



**Helping & caring,
not only our family**

*Northern Territory Indigenous
perspectives on volunteering*

the
power of
humanity



Cover image: Doris Yethun Burarrwanga and Mirrmirryun Beulah Munyarryun.
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This document may contain the names and/or images of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples who have since passed away.

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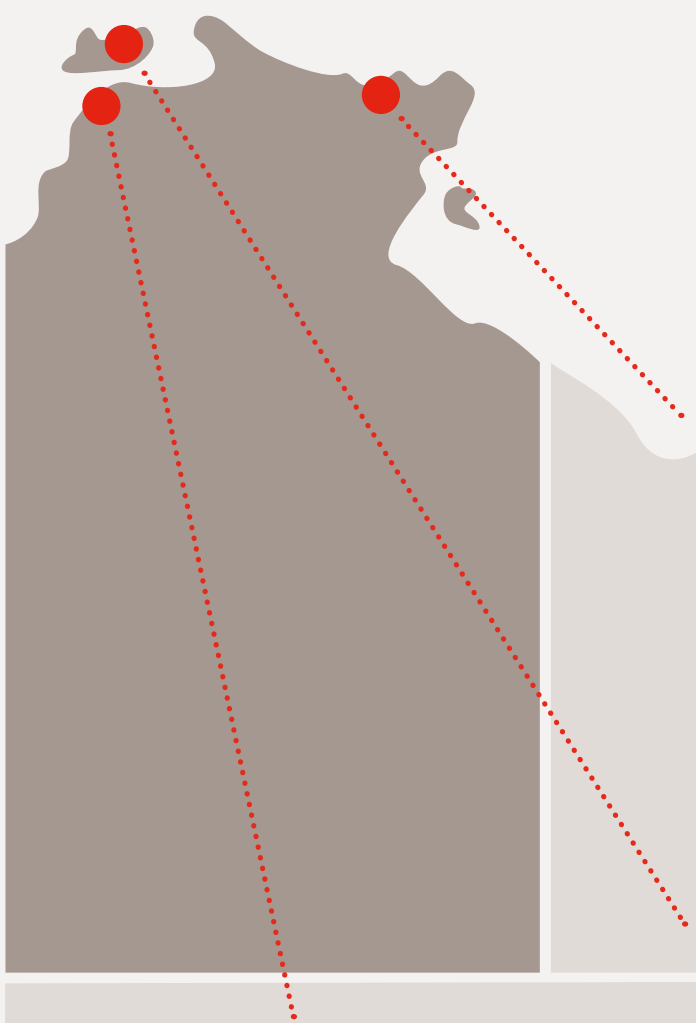
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Key Learnings

- The role that volunteering plays in producing community is an important aspect of services design and services delivery.
- In the places we visited the practices of formal volunteering with Australian Red Cross are seen as being entirely consistent with the ancestral practices of care and concern which are still at work within networks of kin and place.
- When those same practices are set to work beyond the boundaries of each individual’s extensive network of kin, that is when community is built.
- Working within local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander civil societies, Australian Red Cross has a significant role to play in building vibrant local communities through its volunteering program. It is voluntary action beyond immediate kin which produces community.
- Volunteering towards community building, if it is not undertaken with the guidance and authority of community Elders, may undermine traditional authority which is crucial for conflict resolution, ceremonial activity, cultural and linguistic strength, and environmental management.
- Collaborations between Australian Red Cross and formal institutions within the community (school, council, church etc.) are crucial to the success of community development work in Indigenous communities.
- Each community is different, with different social and political constitution, different history, and different local institutions. Australian Red Cross services need to be negotiated differently in each place, and resist any pressure for uniformity with others.
- The authority of the Elders is seen as enabling Australian Red Cross to see each individual in the context of his or her ancestral connections and individual capabilities. It is damaging to treat people as all the same.
- The role of the Elders is to make clear the right steps to be taken, the right process, the right people and the right moment for the right tasks. This demands great flexibility and sensitivity on the part of the non-Indigenous managers with whom they work.
- Non-Indigenous managers for Australian Red Cross in Indigenous communities could see learning from and responding to community Elders as a primary responsibility, especially early in their engagement. This may involve setting up a formal or informal group of senior advisers.
- Local Elders are not volunteers; they are senior managers and should be recognised and acknowledged for their knowledge.
- Volunteering is seen as a form of ‘giving back’ by members of a community who have been well served. Australian Red Cross should be working with those who are unemployed or marginalised to help them find a place in the community, before they might expect them to act as volunteers.
- Volunteering is an important pathway for young people towards the future, so Australian Red Cross should negotiate local ways (in collaboration with local institutions) to engage young people as volunteers and mentees.
- In contexts where it is very difficult to find paid work, volunteering with Australian Red Cross can build skills and connections. Australian Red Cross could consider developing ways of formally recognising these contributions and negotiating pathways to employment.
- Inter-community volunteering also clearly has the effect of enhancing the collective pan-Indigenous identity in Australia and internationally.

NT Research Sites



Galiwin’ku

Galiwin’ku, population 2000, was established on Elcho Island in Arnhem Land as a Methodist mission in 1942. Most of the population is Yolŋu. There are many different clan groups and languages among the Yolŋu people, and networks of relationships within these groups continue to inform ceremonial life, marriage alliances, and community governance.



Darwin

Non-Indigenous people have been settled in Darwin, population 150,000, on the land of the Larrakia people, since the 1870s. Today about 10% of Darwin’s population is Indigenous, including many people from remote communities living temporarily or permanently in Darwin.



Wurrumiyanga

Wurrumiyanga, population 1500, is on Bathurst Island, one of the Tiwi Islands north of Darwin. It was established as a Catholic mission in 1911 by Bishop Gsell, famous as the ‘Bishop with 150 wives’ because of the way in which he ‘bought’ promised wives from old men and established nuclear families of husbands and wives of equivalent age. The population is almost entirely of the Tiwi language and cultural group.

Executive Summary

Australian Red Cross, taking seriously the changing nature of volunteering globally, as well as the need to better understand the perspectives and aspirations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and their communities, commissioned the Ground Up research team from the Contemporary Indigenous Knowledge and Governance group at the Northern Institute, Charles Darwin University to work with them on a collaborative research project.

The research took place in three Aboriginal communities in the Top End of the Northern Territory: Galiwin'ku on Elcho Island, Wurrumiyanga on Bathurst Island, and the Indigenous community within the Northern Territory's capital city, Darwin.

Australian Red Cross provided a Steering Group with whom we teleconferenced several times during the project.

The research agreement required Charles Darwin University and Australian Red Cross to work together:

- To identify Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander volunteer perspectives on volunteering and the values and meaning system that underpin such views.
- To identify the range and nature of unpaid activities which participants engage in to 'help out' and build community capacity.
- To determine which concepts, terms and models best describe the nature of voluntary service in two Northern Territory Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.
- To explore Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, incentive to engage in unpaid activities in their communities.
- To explore if the current Australian Red Cross definition of 'volunteer' resonates with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in these communities.
- To explore the appropriateness of processes and practices that Australian Red Cross uses to engage, support and recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander volunteers.



The researchers had extensive previous experience with collaborative research at the three identified communities, and good connections to enable the engagement of senior knowledge authorities in each place.

The Ground Up researchers were also requested to undertake a review of the relevant literature. The main features were summarised and reported in terms of themes which were emerging in the field research – to do with the scale of the volunteering (within or outside the boundaries of kin and traditional responsibilities), purpose (community development, building civil society, emergency relief), and institutionalisation (formal versus informal volunteering).

Visits to each of the three communities were made for several days. Senior knowledge and cultural authorities were engaged on the way in which the project should be managed and their views on volunteering in their community.

We knew each community to be quite different, and wanted to preserve those differences, so in the first instance, we developed separate reports for each community, with some overall statements as a draft for the Steering Committee.

- At Galiwin'ku we found a strong sense of volunteering as being entirely consistent with traditional responsibilities and practices of care within the extended networks of people-places. Using traditional protocols and understandings through the authority of Elders is the best way to ensure that volunteering builds a vibrant community while supporting traditional values and strengthening family networks.
- At Wurrumiyanga we found a strong sense of the importance of existing institutions in the community, and the ways in which Australian Red Cross could strengthen these institutions by supporting volunteers using traditional categories of social organisation, and traditional mediation practices. Tiwi people were particularly interested in finding ways for volunteering to provide pathways to employment for young people.

- In Darwin, we worked with senior Aboriginal figures who are still connected authoritatively with their remote home communities, and who are undertaking volunteering work to keep their kinfolk and other Aboriginal (and interested non-Aboriginal) people connected and healthy. The ability of these people to understand and engage both ancestral Aboriginal and contemporary Australian governance practices is highly significant, and undervalued.

When consultations in each of the three communities were completed, we prepared the first draft of the report which was provided to Australian Red Cross for feedback. After a teleconference with the Steering Committee, further implications for specific actions which could make a difference, explanatory comments on some of the claims and artefacts, and specific links and disjunctions with the published literature were added along with a set of key findings.

Additions and comments made in response to the Steering Committee are included throughout the report in grey italics.

A second version of the report was provided to Australian Red Cross, and return visits were made to the relevant communities, to seek the endorsement of the key people who had contributed their ideas and efforts. Their comments have been incorporated into this final version of the report.

The final report is in the form of one page of key learnings, two pages of executive summary and 29 pages of full report.

1. Introduction

Within Indigenous settings, volunteering plays a crucial role in maintaining networks of kin, and the interconnection of people and places. The character of this work is often highly prescribed and precisely regulated within the Indigenous organisations and institutions where it takes place.

As Australian Red Cross, and other volunteer organisations, seek to engage more significantly with the defined working relations of Indigenous institutional practice, then there may be interesting opportunities for learning ahead.

In this report, we detail some of the ways in which we have come to learn about Indigenous volunteering as contributing to community building within the three Indigenous civil societies we have engaged in this project – Galiwin’ku, Wurrumiyanga, and Darwin.

Community building here refers to the particular means by which a volunteer’s work may contribute – in precise ways and through specific means – to the constitution of resilient civil societies. It is significant that these means will frequently differ.

Beginning to detail these different means as the findings of this research project, we present preliminary work which may assist Australian Red Cross to negotiate connections with the institutional practices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander volunteering in the future.

Ground Up research

The Contemporary Indigenous Knowledge and Governance group has long experience working in remote Indigenous communities in the Northern Territory. Our research always involves collaborations from the ground up with both Indigenous knowledge and cultural authorities in the Northern Territory and their communities and institutions, and government and non-government organisations who are seeking better ways of working together.

We have named our particular research approach ‘Ground Up’ because of our commitment to working collaboratively on the ground, taking seriously the knowledge and governance of both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. Our research involves participating in the collective life of particular places in collaboration with local researchers and consultants who belong in that place or organisation.

In working with members of Indigenous communities in their capacity as consultants, as well as with emerging cohorts of citizen researchers, government officials, and officials of non-government organisations, we undertake ‘policy work’ and ‘research on social problems’ simultaneously and collaboratively. For more information, see www.cdu.edu.au/centres/groundup.

Researching Indigenous volunteering

In this project our focus has been volunteering in Indigenous settings. We have undertaken to speak with Indigenous consultants and researchers living and working in Galiwin’ku, Wurrumiyanga and Darwin.

The focus of our research discussions has been the character of volunteering, within the Indigenous civil societies of each of these places. We have detailed the particular interests and emphases placed by researchers and consultants on the significance of volunteering, and on the details of how volunteering is being done – both in connection, and not, with Western organisations and volunteering.

In each place, we have not assumed a pre-existing definition of what volunteering is or entails, but have asked Elders and participants to reflect on what volunteering means to them, in English and their language, and current practices of volunteering in the community. Their responses have been reported as quotes from interviews with participants, and summaries of issues arising in consultations.

2. Literature Review

Contemporary Australian Indigenous volunteering

In 2013, Australian Red Cross recognised that in this second decade of the twenty-first century, the landscape of volunteering was fundamentally changing.

A report to the National Board identified the following four significant trends:

- Shift from benevolence to building social capital: volunteering patterns are directly affected by changes in the environment in which it takes place. Since the 1990s, the increasingly complex nature of humanitarian challenges such as climate change, poverty, forced migration and civil unrest, has highlighted the critical role of volunteers in building sustainable communities.
- Changing demographics: alongside the ageing population forecast is the increase in youth volunteering – from 16% in 1995 to 27.1% in 2010. The trend also indicates there will be more people volunteering but for less time.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities: volunteering is often linked to family and kinship relationships and as such is ‘informal’. Volunteering is one measure of a community’s social capital.
- Professionalisation of volunteering: volunteer management has emerged as a profession and career choice. The need to invest in training and development of volunteer managers is matched by a professionalisation of the not for profit sector. This has created tensions between the role of staff and volunteers and the need to ensure collaboration and complementarity.

(Australian Red Cross, 2013, p. 8)

This work is in line with research carried out as part of a global review by International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies which found that the environments and contexts within which volunteering is practised are rapidly changing, and that for volunteering to persist strong commitments to resourcing, research, and appropriate policy frameworks will be required (2015: 3).

In this review we draw on recent studies to map out some of the nuances of contemporary Indigenous volunteering; and do so by responding to several key questions: Where is Indigenous volunteering found? When is Indigenous volunteering offered? Is Indigenous volunteering institutionalised? How does Indigenous volunteering relate to government?

Becoming aware of responses to these questions as they arise in the literature has helped to inform the policy recommendations provided at the conclusion of this report.

Where is Indigenous volunteering found?

Drawing on some of the recent literature and studies on this topic, Indigenous volunteering may be recognised as occurring across a range of scales. It can be found in work done to enact and sustain networks of kin, and may also be offered as work done at the level of the community, or may circulate through global networks of international organisations.

Close networks of kin relations provide the basis for much Indigenous voluntary service work (Kerr et al., 2001). It is through relations of kinship that family groups and clan estates remain connected, and maintaining these connections is an important and driving responsibility for many Indigenous people (Dudgeon et al., 2002).

Within kinship networks, there are specified responsibilities for members of clan groups, as well as the young and the elderly. Through enacting these relationships, people also enter into obligations regarding the care for those who are older and younger than themselves. Fulfilling these responsibilities for many older Indigenous Australians, for example, may entail nurturing a special relationship with the young within their communities (Warburton and McLaughlin, 2007, 2005), or may involve ceremonial or other responsibilities in homelands.

This work is not carried out as extra to the conduct of everyday life (Kerr et al., 2001). Rather it is part of the regulated everyday means by which people live, seek to care for each other; and make sure that their places remember their presence.

Voluntary work caring for others may also extend beyond immediate networks of kin, and extend to a broader sense of community – both as a geographical place including many differing peoples, or to a general community of Aboriginal people (Kerr et al., 2001).

Volunteering of this kind might often be centred around particular issues affecting civic life. These may include activities such as prisoner visitation schemes, programs supporting and encouraging younger people, and art projects (Kerr et al., 2001). They may also involve sitting on boards and councils, supporting employment projects and agencies (Volunteering Australia, 2007, 2012) or offering emergency and other forms of support to Aboriginal people from other communities or parts of Australia.

It may be less common for Indigenous volunteers to travel internationally as part of aid or emergency relief programs. However, many Indigenous people recognise the international standing of service providers within their communities, and have an interest in exploring these networks as volunteers or by other means (Australian Volunteers International, 2011; Jope, 2008).

When is Indigenous volunteering offered?

Within studies on Indigenous volunteering, participants often identify themselves as involved in voluntary service work all the time (Kerr et al., 2001; QG, 2012). This everyday work is related to educating children, caring for the vulnerable, participating in ceremony and caring for country; and may be considered as crucial to the resilience of Indigenous civil societies (Wilson, 2001).

At the same time, much of the work of volunteer organisations is gradually becoming focused around emergency management as government support for these activities recedes (Phillips et al, 2011; Winter, 2000). Voluntary service efforts organised and structured around emergency management and resilience planning may tend to fall into distinct operational phases (Phillips, et al 2011).

In the ‘peacetime’ phase prior to a potential emergency event (e.g. cyclone or fire) there may be specific preparations made, such as assembling cyclone kits, producing cyclone awareness educational materials, fire brigade training (Phillips, 2011). There may also be systemic work undertaken around maintaining infrastructure, negotiating good and respectful working relationships between emergency services and community members, maintaining high levels of health and well-being, and alleviating the effects of poverty (Phillips et al, 2011).

During an emergency event, activities are rather different and may include an extension of existing community safety practices (e.g. work of the Night Patrol) as well as an intensification of everyday forms of work, keeping children calm and happy, caring for the elderly, ensuring everyone is safe and accounted for (Spencer et al., 2016).

After an emergency event, the work of returning to normal is often linked to the work of cleaning up and restoring damage in the community. Including clearing rubbish and debris, and finding ways to continue offering services and care to children and the elderly while homes and other infrastructure are repaired. While this phase may rely on volunteers from other places than the site of the emergency, volunteering may also be important for those who have been affected by the event (Spencer et al., 2016).

Is Indigenous volunteering institutionalised?

Studies on Indigenous volunteering frequently report high rates of volunteering within Indigenous communities. They also report that this voluntary service work is most frequently offered outside of Western organisational structures (Kerr et al., 2001; VA, 2007, 2012; QG, 2012).

However, crucially that does not mean that such work is not institutionalised (Christie, 2006a, 2006b). The roles and responsibilities prescribed through kinship structures are highly regulated and closely monitored (Christie, 2006a, 2006b), and voluntary service work of this kind may only be recognised as legitimate when carried out in defined ways. This work strongly expresses the roles and responsibilities of particular Indigenous institutional arrangements and structures of authority. These arrangements may define access to lands, ownership of intellectual property and access to certain knowledges, while also identifying legitimate people able to offer leadership and counsel to others (Guyula, 2013).

While many Indigenous volunteers are not interested in working for a mainstream organisation, others do seek out structured volunteer positions (VA, 2007), and when undertaken, this mainstream work is often concentrated around sports clubs, and the support of children or other players (Kerr et al., 2001).

It has been noted in several studies (Kerr et al., 2001; VA, 2007; VCSA, 1992) that when Indigenous volunteers seek out mainstream programs and opportunities, they often report being confronted with significant bureaucratic and administrative hurdles (e.g. police and identity checks), and may experience some level of discomfort or lack of confidence in mainstream contexts (including a fear of discrimination, or a lack of training and other supports).

Hybrid voluntary service programs which connect both mainstream and Indigenous institutional practices are likely to come up with local solutions to such issues, as Indigenous and non-Indigenous volunteers and volunteer managers work together to develop programs that make sense on the ground.

In the literature, this on-ground work is detailed through models of volunteer management such as ‘serendipitous’ and ‘social change’ based programs (Macduff et al., 2009). ‘Serendipitous’ programs seek to coordinate rather than manage volunteers and work well with informal volunteering and clan based social networks, while ‘social change’ programs coordinate activist volunteers seeking to influence changes in their society, potentially through the introduction of practices not normally active within the mainstream (Macduff et al., 2009).

How does Indigenous volunteering relate to government?

Indigenous volunteering which extends traditional modes of care and concern re-enacts and reinforces traditional relations of kinship and connections to land. For many Aboriginal people this voluntary work is a key aspect of racial and cultural survival, self-determination and mutual responsibility (Kerr et al., 2001).

Maintaining culture through continued practices of maintaining relations of people and places in this way may be recognised as a form of self-determination which operates outside of government (Kerr et al., 2001), and which is external to the work carried out by organisations delivering services in Aboriginal communities.

Recognising this aspect of Indigenous volunteering, suggests that voluntary service programs in remote communities may be best run as loose, largely unmanaged systems, enabling significant levels of flexibility for those involved (VA, 2007). Such an approach does enable partial connection between the traditional practices of care which are carried out as part of everyday life, at the same time as providing for the possibility of more substantial engagement with Western organisations and volunteer programs when this is appropriate, or the need arises.

Such an approach to volunteering and volunteer management does not focus on the deeply engaged intercultural practices which might accompany volunteering as an activity contributing to building stronger communities (Bell, 2008: 20), and is conducive to forms of volunteering and volunteer management which see Indigenous people and Aboriginal communities as recipients of aid in times of crisis, and who will be the beneficiaries, rather than providers, of aid and services.

Within many non-government volunteer organisations, traditional forms of volunteerism are increasingly moving closer to forms of civic venture, or civic engagement (Macduff et al., 2009). Somewhat in contrast to the approach outlined above, this suggests that both volunteers and organisations are involved in the work of supporting and maintaining what is seen as a shared public or civic domain.

This is in line with shifts in government policy to move the responsibilities for service provision to private, or non-government organisations, and to members of remote and regional communities. This change is consistent with approaches to volunteering which see Indigenous people as providers of services and voluntary service (rather than recipients) (Wilson, 2001; Kerr and Savelsberg, 1999).

Currently Australian Red Cross’ policy on volunteering aims to:

- contribute to stronger, more interconnected communities
- empower and support volunteers
- build a supportive organisational environment (RC, 2015)

This emphasis building organisational capacity so as to support strong and interconnected communities is also echoed by Volunteering Australia (2014) and the United Nations (VA, 2014) who have recently changed their definitions of volunteering so as to reflect a particular emphasis on this civic sphere, and the common good.

Through such an approach, the work of carrying out traditional modes of care and concern are no longer separated from Western voluntary service work, but may become part of a (partially) common effort to strengthen communities through also nurturing and strengthening connections of people and place.

Summary

Contemporary Indigenous volunteering in this account is a diverse set of practices which may circulate at different scales – ranging from family and close networks of kin, to the community level and then through to an international or global scale where volunteers travel from their own country to receive training or deliver aid to others.

These practices may be offered episodically, in correspondence with particular patterns or needs of ceremonial practice and community life. They may also be structured in ways which relate to prevailing trends in emergency management and preparedness, with voluntary duties and requirements taking on different forms depending on whether they are offered before, during or after an emergency event.

While there may be some voluntary service activities carried out by individuals acting of their own accord, most arise as an extension of particular sets of institutional practices – whether those of a Western organisation or Aboriginal culture and law.

However, how these practices are interpreted – as being external to, or involved within – particular efforts to build and shape communities, and relations between Indigenous communities and government can also be variable. Depending on prevailing trends in government governance of remote communities, Aboriginal residents may be more often considered to be recipients or recipient/providers of services and aid.

3. Galiwin’ku

What we did

At Galiwin’ku we worked with the Yolŋu research organisation Yalu’ Marnghithinyaraw whose name translates as ‘nest for knowledge’. For details of the philosophy and practice of the Yalu’ Centre, please visit www.yalu.cdu.edu.au.

Working closely with the Yalu’ research coordinator, we engaged a small team of co-researchers – Rosemary Gundjarrangbuy (coordinator), Doris Yethun, Anita Golun and Stephen Dhamarrandji. We also invited a young mentee, Beulah Munyarryun, to join us while we worked.

The research team used the Yalu’ building at Galiwin’ku as a place to meet and a base for the project. Through initial discussions with members of the research team, and Australian Red Cross, we decided that in the consultations we would ask people to tell stories or reflect on their experiences of Yolŋu volunteering in the past, present and future, as well of their experiences of volunteering work in relation to two recent cyclones that hit Galiwin’ku in early 2015, causing significant damage.

The research team also decided that it would be best if we went to meet with people at their homes. We would meet with them at a time that was convenient, and sit and talk with them in small family groups.

We carried out six consultations – three in town (two at Middle Camp and Beach Camp), one at the new outer suburb (Buthan), and two at nearby outstations (Dhambala and Galawara). We spoke with a total of 21 people. Participants were contacted by Yalu’ researchers before the consultations, and were usually closely related to the members of the research team. Consultations would last for around an hour, and participants were thanked for their contributions with food and power cards.

Consultations were carried out in both English and Yolŋu matha (language). Notes and audio recordings were made of the discussions. Translations were provided at the time by co-researchers or by the senior project advisor at Charles Darwin University.





“That’s how we volunteer, we work räl-manapanmirr. That’s how we contribute our capabilities.”

Rosemary Gundjarranbuy,
Yalu’ Marngithinyaraw Coordinator

Photo: Charles Darwin University, Michael Spencer

Rosemary Gundjarranbuy

Yalu’ Marngithinyaraw Coordinator

Interviewed at Galiwin’ku
28th August 2015

Dhuwal narra Gundjarranbuy, ga narra dhuwal Galiwinku’puy. Ga dhuwal narra dhu wanyany, nhawipuy gam, volunteering djäma, nhä dhuwal volunteering djäma?

Narrakalnydja, narrantany ga guyanya, nanyi dhuwal räl-manapanmirr djäma.

Nhaltjan limurr dhu räl-manapanmirri wiripunur wiripunur organisationgur, ga wiripu wiripu bäpurru mala ga dhäruk wanganydhirr ga djäma wanganygur.

Balanya example narra ga lakaram, wangany narra dhu metaphor using, balanya nhakun, nunhi dhu yolgu marrtji miyapunuw, ga nunhiliyi nhawigur marthanaygur nuli ga nhina four yolgu walal nuli marrtji.

Ga nunhi walal marrtji nuli, huntinglil walal dhu märram miyapunu, each persondhu nunhili ga nayatham different role mala djäma mala nanyi dhu djäma.

Ga walal marngi nhä walal dhu djäma. Nurrungu nanyi nuli marrtji djambatjgu dhärra nunhi nanyi dhu djatthun miyapunu yaka nanyi dhu worryun, yaka, the second one nunhi ga nhina, nanyi dhu worryun miyapunu

Warrpam walal role nuli ga nunhili norra.

Role ga responsibility nuruki four-w hunter-w malaṅuw walal dhu marrtji. Ga every meat walal dhu miyapunuw märram, walal dhu share, except walal dhu first dhu märram, second dhu märram, third dhu märram or fourth dhu märram, right warrpam.

Yaka nanyi dhu märram beṅur number four dhu yaka märram part miyapunu part for first onegu yaka.

When according to linegur nanyi dhu märram. Ga balanya nanyi dhuwal volunteering djäman. Galiwin’ku, strugglingdja nanyi ga, Galiwin’kun, nayiny beṅur beṅur marrtji balanda mala to help balanya nhakun Red Cross marrtji, housinggur marrtjin contractor nhyawi mala, balanya dhukarr djämamirr marrtjin, beṅur ranger marrtjin to help

Balanya djäma, balanya walal ga räl-manapanmirr djäma. Yow. Ga balanya.

I’m Gundjarranbuy from Galiwin’ku, and I’m talking about this thing, volunteering. What is the work of volunteering?

To me, what I think, it is contributing our particular skills for particular work to be done.

How do we contribute our own skills from this or that organisation, and this or that clan group, and come together with one story, and work as one.

So here’s an example, I’ll use a metaphor, for example when Yolgu go out turtle hunting and in that canoe you will see four Yolgu.

And when they go hunting to get a turtle, each person has a different role which he must undertake.

And they know what they each have to do. The one at the front is called djambatjgu, standing there, he is the one who is going to spear the turtle, but he won’t pull it in. The second one is going to pull it in.

Each one of them already has his own role.

A role, and a responsibility for each of those four hunters when they go out. And when they get the turtle meat, they share it, and each one of the four hunters gets a different part of the turtle.

The number four hunter is not going to get the part of the turtle which belongs to the first hunter, no.

They get their meat according to the line-up. And volunteering is just like that. When Galiwin’ku was struggling [because of the cyclone] balanda (non-Indigenous people) came from everywhere to help, like the Red Cross came, housing contractors, road workers, rangers.

That’s how we volunteer, we work räl-manapanmirr. That’s how we contribute our capabilities. Yes, that’s how.

Jane Garrutju Gandaṇu

Golpa Clan Group Elder

Interviewed at Galiwin’ku
27th August 2015

Räl-manapanmirr government and Yolṇu together. With one thought, one vision. Be an example for the future.

Children for today are watching and we need to be an example for our young leaders to do a voluntary job. Any nationality that comes to our country, work together, learn together, teach together, be a role model for our young people for future so they know what voluntary means.

Räl-manapanmirr means working together hand in hand. Black hand holding white hand and walking together to achieve what is there for this community and for our people. Work together, walk together, talk together with one vision. Have a good plan for this community Galiwin’ku, talk to the people before you do something.



Räl-manapanmirr

Räl-manapanmirr is a concept often used to describe Yolṇu ways of working together.

Räl is used to describe the particular abilities of an individual to procure food through hunting – the ability to catch turtles, or crabs, to find yams, wallabies etc.

Manapan is a verb which means to join or place together.

Mirr is a suffix which makes a verb reflexive - we do it for each other, together.

When talking about volunteering, the introduction of the verb räl-manapanmirr implies several things:

- 1. That each person is different, each has their own talents and potential contribution.
- 2. That successful activities, for example hunting or volunteering, need to be properly negotiated and undertaken as a group working together.
- 3. That the authority of the people who know and own the land needs to be central to the negotiations around how to go about an activity together.

For a discussion by Yolṇu theorists about how such practices work in a research setting, refer to Garngulkpuy and Lawurrpa (2005).

Comments from Yalu’ Marngithinyaraw researchers

Project evaluation, Galiwin’ku
28th August 2015

Djäma rrambaṇi guṅga’yunmirr communityṇur ga ṇayaṇu rur’maranhamirr in leadership ga decision makingṇur dhiyaliyi volunteeringṇur djämaṇur.

Nhäma bukmak (holistic) dhiyal community nhä mala program ga djämamirriyam ga räl-waṇḍirri

Ṇayaṇu wanganydhirr guyaṇanhawuy ga gurrupanmirr bala-räli’yunmirr nhä mala djäma dhiyal.

Ṇayaṇu gurrupanmirr ga räl-manapanmirr märr limurr Yolṇu ga balanda dhu djäma rrambaṇi.

Rom nherrpan, ga dhukarr mala dhunupayam guṅga’yunminyaraw, nhaltjan limurr dhu goṇ-ṇayathanhamirr ga marrtji wanganyṇur ga wanganygurr.

Ḳapmaram ga dhukarr, ga marṅgikum nhaltjan dhu gäna djäma.

Ṇayaṇu rur’maram ga Ḳuku nherrpan nhaltjan limurr dhu dhärra gäna.

Ḳapmaram ga mulkurr limurrungu yolṇu-yalu + CDU

Guṅga’yun yuṭany Yolṇuny, nhä dhuwal volunteering djäma.

Work together, helping each other in the community and motivate each other in leadership and decision making in this work of volunteering.

Look at everything in the community, (holistically) whatever the program, and make them work and contribute your skills.

Come together in feeling and thinking, and give to each other, back and forth, whatever work we have here.

Share our deep feelings and pool our individual capabilities so that Yolṇu and non-Indigenous people will work effectively together.

Agree on a proper way forward, and make the ways clear for helping each other, whatever we will do supporting each other, being together, and going on together.

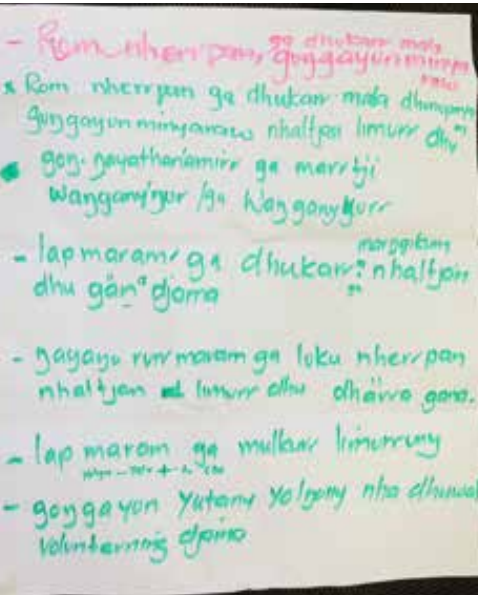
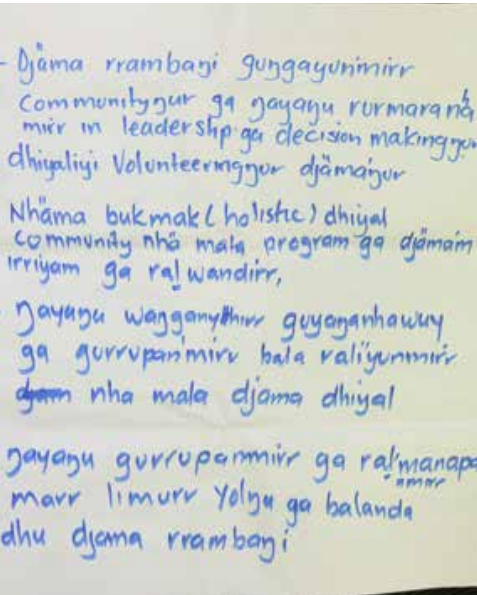
Open the way, and show how to work alone.

Lift the spirit and step out to stand alone.

Opening our minds, the Yalu Yolṇu and CDU (Charles Darwin University).

Help the young people with this volunteering work.

Notes prepared by the Yolṇu researchers at Galiwin’ku (independently of the Charles Darwin University researchers) emphasise the importance of collaboration (with institutions within the community and externally), as well as the way in which the individual as a worker (in the literal sense of volunteer) develops a strong spirit through this process. This independence is declared as highly relevant to the new generations of Yolṇu.



Issues arising in consultations

During our consultations we would sit with people and talk to them about volunteering. Most of the time we spoke in English, but at times the Yalu’ researchers would also speak in Yolŋu matha (language). Within these discussions, project participants sometimes found it appropriate to talk about ‘volunteering’, and at other times preferred to use the Yolŋu phrase räl-manapanmirr (see page 16).

Presented below are a number of significant issues that were raised over the course of these discussions:

“Caring for children and our old people is volunteering”

There are many things that Yolŋu people do every day which they described as important volunteering work. Amongst other things, this included caring for children and the elderly. Responsibility for children does not reside only with the children’s parents, but with their wider networks of kin. This work involves teaching the children about their lands, clan relationships, songs and dances, as well as helping them to remain safe and calm. Elder women may sit with the children teaching them in the afternoons about kinship, and then late in the evenings will also stand on the street making sure that the children can go safely home to their houses. There is also important work to be done collecting bush medicines, and bringing them to the older people who are sick. This is important volunteering work that sometimes connects with Western organisations, but often does not.

The skills of care and concern entailed by volunteering are already at work in Yolŋu life within the networks of kinship. These need to be acknowledged, understood and supported when Australian Red Cross organises volunteers to work at the level of the community (in contrast to the ancestral networks of kin) so that traditional practices can be strengthened.

“Volunteering happens during ceremonies and through sharing food”

When Yolŋu people sit down together at ceremony, or to eat, they share what they have. Sharing food is a part of living together and observing correct hierarchies and relations between people. This is voluntary work which seems to be mundane and every day, but which is part of maintaining connections, helping people to remember who they are, and making sure everyone is cared for and accounted for.

“We all worked together during the cyclone times”

When cyclones Lam and Nathan hit Galiwin’ku in early 2015, many different organisations worked together in the community to spread the word that a cyclone was coming, to let people know what the Bureau of Meteorology warnings meant, to gather food and water, and to transport everyone to the available shelters. The Clinic, School, Shire Council, Marthakal Homelands Resource Centre, Arnhem Land Progress Association, all met in the Shire office to discuss what to do. This was a recent instance when Indigenous and non-Indigenous people and organisations all worked together around an issue for the community. On the whole, this work went well, but it was also carried out under pressure and in a hurry. Significant to this work were the technologies and networks of information through which people became aware of the danger, and the willingness of organisations to work together. There was interest expressed in initiating further joint discussions and training around preparations for future emergency events.

“Australian Red Cross was there to help people after the cyclones”

After the cyclones there were immediate issues around procuring fresh water to drink, and food for people to eat. And there were longer term issues around setting up temporary housing, and helping people to carry on with their lives. Australian Red Cross played a prominent role in these relief efforts, along with government departments and local organisations. Their assistance was appreciated, particularly around providing food for people without cooking facilities, setting up the temporary camp on the oval, providing facilities to wash clothes, and providing activities for the children to keep them busy and happy.

The hunting metaphor explains how volunteering can be done

For Yolŋu volunteering is not just about getting a particular task done, or achieving a particular result. It is about practicing particular ways of working which are conducive to the respectful and smooth functioning of social life, amongst other things. The story of hunting turtles was often invoked to explain how voluntary work carried out by both Yolŋu and Western organisations could be achieved. The story describes a process whereby people or groups who bring different skills and come from different backgrounds can find a way to work together to make something happen, and to produce many and different benefits for all involved. Just like when the men go out hunting, volunteering work involves different people bringing their skills and capacities to the work at hand.

Each person will have a particular position or role to play when looking for the turtle, spearing it and pulling it into the boat.

Then back on shore, the meat from the turtle will be also shared out according to these different roles. The story is an instructive guide offered to others who may be interested in working in partnership in this way.

Yolŋu have long established ways of collaborating to achieve collective ends. If Australian Red Cross is to contribute to building strong Yolŋu communities, they must work with community Elders to select the right people for the right jobs in the right place.

“Learning about our connections is very important”

When Yolŋu children are very young their relatives begin teaching them about their kinship connections. First the children learn about their grandmothers and grandfathers, they start to learn about clans and totems. Connectedness is the substance of Yolŋu life. Beginning to see this, and learning how to work with it, would be a good starting point for people and organisations seeking to work with Yolŋu and to understand volunteering.

Those who organise volunteering in Yolŋu communities need to understand traditional networks of peoples and places, so they can strengthen rather than undermine the authority of Elders through the work of local volunteers.

Working in partnership is important

There has been a long history of Western governments and organisations imposing top down policies and programs on Yolŋu people. These programs have often been conceived of in offices which are at a distance to the places where they are intended to take root and have effects. If Australian Red Cross was to promote volunteering in Galiwin’ku, then they should do so by learning from and collaborating with Yolŋu and Yolŋu organisations. Working in partnership, with Yolŋu and Western organisations meeting and finding ways to teach and learn from each other, may help to avoid some of the problems created by these top down approaches.

Negotiating partnerships between particular Yolŋu and Western organisations helps to ground programs and policies within the contexts in which they will be carried out.

It can be difficult for Yolŋu to receive accreditations

The volunteer activities that Yolŋu undertake – caring for children, caring for the elderly and caring for country through maintaining and observing laws around kinship relations – are vital to the maintenance of collective life and resilient Indigenous societies. However, it is often difficult for people to be accredited for this work in ways which are able to be recognised by Western organisations and potential employers.

Within the Yolŋu community it will be clear who possesses what knowledge, and the level of authority with which they are able to act. This is demonstrated within ceremony, and is respected and reiterated within everyday practices. While significant levels of learning and responsibility are difficult to attain, Western forms of accreditation also have to be achieved above and beyond these other forms of Yolŋu education and practice. When people grow up within Western society, there are accepted and obvious pathways which lead to the attainment of school education, and other forms of qualification. This is not the same for Yolŋu.

Finding ways to recognise and make visible the contributions of Indigenous volunteers helps to build a strong community and improves the employability of young people.

Conclusion

Volunteering contributes in precise means and in specific ways to the production of the Indigenous civil society emergent in Galiwin’ku.

For Yolŋu in Galiwin’ku, there are clear protocols dictating ways in which volunteering work may be carried out so that it observes the relations of kinship and landownership that arose with the ancestors.

These protocols are followed when the elderly are cared for, when decisions are made and when children are taught about songs, bush foods and lands. It is in following these protocols that Indigenous volunteering contributes to the resilience of the Indigenous civil society emergent in Galiwin’ku.

Much of this work does not connect up with the activities of Western institutions and organisations. It occurs in the everyday, and frequently does not link with any of the Western institutional practices that Yolŋu may also commonly engage with.

Western institutions tend to treat all people equally. When the specific connection and location as well as the talents of each individual is ignored, traditional authority and culture is marginalised and undermined.

However, amongst those that we spoke to there was also an interest and an appetite for finding ways for Yolŋu and non-Indigenous people and organisations to work together through volunteering. In keeping with the character of Indigenous volunteering as it was described in this research, there was also strong expectation surrounding the particular means by which such connections might be made and collaborations might proceed.

As shown through the hunting metaphor, each party involved should recognise that they are bringing particular capacities to the work at hand, and understand that they will occupy a particular position, or play a particular role in the proceedings. It is in the process of showing and negotiating these roles that the potential for productive partnership, and shared service delivery may begin to emerge.

When seeking to engage with Yolŋu people and organisations in Galiwin’ku, beginning to talk and learn about careful collaborative planning under the guidance of Elders may be a good place for Australian Red Cross to start.

Through such an approach, engagement would not begin with already established ideas about what work should be done, or how it might be achieved. But rather, may start with Australian Red Cross endeavouring to learn about this manner of working, and the means by which they, as an organisation, might relate to Indigenous volunteering when it is configured in such a way as part of promoting an active and resilient Indigenous civil society in Galiwin’ku.

Photo: Charles Darwin University/Michael Spencer



“We need to be an example for our young leaders to do a voluntary job.”

Jane Garrutju Gandaju
Golpa Clan Group Elder

4. Wurrumiyanga

What we did

Wurrumiyanga was chosen as a site for this project in part because of a new place-based model of service delivery recently adopted by Australian Red Cross when working in this community.

Initial contact was with the Australian Government’s Indigenous Engagement Officer, and with Australian Red Cross’ Regional Manager at Wurrumiyanga. The Regional Manager supported the development of a small research team to work on the project, several of whom were also employed as Australian Red Cross staff. This group included Teddy Portaminni (Tiwi Elder) who worked as a lead coordinator, as well as Nellie Puanti (Wangatunga Strong Woman/ Australian Red Cross), Samson Tipungwuti (Australian Red Cross) and Gail Puruntatimeri (Australian Red Cross).

The research team used the Australian Red Cross building at Wurrumiyanga as a place to meet and base for the project. Through initial discussions with members of the research team, we decided that the key groups of people to talk to as part of the research were: Elder Women/Wangatunga Strong Women’s Group, Elder Men, Young people, Ponki Mediators (see box) and Australian Red Cross staff. We would visit them at their places of work, where they met daily in communal spaces, or when they attended programs with Australian Red Cross.

We carried out six consultations, and spoke with a total of 17 participants. The research team were also happy to offer individual interviews and contribute to a number of information sharing sessions. The research also included a preliminary briefing offered to the Charles Darwin University researcher about the Tiwi skin groups, and a visit to the museum to learn about the past history of the Tiwi people and Kurlama ceremony.

Consultations were predominantly carried out in English. At times the Tiwi co-researchers would speak to interviewees in Tiwi to clarify or explain some discussion points, however, no transcription or translation of conversations was necessary. Consultations were recorded as notes taken during and directly after our meetings. The Tiwi people who participated in the project were thanked for their contributions with food and/or power cards.

Ponki

In the Tiwi language the word Ponki means ‘peace’ or ‘it’s finished’. And the spoken word is often accompanied by a hand gesture; a waving of the hand away from the body.

In recent years on the Tiwi Islands there’s been a concerted effort to combine this traditional concept of Ponki with western mediation techniques. So-called Ponki mediation has been developed as a collaborative project with the NT Justice Centre, and has been used to enable long-term prisoners to return to the Tiwi Islands at the end of their prison sentences and to settle disputes in the community before they escalate.

For more information on Ponki visit:
<http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/lawreport/ponkimediation/2924532>

Edward (Teddy) Portaminni

Tiwi Elder and Chair of Tarntipi Homelands Aboriginal Corporation

Interviewed at Wurrumiyanga
16th Sept 2015

The word ‘ngaruwanajirri’ means that as Tiwi we all help each other. With the family we all help each other, with the food, and when we bring everybody together to get ceremony, how we make sure that we’ve got the right order. So that is where ngaruwanajirri is helping and caring for people. Not only our family, but everyone because there are four big groups on the Tiwi Islands. We have the Sun Group, we have the Mullet Group, Stone and Pandanus. Within each group, they’ve got the small little groups – from where your grandmother comes from, and your mother, and all the siblings are in the same little group. But in the big group, there’s everyone, everyone in there. So today we need to sit down, talk to the children, explain where we come from. They’ve got to know that. So it’s time we all get together and sit down with the kids now. We have to be there for them. If they make a mistake, we have to correct that mistake, explain why it has happened how we can fix it. We have to teach them our laws, customs and beliefs, because we are responsible. We are Tiwi, we remain Tiwi and we will die Tiwi.



Nellie Puanti

Wangatunga Strong Woman

Interviewed in Wurrumiyanga
17th Sept 2015

Ngaruwanajirri means to help one another. Talk about young people, what they do. Talk to them, and work out what’s good for the kids. Tell them not to do anything behind their boyfriend’s back or their husband’s. That’s what we do, we help one another. All of us ladies, we have talked to all the young people. But at the moment, today, we are waiting for the Women’s Centre to be built. It will be built with the name ‘ngaruwanajirri’ – we help one another.



Cyril James Kerinauia

Tiwi Elder and Traditional Owner

Interviewed in Wurrumiyanga
16th Sept 2015

The term ngaruwanajirri is one that we should have up everywhere. It should be in the schools and on a poster, so that everyone can see that word and understand what it means – in lots of ways. It is not just one thing, but you can be doing it in whatever way is appropriate at the particular time.

That word comes in when the whole community comes together to solve problems. But the kids don’t know how to use that word.

However you interpret it, you have to fully understand what it means. It is the key to helping one another. There are a lot of different ways to understand it, but the kids need to know what it really means. People sitting around sharing, having a feed, sharing wallaby, sitting at the campfire. That word has lots of meaning. Put it in the classroom, use it in whatever circumstances that help.



Photo: Charles Darwin University/Michaela Stenger

Ngaruwanajirri

Ngaruwanajirri is an old Tiwi language word, which the Tiwi consultants thought needed to be revived, particularly in discussion around volunteering. “The word has a lot of meanings.” It is variously described as meaning:

- Helping each other to provide food particularly for a ceremony
- Collaborating to make sure things are done in the right order
- Working within the traditional networks of skin groups
- Doing the right thing at the right time.

There is clearly a similarity between the Yolŋu concept of räl-manapanmirri and the Tiwi concept of ngaruwanajirri.

Tenisha Thompson and Marietta Puautjimi

Students from Xavier Catholic College

Wurrumiyanga
18th Sept 2015

Some of the children attending the Australian Red Cross after school drop-in centre were keen to describe what volunteering meant to them. They were given pens and paper. Opposite are two examples of what they wrote. The Elders were delighted with what the children had produced.

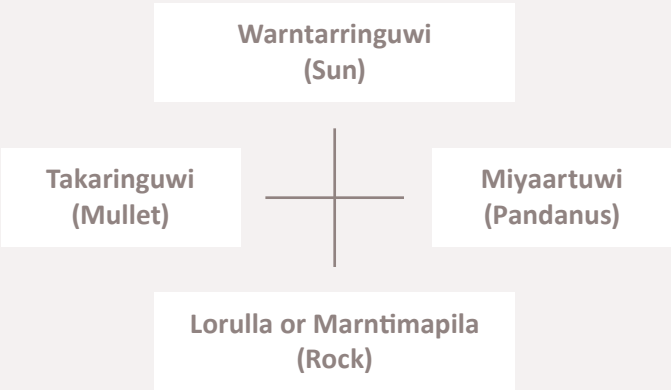
- Stop fighting
- Love one another
- Keep our culture strong
- Live in Peace
- Don’t Hate each other!
- What’s your dream?
- Start volunteering and get a job
- Finishing school
- How do you want to live
- What do you want in life?
- Caring for your family
- Everyone can volunteer
- Voting

Looking at these messages, it seems that the idea of volunteering at least to the young people, involves any positive practice that goes beyond immediate kinship concerns and builds a thriving peaceful community.



Tiwi Skin Groups

Tiwi people inherit their land from their father, and their skin groups from their mother. The four skin groups are Sun, Mullet, Stone and Pandanus. Within each group, there are sub-groups. Skin groups have traditionally defined where people may live, who they may associate with, whom they can marry, and the order in which they will participate in any collective decision making practices. Relations between groups moving clockwise or anticlockwise around the schematic are permitted. However, relations which cross the circle are not permitted. Working through skin groups is a traditional way of addressing and solving disputes.



Issues arising in consultations

During our consultations we would sit with people and talk to them about volunteering. Most of the time we spoke in English, but sometimes times the co-researchers would also speak in Tiwi. Within these discussions, the consultants sometimes found it appropriate to talk about ‘volunteering’, and at other times preferred to use the Tiwi phrase ‘ngaruwanajirri’, which loosely translates as ‘helping one another’ (see box on p.24).

Presented below are a number of significant issues that appeared within these discussions:

Traditionally the Tiwi skin groups have been crucial to making decisions, solving conflict and ordering society

There are four Tiwi skin groups and a number of sub-groups. These groups have traditionally prescribed correct laws of marriage, and the groups in which people live and do their work. Whenever there were problems or conflicts, the skin groups would come together, and sort out the trouble, tracing back correct relations of family and land ownership. These days these strict rules are beginning to break down as the young people are less interested in observing skin group laws and the ways that they order and arrange social activity. Tiwi Elders are very concerned about this, and the way in which it is becoming increasingly difficult to maintain the fabric of Tiwi life through correct practices of problem solving and dispute resolution.

Australian Red Cross workers in Wurrumiyanga should learn about the skin groups, support the Elders in their efforts to use them for building a strong community, and take advice about organising volunteering activities in such a way that skin group connections are respected and supported.

Volunteering is already happening in a number of ways in Wurrumiyanga

Volunteering within Western organisations was a practice which was far more embedded within everyday life in Wurrumiyanga, than it was in Galiwin’ku. While actual numbers remain reasonably low, and fluctuate considerably, it was well known that volunteer work was available through various organisations – including the school, Australian Red Cross, and the fire brigade. There was also a strong culture, amongst the Elder men in particular, sitting on the boards of a number of different Tiwi organisations – including the Tiwi Employment and Training Board, the Club, the Tiwi Land Council, and individual clan corporations.

In the Tiwi context (somewhat differently from the other two sites) people were clear about the voluntary contributions people make to keeping the community (and the wider Tiwi polity) healthy through the civil institutions of Tiwi life. There may be a role for Australian Red Cross supporting the work of these volunteers in civil organisations.

“We want jobs before volunteering”

When talking about volunteering in Wurrumiyanga, many people immediately respond by saying that they want more work, rather than opportunities to volunteer. Many people are unemployed, and living on Centrelink payments as there are very few jobs available in the community. Recognising that their own cultural knowledge and skills are very valuable, some people consider that the work of teaching the children is itself something that should be appropriately remunerated as a valuable service within the community, and so are declining to offer this work on a voluntary basis.

Volunteering in the west has traditionally been a practice of people who have been well served in their lives ‘giving back’ to larger society through their generosity. In communities which have not been served, some people resent being asked to do unpaid work when they have no job.

It was a good experience to help other Indigenous people in need

Many of the Tiwi staff of Australian Red Cross in Wurrumiyanga travelled to Darwin after the 2015 cyclones and helped with the evacuation of the community at Warruwi (Goulburn Island). They volunteered their assistance as Tiwi people helping another Aboriginal community to whom they had ties and felt like family, but who were not part of their immediate kinship networks. This experience of travelling to help other Aboriginal people seemed to be generally very positive for all involved. Those who had been evacuated from Warruwi felt comfortable speaking to the Tiwi volunteers, with the women approaching the women to talk about any issues that they had, and the men approaching the men. The Tiwi volunteers could then act as intermediaries, between Emergency Services staff and the evacuees, producing an extra step in the communication process that allowed everything to run more smoothly.

In the same way that volunteer work with Australian Red Cross builds community, it also can build Indigenous identity when volunteers work in other Aboriginal communities.

“Our young people need to find their path”

The Elder women in particular were very clear that the young people needed to find their path. That they need to start asking questions about what they wanted to do for themselves, and how they wanted to find their role in the community. At the moment, many young people leave school full of hope and expectation regarding what they might do next, only to find that their levels of education do not support their aspirations. It is at this point that some people lose confidence and continue to follow familiar routes of playing cards, and relying on Centrelink payments. Their suggestion was that volunteering may have a role to play in helping these young people to find their way and become leaders in the community.

Not only does volunteering build a skill base, but it builds a strong community, which develops strong institutions which then go on to be able to provide employment for young people.

“The Ponki mediators are volunteers who have worked in Wurrumiyanga to solve problems and manage conflict”

Our consultations included a number of Tiwi people who had worked in a volunteer capacity as Ponki mediators. These mediators were available to be called on to step in if there were family troubles or fights in Wurrumiyanga. It was their task to somewhat step aside from skin group connections and to mediate between the other parties involved, encouraging them to approach each other and to sit and talk through the problem at hand. This was difficult work for the mediators who were a first port of call before the police, and at times were exposed to threats of violence. However, it was also a step towards developing new means for dealing with issues outside of calling community skin group meetings, as used to happen in the past. This group has not been successful in receiving continuing funding, and is not currently active.

Australian Red Cross could consider investing in the work of the Ponki mediators, including in deploying, supporting and evaluating the work of volunteers.

It is good to find ways to travel. Australian Red Cross programs can help you do this

Australian Red Cross has also invested in sending some new staff members to Timor-Leste to visit other Australian Red Cross staff there. This experience has given rise to lasting friendships, and an expanded understanding of ways that people live, and the way that others chose to work as volunteers in the places where they live.

International travel supports the development of a global Indigenous identity.

People who volunteer begin to walk with a ‘spring in their step’

There have been several Tiwi people who have come to work at Australian Red Cross office as volunteers in recent times. These people became involved in the everyday routines of the office, and were able to help out with holiday and other programs on country, and working with the kids. While at the start these volunteers were very shy, over time they began to gain confidence and a sense of pride in their job. One of these volunteers now has a full-time job, and the other has moved away but continues to volunteer.

Becoming involved in the volunteer work has a positive effect on individuals, leading to a more active role in community goings on.

Conclusion

The ‘volunteering’ which has appeared in our research in Wurrumiyanga is considerably different to that which appeared in Galiwin’ku.

Many of the Tiwi people we spoke to, talked about the significance of the Tiwi skin groups in the structuring of Tiwi society, as well as the way adherence to skin group rules was declining. While recognising this great loss which is in the process of occurring, many of the project participants we spoke to were very interested in beginning to explore opportunities for keeping the skin groups system strong, while working and volunteering with Western organisations and service providers.

Moving in this direction would not be without its challenges. There are certain difficulties which have begun to arise at the interface of Tiwi and Western voluntary service practices; in particular around issues of payment with some feeling that teaching culture is a valuable service which should be remunerated, and others preferring to advocate for more jobs rather than more volunteering.

It is also important to note that there was not much attention paid to ways in which Tiwi forms of voluntary service work carried out through skin groups, and Western voluntary service practices might connect with each other at an institutional level. Rather the practices of Western organisations and Tiwi traditional institutional functioning tended to be referred to separately in our conversations.

However, there were already established means by which Tiwi people were beginning to take on volunteer work (whether through Australian Red Cross, the fire brigade or the school) and a strong sense of the very positive experience that was produced for all concerned when Tiwi staff of Australian Red Cross staff volunteered their services and travelled to Darwin to assist other Aboriginal people during a time of need.

Many Elder Tiwi women are encouraging of any volunteering work that young people might take on in the future. They want the youth to be able to become confident, find their path and become leaders in their community. Working on their advice, and looking for ways to support youth volunteer programs, might be one place to start for Australian Red Cross if they are interested in engaging further opportunities for volunteering in Wurrumiyanga.



Photo: Charles Darwin University/Michaela Spencer

Children at the Wurrumiyanga after school drop-in centre write about what volunteering means to them.

5. Darwin

What we did

In Darwin we worked closely with Australian Red Cross’ Voluntary Service manager when beginning to create a project design. Here we expected that the approach we would take at this site may differ considerably from that which emerged in the remote communities.

Initially we approached the Larrakia Nation Aboriginal Corporation, asking for their advice and support in contacting interviewees. We then approached a number of service providers, and the Darwin Correctional Centre regarding their volunteering programs. Existing relationships between the Charles Darwin University researchers and Yolŋu Aboriginal Australians living in Darwin also proved to be very important in beginning to approach people and hold a number of consultations.

We carried out six consultations, and spoke with a total of 18 people. Consultations were generally carried out as meetings with one or two people at a time, with participants invited on the basis of their involvement with different forms of voluntary service work e.g. as Elders taking on roles of responsibility in the community, as volunteers for Indigenous organisations (community radio, church), as individuals initiating their own formal and informal volunteer work, as participants in structured volunteer programs (e.g. Centrelink or court ordered mutual obligation activities), or as past beneficiaries of volunteer programs.

All discussions were carried out in English and recorded as notes during consultations or directly afterwards. Participants were thanked for their contribution through cash payments.

Sheila White

YWCA Board Member

Interviewed in Darwin
23rd February 2016

I was working for two years with the women’s group, with a service provider. But now I just do this volunteering work myself where I can because I have this passion to help our mob. Setting up sports and events. It’s about how to stop the boredom for the kids; doing things that they already like – sports and music. I was always angry. It’s a way to still be angry, but to be doing something positive.



James Gaykamanŋu

Yolŋu Elder, Bagot community

Interviewed in Darwin
30th January, 2016

Volunteering is about helping people to gain discipline, responsibility, respect and education. We have customary law in ceremony. The boss tells the djungaya (ceremony manager) what to do, and the djungaya tells the women and others what to do. When it is that special ceremony for the boy, the djungaya goes and gets the boy, and he has to surrender immediately. This is a volunteering job in different ways – the djungaya is following his responsibilities, and the boy has to offer himself to the ceremony. Each clan group have their own djungaya, but if there is not djungaya present then they can ask another person of the correct moiety from another clan group. Everyone knows the system, and everyone is automatically connected to the system. Once people know the system they know what to do. When you learn education, discipline and respect in this way, then you can also teach that to others.

Volunteering benefits the volunteer as much as the beneficiary. It should be undertaken in accordance with traditional laws and roles of responsibility.



Sylvia Nulpinditj

Aboriginal Resource and Development Service, Yolŋu Radio

Interviewed in Darwin
7th February 2016

The Yolŋu way is djäma rrambanj (working together). This is different to an individual working for themselves. It is based on the Yolŋu way of life where we are altogether, all for each other. Culture shows you and gives you the idea that you are not just there for yourself. Everything affects everyone, and relates to everyone. A Yolŋu person might go to training as an individual [in a mainstream organisation], but then when you come back home and you are not an individual, we are all together.



Issues arising in consultations

During our consultations we would sit with people and talk to them about volunteering. On all occasions we spoke in English. Within these discussions, the Yolŋu project participants also referred to volunteering in their own terms, talking about volunteering as djäma rrambanji (working altogether) or as bala räli (back and forth, give and take, mutual responsibility).

Presented below are a number of significant issues that appeared within these discussions:

People already involved in volunteering work are often confused about what this means

Those we spoke to in Darwin were often aware of different kinds of volunteering work that Aboriginal people were commonly involved in. These included working through cultural practices, as well as offering your time for free to Western organisations, and volunteering so as to receive your Centrelink payments or to complete court ordered mutual obligation activities. However, there was a lot of confusion around these differences, and in particular how volunteering related to other prospects for employment. At times, people who volunteered did not understand that there would not be payment or further work flowing from this activity, or that volunteering through mutual obligation programs was not considered by others to be genuine employment.

“We used to volunteer at church to help the Balanda (Europeans)”

There were church organisations that used to run volunteer programs in Darwin in years gone by. Parishioners would volunteer to meet with Yolŋu or other Indigenous people and to go out hunting; collecting shellfish and catching fish. Sometimes this would involve travelling in a car or boat out from the city, and spending a day away from other stresses and strains. The people who went on these excursions enjoyed them, and felt comfortable going out and doing traditional activities while accompanied by volunteers from Western organisations.

It is difficult here to determine who was doing the volunteering, the Darwin Yolŋu or the white parishioners. The point of the story is that this sort of activity, working across normal cultural boundaries, produces a healthy community.

In ceremony, volunteering has clearly defined roles that are part of a system

Part of what is confusing about volunteering in Western-style programs is that in Yolŋu, and perhaps other traditional ceremonies, the particular roles taken on by volunteers are very clear. There are duties and hierarchies which are attached to these roles, and everyone involved understands the system of operation so it is very clear what is happening and why. Within this system there are particular networks of relations through which volunteering is offered, with some people offering to volunteer their labour and services, while others volunteer themselves to be changed by the activity and relations within which they are involved.

“Volunteering is finding ways to help and work with our people”

There is volunteering work carried out by people working on their own initiative to help their people – by organising sports competitions, music events, special community days and other activities. This is often motivated out of an interest to help other Indigenous people to get together, work together and find ways through the particular troubles they face. As such, the character and format of these activities tends to emerge out of a sense of what will be effective in engaging these individuals and groups, and helping to enliven everyday goings on, rather than following standard program styles or habits of operation.

Working together is important

Coming together and working together is something which in itself can be a valuable activity. Living in Darwin, and often living in houses which are spread out across the Darwin region, people can become disconnected from ways of living that they might ordinarily pursue. Or living in the Long Grass, (see Maypilama et al 2004) people may forget about their connections with others, and what it means to be responsible to other people and places. The act of coming together and working together, and inviting others to do the same, is itself volunteering because it helps people to feel strong in their connections and remember who they are.

Volunteering through Western organisations means becoming involved in a particular government story

Some participants emphasised that it was important to remember, that the work of service providers and non-government organisations is always part of a particular government story. This story often changes, but it directs the work being done, and how people are treated and will need to participate in prevailing government systems.

However, Aboriginal people acting through their own systems of governance were never ‘subjects of the crown.’

Within a Yolŋu way of life, at least, there is not a sense of a primary unit of the individual as a figure which may then be governed by the Queen, or the state. Therefore, for Yolŋu, there can often be a sense that entering into Western institutions produces a very strange feeling of needing to become a person quite different to what they normally are within their other everyday life and routines.

Indigenous people living in Darwin don’t leave their connections with country behind when they come to the city

Darwin is on Larrakia land, and there are Indigenous Larrakia people who continue to live there on their land. There are also Aboriginal people from many other places who have moved to live in Darwin. However, project participants emphasised that living in Darwin did not mean that your connections to places and family in communities and homelands disappeared. Much volunteering work which may be carried out by these Indigenous people in the everyday, continues to be for the benefit of family elsewhere, or is carried out so as to continue enacting the particular connections of kinship and accountability in which they exist.

Yolŋu (and other tribal groups) living in Darwin do much work on behalf of their kin back on country, looking after their Darwin relatives in hospital, in the criminal justice system, or in the long grass. The Larrakia traditional owners understand this. Australian Red Cross could support this work.

Volunteering can be a route to proper jobs

As was emphasised in Galiwin’ku, volunteering through Western organisations was often seen by people as a possible route to become skilled workers in ways which would not otherwise be possible. However, attention often isn’t paid to these potential collateral effects of volunteering, or as focused on as a crucial co-benefit to be discussed as part of partnerships, and worked into forms of organisational practice.

Attending to this would help volunteers to feel valued, to achieve other positive outcomes alongside and beyond their volunteering.

Conclusion

Amongst some of the older people we spoke to in Darwin, there were strong memories of volunteering programs that had been run by various church organisations in the past. These programs had often involved going out hunting and fishing.

People enjoyed attending these programs. They felt safe and comfortable and going out hunting offered a break from the everyday stresses of Darwin city life. It seemed that it was a two way relationship produced within these hunting trips, as Western volunteers and organisations became inducted into particular sets of relations and ways of working which, in turn, Indigenous people experienced as supportive and appropriate.

As Indigenous people become involved in volunteer work today, there seems to be a lot of confusion about what their role is in these programs, and what they might be expecting to receive out the other end. Whether there will be a ‘real’ job waiting, or perhaps some form of certification of service offered and skills learned.

Good conversations and possibly written agreements between Australian Red Cross workers and Indigenous volunteers could help to clarify goals, and to sensitise non-Indigenous workers to how different the practices of volunteering can be from an Indigenous perspective, politically and culturally.

There are tensions within these programs around the figure, or the role, that Indigenous people seemed to be asked to inhabit as they agree to participate in these programs (including Centrelink or court ordered mutual obligation programs) and then find themselves having to perform as if they were an individual, filling in paperwork, being trained, told to take on tasks, as if they were separate from the networks of kin that they will return to when they go home.

Nonetheless, there was significant interest on the part of many of those that we spoke to, to be able to use volunteer work and voluntary service programs to reach levels of skilled work within Western organisations that might not otherwise be possible. Some people have sought out these opportunities of their own accord. Although, after having become involved in formal organisations, some of these people have then chosen to leave these programs and instead become involved in Aboriginal organisations or begin initiating their own events and programs.

There is a significant opportunity for Australian Red Cross to seek out and work with Indigenous people who have experienced working between traditional practices of care and concern, and those formally organised in institutions like Australian Red Cross. These people are often able to articulate some of what is involved in navigating differing ways of being a citizen, a volunteer, and an Indigenous person responsible to their connections with other people and places.



6. Conclusion

This project has investigated the role and practice of volunteering as it emerges among the Indigenous people of Galiwin'ku, Wurrumiyanga and Darwin.

Within discussions with project participants, volunteering was consistently described as playing a key role in the maintenance of connections between people and places. However, the manner in which these connections were made and maintained, and the particular means by which this work might connect with Western institutional and organisational practice differed considerably in each place. In this sense, the shift from benevolence to building social capital reported by Australian Red Cross in their report to the National Board (2013) is consistent with the views of the Aboriginal people we spoke with. Volunteering, (like all aspects of care and concern in traditional society) is aimed at strengthening links between individuals, groups, and places.

Throughout this project we have taken seriously the different institutional practices of volunteering which arise in both Indigenous and Western settings and organisations. In doing so, we have needed to resist the familiar categorisations of Indigenous volunteering as carried out as either 'formal' or 'informal' sets of practices. Rather, we have recognised volunteering exists as differently formalised practices which will vary not just across Indigenous and non-Indigenous institutions, but also within the practices for nurturing and sustaining resilient civil societies in different places. It is in the specificities of these emergent relations and sets of practices that opportunities for productive partnerships, and effective work might arise. This is quite different from Macduff's (et al 2009) 'social change model' aimed at coordinating activist volunteers seeking to precipitate changes in their society. And it is different also from Bell's (2008) 'multi-identity' model in which the volunteer is very flexible, pro-active and non-judgemental, rather than assured on the nature and limits of her place and role.

So the Indigenous co-researchers in each community have told us precise details of the effects of what Kerr (et al 2001) report as caring for others becoming extended beyond immediate networks of kin towards the broader community. These effects, we have found, include building the resilience of the community through its institutions, keeping traditional culture strong, and providing pathways for young people.

Inter-community volunteering also clearly has the effect of enhancing the collective pan-Indigenous identity in Australian and international life as suggested by Australian Volunteers International, (2011), and by Jope, (2008).

If Australian Red Cross is to 'take root' in Indigenous communities, its employees need to learn how to recognise Indigenous organisations and institutions which are active in volunteering in a particular place. In addition, developing capacity within Australian Red Cross to discern the particular operational modes and social character of volunteering that functions in those Indigenous organisations is crucial. Our findings therefore support the notion of 'serendipitous' programs (Macduff et al., 2009) which seek to coordinate volunteers (under the guidance of cultural authorities) rather than to 'manage' them.

Such an approach moves beyond a focus on culturally competent interpersonal interaction as the nub around which successful cross-cultural voluntary service programs might turn. Instead it begins to consider the complex ecologies of knowledge and culture which may be encountered by Western organisations as they seek to engage with Indigenous voluntary service practices. Those interviewed in the two remote sites (Tiwi and Galiwin'ku) emphasised the role of community Elders in assisting Australian Red Cross to supervise its volunteers in productive ways. This involvement can ensure that appropriate people are deployed to appropriate tasks, thus mitigating some of the bureaucratic and administrative hurdles (e.g. police and identity checks) that may arise when community members are engaged without such assistance from Elders as noted in the literature (Kerr et al., 2001; VA, 2007; VCSA, 1992).

If Australian Red Cross is to take seriously its commitment to working collaboratively with community Elders to build community and keep traditional volunteering practices strong, then the Elders should be recognised as supervisors, not as volunteers. As with all authoritative work within traditional society, this work needs to be recognised and valued.

Taking seriously the authority of these local Elders, and the specific differences between communities, we would recommend that Australian Red Cross workers have time and resources to engage local Elders for 'cultural awareness training', rather than that Australian Red Cross prepare 'training materials' for cultural awareness of the sort recommended by Kerr et al (2001).

Given also the insistence of Elders on the need to address the needs of young people, we would recommend that Australian Red Cross adopt a system of identifying and engaging young mentees at all levels of the local organisation and volunteering to work alongside Elders and non-Indigenous staff. When carried out under the guidance and authority of local Elders, such sensitive and respectful engagement of volunteers in Indigenous communities, can contribute to the constitution of more resilient and diverse forms of social life.

Collaborative design of local volunteer programs.

Australian Red Cross may seek to refer to the following steps when establishing or enhancing place-based volunteer programs in Indigenous communities:

1. Engage key authorities:

- Engage key Elders and traditional authorities as advisors
- Engage key Indigenous organisations (e.g. Yalu' in Galiwin'ku, Wangatunga Strong Women in Wurrumiyanga) as collaborators and/or service delivery partners

2. Work collaboratively with key authorities to:

- Discuss how work should proceed (e.g. through certain practices or metaphors for collaboration)
- Discuss issues around which voluntary service work may coalesce (e.g. cyclone preparation, caring for children, supporting the youth)
- Identify community members for appropriate volunteer activities
- Discuss suitable forms of recognition, accreditation and/or remuneration which may be offered to volunteers and volunteer managers
 - e.g. provision of certificates for service; development of pathways to employment; provision of job relevant training
- Discuss aspects of Australian Red Cross programs and organisational practice that may be relevant to consultants, managers and volunteers in community
- Evaluate local programs

3. Act in accordance with above negotiations when supporting and developing volunteering within other aspects of Australian Red Cross service provision.

Particularly in relation to:

- Program design
- Formalising scales of remuneration or other forms of reciprocal benefit
- Agreeing on appropriate timings, and time commitments, of voluntary work
- Evaluation

This list is a device to help guide collaborative design of service provision. It is not a definitive checklist or set of tasks.

In many cases, the steps proposed here may suggest practices already undertaken by Australian Red Cross staff when engaging volunteers and program participants in Aboriginal communities.



Photo: Charles Darwin University/Michaela Spencer

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