



QSA Notes

people, places & projects

Women's healing

Violence against women and children in Aboriginal communities, and particularly child sexual abuse, has been an issue of serious concern to governments, health professionals and welfare workers for many years. However, the Northern Territory Intervention has been criticised for curtailing the rights of Indigenous people even further, and causing severe hardship.

The people of Balgo in Western Australia, one of Australia's most isolated Aboriginal communities, are only too aware of this problem. The women elders of the area want the rest of Australia to know that they themselves have answers to these problems. The Kapululangu Aboriginal Women's Association have established an intergenerational cultural healing and education program in their community with the aim of educating and empowering young women in their peoples' Law (philosophy) and culture (practice) and also providing healing for all members of the community.

In April 2008 Balgo's women elders held a Young Women's Culture Camp. This camp was part of a series of culture classes and required careful practical and spiritual preparation. During the camp six women elders were assisted by *tilitja* (culture workers) to provide ceremonial training for 30 young women.

Activities included ceremonies, games and sport, discussions, bush walks, cooking and just having fun. 'I didn't know the old ladies knew so much' was the reaction of one young woman who attended the Culture Camp run

by the Kapululangu Aboriginal Women's Association.

Other aspects of the project include the provision of a safe refuge for women and children seeking to avoid, escape or recover from domestic and family violence, and to provide Tjarrtjurra service (traditional women's healing) to all community members, including men and children, to contribute to the alleviation of the dire health problems in the community. Regular culture classes have been held over the past six months, and these have included story-telling using sand-drawings, paintup with ancestral designs and the teaching of dancing.

The outcomes of these activities are more profound than the women could have hoped. 'There was a look of absolute awe and joy on the faces of the young women as they realised

that what the elders are showing them is their own cultural knowledge. There's immense pride and self-esteem in that awareness,' said Kapululangu's coordinator, Zohl dé Ishtar. 'This is when the merit of the project is proven.'

This story is all about a courageous and wise group of women, and their determination to pass on their Law and cultural knowledge as part of community healing. There have been serious challenges that these women have had to face. Illness and the death of close relatives have impacted on the project, and extreme weather conditions will delay future activities. But these women are determined to follow through. Over the next six months, another camp and more culture classes will be held. We wish them well, and look forward to hearing more about it.



Preparing for ceremony at Balgo's Young Women's Culture Camp, April 2008.
Photo: Zohl dé Ishtar

QSA is a member of the Australian Council for International Development (ACFID), and is a signatory to the ACFID Code of Conduct. The purpose of QSA is to express in a practical way the concern of Australian Quakers for the building of a more peaceful, equitable, just and compassionate world. To this end QSA works with communities in need to improve their quality of life with projects which are economically and environmentally appropriate and sustainable.

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New QSA website

In early October, QSA rolled out its new website. We have taken pains to make it easy to use, easy to read and packed with useful resources. Now you can access all our educational materials, our Annual Report, our Newsletters and find out the latest news about our project partners. Visit www.qsa.org.au and enjoy.

Study tour to India

In September, eight adventurous Quakers braved Southern India's warm weather to visit one of our long-time partners, Joss Brooks, and the Pitchandikulam Bio Resource Centre at Auroville in Tamil Nadu. The group experienced living amongst our partners as well as hearing all about some of the projects that have

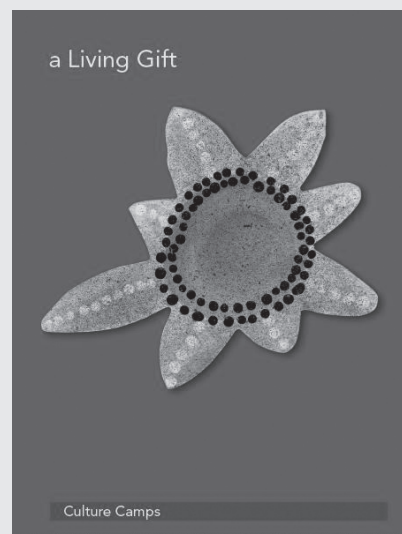
taken place over the years and plans for the future.

The group stayed in the newly built Eco-dorms. In addition to meeting with project partners, visiting aspects of the project and experiencing life in a completely different culture, the group also had the privilege of attending a local wedding ceremony, which was one of the highlights for everyone involved.

Kowanyama Baby Festival

On August 27 and 28, 2008, the third Annual Kowanyama Baby Festival took place in Far North Queensland. This event raises awareness about the issues of child and maternal health, and in particular child foetal alcohol diseases. QSA contributed towards the transport, equipment, a

recording of and carbon offsetting of the event through 'Climate Friendly'. We look forward to hearing about plans for the future.



Living Gifts

Friends, we urge you to get your Living Gift Cards now! Using the Living Gifts Catalogue, you can choose a gift for a friend or family member that is so much more meaningful than yet another pair of socks - and more importantly - will truly make a difference in somebody's life. You might choose to give chickens for a community in Uganda, Culture camps for young women in Indigenous Australia, a toilet and bathroom for a family in India, a mushroom kit for a farmer in Cambodia or one of many more possibilities. Contact us on 02 9698 9103 or visit our website on www.qsa.org.au



Study tour participants view the Spirulina being harvested at Nadukuppam. **Photo:** QSA