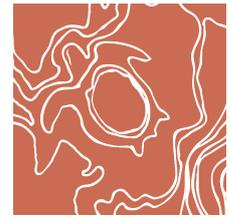


# CASE STUDY 6

## Ngali Ngalim Purru



**INDUSTRY:** Community development

### **THE PROJECT:**

The Ngali Ngalim Purru women's cultural organisation was established and incorporated in 2003 in memory of Queenie 'Mingmarriya' McKenzie, to keep women's culture alive in the community. The women's cultural practices had ceased after Queenie's death and, four years later, were still not being practised. The aim of the organisation was to provide a tangible and recognised community cultural organisation to be managed by the women, who would receive the revenue from the book about Queenie McKenzie, and which would drive cultural rehabilitation.

The objectives of Ngali Ngalim Purru were:

- that Ngali Ngalim Purru remains fully owned by Gija women (Gija being their language)
- to develop sustainable economic enterprises that support, and enable the aims of, Ngali Ngalim Purru
- to develop a forum for Ngali Ngalim Purru women to discuss their cultural, economic and social concerns
- to foster women's participation in community councils, regional councils and other state, national and international organisations that could assist Ngali Ngalim Purru
- to promote and support the cultural achievements, authority and rights of the women
- to establish a business office and centre for Ngali Ngalim Purru within the community
- to establish enterprise opportunities for the women and their families
- to foster support for the women and their cultural practices, in particular, supporting the women's ability to pass on these practices on to children and youth
- to provide opportunities for the women that foster their health and wellbeing, like spending time out bush collecting medicines
- to create partnerships for Ngali Ngalim Purru to maximise their opportunities with government, private enterprise, other community organisations and non-government organisations
- to provide networking opportunities for the women to minimise the effects of their remoteness, such as access to current information and resources
- to provide opportunities for educating others about the women's culture, as this was a high tourism area.

### **THE BACKGROUND:**

In late 1998, the women of Warmun Community lost their cultural leader, Queenie McKenzie. Queenie was the person who revived women's cultural practices in the early 1980s following the impacts of white settlement. Four years after Queenie passed away, those cultural practices remained inactive. Jennifer Joi Field had a long association with the women and after Queenie's death she facilitated the first meeting for the women to discuss their cultural situation and the impact that Queenie's death had on them. Several meetings later, the women came to the decision to establish a women's cultural organisation to carry on Queenie's ambition to 'keep culture strong'.

### **THE ACTIONS UNDERTAKEN:**

Jennifer loved to see the strengthening of the older women and frequently observed that they were happiest when undertaking the cultural practices that were important to them, such as gathering bush medicine or singing their stories. The difference in their demeanour was remarkable when they returned to the bush.

Because of this, Jennifer wanted to find ways to support the elder women to have more opportunities to celebrate their cultural identity while also bringing them other benefits. The women also felt highly responsible for passing on their cultural knowledge to their young people, particularly to the girls, as that was their responsibility. Jennifer appreciated that the young girls were in a situation where they were trapped by the impact of westernisation and the modern world, and the effect that seemed to have on their identity, yet she also appreciated that it was necessary for these girls to be able to relate to both worlds. Jennifer and the older women discussed the opportunities that were available to them away from the community, and suggested they all go on a trip to see what others were doing to introduce them to new ideas. As they were so isolated, they needed to see what other Aboriginal communities were achieving so they could develop relationships with them, learn from their experiences, and make better-informed decisions about what to do with their new organisation.

## **CHALLENGES**

The women and Jennifer went on several trips to other states to look at Aboriginal organisations and businesses, as illustrated in the photo gallery below. After each new visit they returned to their community full of ideas and inspiration; they wanted to create businesses.

The biggest challenge came when the women received their first funding payment. In an impoverished community the payment caused jealousy, including amongst some of the non-Indigenous staff in the community who were used to working with disempowered women and struggled to see them take control. This situation of jealousy presented a real challenge to the older women's leadership and their decision to establish the cultural organisation. If this type of situation had occurred before the breakdown of their traditional system of governance (Aboriginal Law) it would have been dealt with accordingly and the elder women would have restored their balance and leadership. However, the impact of white settlement, and the fact that this type of community is nearly always 'managed' by non-Indigenous people had a big impact on how this issue played out.

They were all senior women, but the breakdown in Indigenous governance processes meant that, when challenged about their 'win' with the funding, the elder women did not feel they could assert themselves to those who argued that the money was meant for other purposes. This also presented a challenge for Jennifer in her role as the person who worked to facilitate the women's objectives. The 'Council' of the community (who were predominantly older Aboriginal people) respected the leadership of the women, and did not intervene in the challenge to their leadership, as that would be disrespectful.

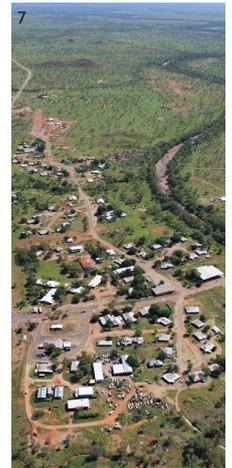
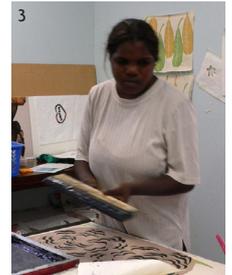
However, the community's predominantly non-Indigenous administrative staff did not have that respect for, or understanding of, the protocols that were being challenged, especially as the turnover of staff was so frequent that there was no time for them to learn about the community's cultural norms, even if there was a willingness to do so. The older women had spent tens of years being controlled by the authority of 'white people', and were in personal conflict as to how to best try to assert themselves in the new cultural mix.

## **OUTCOMES:**

Despite the challenges, Jennifer has sustained her relationship with the female leaders of this group for more than 15 years. She has had to learn to let go of the older women's dreams and instead provide the space for the young women to take the project and the funding in a new direction. Regardless, the project achieved what it was meant to: the elder women wanted to strengthen themselves and pass Ngali Ngalim Purru to the younger women. Across Australia the last generations of Aboriginal women who remember learning from their elders in their traditional lands, such as the women Jennifer has worked with for so long, are quickly disappearing, and in many situations the knowledge they take with them will never be available to future generations.

## **FUTURE:**

Ngali Ngalim Purru was always intended to benefit the women and their community by creating new opportunities and ventures. Since the project began in 2003, several of the elder women have passed away. It is now up to the younger women to take over; to use the royalties from the book for their cultural activities, and to do what was so important to Queenie and the other elders: to *keep culture strong*.



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**Uses:**  
When experiencing forgetfulness or feeling too distracted - this plant aids in problems of the mind.

**Bush Medicine**  
Jukuru - Bush Orange

**Ingredients:**  
Beeswax  
100% Olive Oil  
Jukuru leaf

NGALI NGALIM PURRU ABORIGINAL INC.

**Uses:**  
Fever In Children  
Sinus  
**External Use Only**  
Apply to chest or sinus area

**BUSH MEDICINE**

**Ingredients:**  
Beeswax  
100% Olive Oil  
Manyanangin

NGALI NGALIM PURRU ABORIGINAL INC.

**Uses:**  
Colds & Flu  
Backache & Pains  
**External Use Only**  
Rub on chest or area of pain

**Bush Medicine**  
Pirlinyji - Eucalypt Family

**Ingredients:**  
Beeswax  
100% Olive Oil  
Pirlinyji Leaf

NGALI NGALIM PURRU ABORIGINAL INC.



1. Women visit a wildlife park to look at ideas.
2. Women visit the National Museum.
3. Screenprinting workshops for women.
4. Gija women visit the Kadadu Visitors Centre.
5. Cross Cultural Craft – Timor and Aboriginal women.
6. Community organisations.
7. The Warmun community.
8. Jennifer and Peggy.
9. Group.
10. Two mayors and a law woman.
11. Women visit the Weribee Zoo for ideas.
12. Planning.
13. Stakeholder negotiations – women trying to get permanent access to their ceremonial grounds inside a cattle station.
14. Bush medicine labels.

