “wake up” women and girls (and men and boys) to the strength and healing power of Women’s Law and the contribution it can make to ending the problems in our communities;
- 2) to identify strategies for dealing with issues such as child sexual abuse and violence against women and children, as well as other identified problems in our communities;
- 3) to call for Kapululangu to be funded so that, as Balgo’s sole women’s organisation, it can provide services for women and children in the Kutjungka/Tjurabalan region.

Ultimately, the Law Camp calls on the governments to support and fund the Kapululangu Aboriginal Women’s Association as a matter of urgency. Kapululangu requires funding for its cultural programs for youth and children, particularly the Circles of Cultural Learning initiative, and the provision of a Safe House in Balgo for women and children in need.

Kapululangu has been without funding for six years. It is still waiting on government funding promised for 2005 and 2006. This funding has been held up by problems within the local administration which resulted in the Wirrimanu Aboriginal Corporation (Balgo’s local council) being placed under Administration by the Office of the Registrar of Aboriginal Corporations (now ORATSIC) in 2003. Since its inception in 1999, Kapululangu has been disadvantaged by mismanagement and (at time) outright corruption within the local administration, which has been expounded by bureaucratic inertia and allowed to continue unchecked by government negligence. Kapululangu knows that it is not alone in facing these difficulties. Across Australia Aboriginal people have been forced to pay the price of what has historically been White dysfunction as it has conducted itself in Aboriginal communities.

(* In the context of the Balgo world-view the term “Law” translates as Indigenous philosophy/cosmology. It has little correlation with White concepts of legality as is often supposed, but it does refer to discipline – living “right way” according to respectful relationship with the cosmos, land, kin and self. The term “Culture” refers to customs or practices which are anchored by that Law/philosophy. Hence the term “Law and Culture” translates as traditional Indigenous philosophy and the practice of that philosophy.)

Over 100 Women and Girls attended the Women’s Law Camp

The Law Camp was led by Manaya Sarah Daniels Napanangka (KAWA’s Chairwoman), Yintjurru Margaret Anjule Napurrula (former Chairwoman), and Ruby Darkie Nangala (Vice-Chair). Other Kapululangu elders who participated were Mungkina Dora Rockman Napaltjarri, Maude Martingali Napanangka, Payi Payi Sunfly Napangarti, Nelli Njamme Napangarti, Yupena Eunice Nampitjinpa. The elders were assisted by Kapululangu’s Kwirriya Patsy Mudgedell, Nakarra Marie Mudgedell, and many other “middle-aged” apprentices.

The Camp was organised by Kapululangu’s *tilitja* (culture worker/coordinator) Dr Zohl dé Ishtar “Nakarra” from the Australian Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies at the University of Queensland. She was assisted at the Camp by Aboriginal community educator Ochre Doyle from the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Program, Faculty of Education at the University of Technology Sydney.

Women attending the Law Camp came from Balgo, Mulan, Kururrungku (Billiluna), Ringer Soak, Halls Creek, Broome, Perth, Lismore/Sydney, and Brisbane. Many more women and girls had wanted to come but had to stay behind because of Sorry Business and limited funding. Women in Lenora, far to Balgo's south, wanted to send 13 women but couldn't because they couldn't get funding for their travel. Kapululangu women were very sad for the grieving families and were sorry that this meant that some women couldn't make it to the Law Camp.

Fifteen *Kartiya* (Whitefellas) also attended the Law Camp. They came from Balgo, Mulan, Kururrungku (Billiluna), Halls Creek and Broome. The WA Department of Indigenous Affairs, the Department of Child Protection, the Department of Crime Prevention and Curtin University in Perth were also represented. Two police women came from Halls Creek, invited by Kapululangu. Everyone joined in the ceremonies.

Middle-generation leader Marie Mudgetell Nakamarra said, "Kartiya were there dancing. Teachers, nurses, from all the agencies. And from Kururrungku and Mulan too. And there were police women there too. And government people from Perth. It was good to see them dance. Kartiya can learn. We can learn from each other. Kartiya and Aboriginal people together in one. Two-way learning. When we were there we felt one. We were all one there at that Law Camp, in that big ceremony."

Women's Law Camp was an Indigenous Response to Government Interventions

The Balgo Women's Law Camp was called by the Kapululangu elders at short notice in response to Federal and State (WA) interventions in Balgo, and in related communities in the Western Australia and the Northern Territory.

Specifically, the Camp was a response to the visit of the WA Special Police Taskforce on Child Sexual Abuse which had visited Balgo in mid-July (17-19) which, according to some of Balgo's male and female elders, had failed to inform and consult with the community elders before visiting the community, and had not involved the elders and parents in their questioning of young women and men. The elders were upset that the police task held meetings with young women and men aged around 14 years old where they had asked them what was described as "rude questions about sex". There were some middle generation residents involved in these meetings with the girls and boys but the elders were concerned that many parents had not been properly consulted or involved, and they were worried for the wellbeing of the children who had been subjected to what they considered to be culturally-inappropriate questioning. They complained that, although a few residents were involved in these meetings, the majority of the community had had no idea that these meetings were happening until they were over. The complainants identified the need for external agencies to include the elders in any strategy, to ensure they are all inclusive in their approach to the community, and that they work with the community in a more culturally appropriate manner.

The elders were clearly worried about their grandchildren and great-grandchildren and for all their family and community. The women elders had been asking the Federal and State governments to support them in running cultural programs for young people for many years. They believed that the solution lay in building their young people's self-esteem and pride in

their Aboriginality, in their Law and Culture – the glue of their society. The elders are the Law women and men, the teachers and healers of their community. The Kapululangu women have been asking for funding for their “Circles of Cultural Learning” project (a whole-of-community, whole-of-life cultural program) since 2004 but both governments had repeatedly failed to fund it. The Kapululangu Aboriginal Women’s Association has not been funded for six years and is still waiting for funding promised in 2005 to be released. It has been held up by problems within the local administration and through no failings by Kapululangu.

Kapululangu had consistently called on the Western Australian and Federal governments “to listen to the elders and women, and refashion themselves as facilitators of local Indigenous initiatives particularly cultural programs and women’s organisations”.

Kapululangu argues that had it been provided with funding to support the community’s elders in running their cultural programs over the past years and to establish a safe house for women and children then the sexual abuse of children and other violence against women and men could well have been mitigated.

The Balgo Women’s Law Camp was designed to deliver a strong message to the governments that the Kapululangu women were capable of making an important contribution to their community’s well-being. That they proceeded to run a Women’s Law Camp while their organisation was unfunded was a loud statement to the governments that Balgo women took their responsibility to their families and community seriously. They are calling on the governments to partner them in implementing “local solutions to local problems”. This could be achieved in the first instance by funding Kapululangu as the sole women’s organisation in Balgo. A vibrant women’s organisation will foster other options and possibilities.

Women’s Law Camp was an Indigenous-initiated and Indigenous-led Project

The Law Camp was an Indigenous-initiated and Indigenous-led project. It was initiated by the Kapululangu elders, and organised under their guidance with their fullest involvement in matters pertaining to Law and Culture. The Law Camp program was efficiently run by the elders, particularly Manaya Sarah Daniels Napanangka and Yintjurru Margaret Anjule Napurrula.

Logistical support was provided by the elders’ *tilitja* (culture worker/coordinator) Dr Zohl dé Ishtar, assisted by Aboriginal community educator Ochre Doyle.

The ceremonies were led by Kapululangu’s women elders, particularly Manaya Sarah Daniels Napanangka and Yintjurru Margaret Anjule Napurrula. They included strong *Yawulyu* (Women’s Law) (special thankyou to Ruby Darkie Nangala). The elders put twenty young women and girls aged over eight years through the first levels of women’s Law. The young women fully understood the importance of what they were being taught, and were extremely proud to learn their cultural heritage from their elders. Lots of Kartiya women came too – and they now know more about why Women’s Law is important.

As Marie Mudgetell Nakamarra said, “We had a very strong Law there. We had lots of women there: old women, middle-aged, and all the young ones, and little kids. Everyone was dancing. No one didn’t sit down lazy. Everyone got up. They all danced”.

The Blue Hill Law Camp was an ending of Sorry Business (month-long mourning rituals) for the many Kapululangu women (elders and middle-aged) who had passed away since the last Law Camp held there in 2001. It was an opening up of Law which had lain dormant for many years.

One of the main elders behind Kapululangu, Yintjurru Margaret Anjule Napurrula explained, “I’ve been worry for that lot old people [who have since died]. I been think too much – mother for this Nakarra, and aunty, and for my cousin-sister and cousin, and grannies for this one. I was worrying and I been think about the Law and I been talk, “I can’t follow ‘em [Law]. I’m worried for old people been passed away”. I was really worrying and it broke my heart. I was crying for them. I been sit down six years. I never thinking about for that Law. I wake ‘im up that Law now. I been thinking now: “All these kids, they grown up. I’ll have to wake ‘im up.”

Several weeks before the Law Camp the Kapululangu elders held a “Sweeping Ceremony” (to remove any remaining spirit as a closing of the mourning period) on the site to “open up” the ceremonial ground. It was an important step in the “waking up” (i.e., strengthening) of Women’s Law in Balgo. It had to be done before any work and certainly any ceremony could take place on the site. Throughout the Law Camp the Kapululangu elders continued to mourn and cry/keen for their deceased close relatives.

Women’s Law Camp was an Opportunity to “Grow Up” Young Women and Girls

The Kapululangu elders were delighted that so many “middle-aged” and younger women, and girls, came to enjoy and learn from the weekend of ceremonies and to participate in discussions about different issues. The elders had opened the Camp to young girls aged over eight years because they wanted to pass their cultural knowledge to them, they wanted the young women and girls to know their ‘culture”.

As Yintjurru Margaret Anjule Napurrula said: “All the girls gotta learn healing and *tjarrtjurra* (women’s healing ceremony). So that when they finished all the old people they young fella can hold it now. And when they get older another mob gotta hold it. They gotta share it all the way: from old people to young girls. That’s the strong Law.”

Marie Mudgetell Nakamarra said: “When the young people follow this Law they don’t worry about guntja [drugs] and grog. They’ll forget about those things. Most of the time they can have Law, coming together, camping out with the elders. They can learn so that they keep the Law strong for when they get older.”

Although the women elders had invited girls aged over eight years old, some women brought younger girls and toddlers with them. This meant that the women elders could not engage in deep ceremony as they had originally hoped. Some “middle-aged” women responsible for the care of young children and wanting to attend the Camp had found themselves in an

impossible position and had decided to bring their grandchildren with them. A meeting was held on the first afternoon when it became clear that some the elders were distressed by the presence of the children, but no decision was reached. A few young children did leave the Camp, but the elders fearing for the remaining children decided to curtail their planned program.

Consequently there was only one ritual which involved secret, sacred dance, song and knowledge. It was conducted pre-dawn on the last morning while all the children were still asleep. The ritual did not last as long as it might have because the elders were concerned that the children might wake up and witness it.

Similarly, the elders decided not to proceed with the opening ritual as planned because they were worried that the youngest children might touch the *tarruku* (ritual items) if they were “planted” as intended and this could make the children very sick.

Balgo Men Showed Respect for Women’s Law

The Law Camp culminated with a convoy of thirteen vehicles covered in ochre driving into Balgo community where the entire Balgo community – all the men, and the women and children who had stayed behind – were seated on the oval, heads bowed, waiting for the women’s return. In this way, local men and others showed their respect for Women’s Law. As at the end of the annual Law Time cycle, where women wait for the men to return from the Men’s Law Ground, now it was the turn of the men to wait for the women and to show their respect for Women’s Law.

Unfortunately when the convoy reached the edge of Balgo and parked just outside the police station the women learnt that no one was on the oval waiting for them as arranged. This distressed the women, particularly the elders, as it suggested a lack of respect for Women’s Law. But the women were feeling very strong after such a successful Law Camp and they drove slowly through the community calling out from their cars for the men and remaining women and kids to gather on the oval. Some men were “caught” at the police station, including one man who was released by the police and told he was free to go. He had refused to leave the holding yard: “No, I can’t go out there! Those women will sing me!”

Yintjurru Margaret Anjule Napurrula explains: “We went around with vehicle, and pushed all the people to the oval. We catch all the people from their house. They were all sitting down in their houses. All were running to the oval. They were frightened. ‘Right, all sitting down now, then we take the women, girls and kids and Kartiya to the oval and dance. Manaya took the women, and I been take the young women and girls.”

The women showed themselves to the men. Wearing the full regalia of four days of ceremony they reminded the men of the insurmountable potency of Women’s Law, reasserting women’s Law-ful place in their community.

After the Closing Ceremony on the Balgo Oval, twenty-three women and girls slept-over at the Kapululangu *Tjilimi* (Women’s House) on the Balgo Women’s Law Ground. There was a loud buzz in the air: the women were enthused by the Law Camp’s success. This was the first

time in over a year that women had slept in the Tjilimi. Subsequently, a group of women moved to the *tjilimi* a week later following a bout of heavy drinking in Balgo which was keeping everyone awake at night.

After the Law Camp, as women returned to their families, they exuded a strong energy back into the community. Many people remarked on how “proud” the women looked after their sojourn with their strong Law. Everyone talked about the Law Camp, how successful it had been, for many days.

Marie Mudgetell Nakamarra said, “Women got together at that big ceremony there. It was a very strong one. And we were very proud of it. Everyone was there. They were happy. And inside they felt really happy and strong”.

As for the women who returned to their own communities, many promised to return the next year for another Women’s Law Camp.

As Yintjuru Margaret Anjule Napurrula reported, “When they been going back home they really cry that mob [all the women]: “We’ll come up every year for dancing”.

Men Took Up Their Traditional Role as Supporters of Women’s Law

While focusing particularly on women, the Women’s Law Camp includes an essential role for men. Just as women assist men during the annual Law Time cycle, men are traditionally obliged to assist women.

As Marie Mudgetell explained: “We need men. They are part of that Law too. Men need to come and help. That’s important for us all. Helping each other.”

The Camp’s infrastructure was built by men, organised by the Men’s Health workers of Palyalatju Maparnpa Health Committee and by Wirrimanu Aboriginal Corporation through the CDEP program. Men graded the camp ground and dancing ground, built boughsheds and brought in wood and water. The men’s support helped to make the Camp the success that it was.

However, men are unable to go to a Women’s Law Ground (in Balgo or Blue Hill) without the protection of the women elders. The Kapululangu elders went to the Law Ground with the grader driver and when the men’s group went to build the bough-sheds. The elders’ responsibility was to protect the men from the *Nangala Kutjarra* – the two women ancestors who look after Blue Hill Law Ground and the Balgo Women’s Centre.

As Yintjuru Margaret Anjule Napurrula explains, “Man can’t touch that ring place [Blue Hill]. When him go there he might go away [be taken]. Those Nangala Kutjarra might take him. [Then] We can’t find him. They [the ancestors] gotta take him really long way”.

Marie Mudgetell Nakamarra explained, “When we went to this big ceremony of the Law Camp – that’s the women’s ground. No one enters that ground, only all the women. And if they need help these old people they ask some people with grader, or

making bough sheds. It's alright for those men to be there: they are our workers. And the women have got to be there with them. All day they'll be there with them, looking after them because of that women's way“.

The Kapululangu elders protected the men by conducting small, personal introduction ceremonies where they identified the men as their “workers” and “friends” and stayed with them while they did the heavy work. Kapululangu fed the men while they were on the Law Ground for the women.

The Women's Law Camp was supported by Balgo's male elders but there was difficulty getting the men actively involved. For the male elders it was that only those men with direct custodianship relationship with the Blue Hill land had the right to be involved, or to go to the site. That more male elders weren't involved was direct evidence of people's respect for Law – women and men's. For the middle-aged men it was that they are very wary of Women's Law which they are raised to know is too strong to be interfered with, and none of their business. For the young men, from among whom those who helped build the bough-sheds came, it was that they had never been called upon to support Women's Law in this way before. It had been six years since the last Women's Law Camp. Then, in addition, there was the weight of inertia which currently burdens Balgo amid a context of a full inventory of extreme social problems. This is the direct result of a seventy years history of the introduction of Kartiya (White) structures which has pushed indigenous socio-political systems to the periphery and engendered a disempowering dependency in most public arenas. Because the Women's Law Camp called on the men to take up their traditional supportive responsibilities the event was of immeasurable benefit to Balgo men's side as well.

Women's Law Camp was Supported by All of Balgo's Agencies Working Together

The Camp was actively supported by all of the agencies in Balgo: Palyalatju Maparnpa, Wirrimanu Aboriginal Corporation, Luurnpa Catholic School, Kutjungka Parish, Wirrimanu Adult Education Centre, Warlayirti Art and Culture Centre, Wirrimanu Community Store, Balgo Clinic and the Balgo and Halls Creek police.

Women's Law Camp Received Wide Support from Across Australia

Funding for the Law Camp came from Kapululangu, Palyalatju Maparnpa Health Committee (Balgo), and the Kimberley Aboriginal Law and Culture Centre (Fitzroy Crossing).

The Australian Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies at the University of Queensland enabled post-doctoral Fellow Dr Zohl dé Ishtar to conduct research in Balgo for the past three years as Kapululangu's coordinator.

Kapululangu was flooded with letters of support in the weeks leading up to the Women's Law Camp. They came from across Australia – and from Aboriginal and Kartiya.

Despite it being called at short notice, many communities signalled their interest in being involved in the Camp. It was unfortunate that many communities were unable to attend at the last moment due to unexpected deaths requiring women intending to join the Camp to turn

their attentions to Sorry Business. Or, as in the case of the 13 women of Lenora (WA) who had wanted to attend, being unable to come because they were not adequately funded to cover the costs of travel.

Women's Law Camp Strategised about How to Eradicate Local Social Problems

While at the Balgo Women's Law Camp, participants held a formal meeting to discuss problems in their communities. The Camp's key statement was "Aboriginal women Have Answers Themselves". The message was: "Local solutions by local people for local problems".

The Meeting was opened by Manaya Sarah Daniels Napanangka, Kapululangu's Chair, and Ruby Darkie, Kapululangu's Vice-Chair.

Women participating in the discussion came from Balgo, participants also came from Mulan, Kururrungku, Ringer Soak, Halls Creek, and Broome. Observers were Kartiya from the above communities, and women who came from Perth, Lismore/Sydney and Brisbane. Also present at the meeting were representatives from the WA Department of Indigenous Affairs, the Department of Crime Prevention, the Department of Child Protection and Curtin University.

As the majority of Camp attendees were from Balgo much of the discussion revolved around Balgo, but it was felt that the issues and strategies were also relevant to other communities, particularly those in the Kutjungka/Tjurabalan region – Mulan and Kururrungku.

Many strategies were identified towards solving the problems identified by the women themselves. The issues discussed during the Meeting included:

- Alcohol and Drugs
- Child Neglect
- Child Sexual Abuse
- Community Cultural Development
- Elders responsibilities and rights
- Gambling
- Health matters – and *Tjarrtjurra* (women traditional healers)
- Law and Culture
- Parenting
- Policing
- Truancy – Childhood Discipline
- Violence Against Women and Children
- Youth

Law Camp was a call for Funding for Kapululangu's Cultural Initiatives

Kapululangu has not received funding since 2001, and is still waiting on government funding promised for 2005-2006 and 2006-2007. Meanwhile Balgo's women and children go without services and as more elders die without passing their Law and cultural knowledge on to their younger generations this knowledge is being lost to the detriment of the entire community. The Balgo Women's Law Camp at Blue Hill was held without Kapululangu being funded.

Initiated by the women elders it was a statement that Kapululangu women are dedicated to their project and have the human resources to make it a success. What they lack is partners in their tireless efforts to maintain, revitalise and pass on their cultural knowledge to younger generations so that their people will remain strong.

Kapululangu is seeking funding for its Circles of Cultural Learning project. The Circles of Cultural Learning framework utilises Indigenous incremental learning systems to pass on traditional and contemporary knowledge pertaining to culture (customs) and Law (philosophy). Involving all aged groups, it is particularly directed to younger generations, and is an attempt to raise children and youth who have a strong sense of self-esteem stemming from pride in their Aboriginality – that which makes them unique.

The Circles of Cultural Learning framework was developed by the Kapululangu women, specifically the elders, in 2004. Their aim was to contribute toward the eradication of social problems in Balgo community. The Kapululangu elders believe that the anomie and alienation which is currently impacting on their families and all the residents of Balgo – and particularly the children and youth – stems from the “loss” of Law and Culture. The elders, being the grandmothers and great-grandmothers, want to raise strong healthy children. It is their perspective that this urgent goal can only be achieved through raising children “strong in Law, strong in culture”.

The Circles of Cultural Learning framework was the result of a series of four meetings, facilitated by Dr Zohl dé Ishtar and Aboriginal community educator Ochre Doyle. These meetings took place at a Sorry Camp for the daughter of Kapululangu’s then Chairwoman Yintjurru Margaret Anjule Napurrula. It was a time of immense grieving for all of Balgo’s communities – given that four women died in a period of four months – three of them leading Law women of three generations. That these meetings occurred under these circumstances – when normally one does not hold meetings during Sorry Time – should be taken as a strong indicator of just how deeply the Kapululangu elders felt about the need to pass their Law knowledge on to their younger generations.

The Law Camp was a determined call by the elders and women for the governments to become active partners with Kapululangu in making Balgo a better place for Aboriginal people to live. Its immense success evidenced that as one woman elder put it, “*We have to show this government that we have strong Law here. We have got strong Law ourselves*”.

NOTES FROM THE WOMEN'S MEETING BALGO WOMEN'S LAW CAMP

The following notes report on the discussion held at the Balgo Women's Law Camp at Blue Hill on 24 to 27 August 2007. The Meeting was held on the Sunday morning in a context of four days of strong Women's Law ceremonies. The notes reflect the discussions which took place and, more importantly, the potential solutions which the women identified.

The Meeting was a call to the governments – Federal and State (WA) – to recognise that “Aboriginal Women have Answers Themselves” and to support and fund Aboriginal women's initiatives as “local solutions by local people to local problems”.

Approximately seventy Aboriginal women attended the Meeting. Approximately fifteen Kartiya women attended the Meeting as observers. These notes were taken at the Meeting and are presented in this report written by Kapululangu's coordinator Dr Zohl dé Ishtar. Where necessary, effort has been made to explain the cultural logic behind the women's concerns.

This report does not attempt to be comprehensive: it is a reflection of a discussion which took place in a particular context. It should be read as part of a much longer, ongoing dialogue taking place in the Kutjungka/Tjurabalan region and across Australia. For wider relevance this report should be considered with similar reports by other Aboriginal organisations.*

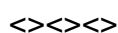
As the majority of women attending the Law Camp, and therefore the Meeting, were from Balgo most of the following discussion pertains to Balgo itself. However, the discussion can be taken as reflecting circumstances and potential solutions in other remote desert communities in the Kimberley region and may, with high probability, be similar to the problems and strategies appropriate to other Indigenous communities as well.

Ultimately, the Balgo Women's Law Camp calls on all governments to support and fund all Indigenous women's initiatives, particularly women's cultural programs. Such as the Kapululangu Aboriginal Women's Association and its Circles of Cultural Learning project.

(* Other references:

Wild, Rex and Patricia Anderson. 2007. *Ampe Akelyernemane Meke Mekarle. “Little Children are Sacred”*. Report of the Northern Territory Board of Inquiry into the Protection of Aboriginal Children from Sexual Abuse. Northern Territory Government: Darwin.

Combined Aboriginal Organisations of the Northern Territory. 2007. *A Proposed Emergency Response and Development Plan to Protect Aboriginal Children in the Northern Territory*. Accessed on 19 July 2007 at <http://www.snaicc.asn.au/news/NTAboriginalOrgsResponse.html>)



OVERVIEW OF DISCUSSION AND STRATEGIES

DISCUSSION:	STRATEGY:
1.1 Social problems result from alienation of children/youth from their Aboriginality	1.2 Increase opportunities for children and youth to learn Law and Culture
2.1 Child Sexual Abuse and Violence Against Women and Children	2.2 Safe House for Women and Children in Balgo; Improve Child Protection System
3.1 Health factors are extremely poor in Balgo and the Kutjungka region	3.2 Involve Indigenous healing methods; Provide better funded medical services
4.1 Alcohol and Drugs are causing tensions in the community	4.2 Increase community cultural activities; Block access to alcohol and drugs
5.1 Children and youth are disadvantaged by an extreme level of truancy	5.2 Strengthen parenting skills, elders' authority and respect for Law; Increase employment prospects, particularly for youth
6.1 Limited Community Identity is Undermining Balgo's Future	6.2 Build pride in Aboriginality through Community Cultural Development
7.1 Violence and crimes remain high, particularly impacting children	7.2 Strengthen policing; Increase community involvement in crime prevention

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Discussion: **Social problems result from alienation of children/youth from Aboriginality**
Strategies: **Increase opportunities for children and youth to learn Law and Culture**

1.1 Discussion: Social problems result from alienation of children/ youth from Aboriginality

- i. The Meeting felt that many of the social problems in their communities had developed as direct result of the alienation of children and youth from their Aboriginal heritage, caused by the disruption of cultural knowledge transmission over the past decades. As one woman put it, "*People are forgetting the Law*". There was concern that "*we are losing our elders*" [by death] and with limited opportunities for them to pass on their cultural knowledge there was a risk of leaving the younger generations bereft of connection with their cultural heritage. Because "*people don't know the Law*" they had "*gotten lost*". This has opened the way for "*grog and guntja* [drugs]" (and petrol sniffing) to get a foothold, particularly but not solely among men and youth. Consequently, participants wanted to "*teach the kids before any more elders die*" and while Law knowledge was still strong in Balgo.

- ii. *“They leave the elders to do the Law themselves.” “While we work the old people are dying.”* The Meeting felt that people were distracted from learning and indeed teaching the Law through a spectrum of influences which included: *“too much cards”* (gambling); the historical influence of the Church, and the need for the “middle-aged” people to work while elders had more time to engage in Law and Culture activities. Middle-aged women complained that they often miss out on day-to-day involvement in Law and Culture events and activities.
- iii. The Meeting felt that *“young women didn’t listen”* to their elders because of *“too much guntja and gambling”* (children aged ten years sometimes gamble). Gambling provides Balgo’s only social gathering activity and location. Women were worried for some girls who are busy *“flirting”* with boys, *“having fights”*, and *“sitting around doing nothing”*.
- iv. The Meeting expressed the need to be more involved in and learn about their Law. Comments made included: *“We can’t just leave it to a few women”*; *“Women need to come together more often”*; *“It is important not to just talk about how important the Law is to us, we need to all get involved”*.

1.2 Strategies: Increase Opportunities for Children and Youth to Learn Law and Culture

- 1. Law and Culture is seen by local Aboriginal people as a major factor in ending the social problems in their communities. The Camp strongly called on the Federal and State governments to urgently fund Kapululangu and to support similar women’s cultural initiatives in other communities. This so that they are able to provide increased activities and events for young women to learn the Law (Indigenous philosophy) and Culture (practices) from their elders.
- 2. The Meeting strongly endorsed Kapululangu’s Circles of Cultural Learning project. This project would provide an innovative learning environment utilising a whole-of-life, whole-of-community framework based on traditional and contemporary learning processes. This framework caters for all age groups and support men and boys as well. It would include providing cultural programs and activities after-school and on weekends to Balgo’s children and youth. Women from Mulan and Kururrungku were interested in the project being extended to their communities as well.

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Discussion: Child Sexual Abuse and Violence Against Women and Children

Strategy: Safe House for Women and Children in Balgo; Improve Child Protection

2.1 Discussion: Child Sexual Abuse and Violence Against Women and Children.

- i. The Meeting was concerned about *“older men raping kids”* and suggested that this particularly happens after large community events such as *“after the football carnival”*.
- ii. Some women stressed that child sexual abuse wasn’t just for a problem for girls. Young boys are impacted as well.

- iii. Some girls and boys are relating in inappropriate ways. *“Some girls are chasing men, flirting with them, humbugging them”*. These young women are *“not leaving them [the boys] alone”*.
- iv. One of the difficulties in dealing with the problem of child sexual abuse is that *“older kids don’t tell their parents and grandparents”* because *“they’ve got too much shame”*.
- v. Whenever women are living at the Kapululangu Tjilimi (Women’s House) other women automatically seek refuge there to avoid or recover from family violence. This places those living at the Tjilimi (normally and predominantly elders) at risk of violence. Many women rightly see Kapululangu as their own organisation and having traditionally always used the Women’s Law Ground as a refuge, they naturally use Kapululangu whenever someone is living in the Tjilimi. Similarly, for a number of years, the Kutjungka Catholic Parish has also provided interim safe protection for short-term stays. Given that neither Kapululangu nor the Kutjungka Parish were established for this purpose or are funded for this purpose or their staff trained to provide this support, it is inappropriate for them to have to provide this support because the government(s) have not provided adequate and appropriate support services in Balgo. For Kapululangu to strive to provide this support places the services it should be providing and the women who use those services at risk.
- vi. The introduced child protection system has failed to build trust with much of the community, and thus women felt it has limited influence as a source of support. Comments made included, *“We need someone who is here and involved in the community”*; *“The office needs to be closer to the community – not all the way down at the police station”*; *“Women and children need to be able to get to the Child Protection worker whenever they need help”*; *“We need to have an Aboriginal woman worker”*; *“We need to have a woman and man for child protection.”*

2.2 Strategy: Safe House for Women and Children in Balgo; Improve Child Protection

- 3. Balgo needs to have a staffed Safe House where girls and boys can get protection and support if they are being sexually abused, and where women and children can avoid, escape or recover from family violence.
- 4. The Safe House could (with sufficient funding) be managed by Kapululangu and advised by a committee which includes local women elders, Kapululangu, Police, Clinic, Child Protection and/or other agencies. It should be staffed by skilled, qualified professionals and paid local Aboriginal women who are provided with appropriate training. The Safe House should be located separately from the Kapululangu *Tjilimi* (Women’s House) to protect women using that facility. It should be built near the police station to enhance the safety factor. Stays at the Safe House should be short term with clients provided with access to counselling and with assistance to leave the community as necessary.
- 5. The Child Protection worker should be encouraged to build trust through relationships developed by having more direct involvement with the community – i.e. take on an active community development role and be involved in running activities for the

children. There is advantage in the Child Protection position being held by two people – a woman and a man. Certainly not a man by himself. A specific request was made for an Aboriginal woman. The Child Protection office should be in the centre of Balgo town, and be easily accessible while providing privacy. That is, it should not be in the Police compound or the Wirrimanu Aboriginal Corporation Administration Office.

6. The community would benefit from the Child Protection system having more direct collaborative involvement with other agencies in town. While the need for client confidentiality is important this problem would benefit from a united, collaborative response which involves all of the agencies. For example, Luurnpa Catholic School staff could benefit from receiving increased training in this field as they work most directly with the children and are in a frontline position of responsibility for the young people. The Child Protection worker(s) and the Palyalatju Maparnpa youth workers could work together more closely. Palyalatju Maparnpa's work would be improved if it was provided with increased funding so that it was able to employ more than two youth workers and provide a fully equipped youth centre and activities.

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Discussion: Health factors are extremely poor in Balgo and the Kutjungka region

Strategy: Involve Indigenous healing methods; Provide better funded medical services

3.1 Discussion: Health factors are extremely poor in Balgo and the Kutjungka region

- i. *"When they get sick we take them to Women's Centre for healing – tjarrtjurra. Every Sunday, every Sunday."* Kapululangu elders complained that their *tjarrtjurra* (women's healing) skills weren't being fully recognised (*"respected"*) although they are called upon to provide their healing service to women, men and children on an almost weekly basis, and are always available to provide assistance in emergencies. Kapululangu elders are regularly approached by community women and men to provide *tjarrtjurra* healing for themselves or a relative. Women's healing ceremonies traditionally operate complementary to the healing services provided by the *maparn* (male healers). Kapululangu's elders rightfully hold a reputation in the community for being strong healers. The elders have repeatedly complained that they are not being adequately compensated for their services. The women elders feel that their skills and their Law (and thus their contribution) is at least equal to that provided by male healers (*maparn*) and that it is only fair that should be equally compensated. For the past year, Palyalatju Maparnpa Health Committee has helped Kapululangu by providing some funding to the women elders but it has limited resources. Consequently women are not compensated equal to the men and some of Kapululangu's healers feel this to be an insult to women's Law. The women elders want their services formally recognised as a significant and important contribution to the health of their community. They want to teach their *tjarrtjurra* skills to younger women so that women's healing methods can continue to benefit their community.
- ii. The Meeting identified the need for specialists coming to the Kutjungka region to *"stay longer – not just one day, not just one week"*. *"They run in and run away again,"* complained another woman. *"We need a dentist to come for a long time. We need counselling and a mental health specialist"* to be permanently positioned in Balgo.

3.2 Strategy: Involve Indigenous healing methods; Provide better funded medical services

7. Kapululangu to be funded so that it can provide a dedicated healing service so that traditional healing methods (female *tjarrtjurra* and male *maparn*) can become strong partners in the campaign to improve the health status of Aboriginal people in the Kutjungka communities.
8. *Tjarrtjurra* to be fully compensated for their healing services and for teaching their knowledge to younger female apprentices.
9. Kapululangu to work with Palyalatju Maparnpa to determine procedures by which *tjarrtjurra* (and *maparn*) can better work parallel to the services provided by the clinic. And whereby resident and visiting medical professionals can develop an increased understanding of the valuable work provided by the *tjarrtjurra* and *maparn*.
10. Kapululangu to invite Kartiya medical professionals to learn from their Aboriginal counterparts by participating in *tjarrtjurra* sessions (healing ceremonies).
11. Palyalatju Maparnpa and Balgo Clinic to be better funded to enable them to bring specialist health providers – including counsellors – to the communities for longer periods of time.

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Discussion: Alcohol and Drugs are causing tensions in the community

Strategy: Increase community cultural activities; Block access to alcohol and drugs

4.1 Discussion: Alcohol and Drugs are causing tensions in the community

- i. “*Women work for Law; men work for grog*”. The Meeting identified men as being more susceptible to alcohol than women and complained that this was an impediment to men engaging with Men’s Law (and was increasingly infringing on the annual Law Time ceremonies at Christmas). This compares with women organising for Law and Culture on a regular basis through Kapululangu, and perhaps eventually a male equivalent. Women clearly felt the weight of taking a large portion of the responsibility in maintaining the community’s Law and Culture heritage and of passing that knowledge on to younger generations. Overall they felt that alcohol impacts negatively on the ability of people to enjoy and sustain their cultural practices and to engage in Law ceremonies and related activities.
- ii. “*Drunkards are always coming to the card place to make trouble.*” Women make a direct link between alcohol abuse and violence against women and children, including child sexual assault. The “*card place*” is the gambling circle and the locus of core community social activity– in the absence of more life-affirming alternatives. Gambling tends to extend into the night, and attracts people who have too much to drink, disturbing others who are only out for a “*good time*”. Some women feel that they expend a lot of energy looking after relatives who are drunk. Some women complained

that “*drunkards*” place too much demand on limited resources – as one woman complained, “*Drunkards are always asking for help*”. People are regularly “*humbugged*” and kept awake all night by drunk relatives asking for food.

- iii. “*We didn’t bring our kids into the world to smoke guntja.*” The Meeting expressed great concern over youth using drugs. Women are concerned that “*drugs are destroying our young people*” – this includes children from the age of ten years who are also using drugs. In Balgo drugs have flooded into the vacuum created by the introduction of Opal Fuel which was successful in decreasing petrol sniffing. Petrol sniffing has recently reappeared in Balgo with four young boys recently found sniffing petrol: they were removed from the community. Petrol sniffing was the scourge of Balgo’s youth in 2000-2006 leading directly to suicide and suicidal attempts among youth.

4.2 Strategy: Increase community cultural activities; block access to alcohol and drugs

12. The Meeting called on increased Law and Culture activities so that the youth not only have an alternative activity to using drugs, but are encouraged to take pride in their cultural heritage to enhance their sense of self and strengthen self-esteem. Similarly, the provision of counselling services to children and youth to enable them to find more constructive ways of deal with their emotions.
13. The Meeting called on police to arrest people who bring in and sell alcohol and drugs in the communities. Women want the police to find more effective ways to block the importation of alcohol and drugs. Women are fed up with the chronic drinking and associated high levels of violence. They encourage police to arrest people who are drunk and causing trouble in the community.
14. The Meeting want greater restrictions placed on the selling of alcohol in Halls Creek and Rabbit Flat so that large quantities of alcohol can not be sold to people who are known to be purchasing alcohol for the purpose of selling it on in the communities.
15. One woman called on all women to go to Halls Creek to hold a protest march there, in full paintup regalia, to call for greater restrictions on alcohol by showing that women have strong Law and that men need to listen to them. It was suggested that women from Balgo, Mulan and Kururrungku hold a Meeting to discuss strategies to deal with the problems of youth and the use of drugs, alcohol and gambling.

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Discussion: Children and youth are disadvantaged by an extreme level of truancy

**Strategy: Strengthen parenting skills, elders’ authority and respect for Law;
Increase employment prospects, particularly for youth**

5.1 Discussion: Children and youth are disadvantaged by an extreme level of truancy

- i. “*Kids are hanging around the Store all day.*” “*Parents got to send their kids to school.*” The Meeting expressed concern that many children are not attending school. The

schools are experiencing an extremely high level of truancy. The Meeting wanted the children to go to school because they want them to learn to read and write better so that they have a chance at getting a job. Many strategies have been tried by the schools, but none have yet been found to be effective: *"The school bus goes around every day to pick kids up, but the school can't force kids to get on it."* Kids are stopped from going into the Store during school hours *"but they play holey-holey outside and wait for drinks and lollies"*. (Holey-holey is a game using coins.)

- ii. The Meeting was worried about the *"Secondary Kids"* who have given up on going to school. *"They are sitting around doing nothing, getting into too much trouble"* – and the young women are *"getting pregnant too early"*. Women are concerned about youth turning to drugs and alcohol: *"They need help so they don't think about suicide."* *"We need to give our young men and women a future."* They wanted the young men and women to be provided with employment and other activities (including Law and Culture) so that they have something meaningful to do with their lives and don't turn to alcohol and drugs.
- iii. *"Kids are out all night doing anything they like. Their parents only think for grog, smoke guntja and play cards"*. Children aged seven and sometimes younger are left to roam freely at night. They hang out in *"gangs"* which entertain themselves by breaking into and trashing buildings and committing other petty crimes. There is concern that the *"kids will end up going to prison"*. It was felt that this was happening because *"Parents aren't looking after their kids properly. They're too busy gambling and watching TV."* Many children are being raised without the active involvement of their parents. Some parents have moved to Halls Creek or another large town where they can more easily access alcohol. The children are left in the care of their grandmothers who are often not supported in providing this care. Some parents are *"wasting all the kids' money. [And the] Kids going hungry."* Gambling results in money which should be spent on buying food for children being lost on cards. It is also tied to alcohol and drug use. The Meeting wants to see parents take more responsibility for their children.
- iv. Disciplining the children is a major problem as other people can't tell the children what to do because they *"might get growled"* by the child's parents. Consequently *"no one has control over the kids, especially when they do wrong things"*. The traditional processes of authority are breaking down leaving children to go freely without constraint and discipline. This is happening because children and young people are losing their respect for their elders. As one woman elder put it, *"Elders haven't got the right any more, to tell kids what to do"*. The bullying of teachers was a widespread problem for many schools. It was thought that this problem was linked to many children suffering from a general lack of respect for parents, elders, family and other authority – a lack of discipline. The Meeting felt that this was happening because *"The people are losing their culture"*.
- v. Discipline and respect for authority is breaking down in Balgo because (in part) the elders have been systematically marginalised through the dominance of Kartiya structures and the long-term Kartiya propensity to install "middle-aged" men and women as *"community leaders"*. When the elders are left without prominent roles in the community, respect for them breaks down and Indigenous patterns of authority fail to operate. The practice of Kartiya to choose or encourage younger people to self-

appointing as leaders because they are the more able to operate along Kartiya methods of communication and accountability provides more efficiency for Kartiya people and their systems but undermines Indigenous methods of operation. Consequently, people lose respect for their own Indigenous systems and structures, and for the authorities which provide individual and collective discipline.

5.2 Strategy: Strengthen parenting skills, elders' authority and respect for Law;
Increase employment prospects, particularly for youth

16. Better parenting skills need to be encouraged. The majority of Balgo's middle-aged generation were raised in the missionary's dormitories without parenting themselves. They need to receive counselling and other support to enable them to better provide for their children. Issues such as alcohol, drugs and gambling also need to be addressed.
17. The Meeting felt that it was important to re-establish the authority of the elders (male and female) and build respect among younger members of the community for the elders. This could be achieved by having them more involved in leadership roles in the community. To this end it is essential that all agencies work towards the fullest inclusion of elders in their projects, wherever possible. Kapululangu and Warlayirti Art and Culture Centre are agencies which centralise elders; other agencies might consider how they could better include the elders.
18. The Meeting discussed using Law and Culture as an incentive to get kids to go to school. "*Kapululangu can do culture camps but only for kids who go to school*". Children might be encouraged to go to school if Kapululangu ties its activities to kids having to attend school to participate. This strategy relies on Kapululangu being re-established as a creative learning environment for children and young women. (This strategy has been successfully trialled in at least one NT community.)
19. Children are more likely to attend school if they feel that it leads to employment. At the moment there is very little opportunity for real employment in Balgo and the vast majority of positions are filled by Kartiya. Employment possibilities need to be developed, and they need to be structured to be inclusive of local cultural needs. Developing real employment opportunities for all adult residents (including elders) will enable children to see some benefit in going to school, and allow young people to set realistic and achievable personal goals. The Wirrimanu Adult Education and Training Centre, for example, could receive increased financial support as the key training facility in the development of employment prospects in the community. This would enable it to provide on-the-job training for young men and women as apprentices (such as mechanics and plumbers). Wirrimanu Aboriginal Corporation (WAC) could be restructured as an employment centre. At the moment WAC struggles to encourage local residents to take up CDEP employment because it does not pay a full wage and there are few other incentives for workers. Warlayirti Art and Culture Centre remains the only local business in the Kutjungka region providing the sole source of income which is not Centre-Link payments or mining royalties. Warlayirti and Kapululangu need to be better funded and resourced to establish tourism ventures in the Kutjungka region.

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Discussion: Limited Community Identity is Undermining Balgo's Future

Strategy: Build pride in Aboriginality through Community Cultural Development

6.1 Discussion: Limited Community Identity is Undermining Balgo's Future

- i. *"We need to be one community, one mob." "All the people need to work together – not from different tribes."* The Meeting expressed that many of the problems in Balgo stem from different language groups refusing to work together, and from tensions and feuds between family groups. They saw the need for everyone to work together if Balgo is to overcome its problems.
- ii. *"Parents don't worry about their kids, but if other people worry about their kids, then some parents will beat up those people for interfering."* Community residents feel disempowered to improve the situation facing the children and youth, particularly to stop child sexual abuse and violence against women and children. They are concerned that if they *"interfere"* they will place themselves or their families at risk of retaliation with charges of becoming involved in other people's business. This is a very real fear and, consequently, people are very guarded about what they become involved in. This personal tendency not to get involved in what is perceived as being *"other people's business"* often manifests as people not becoming involved in communal activities. Kartiya see this as lethargy, or *"laziness"*, without understanding the cultural logic behind it.
- iii. *"Old people have got the right to talk about the issues without being hurt by other people."* Some participants suggested that the women and male elders were positioned to be more able to implement solutions to collective tensions. Kapululangu women elders are often positioned to take collective action to deal with the myriad issues in their community in a way that individual women are not. Unfortunately, they lack the support of many "middle-aged" and younger women who underestimate the contribution the elders could make. The reason for this being that the elders are seldom positioned as the community leaders which is their right by virtue of their custodian relationship with the Law.
- iv. Training Indigenous residents in Kartiya governance procedures is an important step but will repeatedly fail if it ignores the history of Balgo and the powerful machinations of its internal socio-political structures. The history of the Wirrimanu Aboriginal Corporation needs to be taken into account. WAC, as an entity, has a 24 year record (1983 to 2007) of mismanagement and sometimes corruption and has still to prove itself capable of engaging meaningfully with the local Aboriginal community. Barriers to good governance have been able to persist because of government (Federal and State) bureaucratic inertia often operating to an extreme of negligence. Much of the disaffection in the community is the direct cause of the inability of Kartiya political structures to operate efficiently and effectively in Balgo and in way that are inclusive of Indigenous structures, philosophies and practices. Unless improvements and protections can be developed on the Kartiya side as well as the Aboriginal side the problems of poor governance will persist. Without culturally appropriate mechanisms in place the community will remain at risk of the historical malfunction continuing

unabated. This failure is apparent in the crumbling infrastructure and the disrepair of overcrowded houses. It is glaringly present in the lack of interest among Indigenous residents to be involved in the administration and maintenance of their physical community. Most residents prefer to spend their busy lives actively engaged in pursuits in the Aboriginal domain rather than involve themselves in what they perceive to be the Kartiya domain where they have limited power and gain little benefit.

6.2 Strategy: Build pride in Aboriginality through Community Cultural Development

20. Real community development needs to be rolled out in Balgo. It needs to be community cultural development which involves local people directly in improving the social and physical infrastructure of Balgo. For a true community development program to succeed it needs to be embedded in Indigenous concepts and ways of working, and this includes having a core reference to Aboriginal Law and Culture philosophies and practices. This would encourage the full involvement of the elders – male and female – and would strengthen the self-esteem and pride in Aboriginality of all residents.
21. Efforts to re-establish the Balgo Local Council must ensure that the key administrative positions are filled by people holding high level community development and cross-cultural communication qualifications and have a proven track-record of utilising these skills. These personnel should be closely monitored and removed from the position if they cannot deliver. To this end, local Aboriginal people (including elders) must be on the employment selection panels and involved in monitoring the employee on an ongoing basis. It is important to recruit from outside the normal circle of re-cycling community administrators which have dogged the remote communities for decades. The revamped Local Council (expected in November 2007) must involve the elders positioned not in a nominal advisory role but as a senate required to pass all directives on matters related to the social aspects of the community, including those with the potential to impact on Law and Culture.
22. *“We’re tired of all these people flying in and nothing happens.”* External agencies including government departments must take their lead from locally based agencies. It is inappropriate for government and externally-based personnel to make decisions which impact on the local community, particularly in the social and cultural domains. Locally based agencies work most closely with the local community and are therefore more likely to be actively involved with on-the-ground strategies which are or could be implemented by local people. Historically, community development in Balgo has been consistently burdened by the inertia of the bureaucratic systems that many externally employed people are engaged in and accountable to. Balgo residents have watched consultants and government employees fly into the community for short periods and, often after failing to meet with the Aboriginal representatives, particularly the elders, fly out again to design policies which often take years to implement, if they are implemented at all.

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Discussion: **Violence and crimes remain high, children particularly impacted**
Strategy: **Strengthen policing; Increase community involvement in crime prevention**

7.1 Discussion: Violence and crimes remain high, children particularly impacted

- i. *"Police are helping the community become a better place."* The Meeting was happy that there is a permanent police presence in the Kutjungka region, based in Balgo. The Kutjungka/Tjurabalan communities lobbied for the permanent presence for many long years – 1999 through 2003/5. The permanent police presence has contributed to improving the level of safety in the communities (as compared to 1999-2001 for example). There was appreciation for the current officers who are widely recognised as being *"good men"*.
- ii. *"Lotta woman they too frightened to tell police."* Much violence takes place which is not reported to the police. Many women are reluctant to report their drunken men to the police because they are afraid of being punished by the man or by their families for getting him in trouble. This problem would be overcome by providing a staffed Safe House for women and children and a viable and effective Warden Scheme.
- iii. *"We want police to block grog and throw it on the ground."* Women are desperate for the police to take a more consistent and pro-active role in stopping alcohol and drugs from being brought into the communities and stopping drunk people from causing fights in the communities. *"Drunk-fights"* are a constant event; they frighten the women and children and make it impossible for everyone to sleep well as night: *"If we don't give them food they might get angry"*. Women want the police to stop the *"drunkards"* from travelling between communities selling grog and drugs and *"making trouble"*.
- iv. *"We got strong Law too. Police need to follow our Law too."* Police officers need to be strongly engaged with the community and have strong local knowledge and cultural awareness. This can be achieved by officers actively working with the elders and encouraging a greater involvement with Indigenous Law as a means of sorting out minor problems. Increased receptivity by police for community methods of dealing with violence and crime would enhance local residents' confidence in their own ability to prevent violence and crime. Policing would benefit if all police officers received cross-cultural training prior to and throughout their engagements. The benefits of policing are undermined when culturally unschooled police officers react to community situations by being unnecessarily aggressive.
- v. *"We need more police."* *"People know when the police aren't about, and that's when they cause problems."* The Meeting expressed a need for more police officers to be based in the Kutjungka region, at least one officer in each of the three communities. They feel that two police officers are not enough to cater for the amount of violence and disturbance in the entire region. They understand that police need to sleep too – *"They can't chase after people all the time"*. Stationing more police in the region would provide both the police officers and the community with the support that they need.
- vi. *"We want a woman policeman."* *"We want Aboriginal police."* *"We want an Aboriginal police woman."* The Meeting called for at least one woman officer and one Aboriginal police officer to be permanently stationed in the Kutjungka region, this to include a

least one Aboriginal woman officer. This could greatly benefit female residents as they would feel more able to approach an Aboriginal woman officer to report their problems. The Meeting warned that “*girls are hiding the drugs in their panties and socks*” anticipating that male police are less likely to find them.

- vii. “*We gotta have Wardens. They gotta help the police.*” The Meeting recognised that Balgo needs to have a functioning Warden system to assist the police. The Wardens program would operate more efficiently if local men and women were properly trained and paid for the position and properly backed up by police officers. Police should have safeguards in place to ensure that Wardens are people who don’t drink: “*Some Wardens are drunkards themselves*”. Wardens should be used in a preventative and reporting role only; local cultural restrictions mean that they cannot be expected to break up fights. Female and male elders to have a role in overseeing the Warden Scheme.
- viii. “*Kids want more discos and sport.*” There is a need for an increased focus on social-policing such as the staging of or involvement in community events. This would help police build more active relationships with community members, particularly the children and youth. Police could help in staging cultural activities with other agencies such as Kapululangu.
- ix. “*We worrying for all our men in prison.*” The Meeting expressed the concern that women have for their relatives who are in prison. They are worried that the young men of their families tend to spend at least some time in prison. The elders feel that the young men are “*lost*” because they haven’t been raised strong in the Law. Women are concerned that their menfolk need to be re-engaged in the community. If the Law was able to take a more active role in guiding young people there would be less problems in the communities.

7.2 Strategy: Strengthen policing; Increase community involvement in crime prevention

- 23. Increase the police presence in the Kutjungka region, including female and Aboriginal officers and at least one female Aboriginal officer. All communities to have at least one permanently placed officer.
- 24. Police are encouraged to take a more pro-active role in eradicating alcohol and drugs from the community, including actively blocking people from bringing alcohol and drugs into the communities. This includes restricting the capacity of people who are aggressively drunk from harming others in the community.
- 25. Police officers to receive cross-cultural training prior to and throughout their engagements. Police could be advised in culturally-safe behaviour by the Kapululangu elders, for example.
- 26. Re-establish a viable Warden Scheme as a means of supporting police to prevent and report violence and crimes in the communities. The Warden Scheme is encouraged to employ both women and men. It could benefit from being overseen by a committee including male and female elders. Wardens could assist with social-policing by running

regular activities for children and youth – this in collaboration with other agencies such as Palyalatju Maparnpa and Kapululangu.

27. To provide more support and safety for the women and children, the police could be involved in the provision of a Safe House in Balgo working in close collaboration with Kapululangu.
28. Police are encouraged to accommodate the Indigenous Law methods of crime prevention and the punishment of petty crimes among children and youth. The Warden Scheme, Kapululangu Aboriginal Women's Association and other local agencies to provide advice on this matter to the police.