

## An ARDS approach to Family Violence



## ARDS Family Violence project 2015-18: Final Report

**August 2018**

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# 1. Introduction

## The ARDS Family Violence project

This project worked with Yolŋu Aboriginal people of north-east Arnhem Land in the major communities of Milingimbi, Ramingining, Galiwin'ku, Gapuwiyak, Yirrkala and Gunyaŋara.

The project built on the ARDS previous education and resource development on Family Violence over a number of years. In particular this project utilised the ARDS cycle of Family Violence radio plays and cycle of Family Violence poster "nhaliy ŋayi ŋuli wiyin märramany" poster exploring the cycle of Family Violence and parallels with the cycle of seasons.

The poster and radio plays were used by a team of ARDS facilitators, one Yolŋu female, and one non-Indigenous male, in workshops to stimulate dialogue and discussion regarding this sensitive topic utilising the strengths and cultural knowledge inbuilt within the Yolŋu system of kinship (gurrutu).

The aims of this project were to:

- Increase awareness and discussion of family violence issues
- Educate Yolŋu about the damage caused by family violence to family structures and whole communities.
- Empower Yolŋu and support them in consolidating traditional structures that have successfully protected families from family violence in the past.
- Increase Yolŋu understanding of the way that Family Violence is regarded under Australian Law, and the services available to provide support.

## Background

Family Violence is an issue that has gained more prominent attention in recent years across Australia, with a renewed media and political focus after decades as a silent issue hidden from the public sphere.

While this is an issue that affects people across the full spectrum of social and cultural backgrounds, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are one population group for whom the experience of Family Violence is more common than the overall Australian population.

Across Australia one in 7 Aboriginal women experience physical Family Violence each year (AIHW 2018), with Aboriginal women and men 32 and 23 times more likely to be hospitalised as a result of Family Violence when compared to non-Indigenous people.

Underlying this issue are high levels of socio-economic disadvantage and social stressors which are known to be risk factors for Family Violence, including poverty, financial stress, unemployment, low educational attainment and crowded housing; Family Violence is considered both a cause and effect of social disadvantage and intergenerational trauma (AIHW2018).

Additionally in the remote and very remote context Family Violence amongst Aboriginal people is more common than in urban and major regional areas.

There is a broad understanding that programs to address Family Violence need to have a strong cultural foundation and be delivered as part of a broad program addressing the needs of individuals

and the community. Yet there remains a lack of data to appropriately monitor the success of Family Violence programs both within an Indigenous and a non-Indigenous context.

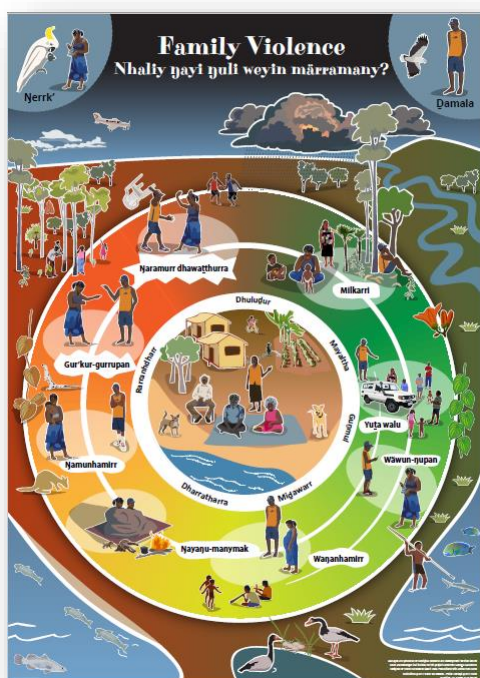
It is in this context within which the ARDS Family Violence program has operated over the last decade. This report will document the nature of ARDS educational workshops on Family Violence during the three year period July 2015 – June 2018.

The report will incorporate the underpinning project methodology and implementation, while exploring some of the key learnings of the project and opportunities for further work in the Family Violence space with Aboriginal people in remote areas.

Information within this report was obtained by looking through project documentation available within the Family Violence project on the ARDS server, and through semi-structured interviews with key project staff. The project documents available included the 6 monthly reports that were submitted and reflections (of the first field trip), a word list which had been compiled, and the project agreement; semi-structured interviews were held with the project co-facilitators (one of whom was the project manager for the first 2.5 years of the project), and informal discussions with the current project manager.

## The Cycle of Family Violence poster and radio plays

ARDS have been working with Yolŋu regarding Family Violence for over a decade, developing educational radio programs and undertaking face-to-face education regarding the topic with Yolŋu in their first language.



In 2013, building on the success of ARDS *Djetpu* *dhäwu mala* radio plays and using an idea initially conceptualised by Gawuŋu Garrawurra, ARDS developed a series of radio plays and accompanying poster which explored the cyclical nature of Family violence and the parallel's with the Yolŋu cycle of seasons.

Development of the radio plays and poster were led by ARDS Yolŋu staff with a range of support staff, to ensure content that is meaningful, relevant and comfortable for the Yolŋu target audience.

This extensive body of work overlays the fictional story of two characters and their family onto the cycle of seasons as the fictional characters go through a journey of new beginnings, happiness, rising tension, violence, sorrow and healing. The radio plays and poster were developed as a resource that could be used by skilled facilitators as a safe, non-threatening way to stimulate dialogue and discussion regarding the issue of Family Violence in Yolŋu communities. The

content of the radio plays are summarised in Appendix A.

## 2. The Project

Through 2015-2018 ARDS undertook a series of workshops with Yolŋu in the major communities of north-east Arnhem Land. A pair of ARDS facilitators, one Yolŋu woman and one non-Indigenous male (fluent in Yolŋu Matha) travelled to each of the communities and used the poster and radio plays as resources to stimulate dialogue and discussion regarding Family Violence in a safe and non-threatening way.

Workshops were held during week long field trips to each of the following communities: Milingimbi (twice), Ramingining (twice), Galiwin'ku (once), Gapuwiyak (twice) and Nhulunbuy/ Yirrkala/ Gunyangara (once).

A total of 37 workshops were held with a combined total of 404 Yolŋu participants, with workshops lasting up to four hours.

The goal of workshops was to utilise the cycle of Family Violence poster and radio plays to stimulate discussion around the topic in a safe and non-threatening way. The workshops sought to build on the extensive strengths incorporated within the Yolŋu systems of law and use this as a foundation on which to explore possibilities for resolving relationship difficulties and conflict. The project methodology is explored further below.

Towards the end of the project, ARDS sought to capture and preserve some of the key ideas developed in the project by producing:

- A resource about yolŋu strength-based approaches to family violence centred on *gurrutu* (kinship). This will increase capacity for ARDS and others to provide culturally appropriate support for people involved in family violence. This will particularly assist non-Indigenous practitioners working in the Family Violence space;
- Radio programs explaining DVO's, following the same storyline which was ultimately included in the workshops;
- This comprehensive Final Report of the project for use as a future reference. This report includes a complete summary of the project, key learnings, and an evaluation of the successes and limitations of the project.

### Project Methodology

The methodology used for this project closely mirrors the educational methodology used by ARDS, which incorporates elements of community development, applied linguistics, adult education and cross-cultural communication, and which draws strongly on the work of Paolo Freire.

Some of the key components of the educational methodology used by ARDS require stepping across the massive cross-cultural divide between non-Indigenous people and Aboriginal people in remote areas. Specific features of this include working in peoples first language, when and where they are comfortable,

#### *Non-interventional*

Because of the sensitive nature of this topic, and in order to support open and honest dialogue, the project was intentionally non-interventional. The project was considered a primary prevention and education project, with the goal of stimulating dialogue and discussion around Family Violence.

Workshops were held with general community members who were interested, with participants including elders, community leaders, younger adults, employed and unemployed. People affected by Family Violence were able to participate of their own accord, but no specific focus or attention was made to individual circumstances.

#### *Fictional characters*

The workshops focussed on a fictional but distinctly Yolŋu couple to generate discussion regarding their circumstances and the broader system of Yolŋu kinship and gurrutu within which the couple and their children lie within.

#### *Co-facilitators*

The co-facilitators for the project were one Yolŋu female, and one non-Indigenous male who is fluent in Yolŋu Matha. This gave gender and cultural balance to the team of facilitators. The role of facilitators was to stimulate discussion and provide some guidance for the discussion. The co-facilitators placed themselves as learners within the process as well as taking notes and responding to questions about Australian systems of law regarding Family Violence, in particular Domestic Violence Orders (DVO's).

#### *Single gender groups*

Because of the significant role of gender within these discussions, the majority of workshops were held in single gender groups with the ARDS co-facilitators. Mixed gender workshops were held only where specific circumstances favoured this option (such as a mens and womens group coming together to share their discussions following gender separated discussion).

While the ARDS co-facilitators were present throughout the workshops, the composition of the ARDS team allowed the possibility for one of the co-facilitators to step out of the room for part of the discussion if that was deemed appropriate by the participants.

#### *Strengths based approach*

The workshops focussed on using the strengths incorporated within the Yolŋu system of law as the foundation for subsequent discussion regarding Family Violence. In particular this focussed on kinship/ gurrutu and Yolŋu law regarding marriage and relationships, and the inbuilt protective mechanisms and pathways for dealing with and resolving conflict in a Family Violence context.

With the guidance of the co-facilitators, participants explored the foundations of gurrutu, reciprocity, respectful relationships and avoidance, interconnectedness, interclan relationships through children, wetj, munhdhurr and milmarra.

#### *Yolŋu led discussion*

The discussion was primarily led and directed by the Yolŋu participants, with some guidance and encouragement from the co-facilitators, so the content was directed and owned by participants and able to follow relevant pathways as necessary. The discussion was able to focus on Yolŋu priorities and concerns, and explore Yolŋu questions in relation to Australian law - there was no pre-conceived notion of goals, targets or key learning objectives.

#### *Working in first language*

Workshops were conducted in peoples first language, Yolŋu Matha, with Plain English where necessary. This allowed the thinking and discussion to be embedded within a foundation of Yolŋu language which fundamentally reflects Yolŋu worldview.

### *Facilitators as learners, Yolŋu as teachers*

The co-facilitators placed themselves as learners in each workshop, ready and willing to learn about Yolŋu systems of law. This included new words, concepts and approaches to exploring Yolŋu kinship and gurrutu.

This allowed Yolŋu leaders to emerge within each workshop, usually more senior members of the group. The leaders were able to fulfill a role as teacher for younger participants and the facilitators.

## **Project Planning**

The project was held over a 3 year period and incorporated two stages. Due to the vagaries of the weather and availability of people, field trips were scheduled only during the dry season from March through to December.

Extensive planning and communication of ARDS Family Violence included informing and discussing the project with key stakeholders, such as Aboriginal and Family violence legal services NAAJA and NAAFVLS, Government Engagement Coordinators, ALPA and the RJCP coordinators, East Arnhem Regional Council and the Local Authority's, local Elders and community leaders.

Flexibility within the project approach and the extensive communication with key stakeholders opened up the opportunity for field trips to take place simultaneously with bush court. This meant the project was able to respond to legal process and specific questions of Yolŋu relating to court and DVO's. This ultimately led to a separate project conducted by ARDS and NAAJA to undertake legal education in Ramingining. It also allowed later in the project for ARDS to specifically plan to avoid bush court, as this was a time in remote communities when people who would otherwise be keen participants, were pre-occupied with the processes around court.

The two stages of the project involved education (stage one), followed by identifying Yolŋu initiated solutions to Family Violence (stage 2). The flexibility of the project allowed ARDS to incorporate stage 2 into the project throughout the 3 year period, as a reflection of the nature of the dialogue which emerged in workshops.

Prior to and again during each field trip contact was made with key stakeholders in each community, with suitable times and locations for workshops often negotiated with community members upon arrival in each community.

Consideration was given to plan around gender and kinship issues that were anticipated, with equal opportunity for workshops involving female and male participants.

Workshops were open for any community members to attend, and participants were free to come and go during the workshops.

## **What the workshops looked like in practice**

### *Icebreaker as a starting point*

At the beginning of each workshop, particularly early during the project and during each field trip participants commenced unsure of what to expect. As an introduction to each workshop the co-facilitators referred to the cycle of Family



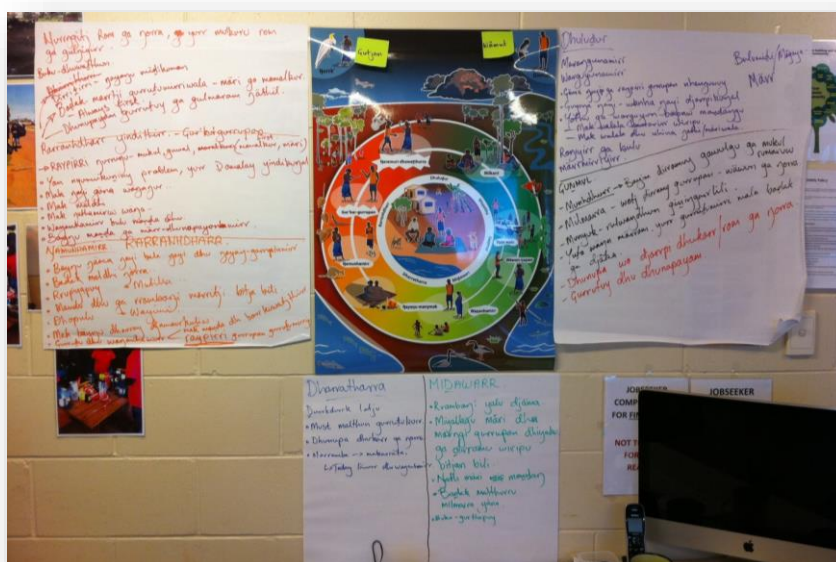
Violence poster and asked people to identify the characters in the centre of the poster – the cartoon images based on four of the people who were instrumental in the development of the concept and resources.

*Poster and Radio plays as the key point of reference*

The cycle of Family Violence Poster was placed on the wall, with butchers paper placed on either side and below the Poster.

Using a small speaker connected to a phone/ media source, the group listened to each episode of the radio play. Following each episode the group would stop to talk about what they'd heard, and wrote key points up on the butchers paper alongside the relevant part of the poster. The non-Indigenous facilitator strategically positioned himself as a learner, and both of the co-facilitators would ask a few questions at the end of each episode to stimulate discussion.

Various people would then explain some of the important concepts relevant to that episode. The more senior people in the room were invariably the people that led the discussion and teaching of these important concepts, teaching both the younger participants and the co-facilitators.



*Key Yolŋu concepts as part of the Family Violence story*

Concepts drawn from the Yolŋu worldview such as milmarra, märr, raypirri and gurrutu/ kinship were explored during these discussions.

Some of the key concepts that were discussed after listening to each part of the radio plays are described here. This is however merely a brief summary of concepts which are rich and detailed within the Yolŋu worldview.

- **Gunmul**

*Munhdurr* – Gift. This is a gift that the man gives to the parents of his promised wife to show he is capable of maintaining his responsibilities to his mothers and wife's clan.

*Milmarra* – Promised marriage system. The man's *märi mala* and *momalkur* decide on a correct pathway for marriage, taking into account the broader context of interclan alliances and relationships.

*Munyuk/ Yinipi* – marking of the mother-in-laws belly. This is the ceremonial process where a man marks the belly button of his future mother-in-law, thereby promising to look after that woman's daughter (his future wife).

*Wetj* – Gifts given to start a gift giving relationship.

*Dhawu'* - the promise in the promised marriage system. The man is able to care and provide for his mothers and wives clan.

- **Midawarr**

*Raypirri* – respect/ discipline. Strict discipline, and the subsequent following of the straight path.

*Yarraṯa* – the spine, the intergenerational connections through the maternal line.

*Yothuy dhä-manapana märram bäpurrunha* - the child is what really brings the two clans together. The child follows the fathers clan, but also carries law and responsibility for his mothers clan and through the maternal line.

- **Dharratharra**

*Djäga dirramu dhu miyalkku* – the man will look after the woman while she is pregnant.

*Rumbi nhäma* – to pay close attention/ to look closely from every angle

- **Rarranhdarr**

*Märr-nhirpanaminyawuy* – trust

*Wetj roṅanmaram* – taking back the gift that was given for family

*Makmakthunamiriw* – acting without respect

Family and friends can be a great source of help and support if the couple are having difficulties.

*Märi'mirriṅuy dhu raypirri-gurrupan maṅdanha* – The *märi* for each of the couple are the family who enforce discipline and respect.

- **Dhuluḍur**

*Bulmiḍi* and *mägaya* – peaceful/ smooth path

*Märr* – honour/ spiritual credit

*Märrmirriyanamirr* – have the personal quality of building his or her honour

*Liya-gulinybunhamirr* – self-reflection, to revise ones own behaviour.

*Wuyunamirr* – sympathy, compassion

*Warwuyun* - There is also a lot of worry, the man is worried for his wife and children, but also of consequences through the police and court system.

- **Mayaltha**

*Ṇayaṅumirr* – to be strong of spirit and heart

*Loḷu* – safe area

*Bulu Ṇayi dhu roṅiyirri romlili märryu* – it is by restoring his honour and spiritual credit that a person will return to a lawful pathway.

*Wurrurṅuy dhu dhä-manapana maṅdanha* – Old people will know when it is time to reunite.

### 3. Key Learnings and Discussion

This section reflects on what has been learnt throughout the project. While it includes some learning with specific regard to content and Yolŋu understandings of Family Violence in the contemporary context, this section focuses more strongly on the project methodology that was used and some discussion regarding the strengths and limitations of the specific approach used by ARDS in the project.

Yolŋu were strongly supportive of this work and the workshops. While initially there was some hesitation and reluctance because of the sensitive nature of this topic, from the commencement of workshops in each community people were highly engaged, participating for up to four hours and wanting further discussions of this nature in their community.

While ARDS did not specifically request feedback, qualitative feedback was often forthcoming from participants who took part in the workshops. This included requests for further workshops, an additional week in the community, taking the story camp to camp in each community. The workshops were described as very helpful for Yolŋu, a way of living in peace, a story that can be used to live in both Yolŋu and balanda worlds. Additionally the notion of teaching younger generations was evident throughout the workshops, more senior Yolŋu actively teaching younger participants within the workshops, while also commenting on the need for parents and children to have these sorts of discussions in order to find solutions to the problems surrounding Family Violence.

#### *CONCEPTS AND CONTENT*

Gurruṯu and kinship are one of the most fundamental components of the Yolŋu system of law. Gurruṯu describes the relationships that are pre-ordained for every Yolŋu child from birth, which connect that person with their clan and clans ancestors through the paternal line, while through the maternal line a person is connected with their mothers clan (ṅāṅḍipulu), grandmothers clan (māripulu), great grandmothers clan (wakupulu), and so on. Gurruṯu describes reciprocal relationships that are taught from birth, which connect the two moieties, Dhuwa and Yirritja, in a mother-child (yothu-yindi) relationship that interconnects Yolŋu clan groups across north-east Arnhem Land.

With respect to the promised marriage system, the man and woman are in a galay/dhuway relationship, of opposite moiety. The mans mother's brother (his ṅapipi) is the father of his future wife, and the man's mother-in-law (mukul rumaru) is in a strong avoidance relationship with that man, which is also a relationship of great respect. The woman's mothers parents and uncles and aunts are the ones with the knowledge of family, ancestors, and clan alliances who will choose the future relationship between the clan groups, the future marriage and subsequent children.



Throughout the workshops, *gurrutu* was a constant point of reference. It is a fundamental source of law, identity, interconnectedness and an intricate network of social structures and supports. These relationships, particularly of those close family members who are integral in the lives of the man and woman, also dictate responsibilities for giving teaching and discipline, in order to ensure that their kin and those that will follow in their ancestral footsteps, shall follow in the same, respectful, law abiding pathway as those who have gone before. Necessarily these same close kin are responsible for supporting the married couple, troubleshooting, problem solving, smoothing relations, negotiating time apart during conflict, negotiating a smooth pathway forward, and sometimes divorce.

Many of the other concepts relating to relationships and family violence are intertwined amongst *gurrutu*.

*Gurrutu* and the structures within this were usually regarded as the strengths underpinning relationships in the contemporary context, and something on which to draw on when difficulties arise in relationships and conflict develops. There is a general reluctance to involve the police, at least early on, and a preference to use these traditional values to work through contemporary problems.

DVO's were often regarded as confusing. An understanding of the differences between the 3 different types of DVO's is not well understood – this is a major source of confusion for Yolŋu. Additionally the timeframes and specific constraints of DVO's were seen by many as simply bewildering. Resolving disputes was regarded as requiring conversation, mediation and searching for a smooth pathway, whereas the law regarding family violence and DVO's in some cases dictates complete separation for a fixed period of time, with no room for negotiation or compromise and an abrupt end date.

Additionally police responses were regarded as unpredictable, sometimes inappropriate or disproportionate to the problem, with a lack of meaningful consultation by police with families. As with all other work filled by non-Indigenous people in remote communities, there are significant challenges to such remote and isolated work in such a foreign context. As such there is a high rate of turnover of the police workforce, and the approaches to the work by different personnel can be highly variable – while some people are open to building strong relationships with the community and an approach of mutual respect, others are unable or unwilling to develop those relationships with the community.

## *PROCESS*

The planning stage of this project involved extensive discussions with Yolŋu staff regarding how best to approach a topic that is sensitive and shrouded in a broader sociopolitical context focussed on dominant culture worldview and corporal punishment.

### *Non-interventional, and use of fictional characters*

Because of the sensitive nature of the topic, ARDS felt that we needed to create a space for dialogue and discussion, identify Yolŋu strengths, and from this point work towards solutions and problem solving of issues surrounding Family Violence.

By using fictional characters that were distinctly Yolŋu, we were able to create a scenario that was familiar but objective and not influenced by personal relationships or current issues. Making the workshops non-interventional, but merely a space for discussion, meant that everyone was able to engage with the workshops without fear of discussion focussing on their individual circumstances and causing embarrassment or offence (*marrana*). This also ensured that the workshops would have the broadest reach possible, again something that was specifically discussed in the planning as necessary for this work from the outset.

As discussed later, this did however mean that there was no focus on intervention, no focus on working specifically with those families affected by Family Violence to identify issues or resolve disputes.

The use of a fictional story also meant that the sessions combined real-world experience (for example discussion of known ways that couples get into arguments) and discussion of an ideal world (for example, the focus on how *gurrutu* relationships work for couples who are in an optimal relationship to each other, which is not always the case in practice).

### *Single gender groups*

There is a strong gendered component to this issue. ARDS felt that to allow the maximum opportunity for input from all participants and to create a safe space for discussion of sensitive issues, gender separate groups would be used for the workshops unless there was a specific request from participants for a combined workshop including men and women. The female-male, Yolŋu and balanda aspect of the co-facilitators allowed both to be present for much of the discussion, but to also have the opportunity for one to step outside for a time if deemed necessary by the group.

### *Strengths based approach*

This approach was adopted for several reasons. The parallel's between the cycle of seasons and Family Violence was a key element in the original radio plays and poster. This paired a well understood and non-confrontational topic for Yolŋu with the contemporary issue of Family Violence, allowing some sharing of knowledge, concepts and language between the two otherwise very separate realms. Drawing on Yolŋu knowledge and regarding Yolŋu as experts within this domain contrasts strongly with many approaches to Family Violence that focus on specific punishment and separation, as well as mediation through mainstream approaches. This was a notable highlight of the project and had several flow on benefits.

Firstly, this approach allowed Yolŋu to be the experts of a known domain, drawing on the extensive Yolŋu knowledge and language encompassed within Yolŋu worldview. Through the process of highlighting what is known and the collective cultural strengths, this provided an excellent foundation on which to follow up with discussion of some of the more sensitive aspects of Family Violence, and collective problem solving for approaches to Family Violence in the contemporary context.

Secondly, focussing on these Yolŋu strengths allowed Yolŋu participants to take the lead in discussions and for senior participants to fill the role of teacher, both to younger participants and also to the co-facilitators. This contributed to a high level of engagement throughout the workshops, and enhanced participants confidence in their own knowledge and skills as well as those of Yolŋu culture.

Additionally, there is such a large body of knowledge and expertise from which to draw upon, including the ways in which the kinship/ gurrutu system provides protective mechanisms to prevent disputes, but also with pathways to address disputes and Family Violence if they do occur. Gurrutu and kinship are such a large part of the Yolŋu law and the daily reality for Yolŋu that they provide an essential resource on which to base approaches to address Family Violence.

### *Working in first language*

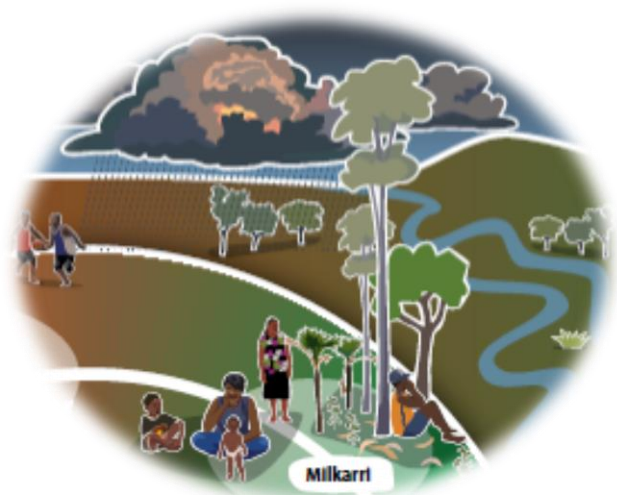
English is not the first language spoken amongst Yolŋu in East Arnhem Land, but rather one of the many Yolŋu Matha languages. Conducting the workshops in people's first language ensured that the content for discussions was embedded within a Yolŋu worldview. It allowed all people to participate equally in the discussion, not simply those with the best skill in the foreign language of English, and allowed both the dialogue and thought processes to be drawn from the same worldview, rather than requiring time and energy intensive translations between different languages and cultures. Working in peoples first language enhances by an order of magnitude their capacity to engage with the subject, allowing them to have ownership of the discussion. It also ensured that the full range of vocabulary and conceptual knowledge was available to participants, minimising the need for translation of complex concepts for which there are no clear parallel's in the worldview or language of the dominant culture.

Issues relating to families are perceived to be a private Yolŋu domain, and discussions led by people from outside individual communities have a long history being deficit focused. Consequently there is a natural hesitancy for Yolŋu to engage deeply in discussions about family affairs with unfamiliar people. While there is a lot of information and willingness to engage with the topic if done in the right way, overcoming this initial hesitancy can be greatly challenging, and one which can be more readily overcome by working in people's first language and focusing initially on Yolŋu strengths and worldview. This opens up doors and makes pathways clear for how to engage with issues of Family Violence. It allows complex and frequently misunderstood issues such as DVO's become accessible.

Quite simply, working in peoples first language allows understanding and engagement.

### *Yolŋu led discussion*

Having the discussion led by Yolŋu with only guidance from the co-facilitators, meant that Yolŋu were actively engaged in the discussion, the content was owned by and the agenda set by the participants. Other than establishing key foundational concepts to form a positive framework for the discussion, there was no pre-set agenda other than guidance from the co-facilitators and response to the radio plays and poster. This allowed important themes, those that were a priority for participants in each group, to emerge during the workshops and to generate questions and request further information from the co-facilitators and beyond, to develop a fuller understanding of the issues surrounding Family Violence and some of the approaches to address it.



## 4. Limitations of the Project

There were however some limitations - these are described along with further improvements that could be made to the project.

### *Evaluation*

The project design did not include any rigorous evaluation to test the success or otherwise of the project. In part, this was a strategic move made by the project. Because the primary goal of the workshops was to stimulate discussion regarding family violence, choosing the least intrusive pathway for the workshops included the almost exclusive use of butchers paper only to record notes and document important language and concepts. The number of participants who were present during part of any workshop was recorded, but there was no record taken of names, age, clan group, or number of people present for the full duration of each workshop. This was done to ensure the workshops were as open and safe as possible to reach the maximum possible audience.

Additionally the project failed to describe the project theory, or describe any logical assumptions that were made regarding the expected short and long term effects of the project activities.

While it is clear that the project was thoroughly successful in achieving its basic goals - to stimulate discussion around family violence, identify and draw on the strengths within the yolŋu system of kinship/ gurrutu, and develop and test ways of talking about those strengths with diverse audiences, the absence of an evaluation framework makes any evidence of this circumstantial.

### *Logical Framework analysis*

In any case it is unrealistic to expect workshops lasting half a day to cause measurable, directly attributable behaviour change. The complexities of human societies and social interactions means that there are an abundance of factors which influence the way we interact as human beings within our broader society. The ability to directly attribute causation of any individual primary prevention program on behaviour is incredibly difficult with the infinite variables of human nature. Furthermore achieving statistically significant results requires large numbers of participants on a scale which is not realistic for smaller programs. Therefore meaningful and realistic evaluation for a primary prevention project such as this should be targeted, for example more towards improving knowledge and understanding of the topic (as a short-term aim of the project). Having a clearly described project logic, which then describes the way this is expected to contribute to the mid and long-term goals of ultimately greater social cohesion and reduced family violence, allows this to be a meaningful and realistic evaluation of the project.

Developing a logical framework analysis (logframe) would allow the project theory to be described, and also provides a valuable platform from which to base any evaluation. Meaningful evaluation is most easily achieved through the clear setting of short and long term goals of a project from the outset, and the description of the project logic allows the identification of key measurable or describable (qualitative and quantitative) outcomes to evaluate the success or otherwise of a project.

### *Reflections as an evaluation tool*

The primary evaluation tool incorporated within the ARDS educational methodology is the process of discussing and writing 'reflections' – an action-reflection process. Reflections are undertaken following workshops and during field trips to ensure ongoing learning and professional development of staff involved in the project, and that the education topics being discussed are meaningful, engaging, and are being understood by participants. Through the process of reflections, the approach to presenting and discussing concepts, as well as engaging with communities, can be adapted over time based on learned experience.

Reflections were completed for the first field trip and series of workshops for the project, in Milingimbi early 2016. This documented the approach to workshops during the week, the content discussed, important concepts and language, some of the key learnings of the project, and the response of participants to the project – It was an invaluable resource in completing this final report.

### *Idealised version of gurrutu*

The focus on Yolŋu strengths and Yolŋu kinship/ gurrutu structures involved the discussion of gurrutu relationships in an idealised version, usually with specific reference to the past. While these relationships were not perfect in the past, the idealised version of this is the concept discussed. In the contemporary world for Yolŋu there are strong connections to Yolŋu culture and worldview which sit alongside and are heavily influenced by contemporary mainstream culture - relationships in the contemporary Yolŋu context are rarely as simple as in the idealised past. As such there is need for future work to also explore the contemporary complexities of gurrutu which deviates from the idealised past, and how to deal with situations of family violence in this contemporary context.

### *Primary prevention focus*

The project design had a primary prevention focus, to stimulate discussion and engage with a broad audience. Consequently there was no component of specific targeting of families currently affected by Family Violence, there was no secondary prevention focus for these families. While there is greater potential benefit and reduced overall cost for projects that focus on primary prevention and reducing the impact of underlying contributors to family violence, there remains an important role for secondary prevention programs which work specifically with those families directly affected by family violence. This project involved significant development of new content and methods, and it is appropriate to begin this development work in a primary prevention context before attempting to further develop these methods for more targeted interventions. Frontline services are necessary components of an overall strategy to reduce the overall impact of Family Violence within society, however ideally such 'frontline' services would operate in parallel with projects with a primary prevention focus. Additionally such frontline service provision requires a specific skill set and training, and careful planning to ensure the safety and wellbeing of staff involved in that work, and would also ideally involve support from subject matter experts already involved in the space around Family Violence interventions.

### *Referrals alongside interagency communication*

For such an important issue, and one which involves a broad range of programs across the community focussing on both primary prevention and secondary prevention, communication between those programs and services would ideally involve robust interagency communication,

and referrals between agencies. While the interagency communication by ARDS with other service programs and service providers was robust, there was an inability to accept substantive referrals. While other organisations were able to refer individuals or families to the Project, because ARDS didn't collect any information regarding participant details, we couldn't report back usefully to other agencies about the involvement of those individuals or families.

*More intensive block of time for workshops in individual communities*

Feedback from participants and the co-facilitators highlighted that one week in each community per year was not enough. This was enough time for community members to become highly engaged and keen to continue and advance the discussions, but finishing after one week limited the capacity of those important discussions to continue. Having a more intensive period of work with individual communities, for example every second week for 2-3 months, would allow those discussions to further evolve and move into more pragmatic problem solving and pathway building territory.

*Specific forum or medium for the project*

The lack of a specific medium or forum for the workshops was also identified as a limitation of the project which made it reliant on the goodwill of existing organisations and services in the communities, such as CDP, the East Arnhem Regional Council, schools, rangers, etc. While this worked well, a specific forum or medium for the project, or a local partner organisation, could make it more sustainable to implement over a longer period of time.



## 5. Concluding Remarks

Family Violence is now recognised as a major issue across Australia. While programs to address this within Aboriginal populations are widely recognised as requiring a strong cultural foundation, frameworks to deliver such culturally appropriate services are limited, and there continues to remain a lack of data to assess the efficacy of such approaches. This project is one that has been highly successful at stimulating cross-cultural discussion in a safe and trauma informed way that begins from where people are comfortable before moving to difficult topics in a safe way. Given the tendency of Family Violence over many decades to being an issue that has remained unspoken and hidden behind closed doors, this is a significant achievement. The project has been successful at opening doorways and creating pathways to discuss a topic of great importance but great sensitivity. Additionally the strengths based approach of this provides a strong foundation from which to follow up with more specific focus on mediation, discipline and Family Violence interventions.

Ideally this project would be able to continue, perhaps with more intensive involvement with individual communities (more than one week per year). Expanding the project to include other regions and non-Indigenous populations, and/or including an additional secondary prevention (intervention) component which operates in parallel to this primary prevention project. Further work should also incorporate a built in evaluation component to be able to more rigorously and objectively evaluate the success or otherwise of the project.

Ultimately addressing the issue of Family Violence requires a broad range of initiatives which must include primary prevention programs with a strong cultural foundation. This project provides one of those significant platforms to draw strength from and contribute to pathways for resolution of this important issue.

## **Appendix A – Summary of Family Violence radio plays**

### **TRACK 1: NEW SHOOTS**

When Yirriṇiṇba is working in her garden, two children tell her that Ḍamala has bought a car for Njerrk.

Yirriṇiṇba ask three elders why Ḍamala bought it for her. They are a promised couple and a mundhurr (gift) is important for Njerrk and her family. This new relationship is like the new shoots (ṇurruniny) that appear during the Guṇmul season (the final part of the wet season). Njurruniny is a time of new beginnings that brings long yams (ganguri), round yams (djitama), white sand lily (wärrkarr), red-flowering kurrajong (dharrangulk), rat-tailed ray (mithirri), young shark (burruw).

### **TRACK 2: HONEYMOON**

It is Miḍawarr time (just after the wet season) when food is plentiful. Two boys ask Yirriṇiṇba for banana, mango and cassava. They see Ḍamala and Njerrk walking past and the boys see that Njerrk is pregnant.

Yirriṇiṇba brings the story to the elders on the beach. They remind Yirriṇiṇba that the magpie geese have also started nesting and laying eggs because the räkay (waterlily corn) is ready to eat. Oysters (namura), black-lipped oyster (yunuṇali) and diamond-scaled mullet (gulku) are full of eggs and become fatty at this time of year. Njerrk is also pregnant and growing a child in this fertile season.

### **TRACK 3: HONEYMOON\_2**

It is Dharratharra time and the nights are getting cold. Ḍamala is upset because he didn't know that Njerrk is pregnant and isn't sure who the father is. Ḍamala has been away in Ramingiṇiṇj so Njerrk hasn't had a chance to talk with Ḍamala. Njerrk's grandfather comforts Ḍamala and helps him be happy and proud as he prepares to become a father of a new son or daughter.

Yirriṇiṇba is sitting with some elders watching a big fire from across the road where Ḍamala and Njerrk sit together with blankets. Ḍamala makes sure to warm Njerrk's body so that the unborn baby is comfortable. The water in the billabongs and rivers gradually runs out to the mouth of the rivers. Barramundi (ratjuk) feel the change of water temperature as do Yolju.

### **TRACK 4: BUILD-UP**

Ḍamala is frustrated with Njerrk because she is playing cards a lot. He is also upset because her family always use the car and now his fishing spear is missing. Wapiriny saw Ḍamala angrily walking past and Yirriṇiṇba overheard some arguments and big noise from Ḍamala's place.

The hot season (Rarranhdharr) is beginning and people often become short tempered as they feel their bodies' heat up. This is Luku-nhāranhamirri (burning feet) season. Although it is time to collect honey, the bees feel too hot to fly around, so they stay inside the trees. The water is drying

up and life gets harder. Yolŋu chew young kentia palm (bulmurrk) for the water held inside when there are few other sources.

#### TRACK 5: STAND OVER

The hot season is continuing to get stronger. Yirriŋba is gossiping with her auntie about Damala and Nerrk. All of sudden, they heard a big commotion with people shouting and crying. Damala yells at Nerrk as he stands over her before he drives away.

Yirriŋba walks to the beach where elders are talking about the season. Yirriŋba asks for fresh water (rarranhdharrwirin) and tells them what she saw in town just before. They wonder why Damala and Nerrk continue to argue.

#### TRACK 6: EXPLOSION

It is just before Dhuluḍur time when the first big storms break. Baywara and Gapuwiyak football teams are playing on the oval. Nerrk is a bit tired of Damala and wants to sit down with Yirriŋba's family to watch the game. Damala has been looking for Nerrk and orders her to come and sit with his family. Nerrk refuses and stays where she is. Damala gets very angry and hits her with chair.

#### TRACK 7: REMORSE

Galitju sings cycad nuts (ŋathu) and rock (barrtha) which have strong connotations to this time of year (Mayaltha).

Two boys tell Yirriŋba that they don't like Damala because he is a problem maker (godumarimirri). Damala is crying and reflecting what he did to Nerrk.

Yirriŋba visits elders who want to know more about Damala and Nerrk, but Yirriŋba doesn't want to talk today because it happened just in front of her. She wants to relax by listening to Galitju's story of the rain clouds and lightning. Rain clouds and lightening do not imply explosion according to Yolŋu worldview, rather it is time for Yolŋu to remember their ancestors and family and cry for them.

#### TRACK 8: NEW SHOOTS\_2

Yirriŋba feels jealous of Galitju and Wapiriny because Damala brought stingray for them. By chance, Damala's car passes. Damala, Nerrk and their baby are in the car coming back from hunting. That morning Yirriŋba saw Damala buying lots of blankets and toys for family. But Yirriŋba wonders why Damala bought things for Nerrk. Are they back together?

This is Guḡmul season again. New shoots (ŋurruniny) are coming out. The plants' life-cycle goes around as the plants flourish before drying out and dying back and then sending up new shoots once again. All of the animals and plants go through this cycle of the seasons.

## TRACK 9: DISCUSSION

It is important that Damala and Njerrk can be apart after explosion stage. We can use women's' or men's shelters (lolu) or send them off to a homeland separately. They need other people to talk to so they can find what is breaking their relationship.

Kinship affiliations can bring people back together. By using the opportunity of various ceremonies (e.g. when Damala's son goes through circumcision), Yolju are able to connect together through law and foundation. It is also a chance for the community to acknowledge and accept the couple again.

There is a problem and Damala made a bad decision. Damala might continue to harm his loved ones (like the cycle of seasons) unless we work at the problems hiding inside. The problem needs to be solved so that his son won't follow the same path.

## Appendix B – Cycle of Family Violence Poster

