QSA Notes, March 2017

Although not as numerous as projects supported overseas, QSA continues, as it has from its inception, to work with Australian Indigenous projects in many states of Australia. Since QSA moved to Sydney, support from its Aboriginal Concerns Fund has been extended to the Purga community in Queensland for its native plant nursery project; to the Kapalulangu Women in WA; the Eleanor Duncan Health Centre in NSW; the Irrkerlantye Learning Centre in Alice Springs to name a few. A common theme in these projects and the current ones, are that the links to them have come from Quakers who have seen or heard about the work they are achieving and think that they would welcome additional financial support and interest shown from QSA.

One current project, in South Australia, was also suggested by a Friend, and is with Kornar Winmil Yunti. QSA's original support began in 2012, and supported a second camp for men from around the state to come together to encourage conversations and to explore, understand and improve their state of physical and mental wellbeing by re-connecting to their Aboriginality and spirituality. The camp was underpinned by Indigenous concepts of wellbeing, that addressed physical, emotional, spiritual, cultural and community needs.

As a result of the feedback from the participants, a project was formed to provide not only an annual camp, but also regular smaller groups in different locations to give more sustainable support for men needing this type of support. It has been successful in bringing about a reduction in domestic violence, which has been of benefit to the whole community, and QSA was pleased to be supportive of this evolving process. An important aspect of the project is also the ability of the various communities to invite the program in their community, rather than the program being imposed, as is often the case. A sustainable formal network of Aboriginal men's groups and programs across South Australia created the opportunity for Kornar Winmil Yunti to offer on-going support to these groups in regards to training and development as well as other activities. Kornar Winmil Yunti feels this aspect is fundamental to the successful outcome of the project due to its implied message of self-determination and respect.

Photo of some attendees at an annual camp. Photo credit Kornar Winmil Yunti

The next phase was to look more closely at younger males, helping them to come to terms with issues such as depression and prevention of youth suicide. Using groups that already existed was considered to be important, and so using football clubs within the region was a useful link, as was

support from the White Ribbon Campaign and its ambassadors in the state. A pilot project with a few clubs showed Kornar Winmil Yunti that this was a good way to meet Aboriginal youth, and that having men recount their own personal stories was a very powerful approach. A second project involving ten more clubs was equally successful. One attendee commented

'I just wanted to send you a quick email to thank you for the training day yesterday, I thought you were both brilliant – incredibly responsive, vigorous and enlightening discussion and you guys are gifted teachers. It was an honour to have the opportunity to participate. I am currently studying community development and it was wonderful to listen to you touch on grassroots/bottom up approaches to community engagement and organizing. I couldn't help but think that I'd love to do a voluntary placement at your organisation one day.
Thanks again and all the best, you are both doing unbelievably important work."
The success and merits of these projects, and comments from the participants led Kornar Winmil Yunti to think and plan their next move, which was to develop a means of supporting the women and children in the community also. A decision to employ an Aboriginal social worker to specifically work with women and children came into being, and QSA has agreed to support this for a six month trial period, beginning from February 2017. QSA's role has been to support Kornar Winmil Yunti in the evolution of this community work, to assist with project design and evaluation processes where possible, and to take a keen interest in this and other aspects of their work.

Another new project has just started in Queensland, supporting Indigenous offenders through the Murri Court system. QSA is linking with another NGO called Five Bridges to provide this support, which is in three parts. The first is to support them physically with toiletries and clean clothing to enable them to give a good presentation in court, as many of the defendants are homeless. With this also comes funding for transport support for some of the Elders who meet with the defendants and write cultural reports that may mitigate sentencing. While some payments to Elders are now again provided, there is no provision for those frail Elders who really need a taxi for safe transport home at the end of a long day. All the defendants supported in this way must have pleaded guilty.

A second component is to provide an art and healthy eating program over four weeks, run and administered by the Elders and the Court Co-ordinator. And the third involves a cultural support for Indigenous prisoners. Funding will be provided to cover the expenses of the Cully Old Girls to make two or more trips from Cunnamulla to the South-East Queensland prisons to visit inmates from the Cunnamulla region. Some of the Old Girls will be related to quite a few inmates. These visits provide, in the words of David Carline *" face to face talking to people they grew up with and have always had in their lives, about news from back home, and encouragement for when they get out that people will try their best to help them get resettled. They let them know they are being thought of, they are not forgotten."*

For Friends wanting to make donation to continue support of these and other Aboriginal projects being managed by QSA, please send your donations to our CUA bank account, BSB 814 282, account number 50585902.