Remote Aboriginal women and meaningful work: Key dimensions for Ngaanyatjarra women

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Abstract

This study depicts how Ngaanyatjarra women in a remote Aboriginal Australian community collectively initiated, developed and managed a suite of community service activities. It describes the development of the activities, a supportive workplace and a worker role meaningful and congruent with the social and cultural contexts of their lives. Using ethnographic methods, it outlines the women's activities and their descriptions and interpretations of these to reveal key dimensions of meaningful work and effective workplace structures and processes that enabled productive work engagement. The epistemological foundations of the research, based on a call for ethnographic research to be "inherently advocative" and emergent from "community-defined needs" (American Anthropological Association, 2002), reveals important insights for politicians, policy and program developers about productive and meaningful work for Aboriginal women in remote communities with crucial implications for government policy linking income security with work engagement.

Declaration

This is to certify that:

1) The thesis comprises only my original work towards the PhD;
2) Due acknowledgement has been made in the text to all other material used;
3) The thesis is less than 100,000 words in length, exclusive of tables, maps, bibliographies and appendices.

Rosalind Beadle

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Writing this thesis and the events which culminated in its creation has been a journey rich with experiences and opportunities I never could have anticipated. In addition to the privilege of living and working in Warburton, I've met a diverse range of inspiring, remarkable and kind-hearted people; many of whom have contributed to the content and completion of this work.

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Abbreviations

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
AEO	Aboriginal Education Officer
AHW	Aboriginal Health Worker
APY	Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara
ARACY	Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth
ATSI	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander
ATSIC	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission
BAC	Bawinanga Aboriginal Corporation
CDP	Community Development Program
CDEP	Community Development Employment Projects
COAG	Council of Australian Governments
DAA	Department of Aboriginal Affairs (Commonwealth)
DCPFS	Department for Child Protection and Family Support (Western Australia)
DNA	Department of Native Affairs (Western Australia)
DVD	Digital Versatile Disc
FIFO	Fly-In-Fly-Out workers
GP	General Practitioner
HACC	Home and Community Care
NCAC	Ngaanyatjarra Council Aboriginal Corporation
NPYEC	Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Empowered Communities
NPYWC	Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Women's Council
NT	Northern Territory
NTER	Northern Territory Emergency Response
PM&C	Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet
RJCP	Remote Jobs and Communities Program
RTO	Registered Training Organisation
SNAICC	Secretariat for Aboriginal and Islander Childcare
TICHR	Telethon Institute for Child Health Research
UAM	United Aborigines Mission
USB	Universal Serial Bus
VET	Vocational Education and Training
WA	Western Australia
WBM	Warburton Breakfast Minyma
WCO	Warburton Community Office
WIAM	Warburton Interagency Meeting

PROLOGUE: *From a small thing it got bigger*



Figure 1 *Mirlirrtjarra Kuurl Mirrka Palyalpayi* painting by Olive Lawson.

In June, 2012, Olive Lawson, a senior Ngaanyatjarra woman from Warburton, a remote Aboriginal community in the Western Desert of Australia, painted the story of *Mirlirrtjarra Kuurl Mirrka Palyalpayi*. Translated as "Making Good Food at Warburton School", *Mirlirrtjarra Kuurl Mirrka Palyalpayi* described a suite of activities that were instigated and run by a group of local grandmothers, mothers and aunties in order to address issues of wellbeing in their community. They referred to these activities as their *waarka* (work), and to themselves as workers.

The name they gave their collective – the Warburton Breakfast *Minyma* (women) - was a result of their activities being initially grounded in providing school breakfast.

The artist, Olive Lawson, is one of the "original" grandmothers who instigated the first activities in 2008 and who later emerged as the "boss"[1] of the Warburton Breakfast *Minyma*. Sitting in the red desert sand at a place of significance to the women a few kilometres east of Warburton, Olive and three other women presented their interpretation of the painting in their language, Ngaanyatjarra. The story of the painting provides the narrative structure for this thesis that contextualises the Minyma's story of their work and their experience as workers. The following is a summary of the Minyma's story and its translation into English.

> Olive Lawsontu Paintingpa ngaanya palyarnu. Tjiinya tjukurrpa Mirlirrtjarrala minymalu-ya mirrka palyalpayi.
>
> *This painting is by Olive Lawson. The story is about the Warburton Breakfast Minyma and their work. The program is called* Mirlirrtjarra Kuurl Mirrka Palyalpayi*. This means Making Good Food at Warburton School.*
>
> Kurranyulu kaparli kutjarra-kutjarralu-ya mirrka palyarnu kuurlta tjilkulu-ya mirrka walykumunu pitjala ngalkulatjaku. Minymalu-ya mirrka palyalpayi Mirlirrtjarra kuurlta. Palunyalu-ya tjapirnu 'Mirlirrtjarra kuurlpa mirrka palyalpayinya.'
>
> *School breakfast started in 2008. Four grandmothers made breakfast for the kids. They wanted the kids to come to school and be healthy. They were called the Warburton Breakfast* Minyma*.*
>
> Minyma pirnirringu waarka palyaranytja. Nyangka tjilku pirnirringu pitjapayi mirrkaku.
>
> *More ladies started working. Lots of kids came to school for breakfast.*
>
> Minyma pirnilu-ya waarka kutjupa puru palyaranytja. Ngarnmanytju-ya

[1] In their description of the program, the Breakfast Minyma refer to Olive Lawson as the "boss", "She is the boss for the Family Place. She is the eldest, the first one working. We respect her and we listen to her" (Breakfast Minyma, 2012, pers. comm). As described in Chapter Four this is a reflection of her senior status amongst the Minyma.

palyaranytja tjilku pirniku kuurlpa pirningkatjaku – Dust Upku, Theme daysku Open dayskutarrartu.

Then the ladies started to do more work. First they cooked for lots of kids at the Desert Dust Up sports carnival. They also cooked at School Theme Days and Open Days.

Palunyalu-ya paaranytja Tamalalanguru Wanarntakutu. Puru-ya mirrka yirringkara palyaranytja Ngaanyatjarra Councilku barbeque.

They cooked for everyone on a walk from Tamala to Wanarn. Then they did a barbeque at the Ngaanyatjarra Council meeting.

Kurlunytjanu mapurlkarringu minymalu-ya kutjupa-kutjupa pirni palyaranytja.

From a small thing, the program grew bigger. The Breakfast Minyma made food for lots of different events!

Mirrka HACC-pa palyaranytja kilinikingka. Palunyatjanu HACC-lu tjapirnu minyma pirninya, “Palya-munta-yan palyanma?” Nyangka yuwarnmanu.

The HACC [Home and Community Care] meals used to be cooked at the clinic. One day the HACC worker asked the Breakfast Minyma*, "Is it all right if you mob do the HACC food?" They said, "Yes".*

Palunyatjanulu-ya high school kungkalu-ya school lunch palyaranytja tjilku pirniku – sandwichpa puru fruitpa.

The Minyma also worked with the High School girls to make school lunches of sandwiches and fruit for all the kids.

Kurranyu-ya palyarnu school buildingka. Palunyatjanu 2010-ta-ya matjarrpangu Family Placetja palunyalu-ya kutjupa-kutjupa walykumunu palyaranytja.

When the program started the women worked in the old school home economics room. In 2010 they moved to their own building, the Family Place where they did more things like sewing and using computers.

Kutjupa Wednesday Kutjupa Wednesday minymalu-ya kungka nintipungkupayi palyaratjaku kutjupa-kutjupa - mirrka paalpayi-ya, mangka palyalpayitarrartu.

Every Wednesday night the ladies still help with Kungka *(teenage girls) Nights at the Family Place.* Kungkas *come for activities like hairdressing, make up, art and cooking.*

Minyma pirnilu-ya purtikutu yankula mirrka palyalpayi. Palunyalu–ya mitjitji nintitjura nyakulatjaku.

The Minyma like to go out bush and do cooking. Sometimes they take [non-Aboriginal] visitors and show them how to make a damper and cook on a fire.

Minymalu-ya barbecue palyalpayi disco ngaralanyangka. Tjilku-ya tanytjarringkula-ya parltjatjirratjarriku palunyalu–ya mirrka ngalkupayi.

The Minyma sometimes have a barbeque at discos. When the kids are dancing and get hungry they can have some food.

Minymanya-ya yanu Perthku. Palunyalu-ya mirrka paaranytja kitchen purlkanyangka. Palunyalu-ya trainingmanu, certificatepa mantjirnu.

The Minyma have been to Perth for cooking training in a big kitchen and received certificates.

Minymalu-ya tjarrparra classroompa tjukurrpa palunyaku waarkatjarra watjalpayi. Nyangka tjilku-ya nintirriku palunyalu watjalpayi “Ngayuku ngunytju, kaparli waarka palyalpayi.” Palunyalu-ya pukurlarripayi yungarrapirti waarka palyaranyangka.

The Minyma go into the classrooms to tell stories about their work. The kids learn from these stories and say, "My nanna, auntie and mother are workers". They feel good and are proud to look at pictures of their families working.

CHAPTER ONE: Understanding meaningful work engagement in Warburton: The context of the inquiry

Introduction

This thesis describes what doing work and being a worker means to a group of Ngaanyatjarra women in Warburton, a very remote community of about 500 people in the Ngaanyatjarra Lands of Western Central Australia. In 2008, the Warburton Breakfast Minyma[2,3] to whom the reader has been introduced in the Prologue, commenced a suite of activities that addressed the wellbeing of children, teenage girls and the elderly.

As the Minyma's activities became increasingly established, so too did their desire to tell stories about what they were doing. In addition to their regular conversations and reflections, formal opportunities to disseminate media about their activities emerged. The media took the form of story books, posters, DVDs, and PowerPoint presentations delivered to a range of audiences: kids in school, other remote Aboriginal women and non-Aboriginal audiences in both the city and regional centres. The Minyma's stories revealed their vibrant engagement characterised by strong participation and motivation and passionate identity as workers contributing to their community. The women's presentations incorporated two significant themes: firstly, the positive impact of their activities

[2] The Warburton Breakfast Minyma will hereafter mostly be referred to as the "Breakfast Minyma" or the "Minyma".

[3] In this thesis I use the singular form 'Minyma' throughout. In doing so I am following the example of the Warburton women for the purposes of the matters considered in this thesis. While there are plural forms of this word in the Ngaanyatjarra language, the forms are complex and vary according to context and syntax. Given that the distinctions have no bearing on the subjects under consideration, they are avoided here. Thus normally where I use 'Minyma' I am referring to 'the women'. If I am intending to refer to one woman, I will make this clear within the sentence. I use a capital "M" to acknowledge the abbreviation of their title as Warburton Breakfast Minyma.

on the wellbeing of their families and community; and secondly, the benefits they experienced in their role as workers and the importance they attributed to *doing* work and *being* workers.

The activities the Minyma implemented and the stories they shared resulted in an array of positive feedback from their families, community leaders, and service and agency personnel, both in Warburton and further afield. As a support worker for the women, I was also interested in and impressed with the impact of the Minyma's growing repertoire of activities and their new capacities, pride and self-identity as workers. My close relationship with the Minyma and interest in their activities prompted this study.

This chapter commences with a description of the study site, Warburton. It is followed by an outline of the background to the study. The next section offers an overview of the experience of work for Aboriginal people in Warburton. I then discuss the Community Development Employment Program (CDEP) which sat behind the policy program guidelines and funding context that enabled the Minyma's activities. CDEP facilitated both income support and work engagement opportunities for remote Aboriginal Australians. This chapter then draws attention to the marked absence of local Aboriginal perspectives in popular discussion of remote Aboriginal people and work engagement in the media. Likewise, there are few substantive ethnographic studies of remote Aboriginal people and work in the academic literature. This study attempts to address this gap.

Study site

Warburton is located in the Great Victoria Desert half way between Kalgoorlie to the south-west and Alice Springs to the north-east, approximately 1000 kilometres in either direction (see Figures 2 and 3). Warburton has a population which at the 2011 census was 474, with 84 per cent identifying as Aboriginal (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2011a, 2011b). The majority of the 78 non-Aboriginal people were residing in Warburton for work as "semi-permanent" "staff" operating in a range of services for the "administration and/or care of Aboriginal people" (Brooks, 2011, p. 23). In addition to the "permanent"

population recorded by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Census, there was also a regular stream of "fly-in fly-out" (FIFO) staff associated with services who did not have a base in Warburton, or from administrative head offices. For example, the Ngaanyatjarra Health Service and Ngaanyatjarra Council Aboriginal Corporation are administered in Alice Springs, and the school in Kalgoorlie (since relocated to Perth).



Figure 2 Map indicating the location of Warburton in relation to the two closest major towns (created for the Breakfast Story Book, see Chapter Six) (Source: Lawson et al., 2010).

Warburton is the largest of eleven communities in the Ngaanyatjarra Lands, the others having evolved as part of the outstation movement in the 1970s and 1980s (Brooks & Plant, 2016). Consequently, it is an administrative 'hub' for "the Lands" from which many agencies and services operate.

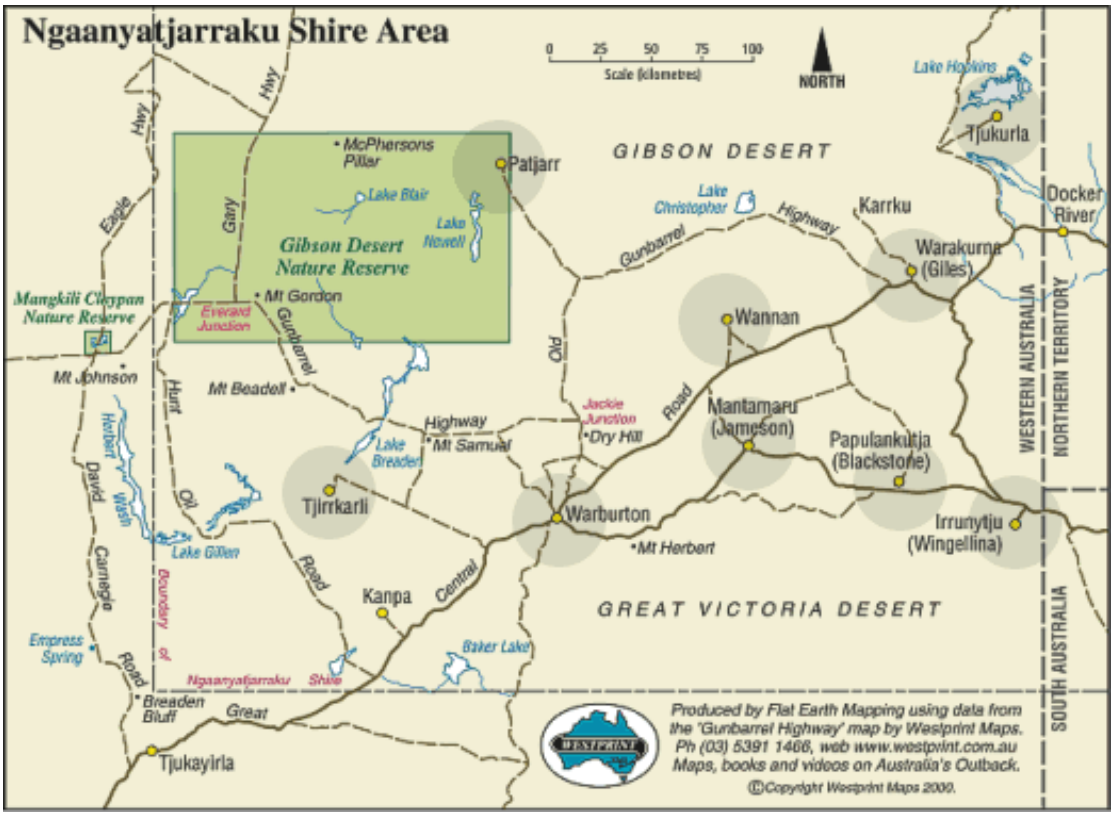


Figure 3 Warburton and other Ngaanyatjarra Lands communities (Source: Flat Earth Mapping - Westprint Maps, 2000).

For most *Yarnangu*[4] in Warburton, Ngaanyatjarra is their first language. The governing body of the Ngaanytjarra Lands is the Ngaanyatjarra Council Aboriginal Corporation[5]. The Council holds monthly public meetings which alternate between Warburton and other Lands' communities. It was at one of these meetings in 2008 that a concern regarding school attendance prompted the establishment of a school breakfast program.

4 "Yarnangu" translates to "body of a living person" or "person, someone, people". Ngaanyatjarra people use it as an 'identifier' and it excludes non-Indigenous/non-Yarnangu people (Newberry, Porter, Richards, Ellis, & Benson-de-Rose, 2003, p. 551)

5 The Warburton mission continued operating until 1973 when the Department of Native Affairs took over. The Ngaanyatjarra Council Aboriginal Corporation was incorporated in 1981 to provide development and advocacy, gain land rights and manage negotiation with mining companies. Each of the twelve Ngaanyatjarra Lands communities, totalling approximately 1500 people, is represented on the Council. The Council is responsible for a range of service delivery organisations and is complemented by the Shire of Ngaanyatjarraku formed in 1993.

Background to the study

I arrived in Warburton in 2009 as a support worker to assist the Minyma. The then support worker who had worked alongside the Minyma for a year was seeking assistance and I went to volunteer. Although I had never been to Warburton before, previously I had worked in community development roles in India, Tonga, the Torres Strait Islands and Tennant Creek in the Northern Territory.

Initially my role in supporting the Minyma was carrying out tasks such as coordinating meetings, liaising between stakeholders, sourcing funding, transporting women and children, seeking out space for activities and fulfilling administrative requirements. As the Minyma's desire to share their stories arose, I facilitated the process by: assisting them with the required technology; suggesting means of disseminating resources; and, sharing my skills to co-write stories for reports, newspapers, newsletters and a widely disseminated annual report. My support role enabled deep and prolonged engagement with the women. I participated in daily conversations, storytelling events, and their everyday work activities as their role evolved.

Social indicators have for many years revealed the ongoing marginalization of Aboriginal people in Australia. There remains a significant disparity in measures of wellbeing – education, health, incarceration and so on - between Aboriginal people and the mainstream Australian population. One of the most significant features of this disparity is evident in economic life, where levels of employment and income, especially in regional and remote areas, remain stagnant, despite continuing efforts of special programs and services initiated by Federal and State governments. Despite the application of significant funding and the development of specific measures to "close the gap" by the Council of Australian Governments (COAG), Aboriginal Australians continue to register at the poorest levels of statistics of income and employment.

What was increasingly obvious to me as I spent time with the Minyma was the stark contrast between their high engagement and self-directedness of their work and popular discourse of dysfunction in remote Aboriginal communities (Hall,

2006; Hirst, 2007; Elise Klein, 2016; Purtill, 2018; The Australian, 2006). From my perspective, it was evident the Minyma's story could contribute richly to the academic and policy discourse by showcasing their positive experience. Consequently, a dialogue between the Minyma and I emerged about the possibility of their stories informing PhD research. Later, having collated their accounts into a thesis, the detrimental impacts of the current policy regime gave the Minyma's story even greater relevance.

The combination of the Minyma's desire to share their stories, my increasing awareness of the significance of *Mirlirrtjarra Kuurl Mirrka Palyalpayi* to the women, my recognition of the importance of their story within a broader context, and my positive relationships with the Minyma prompted the research question: *How do remote Aboriginal women enact and describe their experience of being workers?*

The aim of the question was to investigate how this group of Ngaanyatjarra women in Warburton enacted, described and interpreted their role as workers. Rather than drawing upon retrospective decontextualised interviews about previous experiences of work, the study drew upon the meanings the Minyma gave to being workers in the midst of their activities over the period 2009 to 2014. This provided me with the opportunity to explore the interpretations the Breakfast Minyma brought to their role as workers through their interactions and conversations on a daily basis, as well as on specific occasions when the Minyma discussed particular dimensions of their work and worker role.

To emphasise the significance of this work, next I locate it in the historical context of this remote community.

Work in Warburton

'Work', in the sense of meaningful activities associated with livelihood, was by no means absent from traditional (pre-contact with Europeans) life for Ngaanyatjarra people. For at least 12,000 and possibly up to 35,000 years Ngaanyatjarra people participated in 'livelihood' activities required for survival

(Brooks, 2011, p. 1). As noted by Angus, this 'work' was a central part of 'classical' Ngaanyatjarra life,

> *In classical times, Ngaanyatjarra people were well acquainted with 'work': survival depended on the unremitting search for food and water. Besides hunting and gathering, they also were obliged to maintain relations with kin and participate in ceremonial and spiritual life within the Ngaanyatjarra social order* (Angus, 2017, p. iv).

However, what is and what is not labelled as 'work' in hunter-gatherer contexts is, as noted by McRae-Williams, a "semantic" discussion, which perhaps has its "roots in the western researchers' own cultural perspective" (McRae-Williams, 2008, p. 187). There is "wide academic recognition of the absence of the notion of 'work'" (McRae-Williams, 2008, p. 186) in hunter-gatherer societies, and hence, the 'work' required for survival was not seen as something separate to the "other ingredients of living" (cited in McRae-Williams, 2008, p. 185). This recognition is reflected in the absence of a word for work in many Aboriginal languages (Applebaum, 1984 cited in McRae-Williams, 2008), including Ngaanyatjarra where the word '*waarka'* has been adapted from English (Glass, 2017, pers. comm.). Consequently, contemporary meanings of "work" for people in Warburton have been shaped by the varied histories of both mission and government-led policies, practices and programs.

Until the arrival of missionaries in 1933 and the gradual transition to 'settlement' life, the Ngaanyatjarra people of the Western Desert were hunter-gatherers ranging across known estates of country. The transition to 'settlement' life in Warburton took place over thirty years and this was the "founding period when many of the lasting patterns of black/white interaction were created" (Brooks & Plant, 2016, p. 124). Brooks (2011) suggests the Mission in Warburton was "essentially a very powerless institution" which did not result in the "clashes" between cultures and the consequent "traumatic experience" common in other areas where missions took control (Brooks, 2011, p. 31; Brooks & Plant, 2016, p. 124). However, the missionaries did bring with them the desire to instil a 'work ethic' within the local population, based on the belief that hard work would earn a

place in heaven (L. Smith, 1999), and provide a push for economic participation as part of establishing the settlement.

There are mixed and conflicting accounts of missionary influence on "work" in Warburton from reports kept at the time as well as from people's memories (Plant & Viegas, 2002, p. 4). The reports suggest a very low "economic participation" because of resistance to work and limited funding to pay people. However, the recollections of local Ngaanyatjarra people conjure up images of many adults willingly participating in the United Aborigines Mission's (UAM) imagining of a labour force to create a "flourishing community with its own pastoral industry" (Milnes, 1984 cited in Angus, 2015, p. 18). Hence, contemporary remembering of Mission times, shared with younger generations, are often "very much depicted as a 'golden age', free from contemporary problems" (Plant & Viegas, 2002, p. 4).

Forms of engagement in employment recalled by local Ngaanyatjarra people were the making of mud bricks, building projects, a bakery, cultivating vegetables, road construction, running of livestock, establishing orchards, copper mining, housekeeping and "limited employment" related to the establishment of the first missionary services in the form of a school, hospital and store (Milnes, 1985 cited in Angus, 2017, p. 18; Mollenhauer, 2002; Plant & Viegas, 2002). Additionally, training took place for women and girls in sewing, cooking and crafts (Breakfast Minyma, 2010, pers. comm.). The Breakfast Minyma recalled stories of their mothers and grandmothers applying these skills as they worked "hard" in the school dormitories, making and serving meals to the children who 'boarded' there, describing them as "good workers" and influential in the Minyma's future pursuits (Breakfast Minyma, 2012, pers. comm.). However, there is little doubt that this did not lead to the "flourishing community" anticipated by the missionaries.

To the State Government of Western Australia, Warburton was "out of sight and out of mind" and treated with "consistent and debilitating neglect" (Brooks & Plant, 2016, p. 124). Dependent on thinly spread church donations, the limited funding available for salaries and procurement of rations restricted the number of people who could be formally employed (Angus, 2017; Plant & Viegas, 2002).

Additionally, unlike other remote areas, the largely desert topography, scarce water resources and isolation meant cattle and sheep stations were never established and hence, men did not "experience seasonal work as stockmen or labourers" (Ngaanyatjarra Council Aboriginal Corporation, 2017, p. 2).

Driven partially by government pressure to "solve the problem of finding a new and better economy for the people" (Douglas, 1978 cited in Angus, 2015, p. 13), missionary control of Warburton started to weaken in the 1950s and was relinquished to the Western Australian Department of Native Affairs (DNA) in 1973. Despite receipt of some Government support, the 1950s in Warburton was characterised by a long period of confusion, precariousness and ambiguity (Angus, 2015). The "Warburton Range Controversy" in 1956 exemplified the concern during this period. A series of reports brought national attention to the poor humanitarian conditions in the community which resulted in the intervention of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights (Berndt, 1957). The Aboriginal population had been increasingly "centring" on the mission, becoming dependent on European resources and food, and by 1970 their population numbered 453 (Angus, 2015, p. 12).

Accompanying the 'catchcries' of "self-management and economic independence", the Department of Native Affairs appointed a Project Officer to Warburton in the mid-1960s, an early demonstration of the government's focus on promoting economic development (Angus, 2015, p. 17). A number of projects were attempted and abandoned, including a "stocktake of 'cottage industries'" (Angus, 2017, p. 71). These were largely ineffective due to both the high transience of local and outsider staff, as well as predominantly being "repetitive, artificial tasks assigned by white officials to instil a Western work-ethic" (Angus, 2017, p. iv). There was also a brief attempt at commercial copper mining during which visiting bureaucrats heralded the "benefits of full-time work" to others (Budge, 1979 cited in Angus, 2015, p. 17). Despite this it was reported that "regular work was not enthusiastically embraced by community members" and there were few signs of a "European-style work ethic"; the benefits of work perceived by the missionaries, such as accumulation of wealth, were not valued by the social organisation of Ngaanyatjarra people (Peterson, 1977, cited in Angus, 2015, p. 19).

In 1966, a report by Assistant Superintendent David Kininmonth reinforces the perspective that local people were not especially interested in work. Noting it as a time of "very little activity of constructive benefit" to local people, Kininmonth describes "The period between leaving school, and getting the pension" "as the *lost years*" (Kininmonth, 1966, cited in Angus, 2015, p. 9, my emphasis). A recent submission by the Ngaanyatjarra Council to a senate inquiry contrasts the Ngaanyatjarra experience to the Central Desert people "across the border" [in the Northern Territory]. It notes that unlike their counterparts during this period, Ngaanyatjarra people did not acquire "experience of working for rations or wages" and that employment prospects were hampered by the limited numeracy and literacy education Ngaanyatjarra people received at the Warburton Mission (Ngaanyatjarra Council Aboriginal Corporation, 2017, pp. 2,4).

Despite these attempts in the 1960s to enhance economic participation, a survey in 1970 indicated only two of 95 working-age men, and ten of 79 working-age women were in "regular paid employment" (Angus, 2017, p. iii) and that other than pensioners, community members were living on just $41 a year (Ngaanyatjarra Council Aboriginal Corporation, 2017, p. 3). A report commissioned by the Department of Native Welfare in the same year stated that "Aborigines at the mission had never had more than occasional work, most were illiterate and that the potential workforce was both unskilled and unaccustomed to work" (Scott, 1970 cited in Angus, 2015, p. 19). Despite these reports, records demonstrate that many Ngaanyatjarra people did "want the opportunity of employment" but due to family and cultural commitments – as well as the concept of paid work being relatively new and hence foreign - only "when it suited them" (Furnell, 1974 cited in Angus, 2015, p. 19).

The "small minority" of Ngaanyatjarra people in Warburton with employment during this era can be attributed to three main reasons. Firstly, "the concept of full-year employment, working an eight hour day, was alien to most Ngaanyatjarras" (Angus, 2015, p. 19). Rather, casual work in order to gain the means to purchase required commodities was highly sort after. Reflecting on the Lutheran Pastor Albrecht's journals from the 1920s, Austin-Broos (2006) observes a similar response to efforts to engage people in a "European-style" of employment in Hermannsberg. She recognises that "meanings of commodities

and cash, and time-space of Aboriginal life, were markedly at variance with values of market society and its forms of governance" (Austin - Broos, 2006, p. 2).

The unwillingness of Ngaanyatjarra people to engage in regular paid work was heightened by the reticence of the administration at the time to observe and adapt policies to suit the social and cultural context which "made it difficult to respond flexibly to the idiosyncratic conditions and needs of a remote community" (Angus, 2017, p. 70). Instead, as considered by Angus (2017), the nature of this Western-orientated and often sedentary 'work' required Ngaanyatjarra people to operate outside the realms of their existing activities and ways of life,

> *This [hunting, gathering, maintaining relations with kin and ceremonial activity] was the 'work' that had to go on even after the Warburton community began to assume a more sedentary lifestyle; it took precedence over repetitive, artificial tasks assigned by white officials…*(p. iv).

The second reason for the small number of local Ngaanyatjarra people in employment during the 1960s was institutional. Two aspects of administrative culture were barriers. One was the failure of missionaries and government officials to adequately consult with Ngaanyatjarra people regarding the orientation of work and community development activities. Ignoring Ngaanyatjarra ways of making decisions, the practice of consultation took the form of "politicians and officials attempting to persuade the Ngaanyatjarras that they should endorse what the government representative had in mind" (Angus, 2017, p. 71). Angus (2017) observes that the white agency officials involved in luring Ngaanyatjarra people into the workforce "held an unrealistic estimate of their powers of persuasion to change the behaviour of Warburton community members", compounded by their "difficulty…in seeing the world from a Ngaanyatjarra point of view" (p. 60). The second barrier in the approach of government officials was the tendency to make plans which were not followed through resulting in uncertainty and mistrust, hence, perpetuating disengagement from proposed programs intended to "convince" Ngaanyatjarra people to participate in work (Angus, 2017).

The third reason for minimal Ngaanyatjarra people in employment during the 1960s was that, as stated above, the resources were not available to the UAM to employ people. A substantial injection of Commonwealth funding followed the 1967 referendum but this saw little impact due to the ongoing "dissidence" of Ngaanyatjarra people to work. As suggested by Angus (2017), this was further compounded by Government agencies aspiring to prepare Ngaanyatjarra adults for work within a framework shaped by an assimilationist orthodoxy,

> *Until the end of the 1960s government agencies clung onto the assimilationist goal of preparing Warburton adults for eventual employment in a regional town* (p. 70).

The election of the Whitlam Government in 1972 saw a number of years characterised by "liberal availability" of unemployment benefits for Warburton adults which, perpetuated by the factors outlined above, resulted in a further disincentive to work (Angus, 2017). However, as described by Angus (2017), this coincided with frustration in Warburton that white administrators were not doing enough to create work opportunities for people. Local Ngaanyatjarra man, Don Robinson who represented Warburton on an economic advisory committee, is reported as requesting, "All we want is work and more work" (cited in Angus, 2017, p. 59). Pertinent to today's situation, Angus (2017) describes the paradox of Robinson's statement, whereby,

> *On the one hand, white agency officials complained about the unwillingness to fill the increasing job opportunities that were emerging in Warburton as government development funding poured in, while on the other hand adult Warburton residents complained that they were unable to find a part-time job when they needed cash* (p. 59).

The latter part of the 1970s saw a turning point in the experience of work for Ngaanyatjarra people in Warburton. In response to an increase in unemployment as a result of widespread dependence on social security in remote Aboriginal communities, the Fraser Government introduced the Community Development Employment Program (CDEP) "on a pilot basis" in 1977 (Jordan & Altman, 2016,

p. 2). In 1979, the Warburton Council received funding for 100 part-time positions. Reflecting the intermittent nature of work suited to community life, this funding supported the engagement of 160 Ngaanyatjarra people in its initial year (Angus, 2017).

Despite initial teething problems with the introduction of the CDEP, the Community Coordinator appointed in 1979, Chris Marshall, "was optimistic that the CDEP could become a valuable community development tool" (Angus, 2017, p. 42). According to Angus (2017), the policy tools of CDEP saw "most able-bodied adults…engaged in some form of paid work even though on an intermittent basis" for the first time in fifty years since the Mission was founded (p. 63), a stark contrast to the 12 out of 174 work-age adult engaged in work in the previously noted 1970 survey. Projects included housing renovations, maintenance, attempts to resurrect the cattle industry, and a women's centre for "craft and sewing activities" (Angus, 2017, p. 63). Crucially, and rare in the history of Warburton to date, CDEP also "provided practical, on-the-job training" (Angus, 2017, p. 63). On reflection of these comparatively positive experiences of work for Ngaanyatjarra people and of deep significance to this study, Angus (2017) notes that,

> *Tellingly, the rules for employment under the CDEP, and oversight of the program, were mostly sensitive to the cultural tendencies that had hampered the participation of Warburton residents in development projects over previous decades* (p. 68).

Both nationally, and in Warburton, CDEP grew in momentum from 1977. It peaked under the policy era of "self-determination" in the late 1970s and 1980s, including a rapid expansion following the Miller *Report of the Committee of Review of Aboriginal Employment and Training Programs* in 1985 (Miller, 1985). CDEP continued through to the late 1990s and early 2000s, with the greatest number of participants in 2003 when 35,000 people were employed Australia wide (Jordan & Altman, 2016). Reflecting the high engagement of CDEP participants, who were "formally defined as working" (Jordan & Altman, 2016, p. 3), in 2001, 93.6 per cent of Warburton's Aboriginal residents in the labour force (aged fifteen years and over) were employed and 6.4 per cent unemployed (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2001).

However, described by Jordan and Altman (2016) as the "second 'wave' in the policy approach to reducing Indigenous employment disparity", the end of the 1990s saw shifts in government policy (p. 2). During the early years of the Howard Government, reorganisation of funding arrangements and the privatisation of government service provision resulted in CDEP being "reinterpreted not as a job creation scheme but as primarily a labour market program for welfare recipients from which an exit into other employment was expected" (Jordan & Altman, 2016, p. 4). Accompanying this second 'wave', in Warburton, long-term resident Helen[6] observed that the late 1990s and early 2000s saw a "seismic shift" throughout the Ngaanyatjarra Lands characterised by a decrease in local employment, and an increase in employment of (non-Aboriginal) outsiders (2012, pers. comm., 2 August).

Few of the Warburton Breakfast Minyma were employed immediately prior to commencing their involvement in the activities of the *Mirlirrtjarra Kuurl Mirrka Palyalpayi*. Some of the senior women had been engaged in work a decade previously but this had been followed by a significant break. Many had stories of their parents, or late husbands, having been engaged in work in the agencies and services. However, many of the positions they described were now no longer filled or filled by visiting non-Aboriginal staff. For example, in comparison to the Minyma's accounts of the 1980s and 1990s, during my time in Warburton there were few locally-occupied positions.

The low levels of engagement are reflected in the 2011 and 2016 labour and employment data of the ABS census. Of the full time workers in Warburton in 2011, seven were Aboriginal and 52 were non-Aboriginal, and later, in 2016, eighteen were Aboriginal and 59 non-Aboriginal, a clear demonstration of high dependence on outsiders to fill jobs in the services and agencies (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2011a, 2011b, 2016a, 2016b). Additionally, the low unemployment rates recorded in Warburton in 2001, 2006 and 2011: 6.4 per cent, 0 per cent and 6 per cent respectively, contrasts with 2016 when it

[6] Consultants who contributed to this study are referred to with pseudonyms (see page 51).

increased to 49 per cent, following the cessation of CDEP, described below (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2001, 2006, 2011b, 2016b).

The policy context

Since the late 1970's, Federal Government policy linking income security and work engagement within the Community Development Employment Program (CDEP) has had a major influence on the everyday lives of remote Aboriginal Australians. CDEP framed the experience of work for several generations of Ngaanyatjarra people since the program's funding of positions in the Ngaanyatjarra Lands commenced in 1979 (Angus, 2017). Still operating in Warburton in 2008, CDEP provided a set of enabling foundations for the Minyma's activities to emerge.

The Federal Department of Aboriginal Affairs (DAA) implemented the CDEP program to provide part-time paid work to remote Aboriginal people as an alternative to the widespread receipt of society security and to reduce the consequent "socially deleterious effects" of the benefits (Miller, 1985, p. 118). Through CDEP, the DAA allocated "a lump sum equivalent to the aggregated individual Unemployment Benefit entitlements" to the local council, plus a ten to fifteen per cent loading for administration and capital costs associated with the purchase of resources (Ngaanyatjarra Council Aboriginal Corporation, 2017, p. 6).

The autonomous Ngaanyatjarra Council Aboriginal Corporation designed, developed and implemented community projects that employed local Aboriginal people and remunerated them pro rata part-time wages similar to their foregone social security benefits. CDEP guidelines stipulated:

> *The work to be undertaken through CDEP should be meaningful to the community and assist it to achieve self-sufficiency (e.g. through increasing its local production of goods and services) or the general wellbeing of its members (e.g. projects for the preservation of the environment)* (Miller, 1985, p. 118).

CDEP was considered a community program which benefitted the whole, rather than the individual and recognised that geographically isolated remote

communities did not form part of the open labour market (Kral, McLean, & Murray, 2009). The block grants enabled the local Council to "develop a work program and engage local people in suitable work" (Angus, 2017, p. 61) which responded to "local aspirations" (Altman, 2007, p. 1). Coombs (1977), who was central in the initiative, describes the anticipated indirect impacts of CDEP,

> *CDEP is not simply a means of providing employment as a source of a minimum cash income, but* a training exercise in self-management *and increasing independence for the Aboriginal communities involved* (Coombs 1977, p. 1, cited in Rowse, 2001, p. 41, emphasis added by Rowse).

The CDEP recognised that there are fundamental differences between Indigenous Australians in rural and remote areas and other Australians (Altman & Gray, 2005). Central to this recognition within the domain of work are the differences "in norms, values and priorities" and hence, that remote community circumstances require a "broad interpretation of 'work'" (Altman & Klein, 2017, pp. 9,2),

> *…standard Australian welfare and employment-creation institutions were unsuitable for the exceptional economic and cultural circumstances of remote-living Aboriginal people*… (Altman & Klein, 2017, p. 2).

Under the CDEP at Warburton, participants received a "base rate" income, and those opting to work extra were allocated a "top-up" increment, for up to sixteen hours a week. For people in Warburton, participation in CDEP was considered "working for your living" and jobs included "rubbish collection, garden maintenance, collecting firewood, cleaning, and work at the brickworks, land management, college, school, clinic, cultural centre, arts project, women's centre and play group" (Kral, 2007, p. 169).

When the Minyma commenced their activities in 2008, they were paid standard CDEP pay and the additional cash "top-up" increment for the hours they worked. Throughout Warburton, earning CDEP "top-up" provided people with the status being a "worker", and the weekly cash payment including "top-up" was referred

to as a “wage”. Furthermore, those participating in CDEP were classified by the ABS as “employed” or “working” (Hunter, 2016).

My arrival in Warburton in 2009 coincided with an increased determination by the Federal Government to defund the CDEP program. This was pursued incrementally across urban, rural and remote regions of Australia until its “ultimate demise” in July 2015 (Altman & Klein, 2017, p. 8). Opponents of CDEP, backed by the popular press, construed it as “a barrier to Indigenous participation in the mainstream labour market” (Jordan, 2012, p. 29), thwarting communities becoming “economically viable” (McRae-Williams & Gerritsen, 2010, p. 3), contributing to “welfare dependency” (Dellit, 2001) and preventing Aboriginal people from joining the “real economy” (Barker, 2007). It was criticised (mostly by commentators unfamiliar with its 'on-the-ground' implementation) for not providing “real” jobs, and being a “destination in its own right” (Arbib, Macklin, & Ellis, 2011, p. 6).

Significant shifts in the direction and administration of federal government policy regarding Aboriginal Australians led to the demise of CDEP. The abandonment of the policy direction of “Aboriginal self-determination” in the early 2000's alongside the 2003 abolition of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC), a statutory elected Federal Government Indigenous representative body that advocated, developed and implemented federal Indigenous policy and programs, created a structural absence of formal national Indigenous leadership, advocacy and accountability. This enabled non-Aboriginal politicians and bureaucrats to formulate policy with no avenue of redress by Aboriginal Australians. Thus, the Northern Territory Emergency Response (NTER) (commonly referred to as “the Intervention”) in 2007, a Federal takeover from the Northern Territory (NT) Government of the administration of 73 remote NT Aboriginal communities, became the social laboratory for experimenting with a radical Federal Government policy shift.

Between 2009 and 2015, there was a gradual transition of CDEP participants onto new programs linking income security and work engagement. The new arrangements were focused not on Aboriginal people as responsible members of community collectives, but as individual subjects in a redefined relationship of

mutual obligation to the State. This period was characterised by confusion, frustration and uncertainty for both the Warburton community administration and, particularly, community members. Those consistently involved in a CDEP activity (this included the Breakfast Minyma) remained on CDEP while Federal funding for community administration of CDEP lasted.

The Federal Government defunded the remaining remnants of CDEP in 2015 and, according to Hinkson (2017), "paved the way for the comprehensive application…of neoliberal principles to the bush" (p. 2). Nevertheless, before this happened, the CDEP program mostly as structured originally by the Federal Government and in the on-the-ground format implemented by the Ngaanyatjarra Council provided the basic income security that supported the activities of the Minyma. The policy tools of CDEP thus enabled the women to both develop their own approach to work in ways that were meaningful to them, and to enable the documentation of their unique perspective regarding remote Aboriginal women and work.

Offering a perspective of remote Aboriginal women on work

Within the extensive body of literature about work, employment and economic participation, little is written from the perspective of remote Aboriginal people, let alone remote Aboriginal women. Many of the mostly non-Indigenous academics, reporters and government reviewers who summarise, edit and analyse the voices of remote Aboriginal Australians are commonly "displaced from the contexts and lives within which they were voiced" (Kennedy, 2013, p. 22). Hence the texts are grounded in mostly non-Indigenous discourse, and also from a worldview that is far removed from the lives of those they describe.

Thus the assumptions around what is best for Aboriginal people arise from mostly non-Indigenous perspectives and permeate a plethora of employment and social security policies. Literature around employment in general is framed by the assumptions of a "normal" non-Indigenous social order (McRae-Williams, 2014). Therefore, within Government policy regarding the income security and work engagement of remote Aboriginal people is an implicit assumption that Aboriginal

people will abide by, embrace and partner with bureaucratic interpretations "of what is best for Indigenous wellbeing" (Kennedy, 2013, p. 7).

A central purpose of this thesis is to privilege the perspectives, interpretations and voices of the Ngaanyatjarra Warburton Breakfast Minyma in order for their local situated knowledge (Genat, 2009) to provide the standard or yardstick against which to examine other accounts of remote Aboriginal people and work. Distinctively, it reveals how the women shaped and refined their workplace, worker role and work activities as this unfolded and emerged over a sustained period within the cultural constructs of the Ngaanyatjarra life-world. The account provides a rich and detailed insight from the perspective of Ngaanyatjarra women of how engagement in work can be meaningful and positive in a remote Aboriginal community.

Thesis structure

Intentionally, the structure of this thesis privileges the experiences and voices of the remote Aboriginal women participants regarding their work and veers from the standard format. Thus the thesis presents the experiences, perceptions and interpretations of the Minyma regarding their work and related activities prior to discussing the literature. Key dimensions of meaningful work as experienced by these remote Aboriginal women foreground comparative accounts from the academic, administrative and other literature examined in the Discussion Chapter. Thus, the understandings of the research participants guide my examination of other perspectives in order to avoid framing the research participants' experience and locally situated knowledge within the discourse of expert others (Genat, 2009; Lassiter, 2005; Stringer, 2013).

The next chapter outlines the methodology of the study, the theoretical and ethical standpoint which I brought to the study, the study design, the techniques of data collection and analysis employed, and a discussion of the limitations of the study.

The following four chapters (Chapters Three to Six) present the findings of the research. These are framed around accounts of the Minyma's experience. The first

findings chapter provides an account of how the activities of *Mirlirrtjarra Kuurl Mirrka Palyalpayi* emerged in response to community concerns. The second focuses on the way the Minyma structured their workplace, worker role and work activities in the context of their existing relationships, commitments and obligations as remote Aboriginal women. The third describes the way the Minyma responded to the challenges presented by relationships, responsibilities and obligations of family and community life. And the fourth findings chapter describes specific factors that enabled further expansion of their worker role and skill set.

Chapter Seven presents a discussion of the findings and draws upon key dimensions of meaningful work as experienced by the Minyma to examine current policy linking income security with work engagement for remote Aboriginal people. The final chapter, Chapter Eight, presents the conclusions, implications and recommendations emerging from the study.

CHAPTER TWO: An emergent collaborative methodology

Introduction

This chapter opens with the purpose of the study, the research aims and the overall research question. It then provides an overview of the research approach and the ethical and epistemological standpoint of the researcher. This is followed by the detail of the study design, methods of data collection and analysis and a discussion of the study's trustworthiness and limitations. Central to the theoretical foundations for this chapter and the emergent method of inquiry is my fundamental awareness that I am a non-Indigenous researcher undertaking research in an Indigenous context. Acknowledging the importance of my own standpoint, I present this chapter from a first person perspective.

Research Focus

This research aims to describe the experiences and interpretations of remote Aboriginal women regarding work. The guiding research question was: *How do remote Aboriginal women enact and describe their experience of being workers?* Consequently, the importance of understanding what doing work and being a worker means from a remote Aboriginal woman's perspective underpins the specific aims of this study.

This study was prompted by pejorative representations of remote Aboriginal people by leading politicians (Abbott, 2002; Hall, 2006; Rothwell, 2013) and media (Curtin & Norman, 2015; Hirst, 2007; Karvelas, 2005) regarding their motivation and capacity to engage in productive and meaningful work. Furthermore, both public debate and the discourse of Australian Government employment policy and programs are dominated by non-Indigenous perspectives. Rarely are there accounts of remote Aboriginal perspectives about their experience of work. In response to the dearth of information in this context, this study relates the experiences and perspectives of remote Aboriginal women as

their worker role emerged through the delivery of a suite of self-initiated activities designed to address issues of wellbeing in their community.

Ethical standpoint and approach

Guiding the methodological approach to this study was my ethical stance regarding working in cross-cultural contexts. My ethical standpoint has its foundations in ten years of working in Indigenous communities and international development prior to my arrival in Warburton. It is grounded in a strong concern for social justice and a sense of moral responsibly that embraces the wider struggle for equal rights, gender equality, and acceptance of the diversity of worldviews. I trace these values back to two significant aspects of my childhood. First, I was raised in 1980s/90s Hobart in a family which had emigrated from England. Until my tertiary education any "Aboriginal studies" I did in my schooling was categorised as "History". A defining moment for me was visiting Arnhem Land with Professor Marcia Langton in 2001 and being disturbed by the entirely unfamiliar social reality of Yolŋu life in a country in which I thought I'd mastered the social and cultural "norms".

Second, despite my schooling failing to provide me with an insight into the richness and diversity of contemporary Aboriginal life, it did provide me with a set of Quaker values which encouraged viewing all as equals ("there is that of God/good in everyone"), and frequent participation in community service initiatives. A school-organised trip to Tamil-Nadu at fifteen was a defining moment. As well as sewing a seed for interest in community development work, it heightened my awareness of cultural diversity, colonial impact on Indigenous populations and the privilege of my positioning.

My first post-university job in an Aboriginal Health Service in Tennant Creek inspired my ongoing motivation to work in Indigenous contexts and to explore effective ways to dispel negative stereotypes regarding Indigenous peoples. I recognise that often such stereotypes are driven primarily by a limited understanding that remote Indigenous people's goals, aspirations and perspectives may differ from those of non-Indigenous Australians. Hence, this research aspires to reveal these 'differences' in a way that makes sense to non-

Indigenous peoples and to challenge frequent negative and generalised accounts common in popular discourse.

Ongoing reflexivity for the purpose of monitoring my research practice in terms of my ethical standpoint became a central component of my research in Warburton. I practised this by maintaining a daily journal, regular field notes and having ongoing peer debriefing sessions with my supervisors and colleagues. Maintaining my ethical standpoint required setting aside my own perspectives and aspirations, and observing and learning from the Minyma's different ways of doing, ways of being and ways of knowing (Martin & Mirraboopa, 2003).

In all cross cultural contexts in which I have worked I have discovered that the basis for transcending cultural and ontological differences and hence, gaining an insight into other worldviews, is to be kind, friendly, honest, patient and respectful. My experience is that it is always possible, whatever the contrast in social realities, to discover similarities and mutual interests through which to connect; once established, strong and meaningful relationships naturally emerge.

My ethical approach was also guided by the key values outlined in the National Health and Medical Research Council Ethics document, *Values and Ethics: Guidelines for Ethics in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Research:* reciprocity, respect, equality, survival and protection.

I commenced my support worker role in Warburton on a volunteer basis. Later, I occupied three paid positions during the course of the study period which supported my role with the Minyma: in the Warburton School, with the Western Australian Department of Child Protection and Family Support (DCPFS), and for the Ngaanyatjarra Health Service. As well as contributing to my prolonged engagement in Warburton, the employment provided me with a salary, and housing which was scarce and assigned to organisational employees. Each of the positions I entered on the basis of negotiation with management to allow me to take a non-directive developmental approach in supporting the Minyma. The agencies I worked for expanded the network of stakeholder support to the Minyma's activities and provided additional opportunities. For example, the

DCPFS invited and funded the Minyma to present at their annual Festival of Learning conference in Perth.

As my relationships, and hence familiarity with social context, emerged within my support worker role, I came to appreciate the need to fulfil ethical guidelines in a way that was situated to the frames of reference of the Minyma. Furthermore, as the research process unfolded in response to the Minyma's existing activities, I recognised that these ethical practices, for example gaining consent, needed to be revisited regularly and adapted according to the specific time, place, and phase of the research.

The emergent and prolonged nature of this study (see page 48) contributed to ensuring an appropriate and transparent ethical process in two significant ways. First, there was an extended period over which I was able to establish relationships prior to transacting an official consent process. This enabled familiarity to develop between the research participants and I to the extent that I was confident they would both contribute to the ethical process and "pull me up" if they were uncomfortable with any aspects of the research, which they often did. This included close liaison with two of the Breakfast Minyma who had previously had involvement in research. They assisted with the wording of the plain language statement and consent form, and suggested local members for the required research reference group.

The second significant manner in which prolonged engagement assisted the negotiation of an ethical approach with the participants was my regular contact with the women in my community support worker role. It enabled frequent opportunities to revisit ethical questions. These foundations and conditions in which the research emerged ensured the participants felt comfortable and had shared control over maintaining an ethical approach. The ethical standards also adhered to the research guidelines and requirements of the Ngaanyatjarra Council, the governing body of the Ngaanyatjarra Lands.

Epistemological standpoint and an emergent methodology

My prior experience working alongside the remote Aboriginal women participants reinforced my appreciation of how local people possess a unique insight into their own situation. Yet, too often, 'different' perspectives are ignored by government policy and program administrators. My appreciation of local knowledge informed the epistemological standpoint of my research. In order to operationalise this, it required: first, strong positive relationships with the research participants that enabled them to guide my role as a support worker and researcher; second, a participatory and collaborative approach that enabled the participants to identify their own issues and enact their own responses to these issues; and third, an epistemological approach to capture and articulate the unique experience and perspectives of the local participants that was robust enough to challenge ill-informed, non-Indigenous perspectives on their lives.

While, on the one hand, I had a respectful appreciation of the knowledge of remote Aboriginal people, on the other, I had less appreciation of their limited power. My experience alongside the Warburton Breakfast Minyma highlighted their minimal opportunity to control certain aspects of their lives. In this and other contexts this limited influence can be partially attributed to service agency regimes that assert control of Aboriginal lives (Thurtell, 2003, p. 25).

I am regularly aware of how this differs with my upbringing which provided me with the tools to easily navigate services and programs such as health and education services. This has contributed to a healthy and well-educated life within a justice and political system under which I feel treated fairly. In contrast, many of the research participants operated at the fringe of services that they struggled to navigate and then, with very little control.

A heightened awareness of my "epistemic privilege" (Janack, 1997) is evident by an event I recorded in my field notes which I later viewed as an epiphanic moment. Epiphanies are described by Denzin (2001) as "interactional moments which leave a mark on people's lives", or "turning-point experiences" (p. 34). This

moment provided me with an insight into the Minyma's frame of reference and their challenges in terms of voice, power and representation.

> *It was the "Warburton Interagency Meeting" today, abbreviated as "WIAM", an acronym one staff member recently cynically joked stands for "why am I here?". It's an opportunity for agency representatives to meet, introduce themselves and talk about their programs and upcoming events.*
>
> *Recently I have encouraged the Breakfast Minyma to attend alongside me, and to date they have been the only Ngaanyatjarra faces in the room amongst twelve to twenty attendees. Today there were four Minyma with me. They'd prepared short pieces to read out about their work.*
>
> *At the end of the meeting, discussion focused on the proposed changes to the policy associated with the Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP) program and the intentions of the Federal Government, including the anticipated centralisaton of administrative services. A predicted consequence of this was the possibility of Ngaanyatjarra people leaving the Lands to reside in more populous areas, and the potential "closure" of the community. The jargon around the table was complicated, hurried and in English. None of the Minyma contributed or asked any questions.*
>
> *The meeting ended and the women and I were the first to leave the room, the women quietly conversing amongst themselves in Ngaanyatjarra. Before I'd started the engine, one of the Minyma said to me. "RB [a name they used for me], we are really worried, we didn't understand what those* walypala *(whitefellas/staff) were saying in there, can you explain to us?"*
>
> *The dialogue the Minyma referred to was essentially about their livelihoods. It struck me how alienating it must feel to have so little control over one's life, as if living in a world of 'big brother' who has*

> *information and secrets about your life and future to which you have limited, if any, access* (observation, 22 May, 2011).

This ended up being one of many experiences which raised my awareness of the research participant's lack of power and representation in their daily lives. Other events and situations when the Minyma requested my assistance so that they could more competently navigate systems and bureaucracy based upon mainstream non-Aboriginal assumptions and agendas were at court, during phone conversations with Centrelink (the social security agency), visiting family members in prison, conversing with police, navigating various organisations and businesses on our trips to cities, and in applying for drivers' licences. Mahood (2012) aptly attributes the alienation of Aboriginal people from many aspects of the white world to *Kartiya* (non-Indigenous people) being in "control" of the "resources of their world" (p. 17).

The emergence of the Minyma's initiatives coincided with the dismantling of the well-established CDEP (See Chapter One). The rocky transition into what became a *series* of new programs making provision of income security conditional upon work engagement for remote Aboriginal communities created immense uncertainty and angst for local people and organisations. This further contributed to the Minyma's lack of control over their lives, and it became an additional motivation for establishing an appropriate research paradigm with the Minyma. These many aspects of control and the subsequent estrangement I witnessed influenced my aspiration to approach research in a way that would strengthen the Minyma's power, agency and autonomy in both determining their wellbeing and access to resources.

The external control that I witnessed impacting on the research participants prompted the adoption of an epistemological standpoint influenced by feminist theorists (Butler, 1992; D. Smith, 1987) and advocates of decolonising methodologies (Martin, 2008; Martin & Mirraboopa, 2003; Rigney, 2006; L. Smith, 1999; Wilson, 2001). The intention of this research is to privilege the voice and enhance the power of a subjugated people. Thus, "representation" is a central concern and I apply a critical and reflexive lens to my representation of the research participants. Both feminist (Butler, 1992; D. Smith, 1987) and

decolonising (Martin, 2008; Rigney, 1997, 2006; L. Smith, 1999; Wilson, 2001) approaches to research fit with my ethical and epistemological standpoint.

Feminist ethnography challenges conventional ethnography in order to address the universal subjugation of women perpetuated by "classic, modernist male-centred ethnographic texts" (Lassiter, 2005, p. 59). To confront the consequent unequal distribution of power, feminist approaches to ethnography question "the positionality and authority of the ethnographic process from fieldwork to text, that foregrounds and simultaneously seeks to dissolve the power relationship between ethnographer and subject" (Lassiter, 2005, p. 59). Informing the methodology applied to this study, such an approach aims to yield more humane and dialogic accounts that fully and collaboratively represent the diversity of the Minyma's experience. Although inspired by feminist theory and consequent approaches to research, I'm also aware of concerns which arose in the 1980s regarding the uniform applications of feminism where the "we" of feminism was "invariably white" (Butler, 1992, p. 15).

Being a woman working with women in this inquiry was undoubtedly an advantage given the importance of gender to Ngaanyatjarra people. It provided many shared experiences which enabled trusting and enjoyable relationships punctuated with joking about male partners and discussions about having children. Nevertheless, I recognised that in many ways, the Minyma's meanings of gender conceptions were very different to mine. With time, I became increasingly aware of the differing expectations and roles of being a woman in our respective cultures.

An emergent collaborative methodology

The methodology for this study emerged from my existing ethical and epistemological standpoints and the relationships I established with the research participants over about one year within my role as a community support worker. As described in the Introduction, the research emerged in response to the Minyma's collective desire to share their experience with diverse audiences during the course of their work and my discernment that the Minyma's accounts would be of interest to an academic audience and policymakers and program

managers regarding remote Aboriginal people and work. I designed the research to convey the meanings the Warburton Breakfast Minyma brought to their experiences of being workers.

The non-directive developmental approach employed by the support workers within *Mirlirrtjarra Kuurl Mirrka Palyalpayi* encouraged and complemented an emergent collaborative ethnographic approach. Developmental practice is a solutions-based and strengths-focused model of community development that builds on skills and capabilities "Indigenous to that locality" (cited in Kelly & Burkett, 2008, p. 26) and "enables people to find effective solutions to problems they confront in their everyday lives" (Stringer, 2013, p. 1). The role of the developmental support workers, of which I was one, had three central components which contributed to the emergence of an appropriate research approach: first, to support and build on the Minyma's existing skills and initiatives; second, the support workers responded to cues from the Minyma as to how to conduct themselves; third, the support workers offered their skills as brokers to enable the Minyma's transactions with service agencies and the bureaucracy (Aird & Staples, 2012; Eversole, 2010).

Beadle, Genat and Stringer (Beadle, Genat, & Stringer, 2013) offer a descriptive list of the key characteristics of the non-directive developmental community support worker role enacted with the Minyma, and within which I integrated the collaborative and interpretive researcher role,

> *…impartial facilitator, enthusiastic supporter, curious inquirer, tentative clarifier, attentive listener, respectful simplifier, patient explainer, logical thinker, open learner, passionate advocate, canny strategist, fearless challenger, reflective self-inquirer, careful recorder, responsible book-keeper and patient administrator. At the heart of the support worker role was a commitment to supporting the capacity development of the women and group on their own terms* (p. 17).

The non-directive developmental approach encouraged the self-initiation and self-direction of both the Minyma's work activities and organisation of their worker role. My consequent immersion into community life and the relationships

through my developmental support role taught me that Aboriginal people have "very different ways of talking about people's lives" (Wingard & Lester, 2001, p. v). Hence, as the research took shape in response to the Minyma's desire to tell their story, because of my outsider status as non- researcher, I recognised the necessity to adopt a critical and reflexive approach to ethnographic practice in order to "privilege the voice, experiences and lives" of the Minyma (Martin & Mirraboopa, 2003, p. 4). As well as engaging the Minyma as "active agents" to ensure the research practice reflected their different ways of knowing, being and doing, a multi-method approach to data collection developed within the realm of the Minyma's existing activities.

The joint researcher and developmental support worker roles enabled me to work alongside the Minyma in a collaborative relationship and to observe, inquire and find out the meanings they brought with them to the work as it immediately unfolded. Within the broader qualitative, ethnographic approach, a key method of the inquiry was the repeated cycles of action - reflection, thus "action research" as described by Stringer (2013) (see Figure 4). The participatory action research framework (Stringer, 2013) positioned me to facilitate an interactive participatory group process to build (i) a shared understanding; (ii) solidarity through planning, implementation and evaluation of the collective action; (iii) personal and collective confidences; and (iv) appreciation of the Minyma's own unique capacities.

As well as providing the foundations for meaningful and trusting relationships, the developmental support role enabled extensive opportunities to interact in many elements of the Minyma's "natural lives"; cups of tea at each other's homes, bush trips, funerals, cultural ceremonies, and support for tasks such as negotiating the justice or social security system. This provided me with a deeper immersion into the Minyma's experience. As described by Lincoln and Guba (1985), specific issues can only be understood "in terms of larger cultural parameters" (p. 301).

Enhanced by the non-directive developmental approach, the authority, power and agency the Minyma gained within their worker roles contributed to both their desire to share accounts about their experience, and the capacity and confidence

to collaborate as the research emerged. The developmental support role accorded me the opportunity to mould a system of support in response to the Minyma's ways of being, knowing and doing. This approach provided me with the necessary foundations for a collaborative ethnographic study.

The methods of collaborative ethnography (Lassiter, 2005) provided three central guidelines to the research approach: first, the need for research to be based on "community-defined needs" as directed by the participants (American Anthropological Association, 2002); second, for participants to be "fully involved" in the "initiation, design and implementation" of the research, echoing an appeal from Indigenous researchers (Gorman & Toombs, 2009; O'Donoghue, 2010; Wand & Eades, 2008); and third, to capture the diversity "in discourse about culture and meaning" (Lassiter, 2005, p. 13).

Adopting a collaborative ethnographic approach enabled the research process to evolve synonymously with the emergent nature of the *Mirlirrtjarra Kuurl Mirrka Palyalpayi* activities. Rather than being predetermined and based solely on a set of interests, hypotheses, and prerogatives of myself as researcher, the research question emerged in collaboration with the Minyma and their desire to tell their story within the natural world of their group life and conduct (Blumer, 1969; Denzin, 2001; Lassiter, 2005; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Stringer, 2013). This approach allowed me to gain insights into the Minyma's collective understandings as they reflected on their work together recognising that meaning is "always emergent from a being's interaction with their world, both material and social" (Genat, 2009, p. 107).

Wand and Eades (2008) recognise the importance of collaboration in research in Indigenous contexts,

> *A collaborative approach between researchers and Aboriginal communities is pivotal to developing a research project consistent with Indigenous cultural values and health concepts, with the potential to improve services and outcomes for Aboriginal peoples* (p. 584).

Central to the purpose of this study is the massive ongoing problem regarding the inability of most existing providers in remote Aboriginal communities to meaningfully engage local people in the design and implementation of their programs and services. In order to achieve this, I have adopted an interpretive approach to analysis as described by Denzin (2001). Denzin (2001) notes that the failure of programs in certain contexts is often due to planners and providers assuming that the participants' experience of programs matches their own. To avoid ongoing inappropriate development of programs, Denzin (2001) asserts the centrality of *interpretation* and *understanding* and suggests the need to "produce meaningful descriptions and interpretations of [the participants'] social processes" (p. 43) to make their "world of lived experience [of the Minyma as workers] visible to the reader" (p. 34).

The Study Design

Where the research took place

As outlined in Chapter One, the research was undertaken in the Western Desert Aboriginal community of Warburton. Primarily, it took place where the women undertook their work. As described in Chapter Three, much of the Minyma's work revolved around the "Family Place". This building was established as a consequence of the Minyma's activities and was designated for community activities on the school grounds. However, the Minyma's work – and hence the research 'site' - also extended out to other parts of the community and surrounding areas as explained in the section on data collection (see page 37).

The Warburton Breakfast Minyma (participants)

The research participants were a group of Ngaanyatjarra grandmothers, mothers and aunties and who identified collectively as "The Warburton Breakfast Minyma" and who designed and delivered a suite of activities to address their concerns regarding wellbeing in the community. Their collective of activities was known as the *Mirlirrtjarra Kuurl Mirrka Palyalpayi*.

Over the course of the study period, fifty-one women in the community participated in *Mirlirrtjarra Kuurl Mirrka Palyalpayi*, many of whom developed

resources as part of their work that contributed to the data for this research. Of the fifty-one participants, fourteen of the Minyma became the primary "consultants"[7] for this research. The fourteen consultants that participated in the interviews and focus groups were chosen based on their interest to be part of them, which correlated with those who were most frequently engaged in the activities. The primary consultants were aged twenty-three to fifty-eight, all had children and/or grandchildren of their own, and had been involved in *Mirlirrtjarra Kuurl Mirrka Palyalpay*i for between six months and three and a half years. As well as being regular and consistent 'workers', this sub-group were particularly interested in sharing stories about their experiences for both the research, and for a range of other audiences (see Chapter Six). The fifty-one Minyma who identified as Warburton Breakfast Minyma came from a range of family groups who settled at the original mission in the 1930s; the fourteen primary consultants in the study considered each other "close" family (see Chapter Four).

In addition to the Minyma, two female and four male non-Indigenous consultants participated. Each worked for a different service or agency and had between three and twenty years experience employed as 'staff' on the Ngaanyatjarra Lands. I selected them on the basis of both their connection to the Minyma's work either as support workers or as stakeholders in the *Mirlirrtjarra Kuurl Mirrka Palyalpayi* activities and their interest in participating in the research. They provided helpful historical background and perspectives on the community.

Data collection

The data collection methods that emerged within the collaborative ethnographic research approach aimed to gather participant descriptions and interpretations in order to illustrate the 'lived experiences' of the Warburton Breakfast Minyma. Data collection sought to document the experience and perspective of the Minyma in ways that made sense in their own terms (Stringer, 2013, p. 101).

[7] In order to "produce texts that move beyond the ongoing implications of the colonial encounter" Lassiter applies the terms 'consultant' or 'co-intellectual' (Lassiter, 2005, p. 13).

My everyday interaction with the Minyma led to the choice of data collection methods that were both unobtrusive and comfortable for the participants. As well as collecting accounts of conversations that arose with the Minyma as part of their existing work activities to "complement, clarify and extend understanding" of the Minyma's experience (Stringer, 2013, p. 123) (see description of opportunistic interviews below), I collaborated with the Minyma to find additional creative and enjoyable ways to record their experiences, for example, recording their collaborative fictional script of "Linda's" story (see below). The emergent "multi-method" approach to collecting data contributed to grasping subtle variations in the Minyma's experience (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994), for example, focus group discussions extended and contributed to individual accounts regarding the Minyma's motivations to commence work (see Chapter Four).

Opportunities for data collection were enhanced by the prolonged period over which I worked with the Minyma which resulted in recording their experience on multiple occasions and in a variety of contexts, for example, in the work place, out bush, and on city trips (Stringer, 2013). Hence, the data collection methods enabled the emergence of a range of appropriate "communication spaces" from which I was able to collect accounts of the Minymas' experience and perspectives (Habermas, 1996, p. 360).

Much of the data collection for this study was undertaken within the existing participatory process facilitated by the support workers that, with the advent of the research project, is subsequently identifiable as participatory action research (Stringer, 2013). The Minyma undertook activities (actions) such as preparing school breakfast, reviewed their actions (reflection) within subsequent meetings, which then generated further action. Hence, much of the data arose within cycles of action-reflection facilitated by the support workers and driven by the women's own agendas (see Figure 4). I collected data in this process from observation, annotated summaries of the Minyma's ideas written on butcher's paper or on the whiteboard, in my own field notes and sometimes on a dictaphone. The Minyma produced secondary data from these collaborative discussions that included storybooks the Minyma authored, agendas and minutes from their weekly meetings, Powerpoint presentations they delivered to a variety of audiences, cue cards they used for presentations, posters they developed and DVDs we

collaboratively produced. Additional secondary data collected in relation to the Minyma's activities include work timesheets, newsletters, and reports to funding bodies and project partners.

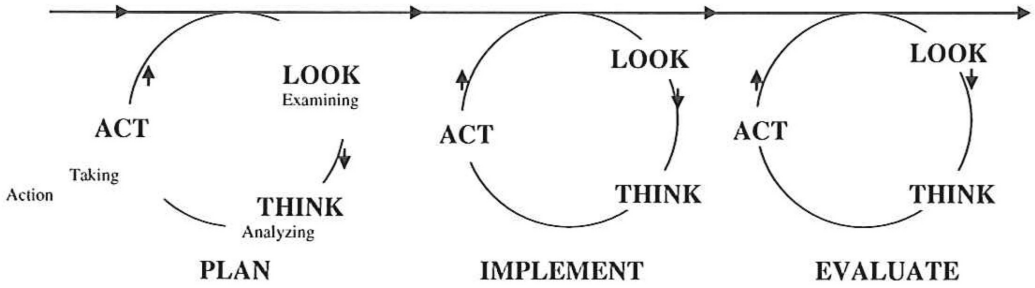


Figure 4 Look-think-act cycles in the action research spiral (Source: Stringer & Beadle, 2012, p. 155).

Another method of data collection was video recording the Minyma's activities, for example during catering at the inter-school sports carnival. The Minyma and I compiled the footage into short videos about their work which were shared with a range of audiences (see Chapter Six). This data had a number of advantages: first, it increased the accuracy of observation, adding to the "richness" of data; second, it provided the capacity to replay the event for "clarification and verification during analysis"; and third it provided me with the ability to focus on "non-verbal cues, interactions between participants and changes in the physical setting" (Tsey, Harvey, Gibson, & Pearson, 2009, p. 5).

Data collection methods also included collecting participant's visual representations of their experience and synchronous or subsequent verbal explanations of these images. As demonstrated in the Prologue, painting in the traditional style was one way for the Minyma to represent their experience. Many of the women were already painters and occasionally they instigated painting as a way to reflect on and illustrate their work. The paintings were 'talked to' during presentations at conferences and meetings with project stakeholders such as Foodbank and enabled the Minyma to narrate their experiences on their own terms. This form of data collection was congruent with the need for "diverse forms of meaning-making" and recognition of "diverse ways of knowing and representing" in contrast to the privileging of spoken and written narrative that

occurs in traditional positivist research (Sunderland, Kendall, Marshall, & Barlow, 2016, pp. 72-73).

Participant observation recorded as field notes was another method of data collection. I observed the Minyma's activity and interaction in a range of contexts including in the locations they worked, for example, in the Family Place, during social events, when in transit and when visiting locations outside of Warburton for training and conferences. I recorded observational data in daily field notes, sometimes recording significant events into extended ethnographic accounts for my own reference. Additionally, both the Minyma and I (as indicated previously) captured observational data through video and photographic recordings much of which was used to produce the resources noted above. Secondary observation of video footage further assisted me to "build a picture of the life-world of those being observed and to develop an understanding of the way they ordinarily go about their everyday activities" (Stringer, 2013, p. 113).

Informal or opportunist interviews that arose in my daily interaction with the Minyma and recorded as field notes constituted another form of data collection. Generally, in the form of casual conversations, these took place in response to a key topic or theme which arose during my conversations with the women which I then sought permission to record, occasionally on dictaphone. These occurred at their place of work, as well as during social interactions either at my home or one of the Minyma's, or when traveling in vehicles together.

Data collection also included recording focus group discussions. The focus groups were comprised of five to twelve Minyma, from the pool of fourteen primary consultants (described above). Over a four-month period, six focus groups took place at a time and place designated by the women. Each session took place 'out bush'. This provided a space away from the demands of home and incorporated other important elements of family and community life, for example, hunting and gathering what was in season following which we gathered around the fire to eat, drink tea and have a discussion (see Figure 5).



Figure 5 Focus group conversation (image intentionally blurred).

The women saw it as an enjoyable extension of their role as Breakfast Minyma,

> *It's good to get out of the community, go out for a walk, go out for a day, sit down and just relax. Sit down and listen to the birds. It's good to get away from the Family Place for a change. Doing too much cooking (laugh). We like coming out bush to tell stories, and to cook* mirrka *(food), [kangaroo] tail, damper and all. Make a* waru *(fire) and have cuppa tea. Bring out kids out, they can run round and be really happy you know?* (Breakfast Minyma, 2012, pers. comm.).

Structured in collaboration with the Minyma, focus group discussions became a specific time and space in which they could talk about their experience with each other. The structure of the discussions observed the cultural orientation of the Minyma, taking into account the roles of relatedness, kin position and authority which determined who could speak and when. Typically, the conversations opened by me posing an open-ended "grand tour" question (Spradley, 1979), for example, "Tell me about your experience being a Warburton Breakfast Minyma". This revealed descriptions of significant issues, events and activities which were then deepened through "mini-tour" and "prompt" questions (Spradley, 1979). These questions encouraged the extension of stories and the women provided examples. Occasionally they did illustrations to expand on what they had said through the use of "story wires"[8], a storytelling practice drawing iconographical illustrations in the sand accompanied by an oral account (Eickelkamp, 2011; Kral & Ellis, 2008). Conversations were also prompted through the use of artefacts the

[8] The traditional use of sticks for this practice has been replaced with fencing wire.

women had created during their work, for example charts, photos, paintings, videos and their storybooks.

During the focus groups the Minyma often spoke for each other, co-constructing the accounts in a way that did not focus on *individual* experience, but rather as their *collective* experience as the Warburton Breakfast Minyma. When individual experiences arose in the discussion, the Minyma's close personal relationships still enabled a collaborative approach to storytelling. For instance, one woman might be recounting an event from her perspective and the other women would join in expanding the account into a collective representation. According to Moreton-Robinson (2000),

> *Indigenous women's texts...are the product of collaborative lives…experience is fundamentally social and relational, not something ascribed separately within the individual…they express the self as part of others and others as part of the self within and across generations* (pp. 1-2).

Consequently, quotes throughout this thesis are regularly attributed to the "Breakfast Minyma" rather than individual women. This also reflects Liberman's (1985) observation of remote community conduct whereby in "much group discourse" comments have a "public nature which minimises personal interests" (p. 4). As the discourse proceeds, the contributors work towards a "consensus without personal authorship, the unanimous possession of the group as a whole" (Liberman, 1985, p. 5). As has been well documented, sharing information orally within groups is an integral component of life for Aboriginal people and hence, oral tradition is valued by Indigenous peoples as a way of collecting data (Goduka, 2006). Wilson (2001) states that the emphasis on the process of storytelling within Australian Indigenous cultures makes it a valuable means of data collection and that "through stories, or narratives, people's identity and personality are formed" (Gorman & Toombs, 2009, p. 5).

Cram, Chilisa and Mertens (2013) attribute the dominance of qualitative research approaches to Indigenous research to the focus on,

> *…narratives and testimony in ways that are congruent with Indigenous peoples' storytelling traditions and has been the most accessible avenue through which to begin to understand how research can engage with, and seek to represent, Indigenous knowledge* (p. 19).

A novel form of data collection emerged spontaneously within the focus group discussions when the Minyma decided to write a film script about their experiences. Three of the focus group discussions turned into film script writing sessions. Initiated by the Minyma, this creative approach to ethnographic data collection arose through one of the women's recent involvement in a health promotion campaign in which she acted for a short video. Writing a script about "A day in the life of Linda, a fictional Breakfast Minyma" allowed the Minyma anonymity and confidence in their reflection on issues which were sensitive and hard to discuss. Consequent "performance writing" emerged as a key ethnographic text for the thesis. This provided a space for the participants to describe the phenomenon "through the act of representation" in a way that is "evocative, reflexive and multivoiced" (Denzin, 2001, pp. 15,19).

As described by Kazubowski-Houston (2017), the use of fiction in ethnography,

> *…could potentially carve inroads into "imaginative lifeworlds" (Irving, 2011, p.22) – interior dialogues, thoughts, moods, and feelings – that cannot always be easily accessed through conventional ethnographic methods but are an important part of lived experience* (p. 117).

As predicted by Kazubowski-Houston (2017) in her work with ethnographic fiction, the anonymity the script writing afforded the Minyma facilitated a "more critical and reflexive construction of ethnographic knowledge" (p. 117). Couched in the safety of the "characters'" lives, using fiction gave rise to discussion of circumstances in the Minyma's lives which were often evaded due to "shame" or retribution. The script writing accords with what Lassiter (2005) describes as "Truly collaborative ethnography"…"where researchers and interlocutors collaborate on the actual production of ethnographic texts" (pp. ix,xi).

Informal semi-structured interviews were also undertaken with the six non-Indigenous participants described above. Each participant identified the time and place for the conversations which lasted for between thirty minutes and one hour. The conversations took place in English.

Recording the data

I recorded data as audio files (subsequently written up in transcripts), field notes, film script, photographs, videos and personal journal entries. The focus groups and planned interviews I recorded on a dictaphone, the recordings of which were stored on a password secure file on my laptop computer. During the collection of this data, occasionally, the Minyma requested I pause the recording when discussing something they did not want to be included in the research. In addition to the recordings, I took notes during the focus groups, and on return from the bush trips wrote detailed field notes to accompany the recorded dialogue. In particular, the field notes recorded the activity and non-verbal actions that played a crucial part in informing the dialogue and meanings recorded as audio. I transcribed the recordings as soon after the focus group discussion as possible in order to both accurately identify the consultants' voices, as well as correlate the field notes (actions) with the relevant dialogue.

In terms of recording the film script, the Minyma and I wrote the emergent script on large sheets of butchers paper, using bold colourful markers to identify the different characters. Following each session, I typed up the script to date. I then took copies of the script to the next session where the Minyma read through the text, continued to allocate characters and extended on the script; often with great enjoyment.

Photos and video also played a vital role in recording the Minyma's activities. As is described in Chapter Six, often the Minyma controlled the cameras. In addition to my own laptop computer, two computers in the Family Place stored the recorded photos and videos and recorded data in other formats such as promotional and educational resources to which the Minyma and their families had regular access. Often the Minyma sought out USBs and copied photos to share with their families and also took copies of the DVDs to play in their homes. The Minyma also kept copies of the recorded data in the form of resources, such as posters and books

for themselves. Recorded data in the form of photos, videos, posters and books were a key resource in the “look-think-act” cycle of the action research process the Minyma employed as their activities emerged and expanded (see Figure 4).

I recorded data generally in English although some Ngaanyatjarra words and phrases were also included. Data recorded from focus groups with the Minyma were a mix of English and Ngaanyatjarra. Some of the Ngaanyatjarra was translated to English on the spot, the rest the Minyma assisted me with subsequently. I transcribed all the recordings verbatim in English. Ngaanyatjarra words were used in the same way the Minyma included them when speaking Aboriginal English. During the focus groups, I also scribed the key themes of discussion on butchers’ paper to visually record significant categories of data as they emerged. Patton (2002, p. 453) describes "content analysis" as searching for patterns or themes that, in the act of analysis, become "codes" that are subsequently further categorised. Data recorded from semi-structured interviews with non-Indigenous participants was in English only. I occasionally recorded my observations and field notes by hand, but usually on my laptop at home, on breaks during the day and in the evenings.

Interpreting the Minyma’s accounts (data analysis)

Data analysis, as indicated previously, utilised interpretive methods as described by Denzin (2001) and Stringer (2013) that seek to reveal the meanings the participants brought to their own experience. I analysed the data by examining the content of the transcripts of the women's descriptions of their activities, drawing on key themes identified by the women in focus groups, as described above, and further identifying key themes and assigning codes on the basis of meanings attributed by the women to their activities (Patton, 2002). I used these themes and codes to analyse my field notes and to triangulate the women's descriptions with my field observations.

Further, the prologue that opened the Introduction chapter provided a summarised account of the Minyma’s description of *Mirlirrtjarra Kuurl Mirrka Palyalpayi* based on Olive Lawson’s painting. The full transcript of this story

(which was filmed and edited into a video) also provided four over-arching categories of experience that guided data analysis and the construction of the text:

1. How and why the activities commenced - "*They wanted the kids to come to school and be healthy"*;
2. How we (the Minyma) became workers and recruited other workers - "*More ladies started working"*;
3. How we (the Minyma) do our work - "*From a small thing, the program grew bigger";* and,
4. How and why we tell the story about our work - "*The kids learn from these stories"*.

Hence, as much as possible the categories of experience constituting the themes of analysis were determined by the Minyma.

Writing up the Minyma's experience

In order to privilege their experience, I endeavoured to put the women's voices and perspectives to the fore. My intention in the writing up of the study and in the framing of the Minymas' accounts was to privilege their experience and to use it to foreground the commentary of 'expert' others, such as policymakers and academic researchers. I applied the following five tools to privilege the Minyma's perceptions and interpretations of work.

First, in an attempt to draw the reader into the experience of the Minyma and their life world, I apply the "verbatim principle" when using the women's voice. In other words, I state exactly what has been said using "terms and concepts drawn from the words of the participants [the Minyma]" (Stringer, 2013, p. 140). The member-checking I employed (described below) assisted in ensuring accuracy of the Minyma's accounts and their interpretations.

Second, reflecting and drawing upon the myriad of ways the Minyma bought meaning to their work, I followed Denzin's (2001) suggestion of reporting in a way which is multifaceted and multivoiced. In order to triangulate the data in this way, I utilised a range of mediums authored by the Minyma both individually and

collectively or as represented by myself drawing upon direct verbatim quotes from the women. Additionally, I used my own descriptive accounts, the Minyma's self-authored film script describing their experience, posters designed and written by the women, Minyma authored texts of their experience (such as storybooks), scripts for public presentations by the Minyma, photographs and video.

Third, in order to both make the text accessible to the Minyma and endeavour to write in a way that represents the Minyma's experience I attempted to avoid the use of sophisticated intra-disciplinary academic concepts and sought to write the dissertation in language the Minyma could understand. As described by Lassiter (2005) this is to acknowledge that, "We are working with real everyday people who deserve to know what we are up to and how we are interpreting their lives" (p. 121).

My approach to writing is strongly influenced by the collaborative nature by which this method of inquiry emerged and responds to requests from the Minyma for this thesis to tell their story. The writing aspires to honour the Minyma's primary empirical knowledge of their own situation and enhance its recognition within the academy. The participants guided attribution of quotes throughout the writing. As indicated above, many of the supporting quotes used are attributed to the "Breakfast Minyma", referring to Minyma in plural (see footnote 3, page 5), rather than individual women. For quotes that emerged from individual interviews with both the Minyma and non-Indigenous staff, pseudonyms have been used. Respecting the significance of names in Warburton and the practice of not using names of people recently deceased, the Minyma identified their own pseudonyms which was part of the member-checking process, described below.

Trustworthiness (rigour)

As described by Lincoln and Guba (1985), my qualitative study with the Minyma in the context of their everyday lives is a form of "naturalistic inquiry". Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest that within naturalistic inquiry, the "trustworthiness" of the representation of the participants should be determined by the participants themselves and replace positivist notions of rigour to determine the worthiness

of this form of research. To "test" trustworthiness in collaborative research requires a set of criteria in terms that are meaningful to the participants. To examine trustworthiness, I draw on four dimensions described by Lincoln and Guba (1985): credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability.

Credibility

Credible research ensures the participants trust and have confidence in the research process. Key approaches of my research which contributed to credibility are prolonged engagement, persistent observation, triangulation and member-checking.

My prolonged engagement and immersion within many aspects of community life in Warburton, complemented by my binary role of support worker and researcher, enhanced the possibility of a research method that captured the Minyma's lived experience. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), prolonged and persistent observation provides a depth of understanding,

> *If the purpose of prolonged engagement is to render the inquirer open to the multiple influences - the mutual shapers and contextual factors - that impinge upon the phenomenon being studied, the purpose of persistent observation is to identify those characteristics and elements in the situation that are most relevant to the problem or issue being pursued and focusing on them in detail. If prolonged engagement provides scope, persistent observation provides depth* (p. 304).

Persistent observation within the extended period of this study (August 2009 until August 2014) allowed me to become increasingly familiar with, observe and inquire about events *as they actually happened*, rather than rely on the Minyma's post hoc retrospective recollections of their work.

By immersing myself for a prolonged period and through persistent observation, I was able to *find meaning in action* due to my familiarity with the context. Furthermore, the protracted and continuous period over which interviews and focus groups took place allowed the Minyma "extended opportunities to explore and express their experience of the acts, activities, events and issues" related to

their work (Stringer, 2013, p. 92). Additionally, the questions I asked in interviews and focus groups were guided by my knowledge of what was important to the women and non-Indigenous staff consultants based on my prolonged engagement leading up to the collection of data.

Immersion into community life beyond my support worker and researcher roles allowed me to enter the Minyma's lives in a "real" way and pave the way for meaningful relationships based on equality, harmony, acceptance, cooperation, and sensitivity (Stringer, 2013, p. 24). Both through observation, and over time with guidance from the Minyma, I learnt how to communicate appropriately including the proper use of body and sign language, and how modes of communication change according to the nature of my relationship with someone or their seniority to me. My insight into the Minyma's social dynamics was heightened by my being accorded a "place" in the kinship system through the provision of a skin and Ngaanyatjarra "bush" name, Tjarwina. Each of us knowing *how* I was related to the Minyma contributed to our relationship being characterised by order, comfort and familiarity. The relationships which emerged from my prolonged period in Warburton enabled the Minyma to share meanings associated with their experience and control the representations of themselves, their work and their worker role, and thereby grounded the findings of the study within an emic perspective.

Another dimension of trustworthiness identified by Lincoln and Guba (1985) within naturalistic inquiry is data triangulation. As previously described above, a wide range of interconnecting methods was used to collect the same data from a variety of sources, often on multiple occasions. I triangulated the key elements of the Minyma's experience expressed at different moments in one focus group session, with the same experience expressed in other focus groups, with the Minyma's interview data, with my own observations and with perceptions that emerged from the non-Indigenous staff interviewees. Enhanced by the prolonged engagement and multiple opportunities to collect data, this approach contributed to my capacity to gain a secure and in-depth understanding of elements of the Minyma's experience.

In order to ensure that the Minyma were comfortable and happy with my interpretation and representation of their accounts, I employed a variety of "member checking" techniques that suited the collaborative approach to research. Member checking provided the women with a series of opportunities to give feedback on the texts as they emerged and the chance to clarify, extend and verify representation of their experience (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006; Stringer, 2013). The member checking process for this study required a degree of creativity to take into account the Minyma's unfamiliarity with the research process and the academic requirements associated with the format of a University thesis, the women's low levels of literacy, and English being a second or third language.

The member checking process fitted with the immediacy in which people lived their lives. Following the focus group discussions the Minyma would occasionally refer to an aspect of the conversation and request it not be used in the research. Additionally, I often had my computer or note pad with me when the Minyma were at work during which I could share aspects of the data and gain feedback. The prolonged nature of the research process allowed the Minyma to revisit areas of their experience, refer back to things they had said and make amendments as they felt necessary. My immersion in the community also provided the Minyma with opportunities for feedback.

I employed a number of techniques for member checking that I designed both in collaboration with the Minyma and based on the knowledge I had gained during my prolonged engagement. One technique was to video myself reading the text. During the videorecording which I did through the webcam built into my laptop, I held up a paper sign with either "Minyma" or "Ros" written on it to indicate if I was reading the words the Minyma had given me, or my written interpretation of events. The Minyma and I then had gatherings both in my home and on bush trips in which I played the video back to the women and paused periodically to get their feedback, or when they requested I pause. As feedback was given, I edited the text on a hard copy I had printed out in accordance with the Minyma's responses.

I also discussed the progress and content of writing with the Minyma by phone, on Facebook messenger, during their visits to my town (after I had departed from

Warburton) and during annual visits to Warburton by myself and my family. During these trips, I organised member checking sessions with the Minyma group, as well as one-on-one sessions with the fourteen consultants. At these sessions I referred to a summary of the thesis chapters which I presented in a display folder. As well as summaries of text in plain English (often in dot-point), I included all the quotes used from the Minyma, photographs of the *Mirlirrtjarra Kuurl Mirrka Palyalpayi* activities and images of data collection sessions, for example focus groups out bush (see Figure 5), to assist in positioning the text for the women. The Minyma allocated their own pseudonyms for individual accounts in the text.

As non-Indigenous perspectives and accounts were identified for inclusion in the text, I liaised with the participants via email sending them contextualised quotes to seek permission for inclusion, and inquire about the use of pseudonyms.

Finally, as the writing of the thesis progressed, I liaised with the Ngaanyatjarra Council Board regarding the content of the thesis to further gain authorisation of the account. I wrote a detailed letter regarding background, research approach and progress of my thesis with the intended submission deadline. A friend and anthropologist well known to the Council and community took this document on one of his visits, and on my behalf shared it with Olive Lawson. On a phone call between the three of us I sought her permission to send the document to the Ngaanyatjarra Council Board who provided their feedback.

Transferability

To what extent is this study representative and thus transferable to other similar settings, people and places? Naturalistic research of this kind allows me only to make claims about what was happening to the Warburton Breakfast Minyma unique to the time and context of the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). As described by Lincoln and Guba (1985), representation of a given population cannot be "time and context free" (p. 298); hence the context of the study is impossible to replicate or repeat. However, other remote Aboriginal women (and their support workers) in comparable contexts may find their own experiences resonate with those of the Minyma as they are interpreted and presented in this text. The Minyma's desire and effort to share their skills and stories with women in

neighbouring communities (see Chapter Six) indicates the potential usefulness of the findings for this research in other remote Aboriginal communities.

Dependability

Dependability is "the extent to which people can trust that all measures required of a systematic research process have been followed" (Stringer, 2013, p. 94). In addition to this chapter providing a detailed description of the procedures employed, ongoing collaboration with the Minyma informed them of the study's process and progress. Additionally, the member checking process with the Minyma provided the opportunity for feedback on the findings to enhance trustworthiness and dependability.

Confirmability

The trustworthiness of the study is further enhanced by its confirmability, "a degree of neutrality or the extent to which the findings of a study are shaped by the respondents and not researcher bias, motivation, or interest" (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006). In addition to using triangulation to ensure the accounts are rich and comprehensive (see above), I continuously employed reflexivity. Enhanced by journaling, peer debriefing and discussions with the Minyma, I maintained awareness of the context of knowledge construction and hence how my ontology and epistemology impacted on the research process and interpretation of the findings,

> *A researcher's background and position will affect what they choose to investigate, the angle of investigation, the methods judged most adequate for this purpose, the findings considered most appropriate, and the framing and communication of conclusions* (Malterud, 2001, pp. 483-484).

Guided by the criteria offered by Lincoln and Guba (1985) and enhanced by ongoing collaboration with the Minyma, I established a research process which was transparent and trustworthy. However, I recognise a number of limitations.

Limitations

The key dimensions of limitations pertaining to this study are power differentials between myself and the Minyma, interpretive limitations given the vastly different social and cultural context of our lives, and particular issues regarding collaboration. These limitations are primarily associated with the risks related to me being external to the Minyma's social experience and an 'outside' non-Indigenous researcher (Foley, 2006), many of whom have been criticised for framing research and information within the "colonising paradigms of Western knowledge" (Anderson, 2004, p. 86). In this chapter, I have addressed this concern by articulating the foundations of my orientation to the study: my ethical stance and my epistemological standpoint. I also attempted to address this issue through the application of a collaborative methodology, prolonged engagement and immersion in the research context. However, I acknowledge that despite these measures, there will always be "significant points of cultural, epistemological and socioeconomic difference" between myself and the women with whom I worked (Osborne, 2016, p. 47) and hence, an inherent power differential within the research process. Smith (1999) suggests that power differentials are implicit in relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, largely determined by a history that has "othered" Indigenous peoples.

Power differential

As well as historical influences, power differentials are starkly obvious in contemporary Warburton. Non-Indigenous people occupy most, if not all, the positions in the services and agencies most of which come with lucrative salaries and free housing. Many of these people are in positions of authority which exert power over Ngaanyatjarra people: white police arrest people, white school principals tell parents to send their kids to school, white people tell Ngaanyatjarra people how to clean their homes, white judges incarcerate people and white social workers (sometimes) take kids away. The consequent power is exacerbated by the attitudes many bring with them: that they have come to "help" the "poor" Aboriginal people and encourage them to aspire to non-Indigenous notions of wellbeing, health and education. High rates of illiteracy amongst Ngaanyatjarra people and restrictions to information because of the rarity of computer

ownership, technological illiteracy, and geographic isolation, exacerbate this inequality in power.

During my time working and researching with the women, I was often conscious of the implicit power differential shaped primarily by my privileged access to resources and information in comparison to the less affluent women. As well as demonstrated by my experience at WIAM (see page 30) this was evident in the access I had to organisational vehicles and other resources as a member of "staff", the ease I had at communicating with other stakeholders and persons of authority compared to the Minyma, the financial capacity that enabled me to come and go from the community, and my personal resources, for example my own camera and computer.

In describing my own sense of power in certain situations, I'm by no means inferring the Minyma were constantly subjugated by this power. In fact, there were definitely times I felt inferior and in some senses impoverished. On one occasion traveling in the car, the Minyma and I had a conversation about what motivated me to stay in Warburton for so long, away from my "home" (referring to Tasmania). "You must have done something that upset your family and they sent you away" was the gist of the Minyma's response. The wide dispersal of my family (parents in Tasmania, a sister flitting between countries doing development work, my Nanna and all other extended family members in England) was so conflicting with the vital immediate family ties of the Minyma, I also started to question the dispersal of my family. The richness of extended collective family life, the strong connectedness the Minyma had to the land, the deep cultural knowledge and practices that gave meaning to the Minyma's lives were all things that I would inherently miss out on.

Additionally, in cultural terms my family status gave me very low seniority. Often joked about by the Minyma was that I had not yet had children. Given that most of the Breakfast Minyma had had their children in their teens and early twenties, at thirty I was considered to be getting on to have a family. In my experience, having children is a significant rite of passage for Ngaanyatjarra girls and women which provides them with the confidence and authority to activity participate in community life and assert one's opinions. The advantage of me *not* having had

children was that the Minyma saw me as a 'kungka' (girl) and therefore they were less restricted in guiding me, or "learning me". This contributed both to my insight into their lives, values and ways, as well as the Minyma's confidence to challenge the way I positioned and conducted myself. Consequentially, the linguistic and social privilege I had as an outsider afforded me the chance to support the Minyma's voice to be heard.

Interpretive limitations

The implicit power differentials based on historical and contemporary relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians call for an interrogation of the interpretive process. As pointed out by Anderson (2004), typically research with Aboriginal people has been carried out by non-Indigenous people which limits Aboriginal involvement in "self-representation" (p. 86) and can result in non-Indigenous researchers viewing interpretations and understandings through their own interpretive lenses. As pointed out by Guenther, Osborne, Arnott and McRae-Williams (2017), researchers are becoming increasingly cognisant of this limitation noting that researchers in remote Aboriginal Australia,

> *…are frequently faced with the challenges of working in an intercultural space where channels of communication are garbled with interference created by the complexities of misunderstood worldviews, languages, values and expectations* (p. 197).

In addition to employing a collaborative methodology to overcome this, I actively practised "bracketing" my perspectives in order to focus on the "meanings inherent in the world" of the Minyma (Stringer, 2013, p. 139) and avoid "non-Indigenous categorisations of reality" (Kennedy, 2013, p. 374). I did this in a number of ways: purposefully seeking guidance and feedback from the women, peer debriefing with co-support workers and supervisors, attending courses in developmental practice, and familiarising myself with Indiginist research practices, described by Rigney (1997, 2006) as research which both privileges Indigenous voices and is focused on the lived and historical experiences and struggles of Indigenous peoples. Tools of self-reflexivity like journal writing forced me to analyse my standpoint, and regular interaction with other non-

Indigenous stakeholders allowed me to observe the way they positioned themselves and their impact on engaging Ngaanyatjarra people (or not).

Interpretive limitations are also common within short-term research in Aboriginal contexts. This is often linked to funding restrictions frequently associated with research. One such outcome is the "yes yes syndrome" that I experienced in my early months of supporting the Breakfast Minyma. This refers to the tendency for Aboriginal people to respond to questions positively and briefly, "even if what is being said is not understood or not actually agreed with" (Osborne, 2014, p. 8). The "yes yes syndrome" has been attributed to the intergenerational impact of Aboriginal peoples being raised under systems of governance where the expected answer to questions was "yes", and consequently sometimes has "disastrous outcomes within the areas of understanding and consent" (Queensland Government, 2011, p. 12). Although this explanation may be transferable to a Ngaanyatjarra context, through my experience with the Minyma I believe it is also a way to cope with the shame and uncertainty of liaising with *walypala* (whitefellas); a brief "yes" is an easy way to close a conversation within which they feel uncomfortable.

Overtime as trust and openness came to characterise our relationships, the Minyma gained the confidence to respond more elaborately, as well as eventually "pull me up" in circumstances when I didn't conduct myself appropriately. For example, one day I joked with one of the women, teasing her in what I thought was a light-hearted way. She got exceedingly upset with me as the nature of the relationship I had with her through our skin groups meant this was an inappropriate way to address her. The Minyma's inclination to challenge my interpretation of accounts in a range of circumstances contributed to my conviction that they were comfortable with the research process as it emerged.

Limitations of collaboration

As described above, my ideal was to collaborate on the research process. Consequently, I needed to frame the methodology in a way that was guided and made sense to the Minyma. There were inevitable barriers to this, not all of which I was able to overcome. I was enrolled in a post-grad degree in which academic requirements and research were a significant part of my paradigm. Compared to

this, few of the Minyma had done schooling beyond year nine. Although some of the women had been involved in an earlier PhD research study (Kral, 2007) many had not, so it was essential that I find creative means to transact the purpose of the research and the format of the end product.

Additionally, although it improved with time, my grasp of the Ngaanyatjarra language was not sufficient enough to converse fluently with the Minyma, nor transcribe Ngaanyatjarra accounts. English was the second or sometimes third language of the Minyma. For my benefit, in the focus group discussions and interviews the Minyma mainly used English; however, the inevitable language barriers presented limitations to my interpretation of the accounts. This improved as I came to know the women who were the most competent at translating and were willing to help me. While I have done my best to represent the experiences of the Minyma in a credible manner in the presentation of much of the thesis, particularly the findings, the academic requirements of the University means there are inevitably components of this thesis which privilege the academic discourse.

Conclusion

Recognising the centrality of the Minyma's perspective to informing the study's 'results', the method of inquiry emerged in a way that was responsive to their everyday lives. Rather than being imposed from the outside, this study gradually evolved within the existing framework and conditions of the *Mirlirrtjarra Kuurl Mirrka Palyalpayi*. My researcher role was synonymous with my initial role as a support worker. Three crucial foundations of the support role which influenced and strengthened the emergent collaborative research approach were: non-directive developmental practice, recognition and immersion in the centrality of relatedness, and ongoing self-reflexivity. Consequently, the accounts presented in the following four findings chapters reflect a genuine attempt to represent the everyday lives of the Warburton Breakfast Minyma.

CHAPTER THREE: *We were worried for the tjitji* (kids): From a school breakfast program to *Mirlirrtjarra Kuurl Mirrka Palyalpayi*

"We were worrying for them tjitji (kids)": Starting up School Breakfast

> *"*Widjala! *(Hurry up!), go to school, you gotta get learned, get* ninti *(clever) one pa, no more lazing around at home, you gotta grow up smart way and get a job".*

This, and similar refrains from parents, aunties, uncles, grandparents and older siblings encouraging children to go to school, were common when the Minyma and I drove around the school Troopy[9] early in the mornings on the school attendance run. Next to me, one and sometimes two of the Warburton Breakfast Minyma sit and direct me from house to house, their insider knowledge intuiting the whereabouts of each child, and in the children's absence a brief exchange with the family in Ngaanyatjarra language, or a simple hand signal, give ample clues. As we pull up from house to house, adult family members encourage the children with varying degrees of coercion to scramble up the metal steps into the back of the clunky vehicle.

Despite the nominal distance to walk to school, consistently low attendance rates demonstrated the children's resistance. A ride in the back of the Troopy with their friends acted as an incentive, especially when their favourite tunes of the local Yabu band were booming joyfully through the vehicle's sound system. One of the

[9] A common nickname given to Toyota Troop Carriers, a popular vehicle in the desert known for its hardiness and ability to carry up to eleven people.

band's lyrics was a message about the importance of a culture within school curricula,

> *"Our dancing, our music, our way of life is slowly fading away;*
> *Cultural education must be in our schools today"* (Yabu Band, 2009).

It's early 2009 and there's now an incentive to come to school, free school breakfast. Leaning out the window the Minyma yell out and hurry up individuals or groups of kids to get to school and eat breakfast before class, managing to apply an effective mix of authority and kindness in their strong voices in messages of persuasion, eager to fill the two long seats in the back of the vehicle,

> *"*Widjala *(hurry up)! Come and have a lovely warm breakfast you kids!*
> *Weetbix, milo, spaghetti on toast, better be quick or you'll miss out,*
> *school siren going to go soon!"*

Many kids willingly jump in, others say they will walk up themselves for breakfast.

At the school home economics room, a portable, temporary classroom installed at least thirty years prior, the kids are met with tempting warm breakfast smells. The Breakfast Minyma serve them a substantial healthy breakfast before they pile out the door and run to class at the sound of the wailing siren to signify the start of school.

Encouraging kids to come to school was the primary factor in the initiation of the provision of school breakfast in Warburton towards the end of 2008. The Ngaanyatjarra Council, including representatives from the Warburton Community Council, and Warburton community members were concerned about school attendance and the effectiveness of the school at addressing the students' needs. This prompted an initial meeting between the Ngaanyatjarra Council Board members, the School Principal and the Education Advisor to the Ngaanyatjarra Council. School breakfast was discussed with the intention that its provision would be an encouragement for kids to come to school in the morning, and a nutritional start to the day that contributed to their ability to learn.

A second meeting was attended by a number of senior Ngaanyatjarra women who had been suggested by Council members as being able to run the school breakfast program. Olive Lawson, who was part of the meeting, recalls that the Councillors asked "*some ladies to make breakfast for the kids*" (Olive Lawson, 2012, pers. comm.).

The idea was quickly translated into action. Intense discussion amongst the group followed, including the identification of four grandmothers and one mother who would start the program. The School Principal offered use of the home economics room as well as supplies left over from a recent school carnival. Later that day it was negotiated with the Warburton community administration (administered under the Ngaanyatjarra Council) that the women would be paid wages under the Community Development Employment Program (CDEP). The Education Advisor to the Ngaanyatjarra Council, a resident of Warburton, was nominated as the initial support worker to the women.

The following day a planning meeting took place in the school home economics room between the women and the support worker who took notes on a whiteboard. The women discussed how they saw school breakfast unfolding, what time it would start, the time they would need to arrive, the necessary preparation, what they would serve the children, how they would tell the kids about it and the cleaning supplies required. This was the first 'Breakfast meeting', a gathering the Minyma repeated on a weekly basis across the study.

Reflecting on their initial involvement in school breakfast, the Minyma indicated that that their participation was grounded in concerns about poor school attendance and their children's education,

> *We were worrying for them* tjitji *(kids). We wanted them to go to school and stay in class, not be running away all the time. It's important for those kids to get learned, you know, grow up and get a job proper way, like the Breakfast* Minyma (Breakfast Minyma, 2012, pers. comm.).

The first school breakfast happened within a week of the initial Breakfast meeting in November 2008. It was an instant success and for the remainder of the school year the women prepared and, according to the Minyma, served between twenty and thirty children most school days.

When the initial support worker commented on the efficiency and effectiveness of their skills, including exemplary food preparation techniques, the Minyma informed him they had learnt the skills when they were younger girls. The four grandmothers had been sent away to Esperance, Western Australia, for high school and resided at Fairhaven Hostel. The high school aged girls from Warburton spent the weeks of their first year between Esperance High School and being trained domestically at the Norseman Mission, founded by Churches of Christ in 1965. After their first year they were placed in various employment such as "childcare, domestics at a motel, employees at a dry cleaning works and at a bakery, and home duties on farms" (Angus, 2017, p. 40),

> *We knew how to work because some of us had learnt things like cooking in the kitchen at Fairhaven where we went for high school* (Susan, 2012, pers. comm.).

The presence of the women at the Warburton school preparing and serving breakfast in the morning quickly became established and well known to the kids, families and school staff. The women soon began referring to themselves as the "Warburton Breakfast *Minyma* (women)", or simply the "Breakfast *Minyma*".

As this chapter describes, the positive impacts of school breakfast and the reputation the Minyma quickly gained for themselves resulted in them being approached to undertake other catering tasks. In turn, the Minyma's increased confidence and agency resulted in instigation of an even broader scope of activities that addressed community concerns. In order to provide the reader with an insight into the Minyma's emerging role and the structures and processes that enabled it, this Chapter commences with a detailed description of the Warburton Breakfast Minyma as they go about their daily routine on a March morning in 2010.

At School Breakfast

"Clink clunk". The latch of the mesh-less screen door pops out of its socket. From the inside, Stephanie pulls open the heavy main door and the bright morning light is steeped in a strong heat delivering the message of another steamy day ahead. Stephanie's voice confidently booms across the smattering of kids engaged in a variety of activities on the bare cracked concrete outside the "breakfast room" – a newly coined term for the school home economics room.

"Come on tjitji pirni *(kids),* mirrka manjila wildjala! *(come get your food quickly!)"*

Stephanie's message resonates in the ears of the waiting throng and has an instant effect.

"Me, me, me!"

With agility, the kids bound up the three worn wooden steps and swarm around Stephanie, the little ones pushing under her armpits, and the taller ones impatiently ducking to get through as she props open the door.

*"*Wiya, wanti*! (no, stop!)", Mary bellows from her position inside, "line up, wash your hands first good way", and she musters the eager bodies away from the bench where the welcoming Weetbix box is gaping open. Despite the daily event of breakfast, the kids are always eager to bypass this mundane part of the routine and get straight into the first course.*

Having wedged the door open with the mop bucket anchored with water, Stephanie moves up to the front of the queue and pumps small quirts of liquid soap into waiting cupped hands. One of the distracted skinny bodies is fiddling with the mop and Stephanie yells at him to get

back into line. In defiance, he pulls it out and a big puddle of water streams across the speckled linoleum floor. In sign language, Stephanie motions to Lucinda who is at her post at the toaster, beckoning her over to assist with the spill. A strong woman, Lucinda eases the wooden handle from the meagre grasp and responding to her authoritative glare, the boy cowers back into the line. At the front, the shorter recipients stand on a child-sized sturdy plastic chair and reach out their hands over the sink towards the tap to meet the trickle.

"Yuwa (yes), rub them hard", Stephanie encourages.

The kids migrate from the sink to a neat arrangement of Weetbix, bowls, milk, fruit and honey that had been laid out by the Minyma prior to opening time. Kids of varying heights huddle together in front of the display, stretching up to the opening in the kilogram-size box of Weetbix. They place two of the crispy biscuits in tin green enamel bowls and flood them with low fat long life milk left in the fridge overnight to cool.

"Careful one pa *(careful)!" Mary exclaims as a small arm tries to negotiate the milk above eye level. Mary leans over, gently extracting the litre carton and guiding the white stream into the bowl. She then takes a stubby can of sliced peaches and plops three of the slimy wedges onto the exposed mounds of cereal.*

*"*Yuwa, palya *(yes, ok)", she encourages, and the little hands grip the edge of the bowl, lowering it carefully and guiding it over to a spot on the communal series of tables, eyes not wavering from the contents.*

The children take their places around three solid square tables pushed together, surrounded by an array of red plastic chairs, and stools. Each gravitates towards an older sibling and/or cousin who help the little ones or shield them from the regular pattern of teasing. The plastic tubes of honey pass between sticky hands, generous golden globs oozing into the soggying mixture. Oversized spoons are awkwardly negotiated into

smiling faces and chitchat swims around the room amongst the kids and the women.

While the kids consume their first course, the women prepare toast and baked beans. Lining up for second course, the kids twiddle with their selected knife and fork. Two industrial sized toasters stand symmetrically aligned on the main bench. Sets of six slices "pop" up and then are generously lashed with margarine and put on trays in the oven. Lucinda pulls a pre-prepared tray out and puts two slices onto a large enamel plate. She passes the plate to Stephanie who holds it over the steaming pan of beans and generously ladles the runny ochre-coloured content onto the bread. It's passed to outstretched arms and carried back to the child's place at the table,

"You finish all that mirrka *(food) before* yanu ku *(going to) class, good boy," Lucinda urges.*

The volume rises at one end of the table – expletives erupting from a couple of eight-year-old cousins, their peers watching on and laughing. Stephanie is quick to move to the scene.

*"*Wanti *(stop), you got to speak good way at breakfast", she directs, standing over the two boys, her hand gestures emphasising her disciplining.*

An abrupt silence settles over the group, a few murmurs only re-emerging as she walks back to her post at the stove.

The long wail of the school siren echoes throughout the community.

"Come on you kids, widjala *(hurry up), time for school!", Mary reacts.*

There is a scurry of activity. A few of the kids who have already finished, drop down from their perches, and scamper down the stairs, not

wanting to miss the morning's first activity – a whole-school game of dodge ball. Some of the older kids take their time, labouring over their soggy toast and gazing tiredly out the window, ignoring the urgings of the women.

A few high school aged kids arrive at the front door and tentatively peer in.

*"*Yuwa (yes)*, you kids are late. Come in quick and have some Weetbix".*

The rule that late-comers can have Weetbix but not second course has been negotiated with the teachers; a decision based on the belief that it's better to have a 'full tjuni *(tummy)' and be late for class than on time and hungry. This is one of the rules on an A3 sheet compiled by the Minyma at their weekly meeting in response to the various issues that arise. Multiple copies have been laminated and strategically blue-tacked to the walls of the breakfast room for the Minyma's reference, assisting in their capacity to assert authority.*

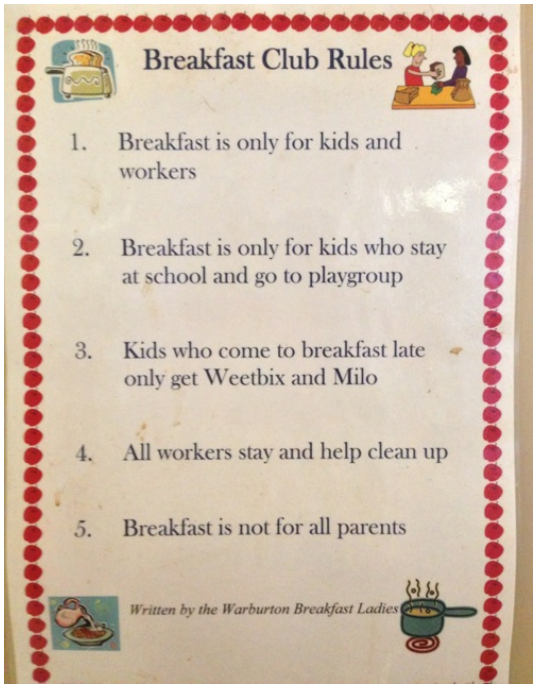


Figure 6 The Warburton School Breakfast Club rules, March 2010.

This account of a morning at Warburton School Breakfast provides an insight into the context from which the Minyma's worker role emerged. The account reveals the certainty with which they enacted their work and the way they conducted themselves during the morning routine. Implicit in the text is the confidence the Minyma exude in both the management of the children, ensuring the kids are orderly, disciplined, maintain good hygiene and have a healthy breakfast, and their catering tasks. Additionally, the Minyma enabled the older children to take responsibility for younger children, an everyday feature of family life in the community.

The account also reveals the structures the Minyma put in place, including establishing a production line, dividing up the tasks amongst themselves and ensuring the breakfast routine met the timing of the school. To ensure a smooth and effective operation the Minyma established a set of rules and guidelines for their work which was regularly assessed and modified during Breakfast meetings (see Figure 6), and as they reviewed the morning's operations during and after the clean-up.

The next section will describe the Minyma's experience following the departure of the children. The post-breakfast routine is an opportunity for the Minyma to reflect on their morning activities, have some social time and execute a clean up of the facility in preparation for the school class which will soon arrive.

> *There is a pool of baked beans left in the bottom of the generous-sized fry pan. Relieved of the bulk of their morning duties, the Minyma take turns serving themselves a portion onto cooled slices of toast. They have a vibrant conversation about events in the community the night before, and discuss their upcoming work trip to Perth. Another Breakfast Minyma, Mary's sister, Susan, comes to the door. Her grandson is with her and she quickly makes him a bowl of Weetbix before making herself a cup of tea and joining the women.*
>
> *"Eat up and then go to class, quick way", she encourages him.*

A teacher sticks her head in the door, reminding the Minyma that her art class is taking place in the room in the day's first lesson. There is a flurry of activity, as the room is restored to its before-breakfast condition. Scraps are scraped into the bin and plates are piled haphazardly on the side of the sink. Susan, who has shuffled her grandson out the door to class, plugs the sink and turns on the tap, the low pressure gradually foams the water from the generous squirt of detergent. Stephanie locates a bottle of 'Spray and Wipe', aiming the cloud of chemicals at the patches of muck on the table and benches, and then leaning around Susan to wet a cloth in the soapy water.

Mary calls to the other women in the room, "Broom na *(where's the broom)!?"*

"Over that way!" Stephanie points to where she's propped it next to the door.

Stephanie hoists the chairs and stools onto the table tops to allow Mary to sweep up the debris that has accumulated below. Little piles are shuffled into the brush and dustpan and dumped in the folds of the shiny black bin liner now encrusted with mucky food scraps. At the sink, Susan uses an empty five kilogram margarine container to decant warm water into the yellow mop bucket, followed by a bold dash of floor cleaner which throws up a powerful eucalypt whiff. She submerges the ageing grey mop head into the clean liquid, instantly muddying it with the residues of previous activity.

Lucinda had taken a seat, resting from the morning's exertion but is beckoned by Susan to lend a hand with the mopping. Her strong arms make streaks of wetness across the floor, expertly working backwards to avoid making footprints with her tough bare feet. When she finishes, she picks up the bucket and tosses it over the outside railing, startling a dog that had found a dusty patch in the sun. Lucinda laughs as he bounds away behind the building.

The morning's duties are complete and on the way out the women reach for the Texta stuck to the wall with a wad of blue-tack. On the weekly time sheet the other Minyma watch on as Stephanie locates their names and in each box slowly scribes "7-9": these hours will contribute to their weekly CDEP payment.

As the women make their way down the steps, Lucinda yanks the door shut behind her and together, the Minyma wonder through the parched grounds, the school gate clanging shut behind them as they chat about their day's plans.

All aspects of the morning's routine demonstrate the mutual support the women offer to each other within their work. The Minyma's desire to comply with the needs of the school in terms of use of the space reveals their integration into the school routine; the management of their time sheets demonstrates their role in work administration. Not only did the efficient provision of school breakfast further the Minyma's aims to strengthen both school attendance and the wellbeing of the children, but also it enhanced their status in the eyes of people around them, as revealed in the next section.

"Walkumunyu breakfast pa!" (Breakfast is great!)

The Minyma's activities, high engagement and success in their worker role attracted positive responses from people around them which contributed to their motivation to continue in their worker role. This section illustrates the responses to the provision of school breakfast from the children, the school, community agencies and the Minyma themselves.

Minyma perspectives

By initiating, organising and serving school breakfasts to the Warburton school children, the Minyma encouraged the kids to come to school and stay in class. This motivation was also implicit in other actions, such as their involvement in the school attendance runs. During the study period, the numbers of children

attending breakfast fluctuated. The women went through periods of keeping records of daily attendance which were anywhere from five to thirty children (out of an average 100 children enrolled at the Warburton School each year).

The Minyma reflected on the impact of school breakfast and how it encouraged kids to come to school,

> *Before school breakfast started kids used to run away from school and some kids had no breakfast. Sometimes they used to be lazy and tired and didn't want to get up and come to school. They now get up have a shower and just walk from home to school 'cause they know they have* mirrka *(food) there. Now when they have breakfast they can go straight to class because they know it's close up* (Breakfast Minyma, 2012, pers. comm.).

While increased school attendance was the primary aim of the women, another motivation was the children's health, reflected in the importance they put on the kids having a substantial and healthy breakfast. They observed that having a "full belly" helped the children to concentrate, learn and stay at school for the whole day, rather than disappearing to find other sources of food,

> *It makes the kids go to school so they have good healthy breakfast so they can keep going to school and be* ninti walykumunu *(good and smart). The kids all say,* "Walkumunyu breakfast pa!" *(Breakfast is good!). Kids go to school everyday when they have breakfast, so they can stay in school and be good kids. When they have a feed … they get full and warm to keep them going for school* (Breakfast Minyma, 2010, pers. comm.).

The women also recognised that it wasn't just the food that encouraged the children's attendance, but also the Minyma's presence on the school campus and their familial connection with them,

> *Now the kids they know, "oh ladies there", and "oh mummy [the inclusive kinship term also includes maternal aunties], she's ready" they get up quick…and they go to school. If their mummies work as breakfast ladies*

> *they go to school with them … kids close by see those ladies going to school so they know that breakfast will be ready soon and they follow them. Some of them can see the Family Place*[10] *… see the door open or the kids on the veranda so they run along to the school for breakfast. The kids tell their families, "I'm going to the school for breakfast"* (Breakfast Minyma, 2012, pers. comm.).

The kids' enthusiasm for breakfast was also indicated by an increase in the number of children bringing themselves to school prior to its official start time. On some mornings, particularly in the summer when the sun rises over the Warburton Ranges as early as 4am, young early-risers congregated in the school grounds long before the arrival of the Breakfast Minyma. If they saw one of the teachers or a support worker from the Breakfast program they would often shout out, *"Breakfast Minyma na?!"* ("Where are the Breakfast Minyma?!"). If there was no sign of any women, the kids would sometimes run to their homes and find their mum, aunt or grandmother and tell them it was time to come to school and make breakfast for the kids. In addition to the Minyma's reflection on why school breakfast worked, the next section provides perspectives of people around them who recognised and commented on the impact of school breakfast.

Other perspectives

As well as the Ngaanyatjarra Council and the school, other agencies, internal and external to Warburton, recognised the positive outcomes of school breakfast and lent their support. Foodbank Western Australia (WA), a hunger-relief organisation based in Perth, donated non-perishable foods, wages were paid through the CDEP and the Community Office subsidised minor resources as required from the funds available through the administration and resources component of CDEP. Because of the positive impact on the children and the high engagement of the Minyma, many of these agencies noted the initiative and provided the Minyma with verbal and written feedback and encouragement and shared the news of the Minyma's success as workers with others.

[10] The Family Place is a building that the Minyma's pursuits operated out of from 2010. It will be described later in this chapter.

In December 2009, the School Principal provided feedback on the impact of the Minyma's provision of school breakfast through a short video, emphasising the benefits of the Minyma's presence in the school,

> *The work of the Breakfast Ladies at Warburton Ranges [School] has been truly amazing this year. The daily provision of a wholesome breakfast is important to ensuring that the children are in school on time and ready to learn. That this is delivered by grandmothers is significant as it provides a "family" atmosphere in which to start the day…this group of women is becoming an even greater asset to the school. Individual ladies are starting to identify for themselves stronger roles they would like [to achieve]. The Breakfast Ladies have become active partners in the school and a source of pride; a very concrete example of how the community can take control of its own destiny* (Soames, cited in Warburton Breakfast Minyma, 2009).

In addition to this feedback, the Principal made regular contact with the Minyma, supporting them and commending them on their work, including writing them letters of appreciation at the end of each year.

Other long-term resident staff also made comments on the work of the Breakfast Minyma. One staff member who had been working in Warburton for twelve years noted the Minyma's high engagement compared to the pattern of recent years,

> *Until your program came along there was a huge gap in the CDEP projects and work encouragement [encouragement of local people to work]. There was a huge gap that needed to be filled and your program has actually had a great success in my opinion, you have maintained [local] staff and that sort of thing* (Bill, 2012, pers. comm., 7 August).

Another long-term resident worker considered the local ownership of the program and the involvement of family members as unique,

> *I'm really opposed to taking responsibility for kids away from parents and feeding them at school but school breakfast here is different. It's*

> *fantastic that it's the ladies who are giving breakfast to the kids and not the school teachers* (Jenny, 2012, pers. comm.).

The provision of supplies from Foodbank WA resulted in a strong relationship with the Foodbank WA staff who were inspired to visit the Ngaanyatjarra Lands on a number of occasions. Subsequently, the Minyma visited the Foodbank WA facilities in Perth, and participated in their workshops. Impressed by the Minyma's work, Foodbank staff described the women's pursuits as having,

> *…produced great outcomes for the kids (increased attendance and concentration) as well as positively impacting the community. Due to the program being initiated at a local level, it has seen long-term engagement of a number of local women in Warburton* (Foodbank WA, 2012, p. 17).

The response of the kids, their families and agency staff together gave the women self-confidence, self-belief and encouraged them to further extend their activities and their worker role. Their developing recognition as workers led to a number of staff members approaching them to consider additional catering tasks. This was the beginning of a more extensive repertoire of activities.

"From a small one it grew bigger": Extending breakfast

The increase in self-confidence of the Minyma and the recognition by both themselves and other agencies of the orientation and scope of their role resulted in opportunities to extend their activities and further broaden the capacity of their worker role. This extension of pursuits occurred both by invitation of agency staff and through their own initiative.

As the activities grew into much more than breakfast, the Minyma gave a name to the collection of pursuits, *Mirlirrtjarra Kuurl Mirrka Palyalpayi*[11] (Making Good Food at Warburton School) proudly describing it as,

> *[Warburton] School has its own* mirrka palyalpayi (school cooking initiative) (Breakfast Minyma, 2010, pers. comm.).

This section starts with an overview of how the Minyma's role in the school expanded and is followed by an account of how their worker role emerged to address issues of concern beyond the school. As the range of their activities broadened, so too did the scope of their worker role as a Breakfast Minyma. While only a few examples are presented in detail, a summary of the activities that unfolded within *Mirlirrtjarra Kuurl Mirrka Palyalpayi* is presented in Table 1 and emphasises the richness and variety of the women's work.

Extending Minyma school catering

The positive approach of the school principal and the Minyma's daily presence led to a relationship between him and the women that was characterised by regular chats in the school grounds and him often seeking their perspective on different aspects of life in the school[12]. At the end of 2009, he sought the Minyma's interest in extending their catering to School Open Days and Theme Days, and the Desert Dust Up Sports Carnival, a significant annual event on the school calendar. The Minyma accepted these additional challenges enthusiastically, thereby initiating a new repertoire of activities described by Olive Lawson when telling the story of her painting (see Prologue) as,

> *From a small one it grew bigger* (Olive Lawson, pers. comm, 2012).

These additional catering activities resulted in the inevitable broadening of the Minyma's worker role, although their trademark title, 'Warburton Breakfast

[11] Despite the scope of activities expanding beyond its focus on catering and beyond the bounds of the school, this name remained throughout the duration of the Minyma's work.
[12] It is important to note the positive approach of this particular principal. During the study period there was a high turnover of school principals at the Warburton School and they varied in how much they supported the Minyma's involvement in the school.

Minyma', remained. However this additional work meant a lot more people to feed and longer hours and hence, required a larger team of workers. Acceptance of the new activities coincided with a growing number of Minyma supporting the school breakfast.

Responding to an increase in their workload because of the high attendance at school breakfast, the Minyma had started to actively recruit additional women (see Chapter Four). Nevertheless, the new activities meant the Minyma were no longer providing a service for school children only, but also to adult family members and staff in the community. This section provides a brief overview of the work required for School Theme Days and School Open Days, followed by a more detailed case study of the Minyma's work at the 2010 Desert Dust Up school sports carnival. It demonstrates how the Minyma's worker role expanded and how they willingly embraced the challenges the work entailed.

School Theme Days

School Theme Days were a regular term event in which a series of activities were offered to mixed-aged groups of children based around a theme. The Minyma prepared healthy "picnic-style" lunches, often liaising with the school staff to prepare elements of the food to suit the theme. The wide variety of healthy options they provided for Theme Days expanded the Minyma's repertoire of recipes. Additionally, in choosing the menu, the women capitalised on their previous experience. For example, they used recipes they had learnt during workshops run by FoodBank WA in Perth. On delivery of the picnic boxes to each group, the women sat with the kids and teachers and partook in the lunch, further contributing to their becoming part of the school community (see Figure 7).



Figure 7 Picnic boxes ready to be served and the Minyma sharing the lunch with kids and teachers at School Theme Day.

School Open Days

School Open days were an opportunity for family members to visit the school, share a barbeque prepared by the Minyma and visit their children's classrooms. As well as cooking meat, the women spent the morning preparing green salads, coleslaw, potato salads and orange wedges, and then served it to long queues of hungry children and family members. Leading up to the Open Days the school principal used the Minyma's tacit knowledge of the community to develop meaningful ways to promote the event and encourage family members to attend, adding a "community liaison" component to the Minyma's worker role. On some occasions, the Minyma created and distributed posters to promote the event (see Chapter Six). Prior to the arrival of the Breakfast Minyma, community participation in the school had been minimal. Their presence vastly increased the number of family members who attended Open Days.

The School Open Days also attracted staff from a variety of Warburton agencies. Many showed great interest in the Minyma's work and struck up conversations with them and the support workers about their activities. As a consequence, additional jobs came their way: preparing and serving food at a Ngaanyatjarra Council meeting, catering for Department of Education staff meetings and catering breakfasts for a week-long cultural camp.

Catering at Desert Dust Up sports carnival

Leading on from the success of Theme Days and Open days, the principal suggested the women cater for the regional sports carnival. This further extended the Minyma's worker role as this required large-scale organisation, project planning, scheduling and budgeting, and transferring their skills and knowledge to women in a second Ngaanyatjarra community from whom they sort assistance. They catered for this annual event from 2009 to 2012.

"Dust Up" as it's commonly known, is an 'interschool'[13] sports carnival with competitions between the nine campuses of the Ngaanyatjarra Lands School. It is

[13]Operating as a "one school system", the Ngaanyatjarra Lands School comprises of nine community campuses administered by a single executive principal (see Figure 3). The purpose of this arrangement is to share resources and so that teachers are able to collaborate and respond to the mobility of Ngaanyatjarra families (Ngaanyatjarra Lands School, 2018). For purposes of clarity, the Warburton campus is referred to as the 'Warburton School' throughout this text.

held over three days and alternates between two 'host' schools, Warburton and Warakurna (250 kilometres east of Warburton). Prior to the festival in 2009, catering as well as organising the event had been the teachers' responsibility.

Leading up to each Dust Up, the Minyma were engaged in mapping out menus, listing required ingredients, collecting orders from the local store, making travel and accommodation arrangements and undertaking practice sessions for meals. In the following accounts, the Minyma describe their work at Dust Up. They note the scale of the event, the large numbers of the Minyma engaged, the long hours, the range of healthy food prepared and positive response from the kids,

> *When there's big event like Dust Up,* minyma pirni *(many women) they make good breakfast, lunch and supper for the kids. For the last couple of years they've been feeding the whole Ngaanyatjarra Lands schools* (Katherine, 2012, pers. comm.).

> *[In Warakurna in 2010] we all cooked for 180 kids and teachers for four days…on some days we worked from 6 in the morning 'til 8 at night. For lunch we made sandwiches with salad, cheese, ham and tomato… For dinner we made hamburgers and cole-salad (coleslaw) for a barbeque, on the next night we made spaghetti bolognaise and green salad. The kids were all so hungry after running around, we enjoyed making food for the children* (Stephanie, cited in Warburton Breakfast Minyma, 2010).

In addition to preparing food, when the event was in Warakurna the women camped overnight with their kids in the school grounds, thereby offering support to the teachers. During the event, the Minyma took turns to have 'breaks' from cooking so they could watch their children and grandchildren participating in the activities, and much to the delight of the Breakfast Minyma, one of them participated in the teachers' and parents' running race, an undertaking considered brave and illustrating a new confidence!

During their work at Dust Up the Minyma excelled at creating efficient assembly lines during food preparation by drawing on their existing knowledge and skills, and also by applying new methods to accommodate this scaled-up catering

project (see Figure 8). When meals were served, the women lined up behind a length of two to three trestle tables where the food was laid out, at the same time directing and maintaining order in the line-up of kids, teachers and family supporters. As indicated in the above quote, the Minyma enjoyed serving not only their children but also nieces, nephews and cousins from other communities.



Figure 8 Preparing and serving food at Desert Dust Up in Warakurna, 2010.

Leading up to the second Dust Up in 2010 in Warakurna, the Minyma organised a number of trips to train five Warakurna women who they would work with at the event. The Warakurna women were kin to the Minyma and together they had a series of training days doing trial runs of the meals. This training component became an additional part of the Minyma's worker role (see Chapter Six). The recognition of their own skills, their capacity to share them, and the willingness of others to want to learn from the Minyma provided an additional source of self-confidence and self-belief which contributed to the further broadening of the scope of their worker role.

During the closing ceremony of the Dust Ups, the Minyma were presented with certificates of appreciation and gifts from the school, an acknowledgement of their hard work. This contributed to the Minyma's pride and assurance in what they were doing. Throughout the events, the women were enthusiastic about recording their work with photos and video. They used these to reflect on the event, accompanied by anecdotes about the enjoyment had by the kids and the teachers from the Minyma doing the catering. From this footage, a video was made which the Minyma presented to a range of regional and urban audiences (to view the Dust Up 2010 video visit https://youtu.be/K0kWlT2oPz4).

Thus Desert Dust Up developed the Minyma's ability to cater for large-scale events, and furthered their desire to look after and encourage their kids to engage

in school activities. Together, breakfast, Open Days, Theme Days and Dust-Up cemented their commitment to being in charge of making food for the children at school events. The Minyma installed themselves as an important and accepted part of the school community. Others were taking note; one was the Home and Community Care (HACC) coordinator who, following the first Desert Dust Up in 2009, approached the Minyma to seek their advice and assistance.

Making meals for the old people

Towards the end of 2009, the non-Indigenous staff member who coordinated the HACC program for the frail, aged and disabled approached the Minyma to discuss an arrangement for the provision of meals for HACC clients. This became part of the expansion of the Minyma's worker role beyond activities associated with the school. During this conversation, the Minyma voiced their concerns about the existing standard of the meals currently provided by HACC. The outcome was that the Minyma volunteered to include cooking the HACC meals as a component of their work. Each had at least one elderly person in their family for whom they were fully or partially responsible and they were concerned about their wellbeing. Here they describe the process of being asked to do the meals,

> *They were doing HACC meals at the store before, and then the* mitjitji *(white woman) came and asked the Breakfast Ladies, "Is it all right if you mob can do the HACC food?" And we said,* "Yuwa" *(yes)* (Breakfast Minyma, 2012, pers. comm.).

"Doing" these HACC meals further added knowledge and skills to the Minyma's worker role as this required designing menus, shopping for ingredients and preparing lunches that were suitable to the elderly, and also packaging them in a way appropriate for delivery. In order to undertake their delivery, some of the Minyma learnt to drive and achieved their licence.

The women here describe the process of doing HACC meals and the variety of things they learnt to cook,

> *Everyday we do the HACC meals for the old people. On Monday we shop for* mirrka *(food) and on Tuesday we cook the meals. We make lots of*

> *different things. We make kangaroo stew, chicken, pasta and tuna bake, and spaghetti bolognaise. We use lots of vegetables in our cooking. Everyday we heat up the meals and deliver them to the old people at their homes. Sometimes we help them with other things like shopping* (Breakfast Minyma, 2010, pers. comm.).

The opportunity to do the HACC meals allowed the Minyma to address concerns for the elderly in a way that was sensitive to community expectations and grounded within their local knowledge of the HACC clients in their community. Additionally, the Minyma's developing relationship with the HACC coordinator, their new authority as workers and their role in providing the HACC meals allowed them to grow the HACC program based on local expectations, principles and values. For example, following the Minyma's involvement, the number of HACC service recipients grew from an initial seven to around thirty, showing that under non-Indigenous management the service had not been reaching all eligible clients. Their relationship with the HACC clients also allowed the Minyma to gauge meal preferences and other client-based needs. As the women's role developed, the program ceased employing a coordinator and the Minyma's services were remunerated on a fee-for-service basis.

One of the Breakfast Minyma, Susan, reflects on the positive response by the old people at the Minyma's involvement in the HACC service,

> *We were happy, you know, and make all the old people happy, all the breakfast ladies cooking them HACC meals. So they* pukurlpa *(happy). Looking at the HACC Toyota [vehicle] running round and they get ready [and] sit down and we give the meals to them* (Susan, 2012, pers. comm.).

Responsibility for the HACC services quickly became incorporated into the Minyma's worker role. Besides the provision of meals, the Minyma assisted the elderly with their shopping, took them to the clinic, washed their blankets, and delivered medication. This was another example of what can happen through increased confidence but also the Minyma's recognition of community needs, another being looking after the welfare of the *kungkawara pirni* (teenage girls).

Convening Kungka Nights

Emerging from concerns they had about the wellbeing of teenage girls in their families, the Minyma drew on their experience, seniority, and growing confidence to establish a support group for *kungkas* (girls),

> *Sometimes some girls they might start being a bit strange. Might stop coming to school and stop hanging round with their friends. That might be when they have a boyfriend. We worry for them. They might not talk to their families about what is happening* (Breakfast Minyma, 2012, pers. comm.).

The particular concerns of the Minyma regarding young girls were their poor engagement and low attendance at school, and participation in risky evening activities such as "walking round at night" and "sniffing" (petrol[14]) (Breakfast Minyma, 2012, pers. comm.). Similarly, the Minyma worried about other risky behaviours, such as smoking cigarettes and ganja and participating in underage sex, particularly when visiting towns like Laverton and Kalgoorlie,

> *We worry about them* kungkas *(girls). You know, sometimes they are just 12 or 13 when they have a boyfriend. Those boys, they might be a little bit older than them girls. They might have one girl one night and then go find another one…like one night stand must be. Sometimes they might have one girl there and then go to another community. That boy might say to them, "don't tell your mother or your sister, if you do I will hit you". Then she is too scared to tell anything. We worry for them, we should talk to them about that stuff at Kungka Night* (Breakfast Minyma, 2012, pers. comm.).

> *Some girls, they go 'til 5 [am] or 3 [am] with boyfriends. That makes us feel no good. Some will be sniffing, hanging round, walking round at night. When they are walking round they will be talking with their*

[14] Petrol sniffing has been an issue of varying degrees for many years in Warburton, particularly in the 1980s and 1990s. During the study period Opal (a low aromatic unleaded fuel) was introduced in Laverton, the closest fuel supplier. This saw a significant decrease in sniffing in Warburton.

> *friends and the other boys, arranging a place for them to meet their* kuris *(partners / boyfriends). I don't know, must be somewhere, maybe the drain or the creek or the football oval* (Breakfast Minyma, 2012, pers. comm.).

In order to curb these behaviours, and to create a forum where they could talk to the girls and provide them with ideas for healthy alternatives, the Minyma initiated "Kungka Nights". This was a weekly evening event for eleven to seventeen year-olds in a safe space. To make the forum relevant, accessible and appropriate for the girls, the Minyma structured these evenings on their principles, values and implicit knowledge of their family members.

Kungka Night became a much-anticipated event every Wednesday evening, with fifteen to thirty girls attending. Resources were purchased with the money the Minyma were making through the HACC work. The Minyma organised, supported and delivered several activities: cooking, hairdos and make-up, dress-ups, computing, arts and crafts, and showing DVDs, both educational and for entertainment. Here, one of the girls and one of the women comment on the evenings (dialogue from a video which was compiled by the Minyma about Kungka Nights),

> *On Wednesday nights we always come this way to the Family Place for Kungka Nights. We do TV, eating, colouring, painting, make up, we do our hair, necklaces, earrings, and cooking* (Kungka, cited in Warburton Breakfast Minyma, 2012).

> *All the girls come to Kungka Nights and we make necklace[s] and make things with photos and movies and make up and we do each other's hair. And all the girls cook dinner and we make dessert* (Mary, cited in Warburton Breakfast Minyma, 2012).

One of the Minyma here talks about how Kungka Nights keep the girls "busy" and "safe", and she refers to the occasional overnight bush trips the Minyma arranged for the girls as an extension of their concern for the *kungkas* (girls),

> *Kungka nights, it keeps them busy you know. Not walking round, drugs, chasing them boys around, not sniffing and hanging around. It's good 'cause they not only learning in school, but learning the culture with the ladies too, going out bush with the ladies and being happy with their families. At Kungka Night is when they not get mad for the boys, staying away from the boys and the men. Keep them, you know, safe way* (Breakfast Minyma, 2012, pers. comm.).

Kungka Nights extended the worker role in a number of ways. For example, the Minyma applied their catering and mentoring skills by teaching the girls how to cook dinner. They also encouraged them to either take part in activities or help with the duties that enabled the evenings to run smoothly. Drawing on both their cultural authority and knowledge, the Minyma delivered "information sessions" for the girls during which they addressed issues of concern. This occurred both as impromptu sessions in response to a particular event, for example a community break-in or steep decline in school attendance, as well as in structured and planned sessions. The Minyma described this as "telling the girls good stories" and "talking about safety and other things". They focused on specific issues such as girls needing to know more about menstruation, contraception and the consequences of sniffing, or sharing their concerns about the girls playing truant.

In preparation for the presentations, the women took into consideration their senior positions in the community, their knowledge of the *kungkas* and concerns regarding their wellbeing. Aspects of their presentations included 1. Providing information on the topics; 2. Outlining risk associated with the girls' actions; 3. Encouraging girls to make healthy choices; and 4. Alternative avenues the girls could seek support. They reflect on the benefits their intervention had on the girls,

> *We like telling good stories to the girls, not to walk around at night, to go back home, have an early sleep, come back to school, to learn everything at school and at Kungka Nights, not to join up with boys, sit down separately, go home at night, have a sleep. Come to school, then come for Kungka Nights and go [straight] home* (Carmel, cited in Warburton Breakfast Minyma, 2012).

The Minyma's ability to engage the girls is implicit in the *kungkas'* response. They were attentive as indicated by their silence, stillness and occasional comment about the topic under discussion, usually directed at each other. If the girls' attention faltered or they tried to sneak to the back of the group, the women stopped them and asked for their undivided attention. DVDs were often used to support the women's discussion, and the Minyma provided commentary in the local language, checking that the girls were understanding the key messages. Following these evenings, often at school breakfast the next morning, the women reflected on the value of these sessions. The way they recounted the event, its content and the *kungkas'* responses indicated pride and satisfaction in this extended part of their worker role, and recognition that they were doing something to improve the health and wellbeing of the girls.

An extension of Kungka Nights was arranging trips out bush with the girls. This provided an opportunity to get away from the community and talk about things in a more private and relaxed "Minyma and Kungkas only" environment. As well as talking about issues of "safety and all that", the Minyma covered discussion about women's cultural business, for example the need for the *kungkas* to "look for" a *kuri* (partner) of the "right skin, not *yirrnurrpa* (wrong skin) [kinship group]",

> *We went out bush on Wednesday night. It was good, first we cooked dinner, after that we had a talk to all the girls about safety and all that. Then we told all the girls to stand up and to get into their skin groups:* Purungu / Karimarra, Tjarurru/Panaka *and we explained to them if you are* Purungu, *you can marry a* Karimarra *man. A* Purungu *can't marry a* Tjarurru, *no, that the wrong way skin. Then we all played a game, pass the parcel. At each go we talked to the girl about safety and other things for the young girls. It was good talking about all these things* (Lucinda, cited in Warburton Breakfast Minyma, 2012).

In addition to training the women in Warakurna in preparation for Dust Up, Kungka Nights extended the Minyma's worker role into the realm of mentoring. The existing relationships the Minyma had with the girls, their cultural authority and deep knowledge, and their previous experience in guiding *Mirlirrtjarra Kuurl*

Mirrka Palyalpayi enabled the Minyma to manage Kungka Nights efficiently and effectively, and to frame the activities so that the girls could engage attentively and without shame. In this way, the Minyma contributed to the girls' wellbeing.

The following observation from the Minyma indicates the enjoyment the girls got from Kungka Nights,

> *Them girls, they say it's good. That other day, must have been a Friday, that girl said, "Can we have Kungka Night [tonight]?" 'Cause that girl must like it. Those girls must want Kungka Night every night!* (Dianne, 2012, pers. comm.).

Kungka Nights added to the repertoire of *Mirlirrtjarra Kuurl Mirrka Palyalpayi* activities. As well as the growing confidence of the Minyma emerging within their broadening worker role in response to the circumstances and events described above, a key structure that supported this extension was having a dedicated facility for their work, the Family Place.

Table 1 Timeline of Warburton Breakfast Minyma activities, November 2008 to September 2012.

Date	Activity
Nov 2008	An informal meeting of Ngaanyatjarra Council and Warburton Council members in Warburton where they expressed their concern about school attendance and a number of other issues
Nov 2008	Initial support worker, Council members, School Principal and grandmothers meet to discuss possibility of school breakfast
Nov 2008	Senior Ngaanyatjarra women commence school breakfast
Jan 2009	Senior Ngaanyatjarra women start to recruit and train younger women to assist them with the school breakfast work
Early 2009	The women running school breakfast start to refer to themselves as the Warburton Breakfast Minyma (WBM)
May 2009	WBM participate in the Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY) Webinar from Warburton, their first formal presentation about their work
July 2009	WBM go to Perth and present about their work at the Telethon Institute for Child Health Research (TICHR)
Aug 2009	Ros Beadle arrives in Warburton and moves into a support worker role
Sept 2009	WBM cater for their first of many termly School Open Days
Sept 2009	WBM cater for their first of many termly School Theme Days
Sept 2009	WBM undertake their first major catering job, Desert Dust Up in Warburton
Oct 2009	Women cater breakfasts for a week-long *Kurrurnpa Tjanyarlpa* cultural camp
Oct 2009	WBM cater for the monthly Ngaanyatjarra Council meeting in Warburton
Nov 2009	WBM start developing photo posters about their activities
Jan - Sept 2010	WBM produce *The Breakfast Story Book* (see Chapter Six)
Feb 2010	WBM design a logo for the program and generate the name *Mirlirrtjarra Kuurl Mirrka Palyalpayi* (MKMP) for their activities
March 2010	WBM travel to Warakurna to assist Warakurna women to start a school breakfast program
April 2010	The Family Place is established on the school grounds
May 2010	Warakurna women travel to Warburton to see the WBM in action providing school breakfast
July 2010	WBM travel to Alice Springs and present at the Secretariat for National Aboriginal and Islander Childcare (SNAICC) Conference
Aug 2010	WBM commence making HACC meals
Aug 2010	WMB design their first uniform
Aug 2010	WBM travel to Warakurna to mentor Warakurna women in preparation for Dust Up
Aug 2010	WBM cater for Desert Dust Up in Warakurna alongside Warakurna women over fours days
Sept 2010	An official poster and brochure is printed about the MKMP program and distributed around agencies in Warburton for display
Sept 2010	WBM travel to Perth to launch *The Breakfast Story Book* and present at a WA Health Promotion Schools Conference
Oct / Nov 2010	WBM return and deliver classes in three classrooms using materials inspired by their trip to Perth
Nov 2010	*The Breakfast Story Book* is published by Postscript Printing and Publishing. It is promoted and distributed by SNAICC on their website. The funds contribute to running of MKMP activities

Jan 2011	A vehicle is provided to MKMP activities from Ngaanyatjarra Council. It becomes known as the Breakfast Yurltu (car)
Jan 2011	WBM start attending the Warburton Interagency Meetings (WIAM) on a monthly basis to inform other agencies about their program
Early 2011	School Breakfast 'officially' moves into the Family Place and a number of other activities commence including computing and sewing
Jan 2011	WBM start doing a number of other catering jobs for government departments and non-government agencies
Early 2011	Four of the WBM are successful in acquiring their drivers licence and commence delivery of HACC meals using the Breakfast Yurltu
April 2011	WBM have their first of many fundraisers – a barbeque at the local disco hosted by the police station. They raise over $700 which contributes to funding their upcoming trip to Perth
May 2011	Kungka Night program commences on a weekly basis out of the Family Place
May 2011	The WBM travel to Perth to enrol in their Certificate One in Kitchen Operations. They commence the course and do a presentation about their work to the staff at Polytechnic West
Aug 2011	WBM are employed by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) to support families to complete the census in Warburton
Aug 2011	WBM participate in their first Ngaanyatjarra Media radio interview which becomes a regular segment
Sept 2011	WMB Cater for Dust Up in Warburton. The lecturer from Polytechnic West visits during the event to assess the women in their workplace
Oct 2011	The HACC program expands with elderly HACC clients having weekly morning teas with the WBM in the Family Place
Nov 2011	Three WBM attend and present at the Department for Child Protection Festival of Learning in Perth
Dec 2011	WBM visit Perth to continue their Certificate One in Kitchen Operations at Polytechnic West
Dec 2011	As an extension of Kungka Night, the first Kungka Ball takes place in Warburton and becomes an annual event
Feb 2012	School Lunches commence with the WBM mentoring High School girls to prepare and serve weekly lunches for the whole school
Feb 2012	WBM cater for the opening of the Personal Helpers and Mentors (PHaMs) program
March 2012	WBM start catering for HACC meals and other events in the commercial kitchen facility of the Warburton Work Camp (opened September 2011)
April 2012	WBM visit Perth to complete their Certificate One in Kitchen Operations at Polytechnic West. Seven women are presented with their Certificate
May 2012	Two WBM represent Warburton community at the WA Department of Education meeting in Kalgoorlie
May 2012	WBM deliver presentations about their work in the school classrooms
June 2012	WBM cater for the seven day Warakurna to Wanarn Tamala walk
Sept 2012	WBM Cater for Desert Dust Up in Warakurna
Sept 2012	WBM article is published in the 2012 Social Justice Report

"A Place for Parents": The Family Place

In 2010 the Minyma were given access to a new building from which they operated school breakfast. This facility also enabled the Minyma to extend their activities "beyond breakfast" as well as decreasing their dependence on the school, its institutional constraints and the space restrictions imposed by the timetable. Thus the building provided the women with an autonomous domain in which to further expand their role and the scope of their work. This building became known as the Family Place. The low community parental involvement in the school and the lack of opportunity for cultural education was a concern additional to the issue of the children's school attendance. According to the Minyma,

> *At that meeting about breakfast [at the end of 2008], peoples talked about having a building at the school for the community. It was a place where families could come to the school and sit, have cups of tea, things like that. We talked about how the families could help out in the classroom and how the kids could come to the 'place for parents' and we could talk to them about culture, things like that* (Breakfast Minyma, 2012, pers. comm.).



Figure 9 Warburton Community Plan - Family Place indicated by a blue star.

When the portable building arrived in early 2010, it was located centrally (see Figure 9) and the Minyma fashioned it for their own use. During a public presentation, the Minyma described the Family Place and its use as follows,

> *We now have a* ngurra *(house) for our program called the Family Place. The building is at the school. It has a living area, kitchen, an office, a storeroom, and two bathrooms. We have a meeting there every Monday to talk about our work. We have been doing sewing. We make things like bags and curtains and skirts. We also have computers there where we can look at our photos and do things like making funeral programs. We have a lovely kitchen in the Family Place where we make school breakfast for the* tjitji *(kids)* (Breakfast Minyma, 2011, pers. comm.).

The women utilised the space to meet, sew, relax, review, discuss and plan the activities they were coordinating (see Figure 10),

> *We do lots of different things in the Family Place like sewing, making jewelleries, making bags, skirts and t-shirts, and making curtains. Making those curtains, it makes me feel good* (Mary, 2011, pers. comm.).



Figure 10 Sewing curtains, bags and skirts in the Family Place.

In contrast to other facilities in Warburton, the Minyma governed, managed and looked after the Family Place. Having a workplace dedicated to *Mirlirrtjarra Kuurl Mirrka Palyalpayi* activities gave the Minyma a sense of freedom in terms of how they could structure their worker role. They undertook work in their own time frames, and initiated impromptu activities that did not need to fit into the school's agenda. It also was a 'safe' space under the local authority. This contributed to other Minyma visiting and inquiring about being involved, or just to stay for a cup of tea and discuss ideas for new activities. Here, the women explain their appreciation of the Family Place,

> *We was all so happy to have the Family Place. In the summer we like to sit around and relax in the Family Place 'cause it's got a cooler [air conditioner] there. Sometimes we watch a video or listen to the radio. After working we like to relax sit down and enjoy our self. It's good, [we] watch movies, have the cooler on, do our little works [work activities]. Play computer, hunt all the kids out [tell the kids to go to school]* (Kate, 2012, pers. comm.).

The response of the Mimyma to occasional break-ins indicated their ownership of and pride in their work venue. In order to address the issues, the Minyma sought out those that had caused the damage, took leadership in explaining the importance of the space to the kids and conscripted them into cleaning up the mess.

The autonomous space of the Family Place provided the Minyma with an opportunity to freely express themselves and extend the scope of activities on their own terms. The Minyma-controlled space enhanced their activities in four key ways: first, it increased their access to a neutral collective space and thus opportunities to plan their work; second, following on from one, it increased their capacity to organise and govern themselves; third, following both one and two, it further developed the activities of *Mirlirrtjarra Kuurl Mirrka Palyalpayi*; and thus fourth, it enabled them to evolve their worker role in ways that not only suited themselves but also had a positive impact both on the kids and other sectors of the community. Additionally, the presence of the Family Place in the school grounds contributed to community engagement in the school.

Representing the community in the school

The arrival of the Family Place provided a more permanent presence of community members at the school, and consequently changed the overall 'feel' of the school. Prior to the Minyma's endeavours, family participation in the school was minimal beyond the employment of two to three Aboriginal Education Officers (AEOs), support for whom was fraught with challenges. The Minyma's growing role and responsibilities within the school enabled engagement with the school on their terms. This was evident in the effect it had on the children, and the impact on non-Indigenous school staff.

Encouraging the kids

The Minyma's presence at the school provided the children with a sense of familiarity and comfort, and consequently increased their willingness to attend. Their being in the school was beneficial because they both enjoyed working in close proximity to their kids and their kids were more likely to come to stay in school due to the presence of family members. The Minyma describe the Family Place as a "magnet",

> *The Family Place is like a magnet pulling them kids. It's really good that those kids hang around. You know, they go sit down with their families, hang around, you know, they've got those seats round the building, they can sit down close by. At recess and lunchtime the kids run to the Family Place to be with their families. That's making them hang about at school instead of going home. They want to hang around there and be close to the school. If they go home, they'll go one way [not come back]* (Breakfast Minyma, 2012, pers. comm.).

The Minyma's relationship with the children facilitated a more positive impact on attendance than was achievable by non-Indigenous staff. They implicitly knew where all children resided, who their carers were, the likely places kids might be when absconding and the reasons why kids may be absent. This understanding enabled the Minyma to participate in attendance efforts by liaising with the children and families in the local Ngaanyatjarra language, and using appropriate forms of encouragement and discipline.

A common factor which inhibited the children from attending school was teasing. This was often based on complex, kin-related, issues that the Minyma had a deeper understanding of than the non-Indigenous teaching staff. Consequently, the Minyma were able to reduce teasing by addressing the conflict on their terms rather than the kids being subject to punishment on the teacher's terms,

> *Sometimes the kids, they get teased when they come to school by the other kids and they come back home. So I was thinking to work there to keep them at school. It's good for the kids, they've got somebody there like a family, then they feel good when they got families working, you know* (Mary, 2012, pers. comm.).

The Minyma's presence at the school provided them with an increased insight into their kids' classroom activities and encouraged school staff to engage community members in the kids' education. The Minyma also created storybooks, and delivered presentations to the children, in each case using content that evolved from their experience as workers (see Chapter Six). Consequently, the Minyma's presence gave the kids confidence and encouraged and sustained attendance by offering a safe community space on campus. They also mediated in disputes, thereby reducing the disciplinary load of school staff.

Assisting school staff

The presence of the Minyma at the school created opportunities for stronger relationships with school staff as 'advisors' and 'community-liaison officers'. Through the provision of school breakfast they played a significant role in school attendance, were able to inform teachers of children's whereabouts, came up with solutions for disciplinary measures and provided 'next of kin' information.

For most teachers, many of whom rarely committed to the remote posting for longer than two years, the context was alienating and unfamiliar, and few knew "how" to learn about community life, creating a barrier to effective teaching. The presence of the Breakfast Minyma acted as a "gateway" between teachers and the local community. This gateway enhanced the teachers' understanding of

community life by providing access to information that might affect their teaching and relationships with students. Additionally, it enabled the Minyma to positively contribute to the school and the kids' education by resolving disputes between children, advising on family backgrounds that may affect children's education and raising teachers' awareness of cultural events that may prevent children's attendance. For example, for a period of time, the Minyma orientated a new school principal. This principal valued the Minyma's knowledge and role within the school, and regularly sought their advice on how she should operate, particularly on ways to engage local people in the life of the school. The respect she had for the Minyma and the value she held in their work both contributed to the Minyma's confidence and provided them with a safe avenue in which to express their concerns.

Reactions and feedback to their work in the school, opportunities for extending their activities within the school and having a new building in which they could situate their work all contributed to the development of the Minyma's work and the scope of their role. Their base at the school provided them with a connection to an agency they considered significant and the relationships and activities that evolved had a positive impact on the kids, the Minyma, the staff and the overall life of the school. Importantly to the Minyma, they were taking on roles that had previously been done by *walypala* (whitefellas/non-Indigenous people).

Demonstrating capacity: Taking on the role of *walypala* (whitefella) workers

Taking over jobs that had previously been undertaken by *walypalas* was a significant achievement in the experience of the Minyma. Non-Indigenous people from outside Warburton occupied most of the roles in the agencies and services, such as health and education, for varying tenures. Taking on components of these roles through their own initiatives and using approaches grounded in their tacit knowledge of the community was an inspiration for the Minyma and contributed to the status they derived from being workers. In particular, the Minyma drew attention to taking on the role of teachers when they reflected on

doing the catering for Desert Dust Up, noting that the "big work" was now done by them,

> *Helping for the Dust Up, that's a big thing, a big work. Before only teachers [were] there to do the* mirrka *(food). Some they sit up all night, the teachers, long time. Now we got the Breakfast Minyma going [and] helping with that* (Breakfast Minyma, 2012, pers. comm.).

During the Dust-Ups school staff, many aware that this had previously been their job, regularly popped in to congratulate the Minyma on their efforts, thanking them for their tireless work feeding everyone.

The Minyma also note the taking over of teachers' roles in relation to the School Open Days and the importance of the school having their own "cooking program" run by the Minyma. In other words, the women had created their own niche in the school which was to look after the 'eating' needs of the kids,

> *Teachers used to be doing the Open Day. It changed with the breakfast ladies, they are happy, they are proud.* Ngaanya *(that)* Mily [an abbreviation for *Mirlirrtjarra*, the Ngaanyatjarra name for Warburton] *School has its own* mirrka palyapai *(school cooking program)* (Breakfast Minyma, 2012, pers. comm.).

The Minyma also boldly took on the services of the HACC program, expanding and improving on what had previously existed to the extent that the role of the non-Indigenous supervisor was made redundant.

The way the Minyma describe their experiences demonstrates the importance they attribute to taking on tasks seen by many as within the domain of *walypalas*. Their pride at succeeding, and in many cases doing it better, demonstrates the value they place on their own capacity to deliver in a context where there is often scant recognition of their knowledge and skills.

Conclusion

This chapter describes the evolution of the Warburton Breakfast Minyma, and how their work developed through their own initiative and encompassed a suite of service provision activities that benefitted themselves, school children, school teachers, the school administration, regional schools, local young girls and the elderly and disabled in Warburton. In parallel, it reveals how the Minyma embraced opportunities to demonstrate their capacity for work by drawing upon previous skills and knowledge and through developing new skills and understandings.

As the scope of their worker role expanded, the Minyma developed strong organisational skills, capitalised on relationships with people around them, designed and made the most of their working space, initiated new activities, and organised themselves creatively as workers in a way that consolidated the many other family and community obligations associated with being a Ngaanyatjarra woman. In initiating, planning and delivering their activities, the Minyma applied their strong tacit knowledge of the community. Consequently, in many cases the Minyma's approaches appeared to be more relevant and effective than programs operated by well-paid highly "skilled" non-Indigenous staff employed to undertake the same tasks.

CHAPTER FOUR: Relationality and work: "We are good working together"

Introduction

The previous chapter described the experience of the Warburton Breakfast Minyma in initiating, designing and expanding the scope of their work and worker role. It also presented the rich suite of activities generated which they called *Mirlirrtjarra Kuurl Mirrka Palyalpayi*. These activities evolved, grounded in concerns about kids, family and community wellbeing, a commitment to working as a collective, and a shared intention to address local needs that they identified and considered important. This multi-faceted approach enabled the Minyma to establish and organise themselves as workers on their terms.

This chapter describes how the Minyma developed the organisational structures and processes to support and sustain their work and worker role. It also illustrates how the Minyma responded to the direct experience of their everyday lives in ways they perceived were effective and appropriate. The women found ways of working that suited their relational world using a variety of innovative responses such as building their collective spirit, developing a worker "pool", and establishing their own form of governance. As the Minyma established ways of working that were appropriate to their family and community life, there was an increase in their confidence, authority and agency as workers, which further augmented their worker role.

How the Warburton Breakfast Minyma established and organised themselves as workers

It was not long into the running of school breakfast that the Minyma recognised the demanding nature of the work required the recruitment of additional workers. This was necessary to meet the needs of the growing number of children at school breakfast. Additionally, at times, the commitment to the

provision of breakfast conflicted with the Minyma's other family and community responsibilities, thus limiting their ability to work everyday. To meet the need for additional workers, the Minyma used a "recruitment" process driven by their kinship connections. Grandmothers first encouraged younger women in their families to work with them; later, through family connections, 'new' women actively sought out work with the Minyma.

This section describes how and why additional women became Breakfast Minyma and the incentives that encouraged their participation in *Mirlirrtjarra Kuurl Mirrka Palyalpayi*. It also considers how, in a way that suited themselves and their families, the Minyma organised the growing number of workers and their roles. As becomes evident, family connections were a key factor in maintaining organisational structures and processes that made work meaningful, engaging and enjoyable.

"You want to work for breakfast?": Starting work as a Breakfast Minyma

To meet the demands of their existing and new activities the grandmothers enacted a variety of means to recruit 'new' Minyma. Initially, this was through kinship. Reflecting on the connections between the 'original' senior workers, Lucinda described how she is related to the four other women who commenced School Breakfast in 2008,

> *Susan is my niece, Annabel is my cousin, Josephine is my cousin and Lucy is my niece* (Lucinda, 2012, pers. comm.).

Additional women became interested in the work when the grandmothers shared their stories with family members, and when kids took stories home about school breakfast. Dropping their kids off at school was an opportunity for potential recruits to meet the Minyma and learn about the work. When this happened, these women might ask to help out or were encouraged to stay and assist the existing Minyma,

> *After a little [while] we had more girls coming in for work. Some of them was our families like our sisters, nieces and cousins. Some of them are still working now. They used to come and bring their kids to school so soon some of them wanted to start working too. It was good for them to have a job* (Susan, 2012, pers. comm.).

Dianne, a young woman saw the Breakfast Minyma working and this prompted reflection on her own potential to work. As she describes here, one of the Minyma invited her to start working,

> *When I was taking my kids to school, I seen these ladies working, having fun, the kids going and having breakfast. When I went back home I was thinking I might as well work with the ladies instead of sitting round in the house doing nothing. Then one day, one of the ladies told me, "Oh, you want to work for breakfast?" and I told her, "*Yuwa *(yes), I'll start tomorrow and work". So I started work the next day* (Dianne, 2012, pers. comm.).

All the Breakfast Minyma who participated in the work had children, grandchildren, nieces or nephews enrolled in the school. As noted in the previous chapter, the Minyma recognised that their presence was an incentive for the kids to come to school and stay in class throughout the day. For some of the women, their children's attendance was the motivation to start working. Here Dianne describes the impact of her participation in work on her children coming to school,

> *Sometimes my kids, they didn't come to school, they sit down at home. When I told them to go school they didn't want to. When I started working they came to school with me and after, when I finished [serving school breakfast] I clean up and go to the classroom with them* (Dianne, 2012, pers. comm.).

Dianne's sister Mary was also aware of the work of the Minyma and sought to participate. According to Dianne,

> *My sister [Mary], she wanted to work there too so we started working together* (Dianne, 2012, pers. comm.).

Mary reported that "keeping" the kids at school was also an incentive for her to work there. As described in the previous chapter, she had concerns about how teasing often drove children to abscond. Complex, often kin-related, factors prompted the teasing. Quoted in the previous chapter, Mary recognised that her tacit community knowledge provided more insight into the causes of teasing than was possible for school staff. Her desire to reduce the teasing between children was a factor that persuaded her to work at school breakfast.

Like the kinship connection between Dianne and Mary, seeing her sisters working encouraged Jane to start,

> *I just started, I seen my sisters working, that's why I came to do this breakfast, doing cleaning and breakfast, doing HACC meals for old people, taking the feed [meals] around* (Jane, 2012, pers. comm.).

Kate's cousin, Josephine, asked her to join the Minyma, an involvement sustained further by the joy she experienced from the impact of the activities on the kids, including her own,

> *[The] ladies, I didn't know they were working there but Josephine, she told [asked] me, "You want to work there?" So I started working. It felt good, you know, made me happy. Breakfast bringing all the kids in [to school], [it] bring[s] my own children to have breakfast in the school* (Kate, 2012, pers. comm.).

One of the women who joined in 2010 had recently had a run of "bad luck", referring to a number of close family members passing away. She was at a very low point in her life. Seeing her low morale, her cousins encouraged her to get involved with the work. She had never worked before, later reflecting,

> *I kept working and getting to know the ladies and Ros and ET (support workers). It was good, and you know, I was getting to know the ladies,*

> *making friends and jokes, tell stories, make me laugh you know, instead of sitting round home doing nothing* (Sarah, 2012, pers. comm.).

In addition to family connections, close relationships that had originated from the women attending school together influenced the recruitment process. The women commonly recalled mutual anecdotes from their school days that related to particular teachers and school camps, or the types of activities they had done together in the home economics/art room where they now provided breakfast. One of the women describes how the bond of attending school together contributed to their working relationship,

> *We are good working together. We went to school together so [have] known each other for a long time* (Breakfast Minyma, 2012, pers. comm.).

As stated in Chapter One and described in detail below, over time the Minyma considered Olive Lawson the "boss" of the work and Figure 11 reveals the Minymas' kinship connections and Olive's place amongst them.



Figure 11 Kinship connections between the Warburton Breakfast Minyma (Source: Mary, 2017, pers. comm.).

When they commenced work, most of the Minyma were participants of the Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP) program. CDEP provided them with the opportunity to work up to sixteen hours a week at award rates and additional "top-up" hours if required by the demands of their activities. As suggested by Altman and Klein (2017), CDEP acted as an unconditional basic income for the Minyma. This aspect of CDEP recognised that through their day-to-day lives, many Ngaanyatjarra people were regularly engaged in productive work such as caring for country. In the case of the Minyma, the safety net offered by CDEP accommodated their many other responsibilities that either prevented

them from working, or required them to have time away from work for varying periods as described later in this chapter. Hours they worked provided them with additional income, equivalent to the minimum wage, which they appreciated,

> *It was good, I always got $90 wages, just little money before working. [Now] I get like $200 money, not $90 all the time, every payday.* (Dianne, 2012, pers. comm.).

The Minyma reveal the enjoyment work gave them: "Feel happy one *pa*" (it makes us feel happy), "Makes us proud", "*Nintiringula waarka*" (we are smart/clever doing work), "*Walykumumu* work" (work is good) and "I'm working for my living!" (Breakfast Minyma, 2012, pers. comm.). They compare these emotions to what life was like for them before they started working. A typical comment was life was "dopey and lonely" (Breakfast Minyma, 2012, pers. comm.),

> *Before I worked for the breakfast program I just used to stay in the house…cleaning the house. I like the breakfast program because it keeps me from staying at home and keeps me busy. It makes life easier for me and my children. It's good work. I just feel like working you know, I don't wanna (want to) stay home, sit around and watch TV and that, I like my work* (Dianne, 2012, pers. comm.).

The recruitment of new Minyma responded to both the need for additional workers to fulfil increasing work commitments and the desire of other women to be workers. Connections between the Minyma both through kinship and friendships forged at school facilitated this recruitment. The above insights from the Minyma demonstrate five incentives implicit in the recruitment of new women: first, working alongside women with whom they had a strong existing relationship, usually kin; second, motivating children, particularly their own, to attend school; third, earning wages; fourth, liberation from boredom caused by lack of opportunity; and fifth, the joy and delight of the children, elders and teenage girls who benefitted from the work of the Minyma. Developing a larger "pool" of workers enabled the Minyma to integrate their work into the existing

web of ongoing family and community relationships and still meet the obligations and responsibilities that constituted the fabric of their remote community lives.

"Another one goes and another one comes in": A "pool" of workers

The active recruitment of additional workers resulted in a large group of women or "pool" of workers participating in *Mirlirrtjarra Kuurl Mirrka Palyalpayi*. This pool acted as an "agency"[15] from which the women could meet the requirements of their daily activities. This section describes how the establishment of a pool enabled the Minyma to commit to both their work, and to fulfilling obligations outside their worker role.

Over the duration of *Mirlirrtjarra Kuurl Mirrka Palyalpayi*, fifty-one Minyma in the age range of sixteen to fifty-eight years old worked to deliver the activities. In the first year, the Minyma, including the 'original' grandmothers, were primarily from one family group, and resided in the "Bottom End" sector of the Warburton community, one of the three sectors that formed the community (see Figure 12). Loosely, these sectors are representative of family groupings and reflect the direction (and traditional country) from which the occupants came to settle in Warburton [16]. As the worker pool grew it came to include all generations of women from different family groupings, consequently all segments of the female population. Although the work commenced with mostly senior women, over time women aged around twenty to forty years old, often referred to as "young girls" by the older women, became the main participants.

[15] Neither "pool" nor "agency" were words adopted by the Minyma to describe their collective. These are terms the support workers applied as a way of describing the arrangement to non-Indigenous audiences.

[16] Over time, this has become less defined, especially with the building of new housing. A more recent photo of the community would include additional houses.



Figure 12 Warburton community in 2011 and an approximate indication of the three residential sectors.

The pool enabled the Minyma to come and go from their work as their family and community lives allowed them. Table 2 demonstrates the monthly movement of the Minyma's participation in work between October 2010 and August 2012. The graph shows the transient nature of worker commitment and the consequent benefit of the Minyma organising themselves as a pool. 'BM' on the x axis is a numerical representation for the Minyma who participated over the period. The table shows that in any month, between five and nineteen women worked, with an average of twelve each month across the sample.

Table 2 Frequency the Warburton Breakfast Minyma worked October 2010 to August 2012 (gap in data is due to school holidays).

	Oct-10	Nov-10	Dec-10	Feb-11	Mar-11	Apr-11	May-11	Jun-11	Jul-11	Aug-11	Sep-11	Oct-11	Nov-11	Feb-12	Mar-12	Apr-12	May-12	Jun-12	Jul-12	Aug-12
BM1																				
BM2																				
BM3																				
BM4																				
BM5																				
BM6																				
BM7																				
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BM42																				
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BM44																				
BM45																				
BM46																				
BM47																				
BM48																				
BM49																				
Total/Mth	8	15	12	12	12	10	9	10	5	10	10	9	11	16	12	13	14	15	19	15

The establishment of a pool of workers enabled the Minyma: to initiate diverse activities that required different numbers of workers; to collectively manage non-Indigenous interference in their work; to respond to family commitments; to broaden recruitment to all segments of the community; to support their fellow workers to retain their worker role during challenging or stressful times, and; to substitute for absent women because of commitments away from the community. These enablers are now addressed.

The pool enabled the Minyma *to initiate diverse activities that required different numbers of workers*. For example, it was ideal to have three to five Minyma to prepare breakfast, and eight to twelve to cater at the Desert Dust Up carnivals. Using their knowledge of each other's whereabouts, availability, and desire to work, the Minyma communicated and organised the required number of workers for each activity.

To strengthen their organisational capacity, a second-hand car was acquired. This was used to pick up additional workers as required, and enabled a number of the Minyma to obtain their driver's licence,

> *Everyday about three or maybe four women come to help make breakfast for the kids. If only one lady comes then RB [support worker] might go and pick up some more women, or we can use the Breakfast* Yurltu *(car) to pick other Minyma up. On some days, like Monday, it's busy and lots of ladies will come. It's good to have lots of ladies so there are more people to help clean up and feed the kids* (Breakfast Minyma, 2012, pers. comm.).

The pool also provided the flexibility to respond to unforeseen events. On some occasions, a large number of people, including the elderly travelled from other communities for funerals in Warburton, and hence, more workers were required for preparation and delivery of an increased number of HACC meals.

Attendance at school breakfast each morning was in part determined by the day of the week, the weather, and by community and cultural events,

> *There are lots of kids coming to breakfast on Mondays. Must be 'cause they are really hungry, no* mirrka *(food) on the weekend you know. There is sometimes no* mirrka *(food) on the weekend because one house has got too many families [family members]. Also maybe on Mondays all the mothers and parents get up early to go to get book-up at the [community] office so they tell their kids to go to school first for breakfast* (Breakfast Minyma, 2012, pers. comm.).

The women attributed the high numbers of kids on a Monday to the limited weekend resources of families. So on a Monday, the women drew on the broader pool to meet the expected demand.

The pool enabled the Minyma *to collectively manage non-Indigenous interference in their work*. A rule was established, "No Minyma, no breakfast". In other words, if the Minyma were not there to provide breakfast, then breakfast did not take place. The support workers negotiated this "rule" with the Minyma in order to minimise the risk of school breakfast being taken over by non-Indigenous staff in the Minyma's absence. Often in remote Aboriginal contexts, non-Aboriginal residents assume Aboriginal led projects will fail and on the basis of their intent to "help" or "do good", they assume control over such projects. The pool of workers enabled the Minyma to uphold this "rule". For example, if certain Minyma were unavailable e.g. attending a funeral, those who were not attending the funeral could run breakfast. Hence, the pool of workers meant that rarely breakfast did not take place and the Minyma always served it.

The pool enabled the Minyma *to respond to family commitments*. This happened in two ways. Firstly, the Minyma incorporated the wellbeing of children within their worker role by nourishing them, encouraging school attendance, being involved in their kids' education, supporting the teenage girls and making healthy meals for the elderly. Secondly, the pool enabled the Minyma to address family commitments outside their worker role.

Most, if not all the Breakfast Minyma, fulfilled family responsibilities, mainly care for their children, and frail, aged and disabled family members. Additionally they often organised the shopping and undertook other necessary domestic chores.

Chapter Five presents a case study that illustrates the extensive family commitments of the Minyma.

Most of the women had biological children and grandchildren, and many were also primary carers for children of extended family members. For example, two of the Minyma had shared care of five children whose biological mother was in prison for an extended period. As Susan describes, having "lots of women working" enabled the Minyma to maintain these additional commitments,

> *More and more young girls keep coming to work. They want to have a job so they keep working. It's good to have lots of women working 'cause then if one is you know sick, or needs to stay home and look after her* tjitji *(kids), she can tell one other lady to come to work* (Susan, 2012, pers. comm.).

The pool also enabled the Minyma to take time off when they had babies. Sometimes, the women would bring their older babies to work with them, although this was not always easy,

> *When the breakfast ladies have a baby, we call them the "breakfast babies". They [the babies] can come and have a rest or a sleep in the Family Place, but sometimes it makes it hard for the mums to work with their baby there* (Kelly, 2012, pers. comm).

The pool enabled the Minyma to *recruit women from the broader community*. Recruiting women from a range of family groups assisted the Minyma to promote and direct their activities towards a wider range of clients, for example, additional elderly people who required HACC services. Additionally broad recruitment assisted to sustain activities when large groups of family members were otherwise engaged, such as, through the period of mourning associated with a death in the extended family. The connection through in-laws assisted in engaging women from other family groups, and this allowed further expansion of the pool of workers.

The pool enabled the Minyma *to encourage their fellow workers to retain their worker role during challenging or stressful times*. The personal and family

problems that confronted the Minyma often made it hard to work and the availability of a pool of workers resolved these absences.

Although the Minyma had rich extended families that provided support, families could also be a source of tension and disputes that occasionally spilled into the workplace or prevented the women from attending work. Challenging and stressful times included having sons in prison, financial insecurity and family members hassling them for money, over-demanding children, and poor and sometimes violent treatment by their *kurri* (partner/husband). The Minyma's implicit knowledge about each other's problems meant that they treated each other with kindness and concern, and encouraged the distressed woman to have a break from work.

The pool enabled the women *to substitute for absent Minyma who had commitments which required time away from the community*. Travel for varying periods away from Warburton was a regular need and the pool allowed for this without impacting the capacity of the collective Minyma to fulfil their commitments. For example, the Minyma regularly travelled to visit kin, attend funerals and cultural ceremonies, meet medical appointments, visit relatives in prison, make major purchases at regional centres, and to attend committee or board meetings,

> *Some ladies they go up and down. Maybe they will go down to buy a car and drive back with families [other family members]. Most people from Ranges [Warburton], they have some families in Laverton or Kalgoorlie, or must be Alice Springs. They go visit their families in other places. Sometimes ladies can't come to work because they have to go to [cultural] business or a funeral or maybe appointments in Kalgoorlie* (Breakfast Minyma, 2012, pers. comm.).

While Warburton was home for all the Breakfast Minyma, the broad kinship network extended across a wide geographic area and it was common to go away to spend periods of time with family elsewhere. The pool of workers assisted in filling the gap during these absences.

Often the need to travel arose unexpectedly. Such unforeseen absences were covered by other Minyma in the pool. They often occurred because of lack of public transport beyond a very expensive air service, remoteness, and low rates of car ownership per capita. For these reasons Ngaanyatjarra people were opportunistic when lifts were available. For example, one evening Josephine was working at a fundraiser event; she indicated being at work next morning but did not turn up. I inquired about her whereabouts with her family. "Oh, Josephine, she went LA [Laverton]", was the response.

A few weeks later on her return I asked Josephine about her absence. She explained her uncle had a spare seat,

> *Sometimes we go to other places for funerals. We have to find someone with a Toyota [car] and jump on for a ride. Sometimes we go to Wiluna, or must be Wingellina, Warakurna somewhere like that. If you want to get back to Ranges [Warburton] you can get a lift with anybody. When you are stranded in town, if you see a families [family member], an older person, you jump on [in the car]* (Josephine, 2012, pers. comm.).

Other work took the Minyma away from the community. Some women had commitments to the Ngaanyatjarra Media program. Susan was on the Board for the Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Women's Council Aboriginal Corporation (NPYWC) and took regular trips to Alice Springs.

Hence, the Minyma had a variety of reasons for being unable to participate in work for periods of time. The Minyma describe this as "coming and going", noting here the benefit of the pool, that when one goes, another fills their place,

> *There are lots of different Minyma helping, comes and goes. It's good way, another one goes and another one comes in* (Susan, 2012, pers. comm.).

The Minyma's confidence in both each other's ability and that they would back each other up sustained their organisation as a pool. During their absences, each worker retained knowledge of their work requirements and were able to slip

easily back into the role on their return. The Minyma describe this as being "*ninti*" or clever about their work,

> *It's good to have lots of breakfast ladies. Sometimes when we can't come to work we tell one of the ladies to go to work, or give the* nyaapa (thing) *key. Some ladies have finished working now but they know what to do so if they want to come back, they are* ninti *(clever) for it* [they know what to do having done it before] *and we don't have to tell them* (Kate, 2012, pers. comm.).

In summary, the development of a pool of workers established a foundational organisational structure for *Mirlirrtjarra Kuurl Mirrka Palyalpayi*. The pool was crucial to the Minyma creating functional worker roles that enabled them to fulfil their existing family and community obligations and cope with the exigencies of remote Aboriginal community life. The pool enabled the Minyma to participate in a range of activities that required varying numbers of workers, take control of their activities and minimise non-Indigenous interference, maintain commitments to their families, recruit women from a range of families into the workplace and fulfil working commitments when women were absent. The Minyma's existing connections were the cornerstone for both the recruitment of additional Minyma and the establishment of a pool of workers.

Working collectively: The importance of established long-term relationships between the Minyma

Long-term relationships influenced both the nature of the work the Minyma instigated and the way they operated as workers. As outlined above, kinship connections as well as affiliations forged by having gone to school together guided the recruitment and formation of the pool and, as will emerge below, the way the Minyma enacted self-governance.

This section describes three aspects of how kinship influenced the way the Minyma organised their work and the dimensions of their worker role. First, it explains how the Minyma built each other's confidence, recognised and valued each other's competence, and acknowledged each other's personal troubles.

Second, it focuses on how the Minyma valued the social component of their work and the way they extended this beyond the workplace through shared engagement during time away from the community. Third, it describes problems the Minyma experienced when working alone, highlighting their desire to work collectively. In conclusion, an anecdote demonstrates the strong sense of belonging the Minyma had within their group.

Encouraging each other to work

Prompted by long-term connection and familiarity with one another, the Minyma encouraged each other to become workers, and to learn and progress in their worker role. The familial connections facilitated a friendly and supportive work environment that ameliorated disincentives such as shame, loneliness or lack of confidence which are common to some remote Aboriginal people's experience of workplaces.

The Minyma's familiarity with each other enhanced the possibility of shared encouragement which in turn, strengthened their resolve and motivation to work in a number of ways. First, the Minyma understood and valued each other's competencies and strengths. They encouraged each other to draw on these and apply them to their work (see Chapter six). Second, they had a mutual means of communication that enhanced their ability to work collectively e.g. by conversing in Ngaanyatjarra and local sign language, and understanding kinship protocol regarding communication. Third, the knowledge of each other's personal circumstances, such as care for children and jealous husbands, resulted in a mutual awareness of circumstances that inhibited participation in work. Collectively, the Minyma supported and encouraged those affected to find ways to overcome the barriers. Fourth, the Minyma had a close awareness of each other's whereabouts, which contributed to effective daily recruitment and management of the pool. As well as contributing to shared encouragement, the relationships between the Minyma gave way to the workplace being a social and enjoyable place to be.

"Work makes us feel happy one pa": Creating a social workplace

Working collaboratively with family produced a work environment characterised by informality, camaraderie and comfort, all highly valued elements of the Minyma's everyday life. Collaborative "social" elements were

built into the organisation of their work: breaks for cups of tea, reflection and review of their activities, looking at photos and video footage of their pursuits, celebrating their collective achievements, conversations about family and community life, and sharing their favourite music from the radio and CDs to which the Minyma occasionally broke out into dance.

The social aspect of work was also built into interaction with the recipients of their activities. They conversed with children during school breakfast by telling them stories, involved the kids with food preparation and clean up, and when they could, sat and ate alongside them. During the delivery of HACC meals the women stopped and chatted to the elderly and their families; HACC recipients were also brought to the Family Place to have a cup of tea with the Minyma. At catered community discos they had a dance break with the kids and during meal preparation would taste-test their fare together.

The Minyma valued spending time together away from work to enjoy and share connection to land, family and bush food. "Bush trips" became a central activity as a collegial way of spending extra time outside "formal" work hours. On these trips they undertook pursuits they valued e.g. hunting and gathering of berries, bush tomatoes (*kumpurarr*) and *tingka* (goanna), and *ngaaru* (burning off necessary patches of for regeneration and hunting at the appropriate times of year). These ventures out of the community also provided a relaxed space and opportunity to "tell stories" and to reflect upon, discuss and plan their work,

> *It's good to get out of the community, go out for a walk, go out for a day, sit down and just relax. Sit down and listen to the birds. It's good to get away from the Family Place for a change. Doing too much cooking [laugh]. We like coming out bush to tell stories, and to cook* mirrka (food)*, [kangaroo] tail, damper and all. Make a* waru *(fire) and have cuppa tea. Bring our kids out, they can run round and be really happy* (Breakfast Minyma, 2012. pers. comm.).

Work trips to Perth and Alice Springs also incorporated a range of social activities: going to the beach, shopping at second-hand outlets, eating at restaurants, visiting family in hospital and going to the zoo. The Minyma's desire

to socialise in this way and when delivering their activities indicates that their relationships with each other went beyond that of being work "colleagues". Belongingness, spending time together in and out of work, and their collective approach to work were equally as important.

"I'm a Warburton Breakfast Lady": Belonging to a group

Consistently, across the range of their activities, the Minyma cultivated, articulated and celebrated their identity as a collective. This was evident in their collaborative facilitation of activities, introducing themselves collectively as "the Warburton Breakfast Minyma" during their presentations, and the desire to identify themselves jointly by wearing a uniform. The Minyma recall what Olive Lawson says about working together as a group,

> *She (Olive) say, "You* palya *(ok) you fella helping, work good way … we all working together you know, it makes me happy to see the young people coming working helping each other you know", it's a* nyaapa (thing) *you know, [a] group* (Sarah, 2012, pers. comm.).

Designing and wearing a uniform was a clear expression of the Minyma's identification with their collective. In 2010, 2011 and 2012, the Minyma designed three T-shirts to wear as uniforms (see Figures 13 and 14) which were then worn at work and for presentations. A great deal of care and ownership went into their design and, often after a long wait, there was excited anticipation on receipt of the printed shirts followed by a lengthy photo-shoot. During the photo-shoots the Minyma collectively yelled, "Breakfast Minyma!" then everyone gathered round the little screen of the camera to get a glimpse of the image, laughing, happy, and exclaiming, "Walykumunu (good/great)!", "We look lovely!" with requests for copies to display on their walls at home. The photos included children from the Minyma's families who, on their recess break, were milling around to catch a glimpse of their proud mums, aunties and grandmothers, also making excited exclamations about the new uniforms.

During one of the presentations, one woman who was a confident speaker deviated from her prepared text and gestured to her uniform stating,

I like wearing my uniform, it opens up my heart when I put it on (Stephanie, 2010, pers. comm.).

The same Minyma revealed her identification with the collective in a spontaneous conversation with a couple of German tourists. After introducing herself to the tourists and being asked in return where she was from, she responded, "I'm a Warburton Breakfast Lady" (Stephanie, 2012, pers. comm.).



Figure 13 Original drawing and graphic design for the back of the 2012 t-shirt. The footprints are the Minyma arriving at school for work. At the centre is a table of food around which children are gathered.



Figure 14 The Breakfast Minyma uniforms, 2010, 2011and 2012.

By drawing on long-term relationships and familiarity, the Minyma collaborated to build their own collective with a shared identity that enhanced their sense of belongingness. Encouragement and emotional support within a social context of informal camaraderie and friendliness enabled a thoughtful and reflective engagement with their community support activities. This approach also contributed to the collective self-governance of their work.

Planning and making decisions about work: Existing relationships and cultural protocols guide governance practices

Within their relational and highly supportive collective, the Minyma instituted their own planning and decision-making practices. Established connections were essential in how this happened. Across the community, status within the existing inter-family network of relationships of the Minyma influenced the way planning and decision-making practices unfolded and hence, the management and leadership of their work. The senior status of the original grandmothers and their long-term involvement with *Mirlirrtjarra Kuurl Mirrka Palyalpayi* activities positioned them as leaders in the eyes of the other Minyma. The Minyma accorded one of these grandmothers the title of "boss" of the program and often sought her guidance.

"We respect her and we listen to her": The boss for Mirlirrtjarra Kuurl Mirrka Palyalpayi

As the activities of the *Mirlirrtjarra Kuurl Mirrka Palyalpayi* grew, the Minyma recognised the need to have one woman in a "leadership" role. This did not involve a formal nomination or application process, the Minyma just started to refer to Olive Lawson as the "boss". Her emergence as the "boss" was tightly aligned with her cultural seniority and status as one of the 'original' Grandmothers identified as a key contact for the Ngaanyatjarra Council in 2008.

Olive's "appointment" as boss was also based on her confidence and experience. In this role she convened and chaired the Minyma's meetings, acted as a mediator, and gave advice to non-Indigenous support workers for example, on cultural protocols and appropriate means of communication. The following demonstrates the respect held by the Minyma for Olive,

> *Nyalypingka [Olive], she has been working for the breakfast program since it started. She is the boss for the Family Place. She is the eldest, the*

> *first one working. We respect her and we listen to her, she does work for the young ladies, helping them out. We all look after the Family Place but when she tells us, "I'm busy, you fella right, I'm going doing this and that, going out for meetings", then we have to look after it and she say, "I'm happy,* yuwa, walykumunu palya (yes, that's good)*"* (Breakfast Minyma, 2012, pers. comm.).

The Minyma understood that Olive's commitments as a senior woman resulted in her working minimal hours and the Minyma managed her absences through the pool. Olive's presence was critical to decision-making, and in guiding resolutions when difficulties arose. Olive was always a key attendee at presentations about their collective experience. The Minyma considered the other grandmothers who had established school breakfast as senior workers. The respect they were accorded reflected this recognition, and their leadership role in the day-to-day activities of the Minyma.

"We are all Breakfast Minyma": Flexibility and equality in their worker role

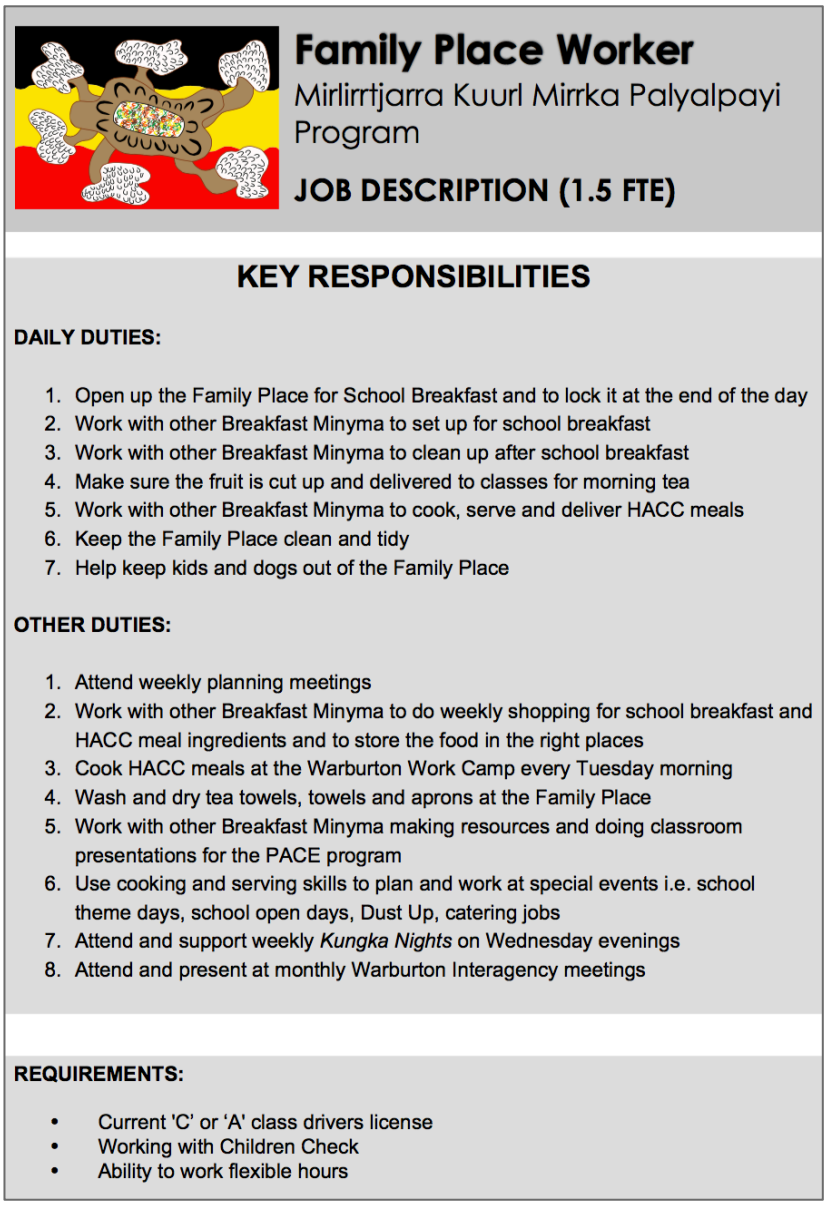
The other Minyma – who were mostly young - viewed themselves as having an equal standing in their worker roles. The "positions" which each of these women occupied did not align with a single job title or description. Instead, each had a shared understanding of the components of the tasks required for each activity, tasks they considered equal and interchangeable. This was demonstrated in the account of Warburton School Breakfast (see Chapter Three) in which Stephanie, Mary, Lucinda and Susan shared the tasks required for a successful and efficient preparation and delivery of breakfast. The interchangeable nature of the pool of workers also required each of the women to be familiar with all components of each activity, previously described as being "*ninti"* (clever) for the work.

Inevitably, the women brought their own skills and personalities to these roles and this determined which aspects of the work they adopted. For example, in the account about school breakfast just referred to, Stephanie takes a leading role in keeping the kids in line, while Lucinda makes the toast and does the washing up. Roles fitted the interests, concerns and motivations of the individual. Women

with experience in media would take charge of using the video camera; those confident in public speaking would share delivery of public presentations. It was not in the Minyma's nature to 'brag', boast or even refer to their skills or roles. Rather, they drew on knowledge of an individual's skillsets, previous training and work experience and encouraged each other to use their strengths to deliver in several roles.

An effort to attract additional funding prompted the Minyma to identify the components of the 'standard' Minyma role. Conversations with potential funding agencies resulted in a suggestion to 'formalise' a few of the Minyma's positions, that is, provide some women with salaried positions rather than payment through CDEP 'wages'[17]. With my support, the Minyma wrote a job description for a Warburton Breakfast Minyma. For the purpose of the proposal, the Minyma labelled the positions "Family Place Workers". The intention was to advertise, recruit and offer three part-time positions (see Figure 15). However, despite the available funding, the positions did not come to fruition.

[17] This was driven by the pressure of shifting federal social security policy and the cessation of CDEP as described in Chapter One.



Family Place Worker

Mirlirrtjarra Kuurl Mirrka Palyalpayi Program

JOB DESCRIPTION (1.5 FTE)

KEY RESPONSIBILITIES

DAILY DUTIES:

1. Open up the Family Place for School Breakfast and to lock it at the end of the day
2. Work with other Breakfast Minyma to set up for school breakfast
3. Work with other Breakfast Minyma to clean up after school breakfast
4. Make sure the fruit is cut up and delivered to classes for morning tea
5. Work with other Breakfast Minyma to cook, serve and deliver HACC meals
6. Keep the Family Place clean and tidy
7. Help keep kids and dogs out of the Family Place

OTHER DUTIES:

1. Attend weekly planning meetings
2. Work with other Breakfast Minyma to do weekly shopping for school breakfast and HACC meal ingredients and to store the food in the right places
3. Cook HACC meals at the Warburton Work Camp every Tuesday morning
4. Wash and dry tea towels, towels and aprons at the Family Place
5. Work with other Breakfast Minyma making resources and doing classroom presentations for the PACE program
6. Use cooking and serving skills to plan and work at special events i.e. school theme days, school open days, Dust Up, catering jobs
7. Attend and support weekly *Kungka Nights* on Wednesday evenings
8. Attend and present at monthly Warburton Interagency meetings

REQUIREMENTS:

- Current 'C' or 'A' class drivers license
- Working with Children Check
- Ability to work flexible hours

Figure 15 Job description for Family Place Worker.

The Minyma attributed their lack of interest in the "formalised" role as Family Place Worker to a number of factors, all which were related to the way the role required them to deviate from the nature of the "worker role" established on their terms. First, the Minyma did not feel comfortable with the expectation of the agency funding the position to comply with a non-Indigenous-style recruitment process; second, the inflexibility required of the specific job description and working hours was anathema to the their flexible and shared approach to work; and third, they were not happy with the anticipated inequity in wages and status that the few salaried positions would create. In summary, the *individualised* notion of a worker suggested by the job description ran

counter to the nature of the worker roles the Minyma had designed to suit their own needs as a collective and their desire to maintain an equal status.

"Having meetings to talk about our work": Planning, making decisions and guiding the activities

Subsequent to the planning of the first school breakfast in 2008 (see Chapter Three), the Minyma convened weekly meetings where they reflected on activities and addressed potential issues relating to operational procedures. Many of the Minyma, particularly the older ones, had experience with 'meeting' processes having been involved with Ngaanyatjarra Council meetings, membership on boards, and other work which required participation in meetings. The Minyma designed and executed their "Breakfast meetings" in a format that suited them and their work. They considered timing, location, effective means of including each other, and running the meetings in a way that was comfortable and responsive to their needs.

Monday morning emerged as the most appropriate time for meetings because, as described above, additional workers were required on Mondays. Monday was also an ideal time to talk about the week's forthcoming events. However, attendance could vary from three to twelve women being present and so, in order to maximise numbers, women would be reminded, and if necessary picked up.

Prior to the meetings, the support worker consulted with the women to ensure that issues were written up as an "agenda" on a whiteboard to guide the discussion. Recurring issues were: supplies required for school breakfast, ideas for HACC meals and plans for Kungka Nights. The Minyma used the meetings to plan events like Desert Dust Up, recruit new Minyma, discuss new uniforms and training, and inform new Minyma about their work.

Over time, the meetings shifted from being chaired by a support worker and conducted in English, to being chaired by Olive Lawson, or in her absence, one of the other senior women, and conducted in Ngaanyatjarra. This change coincided with participation in the conversations going beyond a few key vocal women. As

these meetings gathered momentum, more visible energy and excitement was apparent and the women put pressure on each other to attend. Heated discussion often arose around issues on the agenda, making the meetings vibrant and evocative. The Minyma engaged in lengthy conversations prior to making decisions, and often they identified the need for absent individuals to be part of the process.

The following record in my field notes provides an insight into one of the meetings in 2010. It highlights the meeting's vibrancy, the organic nature of the Minyma's concerns and the increasingly peripheral role of the support worker,

> *Breakfast has been cleared away and the Minyma gather on the glossy black fake leather couches in the Family Place, some moving in from the kitchen with steaming cups of tea. Olive sits closest to the whiteboard on which I've noted the standard agenda that has emerged in the course of the weekly meetings: 1. School Breakfast, 2. HACC meals, 3. Required supplies, 4. More workers, 5. Other issues.*
>
> *A bellow from the school principal can be heard from outside, "you kids, get to class!" and a low snigger emerges from some of the Minyma.*
>
> *I take a perch behind one of the couches on an uneven plastic stool, a hand-me-down from the school during their last upgrade of equipment. I look questioningly at Olive, her return nod silently indicating, "Yes, it's time to start". In turn, she directs a questioning gaze at the Minyma and a simple, "*Yuwa? *(yes)", demonstrates the start of the meeting.*
>
> *There's long pause then one of the women says, "It's hard, these other women coming and having a free feed, not helping".*
>
> *The statement is partly directed at me. Some of the parents have been turning up with their kids, helping themselves to breakfast and then leaving. The other Minyma murmur their agreement and then a long animated conversation in Ngaanyatjarra breaks out, the couple of women who worked that morning recounting anecdotes in detail that*

describe the concern. One of the women, particularly engaging in her storytelling technique, re-enacts a dialogue that took place between one of the Breakfast Minyma and an uninvited guest which has the Minyma in stitches.

I wait for a pause and what feels like the end of the conversation and I ask what they think should be done. The woman who instigated the discussion looks at me and says, "One of those women spoke bad way about you, they said that you should be looking after the kids in here", the comment inferring that as a white woman it should be my job to keep the kids under control.

"But this is your work", I respond and enthusiastically note the nature of their work being staffed by Yarnangu *workers.*

In response, the Minyma again commence an animated discussion about the importance of what they are doing and remarking on some of the many achievements they've had this year. They talk about ways they can enforce the rule that "parents can come and have breakfast with their kids as long as they stay to help and clean up", most of the women contributing to the conversation.

Despite the list on the whiteboard, the agenda unfolds organically with the discussion merging into a focus on the need to train women in other communities how to do work like the Warburton Breakfast Minyma, and how the Minyma would like to support that (observation, 2010, November 15).

In addition to weekly meetings, the Minyma made decisions and plans about their work in a variety of forums, all shaped by local means of communication, cultural parameters and relationships. Informal conversations regarding work took place between the women over cups of tea during work breaks, on journeys in the car, on attendance runs, during bush trips, at the store, at discos, and within their homes.

As noted above, community life and commitments inhibited the Minyma's consistent participation in work. Nevertheless, some women still wanted to be party to decisions being made at Monday meetings. For example, one of the 'original' senior women had to stop work for family reasons. A few months into this 'break' she heard about a significant change to one of the activities. A Minyma reported this absent woman's disappointment and anger at not having been advised about this change. At her request, some of the Minyma and I visited her; she insisted that she was "still a Breakfast Minyma" and required consultation.

The Minyma executed governance practices grounded in approaches to planning and decision-making that they were familiar and at ease with. The weekly meetings were an essential component of planning, organising and monitoring their work by applying styles of communication and collaboration that suited them. The Minyma's approach to self-governance which enabled strong participation and an ongoing set of positive consequences for their work contrasted with their experience during participation at meetings primarily convened by *walypala* (whitefella/non-Aboriginal) staff.

"They use words that are strong and hard": Struggles liaising with non-Indigenous people

As their skills and confidence developed, the Minyma connected their activities to a network of other agencies in Warburton which predominantly consisted of non-Indigenous staff. The Minyma built relationships with the school principal, Department for Child Protection and Family Support staff, teaching staff, Foodbank WA staff, the local general practitioner, other health service staff and the support workers. However, initially, the Minyma commonly experienced shame, distrust, wariness, and uncertainty with many of these relationships.

The myriad of services in Warburton and the high transience of the majority of their *walypala* staff resulted in the Minyma needing to get used to a variety of approaches that these staff brought to the community and their work. The Minyma's wariness and anxiety about liaising with new staff was understandable

given that *walypala* (whitefella) behaviours might portray authority, thoughtlessness and disrespect,

> *Some* walypala*, they work and they like talking rough way to the ladies. Some talk rough way, some don't. There are some* walypala, *they don't talk, they don't even say "hello" or "good morning" or introduce their name, they just look around, you know, they just drive past. I don't know why they are here, they just want to make money and work and go back with a lot a money. If they talk to us rough way it makes us feel funny and we get sad inside* (Breakfast Minyma, 2012, pers. comm.).

I initially assisted in addressing the Minyma's inhibition by acting as a conduit between the women and *walypala* staff. As the Minyma developed more confidence, they liaised directly with them. Overtime, the Minyma welcomed staff visits to the Family Place, approached them about their concerns, for example, the behaviour of teaching staff, and participated in discussions about their work on both a casual and formal basis.

The Minyma participated in the monthly Warburton Interagency Meetings (WIAM) where representatives of services and agencies gathered to share news about their programs. The Minyma's desire to share news about their work and be privy to other events in the community assisted them in overcoming feelings of shyness, nervousness and anxiety associated with this interaction. Also to help, two to four Minyma attended each meeting to provide mutual support. At their own weekly meetings, they identified aspects of their work that they planned to share, and with assistance, wrote cue cards. Despite this preparation and desire to attend, the Minyma often hesitated upon arrival at what felt like a "whitefella" domain.

The Minyma identified two elements that led to this hesitation. First, the nature of the language used was inconsiderate,

> *It's good to you know, represent the Breakfast Minyma program,* palya *(ok). But you know them* walypala*, they should think of*

> Yarnangu *(Aboriginal/Ngaanyatjarra people) here too, they should talk slow. But they think just* walypala *can listen, we want to listen in too, [to] what they are saying, what we are doing in the community. Someone should tell them, you got to steady down…so we can understand what they are saying. Too fast, we can't get the words properly. They got to realise, it's not just* walypala pirni *(lots of whitefellas) listening, when* Yarnangu *come to meeting they got to talk steady [slow] way you know, we want to understand what they are saying properly way…not use words that are strong and hard* (Breakfast Minyma, 2012, pers. comm.).

Second, the Minyma did not appreciate *Yarnangu* being talked about "behind their backs",

> *Whitefellas, when they are separate they must be talking about* Yarnangu*, running people down. That's why they [family members] gotta be there [at WIAM] listening. Like that principal was talking about the kids and we don't know what kids they talking about. They need the parents there, whoever the kids' parents are – they gotta deal with the kids, the parents. The parents, they should come to the meeting. They [the whitefellas] should think "ah whitefella, with brains, we should bring the parents, you know, bring them"* (Breakfast Minyma, 2012, pers. comm.).

Because of their concern about WIAM meetings being a predominantly non-*Yarnangu* space for discussion about *Yarnangu* issues, the Minyma suggest that agencies bring local 'workers' or community representatives to the meetings,

> *That's no good, no* Yarnangu *there in that meeting. More community members too should come to meeting, must be workers that whitefellas are working with, like their* malpa *(friends), like Ros brings the [breakfast] ladies. Them other staff, they got nothing, look like they got no workers with them. They should be talking to the* Yarnangu*, not to each other, talking and writing on the computer and keeping that paper [meeting minutes]... That's in the community they*

> *are working, they gotta let the* Yarnangu *know too. Some [local] workers, they might get hard [not want to come] but they [the whitefellas] should still tell them, "You gotta come and listen what we are saying you know, you can't be shy all the time"* (Breakfast Minyma, 2012, pers. comm.).

The Minyma experienced some fundamental challenges relating and communicating with non-Indigenous people. Language was a significant component of this, however, so too were the differences in the entire approach of non-Indigenous people to communication and relationships with others which were distinct from the Minyma's own Ngaanyatjarra means of interaction. Thus, for the Minyma, networking with non-Indigenous people required special preparation and management.

The Minyma organized and managed themselves in ways appropriate to their context. Notwithstanding the identification of a "boss", the otherwise egalitarian nature of Minyma roles reflected their social and cultural values and existing styles of relationship. The Minyma conducted their regular meetings in a way that enabled them to plan and reflect on elements of their work in a productive, safe and comfortable way. As their confidence developed, so too did their desire to participate in discussions with other agencies about broader issues within the community and to offer solutions. The Minyma's participation in WIAM demonstrates the challenges Ngaanyatjarra people confront within a non-Indigenous domain, and the stark contrast with the Minyma's experience when operating on their own terms.

Conclusion

This chapter described the way in which the Minyma integrated the organisation of their work and role within it with the existing social context of Warburton. The self-authorship, self-directness and self-governance by which the activities of *Mirlirrtjarra Kuurl Mirrka Palyalpayi* emerged allowed the Warburton Breakfast Minyma to develop a community service agency on their own terms and in ways that made sense to themselves and their family members. Three important elements facilitated its development: recruitment of new Minyma

based on existing relationships; the establishment of a pool of workers in order to effectively commit to both their work and their many other responsibilities; and a framework of governance and management that was suited to their social structure.

Self-directedness served a number of purposes. First, the Minymas' communication channels and a tacit knowledge of each other contributed to the organisation of their work; second, the social connections contributed to enjoyment of their worker role; third, family relationships provided them with a worker space that was comfortable, attracted additional workers and provided mutual encouragement; and fourth, managing, planning and making decisions about their work was done within an existing social and cultural framework. This resulted in confidence and authority that enabled the Minyma to participate in a broader range of forums. Together these culminated in the design of organisational practices on the women's terms which resulted in an opportunity to participate in work that was meaningful, engaging and purposeful.

Drawing on the case study of Linda the Breakfast Minyma, the next chapter will explore some of the challenges the Minyma responded to in the development of their worker role.

CHAPTER FIVE: Negotiating family sharing obligations: “Too much people bossing”

Introduction

As new activities of the *Mirlirrtjarra Kuurl Mirrka Palyalpayi* unfolded, numerous factors, both enabling and challenging, associated with family influenced the structure of work and the scope of the worker role that the Minyma directed. The Minyma designed their work, established and shaped their worker role and organised themselves in ways that combined their family and community roles, relationships and responsibilities (see previous two chapters). This enabled them to take an approach to work that was both effective, and suited to their context.

To further illustrate and illuminate the ways the Minyma balanced work and family life, and how these each influenced the other, this chapter presents a case study of Linda. Linda is the central protagonist of a fictional drama script, *A Day in the Life of Linda, a Warburton Breakfast Minyma* constructed by the Minyma and based upon their real life experience. The script was developed specifically for the purposes of this research.

Central to Linda’s story are two themes. First, “family sharing” which emerges repeatedly throughout events in Linda’s day and second, particular expectations operative within family sharing relationships. Family sharing is a structure of kinship which creates a framework of reciprocity and ultimately, interdependency between extended family members. Family sharing practices include reciprocity in relation to material resources, shared care arrangements within extended families, for example of children and elderly, emotional support during times of crisis, and sharing of family and household responsibilities. The impact of family sharing practices on how Linda enacts her worker role is explored in terms of three themes: first, how family sharing practices enable Linda’s ability to fulfil her worker role; second, how these practices challenge Linda’s ability to fulfil her worker role; and third, how Linda juggles these

demands. As Linda's story unfolds, this chapter presents complementary experiences of other (non-fictional) Minyma to portray more broadly how at the household level the Minyma balanced work and family responsibilities and, how together, they constructed a work context and worker role that enmeshed these aspects of their family lives.

Subsequent to a list of the cast members (mainly Linda's family), the chapter begins with a description of the setting from which Linda's story emerges. A chronological journey through Linda's day is then portrayed. This describes where she lives, her family dynamics and her varying responsibilities towards work and family. Brief synopses of each setting provide the context in which the scenes are set. Following each scene, I highlight issues as they emerge, and where appropriate triangulate Linda's fictional experience with accounts from the Breakfast Minyma[18].

A Day in the Life of Linda, a Warburton Breakfast Minyma

Cast: character, age (when stated) and relationship to Linda

- **Linda** (32): A Warburton Breakfast Minyma
- **Adam** (38): Linda's *kurri* (husband]
- **Kanon** (2) and **Shianne** (12): Linda and Adam's *tjilku* (children)
- **Darcy** (36): Linda's brother-in-law (Adam's brother)
- **Leshanti** (33): Linda's sister (married to Darcy)
- **Sheila**: Adam's *ngunytju* (mother)[19] (Valerie's younger sister)

[18] Most of the script is written in English and reflects how the Minyma voiced the script's dialogue. However, for all of the women, conversation that occurred in the home and between the Minyma at work was primarily in Ngaanyatjarra.

[19] *Ngunytju* is used to describe both biological mother and mothers' sisters. Rather than a separate word for "aunt", maternal aunts are commonly thought of as another mother and are called as such. For example, Adam would refer to Sheila, Valerie's sister, as "Mummy Shelia". Hence, although Shelia is not Adam's "biological" mother in Western kinship terminology, she will be referred to as his mother and as Kanon and Shianne's grandmother in this text in line with Ngaanyatjarra kinship terminology.

- **Owen** (21): Sheila's *katja* (son)/Adam's *watjirra* (cousin, mother's side)
- **Terrence** (lives in Kalgoorlie): Sheila's *kurri* (husband)
- **Marshall** (elderly): Linda's (father-in-law) / Adam's *mama* (father)
- **Valerie** (finished/passed away): Linda's (mother-in-law) / Adam's *ngunytju* (biological mother)
- **Luke:** Adam's *watjirra* (cousin, mother's side)
- **Regina** (32): Support worker/*mitjitji* (white lady)

  Other Breakfast Minyma
- **Mary**[20] (27): Linda's *watjirra* (cousin, mother's side)
- **Stephanie** (37): Linda's *tjurtu* (older sister)

As told by the Minyma…

This is the story about a day in the life of Linda, a Warburton Breakfast Minyma. Linda started working in Mirlirrtjarra Kuurl Mirrka Palyalpayi *in 2009, when she was waiting [pregnant] for her son Kanon who is now two years old. She also has a teenage daughter, Shianne. Linda enjoys coming to work but she usually only goes if her cousin Mary and/or her sister Stephanie is working.*

Linda and her kurri *[husband] Adam have been married for a long time. Linda and Adam started their relationship in the early months that Linda was waiting [pregnant] with Shianne. Adam thinks he is Shianne's father but Linda knows he is not. Linda is the only one who knows this secret. Shianne's father is not in Warburton and he is most likely in Kalgoorlie 1000 kilometres across the desert south-west of Warburton [the Goldfields district] where many of his family members live.*

Linda and Adam's family live in a house in Bottom End (see Figure 12). *The house is painted a sky blue on the outside and a light grassy green on the inside, typical of the homes around them which are a variety of bright colours. There are four bedrooms branching off a fairly spacious but dim living area where on one side a simple kitchen is built. A small passage takes the family members outside to a wide*

[20] There is no association between the characters Mary and Stephanie in this script and the women with the same names to whom quotes are attributed in other chapters.

concrete veranda. Above a hip-height Besser brick wall, a sheet of thick metal mesh offers a screen that lets in cool air at night and keeps out the harsh sun during the day. Entrances to two small separate rooms housing a toilet and shower run off the veranda, and hoisted outside on the home's external wall is a sink streaked with the yellowy stains of calcium from the hard desert water. There's a haphazard arrangement of cotton-covered foam mattresses on the veranda, upon which are piles of elaborately-patterned fluffy mink blankets.

The house belongs to Adam's family. Adam's mother, Valerie, had been the head of the household but she passed away four years ago. Adam's father, Marshall, and Adam's other (non-biological) mother, Sheila (Valerie's sister), have been "getting around together" (having a relationship) for the last two years. Marshall is getting old and a bit sick. He doesn't have the capacity to walk to the store anymore so he is on the "HACC [Home and Community Care] list" and gets mirrka *(food) delivered to him by the Breakfast Minyma each day.*

Sheila has a son, Owen who is 21. His father is Terrence. Terrence has gone to Kalgoorlie and has lived there for a long time. Linda's sister Leshanti and her kurri *(husband) Darcy also reside in the house. Sheila has the only car in the household which she purchased with mining money (royalties). Adam usually has control of the car and uses it to get around the community.*

This story starts on a Monday morning in April 2012[21]*. The season is starting to change from summer to winter. It's warm enough each evening to sit out on the veranda and chat, but chilly enough to want to have a fire for warmth when the family wakes up.*

"I gotta get up and go for work!": Family sharing and attendance at work

As told by the Minyma…

[21] This was the month and year that the Minyma instigated telling the script, hence choosing to describe Linda's life in the present day.

Linda wakes up in her home with her extended family. Her children are already awake and Linda notes the absence of Kanon's lively little body which usually wakes her in the room she shares with Adam and her son, huddled on the same thick foam mattress. Although the mornings are getting cooler, the sun is still rising early and there is bright light coming in through the thin cotton curtains she made at the Family Place last year. The cooler nights mean the other family members have dragged some of the mattresses inside from the veranda. Shianne, her cousin Owen and Sheila have slept in the living room; the others are spread out between the three remaining bedrooms. Linda can hear someone in the shower, the water gurgling down the drain not far from where her head rests on a lumpy pillow. She sees Adam through the doorway, sinking into the softness of their velour navy armchair in the lounge.

Linda: Morning (she yells out to the household in general)…I gotta get up and go for *waarka* (work)!

Adam: *Yuwa* (yes), Shianne already awake. She in the shower.

Linda: She better hurry up, I need a shower. *Kanon na* (where's Kanon)?

Adam: Kanon, he with Mummy Leshanti other side of the *ngurra* (house).

Linda: Adam, can you make *waru* (fire)? Cold one pa.

Adam: *Wiya*, you make a *waru* (fire). I'm having a cuppa tea.

Linda: *Wiya*, I gotta go to work, earn some money for our families. You gotta help round the house more.

Adam: *Palya*, *kuwarra* (wait).

Linda: *Wiya*, *widjala* (no, hurry up)! Shianne! Hurry up, I need to go to work.

Shianne: *Yuwa*, *palya* (yes, ok), I'm coming!

When Shianne comes out of the shower, Linda goes in, has a shower and gets dressed. Regina, the support worker for the Breakfast program, comes round in the Breakfast Yurltu *(car).*

Yurltu: BEEP BEEP!

Adam: Some *mitjitji* (white lady) here calling you for work.

Regina: Linda! No *minyma* (women) at the Family Place, you coming to work?

Linda: *Yuwa* (yes), after. I got to feed Kanon first. Pick up them other ladies.

Regina: *Yuwa*, *palya* (yes, ok). *Nganalu* (who)?

Linda: You know, Mary, Stephanie, they must be want to work. I'll walk up after.

Regina: Ok, does Shianne want a ride to school?

Linda: *Yuwa* (yes). Shianne! You going to have a feed at school?

Shianne: Mummy! Hurry up!

Linda: *Wiya* (no), I'll walk up [by my] self. You go and I'll follow you there after.

Shianne: You seen the hairbrush?

Linda: *Wiya* (no), you can do your *manka* (hair) at the Family Place. There's a brush there.

Regina: *Palya* (ok), see you there after.

Regina and Shianne leave to go to school and find some other Breakfast Minyma. Linda calls out to her sister, Leshanti.

As indicated in the opening scene of Linda's story, family life provided both benefits and challenges to the Warburton Breakfast Minyma. The challenges included: first, minimal material household resources (e.g. only one shower, one hairbrush); second, reliance on family sharing of domestic tasks (e.g. fire lighting); and third, resistance to family sharing (e.g. Adam's resistance to lighting the fire). Nevertheless, family sharing between the Breakfast Minyma also enabled them to enact their role (e.g. Linda's suggestion to Regina to pick up her sister and her cousin).

Linda faces numerous challenges during the morning which demonstrate why she can't leave for work when Regina comes to pick her up. She's woken up late, possibly as a result of tending to Kanon in the night or struggling to leave the warmth of her blankets in a cold house, on a chilly morning. The minimal material household resources include one shower in a nine person household, an indication of overcrowding and inadequate facilities in her home. In her hurry to get ready, she expresses frustration by the initial refusal of Adam to light a fire[22]. He told her she needed to wait while he had his cup of tea. In response, she told him she needed to get to work, highlighting her desire to get ready and the need for his cooperation in sharing the morning tasks.

Linda faces challenges including demands from her children which she needs to fulfil before attending work – feeding Kanon and making sure Shianne gets to school. Following her shower, Linda feels hassled by Shianne who wants her to both come to work and find a hairbrush for her. The inability to find the hairbrush is demonstrative of a common challenge for the Minyma; that of maintaining track of minimal material possessions commonly treated as shared property within the family. Linda's suggestion for Shianne to use a Family Place hairbrush is an example of making use of the resources she has access to through work.

Linda also demonstrates how family sharing enabled her to work, particularly the shared understanding and empathy between family members. The Breakfast Minyma's knowledge of each other's circumstances contributed to the smooth operation of identifying workers each day from the pool of Minyma. Linda's suggestion that Regina pick up Mary and Stephanie for work is based on her knowledge of their availability and, as emerges later, their understanding of Linda's restrictions on getting to work early. Before Linda joins them, she needs to make arrangements for the care of her son.

As told by the Minyma…

[22] Many homes have electric heaters. However, for these Powercards are required. They are a pre-paid system for local people in Warburton to power their homes. The card is purchased from the store or roadhouse then inserted into a slot in the meter box and the value of the card ($5, $10, $20 or $100) is credited to the house. A wood fire is often an alternative or additional option for heating (and cooking) in the cooler months.

Regina and Shianne leave to go to school and pick up Mary and Stephanie while Linda continues to get ready for work.

Linda: Bring that kid here, I need to feed him before I go to work.

Leshanti: *Yuwa* (yes), he's here. Kanon, go to Mummy Linda.

Linda: Adam! Get that little boy's pram.

Adam: *Wiya* (no), I'm sleepy one *pa* (I'm sleepy). Your sister can get it for you.

Linda: You lazy one *pa* (you're lazy)!

Linda (to Leshanti): I'll leave him here today while I got to do work at the school.

Leshanti: *Wiya*, I gotta go to office get book up[23], give him to Sheila to look after.

Linda: *Palya*, *yuwa*, (ok, yes) I'll give him to Sheila. Can you get my book-up too? I'll be busy working.

Leshanti: *Yuwa* (yes), Darcy and I will go up after [later].

After Linda feeds Kanon, she starts to leave to go up to the school for work. Marshall, her father-in-law asks her where's she's going.

Marshall: *Wantjantan* (where are you going)?

Linda: I gotta go work. You and Sheila can look after Kanon.

Marshall: Tell those *minyma pirni* (women) to bring my *mirrka* (food)[24] and not be late one *pa* (don't be late).

Linda: *Yuwa*, *palya* (yes, ok). I'll tell them.

[23] "Book-up" was a $20 supplement distributed on a Monday. It assisted CDEP participants to get through to the next weekly pay on a Thursday (see Sanders, 2016b, p. 34).

[24] Marshall is referring to his daily HACC meal that the Breakfast Minyma prepare and deliver to the elderly people in the community as described in Chapter Three.

Linda puts Kanon in the pram and pushes it towards Sheila, explaining to Kanon that she has to go to work and his kaparli *(grandmother) will look after him.*

> **Linda**: Here, I'm coming back after I've been to work [to] give them kids their *mirrka* (food) [referring to school breakfast].
>
> **Sheila**: *Palya* (ok), I'll wait here, [I'll] keep an eye on Kanon and that old man. I got to do some cleaning and raking in the yard.

While, as demonstrated above, the Minyma's ability to work relied partially upon family sharing of domestic tasks and material possessions, it also related particularly to care of children and the elderly. During Linda's morning, a number of family members take responsibility for the care of Kanon, her two-year-old son. When Linda wakes, her sister Leshanti is looking after him. After Linda has fed him and it's time for her to go to work, there's a negotiation process, following which Kanon is left with his grandmother, Sheila. As the previous chapter noted, the Minyma sometimes took their children with them to work. This is inferred by Linda's statement, "I'll leave him here today". Leaving young children at home was by far the preferred option for the Minyma especially when they were "toddler" age, but this was not always possible.

Commonly, through the expectations of family sharing, the Minyma also had some responsibility for other members of their family. Although Linda is not staying at home, Marshall (her elderly father-in-law) expects her to ensure that he receives his HACC meal for the day. As the Minyma were the providers of the HACC service (Chapter Three), this was sometimes an additional responsibility to those who were family members of elderly recipients.

Additional demands on the Minyma were from other family members such as older sons or teenage children wanting their mothers to stay home to "look after them". For example, one of the Minyma was due to come on a trip to Perth for training but on the morning of departure her teenage granddaughter made such a fuss about her not being around to look after her, the woman chose not to come.

Often, because the Minyma had access to a work vehicle, family members sometimes pressured them to provide transport. Over time, the Minyma found ways to weave such requests into their worker role, but it sometimes became tiring and a source of frustration,

> *It can be hard sometimes cos when we drive the* yurltu *(car) round for work, people ask us to give them rides. We say, "*Wiya *(no)! I'm not taxi driver!"* (Breakfast Minyma, 2012, pers. comm).

> *Sometimes I get tired one* pa *(get tired), too much people bossing* nyaapa *(thing) the taxi driver. One morning I told RB [the support worker], "Don't give me the key for the HACC* yurltu *(car) yet, you know, people will be asking me to drive them around if I have the key, you keep it for a little while"* (Breakfast Minyma, 2012, pers. comm).

Linda's experience demonstrates how having access to resources through work had both advantages and disadvantages. Linda resolved the lost hairbrush in the morning by using the brush available at the Family Place. The Minyma accessed breakfast food through their work. However, as the above quotes demonstrate, access to resources could also be a burden with an expectation of sharing resources with family members. To ease the pressure, for both the work vehicle and Family Place resources, their solution was to leave the keys with the support worker.

While the Minyma's account of Linda leaving for work reveals how family sharing of domestic tasks enabled the Minyma to work, it also reveals resistance to family sharing obligations, thus challenging the Minyma's worker role. Linda's partner Adam was less obliging about sharing tasks. He was hostile about lighting a fire, and unsupportive of Linda's request to get Kanon's pram, instead handballing the task to Linda's sister. Linda's frustration at Adam's lack of assistance is evident in her comment that he's "lazy!" She is clearly upset that he's not helping her get to work. Adam's resistance and its impact on Linda's worker role emerges further below.

As told by the Minyma…

The rest of the family are sitting round on the veranda, having breakfast and cups of tea. Linda starts walking up to the Family Place. On the way, she sees some kids milling about with no clear intent to go to school.

> **Linda**: Come on you kids, breakfast time, *widjala* (hurry up)!
>
> **Tjitji pirni (kids)**: *Yuwa* (yes), we coming!

Six little kids follow along behind Linda. They walk into the Family Place where kids, including Linda's daughter Shianne, are gathered, chatting and happily eating their Weetbix.

> **Mary:** *Yuwa*, *walykumunu* (yes, hello). Come on Linda, help us make breakfast for *tjitji* (kids). *Tjitji pirni purlkanya* (lots of kids) today. We are getting tired one *pa* (getting tired).

Linda settles into the morning provision of school breakfast routine (described in Chapter Three)*. Together, her, Mary and Stephanie provide the children with their second course, baked beans on toast. Then, when the school siren goes, the Minyma encourage the kids to go to class.*

As the women's role and status as workers evolved, the Warburton Breakfast Minyma had a positive influence that reached beyond the bounds of the Family Place. In addition to providing breakfast to improve school attendance, the Minyma directly encouraged kids to attend school and the kids responded to the women. For example when Linda encouraged the kids she came across on her way to work, or, as described in Chapter Three, when the Minyma participated in the daily attendance run. The positive response demonstrated an increased acceptance and recognition of the Minyma's role enabled by both their family connections and their association with the school. The kids' compliance was indicative of both the Minyma's authority and its acceptance by parents and carers in households thus enhancing their status in the community. In this way

the women extended their actions as Warburton Breakfast Minyma beyond the school into daily life.

Family connectedness between the Minyma, such as Linda, Stephanie and Mary, enabled the effective functioning of the Minyma pool of workers (see Chapter Four). The benefit of the pool first emerged in Linda's day when she was unavailable to commence work early, and suggested Regina pick up Stephanie and Mary. Secondly, the pool contributed to relieving pressure when work was demanding. For example, Mary announcing upon Linda's arrival that as a result of the large number of kids being provided for she and Stephanie were getting "tired".

Both the Minyma's intimate knowledge of each other through their family connections and their collective sharing of tasks at work contributed to their capacity to fulfil the responsibilities of the worker role as a Breakfast Minyma. Egalitarianism, empathy and mutual support are evident in the ease with which Linda picks up her Minyma tasks despite arriving late, halfway through breakfast. The Minyma's existing relationships gave way to creating a mutually supportive environment for sharing personal challenges, thus making 'public' the issues they faced personally and transforming them into new possibilities for strengthening community ['public'] wellbeing as demonstrated further below regarding the wellbeing of young girls.

"We gotta talk to them at Kungka nights": Family sharing as a vehicle for innovative work

Individually, each of the Minyma shared responsibility of 'growing up' and looking after children within their extended families. Concerns or 'worries' they had about young people, including teenage girls, were central within this practice of family sharing. The Minymas' concerns about young women became structured into their work and demonstrates how family responsibilities were a key consideration in the direction of their work. This is evident in the way Kungka Nights became established as a component of *Mirlirrtjarra Kuurl Mirrka Palyalpayi* (Chapter Three).

As told by the Minyma…

Linda works with Stephanie and Mary to clear and clean up, wash the dishes, put the food away, wipe the benches, and mop the floor. They chat about events in the community the night before and Linda is worried about her daughter, Shianne.

> **Linda**: I'm really worrying for Shianne. That girl been walkin' round late at night, acting like she's a big lady. She's just a girl, she shouldn't be hanging out with them boys, looks like she must be looking for a *kurri* (husband).
>
> **Mary**: *Yuwa* (yes), that niece of mine, Kiara, she been do the same, walking around every night, sleeping all morning. We all worried 'bout them *kungkawara pirni* (teenage girls). They up to no good at night. Must be sniffing [petrol], [taking] drugs, chasing them boys around. We should tell them straight way, they gotta listen to us ladies. Must be we gotta talk to them at Kungka nights.
>
> **Susan**: We should tell them other ladies at that meeting this morning. Get all them girls together and talk to them about what could happen to them if they keep walkin' round at night. It's no good, they could get raped, murdered. You seen them things on TV, what happens to girls in Kalgoorlie and Alice Springs, places like that. Those girls should hear them stories, listen to us good way.

The family connections between Linda, Stephanie and Mary, combined with the egalitarianism, empathy, mutual support, and the comfort and security of their 'own' shared space (the Family Place) enabled them to collectively share their 'worries', and to consider and plan joint actions in response. For example, to talk to the other Minyma about raising their concerns with the girls at Kungka Nights.

The Minyma drew on their existing role and subsequent knowledge as mothers, aunties, sisters and grandmothers of the teenage girls to identify the most appropriate means of addressing their concerns. Consequently, family sharing in the form of shared care of young people within families (i.e. between

grandmothers, aunties and mothers) continued within the Minyma's work. A further aspect of family sharing practices that had both challenges and benefits to the Minyma's capacity to fulfil their worker role was the sharing of material possessions, including money.

Prioritising children over male partners: Discriminating between family sharing claims

The Minyma both experienced benefits and encountered challenges regarding the reciprocity of obligations of family sharing. While, on the one hand, shared care by others of dependent family members, such as their children or frail aged relatives enabled them to earn additional income, on the other hand, it also opened them up to demands on this income from others. Drawing on the Minyma's account of Linda's experience, the next section illustrates how the Minyma responded to demands regarding the sharing of the additional income they earned through their work and the resultant tension and stress associated with such claims.

As told by the Minyma…

In the midst of their conversation and the cleaning up routine, there's a loud banging on one of the Family Place windows. It's Adam, Linda's partner.

Adam: Linda! I need some money.

Linda: *Wiya* (no), I got nothing, *wiyartu* (nothing).

Adam: What about your book up?

Linda: *Wiya* (no), I got nothing. No chance to go to the office. It's your payday today, you should go give me some money.

Adam: *Wiya* (no), store not open yet so no money. Come on, come to the office now so we can get your book up.

Linda: *Wiya* (no), I'm still working. I gotta work to make money for them kids. I'll come home after.

Exacerbated by limited resources and low incomes, the close-knit nature of families, and interdependency on material possessions resulted in shared family knowledge regarding individual incomes. Consequently, family members of the women often visited them at work and made claims on their earnings, especially on paydays. Such claims put a strain on the Minyma in terms of both managing the distribution of their income, and juggling the demands between family and work duties. For example, when Adam seeks Linda out at work first for money and later to take Kanon to the clinic (see below).

Many of the Minyma were subject to pressure to share money with both their partners and adult sons within the domain of the male-female relationship, as evident in Linda's experience. According to other Minyma, sometimes, actual or threats of physical abuse accompanied these demands,

> *My husband too, he got wild with me and tried to hit me for my money. I had already given him some but he wanted more. But I pulled the blanket up and hid under it* (Kate, 2012, pers. comm.).

In order to meet the obligations of family sharing practices within their worker role, the Minyma had an "open door" policy at the Family Place (Chapter Three). As well as partners, visitors included kids who occasionally popped in to see their grandmothers, aunties and mothers during breaks at school to spend time with them or to request money to buy lunch. Additionally, elderly people came in to check on the progress of their meals or have a cup of tea with the women. The opportunity for family members to have access to the Minyma while they were at work was a way the Minyma ensured their worker role did not inhibit them from fulfilling their family responsibilities.

However, an open-door policy towards family was not always to the Minyma's advantage such as when family members, for example Adam, disregarded their work obligations. As well as not supporting Linda to get to work in the morning, his subsequent actions to make a claim on the rewards of her work is a source of stress and tension for Linda.

As highlighted by Linda ("I gotta work to make money for them kids"), the Minyma's resistance to sharing their income with their partners (and adult sons) is grounded in their desire to share their income for the benefit of their children or grandchildren. In addition to making claims on their money, sometimes, according to the Minyma, male partners also made a claim on the women's time, insisting that rather than working, they come and "sit down at home",

> *So I say, "No, you can't tell me to sit down at home, I'm doing work, I gotta go, I'm working for my living!" or "I'm working for my families or my granddaughter or kids". I need the money for the kids so I say, "You can't stop me to sit down, you'll pay me in'it"! Pay you to sit down? [Minyma laugh together]* (Kate, 2012, pers. comm).

While the family sharing of money was a challenge for the Minyma, it was also an enabler of their activities by engendering a sense of pride, happiness, and joy within the women when they are able to support other family members, particularly children,

> *It's important to work so I can have more money for the kids, you know, like [putting] $20, $30 in their bank [kitties]. When we work it feels* walykumunu *(good) and I can save my money for weekends. The kids say, "My mum's got money, she's been working and saving it for the weekend"* (Diane, 2012, pers. comm.).

Thus, the additional income the Minyma received from work both benefitted and challenged the Minyma in regards to meeting the obligations of family sharing practices. Supported by accounts from the Minyma, Linda's experience demonstrates the pressure partners (and adult sons) put on the women to share their money, including interrupting them during work hours. The central aspiration stated by the Minyma towards directing most of their income to support their children was asserted as the basis of their resistance to partner demands. Supporting this resistance was the mutual support offered by other Minyma.

Family Sharing: Challenges to the Minyma within husband-wife relationships

Challenging some of the Minyma regarding their capacity to fulfil their worker role are specific expectations of some Ngaanyatjarra men regarding the relationship of husband and wife. So far in her day, regarding Adam, Linda experiences both inadequate support at home getting ready for work (disregard of her commitment to her job) and demands on her for money.

As told by the Minyma…

Linda has told Adam she is working and he leaves the Family Place. Linda feels no good so she makes a cup of tea and sits on the couch while Mary and Stephanie finish cleaning up. Then they join Linda and sit down for a cup of tea and some Scotch Finger biscuits from the storeroom.

Linda: That Adam, he always hassling me for money.

Mary: *Yuwa* (yes), he no good. I got no husband, just self [by myself], it's better that way, no *kurri* (husband) to tell me what to do.

Stephanie: *Yuwa* (yes), no one to bash you or speak to you wrong way.

Linda: He always speak to me wrong way, tell me I shouldn't go to work, that I gotta stay home.

Mary: He just jealous cos you got lovely clean clothes and *manka walykumunu* (nice hair).

Linda: He think I get dressed up for another man but *wiya* (no), I get dressed nice for coming to work. I should go to the police, get a restraining order. Then I'll be free to do work, good way.

Mary: *Yuwa* (yes), you should do that. He not working, he should get a job, look after you like.

Stephanie: We should tell Regina, she can take you to the police station after [later today].

Regarding family sharing between husband and wife, some of the Minyma experienced the related expectations of their partners as inappropriate and detrimental to their worker role. These expectations and related behaviours inhibited the Minyma fulfilling their worker role in a way that was satisfying, or as described by Linda, as being "free". As indicated in the story of Linda above, family sharing claims by male partners were sometimes accompanied by verbal abuse (prompted by jealousy according to the Minyma), domestic violence and restraint on their right to work.

According to the Minyma, the treatment of women by their men was evidence of their frustration over the altered power relationship as the Minyma publically thrived and prospered in their worker roles. The Minyma attributed the jealousy of male partners to: first, the Minyma's obvious enjoyment spending time away from home working; second, their increased capacity to earn money; third, their obvious pride and increased self-esteem associated with dressing nicely for work (which, according to the Minyma, the men interpreted as seeking other potential partners); fourth, their increased access to resources and opportunities such as a car and trips to Perth; and fifth their increased dignity, community status and personal confidence.

According to another Minyma,

> *Some might not work cos their* kurri *(husband) gets jealous sometimes. They get jealous for nothing. Must be that lady, have a shower, cleaned up, must be coloured t-shirt, walks to the school, they get jealous for that. Or must be lovely coloured skirt. They might say, "Are you getting dressed up for that man so he can have a look?" Then they say, "You not working, you sit down at home", some mans they get like that* (Breakfast Minyma, 2012, pers. comm.).

Most of the Minyma who became workers and participated regularly and consistently were single; or widowed, separated, or in intermittent relationships thus suggesting that having a male partner could be an obstacle to working as a Minyma. Like the characters Mary and Stephanie in the Minyma's fictional

account above, the women often commented that in order to work, being single was an advantage: "It's better that way, no kurri (*partner*) to tell me what to do" (Mary, fictional Breakfast Minyma).

Another example is the story of Mavis.

Mavis made consistent contributions to work for about a year. One day she told me she couldn't come to work. Based on previous information other Minyma had shared with me, I whispered to her over the fence, "Is your *kurri* (husband) back from lock-up [prison]?" to which she nodded, eyes to the ground and turned and walked back inside.

Another Minyma, Selima, who tried to work regularly throughout the program was in a relationship characterised by high levels of family violence for which her husband was periodically incarcerated. During the time her husband was in prison she was she was "free" to work. Outside of these times he thwarted her attempts to come to work blatantly demanding she stay home. Like Adam, Selima's partner intimidated her by lurking around the Family Place, demanding money or regularly calling her on the mobile.

The Minyma described this behaviour as men "checking on" them,

> *Sometimes when I go to work the man comes round to the Family Place or some of them will have a mobile and ring you up. They say, "Come home, I'm getting worried by [my]self". Sometimes when we drive the Breakfast* Yurltu *(car) [and they see us] the men get wild* (Kate, 2012, pers. comm.).

The Minyma's discussions about men's "jealousy" in response to them working, were couched in normality, acceptance and often humour. Additionally, their responses illustrate their aspiration to overcome this male claim to power, and assert the importance of their worker role to their partners,

> *When someone sings out from the gate [of the Family Place] for us, must be your* kurri *(husband) or my* katja *(son), we call out to them and*

*say, "*Kuwarripa! Ngara. Waarkarringkula-rna *(wait, I am working)"* (Breakfast Minyma, 2012, pers. comm.).

Nevertheless the men's claims based on their expectations of family sharing inside the husband-wife relationship were a source of tension and stress for those women subject to them and they struggled to reconcile the demands of work with the demands of their partners. Witnessing the verbal and physical abuse suffered by their colleagues, left the other Minyma saddened and frustrated.

Beyond attempting to exercise power over their wives as outlined above, some men resorted to, on the one hand, utilising local Aboriginal cultural expectations regarding the traditional child care role of women and, on the other hand, utilising non-Aboriginal local institutional influence over local Aboriginal women regarding child health and welfare as is evident in the next section of Linda's story.

As told by the Minyma…

While the women finish cleaning up, Linda's partner Adam comes back to the front door. He's borrowed Sheila's car and beeps the horn outside the Family Place.

Adam [from car]: Linda, *widjala* (hurry up)!

Linda: *Munta* (sorry), sorry ladies, I gotta go, Adam here. Tell Regina I wont be helping do the HACC *mirrka* (food) today.

Mary: *Yuwa*, *palya* (yes, ok). We'll finish off here, take the fruits to the classrooms[25], do the HACC *mirrka* (food). See you after.

Linda: Yuwa, remember HACC *mirrka* (food) for that *tjamu* (old man) at *ngayuku ngurra* (my house).

[25] In 2010, the teacher's sought the assistance of the Breakfast Minyma to prepare and deliver bowls of chopped fruit to the three early primary years classrooms for the children's morning tea.

Linda walks down the steps of the Family Place and gets into the car with Adam.

Adam: *Tjitji* (children's) doctor here, sister came to the house. You got to take Kanon for check up.

Linda: *Yuwa*, *palya*, *mapitja* (yes, ok, we'll go).

Adam: Shianne, I saw her walking off with those other girls. She just pretend she go to school.

Linda: *Wiya*, I saw her there, she been have breakfast at the Family Place.

Adam: No, she took off. If I see her later I'll give her a hiding! You should have made her stay at school good way.

Linda and Adam go home and pick up Kanon and take him to the clinic. While Linda is inside the clinic with Kanon, Adam waits in the car having a smoke.

Within the culture of this remote Aboriginal community, childcare is understood generally as a responsibility within the women's domain. In the above interaction, Adam draws upon both this cultural imperative and the authority of the medical clinic to assert personal authority over Linda. The blame he asserts for their daughter absconding from school is further evidence of the husband asserting power over her. Although not explicit in the script, Adam's control of the family's car (despite it having been purchased with Sheila's money), further determines his claim to power over Linda who requires it for both taking Kanon to the clinic, and for a number of other purposes that arise later in her day. Family sharing practices and the benefits and challenges for the Minyma within their daily lives is further explored outside of Linda's working hours.

While the Minyma relied upon acceptance of family sharing obligations by their other family members to enable them to go to work, expectations by some men of the Minyma regarding these obligations inside husband-wife relationships challenged the choice of the Minyma to work. Despite doing their best to support and encourage each other to overcome these challenges, Minyma sometimes experienced claims upon their earnings and their work time from their husbands accompanied by verbal abuse and domestic violence. Some Minyma experienced

outright restrictions on their access to work. Husbands also sought to exercise power over their female partners by leveraging power held by local institutions (such as the clinic) over local Aboriginal families.

"You've got big money! Here give me some": Family sharing claims on income

As told by the Minyma…

After Kanon's check-up, Kanon and Linda get back in the car with Adam and they all go to the store. On the way they see Leshanti walking near the park.

Linda: Leshanti! We going to the store, you want a ride?

Leshanti: *Wiya* (no), I'll walk.

Linda: You got my book up?

Leshanti: *Yuwa* (yes), I'll give it to you at the store.

Adam and Linda are in the store at the ATM machine. Adam pulls out $500 from his Centrelink pay. They see Leshanti in the store who comes and joins them.

Linda: You got big money! Here give me some.

Adam: *Wiya* (no), you got book up.

Linda: That's not enough for a big feed for all the families. OK, you buy a feed for the *tjitji* (kids) and all the family.

Adam: *Palya* (ok), here's $200, I'm going to the *yurltu* (car). You always take all my money!

Linda: No help! Can't help me and just hold the kid, I need to do the shopping!

Adam: *Wiya* (no), you [are] his mother, you take him.

Adam leaves the store. Linda walks around the aisles and does the shopping while her sister-in-law Leshanti keeps an eye on Kanon. They go back to the car, carrying big boxes of shopping and place them in the back.

A contentious component of family sharing practices relates to claims upon the income or financial resources of other family members. By receiving a regular wage, the Minyma faced frequent claims by other family members on their income. As is evident in the fictional account of Linda's day, initially Adam approached Linda at work, requesting her book up money that she was due that day. Another example is provided by Linda when she demands a portion of his money as a contribution to the purchase of goods for the household.

Demands and expectations of family sharing challenged the Minyma consistently. Like in the story of Linda, none of the Minyma had saved income, and hence, on paydays, they faced claims on income from a variety of family members. On paydays for the women, it was common for family members to drop around to the Family Place, or wave the Breakfast *Yurltu* (car) over to request a portion of the Minyma's pay.

Expectations about the redistribution of income through family sharing made saving difficult for the Minyma. One of the Minyma, Kate, recounts her experience after winning handsomely at a card game,

> *My oldest daughter had come with my* tjamu *(grandson). She hung around a bit and was asking me for money. A bit later in the morning my son [eight years old] came along. He was crying for money. I had already given him forty dollars but some other kids must have taken that from him. I told him,*
>
> *"They can't steal the money from you, I gave you big money".*
>
> *He was starting to get wild so I gave him twenty dollars. Then his little nephew [my grandson] started crying for money. I said,*
>
> *"*Wiya *(no), you don't need money, you've had some* mirrka*" (food).*

But he wouldn't stop crying. I told my son to take him to the store. He took him by the arm and said,

"You can have five dollars or ten dollars of this money", and they went to the store.

Then my kurri *(husband) came. He kept asking and asking and asking. I went out on the veranda with him and got a little bit wild. He is always asking me for things. Later he might hit me. He might even kill me. I gave him forty dollars and he went away to the store…I was tired from everyone asking me for money. Then my other daughter, she kept looking through the door window [of the Family Place] for me and calling my name. After a little while I went out. She was asking me for money. I said,*

*"*Wiya*, I got no money", but she kept asking me and I gave her forty dollars.*

Her and her friends went to the store. When I got home my daughter-in-law asked me for money. The store wasn't open so we got a ride up to the roadhouse to all buy lunch. Then my kurri *(husband) asked me for more money. He needed to buy a USB from his son-in-law. It was hundred dollars. That was the end of my money.*

As is evident from Linda's story and those of the Minyma above, the redistribution of income through family sharing was a central component of the Minyma's material context of family life. The fictional story of Linda, and complementary accounts from the lives of the Minyma illustrate how family sharing could have both benefits such as support of children, the joy that came with being able to share money, but also challenges such as demands from male partners and other family members, and the inability to save money. And, as already indicated earlier, the Minyma themselves also relied upon family sharing obligations of other family members in order to work and were not shy in

asserting such claims, as is evident in the next component of the Minyma's fictional account of Linda, the Breakfast Minyma.

As told by the Minyma…

Linda, Leshanti and Kanon join Adam in the car with the shopping. Leshanti asks if they can drop her in Top End (see Figure 12).

> **Leshanti**: Can you drop me Top End?
>
> **Linda**: Why you going there?
>
> **Leshanti**: I'm going to play cards.
>
> **Linda**: *Wiya* (no), you can't gamble all the money away. You do that every week then eat all that food Adam and I buy!
>
> **Leshanti**: *Wiya wanti* (no, stop that), I bought that *mirrka* (food) last week!
>
> **Linda**: I'm sick of you, you no good, gambling everyday, you should get a job, not just sit down all day, waste your money. You should save your money and buy tea, sugar, flour, tin-a-meat for them *tjitji* (kids).
>
> **Leshanti**: They not my kids! I'm going.
>
> **Linda**: You should be come and help me clean the house, battling struggling do all the cleaning self! Too much things to do round the house so I can't work and earn good money. You just jealous of me being a good worker!

Adams slows down at the roundabout and Leshanti gets out of the car and walks away towards Top End.

This small vignette from the account of Linda reveals how within family sharing, claims on income extend to advocating how others in the network not only expend their money but also how they allocate their time, with a particular emphasis on family equity regarding the sharing of resources. For the Minyma, their pride in working and earning an income enhanced their sense of injustice when other family members did not contribute to the 'pooled' household income. This was mirrored in the distribution of household chores. Many of the Minyma

possessed leadership qualities and skills within their households which in part influenced their capacity and desire to work, but resulted in an added pressure to also fulfil domestic tasks. This further exacerbated their sense of injustice when other family members, such as Leshanti, did not assist, as indicated by the frustration and anger in Linda's exclamation to Leshanti in the excerpt above.

The pride the Minyma experienced in their worker role was associated with a sense of dignity and self-respect which was emphasised by their assertions that others should also be working such as when Linda tells her sister-in-law, "you should get a job". The Minyma associated their worker role with doing something "good" for their families, that is, earning additional income for their kids, being role models (Chapter Six) and providing a service that benefitted the community. Thus, the Minyma both through their actions and through the Linda story advocated equity regarding family sharing as it applied to both income and the distribution of household tasks.

The demands experienced by the Minyma as a result of family sharing practices was combined with their disappointment when other family members did not 'pull their weight'. For example Adam not assisting with looking after Kanon or Leshanti not making her expected financial contribution resulted in stress and exhaustion for Linda, as well as placing strain on her family relationships. These pressures sometimes prevented the Minyma attending work which demonstrated the need for having a pool of workers. Nevertheless, there were powerful benefits of family sharing for the Minyma.

"Can you watch Kanon?": Family sharing beneficial to the Minyma

The following excerpt of text from Linda's day highlights how family sharing practices within their extended family living arrangements could both benefit the wellbeing of the Minyma and enhance their capacity to work.

As told by the Minyma…

Linda and Adam drive home. Adam drops Linda and Kanon off and then goes off cruising the streets. Linda asks Sheila to help with Kanon and Stephanie arrives to deliver HACC mirrka *(food) to Marshall.*

Linda: *Yuwa* (yes), I got to do some washing. Can you watch Kanon?

Sheila: *Yuwa* (yes). Kanon, come here to your *kaparli* (grandmother)! I'll take him over that way (*she points next door*). You keep an eye on that old *tjilpi* (old man) (*indicating to Marshall*).

The HACC yurltu *(car) pulls up to the side of the house and Stephanie beeps the horn.*

Stephanie: *Marshall na* (where's Marshall)? *Mantjila ko kati mirrka*! *(Come and get the food!)* HACC meal here!

Linda: *Yuwa* (yes), thank you, I'll take it to him. *Munta* (sorry), sorry I can't help. Too much chores to do round here.

Linda takes the meal from Stephanie in the car and delivers it to Marshall who is sitting in the shade of the veranda on an old mattress.

Kanon and Sheila have gone next door to Sheila's brother's house. Linda does a load of washing and hangs it over the fence to dry. She's really tired and has a nap in the afternoon sunshine on one of the foam mattresses on the veranda.

It's late afternoon when Linda wakes. She gets up and wipes the kitchen bench and lights a fire on the veranda. She seeks out a couple of bags of self-raising flour from the box of shopping on the kitchen counter. Next she finds a large bowl and fills a pannikin (large metal cup) with water. She sits cross-legged on the veranda, and kneads a large ball of damper dough into shape, then wraps it in silver paper (foil) and places it on the coals.

Later, at mungarrtji-mungarrtji *(late afternoon/early evening time) the family starts drifting back to the house. Linda asks Shianne to get some other food from*

the box; potatoes, sweet potatoes, gravy powder, tins of tomato and some tin-a-meat (corned beef). In a big pot resting on a grill over the fire, Linda, Leshanti and Shianne make a stew from a recipe Linda has made for HACC meals at the Family Place. This is accompanied by a vibrant discussion about events of their day, frequent laughter and the two women and Shianne gently and jokingly reprimand Kanon as he tries to participate in their shared preparation of dinner.

The women's responsibilities to their children, grandchildren, nieces and nephews, especially those who were not yet school age, sometimes challenged the Minyma's capacity to fulfil their worker role. Like Linda, many depended on other family members to care for children while they went to work. Similarly, this family sharing practice enabled the Minyma to ensure the completion of household chores. The large number of responsibilities required of the women as a result of both being workers and undertaking expected domestic tasks was further enabled by family support, such as when Sheila took Kanon next door to enable Linda to do the washing and have a rest.

The evening 'scene' at Linda's house provides an example of shared contributions to a family task – preparing dinner – characterised by jovialness and a relaxed atmosphere. The replication of a HACC meal at home is an indication of how the skills Linda has gained through work can have a positive impact on her family's wellbeing.

The establishment of the pool of workers allowed the Minyma to be flexible in the number of hours they worked so that they could fulfil commitments linked to family sharing practices. For most of the women, working full days was not possible[26], and even working beyond the required hours to do school breakfast was a challenge, as experienced by Linda as reported in the story above. The flexibility of the work arrangements enabled the Minyma to frame their work and worker role according to their capacity and what their family circumstances would allow. For example, unlike Linda in the fictional account, Stephanie did not

[26] During events such as Dust Up and trips to Perth which required a commitment of multiple full days, the Minyma made special arrangements regarding their other responsibilities for which they relied on the support of their families.

have young children (or a demanding husband). Hence, she was able to both commit to working at breakfast and to preparing and delivering HACC meals.

In summary, in contrast to the demands on the Minyma that came with family sharing practices, the richness of events in their shared family life was also an enabler for the Minyma in the establishment of their work and worker role. As described in Chapter Three, many of the activities within *Mirlirrtjarra Kuurl Mirrka Palyalpayi* were inspired by family relationships and family responsibilities.

While, on the one hand, the evening scene rendered by the Minyma in the fictional account of Linda the Breakfast Minyma is demonstrative of the significant support provided though family sharing that enables the Minyma to work, contrarily, on the other hand, the domestic scene later in the evening underscores the detrimental impact on the capacity of the Minyma to work due to the persistent challenges inside husband-wife relationships.

"I'm gonna feel no good for working tomorrow!": Further challenges to the Minyma inside husband-wife relationships

As told by the Minyma…

Shianne [Linda's daughter] eats her feed quick way and then takes off with a couple of the other Kungkas who yell out to her as they are walking by, telling her they're going up to the drop-in [youth] centre. A car pulls up outside the fence and Luke, Adam's cousin leans out the window.

Luke: Adam…I got this…you want some?

Luke makes the hand signal that indicates 'mixing drugs' and holds up a little bag of grass (ganja/marijuana).

Adam: *Yuwa* (yes), I'll come.

Luke: You got weapons [equipment for taking drugs]?

Adam: *Yuwa* (yes), this way.

Adam gets up and goes over to the car. He indicates towards the back veranda of the house and Luke and him go there where Adam gets a cap, billycan and water to make the weapon (a bong/water pipe). The rest of the family are having a feed on the front veranda. After a while Adam comes round from the back of the house.

Adam: Where'd that *kungka* (girl) go? (referring to Shianne).

Linda: *Ngurr-pa* (I don't know), she must be at the drop-in centre, she should come home soon.

Adam: It's getting late, I'm going to go for a ride, [to] find her.

Sheila: *Yuwa* (yes), it's getting late, she'll get sick, it's a cold night.

Adam jumps in the car with Luke. They go for a drive and he sees Shianne and her friends. They are in the park near the stage and they are smoking cigarettes. He and Luke go home and get Linda.

Adam: That daughter, she no good hanging out with them *kungkawara pirni* (teenage girls), I just seen her smoking in the park. *Widjala* (hurry up), come get her Linda!

Linda gets in the car and they go and pick Shianne up and bring her home. Back at the house Adam goes inside. Linda stays out and talks to Shianne.

Linda: Shianne, you shouldn't be walking round at night with them girls and smoking, it's no good for you.

Sheila: *Yuwa* (yes), you should be looking after your body.

Linda goes inside and Adam is wild.

Adam: You gotta look after that *kungka* (girl)! Walking round with them other girls no good way and they was smoking cigarettes! Them other girls no good for her. I should give her a hiding! You should be looking after that girl, my daughter, the right way.

Linda: You should look after her instead of spending all your money on drugs! Every week we have no money for *mirrka* (food) cos you spend it all on drugs. You no good! You make me wild, I'm gonna (going to) feel no good for working tomorrow!

Adam gets wilder and throws a tin-a-meat (corned beef) at Linda that was sitting on the kitchen bench with the other things she'd bought that day. Adam goes outside and gets back in the car where Luke is waiting for him.

Linda comes out of the house. She calls Regina and asks her to come and pick her up. Regina comes and they go to the police together. Linda makes a statement and the police go and arrest Adam and put him in lock-up (police cell) for the night.

The challenges of family sharing inside husband-wife relationships had a significant impact on the Minyma. The above scene in Linda's evening reveals additional layers of causation and effect associated with these pressures, such as, first, the financial pressure Adam's drug habits places on Linda and the family; second, the way Adam uses the accepted local cultural imperative of childcare as the prime responsibility of women to claim a position of authority over Linda through accusations of inadequate mothering of her teenage daughter Shianne; and, upon that basis, he proceeds to physically threaten Linda. The combination of these events in Linda's evening results in her feeling "no good" for working the next day.

As described in Chapter Four the Minyma recognised that the day-to-day context of their family and community lives required them to develop a pool of workers in order to maintain the continuity of their collective work commitments. For some of them, violence was a regular part of their families' lives and was a further inhibitive factor in their participation in work. In the event that the

Minyma felt "no good" for working as in the case of Linda, other Minyma would fill in.

Another Minyma recounted her experience of a violent episode in her relationship on a day that she was not able to attend work,

> *I never had a lunch today. I was laying down a while and he whacked me with a shovel and I grabbed that shovel and I whacked him back. He never make a dinner. Wiya (*no*), I gave him $20 book up, I don't know what he do* [what he will do next] (Breakfast Minyma, 2012, pers. comm.).

During the telling of this story, the women laughed with her as she recalled how she retaliated and stated that he did nothing around the house, unlike her who not only gave him her "book up" money that day, but also worked; a story that resonates strongly with Linda's experience. This humorous approach to recalling stories about family violence was not uncommon.

The final scene in the Minyma's fictional script about Linda is a conversation between Linda and Sheila, following the consequences of Adam's arrest. This interaction is again reflective of the humour the Minyma often bought to conversations about damaging treatment by men. The story ends on a comical note[27], leaving Linda with a sense of empowerment both due to her new "freedom" as a single woman, as well as her secret deception regarding Adam's paternity.

As told by the Minyma…

[27] Although this was my experience of the Minyma's approach to a discussion of this nature in group situation, this was not my experience when the women discussed family violence with me one-on-one; then they were commonly withdrawn, sad and distant. Alternatively they simply avoided me and the workplace, with other women explaining their absence as "[name of man] is back from lock-up (prison)".

It's court the next day[28] *and Adam is sent to prison for 12 months. Back at home that afternoon Sheila is wild at Linda for putting her nephew/son in prison.*

> **Sheila**: Why have you bin put my nephew in lock-up (prison)!?
>
> **Linda**: He always get jealous for me, telling me not to go to work.
>
> **Sheila**: *Wiya* (no), he was a good *wati* (man). Now that little boy and girl got no father.
>
> **Linda**: He wasn't *Shianne ko* (Shianne's) father anyway.
>
> **Sheila**: *Nyaapa*?! (what?)
>
> **Linda**: She had a different father. Adam bin (been) no good father to her. Better off with no *kurri* (husband) anyway.

Only Sheila heard that, she never tells the other family members the new secret she has learnt that Adam isn't Shianne's real father.

Together, through the story of Linda, the Minyma reveal the persistent challenges some of them encounter in husband-wife relationships: resistance and lack of cooperation in family sharing tasks, being subject to male assertions of authority and power over their time and income, and threats of and actual verbal, emotional and physical abuse from partners. For the character Linda in the script, one of the major challenges at each stage of her day was the pressure from her partner Adam. His male claim to power is enacted through first, his lack of support for her to attend work; second, his demand on her time while she's at work; third, making monetary demands; and fourth, expectations on her regarding provision for the undertaking of household tasks and responsibility for their children.

The Minyma's "new" worker role resulted in a shift in both their priorities and ways they spent their days, a shift that their male partners and other family members sometimes struggled to adapt to. Adam's treatment of Linda is

[28] Court is held monthly in Warburton for which a team of legal aid lawyers and a judge fly in from Kalgoorlie for two days to hear cases.

indicative of his frustration, jealousy and his challenge to accept both her elevated status because of monetary rewards and access to recourses, as well as the time she requires away from him that is demanded of her worker role. Adam attempts to control the resultant altered power dynamic within their relationship through lack of cooperation, assertions of authority and abuse. Perhaps partially driven by the support, advice and role modelling of her female kin and colleagues, Linda recognises the unfairness of Adam's behaviour, and seeks intervention from the justice system.

Conclusion

Chapters Three and Four described how the Minyma set up particular structures and processes in order to create a working environment and worker role that fitted with the everyday context of their family and community. Within this chapter I have revealed a central component of their everyday family lives: the lived experience of family sharing practices. Central to their social context, these practices were driven by reciprocity and interdependency between extended family members. The experiences that have been presented through the Warburton Breakfast Minyma's telling of Linda's story demonstrate graphically both the enabling and challenging aspects of family sharing practices that the Minyma juggled in order to enact a worker role that responded to their family lives.

The themes of family sharing practices which emerged within Linda's day and *enabled* the Minyma to fulfil their worker role were:

1. Maintaining a shared priority in their work for the wellbeing of their own and the children of others thus gaining community status and support for their role;
2. Sharing the care of children and the elderly with family members;
3. Sharing domestic tasks;
4. Using monetary rewards from work to support their children;
5. Working alongside family for camaraderie and support with egalitarianism, empathy, shared understandings (i.e. of personal

problems that were experienced by other Minyma) resulting in mutual support and collaboratively resulting in creativity and innovation in their worker role;

6. Sharing the workload with family members who were sympathetic to each other's circumstances and creating a pool of workers; and,
7. Developing the direction of the work alongside family members.

The themes of family sharing practices which emerged within Linda's day and *challenged* the Minyma to fulfil their worker role were:

1. Responsibility to care for children and elderly people;
2. The specific kinship relationship between husband and wife;
3. Pressure to share income with partners and other family members;
4. Family commitments unsupported by other family members such as domestic duties; and,
5. Conflict and violence within husband-wife relationships.

Indicative of the Minyma's desire to work, Linda's story highlights how they managed these enablers and challenges so that they could frame their worker role in a way that was meaningful, effective and engaging. This was achieved in a number of ways. First, they designed their work activities in a way that addressed many of their existing concerns and responsibilities, for example, concerns about *kungkas* (young girls); second, they shaped their work and their worker role flexibly in a way that enabled them to juggle the competing responsibilities by creating a pool of workers; third, they drew on the confidence, authority, knowledge, camaraderie and skills they gained in their worker role to modify other aspects of their lives that enabled work to be satisfying, for example, Linda reporting Adam's behaviour; fourth, they voiced how other family members should expend their money and allocate their time; and, fifth, they advocated for equity regarding family sharing tasks.

The story of *A Day in the Life of Linda, a Warburton Breakfast Minyma* lists actual experiences that contributed to the overall account of how the Minyma shaped their worker role. The next chapter focuses on the key enablers, learning, mentoring and role modeling that the Minyma built into their role as workers. Emerging from their commitment and enjoyment of work – and a driving force behind this thesis – was the Minyma's desire to share their stories. How they did this, the variety of audiences their story reached, and the pride that emanated from their storytelling also forms part of the next chapter.

CHAPTER SIX: Expanding the dimensions, scope and influence of the Minyma's role: “From a small thing, it got bigger”

Introduction

Drawing upon descriptions of the activities of the Minyma and their own accounts, I have demonstrated how their worker role emerged as a way to encourage children's attendance at school. I described the positive responses the Minyma received from various agencies, the emergence of the Family Place, the resultant expansion of the worker role and how the women structured their activities to integrate them into the reality of their lives within a remote Aboriginal community. A closer examination of Warburton family life was presented through the women’s collaborative drama script about a “generic character”, a woman named Linda whose experience as a Breakfast Minyma highlighted the key challenges and enablers of family sharing that influenced the women’s moulding of their worker role.

In this final findings chapter, I outline additional dimensions of the worker role enacted by the Minyma as they expanded their repertoire of activities. First, I provide an account of the initiation, compilation and production of a storybook about School Breakfast that provides a succinct snapshot of how, through creative engagement in a self-initiated project, the Minyma reinforced their existing knowledge and learnt new skills. Central to the development of the book and the broadening of their responsibilities was the agency of the Minyma in adopting new roles as learners, mentors and educators and most importantly, role models.

Presenting as a "productive worker" both locally to Aboriginal children and their families, and more broadly to residents of other Aboriginal communities was the key role modelling activity. Their own recognition of the special value of their role in challenging the stereotypical portrayal in the popular press of remote

Aboriginal women as welfare-dependents lacking initiative and agency, motivated them to share their experiences with non-Indigenous observers in a variety of fora. Their willingness to respond to non-Indigenous audiences within these fora resulted in those mostly metropolitan audiences to bestow the role of "authentic cultural authority" upon the women.

Developing and sharing the Breakfast Story Book

The project for the initiation, compilation and production of a storybook about School Breakfast emerged as an idea in discussion between the Minyma at the end of 2009. Over a cup of tea, following the preparation, serving and clean up of school breakfast, the Minyma chatted about the morning events and their subsequent plans for the day. I listened carefully. The chatter fluctuated between Ngaanyatjarra and English, no doubt for my benefit. Lucy, one of the four 'original' grandmothers, looked in my direction and stated, as if providing me with a summarised conclusion of their lengthy conversation,

> *Tjarwina[29], we should make a little storybook that the* tjitji *(kids) can look at and learn (teach) them about our work, [a book so] that they can read about school breakfast* (Lucy, 2009, pers. comm.).

This conversation initiated an expansion of the Minyma role into developing and publishing local resources for the learning of the school children.

The production of the book emerged as a collaborative project between the older and younger women. Together they developed and implemented a process for compiling a book: first, they took a series of photos of different aspects of school breakfast; second, they identified the photos they wanted to use to tell the story; and third, using the iBook program they chose a book template, allocated the photos and captions to each page and applied colourful fonts and background colours to stimulate and interest the children. The school principal suggested the Minyma include some of the first words children need when learning to read English, and provided the Minyma with a word list from the curriculum. The

[29] The Ngaanyatjarra name I was given early in my time in Warburton due to the similarity of my name with someone who had recently passed away.

Minyma perceived the books would not only be an engaging educational resource by including names and pictures of the children and their family members but also portray their ongoing work.

The production of the Breakfast Story Book enhanced the Minyma's collaboration, composition, writing, computer and text production skills, and drew on each other's strengths. For example, those with photography and computer skills guided those aspects of the project, and those with confidence writing English supported others less skilled. Gradually, I observed the Minyma's worker role expand to encompass the production of educational resources for their children. Further, this functioned as an effective method of explaining their valued, productive worker role to children.

Positive responses to the published book provided a further source of encouragement. On arrival of the initial copies, the Minyma eagerly gathered to view it, reacting with delight at the professional, colourful glossy finished product which told a chronological story of a morning at school breakfast, with a focus on both the actions of the kids and the 'behind the scene' work of the Minyma. The book instantly became a popular resource for all who frequented the Family Place and the Minyma proudly shared it with visitors, prompting the school to fund the printing of an additional fifty copies which were distributed to the classrooms and libraries of the nine campuses of the Ngaanyatjarra Lands School (see footnote 13, page 75). The feedback the Minyma received augmented their interest in contributing to the education of the kids, and initiated a desire to share their story with a broader audience.

The book's success and its distribution throughout the Lands enhanced their confidence and provided a foundation for even greater agency and creativity in sharing their experience. The Breakfast Story Book became a central resource for the delivery of two presentations by the Minyma in 2010 – the first at the national Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC) conference in Alice Springs, and second at an official launch[30] for the book at the Telethon Institute of Child Health Research (TICHR) in Perth (see Figure 16) –

[30] The book was launched by Liz Constable, Western Australia's Minister for Education, Tourism and Women's Interests in 2010.

both to a predominantly non-Indigenous audience. Through the preparation of these presentations, the Minyma learnt how to use PowerPoint and to present in public.



Figure 16 Launch of the Breakfast Story Book with the Minyma's painting of School Breakfast.

From the instigation of the Breakfast Story Book for the kids, the Minyma's worker role organically took a direction that encompassed the development of skills to create educational resources and the acquiring of presentation skills for different audiences, including in the school classroom. These initiatives prompted greater recognition by themselves and the school of their capacity as early childhood educators.

Becoming a stimulating, engaging early childhood educator

Drawing on both their confidence gained from creating and presenting the book, and the increase in respect and trust by school staff the Minyma then developed skills as early childhood educators and role models for their children, thus further expanding the scope of their role. Ongoing catering for breakfast and other school events, as well as access to the Family Place as a venue to work (see Chapter Three) further supported this extension of their worker role into the [school-based] educational domain. Consequently, the Minyma spent prolonged hours on the school premises which enriched connections with the school and

enabled the Minyma to fulfil their desire for a greater role in their children's education.

On the basis of having built trust with school staff through delivery of the School Breakfast, the Minyma delivered a series of "classes" using resources based on their experience as workers (see Figure 17). In one session, a PowerPoint show featured photos and captions about their trip to Perth with topics such as visiting the hair salon, going to the beach, visiting the zoo and a photo of the *marlu* (kangaroo) statues which are positioned as if hopping down one of the city's main thoroughfares. The students related to the Minyma shuffled across the floor to be closer to their mothers, aunties and grandmothers during the classes. As the "lesson" unfolded, the women helped the kids to read the English captions, conversed about the slide content in Ngaanyatjarra, posed questions about the images, encouraged the children to inquire, and offered praise, encouragement, and where necessary, disciplinary measures.

The positive feedback from both the kids and school staff further cemented the Minyma's role as Aboriginal educators, and contributed to the development of school-community engagement (see Chapter Three). The delight the Minyma experienced in this role was evident to me in the elation they expressed after the "class", exclaiming at the children's interest and high engagement, laughing at some of the children's creative responses to the questions, and making plans for the next class. They did not want any children from their families to miss out on the experience. The Minyma reflected collaboratively on each presentation; they considered how they could modify the class to make improvements, such as developing writing exercises to follow their presentations. The next classroom session by the women involved them supporting the children one-on-one and the Minyma and kids helping *each other* to write.

According to the younger Breakfast Minyma, their motivation to expand their role into the classroom arose from their own educational experience which, in contrast to the present-day curriculum dominated by English language and non-Aboriginal Australian stories and culture, had incorporated and celebrated aspects of Ngaanyatjarra language and culture. Furthermore, there was little

recognition in the curriculum that nearly all children commence school with English at least a second language[31].



Figure 17 Delivering classroom presentations and supporting children to do writing exercises.

The Minyma became aware of the impact of an education dominated by mainstream resources and teaching methods on their kids, and used their skills and new position in the school to provide children with a repertoire of learning resources which incorporated content that was familiar, engaging and relevant, such as the Breakfast Story Book. Driven by the joy and positive feedback to this book, they initiated a number of new resources based on other content from their work (see below). The opportunity to develop these resources also enabled the Minyma to model a productive and valuable worker role to children, an aspiration they sought to inspire in the younger generation.

The Minyma recognised that they had the capacity to model a valued worker role to the children: first implicitly in the *doing* of their work, and then later more explicitly through direct education of the kids,

> *I like the breakfast program because it keeps me from staying home and keeps me busy. It makes life easier for me and my children. My children are happy, they see me go to work. Kids see us, what we do and learn to do the right thing* (Stephanie, 2010, pers. comm.).

[31] As noted by one of the teachers who commented on the inappropriateness of the content of standardised testing for Ngaanyatjarra children, "Standardised tests are based on a middle class mindset inappropriate for a remote Aboriginal context and add insult to injury when they throw in the crayfish industry – as if desert kids have the slightest idea what in hell a crayfish is!" (Teacher, 2011, pers. comm.).

Also, as previously outlined in Chapter Three, underpinning the Minyma's initial motivation to provide school breakfast was their desire to encourage attendance at school in order for their children to receive an education and obtain a job,

> *When our kids grow up they'll get a job somewhere, get a job and work. Must be school, or like* ngaanya *(that person), doing PACE [Parent and Community Engagement project officer]. Or they might get a job in health, health worker, [driving] Shire truck, like youth [workers] at the drop-in centre, must be [at the] show, anywhere they can work. If you want to be a health worker they gotta go to school, everyday, get learn* (Breakfast Minyma, 2012, pers. comm.).

Hence, the delivery of the resources that the Minyma created for the children had a number of benefits: they informed children about the scope of their own worker role; they encouraged and motivated children to aspire to work; they offered engaging 'lessons' enhanced by the Minyma's tacit knowledge of what is stimulating and interesting for *their* children, for example the content of the PowerPoint used in the classrooms described above; and they provided culturally rich and relevant materials to encourage engagement, including resources in Ngaanyatjarra language.

The Minyma recognised the value of incorporating local content into resources for the kids,

> *It's good for the kids, to see the photos, watch the ladies. Like they want to learn, when they grow older, they see the photos, they see the family working there, they get happy the kids,* yuwa *(yes), and when they must finish school, [they will] get a job you know, like the ladies too* (Breakfast Minyma, 2012, pers. comm.).

According to the Minyma the role of a stimulating and engaging Aboriginal educator was largely absent in the children's existing relationships in the school and they sought to fill that absence.

Non-Indigenous recognition of the impact of their involvement in the school was also important. The Mimyma saw that a spin-off from their participation in the classrooms was the opportunity to inform the non-Indigenous staff about their work and community life,

> *Yuwa* (yes)*, the teachers they like the Minymas coming into the classroom, showing the kids photos, and talking about what they are doing you know. Teachers, they like it cos they want to see the photos, it's what the ladies are doing, they want to have a look too* (Breakfast Minyma, 2012, pers. comm.).

The high level of student engagement prompted by the Minyma's involvement in the classroom was also a revelation to the teachers. According to one teacher,

> *I've never seen the class so attentive!* (Teacher, 2011, pers. comm.).

The ingress of the Minyma's worker role into the educational domain of the school fitted with how the women framed the initial activities of *Mirlirrtjarra Kuurl Mirrka Palyalpayi,* around concern for their children and families' wellbeing. The Minyma's self-initiated actions of undertaking the development of educational materials, actively sharing them in the classroom, and promoting a valued worker role demonstrates the importance the Minyma attributed to educational wellbeing, their children's future, and their connection to Ngaanyatjarra language and culture. Their uptake of an early childhood educator role also demonstrates the Minyma's growing confidence in operating within the predominantly non-Aboriginal domain (the school) and how they implemented successfully an alternative curriculum to one dominated by non-Aboriginal culture and language. To further build their capacity to work in the educational and catering domain, the Minyma sought formal learning.

“It’s important for us to learn [teach] them”: Embracing learning

In order to further enhance and add meaning to their work, and to be better able to respond to new activities, the Minyma sought opportunities to engage in formal learning. Training provided them with additional skills that were relevant and applicable to their activities. For example, in the area of culinary skills, it enabled them to prepare and serve a more diverse range of foods. Subsequently, the Minyma shared these skills with others.

The enacting of an adult learner role as a part of their activities as Breakfast Minyma commenced almost from the beginning of setting up School Breakfast. In consultation with the Minyma, the support workers and staff of a carefully selected Registered Training Organisation (RTO) in Perth modified the course content to enable the Minyma to attain a Certificate One in Kitchen Operations (see Figure 18). Consideration was given to the need for flexibility, to allow for limited levels of literacy, and to provide skills that complemented and enhanced the existing work and activities initiated by the women. The training accorded the Minyma access to a commercial kitchen and instruction by an accredited chef who, during their enrolment, visited the women in Warburton to understand the context of their work. Importantly the training exposed them to new recipes, ingredients and ideas that they replicated and applied to their work.

On a tour of the RTO campus one of the women exclaimed excitedly upon viewing the succulent herb garden,

> *Come here, come here and look at this! This is what we need at the Family Place!* (Kate, 2012, pers. comm.).

The Minyma’s enthusiasm and enjoyment of the training was evident in their careful attentiveness to the Chef’s instructions, their impeccable accuracy at replicating his demonstrations, the laughter and occasional dance that erupted from their cooking stations, and their enthusiastic responses at tasting the fare they created,

Delicious! Walykumunu! *(great!)* (Mary, 2012, pers. comm.).

Susan, who had been feeling unwell for the last few days observed,

That food was good medicine for me. I feel all better now (Susan, 2012, pers. comm.).



Figure 18 Training for and receiving Certificate One in Kitchen Operations, April 2012.

By attending training on campus in Perth, the State capital of Western Australia almost 1500 kilometres away from their desert community home, not only did the Minyma gain kitchen and cooking skills on campus, but also broader life skills prompted by the challenges of living day-to-day in a large modern city. These challenges included learning about plane travel, how to commute across the city and how to access various city attractions such as the movies and the zoo. To deal with and overcome the challenges and the *kurnta* or 'shame' (embarrassment; feelings of being less worthy; uneasy or uncomfortable (Newberry et al., 2003)) associated with conversing with mostly non-Indigenous strangers in unfamiliar contexts, the Minyma collectively supported each other.

On later trips to Perth, their confidence and competence to deal with the cultural complexities of being in a city increased. They were less inhibited when communicating with new people and during presentations to non-Indigenous audiences. They were also willing to initiate activities, and to independently undertake financial transactions,

> *It was fun. It's changed my life. Learning to cook meals, teaching how to talk to the whitefellas and enjoying (time) with the breakfast ladies, doing shopping, going out for dinner and enjoying telling stories. I was happy that I went to Perth on this trip (cited in Stringer & Beadle, 2012, pp. 158-159).*

Not only did the Minyma embrace their own learning and the adult-learner role enthusiastically, but also by further extending their role and building upon these new understandings and skills they established themselves as mentors and role models, demonstrating and sharing their skills with new recruits, Minyma in other communities, and young girls (*kungkas*) in their own community.

Over time and in response to their enhanced self-esteem, participation in formal training, increased diversity of work activities and increased confidence, mentoring and sharing of their skills became a central component of their work. As described in Chapter Four, the original senior women incorporated mentoring early on in the development of *Mirlirrtjarra Kuurl Mirrka Palyalpayi* when they showed "young girls" how to work,

> *It was good for them to have a job and we learned (taught) them how to do the* mai[32] *(food) for the kids. The grandmothers helped learn (teach) the girls how to work. We talked to them and showed them to cook* mirrka *(food)…they watch what we do and learn how to work* (Susan, 2012, pers. comm.).

The 'original' Minyma shared the skills required to provide school breakfast with their new recruits on-the-job. Existing relationships enhanced their capacity to do this effectively and efficiently (see Chapter Four). Formal training provided the Minyma with enhanced confidence and hence they became "*ninti* (clever) for learning (teaching)" each other (Breakfast Minyma, 2012, pers. comm.).

[32] '*Mai'* and '*mirrka'* both refer to non-meat foods. *Mirrka* is more common in Ngaanyatjarra. 'Mai' is from a different central desert Aboriginal language but understood by Ngaanyatjarra people and used interchangeably.

Rather than the Minyma providing formal didactic instruction to new recruits, they mentored them using role-modelling, working alongside the new workers and demonstrating how to undertake the work,

> *When a new* Minyma *comes and wants to work we say, "*Yuwa *(yes), you can help". They watch us for a while and we show them how to do things the right way like putting out the* mirrka *(food) and cleaning up after breakfast. It's good to have lots of workers to help out if they want to work* (Breakfast Minyma, 2012, pers. comm.).

Consequently, the Minyma mentored their peers using a learning model relevant to their cultural and social context, and thereby increased the number of skilled workers available to their program of activities.

News of the Minyma's activities in neighbouring remote Aboriginal communities led to requests for them to train other women in similar situations to themselves. The Breakfast Minyma visited Warakurna Community, 250 kilometres away to train local women who were commencing a breakfast program in their school. That many of the women were either related or known to each other assisted the transfer of skills thus enabling the establishment of a successful sister program. The Warburton and Warakurna women also worked together to cater at the Dust Up sports carnival (see Figure 19 and see Chapter Three).



Figure 19 Warburton and Warakurna women working together, 2010.

As described in Chapter Three, based upon their concerns about *kungkas* (girls) "walking round late at night" the Minyma initiated a range of activities that included mentoring. While the Minyma allowed the girls to decide for themselves the activities of Kungka Nights, with the Minyma's encouragement, it included cooking and associated activities. Hence, it was natural for the Minyma to step in and guide the *kungkas*,

> *We also learn [teach] them girls at Kungka Night. We can learn them about safety and we learn them how to cook. We also show them how to clean up proper way. It's important for us to learn them how to grow up safe way* (Breakfast Minyma, 2012, pers. comm.).

While the underlying purpose of Kungka Nights was to involve the girls in activities that they found meaningful, when the opportunity arose, the Minyma also mentored them in activities outside of Kungka Nights. For example, Kungka Night-aged girls (often kin to the Minyma) voluntarily and enthusiastically helped the Minyma at community events,

> *Then sometimes when the ladies are cooking, like at barbeques and things, the young girls can help us. It makes us feel happy when they come in and help the workers* (Breakfast Minyma, 2012, pers. comm.).

Another additional benefit of mentoring at Kungka Nights was that some girls were later recruited as workers.

The mentoring role of the Minyma, demonstrating and acting as role models to facilitate the learning of their daughters, nieces and granddaughters, fitted precisely with their own, and family and community expectations of this relationship. This form of intergenerational training met existing cultural modes for the learning and passing on of skills, as noted by one of the *kungkas*,

> *In the kitchen all the big ladies show the girls how to cook. The ladies teaches how to do lots of things like cooking food and cleaning, and sweeping and mopping* (Kungka, cited in Warburton Breakfast Minyma, 2012).

Extending their mentoring role from Kungka Nights, the Minyma recruited high school girls to assist with making school lunches for all the school children at the Family Place under their supervision. School lunches enabled the Minyma to further develop their training role with the girls. They recognised the benefits of demonstrating their kitchen techniques to the *kungkas*,

> *We are learning [teaching] the high school girls how to cook* mirrka *(food). It's good that they learn to cook their own food in case they have a* yamatji *(partner) so when they get married they can cook their own feed. When the girls come all the ladies help them, show them how to cook. We teach the girls how to use knives. When we go for training we come back and then learn [teach] these other little girls, yeah, it's a really lovely way to teach them* (Breakfast Minyma, 2012, pers. comm.).

According to the Minyma, the *kungkas* responded positively towards having their mothers, aunties and grandmothers as mentors and role models and it enhanced their learning,

> Yuwa *(yes), the girls they really happy you know, "Oh my grandmother and my auntie, working and learning, cook and do this and that", teaching them girls and they are getting really* ninti *(clever) you know. They are 'brainy one' when they are learning,* nintiringkula *(getting clever). This will help them for the future so they can get really* ninti *(clever), they can travel around with others for work* (Breakfast Minyma, 2012, pers. comm.).

The Minyma themselves initiated their engagement in training and the learning of new skills and, on that basis, actively set themselves up as mentors for others. Travelling extended their world view, gave them access to new audiences with whom to share their experiences, and provided new content for their educational resources. The status and confidence gained by the Minyma enabled training to become central to their worker role. Fundamental to this extension,

was the Minyma's desire to be considered a role model for a productive and valued worker in the community.

Promoting a valued and productive worker role

Drawing on their new skills, previous experience and motivation to showcase their worker role, the Minyma initiated other means to promote and encourage their work. To do this, they designed material that promoted themselves as productive workers, again further extending their skills and the scope of their role. They hoped to encourage others to follow in their footsteps. An example was a series of short documentary-style DVDs about various elements of their work that the Minyma saw as having potential to reach further afield,

> Yuwa *(yes), we want to make a little movie about the work the ladies do, not just breakfast but all the things like HACC, Kungka Nights, [cooking at the] Work Camp, you know. You know, we want stories on NITV [National Indigenous Television] from Ranges, not just all them other places. We want to tell the story of the Breakfast Minyma so other people can learn about the program, other people all over the communities. It can teach them about what we all do in Ranges. It can show this Family Place and everything* (Katherine, 2012, pers. comm.).

In addition, the Minyma designed and produced both amateur and professional posters made of collages of photos from their activities at the school which told stories about their experience (see Figures 20 and 21). The Minyma displayed them at the Family Place, on notice boards throughout the community and during presentations. Paintings were made that represented their work, such as Olive Lawson's which appeared in the Prologue. The Breakfast Story Book became the first of a series of books about their work, many which were translated into Ngaanyatjarra, including a story based on Olive Lawson's painting. And lastly, the Minyma designed and wore a uniform in order to identify themselves as workers (see Figures 13 and 14 in Chapter Four). Not only did these initiatives have an impact on women in their own community, but also influenced women further afield in other Ngaanyatjarra communities.

The development and production of these promotional materials also prompted self-reflection and contributed to building the self-esteem and confidence of the Minyma. To a certain extent, it appeared that the collaborative reflection, positive collective representation and joint celebration of their activities went some way toward enabling them to overcome some of the challenges that they faced in the work (as outlined in the previous chapter). For example, as the Minyma were choosing the photos for their posters, the room was always full of boisterous laughter and storytelling. The photos sparked memories of amusing moments that were retold in detail. Reflection on the still images also led to suggestions that the women modify certain activities. These collaborative reflections which stimulated thinking as to how the program should evolve, were a source of inspiration and encouragement, and a reminder of all the things they had achieved together.

The Minyma also recognised that these representations were a way of reminding the children who benefitted from the *Mirlirrtjarra Kuurl Mirrka Palyalpayi* activities of the positive experiences the women's work provided,

> *It's good that we have all them photos up in the Family Place so we can have a look at how it was when it started. The pictures [on the posters] is showing them ladies, you know they were working. It's to show everybody you know round the community or must be city, town, show them what we've been doing. It's also good to have those posters for the kids to look at. They can have like little memories you know, think back. They can have a look and say, "oh yes, I was doing that, putting fruits in the bowl with Weetbix, putting honey on the Weetbix, sitting down at the table good way and behave having breakfast"* (Katherine, 2012, pers. comm.).



Figure 20 The 'official' poster developed for the West Australian Health Promoting Schools Association (Inc) Conference, 2010.



Figure 21 The Breakfast Minyma making and displaying posters about their work.

Although primarily targeted at other women and young people, the Minyma also aimed their promotional material to the men in their families. Promotion of themselves as role models assisted in the evolution of a parallel men's work program. Interestingly, the male participants of the *Wati* (Men's) Bush Leadership Project were primarily sons, husbands and nephews of the Minyma.

The Minyma were proud of their achievements and recognised that their worker role was somewhat unique in the context of remote Aboriginal Australia. Hence they wanted to encourage other remote Aboriginal men and women to follow suit. The promotional material the Minyma developed played a large part in delivering this encouragement. However, the Minyma also recognised that the sustainability of their program and activities was somewhat dependent on the support of outsiders. To sustain this support, the Minyma also promoted themselves to non-Indigenous audiences.

Challenging non-Aboriginal representations of remote Aboriginal women: Assuming the role of cultural authority

The Minyma's promotion and presentation of themselves as productive workers extended throughout and beyond Warburton and the desert communities to metropolitan audiences interested in their activities. While the collective design, production and delivery of these presentations built their skills, it also extended their role to include that of 'authentic cultural authority', a role non-Aboriginal audiences largely bestowed upon them. Furthermore, on occasion, within this role, the Minyma also acted as cultural consultants to policymakers and program administrators visiting Warburton. In some instances, these relationships provided further avenues for self-promotion through media channels and related opportunities.

After their presentations in 2010 at the annual SNAICC conference held in Alice Springs and at the book launch at the TICHR, the Minyma both accepted other opportunities to promote their work to the broader Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal audiences. They presented their story using attractive PowerPoint

slides (see Figure 22) and prompt cards (see Figure 23); their DVDs were used to provide a deeper insight into the context of Warburton and the Minyma's pursuits. Their central messages were: first, the positive influence of their worker role on the wellbeing of the community; second, recognition of their value to the school and their growing role as Aboriginal educators; and third, the importance they attributed to being part of the collective of the Warburton Breakfast Minyma. The women recognised that many non-Indigenous people in their audiences had little understanding of their background, experience and aspirations. Telling their stories provided an opportunity for non-Indigenous peoples to learn more about their remote Aboriginal life.



Figure 22 Examples of PowerPoint slides used in presentations.

Yuwa, walykumumu. My name is [redacted].

I have been working with the Warburton Breakfast Minyma for three years. Our program is called Mirlirrtjarra Kuurl Mirrka Palyalpayi. This means Making Good Food at Warburton School.

We make breakfast for the school kids as well as lots of other activities. I have a tjamu, his name is [redacted]. He is [redacted] years old. And I have 2 kaparlis, they are called [redacted] and [redacted].

This is our community of Warburton. We sometimes call it Ranges. There are about 500 Ngaanyatjarra people living in Warburton.

Warburton is the biggest community in the Ngaanyatjarra Lands in Western Australia.

The Warburton School Breakfast program has been going for three years. It helps kids come to school and stay in class.

It started with four grandmothers making breakfast for the kids. Since then over 30 Minyma have worked in the program. The women make breakfast for 20 to 30 kids everyday.

We will now play you are song about Warburton which is sometimes called Mirlirrtjarra.

Yuwa, walykumumu. My name is [redacted].

I have been working for the Mirlirrtjarra Kuurl Mirrka Palyalpayi for two years. I have [redacted] children, [redacted] is [redacted] and [redacted] is [redacted] and they both go to Warburton School.

For breakfast we arrive at school one hour before school starts.

First we put on the stove, toaster and hot water.

Then the tjilku arrive at school. They line up and wash their hands.

First they have weetbix with fruit, honey and milk.

Then they rinse their bowls.

Then they have toast with spaghetti and baked beans.

After eating they have milo then go out to play.

We cut up fruits for morning tea for the little kids.

Then we wash the dishes, mop the floor and put out the rubbish.

Figure 23 Examples of prompt cards used in presentations.

The Minyma's larger public profile and confidence as public speakers attracted interest from non-Indigenous people including those working in Warburton, non-Indigenous people who visited Warburton and in interactions when the Minyma travelled to other regional centres and the State capital. On their visits to Warburton, Job Network Providers, Food Bank WA, Prime Minister and Cabinet staff, and the Department for Child Protection staff consulted with them about service provision in remote Aboriginal contexts. It was common for such agencies to struggle to make contact with remote Ngaanyatjarra people when they visited. As an established well-known informal and authentic community group, the Minyma became "key contacts".

Staff from Warburton-based services also recognised the value of the Minyma's work, and the benefits of engaging them to seek advice. For example, the clinic was overseen by non-Indigenous people and staff struggled to engage *Yarnangu* in their programs. The clinic's general practitioner (GP) liaised with the Minyma to inquire about effective ways to deliver sexual health education to teenage girls. The end result was the co-delivery of information sessions by the Minyma and the GP at Kungka Nights.

The police, child protection workers, nutritionists, mental health workers and teaching staff also sought the Minyma's advice. Of particular value was the knowledge the Minyma shared with them about community, family and culture; these service providers recognized that this information could make their programs more effective, engaging and relevant to local people. The Minyma's experience in their worker role enabled them to assist the agency staff in a variety of ways: they contributed their cultural expertise; they enhanced participation in programs through their existing relationships with 'clients'; their knowledge of programs and services in the community enabled them to share information with their families; and they drew on their enhanced esteem and confidence to contribute to program development.

The Minyma also valued this extension of their worker role, both as "cultural consultants" to staff, but at the same time benefitting by learning "what's going on" in the agencies,

> *Other peoples, they might want to know what we think about sniffing, or about kids not going to school. We like talking to them about these things 'cause they want to know what we, the Minyma, the community you know, think about it. It's good that we know what's going on. Like that time the sister came to talk to us about the school health checks. Then we can tell our families and tell other peoples about it so the kids, they can have their checks and be health[y] you know* (Breakfast Minyma, 2012, pers. comm.).

The importance the Minyma attributed to their worker role, and positive feedback, encouraged them to build capacity and engage with the non-Indigenous world and for non-Indigenous people to engage them as cultural authorities. The confidence to speak publically and to participate in conversations with agencies and services interested in *Yarnangu* perspectives on a range of issues were major outcomes. Their reflexive use of a range of modern media to further promote their role enabled the Minyma to reframe representations of remote Aboriginal women to non-Aboriginal people and to challenge the dominant perspective on Aboriginal people and work.

Conclusion

The previous chapters showed that the Minyma developed and moulded an effective worker role on terms that both suited their family life and contributed to the wellbeing of many in their community. This chapter has demonstrated how they further broadened their activities, and thereby challenged themselves and extended their skills. They instigated a variety of creative ways of strengthening their engagement with school children, and their own role as both learners and mentors of others, and as productive worker role models. A further result of these initiatives was the promotion of both their productive worker role and the profile of remote Aboriginal women in general resulting in an additional extension of their role to that of cultural authority.

These developments in the Minyma's worker role were prompted by the Minyma's desire to share their experience as valued and productive workers with local school children, teenage girls, other Ngaanyatjarra women, and men

and non-Aboriginal people. This happened in five significant ways; first through initiating local approaches to schooling; second, by being role models for a variety of Aboriginal audiences; third, by seeking opportunities to enhance their knowledge and skills through training in work skills and resource development; fourth, by mentoring others; and fifth, by finding effective ways to counter negative representations of remote Aboriginal in the popular press. To support these initiatives, the Minyma actively and creatively developed informative, engaging and encouraging resources.

Through these successful initiatives of their collective, enhanced by the positive feedback from their families, young people, other women and non-Aboriginal people, the Minyma's status, self-esteem and pride blossomed. Their collaborative approach and the mutual support of kinship connections helped to build the necessary confidence to challenge themselves, extend their worker role and take on new skills such as public speaking, and to make an authentic contribution to non-Aboriginal understandings of their lives and to what might constitute appropriate policy and program development.

Summary of Findings

Initially responding to express community concern regarding school attendance, the Warburton Breakfast Minyma initiated, designed and implemented a rich set of activities that culminated in *Mirlirrtjarra Kuurl Mirrka Palyalpayi*. This section provides an overall summary of four key dimensions foundational to meaningful work for these remote Aboriginal women; central factors operative in how the Minyma designed and organised their work, shaped their worker role and structured their work environment in order to contribute to the context of their remote family and community lives.

The first key dimension of meaningful work for the Minyma was the realisation of income security, receiving a regular wage. Secure in the knowledge of a weekly income, the wage they earned assisted in meeting ongoing costs of living and the unique demands of family sharing. Importantly, the Minyma could

provide extras for their children, a capacity which contributed to their pride as workers.

Second, the self-directedness of the Minyma's activities emerged as another factor of meaningful work. Self-directedness resulted in their work being relevant to both themselves as workers and to the "clients" for whom they fashioned the programs: children, teenage girls and the elderly. Capitalising on their previous education and training, existing skills and their familiarity with the context, the women collectively applied their extensive and in-depth local knowledge to designing and developing a range of service provision. Grounding their work in the social reality of Ngaanyatjarra people and applying their existing skills and experience enabled a style of work engagement that was highly creative and meaningful to both them and the recipients. The self-directed manner in which the Minyma shaped their workplace and worker role was characterised by high engagement, motivation and enjoyment which in turn underpinned the positive impact of their activities.

These positive impacts of the Minyma's self-directedness had a series of flow-on effects for *Mirlirrtjarra Kuurl Mirrka Palyalpayi*. First, success of the initial school breakfast program gave the Minyma the confidence to create other catering-based activities in response to their prerogatives as well as community and agency-identified needs. Second, the enhanced esteem and agency the Minyma gained as a result of wider recognition of their positive contribution to community wellbeing resulted in an expansion of their worker role beyond catering. These roles included participating in training, mentoring other Ngaanyatjarra people, being role models for local children, developing learning resources, and communicating their experience with a range of audiences.

The third central dimension underpinning meaningful work for the Minyma and its positive outcomes for both themselves and others was its basis in supportive existing relationships. Initially, this was between the 'original' senior women, and then later with the 'young girls' they recruited. The networks of the women within large extended family groups facilitated recruitment of both appropriate and supportive colleagues. The Minyma's control of the recruitment process enabled a harmonious and productive work environment and ensured working

relationships characterised by familiarity and trust. The consequent camaraderie between the women contributed to creative collaborative approaches to designing their activities about which they were often on the same 'wave-length'.

The familiarity of the Minyma with one another enhanced their experience in a number of ways. First, a self-governance process emerged whereby the women established planning and decision-making procedures that observed local seniority and cultural orientation. Second, the Minyma incorporated social and cultural elements of their day-to-day life which led to a workplace that was familiar, comfortable and enjoyable. Third, the intimate knowledge of each other's personal circumstances – sometimes characterised by serious hardships – created a mutually supportive environment where they were empathetic and understanding of barriers to work commitment. Fourth, mutual recognition of their myriad of family, social and cultural obligations as Ngaanyatjarra women prompted the Minyma to organise themselves as a pool of workers.

Engaging with and accommodating obligations and expectations associated with family sharing was central to the way the Minyma structured their workplace and worker role. As illustrated by Linda's story, engaging with family sharing had benefits for their work including supportive distribution of child and elder care with other family members and sharing of confidences with each other. However, it also came with challenges, such as family demands on their income and their time, and male partner assertions of control. Although the barriers created by family sharing practices often impacted the Minyma's capacity to work, their desire to overcome the challenges influenced and inspired the way they shaped their worker role. Specifically, they capitalised on the enablers and incorporated many family and community obligations into their work activities, for example feeding kids and pastoral care of teenage girls. Hence, they consciously merged their existing roles and responsibilities as Ngaanyatjarra women with their work; an approach which enabled meaningful work engagement in the remote Aboriginal community context and that resulted in many benefits to themselves, their families and the broader community.

Further to the dimensions of self-directedness and embeddedness in existing relationships and the social context, a fourth fundamental dimension of

meaningful work for these remote Aboriginal women was a worker role that incorporated learning, mentoring and role modelling. As collaborative learners, mentors and role models the Minyma had wide-reaching impacts on both themselves and others. Motivated by the successful application of existing skills they brought to their initial work, they sought additional opportunities for learning relevant to their activities. While facets of their training were on-the-job, formal training and subsequent certified accreditation further contributed to their self-esteem and confidence as workers. Piggy-backing off this confidence and increasing status as workers, the Minyma actively incorporated mentoring into their worker role. The Minyma mentored each other in the proficiencies required for the job, mentored remote Aboriginal women in other communities and mentored teenage girls both as a component of Kungka Nights and for the purpose of preparing and recruiting new workers to *Mirlirrtjarra Kuurl Mirrka Palyalpayi*. Emerging from both their increased self-esteem and confidence, and their widening mentoring role, the Minyma expanded their audience to share stories about their experience publically.

The women's motivation to share accounts about their work responded to a range of factors. The first was a desire to demonstrate their worker role to other women, local children and men in their families. In addition to sharing stories at home with their families, the Minyma designed and delivered classes in the Warburton School and created a range of learning resources. They distributed and promoted books and DVDs about their work. Second, the Minyma recognised that their successful and enjoyable experience as workers was counter to the existing stereotypes of remote Aboriginal people and work. Eager to share their positive experience, the Minyma did presentations at a range of conferences, and to government and non-government audiences that were accompanied by a range of articles and reports.

Associated with the four dimensions indicated above were a range of related outcomes which further made the work meaningful for these remote Aboriginal women. Primarily, a key benefit was the positive impact of their work, not only on themselves but also the benefits it had for others in their community. The self-identified suite of service provision activities initiated and directed by the Minyma enhanced the wellbeing of community members, and also the women's

own sense of self-efficacy and empowerment. The Minyma's control over directing and governing their community service work, founded upon their knowledge of wellbeing grounded in a community perspective, ensured the activities were both enjoyable for them to deliver as workers, and appealing and meaningful to the community members. Hence, overarching benefits for the Minyma were: satisfaction and enjoyment of their work; increased status as workers in the eyes of both community members and agency staff; and enhanced self-esteem and confidence within their 'new' identity as workers. The activities of the Minyma also contributed to the wellbeing of community members, specifically school children, teenage girls and elderly.

In addition to benefitting themselves and other Ngaanyatjarra people, the Minyma's activities within *Mirlirrtjarra Kuurl Mirrka Palyalpayi* had other impacts. First, it benefitted agency staff who collaborated with the women on projects and hence, gained an insight into the way the Minyma worked and their life-world. Second, as the Minyma expanded their role and participated in agency forums, the Minyma benefitted from insights into the operation of local services and programs, and the agency workers benefitted from the women's perspectives on the community. Third, the focus of the Minyma's work enhanced engagement of the school with the community and families, together influencing practices within the school.

I have outlined four key dimensions of meaningful work in this summary: first, the realisation of income security; second, self-directedness regarding the worker role and work activities; third, integration of family/community/cultural relationships and responsibilities into their worker role; and, fourth, incorporation of a learning and mentoring role into work. In the next chapter, policy and associated literature regarding income security and work engagement for remote Aboriginal Australians is examined through the Minyma's lens of these four key dimensions of meaningful work for remote Aboriginal women.

CHAPTER SEVEN: The key dimensions of meaningful work for the Minyma

Introduction

This study set out to investigate the question: *How do remote Aboriginal women enact and describe their experience of being workers*? As revealed previously in the four findings chapters, the Minyma cultivated a worker role on *their* terms. Drawing upon three central contextual programmatic supports: the auspice or backing of their own community, the ongoing assistance from a non-directive community support worker and the local implementation structures and processes of the Australian Government's Community Development Employment Program (CDEP), the Warburton Breakfast Minyma established an effective workplace, worker role and set of work activities. In doing so, they developed an informal, community service operationally congruent with the broader dimensions of their family and community life.

Within this Chapter, the application of current Australian Government policy and program guidelines linking income security with work engagement as applied to remote Aboriginal people, in particular Aboriginal women, are discussed in terms of the four dimensions of meaningful work for the Minyma revealed in the findings. These four dimensions were: first, the Minyma were assured income security through receiving a regular income at (or above) award rates with which they could support their family and in particular their children; second, the Minyma self-initiated, self-directed and self-governed the structures and processes of the workplace in response to the social context; third, the Minyma integrated their work with family and community relationships; and fourth, the Minyma integrated both learning and mentoring into their worker role congruent with their existing status in the community.

Amidst the Minyma's story of how they cultivated their worker role arose an array of other issues regarding their experience of being women in Warburton. For example, the findings revealed issues in regards to the concept of gender

such as the cultural expectations of women, gendered roles and the related challenges within these roles. These issues are worthy of a lengthier discussion, for example, exploring how the expectations of Aboriginal women are congruent with non-Aboriginal women yet without the access to resources such as childcare (Felton-Busch, Solomon, McBain, & De La Rue, 2009; Jordan, 2016b; Shahid, Finn, Bessarab, & Thompson, 2011). Due to the narrow focus of the research question and limitations regarding writing space these issues are not pursued fully in this thesis but warrant further investigation.

Additionally, the findings reveal a range of issues regarding the relationship between men and women. While, for methodological reasons described in Chapter Two, the focus of this thesis has been on the experience of women, the findings make it clear that Ngaanyatjarra men have their own struggles with the social, cultural and economic realities of Warburton life. Ongoing practices of colonisation have created tensions in men's lives which have led to both disempowerment and a complex set of pressures on their relationships with women (Blashki & Brown, 2005; McCoy, 2008). Chapter Five illustrates these issues during the women's pursuit of their worker role within the domain of their relationships: husbands' jealousy of women working, men exerting power over women and family violence provoked by the women's desire to exercise agency on their own terms thus challenging taken-for-granted expectations of both some men and possibly some women in the community. Whilst I acknowledge these issues are central to the lives of both the remote Aboriginal men and women in this account and invite further investigation and commentary, in the following discussion of the findings I focus on dimensions of the workplace experience that support the engagement of remote Aboriginal women and the resultant policy implications.

Three critical contextual programmatic supports

As indicated above, three critical programmatic supports contextualised the Minyma's activities: the endorsement or auspice of the community; the women's relationship with a non-directive community support worker (latterly, the researcher); and the implementation structures and processes of the Federal

Government's CDEP program. Together, these factors created a supportive context in which the Minyma could initiate their program of work - *Mirlirrtjarra Kuurl Mirrka Palyalpayi* - in a way that was meaningful to the context of their lives.

Auspice for the program of work was established when members of the Ngaanyatjarra Council, the local governing body of the Ngaanyatjarra Lands, initiated the school breakfast program. A meeting of Council Board members nominated, endorsed and supported the senior Ngaanyatjarra women who commenced school breakfast, the 'original' Breakfast Minyma. The suite of activities which emerged within *Mirlirrtjarra Kuurl Mirrka Palyalpayi* was therefore established as an initiative of local Aboriginal people, in contrast with the majority of programs in remote contexts. Local auspice, which was enhanced by the Council's administration and execution of the CDEP program, was a crucial enabler to the self-directedness of the Minyma's ongoing work.

The second critical contextual programmatic support was the non-directive, developmental approach (see page 33) used by the initial community support worker nominated by the Ngaanyatjarra Council to assist the women to develop, plan and implement a school breakfast program. This enabled the Minyma to initiate activities through their own terms and to tailor activities to the needs of the community.

The third programmatic support was the Federal Government's CDEP policy that enabled the Minyma to be employed under the CDEP scheme. The structure of the CDEP offered income security through a base-level income support payment with the eligibility to earn extra "top-up" wages for extra hours worked. Crucially, the CDEP provided great flexibility regarding both the focus of the Minyma's work and hours of engagement, thus assisting the women to shape and structure work in a meaningful way.

Other key features of the CDEP policy framework supported the Minyma's endeavours. First, it enabled the long-established Warburton Aboriginal community-controlled administration to determine and define productive work activities that would benefit their community. The local administration of the

CDEP program had intimate knowledge of the people in the community and their circumstances and the Minyma quickly received support for their proposed work programme. Second, CDEP grants permitted the community administration to purchase uniforms and equipment. Together, these programmatic supports enabled the Minyma to establish manageable, effective and enjoyable activities that provided both income security and meaningful work.

The key dimensions of meaningful work revealed by the Minyma: income security, self-directedness, integration with family and community life and accommodative of both learning and mentoring, together provide a helpful framework derived directly from remote Aboriginal women's experience with which to review current Australian Government policy regarding their income security and work engagement.

The current policy context

Following the gradual demise and subsequent shutdown of CDEP in 2015, Federal Government policy regarding income security and work engagement in remote Aboriginal communities underwent a profound structural and discursive shift. The current "work engagement" policy that succeeded CDEP and its successor, the Remote Communities Jobs Program, was the Community Development Program (CDP), one component of the Indigenous Economic Development Strategy 2011 - 2018 that focused on linking "job seekers" (rather than the “unemployed”) to the "real economy" by ensuring "job search requirements are enforced" (Australian Government, 2011, p. 16). Described by the Minister for Indigenous Affairs, this aimed to provide "better opportunities for job seekers", "ensure job seekers are active and making a positive contribution to their community", and to support "job seekers to become job-ready" (Australian Government, 2015b). Policy implementation is premised upon participant compliance with provisions, such as, "job seekers with activity requirements are expected to do up to 25 hours per week of work-like activities that benefit their community” (Australian Government, 2018a); “run over five days to support school attendance” (Australian Government, 2015a); and “helping them to understand what they need to do to continue receiving income support” (Australian Government, 2018a). Within the discussion below, this

policy framework and its implementation in remote contexts are examined using the key dimensions of meaningful work engagement identified by the Minyma in this study.

Income security within remote Aboriginal work engagement policy and programs

Earning a wage and thereby accessing a secure income was a central dimension of meaningful work for the Minyma. By structuring their work hours to cover not only the basic payment from CDEP but also extra 'top-up' hours, the Minyma received a wage that enabled them to support themselves and their families. The flexibility of the CDEP implementation guidelines was central to enabling this arrangement. Thus, according to Jordan, the CDEP accounted for "local circumstances" of remote Aboriginal people (Jordan & Altman, 2016, p. 7). Kral observes that the basic income provided by CDEP plus 'top up' hours provided "a decent weekly wage relative to the local economy" (Kral, 2016, p. 23).

Achieving income security through receipt of regular pay was fundamental to the Minyma's agency and confidence as workers. The payment of a regular wage that enabled them to contribute consistently to the financial wellbeing of their families was described by the Minyma as a source of pride. The Minyma specifically noted that compared to being without work, they now had extra money for their kids at the weekend and spending money for when they went on their work trips to Perth.

A direct correlation between the hours worked and their weekly income facilitated the Minyma's agency regarding financial control over their level of income. Therefore, inbuilt within the flexible CDEP policy guidelines, participants experienced an immediate link between effort expended and level of income thus mimicking incentives for work engagement within the formal labour market. Hence, the Minyma's experience demonstrates that the monetary arrangements offered within the policy framework of CDEP responded effectively to a context in which there is limited access to a formal labour market.

Furthermore, flexibility within the policy framework enabled the Minyma to achieve income security despite the complex social and familial arrangements that in remote communities can commonly restrict continuous and consistent participation in work. Jordan (2016b) refers to this as the common practice for remote Aboriginal people to participate in "intermittent working" which takes into account a number of barriers which prevent commitment to work, such as described by Sanders (2016a),

> *Many people in remote communities have caring responsibilities, cultural obligations or complex barriers that mean that full-time work is not a realistic option* (p. 28).

Income security within current policy

In contrast with CDEP, participants in the CDP do not receive wages dependent upon effort expended but receive a social security allowance, Newstart, for working the required hours and for their adherence to a strict reporting process dictated by the job seeker compliance framework (Australian Government, 2018b). Participants who cannot meet the requirements of this framework are financially penalised through a "no show, no pay" system administered externally. For remote Aboriginal people the vast geographic distance from CDP administrative centres as well as the complexity of reporting requirements are barriers to fulfilling the obligations of the system, thus substantially jeopardising their income security.

The compliance framework of CDP requires participants to work for twenty-five hours a week (Monday to Friday) to receive their social security "allowance". In contrast, under CDEP policy participants worked sixteen hours a week (the hours undertaken at any time within a week) at or above the legislated minimum "wage" pro rata for the same amount of pay (Sanders, 2016a). Thus, "work for the dole" hours have been substantially increased within CDP but "there has been no corresponding increase in pay so participants' hourly income has been substantially reduced" (Jordan, 2016a, p. 1). According to one report, the hourly rate was reduced from $18.67 to $11.20 per hour, a drop in hourly pay to below the minimum wage (Campbell, Browne, & Grudnuff, 2018; Fair Work Commission, 2018; Jobs Australia, 2016a). As well as being considered "seriously

inequitable" (Sanders, 2016a), the reduced rate of pay is a disincentive for people to work.

For the Minyma, achievable hours per week work requirements, a reasonable hourly rate of pay, flexibility regarding attendance at work and the associated income security together provided a significant incentive that contributed to their motivation to engage in work. The reduced hourly rate under CDP acted as a disincentive for the Minyma to engage in work and as a result the *Mirlirrtjarra Kuurl Mirrka Palyalpayi* became unsustainable.

Another significant factor contributing to the income security of the Minyma under CDEP was the local administration of the program including employment records, financial transactions and payment of wages by the Warburton Community Office (WCO). Local access to the CDEP administration made it logistically and administratively efficient for the participants: the Minyma walked across the road to pick up their pay and any discussion regarding their remuneration occurred with the relevant staff on the spot. The local administration of their wages provided the Minyma with both knowledge, control and hence agency to manage their income.

The importance of local administration in the support of remote Aboriginal people's livelihoods and its role in income security is also highlighted by the experience of the Kuninjku community in Arnhem Land (Altman & Klein, 2017). The local administration of CDEP by the Bawinanga Aboriginal Corporation (BAC) responded to community priorities and motivations to work. Local control provided advocacy and support that enabled people to work and ensured income security in the absence of a formal labour market. Equipped with the implicit knowledge of residents' circumstances, BAC acknowledged people's desires to work "on country" and the importance of participation in ceremonial activity (Altman & Klein, 2017). Furthermore, BAC recognised that "people at outstations had to work to survive", and were hence paid unconditionally with the understanding that they would be participating in at least eighteen hours a week "on outstation village maintenance" (Altman & Klein, 2017, p. 8). Hence, similar to the experience of the Warburton Breakfast Minyma, CDEP enabled people in the Kuninjku community to gain income security while participating in a form of

labour that was suitable and meaningful to the context, and contributed to their own community's development.

The familiarity of the WCO staff with the Minyma, their work, and their complex and seemingly chaotic personal and family circumstances, supported the flexibility the Minyma required for their work while ensuring their financial security. Advocates suggest that localised administration of CDEP enabled "local control and local knowledge of people's circumstances" (cited in Kral, 2016, p. 19). Fowkes observes the local organisational control of CDEP enabled "provider discretion to tailor obligations" to the special needs and circumstances of each community (Fowkes, 2016b, p. 16).

In contrast to CDEP's local community governance arrangements, CDP is administered in regional centres and state capital cities far removed from the locus of participant activities. Thus, local knowledge and familiar relationships such as those that created meaningful work and income security for both the Minyma and the Kuninjku are absent. This external administration of CDP is largely focused upon monitoring of participant compliance.

CDP policy dictates that participants must report regularly to external administrators far removed from the community context. Such arrangements have created difficulties for remote Aboriginal participants: limited access to the necessary information technology to liaise with administrators (Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Empowered Communities, 2017), lengthy call waiting times that are often beyond two hours (Conifer, 2017) and an expectation of people to communicate in written and spoken English, that is their second or sometimes third language (Kral, 2017).

The combined impact of these multiple barriers that work against compliance leads to a greater likelihood of people on CDP becoming disengaged and disenchanted with participation in work (Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Empowered Communities, 2017). As found in this study, there are many social and cultural factors which present barriers to remote Aboriginal people committing to twenty-five hours of work per week. These factors and the complex reporting requirements of CDP have resulted in frequent cases of non-

compliance and a very high number of penalties (Fowkes, 2016b; Wahlquist, 2017). Out of a total of approximately 35,000 jobseekers on CDP, a report in July 2017 stated,

> *Since the CDP began, 299,055 penalties have been applied to CDP participants. While we don't have updated information about how many individuals have been penalised, we know that, in 2015/16, 20,409 individual CDP participants were penalised, 90% of whom were Indigenous* (cited in Fowkes, 2017a, p. 2).

The damage caused by the distant administration of CDP to the income security of remote Aboriginal people places local providers such as the Ngaanyatjarra Council, the regional representative body of the Ngaanyatjarra people, under persistent pressure to penalise their own constituents found to be non-compliant by these distant administrators. If a jobseeker is not complying, and fails to "provide a 'valid excuse'" (Fowkes, 2017a, p. 3), the provider will not get paid service fees unless they impose a penalty, a practice enforced by "random checks" on providers (Campbell et al., 2018, p. 17). Removing local control is described by Altman as a political approach of surveillance, where individuals' income security is now conditional on a set of circumstances, including "income testing or activity testing" administrated and controlled by external bureaucracy (Altman, 2016, p. 6).

A prominent and regular criticism of CDP has been its detrimental effect on income security and contribution to poverty in many remote Aboriginal contexts (Brooks, 2016; Campbell et al., 2018; Davidson, 2016; Fowkes, 2017b; Jordan, 2016a; Kral, 2017). Contributing to this impoverishment is that unlike CDEP, CDP offers no safety net,

> *His [Scullion's] proposal was fundamentally different from CDEP in that CDEP was a wages-based system that did not involve a dilution of social security rights. Individuals in CDEP who were unable to meet the requirements for a full wages payment could still fall back on a social security safety net* (Jordan & Fowkes, 2016, p. 30).

Hence a significant impact of the structural arrangements of CDP is that the income security of the Ngaanyatjarra Lands is being severely put at risk (Brennan, 2018; Brooks, 2016; Kral, 2017)[33]. This is indicated by the increasing rental arrears and decrease in food sales and store profits in remote communities (Davidson, 2016; Fowkes, 2017a). There has also been an overall decrease in individual, family and community incomes that is reportedly causing a great deal of "stress and hardship", having detrimental impacts on children's welfare (Ngurratjuta/Pmara Ntjarra Aboriginal Corporation, 2017), harming people's health, and "leading to a loss of social cohesion" (Brennan, 2018).

Specific to Warburton, Ngaanyatjarra Council Chairman, Harris, reports,

> *We now find ourselves in a situation where desert people cannot feed their families. People don't know what they can do to fix this problem. They feel frustrated and helpless* (Ngaanyatjarra Council Aboriginal Corporation, 2017, p. ii).

The cessation of CDEP was predicted to "profoundly weaken the economic certainty and social fabric" of the Ngaanyatjarra Lands, which already had the lowest per capita income in Australia (Kral et al., 2009). Consequently its demise was met with "protestations by the Ngaanyatjarra Council and its member communities" fearing that welfare dependency would in fact become *more* entrenched (Kral et al., 2009).

Since this prediction by Kral, McLean and Murray (2009) (these authors had had extensive experience supporting local employment initiatives in Warburton), there is little doubt that the cessation of CDEP did not have the intended consequence of people becoming involved in the "real economy". Rather, in lieu of its cessation, workforce programs have been privatised, eligibility for unemployment benefits restricted and the Community Development Advisor at the Warburton Community Office has described the introduction of CDP as a

[33] Demonstrating the community's existing economic disadvantage are median personal weekly income statistics for those above 15 years of age which for Aboriginal people in Warburton was $245 in 2011 and $286 in 2016, which is 42 and 46 per cent of the national average, respectively (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2011b, 2016b).

"catastrophic debacle" which has worsened poverty (Aikman, 2016; Joyner, 2018). In response to the destruction, disempowerment and poverty it has caused, an investigation into CDP is underway by the Australian Human Rights Commission on behalf of the Ngaanyatjarraku Shire (which encompasses Warburton) based on claims that the program is "racist and illegal" (Aikman, 2016; Jordan, 2016a).

Self-directedness as a factor in remote Aboriginal work engagement

Collectively, the Minyma self-initiated, self-directed and self-governed the structures and processes of their work in a way that suited the day-to-day lives of themselves, their families and the community. Following the initial brief from the Ngaanyatjarra Council to address community concerns around school attendance, the Minyma designed their work activities around community needs informed by their local knowledge. Hence a suite of activities emerged that together led to both meaningful work for the Minyma and programs that Warburton community members recognised as pragmatic and relevant.

With the assistance of the three contextual programmatic supports outlined above, the Minyma established work structures and processes that fostered self-directed, collective engagement in the planning and implementation of their activities. Along with the flexible policy guidelines of CDEP, a crucial programmatic support for self-directedness was the non-directive, developmental practice of the community support workers. As outlined in the methodology, the non-directive practice of the support workers facilitated collective engagement, reflective discussion, strategic thinking, shared decision-making and also enabled and brokered relationships with key stakeholders. Hence, a non-directive developmental style of support actively encourages self-directedness, in marked contrast to the highly directive managerial style adopted by many project workers, program administrators and government workers in remote Aboriginal contexts. Such attempts to coax, direct or force program participants to comply with predetermined agendas is in striking contrast with

the non-directive style of developmental community practice which stands as a significant enabler of self-directedness for remote Aboriginal people.

The Minyma's self-directed planning of their activities resulted in the development of workplace structures and processes that included routines and rules for delivery of the school breakfast, organisational rosters and inventories for required resources and equipment. They were also able to establish their worker roles and activities in ways congruent with their values and ways of being that directed their lives as Ngaanyatjarra women. As described in Chapter Four, a mutual form of self-governance emerged from the Minyma's self-initiation and self-directedness: a leadership structure and collective decision-making processes. The scope of their role as workers enabled them to respect and meet family and community responsibilities and a key to this flexibility was the structure of a pool of workers. Further, their own physical space, the Family Place, enhanced the Minyma's capacity and agency for a self-directed approach to work. These elements provided the Minyma with flexibility to weave their existing family responsibilities into their worker role, for example care for children and the elderly and at their Kungka Nights program during which the Minyma imparted cultural knowledge.

The self-directedness of their activities within *Mirlirrtjarra Kuurl Mirrka Palyalpayi* resulted in a number of other flow-on effects. First, their workplace might be characterised as an enthusiastic collective of co-workers who shared a clear set of purposes, principles and values. Enhanced solidarity, determination, motivation and commitment to their work also resulted in a strong worker identity of which the women were proud.

A second effect of self-directedness and collective solidarity was the relative speed at which the *Mirlirrtjarra Kuurl Mirrka Palyalpayi* activities unfolded. Following their prompt initiation, the Minyma's activities had an immediate impact, in contrast to many government programs commonly criticised for the prolonged time lag often evident in implementation (Aird & Staples, 2012, p. 15).

A third effect of their self-directedness was enhanced esteem, confidence and agency in their worker role. This was somewhat of a "chicken and egg syndrome"

whereby the self-direction and positive experience with work encouraged new activities and a broadening of their worker role, further enhancing their esteem, agency and pride.

The fourth effect of their self-directedness was the increased confidence of the Minyma that led them to undertake roles previously held by non-Indigenous staff. The Minyma's presence within the school in these roles encouraged other Aboriginal family members to attend school activities and to visit their children's classrooms. This fostered interactions between the teachers, school administration and family members, developing relationships that previously had been largely absent.

Self-directedness is a long-recognised community development principle: the need for programs and services to emerge from community concerns and be driven locally if social indicators are to be improved (W. W. Biddle & Biddle, 1965; Hunt, 2013; Kelly & Sewell, 1988; Stanley, 2013; Twelvetrees, 1982). Stanley suggests local people require a voice in policy and program development,

> *…the way that these services are implemented should be done in collaboration with those who will be affected, the people themselves. Otherwise they simply do not work* (Stanley, 2013, p. 206).

The necessity of incorporating local collaboration and self-directedness into policy linking income security with work engagement is also a recommendation from the Final Report of the 1991 Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody,

> *…the preparation of CDEP work plans (community development plans) should be a participative process involving all members of the community* (cited in Blakeman, 2016, pp. 223-224).

The fundamental importance of self-directed work engagement in productive channels identified locally and its capacity to contribute to the development of communities in a meaningful way is highlighted in a case study which draws on

the experience of a Kuninjku community in Arnhem Land (Altman & Klein, 2017), previously referred to above. Altman and Klein (2017) describe how CDEP policy enabled remote communities to respond to the "highly restricted labour market" and develop "new forms of commodity production" grounding their work in structures, processes and priorities that aligned with their community lives (Altman & Klein, 2017, p. 7). Additionally, the flexibility provided by CDEP enabled Kuninjku to "control work routines and define productive labour" (Altman & Klein, 2017, p. 7). Hence, like the Warburton Breakfast Minyma, local control enabled Kuninjku people to pursue a series of self-directed "productive activities *in their own way* beyond the rigid forms of mainstream employment" and in alignment with Kuninjku aspirations (Altman & Klein, 2017, p. 8, my emphasis) with the central benefit of enhancing self-management and community development.

The nomenclature of the current policy linking income security and work engagement (CDP) implies a community development program based upon self-directedness. It also implies some similarity to the "Community Development" Employment Program (CDEP) that actually encouraged local, collaborative and self-directed development. However, as indicated in the previous section, work engagement within CDP requires undertaking activities predetermined by non-local CDP administrators and activities officers and adherence to a punitive compliance framework. Nevertheless, according to the current Minister for Indigenous Affairs,

> *It's my intention to develop this programme [CDP] to ensure activities reflect what communities want* (Australian Government, 2015b).

Six months following the statement, in a speech to the Senate, the Minister claimed that opportunities within CDP did reflect community aspirations,

> *There is now a broader, more flexible range of CDP activities that people can participate in to meet their activity requirement [which are] useful to the community* (Commonwealth of Australia, 2015a).

Contrary to these observations by the Minister, many observers suggest CDP policy does not foster self-directed programs by remote Aboriginal Australians. In contrast to the Minyma's self-directed workplace, worker role and work activities, it has been noted that CDP policy guidelines create barriers to local involvement and autonomy in the self-directedness of work activities (Fowkes, 2016b; Jordan & Altman, 2016; Kral, 2016; Morrison, 2016). Further, evidence in a broad range of reports, media sources, academic literature and submissions to a Senate Inquiry indicate a failure of CDP to support self-directedness (Altman & Klein, 2017; Kral, 2017; Paterson, 2016; Sanders, 2017).

A range of reports indicate that local control and local auspice of work and work-type activities have significantly diminished under CDP (Altman & Klein, 2017; Fowkes, 2016a; Jordan & Altman, 2016; Kral, 2017; Ngaanyatjarra Council Aboriginal Corporation, 2017). Instead, the definition of what constitutes "work" and "work activities" are under Government control (Jobs Australia, 2016a, p. 5). Rather than guiding their own means of working which was such a successful approach for the Warburton Breakfast Minyma, CDP participants are "told to turn up somewhere everyday…and undertake activities that someone else has decided on" (Sanders, 2016a, p. 28). Compounding the inevitable disincentive to work under these conditions is the narrow definition of "work" under CDP which, rather than being influenced by local knowledge and social and cultural framing, is externally defined and reflects primarily non-Indigenous ideals and notions associated with "work".

The definition of work and work activities was used as a key point of contention by critics recommending the abolishment of CDEP. In debate about the replacement of CDEP, opponents criticised it for constructing "'pretend jobs' that had no clear career path and perpetuating meaningless "make work" activities" (Jordan, 2016b, p. 126). Additionally, political opponents criticised CDEP for furthering "social welfare" and dependency (cited in Blakeman, 2016, p. 231), and that alternatively, remote Aboriginal people needed to be orientated into "more favorable" "real employment" (Jordan, 2016b, p. 125).

What "real employment" is and how it should be expressed in remote contexts geographically isolated from the operations of "the market" is somewhat

ambiguous. Altman notes that "real employment" is “a rarely defined term” (Altman, 2013). Jordan also notes that, “The exact features of ‘real jobs’ [in remote Aboriginal contexts] have never been clearly defined” (Jordan, 2016b). The application of the “realness” label to CDP would appear to stem from an assumption that anything outside orthodox economic development is “unreal” and hence “other” notions of economic development are to be rejected. This assumption is implicit in the recommendations of an Australian Government commissioned report (Commonwealth of Australia, 2014) which played a significant part in the shaping of CDP policy. Under a subheading *Empowering people in remote communities*, Recommendation 22.4 of The Forrest Review suggests that valid work engagement is only to be had as an employee in a commercial enterprise,

> *Activities should reflect real workplace pressures and requirements through an intermediate labour market or preferably a commercial operation* (Commonwealth of Australia, 2014, p. 53).

Altman observes that the likely interpretation of the “real economy” is “mainstream economic development like mining and tourism” (Altman, 2013). Such an interpretation of real work as employment in a commercial enterprise appears to ignore the logistical distance of remote Aboriginal communities from commercial opportunities, the scarcity of viable commercial enterprises in locations with tiny populations and the potential of alternative “real work” in the form of the types of self-initiated and self-directed activities of *Mirlirrtjarra Kuurl Mirrka Palyalpayi*.

Channeling remote Aboriginal people into work “opportunities” in the so-called “real economy” strangles potential for the types of creativity demonstrated by the Warburton Breakfast Minyma and the Kuninjku that was possible within the flexible framework of CDEP. The CDEP policy guidelines enabled the Minyma to self-direct the establishment of a workplace, worker role and work activities that responded to local social and cultural priorities and aspirations, some of which were different to orthodox economic understandings of 'rational market actors'. The flexibility of CDEP was important as it enabled the Minyma to participate in work despite the limited labour market in Warburton and allowed a set of

relevant and effective programs to develop that contributed to the wellbeing of the community. In contrast, the narrow definition of work within CDP now inhibits locally developed programs like *Mirlirrtjarra Kuurl Mirrka* Palyalpayi from emerging.

A restricted definition of work now applies under CDP in Warburton. Kral (2016) notes that in Warburton, jobs for men under CDP policy are defined as activities in the plant repairs and maintenance workshop (the “Men’s Workshop”) and for women, the arts and craft centre (“Women’s Arts and Crafts room”) (p. 23). In response to these limited options one young man who had “a good work history and leadership qualities” stated, “not enough job[s]…only one job . . . but CDEP was every kind of job” (Kral, 2016, p. 23). Other observers critique CDP guidelines regarding the definition of work as only activities linked to the "real" economy and formal labour markets. According to Klein, “The concept of [CDP] work [for remote communities] is far too limited” (Klein, 2017, p. 1).

Meaningfulness and motivation are descriptors that rarely appear in the reports on remote Aboriginal people's engagement in CDP. Limitations regarding the definition of work within CDP mean that in comparison to a more flexible policy such as CDEP, potential positive impacts of work engagement on the creation of wellbeing of the community remain unrealised. Because the nature of the work on offer in the Men’s and Women’s sheds in Warburton lacks meaning, Kral (2016) suggests that people [in Warburton] are “compelled to do activities that appear to have no purpose, just to get the hours [of required participation]” (p. 23). Consequently, there is a feeling that remote Aboriginal people are “doing activities for activities sake” (Miller, cited in Official Committee Hansard, 2017a, p. 6).

Consultations by the Empowered Communities program in the Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara region (a grouping of twenty-five communities in the Central Australian region which includes Warburton) highlighted that one of the specific concerns regarding CDP was its inability to provide opportunities for people to work in a way that contributes to community (Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Empowered Communities, 2017). Consequently, despite policy claims that CDP is offering “meaningful activities” (Fowkes, 2016b,

p. 18) “while helping their community” (Australian Government, 2015b), the experience of some participants, is that they are “meaningless”,

> *When CW asked PP why she has not been meeting her participation requirements, she expressed that her activities were to cook for herself at the TAFE [Technical and Further Education], and this activity felt and appeared meaningless to her* (Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Empowered Communities, 2017, p. 12).

In contrast to the meaningless experienced by some CDP participants, the Minyma self-identified as workers with a clear sense of meaning and purpose; that of strengthening the wellbeing of their community. According to Kral (2016), this experience was not unique to the Minyma, “those on CDEP *saw themselves as workers*” (p. 23, my emphasis). The Minyma’s self-identification as workers appears more commensurate with creating an innovative orientation to work or being "job-ready" than performing meaningless tasks dictated by a distant CDP administrator.

Not only do participants under CDP not experience themselves as purposeful workers, but also in contrast to CDEP, their official status as being ‘employed’ in the labour market changed to the status of being ‘unemployed’. According to Fowkes (2016c), former CDEP recipients, despite participating in the same or similar activities under CDP, immediately went from being classified as ‘employed’ under CDEP as defined by the International Labour Organisation (Jordan & Altman, 2016, p. 2), to being “considered unemployed or not in the labour force” (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2016c). The implications of this change of status are placing remote Aboriginal people at risk in a number of ways: at risk of being stripped of income security, subject to a punitive compliance regime, required to make frequent endless futile long distance telephone calls to Centrelink and subject to the seemingly arbitrary power of CDP administrators. The culminating experience of these demands is such that in contrast to opportunities to work created by CDEP, participants experience a significant absence of morale and are made to feel like second class citizens.

Implicit within CDP discourse is that in the absence of a formal labour market people don't *work*, but rather, they *participate* in work for the dole activities (Australian Government, 2016, p. 14). In contrast to the pride felt by the Minyma as a consequence of *working* within the frameworks of CDEP, the language used for CDP participants has eliminated any sense of vision or feeling that they are engaged in meaningful work. According to Kral (2016, 2017), this shift in policy discourse has seen workplace pride "evaporating" and consequently, existing "working behaviours" created under CDEP have been "undermined" and "unravelled" through the introduction of CDP policies.

Like the Kuninjku, the Minyma worked within a framework that enabled them to apply creativity and ingenuity to the development of their activities. This allowed them to follow their intuition and initiative to respond to what they saw would benefit their community and to deliver their work in a way that was both possible and empowering within the context of their remote community lives. This reflects the policy vision of the CDEP which was "explicitly designed to empower communities" (Jobs Australia, 2016a, p. 5), provide remote Aboriginal people with "a sense of community control" (Kral, 2017, p. 4) and facilitate "a degree of community self-management" (Jordan & Altman, 2016, p. 3).

In contrast, the intent of CDP policy to define work and work-type activities in line with non-Indigenous notions of work undermines the self-directedness, flexibility, creativity and the resultant sense of agency that was possible for remote Aboriginal people such as the Minyma and the Kuninjku. CDP policy requires providers to "ensure that participants engage in 'work-ready' activities, not activities that would replace real jobs" (Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Empowered Communities, 2017, p. 12). The Minyma's work *did* mirror "actual jobs" in the burgeoning community service sector but did so drawing collaboratively on local kinship structures and on self-directed terms that suited their lives. Importantly, the Minyma's jobs were informed and shaped by their local knowledge and experience, which made the activities and consequent services they offered not only meaningful to themselves as workers, but also their families and the broader community.

In addition to determining the focus of their activities, the Minyma also designed and developed an agreed way of working that suited their circumstances. Within the context of the three programmatic supports outlined earlier, the Minyma applied their own creativity and pragmatism to the structuring of their workplace (ways of working), their worker role and work activities. The flexibility of CDEP guidelines enabled the women to develop a pool of workers to get the job done and to accommodate their family and community obligations. The pool enabled the women to vary their hours of commitment to work from week to week with immediate back-fill for their positions available.

Rather than recognising the potential of remote Aboriginal people for self-initiative and self-directedness regarding work and ways to make it meaningful to the context of their lives, CDP policy is focused solely upon behaviour change and channelling people towards adopting "work-type" behaviours aligned with labour market structures, assumptions and values regarding work. This objective is evidenced by the actual wording of the 2015 Social Security Legislation Amendment (Community Development Programme) Bill 2015 (Commonwealth of Australia, 2015b),

> *Current incentives within the income support system need to be stronger for those in remote communities to drive the behavioural changes needed to get people active, off welfare and into work* (p. 1).

Indicative of the Government's behaviour change agenda is the requirement that CDP participants work five hours a day, "across a five day, Monday to Friday week" (Australian National Audit Office, 2017, p. 27). This requirement removes the flexibility of CDEP that contributed to the Minyma's capacity to structure a way of working that suited their circumstances. Jordan and Altman (2016) note that critiques of CDEP failed to acknowledge that, like in the case of the Minyma, the flexibility accorded by CDEP encouraged "productive activity by matching work routines to local needs" (p. 7). In contrast, underlying CDP's hourly requirement is a behaviour change agenda based on a belief that,

> *Four hours, four days a week was not quite seen as involving the 'discipline' of a 'standard working day' in which people 'return after lunch'*[34] (Sanders, 2016a, p. 26).

Incorporated into the behavioural change agenda of CDP is the intent to steer remote Aboriginal people towards ways of working that align with the assumptions, values and approaches used in Australia's market economy despite remote contexts being "far removed from the market-place" (Miller, 1985, p. 35). Within the policy discourse, as expressed by the responsible Minister, this is referred to as the desire to create "real employment and business opportunities", to "support job seekers to become job-ready", to "promote work-like behaviour", and to "discipline" people, through creating the "right incentives" (Australian Government, 2015b; Commonwealth of Australia, 2015a).

McRae-Williams (2008) investigated the meaning and value of work for remote Aboriginal people in Ngukurr in South East Arnhem Land during 2006 and 2007. Within her ethnographic approach study, her primary method was participant observation alongside semi-formal interviews with 23 core informants. Her overall research question was: *What is the meaning of work in a remote Aboriginal community and how is it valued?* She found that for Aboriginal people in Ngukurr, work is "Shaped by unique historical, social and cultural phenomena" and hence, they "have a work ideology that is distinct from its western counterpart" (McRae-Williams, 2008, p. iii). Despite these differences, her research found that governments expect remote Aboriginal people to internalise a Western work ideology, abide by a "work ethic" and pursue a "career" (McRae-Williams, 2008, p. 253). Rather than the current "one size fits all" approach of Government policy, this study supports McRae-William's findings and suggests that greater flexibility is required to enable the local definition of work to provide remote Aboriginal people with choice regarding meaningful work engagement.

[34] Phrases "drawn from an informal transcript of the minister's [for Indigenous Affairs] actual speech as delivered at the Remote Jobs and Communities Program (RJCP) business meeting" (Sanders, 2016a, p. 32).

In contrast to the narrow definition of "work" as defined by the policy framework of CDP, the Minyma integrated choices and values into the structures and processes of their work activities, worker role and workplace. The women's approach and the programmatic support available to them reflects a central component of Sen's Capability Approach: that social opportunities need to be determined by human agency, rather than people being "forced" into "a particular life" (Drèze & Sen, 2002, p. 6) by institutions including markets and governments (Sen, 1999). These issues are taken up in recent theoretical debates that focus on the impact of neoliberal ideologies that promote visions of social life determined by economic imperatives driven by market-based social processes in which,

> *…the techniques and values of accountancy have become a central organisational principle in the government and management of human conduct – and the new kinds of relationships, habits and practices this is creating* (Denzin & Giardina, 2018, p. 3).

An important aspect of the Minyma's self-directedness was the establishment of a set of governance structures and processes by which they managed their work. These structures, that were set within the framework of their existing social and cultural norms, enabled the Minyma to plan and make decisions about their work in ways which were familiar and effective. The self-governing protocols also contributed to the positive outcomes of their work. Self-governance is recognised as an essential component of successful development and poverty reduction programs,

> *There is a dominant theoretical supposition in the governance and development literature that good governance at the local level is imperative to poverty reduction and development more generally* (cited in Altman, 2008, p. 181).

The Minyma's relationships as Ngaanyatjarra women within their existing kinship networks were central to their self-governance and approaches to leadership, management and communication. Fundamental to their governing framework was the nomination of a senior woman as the "boss" of the work. As

described by Hunt, the Minyma accommodated, "strong norms about consensus, negotiation and consultation" within their existing relational world (Hunt, 2008, p. 22). These considerations reflected the importance Indigenous people attribute to "age and knowledge" in defining leadership positions (Ivory, 2008, p. 237).

The community development values of self-directedness and self-determination explicit within CDEP policy facilitated approaches to planning and decision-making guided by local Aboriginal principles and practices recognising that remote Aboriginal Australians "have different norms, values and priorities" (Altman & Klein, 2017, p. 9). Hence, the policy design of CDEP acknowledged different norms and values associated with the *ways of working* of remote Aboriginal people.

According to Dodson (2008), these shared values reflect an "underlying cultural system within which their governance is embedded" (p. xviii). Similarly, the Indigenous Governance Project, comparative research into the "cross-cultural meanings and expressions of governance" (D. Smith & Hunt, 2008, p. 7), proposes that "culture matters for governance"(D. Smith & Hunt, 2008, p. 12),

> *By culture we mean the shared values, meanings, ways of understanding the world, and beliefs of a group that inform their everyday practice. It underpins the way Indigenous people work together in their communities and organisations, and it flows through their governance arrangements in persistent and innovative ways* (D. Smith & Hunt, 2008, p. 12).

Local control of CDEP through the region's governing body, the Ngaanyatjarra Council, also supported the Minyma's self-governance. Within *Mirlirrtjarra Kuurl Mirrka Palyalpayi*, the administrative demands occurred within a network of existing relationships and shared understanding of Ngaanyatjarra approaches to planning and decision-making. This contributed to the confidence of the Minyma asserting self-governance of their project.

In contrast, within CDP policy there is no option of self-governance. While the Ngaanyatjarra Council has maintained its "provider" status in Warburton under CDP, policy guidelines effectively prevent the Council from supporting local work initiatives and local self-governance practices in ways that are conducive with community needs and aspirations. Jordan (2016a) and Kral (2017) observe that local control is eliminated: a defining feature of the CDP program is its "top-down" policy making enforced through bureaucratic control of the nature of work and "external control of money via Centrelink" (Kral, 2017, p. 4). Further, according to Jordan, "the message from PM&C [Prime Minister and Cabinet] is that [the "providers"] are the delivery arm of government, with limited authority to tailor the program for local circumstances" (Jordan, 2016a, p. 3).

The detrimental impact of government control as a result of CDP in the Ngaanyatjarra Lands is evident in a statement from Harris, the Chairman of the Ngaanyatjarra Council,

> *….we don't want CDP. We didn't want it when it started but we thought it would be like CDEP because it has the same letters. That was wrong to use those letters because it tricked us. We feel that government stole our self-respect when CDEP was taken away. We want the government to let us manage our own communities. We can't do this unless we get rid of CDP and go back to the CDEP. We can do a good job* (Ngaanyatjarra Council Aboriginal Corporation, 2017, p. ii).

The intent of CDP severely restricts opportunities for local Aboriginal organisations to contribute to policy design, despite their possessing the deep insight into local contexts and circumstances that is essential for effective policy implementation. According to Kral (2016), CDP policy disempowers remote Aboriginal community governance structures that are essential to economic and social development,

> *…the very authority the government is seeking remote communities to exert over their membership to improve mainstream outcomes is being relentlessly undermined by the government simultaneously removing*

> *resources and a sense of control, and consigning governance to mute irrelevance* (p. 23).

CDP has abolished the structures and processes that supported local self-directedness. Disregarding of the essential community development principle of local analysis of "the problem and developing agreed solutions" (Hunt, 2013, p. 33), CDP has shifted the discourse "from emphasising community development to prioritising integration into market capitalism" (Altman & Klein, 2017, p. 8). Consequently, rather than providing a set of policy tools that recognise the unique circumstances, existing skills, motivations and aspirations of people to initiate and direct work, the top-down legislated work engagement of CDP has narrowed the framing of work in Aboriginal communities to one which emphasises the role of "job-seekers" to aspire to participate in "mainstream capitalist ventures" (Altman, 2016, p. 7). In effect, the huge benefits that *Mirlirrtjarra Kuurl Mirrka Palyalpayi* brought to the welfare of the school, teenage girls and elderly in the Ngaanyatjarra Lands have been lost.

In the next section, a further key dimension of meaningful work for the Minyma, integrating work with family and community life, is used as a frame to examine the Community Development Program, the current policy linking income security with work engagement in remote Aboriginal communities.

Family connection and mutual support as factors in remote Aboriginal work engagement

Another key dimension that gave meaning to the Minyma in their work was its embeddedness in their existing network of family and community relationships and their associated roles and responsibilities. The Minyma integrated family and community life intentionally to make their work meaningful and enjoyable. This section examines the support available to the Minyma to participate in work in ways that suited the social reality of their lives and contrasts this with what happens under current policy.

Synchronising their worker role with existing kinship networks and aligning their activities with their prevailing obligations and responsibilities enabled the Minyma to work in a way that was not only meaningful to them but also to their families and their life in the community. The grounding of the Minyma's activities in existing relationships resulted in shared aspirations, interests, skills and motivations. The mirroring of Ngaanyatjarra relationality in the Minyma's workplace resulted in a range of related outcomes that made both a positive contribution the women's experience of work, as well as a positive impact on those around them.

The significant benefits of integrating family and community life into their work were social support, positive feedback, enhanced self-esteem and confidence. The workplace provided a safe and convivial social space alongside like-minded family members, a sense of belongingness and solidarity, a shared mutual identity as workers ("Warburton Breakfast Minyma") and the mutual support to collectively identify and resolve shared issues. The Minyma achieved this legitimacy by collaboratively establishing a work culture that included and utilised "their distinctive knowledges and perspectives, and their own sources of identity, resilience and aspiration" (McRae-Williams, 2014, p. 57).

Current policy regarding integration of family and community life into work

The flexibility of CDEP policy guidelines provided the opportunity for the Breakfast Minyma to design their work within the existing frameworks of family and community life. The accommodating and broad definition of work within CDEP policy presented openings for innovative approaches to enabling community and economic development in locations remote from a labour market. As noted by Morrison, CDEP encouraged communities to initiate "socially useful tasks" (Morrison, 2016, p. 9) within systems that made sense to remote Aboriginal people.

"Socially useful tasks" initiated by the Minyma were providing school breakfast, catering for school events, cooking healthy meals for the elderly and providing evening activities for teenage girls. McRae-Williams' (2016b) findings in her

study of remote economic participation parallel those of the Minyma: the choice to engage in employment hinged upon their work being "oriented towards social goals of local benefit", and local aspirations "for belonging to family, community and country" (McRae-Williams, 2016b, p. 3). However, with the cessation of CDEP, opportunities for remote Aboriginal people to self-initiate activities integrated with family and community life are compromised.

Under CDP, participants must undertake activities in spaces prescribed by external administrators and nowhere beyond. In Warburton, these spaces are the previously described "Men's Workshop" and "Women's Arts and Crafts room" (Kral, 2016, p. 23). Hence, under CDP, remote participants do not have the opportunity to creatively respond to the circumstances of their family and community lives. Consequently, unlike the nature of the work self-directed by the Minyma,

> *CDP activities do not dovetail with community needs. There is no coordination or future planning or articulation with well-established community systems* (Kral, 2017, p. 6).

The central community system within the lives of remote Aboriginal people is kinship (Brooks, 2016; Ellis, 2016; Liberman, 1982; Myers, 1991; Tonkinson, 2007). How kinship permeates contemporary Ngaanyatjarra existence is described by Brooks (2016),

> *…people had to be seen as relatives…If you came across people who were not relatives it was a problem. Anyone who wasn't a relative was a stranger and possibly sub-human, certainly a threat. This was implicit in the fact that you had no template for how to relate to them* (pp. 6-7).

The Minyma organised themselves in the workplace on the basis of kinship connection.

Other observers highlight the importance of kinship and family in the successful engagement of remote Aboriginal people in work. In relation to Aboriginal

people in the remote Anmatjere region of the Northern Territory, Davies and Maru (2010) note that it is,

> *Relationships, rather than government-sponsored labour market programs, [which] are providing the entrée for Aboriginal people into workplace culture* (p. 25).

Davies' and Maru's (2010) findings echo the experience of the Minyma. They note that people in their study spoke of the importance "of being 'picked' for jobs by family members, and of working through family members to learn new skills" (p. 25).

Kennedy's (2013) findings are also congruent with the experience of the Minyma. An informant in Kennedy's study set in the remote Western Desert community of Ntaria suggested that compared to work environments in [the closest town of] Alice Springs "where she would feel unsafe and uncomfortable" (p. 183), her job in the community office made her feel more comfortable,

> *…real happy where I am, workin' with my own family you know, with my own side* (Thatha, in Kennedy, 2013, p. 183).

The benefits of working with family were also supported by another informant in Kennedy's (2013) research who notes,

> *...it makes it easier workin' with family you know…makes it more comfortable…makes you do things as well* (Thumbu, in Kennedy, 2013, p. 183).

These positive accounts of feeling "happy", "comfortable" and motivated when working with family are indicative of a desire to work collectively and not alone and resonate with the Minyma's experience. Nevertheless, in contrast with CDEP policy, rather than viewing the relatedness of remote Aboriginal lives as a strength that could be capitalised upon for engagement in meaningful work, Hunt suggests that within the federal government's policy discourse,

relationships are seen as a "barrier to development, and will have to change" (Hunt, 2008, p. 18).

Despite remote Aboriginal people maintaining their own kinship systems and culture, the structure, management and guidelines of the CDP disregard the "well-established community systems" created by inter-family networks in remote communities and of their local knowledge within (Kral, 2016, p. 23). Instead, the CDP policy channels clients towards participating in a market economy within a "traditional human capital framework" based on the assumption of the individual as a rational economic unit (McRae-Williams, 2016b, p. 3). The administration of CDP focuses solely on isolated "individuals" who develop job plans and a tailored strategy to compete successfully in a "labour market" which in Warburton is non-existent as it is situated between two regional centres one thousand kilometres in each direction.

Thus CDP results in what Altman and Klein (2017) describe as "irreconcilable tensions between Indigenous *relational* and neo-liberal ways of thinking and being" (p. 9, my emphasis). Exacerbating this "tension" is an assumption that "individualism and economic development are intrinsically related to one another" (McRae-Williams, 2014, p. 59). Further perpetuating these views are assumptions that group-orientated collective communities, cultures and nations are devalued on the grounds that they are less "entrepreneurial" than individualist ones (cited in McRae-Williams, 2014, p. 59). The tenuous basis of this claim is evident through activities of the Minyma who were highly entrepreneurial even though embedded relationally in their work via kinship networks and community.

Bond and Howgego (2016) observe that within Western contexts, people are increasingly defined by "work", and participation in work is a "source of identity" which "permeates our sense of self" (p. 30). However, prior to the rise of paid employment in the nineteenth century, "…our sense of belonging was more likely to be determined by our family, religion or the place we lived" (Bond & Howgego, 2016, p. 30). People identified with the *groups* to which they belonged. Increasingly, work "identity" is couched in an expectation that work and family are segregated within the context of Western lives and that schooling and work

is an opportunity to express "individualism" (Green, 1983, p. 41). Consequently, according to Davies and Maru (2010) the intentions of federal policies to channel people into "formal labour markets" and the "real economy" are influenced by current non-Indigenous notions of work, work ethics and workplace cultures which,

> *…includes norms for how one should behave in the workplace, where interactions are based on roles rather than social relationships. Such assumptions are also built into government policy, given that it is established to facilitate* transactions among strangers (p. 25, my emphasis).

In aspiring to "facilitate [work] transactions among strangers" or isolated individuals, the policy tools of CDP not only ignore the reality of the inherent strengths but also the advantages of kinship and relatedness in remote Aboriginal contexts. As in the case of the Minyma, these strong networks can contribute and enhance engagement and participation in meaningful work. The ignoring or even ignorance of the strength of kinship-based and group-orientated systems that underpinned *Mirlirrtjarra Kuurl Mirrka Palyalpayi* is likely to be a major factor contributing to the high disengagement from CDP activities.

In response to negative employment trends for Indigenous peoples between 2006 and 2011, Hunter and Gray (2017) note that public and employer policy could benefit from taking into account "flexible work arrangement that allow employees to meet their work and their family/community responsibilities" as well as "providing family support" in the workplace (p. 2). The Minyma's experience demonstrates that if underpinned by the contextual programmatic supports of local auspice, flexible policy and non-directive community support staff, entrepreneurial activities can be successfully integrated into the relational world of remote Aboriginal people.

As described above, CDEP provided the opportunity for communities to enact local means of governance. Echoing the practice of the Minyma, Hunt (2008) points out that building governance structures on "kinship and clan

arrangements" contribute to sustainability of improved outcomes for Indigenous communities (p. 19). Additionally she notes that effective local governance systems provide "processes and systems" within which communities can successfully partner with government and "drive their own social and economic development" (p. 19).

In contrast to this, the CDP policy structures and guidelines do not allow for remote Aboriginal people to enact their social and cultural hierarchy within their domain of work. A Senate Inquiry into CDP demonstrates the shame that has been created by the inappropriateness of activities people are pressured into undertaking. In Blackstone, a Ngaanyatjarra community approximately 200 kilometres west of Warburton, it is reported that ignorance of family and community status relationships resulted in community tensions,

> *…a very proud Aboriginal law man…had been asked to pick up rubbish at the front of his house. There was so much shame that it actually created tension in the community* (Insp. Willers, cited in Official Committee Hansard, 2017b, p. 2).

Entrenched with the purpose of inculcating behavioural change, the policy tools of CDP ignore the inherent strengths of the relational world and existing systems in remote Aboriginal communities. Instead, driven by labour market discourse, CDP purports to place *individuals* into "real jobs" in order to "engage with the mainstream market capitalist economy in the same way" as other Australians, an approach that "resonates with assimilation policies of the 1960s" (Altman, 2018, p. 3). Asserting that remote Aboriginal people should follow an assumed pathway to employment that reflects mainstream cultural assumptions, CDP policies contrast with the flexible and innovative policies of CDEP that responded to the "unique" circumstances of remote community life (Morrison, 2016, p. 8). As demonstrated by the Minyma's relational collective, CDEP provided flexible support that enabled communities to work in ways that incorporated the existing realities of remote social contexts.

Learning and mentoring as factors in remote Aboriginal work engagement

Another key dimension of meaningful work for the Minyma was the incorporation of learning and mentoring within the scope of their worker role. The Minyma purposefully extended their worker role to incorporate not only ways to further their own knowledge and mastery of skills, but also to enhance those of others. Beyond becoming active learners, they became mentors, early childhood educators, role models and cultural authorities representing remote Aboriginal women.

Responding to the community needs evident within their family and community lives, the Minyma self-initiated themselves as adult learners to enhance their own skills to serve the community and to pass on these skills to others. Essentially, each new facet of their worker role flowed from the success of existing elements of their work. Both old and new activities and the related skills complemented each other and iteratively built their competence. On the basis of the expanding scope of their role and skill set, the Minyma became role models, educators, trainers and mentors.

As role models the Minyma demonstrated being "productive workers" to family and community members, both inadvertently by their presence in a range of community and school spaces and more directly through promotion using resources such as uniforms and videos. Motivated by the niche the Minyma created for themselves at the school, they developed relevant educational resources and delivered classes as informal early childhood educators. Inspired by their desire to enhance their capacity, the Minyma trained and learnt from each other "on-the-job", as well as attending formal training in Perth and achieving their Certificate One in Kitchen Operations. On the basis of their increasing skill set and confidence, the Minyma mentored both each other and others, adopting familiar approaches that reflected unique Ngaanyatjarra ways of learning and teaching. Bolstered by their increased self-esteem and pride in their worker role, the Minyma presented accounts of their experience as remote

workers to non-Aboriginal audiences and hence acted as a gateway to knowledge about life for remote women.

The Minyma incorporated learning and skill development into their worker role in a manner congruent with the experiential learning that largely shaped their own lives growing up in a Ngaatyatjarra-speaking, culturally distinct, remote Australian Aboriginal community. Contextualised by the three programmatic supports, local auspice, a non-directive community support worker and the policy and program framework of CDEP, the Minyma's self-directed learning journey was relevant, flexible and meaningful to the collaborative nature of their worker role and made best use of the skill-set required for *Mirlirrtjarra Kuurl Mirrka Palyalpayi*.

The Minyma's self-directed worker role enabled them to embrace learning and mentoring grounded in approaches they knew were meaningful to themselves and those they "*learned*": those they taught or mentored; for example, demonstrating their skills to the high school girls in the making of school lunches, and sharing their skills with new recruits. Tjitayi[35] and Osbourne (2014) note that "Anangu have a very different sense of expressing the essence of meaningful learning" (p. 24). Reflective of their group-orientated approach to work, the Minyma undertook their learning and mentoring tasks collaboratively, learning new skills as a group, being mentors for each other, being mentors for others such as the Kungkas, and undertaking a role as childhood educators in the school classrooms. The sharing of knowledge crossed generations, whereby the older women passed on skills and knowledge to the younger women, teenagers and children.

Minutjukur and Osborne (2014) and Tjitayi and Osborne (2014) note that support of family-based intergenerational learning environments is essential to

[35]The authors referred to in this section, Tjitayi and Minutjukur are Anangu educators from the remote communities of the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (APY) Lands. Like *Yarnangu* (see footnote 4, page 8), *Anangu* translates to Aboriginal people who reside in or are from the APY region. The APY Lands are 'next door' to the Ngaanyatjarra communities, "separated" by a state-imposed boundary between Western and South Australia. Many Ngaanyatjarra people understand the primary languages of the APY communities, and vice versa, and the Minyma regularly visit their relatives residing in the APY Lands. Hence I suggest that given the similar characteristics of APY and Ngaanyatjarra communities, the experiences of these authors regarding learning and education are transferable to the Warburton context.

enhance the confidence of learners and students in remote Aboriginal contexts. Based on extensive experience in the domain of remote Aboriginal education, Minutjukur and Osborne (2014) provide examples "beyond the school fence" that have incorporated learning styles endemic to the local context and hence, had a positive impact on remote Aboriginal people's experience of work,

> *…there are many good examples in* Anangu *communities where traditional values, learning styles and social relationships are valued and, in fact, underpin the strength of the work, rather than being identified as an obstacle, or barrier to "success", as is often seen in education contexts. Art centres, for example, draw on intergenerational knowledge and relationships to provide an employment and economic focus in communities right across remote Australia. In this context, ecological knowledge and knowledge of the* tjukurpa *(traditional dreaming stories/ law) is an asset rather than an antiquated hindrance* (pp. 19-20).

Grounded in their collaborative and family-based approach, the Minyma structured learning and mentoring environments which were characterised by mutual support, good-humour, confidence and shared encouragement. Further fostering these elements of their worker role was the flexible and informal nature by which the training emerged, primarily taking place in the context of work activities and in the women's own space, the Family Place. As formal opportunities for training emerged, trips to Perth, the state capital, opened up additional opportunities such as learning to cook in a commercial kitchen.

McRae-Williams (2014) notes that in contrast to the Minyma's collaborative and intergenerational experience, training models in remote contexts commonly perpetuate the "dominant frame" whereby training is shaped by values such as individualism, "democratic authority structures and institutionalised education and training" (p. 57). She suggests that when this approach is taken as "neutral or 'normal'", ways of learning that resonate with local realities, values and aspirations, such as the Minyma's, are "rendered invisible", "illegitimate" and "often described in terms of abnormality" (McRae-Williams, 2014, p. 58). However, in remote Aboriginal communities, adult education and training

(Vocational Education and Training [VET]) developed and implemented within a discourse of mainstream economic development continue to be met predominantly with low levels of engagement and completion (Guenther, Bat, et al., 2017).

The self-directedness of their worker role enabled the Minyma to aspire to and participate in modes of learning that privileged their "ontology, epistemology and axiology" (McRae-Williams, 2014, p. 58). This contrasts with a *traditional human capital framework* which*,*

> *…assumes certain motivations for engaging in training and employment…while these may hold for some people in more urban areas, the framework fails to recognise the motivations and aspirations of local ATSI [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander] people in very remote Australia* (McRae-Williams, 2016b, p. 3).

Key elements that enhanced the Minyma's positive experience of being learners were learning collaboratively, with the support and encouragement of kin, and self-directing their learning journey. Features identified in a study on the success of adult education and training in various remote locations echo the experience of the Minyma. Guenther and colleagues (2017) suggest key success factors include: the role played by family and community support, the importance of relationships with other students, and the extent of community ownership of the training.

The education of young people and their future employment prospects were crucial motivators to the Minyma actively learning, mentoring and presenting themselves as role models of a productive worker**.** Encouraging their children to attend school, contributing to their children's classroom learning and mentoring young women in the culinary skills that they themselves had acquired contrasts with representations of remote Aboriginal people lacking aspiration for both themselves and their family members,

> *Non-Aboriginal people feel that Aboriginal people don't value learning or employment and need to change their whole thinking to be successful* (McRae-Williams, 2016a, p. 1).

The Minyma's increased participation in the school and the greater insight gained into their children's education and school experience more broadly encouraged them to extend their worker role in a way that enabled them to also contribute to their children's learning. The Minyma recognised the absence of cultural content in the school classrooms which, combined with their desire to role model themselves as productive workers, encouraged them to develop learning resources relevant to the context of the children's lives. The Minyma's increasing presence in the school at open days, theme days, in the classrooms and each morning at breakfast prompted the engagement of other community and family members in school activities. These developments had flow-on effects for strengthening their children's learning, for example, by enhancing teachers' knowledge of community life. The way the Minyma shaped their learning and mentoring roles reflects *Anangu* educator Tjitayi's (2014) description of "family-based and historical approaches to teaching and learning", which she suggests should be a focus of school-based learning in remote Aboriginal communities in order to "engage families and intergenerational knowledge" and "build the confidence of children" (p. 24).

Currently, the prevalence of non-Aboriginal educators in remote Aboriginal schools creates what Delpit (1993) describes as a "culture of power" (cited in Tjitayi & Osborne, 2014, p. 29). Children are expected to participate in classrooms shaped by curricula and social context informed by norms of the dominant culture which contributes to alienation and hence disengagement of Aboriginal children who fail to have a shared understanding of the associated rules, codes and social norms (Minutjukur & Osborne, 2014; Tjitayi & Osborne, 2014). The Minyma's presence and participation in the school provided what Tjitayi and Osborne (2014) refer to as "close Anangu voices" or "close family voices" which enhanced the children's confidence to participate in formal schooling,

> *"Family voices" are important in that they locate children, affirm identity and allow them to see that they are not alone, but there is a network of support to draw on for advocacy, protection and encouragement, building confidence to try new things and take risks* (p. 26).

Recognising the struggles the Warburton children experienced learning in a system that rarely acknowledged the social and cultural context of their family lives influenced the Minyma to orientate their role as early childhood educators in a way that acknowledged the "deeply embedded axioms, epistemologies, ontologies and cosmologies" shared with their children (Tjitayi & Osborne, 2014, p. 26). Reflective of the Minyma's motivation to integrate Ngaanyatjarra social and cultural experiences into their children's learning, for example role modelling a productive worker role, Nakata (2007) notes Indigenous approaches to education are "almost diametrically opposed in their essence to the values and neoliberal assumptions that underpin Western education" (cited in, Osborne, 2014, p. 8). Hence, rarely do the resources employed by the teachers include or acknowledge Ngaanyatjarra knowledge, language and cultural experience.

During the period of this study, and prior to the involvement of the Minyma, there was a dearth of bilingual resources and community input in the school. This prompted the Minyma's involvement and resulted in strong engagement by the children during the Minyma's "classes", interest in the bilingual resources developed by the women and increased community participation in the school. The high engagement of the Minyma in the classroom supports the suggestion by Minutjukur and Osborne (2014) that the "recognition and retention of long-held values [of *Anangu*] might *benefit* the broader experience of education, rather than be considered as a barrier or constraint to 'success'" (p. 15, my emphasis). Thus, in the context of remote Aboriginal community life, the Minyma saw themselves as legitimate educators of their children and extended their workplace role to include their existing family and community elder/educator role into the schooling of their children within which they were both embraced and affirmed. This positive experience provided the impetus to further extend their learning and mentoring activities.

The Minyma's intergenerational approach to mentoring and "teaching" in the classrooms reflects the dominant cultural learning mode in an environment where respect for those older than you is foundational to learning (Yunupingu, 1999). The Minyma mentored each other and young girls in ways that honoured their existing relationships, recognised cultural seniority and incorporated local modes of communication and knowledge transfer. In addition to their work in the classrooms, the Minyma mentored and worked alongside other local women and Kungkas, demonstrating and role-modelling the skills that they had acquired in the course of their work: grandmothers training the "young girls" to do school breakfast; the Minyma teaching the Kungkas how to cook. Sharing knowledge in a way that was meaningful to both themselves and the recipients resulted in high engagement and increased and ongoing participation in the various elements of their work and activities. This way of mentoring contrasts with mainstream practices commonly associated with skill development in remote Aboriginal contexts, as described above. However, as noted by McRae-Williams (2014), local learning and mentoring styles are often disavowed by educational institutions and government funded training programs who give preference to formal institutionalised learning models which, as indicated previously above, are often not effective in remote Aboriginal contexts.

The learning and mentoring component of the Minyma's worker role also extended to non-Aboriginal agency staff and program managers visiting Warburton, a dimension that gave their activities even more meaning and further rewards and incentives. The Minyma's experience of being a "cultural authority" to agencies and services and non-Aboriginal staff demonstrates the importance of local input into the design and delivery of services in remote communities**.** For example, the Minyma facilitated the delivery of sexual health information to teenage girls by combining the expertise of the clinic staff with their local expert knowledge of the most effective ways of engaging the girls. Their participation in Warburton Interagency Meetings (WIAM) provided valuable local perspectives and their contract to prepare and deliver food for HACC clients resulted in a broader identification of other elderly in need of the service. However, the "current 'orthodoxy'" (Aird & Staples, 2012, p. 7) of service delivery in remote Aboriginal communities is commonly one whereby the non-

Indigenous staff come in from outside and apply knowledge and skills that render local knowledge irrelevant.

The Minyma recognised the minimal understanding held by many non-Indigenous Australians regarding remote Aboriginal lives and of the conditions that can lead to effective engagement in programs and work in these locations. Bolstered by their enhanced pride and self-esteem, the women presented to a range of audiences in order to dispel existing stereotypes and enhance awareness of the barriers and enablers for remote Aboriginal women to work. Their acknowledged role as genuine cultural authorities was both rewarding for them and enlightening for their audiences.

Current policy regarding importance of ongoing relevant and meaningful learning and mentoring

The Minyma framed a meaningful worker role with an inbuilt learning and mentoring component tailored to build capacity relevant to the context. Their experience sits in stark contrast to discourse that suggests remote Aboriginal people qualify solely for the role of employees available for hire in a formal labour market.

Within the context of CDEP policy with its flexible arrangements for local implementation and building on existing skills, the Minyma steered their learning experience in a direction that responded to the needs of their community, related work and their aspirations as workers. This achieved two key outcomes: first, the Minyma were highly engaged in their “training” because of its relevance to their work with many completing their formal certification; second, the “learning” and its consequent application to their work meaningfully provided the Minyma with a practical set of applicable skills as well as the self-esteem and confidence to work. This outcome far exceeded the achievement of so-called “work ready” traits associated with formal, institutionalised 'employment' training programs. The Minyma's new skills, acquired in a way that was conducive to their approach to learning and learning needs, encouraged some of them to successfully transition into employment in the Western

Australia Department for Child Protection and Family Support, the Home and Community Care program and the Warburton School.

These outcomes demonstrate not only the effectiveness but also the importance of self-directed, practical experiential learning opportunities within existing programs and services as the best way of capturing participation and engagement. In the well-recognised absence of a formal labour market, CDEP enabled remote Aboriginal people like the Minyma to mould and pursue employment and learning opportunities that responded to community ideas for "socially useful tasks" and contributed to community development (Altman, 2016; Morrison, 2016). The policy tools of CDEP were further supported by the two other contextual programmatic supports of local auspice and a non-directive developmental community support worker.

By contrast, CDP activities are commonly dependent on external and often short-term project officers who assume that they are working with a very low skill base. According to Brooks (2017), trainers with a very minimal understanding of the remote community and the lives of the participants often also bring their own, and the Government's notions of what is relevant training for the "participants", typically thinking that they can "solve the problem".
Brooks also provides an example of a conversation with an externally recruited CDP Activities Supervisor on a visit to a Ngaanyatjarra community in 2017. Referring to her approach to engaging participants in training and work, the CDP Activities Officer reported,

> *The people here didn't get it at all when I first got here, but I kept on explaining it, using all sorts of different ways, and now they've pretty much got it* (Brooks, 2017, pers. comm.).

Hence, as previously noted on page 215, CDP activities are not established in ways that "dovetail with community needs" (Kral, 2017, p. 6). Tragically, the rich history of the skill development and strengths that emerged within CDEP in communities such as Warburton has been disregarded and, through CDP, replaced with programs that force people into work and activities which are absent of meaning and do not resonate with Ngaanyatjarra values and

aspirations. Consequently, according to Kral (2017), CDP is "undermining the skill base and incentive to work that was built up under CDEP" (p. 5).

The Minyma's self-direction of their training enabled them to participate in ways that were both conducive to their family sharing responsibilities and provided them with a range of relevant learning opportunities. The flexibility accorded by CDEP enhanced by the context of non-directive developmental support meant the Minyma planned the timing, place and duration of their training that accommodated their responsibilities. For example, scheduling it so they could leave the care of their children to other family members. Hence, the training often occurred "on-the-job".

Travel to the city to enhance training opportunities also fostered the acquisition of new life skills such as navigating city life and communicating with non-Indigenous people in mainstream contexts, such as, undertaking commercial transactions in shops and interacting with stakeholders associated with their work. The extended training led to a trusting relationship with the Perth-based instructor.

In contrast, Kral (2017) offers an example of "training" associated with CDP,

> *In one Ngaanyatjarra community trainers travelled from a TAFE [Technical and Further Education] in NSW [New South Wales] for three days - insufficient time to get an understanding of anything. They enrolled six CDP participants in a literacy program. Only one person in the community undertook the literacy training which involved filling in workbooks and returning them to NSW where they were marked and returned along with a new workbook. No face-to-face teaching took place, instead the untrained CDP Supervisor was expected to oversee the literacy tuition (i.e. completion of workbooks)* (p. 6).

CDP provides limited opportunities for relevant and community directed training. Rather, "government policy has increasingly tied individual literacy competence to employment outcomes" and workplace skills (Kral, 2017, p. 5). Hence, in the Ngaanyatjarra Lands "training" to meet the government's Key

Performance Indicators is offered in the form of short-term adult literacy courses. As noted by Kral (2017) this takes "no account of the social, cultural and political factors which also contribute to literacy acquisition and use" (p. 6). In stark contrast, the Minyma's experience demonstrates that through meaningful and relevant work, literacy skills can emerge through making books, reading recipes, developing PowerPoint displays, working with kids in the classroom and maintaining personal portfolios for their Certificate One in Kitchen Operations.

In contrast to the dynamic, varied and ever-changing nature of the Minyma's self-directed work, the activities offered through CDP are relatively stagnant and the associated concept of work is both limited and unresponsive to community initiatives and interests (Klein, 2017; Kral, 2017; Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Empowered Communities, 2017). Rather than participating in work enriched with opportunities to acquire skills and undertake training framed in ways that had meaning, purpose and application to Ngaanyatjarra aspirations and goals, CDP policy equates work with "activities" and "reporting" (Kral, 2016, p. 23). The limitations of CDP in terms of its training component is summarised by Klein (2017),

> *Proponents of CDP claim that training is given to CDP participants… most of the training is superfluous to not only the limited number of labour market opportunities that may emerge, but also to the aspirations and interests of participants* (p. 2).

Undermining income security, work engagement, remote Indigenous community capacity and human dignity

Meaningful work for the Warburton Breakfast Minyma had four key dimensions: income security, self-directedness, family connectedness and encompassing a learning/mentor role. The Minyma orientated their work and worker role in a way that built upon the skills they brought with them, existing relationships, and shared interests and concerns. Hence, they integrated their experience as workers into the lived reality of their remote community lives, incorporating

respect for the local context, Ngaanyatjarra systems of knowledge and wellbeing needs of their families.

The meaningful work and worker role the Minyma moulded for themselves provided a strong collective identity which boosted their self-esteem and strengthened their agency. The resultant confidence and pride enabled the Minyma to extend their worker role, and adopt culturally aligned learning and mentoring roles which further enhanced their dignity and status. Additionally, these flow on effects from participating in meaningful work created the opportunity for cross-cultural dialogue. Thus, the way the Minyma directed their role contributed to reconciling cultural differences in a context where such exchanges and interaction have been less that optimal.

Underpinning the unique, creative and meaningful approach to work undertaken by the Warburton Breakfast Minyma was a flexible policy framework regarding income security and work engagement tailored to the context of remote Aboriginal community life. However, recent CDP policy has furthered the geographical, cultural and institutional distance between program administrators and participants. The policy has restricted the choice and opportunities regarding meaningful work engagement, introduced a punitive compliance regime placing income security at high risk, drastically reduced the hourly employment rate and the status of participants compared to the employed population and crippled the creative and entrepreneurial spirit of those the policy is meant to serve. Not only has this move already stripped some remote Aboriginal people of income security but also restricted many participants from participation in recognisably useful and meaningful work. The consequences of this policy are appalling: mass alienation from systems which control Aboriginal Australian lives, gross impoverishment, disengagement, humiliation and despair.

CHAPTER EIGHT: Strengthening remote work engagement policy by affirming local Indigenous knowledge

This study investigated remote Aboriginal women's work in a suite of self-directed community service activities and revealed four key dimensions of meaningful work. It demonstrated the potential of these women as both workers and entrepreneurs and their capacity to work meaningfully to support both themselves and their communities while maintaining the integrity of their complex social and cultural lives.

There is a striking contrast between the enthusiastic engagement of the Minyma in work to serve their community and the often pejorative representation of these communities by politicians and the popular press (Curtin & Norman, 2015; Karvelas, 2005; The Australian, 2006). Thus the long list of well intentioned but failed government programs cited by advocates for the closure of remote Aboriginal communities is not predominantly, as stated, testimony to the qualities of Aboriginal people. More likely it has been and remains the inadequacy of government policies. As this study demonstrates, strategies and practices consonant with the social and cultural realities of Aboriginal community life provide the basis for more productive and effective processes that build on the strengths, capacities and skills of local people.

In this chapter, I suggest how social security policy linking income security with work engagement can be reoriented based upon the four dimensions of meaningful work revealed by the Minyma. In doing this, I note recent recognition of the failure of the Closing the Gap policy to contribute to the social development of remote Aboriginal Australians and how both responding to the call of the *Uluru Statement of the Heart* and greater incorporation of local Indigenous knowledge into work engagement policy offers a more positive way forward.

Policy implications: Meaningful work and enhanced social development

To accomplish the effective linking of income security with engagement in work in remote Aboriginal communities, the Warburton Breakfast Minyma's experience as revealed in this thesis suggests important directions for reorientating work engagement policy. While this study investigated the interpretations of one particular group of remote Aboriginal women regarding work, potentially other remote Aboriginal women and men may recognise the experiences of the Breakfast Minyma as similar to their own and like the Kuninjku (Altman & Klein, 2017), value similar dimensions of meaningful work. The literature clearly indicates the limitations of current policy regarding the linking of income security with work engagement under the Community Development Program (CDP). In this context, the findings of this study propose an alternative set of assumptions upon which to base this kind of policy and the potential benefits of such an approach.

Four key dimensions of experience were central to meaningful engagement in work for this group of remote Aboriginal women: provision of income security; ability to undertake self-directed and governed work; the scope to work collectively and collaboratively with family and community members; and the incorporation of peer learning and mentoring into their worker role. These dimensions provided the means to make their work meaningful within the social and cultural structures and processes of their lives. Not only did participation in work orientated to the social realities of Ngaanyatjarra life result in positive impacts on the Minyma's wellbeing but also that of the wider community. These four key dimensions offer a vision of how good policy can create meaningful opportunities for work in remote Aboriginal communities that has manifold positive impacts on those in the immediate program and also in a broader social context.

The policy implications concerning provision of income security derive from the benefits gained through remote Aboriginal people earning a liveable income within the parameters of community life. Income security contributes to the self-

esteem and pride inherent in having the ability to meet basic living needs, provide for children and respond to the demands of family sharing. The opportunity to be remunerated based on legislated award rates for an hourly part-time contribution to work provides remote Aboriginal people with a "safety net" in a context that often prevents people's consistent engagement in employment.

Work engagement policy that honours the need for income security offers a stark contrast to that associated with current Government programs and services. CDP takes a highly directive approach that forces people into unrealistic 'mutual obligation' requirements accompanied by a marked negative impact on income security. Subsequent tensions for remote Aboriginal people arise because of the inability of families to feed their children, financial stress-driven conflict within and between families and feelings of loss of control over their lives. Thus, rather than encouraging people to engage in work by offering policies that enhance income security, CDP is aggravating impoverishment (Aboriginal Peak Organisations Northern Territory, 2017; Brennan, 2018; Conifer, 2018; Fowkes, 2017b; Jobs Australia, 2016b; Joyner, 2018; Kral, 2016; Ngaanyatjarra Council Aboriginal Corporation, 2017).

Current CDP directives also exacerbate poverty and dysfunction by attempting to force remote Aboriginal people to act in ways incompatible with their social and cultural norms. Stiglitz (2002) describes such government policy demands as "shock therapy"; an approach which makes it exceedingly difficult for people to comply and hence is detrimental for democratic social change. The only alternative to "compliance" within the rules of CDP programs is to disengage and forego the right to social security. Because of this punitive approach, some remote Aboriginal people are relocating to urban areas where receipt of welfare payments is outside the control of CDP rules. However this inevitably removes them from the innate social support offered by family and community life and effectively, relocates the problem.

Rather than jeopardising income security and impoverishing remote Aboriginal people, this study demonstrates the inherent creativity and agency - in economic terms, the potential human capital available - in remote Aboriginal Australia.

What is required is the adoption of skilfully tailored government work engagement policy that offers income security and that accommodates the social and cultural responsibilities and obligations of remote Aboriginal people. Through this approach, policy can be used to strengthen the capacity of program recipients so that they can contribute to the national economy and at the same time maintain their dignity as remote Aboriginal Australians.

How can this be done? This study proposes that establishing a flexible work engagement policy framework that enables local Aboriginal people to self-initiate and self-direct their work can ensure that work resonates with their own values and the context of their remote community lives. This high personal investment enhances commitment and leads to work that is meaningful to the participants. In addition, framing work activities and worker roles within familiar ways of being, knowing and doing (Martin & Mirraboopa, 2003) boosts self-esteem, enhances agency and contributes to both ongoing productive engagement and generation of new work activities.

Supporting local means of control also affords people the opportunity to direct, manage and make decisions regarding their work within their own systems of governance. Within the Breakfast Minyma collective, leadership was determined by cultural seniority. This enabled the growth of local leadership and sustainable systems of operation which supported their work. By contrast, most current work programs dictated by public servants are far removed from the social and cultural realities of remote Aboriginal lives. Self-direction also allows local people to use creativity and innovation so that their work responds to the realities of community life. For the Minyma, self-directedness paved a pathway to bridging networks between the community and non-Indigenous workers and agencies, thus strengthening their program and the purposes of the local services.

Self-directedness in the workplace can be encouraged by work engagement policy that allows for both institutional and non-directive, developmental community support at the local level. Thus, control of the policy implementation, workforce and program operations, for instance the role of program administrators, field officers, vocational trainers and project facilitators by

resident Aboriginal organisations is critical. Furthermore, a work engagement policy and program workforce trained in the theory, values and application of non-directive developmental practice that nurture and encourage local participant planning and implementation of day-to-day program operation that privileges the priorities, interests and skills of community members is crucial to successful implementation. The reflective, collective approach of local people enabled by non-directive developmental practice allows participants to review and amend their work on an ongoing basis, continually readjusting their activities to suit conditions.

Unfortunately, current Government work engagement policy as framed within the CDP precludes both local control and skilled developmental support perpetuating the inequitable power relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians and according to Altman and Klein (2017), is “a reminder of the enduring coloniality inherent in Australian settler society” (p. 2). The absence of local control and facilitative, non-directive community support possible under CDP contrasts markedly with the processes that were followed throughout this study, where program support enabled self-initiation, self-directedness and self-governance in the Minyma’s worker role. The outcome was a suite of highly appreciated community service activities that led to increased self-esteem, pride and confidence, enhanced agency, and personal and collective empowerment.

Thus policy regarding income security and work engagement would benefit from providing the flexibility for local people to self-direct and self-govern their work activities. This has been shown through the Minyma’s experience to build individual skills, creativity and dignity and to strengthen community capacity, governance and leadership. A work engagement policy that invests in the development of these "work-ready" qualities and also maintains the income security of participants potentially builds a portfolio of talents that enables productive participation in the market economy across their working lives.

The third key dimension of meaningful work, the scope to work collectively and collaboratively with family and community members, suggests the need to reorient government policies and practices in order to develop worker roles

within the existing frameworks of remote Aboriginal people's family and community relationships. The Minyma gained both encouragement from working within their existing network of relationships, and pride, status and wellbeing from undertaking activities that benefitted their family and community networks. This finding indicates that for remote Aboriginal people who are both distant from, and with no significant history of participation in the market economy, facilitating activities that build their self-esteem and confidence as workers in the context of their own lives is likely to be more empowering and better preparation for engagement with "transactions amongst strangers" (Davies & Maru, 2010, p. 25) typical of the market. Entering the market economy with significant experience as a competent worker or member of an entrepreneurial team is surely better preparation than entering as a supplicant to an externally imposed regime of administrative compliance.

While most work engagement programs focus on the development of individual capacities, this study demonstrated the power of group-orientated approaches to work. This approach also resonated with the clear preference of people in remote Aboriginal communities to engage in activities within the cultural safety of family relationships. Collective means of engaging in work increase enthusiasm and motivation in the workspace; recruitment, training and the organisation of work structures which resonate with existing social and cultural norms of remote life are likewise more effective. In the market economy, the experience and capacity to work collectively in a team is highly valued. Programs and practices that exploit the strong social capital existing in community life by building work programs around existing systems of kinship will enable people to work in contexts that are familiar, safe, and enjoyable and provide a foundation for transferring team-work skills to other contexts.

The fourth key dimension of meaningful work, the incorporation of peer learning and mentoring into their worker role, also suggests a reorientation to current work engagement policy and related training programs. Many existing programs are based on didactic instructional processes in which an "expert" instructor directs the learning of trainees. Framed as a relationship of authority, this runs contrary to the practices of remote Aboriginal community life where most learning is passed on through processes of mentoring. The Minyma

demonstrated the effectiveness of peer mentoring where novice participants worked alongside more skilled community members in order to learn.

Using both their existing skills and knowledge, and those gained through their collective learning in an accredited course, the Minyma's own training practices responded to needs within the group. The mentoring component further contributed to their meaningful work engagement. This experience signifies that the delivery of training and skill development programs for "work readiness" provided within "work engagement" programs based on mainstream assumptions about trajectories into work would be better served by embracing and utilising the "strengths, assets and capital" which exist within the local context (McRae-Williams, 2016b, p. 3).

Central to effective mentoring and learning within vocational education and training within remote Aboriginal communities is the need to give greater regard to generating opportunities for intergenerational skill sharing in these highly relational contexts. Given the tendency for Vocational Education and Training (VET) and other training programs to split novice workers into age-related groups, the experience of the Minyma demonstrates the efficacy of embracing intergenerational approaches to learning and mentoring that enhance the possibility of youth participation and provide local role models familiar to participants.

Flow-on effects of meaningful and purposeful work

The findings of this study have shown that social security framed in ways that respond to the lived reality of remote Aboriginal people has potential for providing opportunities for meaningful and committed engagement in work. As exemplified through the Minyma's experience, committed engagement resulted from the opportunity to participate in work which was self-directed according to *their* interests, *their* existing skills, *their* initiatives and *their* local knowledge.

Rather than embracing the structures, strengths and values inherent in remote Aboriginal society, current government policy links income security with compliance to a "job-seeking" regime oriented to the market economy. This is based on the premise that people will change their behaviours in order to make the 'right choice' towards a form of economic development framed by a specific Western lens of modernisation. An implicit assumption of CDP policy is that remote Aboriginal people will follow a prescribed and singular pathway to "modernity" via participation in Government mandated activities, leading to employment in the labour market (Jordan & Altman, 2016; Klein, 2015). This is despite the fact that, as many commentators have noted, a labour market is largely absent from remote Aboriginal communities (Altman, 2013; E. Klein, 2016).

The assumption of a singular economic pathway to development reflects the tenets of neoliberal economic rationalism. CDP shares these assumptions, thus pressure is applied to comply with rapidly implemented economic models that embrace "employment" as a means of achieving modernisation. The reality for remote Aboriginal communities is that this approach has perpetuated unrest in people's lives, created more rather than less poverty and increased violence and social problems.

A reorientation of the remote "work engagement" policy which incorporates the key dimensions of meaningful work revealed in this study has the potential to achieve outcomes that deliver effective capacity and social development. The flow-on effects of the Minyma's committed engagement were confidence, self-esteem and empowerment which in turn contributed to the strengthening of their feelings of pride and dignity. It was these important attributes of human existence that nurtured the individual and collective capacities that led to their engagement in creative entrepreneurial activities. Together, these outcomes suggest the need for a responsive policy that enables work that is more *meaningful* to people who live in remote community contexts. Such a reorientation could contribute towards economic development that makes sense to remote Aboriginal people and has the potential to assimilate a market ethos in remote Aboriginal cultures *on their own terms.*

The Minyma's committed engagement to their work contributed to multiple facets of social development and enhanced wellbeing for both themselves and the broader community. They directed their activities towards the community and enhanced the wellbeing of school children, teenage girls and the elderly. Other broader social development outcomes were increased school community engagement, improved school attendance, a more effective Home and Community Care (HACC) service and their establishment as local role models of productive workers in a creative and successful enterprise.

Many of the outcomes of the Minyma's self-directed activities were congruent with the broader Australian Government's policy objectives of the time and the goals of existing agencies and services that operate in Warburton. However, in spite of this being the case, seemingly both policy makers and staff in the agencies were largely ignorant of the unique values, ways of working and potential capacity of community members such as the Minyma. A policy framework that encourages a reorientation of agency staff towards non-directive developmental practice may be a way towards embracing remote Aboriginal ways of working and improved socioeconomic outcomes. However, as noted by Klein (2015), often Indigenous approaches to development are "ostracised" by policy makers and program developers (p. 3). Hence, she and other observers suggest that existing Indigenous structures, systems and skills which were so valuable in enhancing development and wellbeing in the Minyma's work are instead viewed as barriers to development (Carey, 2013; Hunt, 2008; Klein, 2015; McRae-Williams, 2016b).

In the current CDP context, the Australian Government controls the social development of Australian Aboriginal people using market mechanisms of which 'employability' is seen as a key indicator. According to Stiglitz (2002), governments tend only to engage with Aboriginal people on the basis of their willingness to comply with the requirements of their programs and services on which many of them are dependent. Broadly, Australian Government policy directed toward Indigenous Australians and, in particular CDP policy, fails to acknowledge that remote Aboriginal people have the interest, capacity and agency to contribute to wellbeing and social development in their community. Instead, and to the detriment of both the participants and the taxpayers, current

policies focus upon coercing these people into employment in a barely extant labour market.

The events depicted in this study, although specifically relevant to the local regional communities at the site of this investigation, provide a clear example of a broader and global social dynamic. In landmark explorations of social life, Michel Foucault (1972) contended that any large-scale analysis of social life must be built from an understanding of the micro-politics of power at the local level. He suggests the need to,

> *…conduct an ascending analysis of power, starting…from its infinitesimal mechanisms, which each have their own trajectory, their own techniques and tactics, and then see how these mechanisms of power have been…invested, colonised, utilised, involuted, transformed, displaced extended, etc., by ever more general mechanisms and forms of global domination* (Foucault, 1972, p. 159).

Foucault (1972) goes on further to suggest that oppressive systems of domination and control are maintained not by autocratic processes but through the unconsciously accepted routine practices incorporated into programs and services that people use in their everyday social and organisational lives. He proposes that at each site a professional elite – administrators, program directors, policy makers, etc. – defines the language and discourses of practice, and in doing so, builds a framework of meaning into an organisation that may have little relevance to people in that context. Foucault (1972) also suggests the need to cultivate and enhance planning and decision-making at the neighbourhood level by encouraging people to be more flexible in the ways they conceive and organise their activities. In this way, local people might ensure that diverse perspectives are incorporated into their social and organisational lives.

More recently Joseph Stiglitz (2002), former Chief Economist at the World Bank, noted the devastating effects of neo-liberal, economic globalisation on developing nations and the failure of broad scale developmental projects of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank conceived within this paradigm to deal with the ensuing poverty and dislocation of peoples. He spoke

of the need for a more considered approach to development that moved away from centrally formulated and controlled policies based on wholesale introduction of fundamental reforms. Stiglitz (2002) advocated the introduction of phased development where local social and political imperatives are taken into consideration, suggesting that the rules which govern people's lives should be arrived at through democratic processes in which authorities and governing bodies heed and respond to the needs and desires of those affected by their decisions. The global phenomena identified by Foucault (1972) and Stiglitz (2002) resonate with Australia's domestic situation in the context of remote Aboriginal communities and further underline the need for a new policy approach.

A new approach: Crafting a joint policy framework

The Minyma's committed work engagement contrasts with reports of disinterest and disengagement amongst CDP participants. People voting with their feet to leave the current social security system is indicative of a desperate need for policy change. Two recent significant events in the Indigenous Australian policy arena emphasise the relevance of the findings from this research with respect to a revamped policy framework for remote Aboriginal communities. Such a framework is urgently required to address the shortfalls, dysfunction and damage being created by CDP to individuals, families and the social fabric of remote Aboriginal communities.

The present policy context is marked by two key recent publications: one, the tenth Australian Government Closing the Gap Report describing the progress of the Indigenous Australian population towards achieving a set of key statistical socioeconomic benchmarks comparative with the whole Australian population; and two, *The Uluru Statement from the Heart*, a collective statement of all the Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language groups seeking recognition of Indigenous sovereignty in the nation's constitution founded upon a formalised agreement.

In May 2017, a group of 250 Indigenous delegates issued *The Uluru Statement from the Heart*. Based on a dialogue between over a thousand Indigenous Australian people, the statement sought constitutional reform through a voice in Parliament to address the "torment of our powerlessness" (First Nations National Constitutional Convention, 2017). Grounded in the desire for "justice", "empowerment" and "self-determination", the statement reflects the lack of recognition felt by many Indigenous people; it was a call for an agreement about shared decision-making between the Federal Government and Indigenous peoples. The rejection of the Uluru Statement by the Prime Minister of Australia demonstrated the Federal Government's resistance towards valuing of Indigenous perspectives and partnering with them in policy formulation regarding their own livelihood and future.

Eight months later, in February 2018, the Prime Minister launched the Closing the Gap report on the tenth anniversary of the initial implementation of the Closing the Gap policy framework, the overall statement guiding Australian Indigenous policy. Despite the millions of dollars channelled into Aboriginal employment policy and programs, the report revealed the failure to meet the target to "Halve the gap in employment outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians by 2018" (Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2018a). The employment gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians had in fact widened (Productivity Commission, 2015, cited in Altman & Klein, 2017; Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2018b).

The Australian Government, through policies targeted toward "closing the gap" sought to achieve "statistical equality" between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians (Pholi, Black, & Richards, 2009). Thus, Closing the Gap and the programs designed to meet its targets reflect a perspective that appears to assume Indigenous peoples aspire to both non-Indigenous social and cultural norms. While Indigenous Australians have a right to public services such as accessible health care and educational opportunities available to other Australians, as the findings of this study suggest, Indigenous people have their own social and cultural processes and structures, to which, Australian Government policy provides scant acknowledgement. According to a range of observers, Closing the Gap policies fail to acknowledge the diverse livelihood

priorities and aspirations and the distinct cultural and social templates of remote Aboriginal Australians (Altman, 2018; Altman & Klein, 2017; Brooks, 2016; Jordan & Altman, 2016).

These two significant policy events, first, acknowledgement of policy failure in the Closing the Gap Report and second, the appeal in the *Uluru Statement from the Heart* from all sectors of the Australian Indigenous population for a new relationship with the Australian Government, together with the findings of this study suggest the need for crafting a more appropriate and effective policy framework, and in particular, policy that links income security with work engagement for remote Aboriginal people. A reformulated policy is necessary first, to rectify the power imbalance perpetuated by sidelining Indigenous knowledge and second, to recognise that remote Aboriginal people's pathways towards improved socioeconomic indicators should be congruent with their own social and cultural norms.

For effective policy combining income security and work engagement for remote Aboriginal Australians, this study suggests that: first, local Indigenous knowledge is sought, recognised and privileged above social experiments based on less credible knowledge and ideology lacking local Indigenous foundations; and second, that success stories of what has worked in remote Aboriginal Australian contexts are exemplified in order to reveal, broaden and promote local Indigenous knowledge of remote Aboriginal contexts. As described in the Introduction chapter, there is currently a dearth of remote Aboriginal perspectives in both the existing academic literature on work and in the broader public domain. Privileging the Minyma's perspectives in this study is an attempt to both redress this balance and to meet Biddle, Hunter, Yap and Grey's (2016) call for, on the one hand, evidence of what specific interventions *have* worked in remote Aboriginal contexts, and on the other hand, to address the current "lack of engagement with what Indigenous people think themselves about priorities or policy responses".

Effective and meaningful approaches to harnessing and disseminating remote Indigenous knowledge is essential in order to bridge the gap in "social reality" which commonly contributes to and perpetuates misunderstanding,

misjudgement and negative stereotypes regarding remote Indigenous people and their engagement in productive work (Brooks, 2016). Currently, policymakers and program developers, encouraged by popular media representations, demonstrate a grave lack of compassion, empathy and interest in acknowledging and understanding remote Indigenous perspectives. This blinkered approach is driven in part by the hegemony of a global economic system based solely on adherence to the mechanisms of a market economy (Stiglitz, 2002). Such a mindset combined with ignorance regarding the lived reality of remote Aboriginal people propagates the tenets and assumptions embedded in the policies of CDP: that remote Aboriginal people should change their behaviour in order to prepare for and aspire to be like non-Indigenous Australians. Not only does this policy devalue Indigenous perspectives, it also feeds the negative stories emerging from institutional policy failure. Thus the failure of CDP has resulted in the perpetuation and reinforcement of negative stereotypes that work to undermine and conceal positive accounts and successes of remote Indigenous people such as that of the Warburton Breakfast Minyma.

Dissemination of the Minyma's story and their remarkable achievements seeks to serve an additional purpose. As well as contributing a remote Aboriginal perspective, the Minyma's accounts shared in this thesis offer a stark contrast to the deficit perspectives and deficit terms by which remote Aboriginal work is typically written about, debated and discussed. Dominating the rhetoric that filters its way into the ears of policy makers and program developers are negative stories regarding remote Aboriginal people which paint bleak pictures of remote community life entrenched in failure, disengagement, dysfunction, and hopelessness. Compounded by a tabloid media that derives pleasure in creating scandal and shock, asserting blame and perpetuating deficit models which further marginalise communities, these negative perspectives contribute to a vicious cycle whereby deficiency-based thinking infiltrates and influences policy makers (Fforde, Bamblett, Lovett, Gorringe, & Fogarty, 2013). The Minyma's positive experience in the domain of work, and their capacity to enhance community wellbeing in a way that capitalised on their existing skills and knowledge bring into question these generalised negative assumptions.

Challenges associated with engaging remote Aboriginal people in research processes effectively, meaningfully and ethically contribute to the dearth of Indigenous perspectives in the literature. In contrast to positivist research which often depersonalises, reduces people to population statistics and misrepresents the lived experience of Aboriginal people, this study, a naturalistic inquiry, emerged collaboratively and aligned with the participants' needs, values and interests. Thus, the research incorporated the Minyma's group decision-making, authority structures, cultural values, and family and community obligations as expressed within their natural world (Blumer, 1969; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

While I recognise my limitations as an "outsider" researcher (Foley, 2006; L. Smith, 1999), I assert the credibility of this account. The prolonged period over which I was in Warburton, my close relationships with the Minyma, and familiarity with the extensive and emerging literature of Indigenous researchers (Cram et al., 2013; Foley, 2006; Martin, 2008; O'Donoghue, 2010; Rigney, 2006; L. Smith, 1999; Wand & Eades, 2008; Wilson, 2001) regarding decolonising methodologies enabled me to be cognisant of "epistemologies, ontologies, axiologies and methodologies" within an Indigenous research paradigm (Guenther, Osborne, et al., 2017, p. 199). For this reason, I present this as an authentic attempt to provide a credible representation of the Minyma's experience.

The collaborative ethnographic approach of this study offers two important contributions: one is new knowledge about key dimensions of meaningful work for the Minyma and possibly other remote Aboriginal women; and two, an exemplar of a methodology of effective and appropriate ways to conduct inquiries in remote Aboriginal contexts that supports the empowerment of Indigenous people and foregrounds their experience. The approach to research revealed in this study may enhance the possibility for future parallel contributions to the literature and hence, further the chance of remote Aboriginal voices influencing policy.

As this study reveals, mainstream Australian visions of employment embedded in government programs have failed to take into account the deep-seated social and cultural realities of remote Aboriginal life. This study illustrates the way

locally-directed initiatives provided a remote Aboriginal community with increased employment opportunities that enhanced family and community lives. It reveals the key elements of activities that not only increased income levels of participants, but incorporated education, training, social capital and other measures that enabled participants to contribute to the wellbeing and social development of their community. The study therefore recommends that those responsible for developing programs and services should consider more appropriate approaches to policy development and implementation that enable Aboriginal people to accomplish better outcomes for themselves, their families and their communities.

EPILOGUE: *[We] really want to work…it was a good job*

The Warburton Breakfast Minyma, a dynamic and determined group of Ngaanyatjarra women, accomplished a noteworthy program of work that made a significant contribution to their personal, family and community lives. In 2016, my family and I visited Warburton from our new home in Alice Springs. On my final evening, eight of the women and I gathered. We had fruit and sandwiches and looked at many of the photos and DVDs about the Minyma's work from 2008 to 2014. It was a vibrant and joyful atmosphere and their experiences were reflected on with clarity and pride. The room was filled with hoots of laughter and happy gasps at memories of the time that they were involved in the activities that had culminated in meaningful and enjoyable work. For me the evening was an embodiment of the spirit of *Mirlirrtjarra Kuurl Mirrka Palyalpayi.*

The Minyma's enthusiasm about their own work, two years after many of the activities had ceased, contrasted markedly with their response to the current "Work for the Dole" (Community Development Program) regime that the women reported to be having disastrous impacts on families in Warburton. Apart from a few women working part-time in positions gained because of skills developed through their participation in *Mirlirrtjarra Kuurl Mirrka Palyalpayi*, by 2016 most Minyma were disengaged from work and struggling to maintain income security. The circumstances reinforced their desire for me to share their story with a broader audience,

> *You been in Warburton and you got* ninti *(clever) [about] all them things, language and stories. You right [you're all right], you write [the stories] in English so the Government understands* (Kate, 2016, pers. comm.).

The message from these women is that governments should help them build remote Indigenous communities by using their inherent strengths rather than continuing to impose alien and ineffective policy regimes which ignore the rich

skills, motivation and enthusiasm that reside in remote Aboriginal people. This will require a reframing of government operations at all levels. The Australian Government must recognise and acknowledge the aspirations, strengths and agency of remote Aboriginal people, rather than continuing to impose a perspective of deficit compared with non-Aboriginal Australians.

The Minyma's lives encompassed a deep and lasting concern for the wellbeing of their families and an unwavering desire for their children to have a bright future. Based on my extended period working in Warburton and influenced by my more recent experience of raising and juggling a family myself, I reflect on the attributes of the Warburton Breakfast Minyma:

> The Minyma are proud, passionate, creative, assertive and spirited women with a remarkable sense of humour, a collective capacity to surmount some of the greatest "worries" and an enduring optimism for life;
>
> The Minyma have lives rich with intricate family connections, deep with cultural knowledge, and a connection to and knowledge of the land which supports their survival beyond dependence on externally designed and delivered programs and services. They have family and community relationships which give way to a robust network of social capital that will transcend any policy framework; and,
>
> The Minyma endeavour to care for their families and give their children the best future possible despite minimal financial and material resources. They continue to draw on their inherent strength, pride and intellect as Ngaanyatjarra women and to nurture and empower themselves and their families whatever adversity is thrown their way.

These are the capacities that enable Aboriginal people to move forward as they grapple with the externally imposed changes that threaten their wellbeing and their people. The Minyma's determination to both enable change and project an

influential voice was fundamental to the way they spoke about their work in the midst of their activities in 2012,

> *The Minyma [are] really* ninti *(clever) and happy,* purkurlpa *(happy)… they really want to work…And the kids, they are proud [of us] you know, working at the breakfast. My children are happy, they see me go to work, what we do and they learn the right things. All the families of the Breakfast ladies, they are really proud of the Breakfast Minyma… the girls [*kungkas*] they [are] really happy you know, [they say] "Oh my grandmother and my auntie, working and learning, cook and do this and that", teaching them girls and they are getting really* ninti *(clever) you know. They are 'brainy one' when they are learning,* nintirringkula *(getting clever). This will help them for the future…they can travel around with others for work…*Yuwa *(yes) and when they finish school [they can] get a job you know, like the ladies too….We want to tell the story of the Breakfast Minyma so other people can learn about the program, other people all over the communities. It can teach them about what we all do in Ranges [Warburton]* (Breakfast Minyma, 2012, pers. comm.).

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