

Riverside
PARRAMATTA

Rainbow's End

By Jane Harrison



Teacher's Resource Kit

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Rainbow's End- Cast and Crew

Cast

| | |
|--------------------|-----------------|
| Gladys Banks | Christine Anu |
| Nan Dear | Lillian Crombie |
| Dolly Banks | Chenoa Deemal |
| Errol Fisher/Males | Garth Holcombe |

Voices on the radio

Ross Higgins, Heather Mitchell, Jamie Oxenbold, Alice Parkinson, William McPherson, Scott Higgins

Creative Team

| | |
|-------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Director | Craig Ilott |
| Set Design | Jacob Nash |
| Lighting Design | Matthew Marshall |
| Costume Design | Rita Carmody |
| Composer | Steve Francis |
| Sound Design | Jeremy Silver |
| Stage Manager | Adeneen Craigie |
| Assistant Stage Manager | Jaz Haynes |
| Theatre Technician | Greg Lyons |
| Producer | Camilla Rountree |
| Production Manager | Sean Clarke |
| Producer | Camilla Rountree |
| Scenic Art | Lyn Rowland |
| Costume Construction | Marcia Lidden |
| Props Construction | Malcolm Webb & Noel Benham |
| Makeup Consultant | Peggy Carter |
| Sound Recording | Robin Gist, Tone Master Productions |
| Set Construction | Thomas Creative |
| Set Elements | Theatrical Supplies of Australia |
| Production Image | Branco Gaica |
| Production Photos | Heidrun Lohr |
| Archive Recording | Tristan Baker, Moonbaker Studios |

Production Thanks:

Brett Wheeler & Riverside Technical Crew
Jeff Newby - The Look
Phil McCray - Animal Fetish
Bob Peet and Miranda Musical Society
Lots of Watts
Chameleon Touring Systems
PRG Touring Systems
The Look Sydney
Arts on Tour



Transcript of Interview with Jane Harrison Riverside Theatres- July 2009

Please note- this article is hyperlinked for interactive learning.

Download an electronic copy from:

<http://www.riversideparramatta.com.au/performance.asp?piD=840>

Download a video of this interview from:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BXne7NwsCXI>

Q: Where did the story for Rainbow's End come from?

Rainbows End came out of commission by [Ilbjerri](#) who were the only Aboriginal and Torres straight islander theatre company in Melbourne. They asked a number of writers to write about a decade of Victorian Koori history, in particular to write about the 'heroes' of that era. Of course there were a lot of real life heroes that I could have written about (people like [William Cooper](#) and [Pastor Doug Nicholls](#), people of that ilk), however, I only had eight weeks to come up with the first draft and to do a lot of that research would have taken a bit longer so I decided to write a fictional account and to write about [the time when] the men were off and away doing great work in the wider community [while] the women were often left behind keeping the family and keeping the food on the table and those kind of things. I decided the real heroes to me where the women who were keeping the families together and that everyday struggle they had, particularly living in that area around the river near [Shepparton](#), the area called 'The Flats'. It was about those women living on the outskirts of town and the day to day struggles they had.

Q: What do you want audiences to get out of your play?

In some ways, writing a historical play (because it is set around the 50's and it does have a few real life incidences- like the [Queen's visit](#) and the development of the housing around that area called [Rumbalara](#)- it is based on some historical facts) but it is a historical play so in a way it's a little bit of a peep hole into that era. And it's not so long ago, you know, it's a little bit before my time but it's still in living history so it's really interesting to see how times have changed and some of the conditions that people had to live in there, living in [humpies](#) beside the river and the fact that there was no welfare and the fact that there was no support and that a lot of people had to do very menial labour because there weren't the opportunities for education (aboriginal people were kind of locked out of a lot of those opportunities). So I think it's fascinating that we have moved quite a long way but in some ways there are residences with some things that are happening currently- I suppose the [Northern Territory interventions](#) are another modern day equivalent of that kind of intervention with Aboriginal people's lives. So I suppose I just want to get an insight, and also, the richness of their family life I think is important for audiences to see, because although they didn't have the material things they had each other, they had a very supportive family life and they were very

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connected as a family, they're a lovely family to me and I hope audiences respond to their warmth and the characters.

Q: Is the story uniquely Australian or do you think international audiences will identify with it?

Well the play actually has had a [season in Japan](#), in Tokyo, there's a small theatre company there that has done a couple of Aboriginal plays, quite a few, so how an aboriginal play transfers to another country is always really interesting cause there is a lot of vernacular in the play, there's a lot of slang, there's a lot of local references and a lot of stories that make sense for that area and that time, so actually translating that to another language is a challenge. But I think what people respond to is their humanity and just the family life so I think an audience from overseas can, you know, see the beauty of their relationships and I think that's fairly universal. I felt the same with [another of my plays] [Stolen](#), I actually didn't see *Rainbow's End* in Japan so I don't exactly know how the audiences responded to it but I was in Japan when *Stolen* played there and, again, the universality of those kind of circumstances came through, people could always find something to relate to in the characters.

Q: Each of the characters goes on a journey. Can you describe them?

The basic story is about three generations of aboriginal women living on the flats beside the river, living in a humpy. There's Nan Dear, her daughter Gladys and then the granddaughter, Gladys daughter, Dolly, so it's about their world. Papa Dear, who's Nan Dear's husband is off doing good work, he's a pastor, so we don't see him really (he's referred to quite a lot but we don't see him on the stage) and the only other outsider character who comes in is Errol who's an [encyclopaedia](#) salesman and he (it's a bit of a 50's love story) he does fall in love with Dolly, and they have their journey, their relationship journey. I think all of them go through a bit of a journey and it's about finding their own voice, particularly with Gladys, I don't want to give too much away about Gladys' character but to me she's a really powerful woman who just doesn't realise how strong she is and what a contribution she can make and I think hopefully by the end of the play we're all cheering on Gladys! And I think for Errol being a non-indigenous character I think that's an interesting journey too because at one stage he, again without giving too much of the story away, he's offering her, Dolly, a better world and he has to come to the realisation that in fact their world, although it doesn't have as many material things as the world he comes from, their world has another richness which is in their family relationships and he has to meet *them* halfway if he's to be part of their family, so he goes on that journey. I think Dolly is a young character, she goes on an enormous journey really, at the beginning of the play she's very close to her grandmother, Nan Dear, and mother, she's kind of a bit caught between both of their desires for her, she has to find her own voice and make her own choices in life and I think she does that by the end of the play. It's got some [lovely music](#) in it from the 50's, it is a bit of a love story, but I think it's also telling a bigger story about some of the challenges aboriginal people faced in

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that time and how resilient and strong they were and how they just did what they had to do to keep the family together.

Q: Do you think the issues raised in the play for Aboriginal people in the 1950's still exist today?

I think a lot of the issues that faced people then we're still facing, maybe not so much in the urban areas but certainly in parts of Australia, things like the town camp situation in the Northern Territory, not that I'm an expert on that, but I think there's resonances really with how aboriginal people *still* aren't in control of their own destiny, [self determination](#) is still something we're fighting for, still having to fight those battles for self determination. And there's a patriarchal approach to aboriginal people that we're still in many communities being treated as children who don't know how to look after our own best interests, or we don't have the answers, and I think aboriginal people *do* have the answers and need to be listened to and considered rather than sending in the army to "fix up" the aboriginal problem. I mean, again, in the fifties and that story in the play about the inspector coming in that was based on real circumstances that happened in Victoria and I think those things are still happening where we're being assessed and judged and then there's an "aboriginal problem" that white people need to solve.

Further reading and suggested learning activities:

⇒ **The 1950's in Australia:** Indigenous and non-indigenous Australians lived and belonged to two very different worlds in the 1950s (as demonstrated by Errol and Dolly in the play).

- [The non- indigenous Australia](#)
- [The Indigenous Australia](#)

Suggested activity: After reading these webpages, why not try writing a creative writing piece, describing the 1950's Australia through the eyes of an indigenous teenager like Dolly.

⇒ **After the 1950's- the move towards citizenship:** [The 1967 Referendum](#) bridged some of the gap between these worlds, and some of the rights that heroes like Papa Dear were fighting for were closer to being a reality.

Suggested activity: Does citizenship alone make a group of people really *belong* to a country or society? What needs to happen to achieve a true sense of belonging? Write your response to these questions, with reference to the play "Rainbow's End" and what you know of the 1967 Referendum.

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⇒ **Beyond the referendum- Indigenous Affairs up to today:** There have been a number of significant events in Australia since the 1967 Referendum that have been milestones for Indigenous Australians. Read about the following three events at these links:

- **1972: The erection of the [Aboriginal Tent Embassy](#)**
- **1992: [The MABO Case](#)** (navigate through this entire website to get the most information)
- **2008: Prime Minister [Kevin Rudd says Sorry](#) to the aboriginal people who were part of the [Stolen Generations](#)**

Suggested activity: There are quite a few events not listed above. Using the internet, do your own research and compile a timeline of significant events for Indigenous Australians from 1967 to today.

Closing the Gap: Following the 2008 Government Apology, the Closing the Gap strategy was created to address Indigenous disadvantage. One of the key focus areas is housing. In class, discuss the importance of adequate housing in Indigenous communities and the progress of the government so far. More information may be found at:

[Closing the Gap - Building Momentum - The Building Blocks- Action to Close the Gap](#)

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**Transcript of Interview with Director
Craig Ilott
Riverside Theatres- April 2011**

Q: What first attracted you to the play?

Its heart. And the importance of this story being heard.

Q: How did you first approach the text?

I read and re-read the play, all the while indulging in a great deal of daydreaming. I'm very keen on a long and collaborative design process so there are many conversations with the designers, along with sharing thoughts and images and impressions inspired by the play. An essential statement is important to identify, from which all else follows. Outside of that I find it hard to outline an approach, as I don't follow any particular method or technique – it's very instinctual.

Q: After seeing your production of Rainbow's End, what do you want the audience to be left with?

Admiration and love for these women. For the hardship they endured and the courage and dignity shown in overcoming it. And also a belief in the family of five that has formed and is cut in silhouette at end. Hope for the future.

Q: Thinking of the issues raised in the play, do you think it could be set in 2011?

Certainly times have changed but it wasn't too much of a stretch to imagine what it would be like to live with such racism. Sadly the issues and themes are still potent and pertinent. It is distressing and at times incredible to examine some of the policies made regarding indigenous Australians over the years.

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Q: How has the play evolved and changed over its touring history?

The author Jane Harrison was present for some of rehearsal period and was very receptive to what was happening on the floor. I think we all found there were some things stronger on the page than in performance. Accordingly we reworked certain parts of the text to enhance the theatrical experience. We were blessed with a generous writer who embraced the energy of a wonderful group of actors and the particulars of the rehearsal room.

Q: The concept of home and how this creates a sense of belonging is central to the play. How does this shape your character's journey in Rainbow's End?

I think it culminates in scene 13 between Dolly and Errol at the river. It's a sad yet beautiful scene where two people in love keep missing each other. No matter what words are uttered they cannot be understood. What it is that makes a home and our need to belong hang in the air.

Q: The play is currently in the process of being re-written in some parts. What aspects of the play did you want to change after the most recent rehearsal period?

For both Jane and myself the first few scenes were the most troubling. The suggestion of a flood abating and the women cleaning up after it was quite filmic. Considering the flow required with the rest of the play production wise, this was difficult to establish without losing the openness required of the overall arc. We included a radio voice over to introduce the flood and we looked at ways to heighten the first couple of scenes pre Errol's entry - after which the energy of the piece kicks along nicely.

Q: As a non-Indigenous director, how do you sensitively approach material such as Rainbow's End that deals with Indigenous history?

By listening a great deal. Respect is also a vital ingredient. Early on I was concerned about bringing in a bullish white sensibility that would mar the piece. Conversely I didn't want to be too timid a director and drown the whole thing in respect. Balance has been the key. I spoke to a number of trusted colleagues, including the originating director Wesley Enoch, who was a generous mentor in the early stages. I've learnt a great deal during this process – as a person and director.

Further reading and suggested learning activities:

⇒ **The Process and the People:** As Craig explained above, the director undertakes a [long process](#) of collaboration with other members of the creative and production team to bring a play to life. There are hyperlinks in Craig's interview to sites explaining the role of a director, producer and set designer. Read the following sites about the other major roles in the theatre

- [Actor](#)
- [Costume Designer](#)
- [Stage Manager](#)
- [Lighting Designer](#)
- [Sound Designer](#)

Suggested activity: Pretend you have been given the role of either set designer, costume designer, lighting designer or sound designer for this production of "Rainbow's End". Write a 1 A4 page pitch to Craig, telling him what your design concept would be for this production and how your design will look for the major scenes on stage.

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Online Newspaper Article

Link: www.theage.com.au/national/living-in-a-town-like-shep-20080711-3dsa.html?page=-1

Living in a town like Shep



Les Briggs at home with his family. *Photo: John Woudstra*

Jo Chandler

July 12, 2008

Victoria's Aborigines live far from the dust stirred by the intervention, but also face bleak realities. Amid the hardship, however, is hope.

AS A TEENAGER in the late 1950s, Les Briggs lived in an Aboriginal shanty town wrought from old tin and ingenuity on the banks of the Goulburn just outside Shepparton. When the river rose, the fringe-dwellers shifted to higher ground — a rubbish tip across the causeway. When young Queen Elizabeth drove by in 1954, local lore has it that her sensibilities (and those of the local burghers) were spared by the draping of a hessian screen along the length of the bridge. In their way "they were good days", he says. "Uncomplicated."

More than 50 years later, at the age of 66, Les Briggs finally has a home of his own. Last month, helped by a subsidy from a locally grown pilot Shared Responsibility Agreement, he co-signed a mortgage with his son Doug and gained title to 1.6 hectares of land on the Murray that he long considered his by right.

He'd rented the property with his late wife, Lorraine, from the Rumbalara Aboriginal Co-operative for a decade — the tenancy translating to an almost 20% discount on the value of the property under the pilot, which he could then draw as equity for a deposit. But as a Yorta Yorta man, his claim goes back much further. The irony of buying white man's title to land denied him through a landmark native title case is acknowledged with a shrug of hard-earned equanimity. "This is like a buy-back scheme."

What does owning the house mean? "It means the world," is Briggs' instant, emphatic response. "To have security, a place for all the family to go to." He has seven surviving children and 27 grandchildren. In the way of Aboriginal family, waves of them will occupy his house.

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A mortgage goes against the grain in some ways, he says. "As an Aboriginal person, you live for the day." But acquiescence to this fundamental of "Western ways" is, he says, a down payment on gaining his grandchildren a better future in a society where the odds remain stacked against them. Where the bleak truths of Aboriginal life in Victoria remain screened from view.

Most Aborigines live a long way from the dust stirred up by the Northern Territory intervention. But the bleak reality of their expectations for health, education and employment is not so distant from that of the most remote communities.

The invisibility of local Aborigines, hidden by regional prosperity and an enduring social apartheid only now beginning to fracture, is remarked upon by community leaders white and black. Shepparton City chief executive Bob Laing, a Kiwi import who is still surprised at the chasm between Maori and Aboriginal circumstance, questions how the broader community has for so long been "so accepting about such social disadvantage".

Though it is home to Victoria's largest Koori community, "there are people in Shepparton who would not have had contact with an Aboriginal person", says local indigenous leader (and Les' younger brother) Paul Briggs. A one-day spot audit of all the major supermarkets, chain stores and banks in town a couple of years ago found not one Aborigine among 221 front-of-house workers. "That diminishes us, and diminishes our relationship."

These days local Aboriginal reality is as often as not obscured by public preoccupation with the gross hardships of life in remote communities in the red centre and the far north, where the news crews, politicians and football teams fly when they want to engage with, as Paul Briggs puts it, "real blackfellas". In fact, as confirmed by new Australian National University modelling, 43% — and growing — of Aboriginal people live in places such as Shepparton: rural and regional towns. By comparison, 15% live in places such as Mutitjulu, and another 8% in far-flung outstations.

Measuring distance between Aboriginal reality in the Northern Territory and in northern Victoria is a slippery business. It can seem as far apart as the map decrees when you stand on the earth floor of the tiny concrete house maintained as a museum piece in the grounds of the Rumbalara Aboriginal Co-operative — first-generation, state-owned Aboriginal housing circa 1958. The old house is disconcertingly similar to those occupied by many Northern Territory Aborigines.

Such accommodation has long since been left behind in Shepparton, and yet distance vanishes when you compare the graphs plotting the journey from birth to death of Victorian Aborigines against those who live in the Territory.

Bearing in mind that the NT has an overall Aboriginal population more than twice that of Victoria, the percentage of low-birthweight babies born to Aboriginal mothers in Victoria is not only much higher than non-Aboriginal numbers, it is also comparable to the NT rate: 12.75% compared to 13.3% in 2003. By 2006, in Victoria, it was 13.4%, almost double that of non-Aboriginal Victorian mothers.

New state figures show the gap between the life expectancy of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Victorians has grown. They predict Aboriginal children born this decade (to 2006) will have 19 fewer years than other Victorians — boys living to 60 compared with 79; girls to 65 compared with 84. Aboriginal men in the NT have even grimmer prospects (57.6 years). But it's noteworthy that the gaps between indigenous and non-indigenous life expectancy are much larger in Victoria than the most recent NT figures (2001), where the difference was 13.2 years for males, and 11.3 for females.

On the question of child welfare and safety — the core concern of the NT intervention — latest Victorian figures show the number of Aboriginal children found to be in need of protection, following an investigation, is more than 10 times that of the non-Aboriginal population, despite a significant drop in the past few years. Felicia Dean, who as chief executive of Rumbalara Aboriginal Co-operative oversees a range of welfare programs, believes the safety of Victorian Aboriginal children is as fragile as that of children in the north, primarily due to neglect. She is also concerned that the slowness of an overstressed system is putting children at even greater risk.

Continue to paint by numbers across a range of benchmarks defining quality of life, and the emerging picture is frequently as dark for Victoria as for remote communities. Kindergarten participation rates are low and declining. Staggeringly high rates of mental illness afflict Aboriginal men and women. Alcohol-related hospital admissions for Aboriginal men are 10 times the rate of non-Aboriginal admissions, for drugs the difference is fivefold. Loss of Aboriginal students at year 10 in Victoria is, with NSW, the worst in the nation.

In Shepparton, a Melbourne University study published last year found the average Koori student was leaving school before the end of year 8, and by year 12 less than one-quarter were still at school. At the primary level many struggle, Achievement Improvement Monitor testing showing they typically lag six months behind in numeracy and literacy.

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Prospects beyond school are dismal. While north-east Victoria has the lowest unemployment rate in the country, at 2.3%, the Shepparton Aboriginal jobless rate is almost 10 times that. An extrapolation of a local survey and case files kept by Rumbalara puts the figure at closer to 35%.

These numbers expose what local leader Neville Atkinson calls "a silent scream". Though Paul Briggs is reluctant to define his community by such data, which he believes further erodes self-esteem and expectation, he says, "I'd say we are in a crisis, now ... It's a situation that has not occurred because we have invited it, nor because we have sat on our hands and done nothing."

AS THE sun sets on a chilly river-country training night, netball girls squeal inside clouds of their own breath as they race each other across the court. Paul Briggs settles with a cuppa in the warm of the social rooms of the institution he built — the Rumbalara Football Netball Club. Boys jog the boundary line below. The scene epitomises Briggs' solution to much of what ails his community: joyful and confident embrace and expression of identity.

There's a weariness as he prepares to trot around the same old ground. Thirty years he's been talking about all this. But he wrestles it down as he looks out on the kids playing hard in the gathering dark. "You can't not be inspired by that," he says. These are the people whose fate is captured in all that data. "You look at all those faces and you think, by jeez, I don't want the same descriptives for them."

In many ways Shepparton is better placed than any community in the country to respond to these figures. The Rumbalara Football Netball Club, and the Aboriginal co-operative, are at the core of an evolving structure of indigenous organisations and facilities. There's the Academy of Sport, Health and Education (ASHE), supported by Melbourne University and drawing school-leavers back into education using their passion for sport; indigenous employment agency Ganbina; the Koori Court, where elders such as Colin Walker shame brash offenders into squirming contrition; and Indigenous Enterprise Partnerships, its latest effort being a financial literacy pilot.

These efforts have the encouragement and input of a committee of eminent Australians including Police Commissioner Christine Nixon and ANZ chief economist Saul Eslake. And finally — after years of pleading — they have a policy unit charged with capturing the disparate, far-flung data, and figuring out what is and isn't working. It seems breathtaking that despite so many programs over so many years, baseline analysis of what it all means has been so long neglected. Even the size of the Aboriginal population is uncertain — varying between an official count of 2000 and local estimates closer to 6000.

None of these initiatives has been an accident. They are the legacy of a culture of leadership spawned by activists from nearby Cummeragunga, the old mission on the Murray. People such as William Cooper, whose lobbying for recognition underwrites this week's national NAIDOC celebrations, and Pastor Sir Douglas Nicholls, who was mentor to a young Paul Briggs. They rest in the cemetery at "Cummera", now increasingly crowded by the too-young dead: teenage suicides and the generation who should have been their elders, claimed by kidney problems, diabetes, circulatory and respiratory diseases.

Felicia Dean's Mauritian-born great-grandfather was the first teacher at the Cummeragunga schoolhouse, and his legacy has endured in her family and underpinned her trajectory. "My mum was from a family of 14, and education was always a big priority." Now she oversees health, housing and support programs at Rumbalara, and pins many of the problems she sees to the lack of education.

"I also see families struggling from lack of adequate housing, from drugs and alcohol, family violence, employment, and, like every other Australian, they are struggling financially," says Dean. "There are still families here where no one, ever, has been gainfully employed. Where a child of 15 or 16 will be the first in their family to complete year 12. That circle is still there.

"Sometimes it sounds like all doom and gloom," she reflects. But the energy of the buzzing clinic and offices around her defies that. "Shepparton really is the leader, we've had leaders coming out of here forever and a day." Progress is under way, "but we have to bring everyone along on the journey ... so that everyone is rising".

The home ownership pilot — Shared Responsibility Agreement — that her organisation initiated three years ago was seen as crucial to that effort. It has been feted as a possible model for a national program — providing financial counselling to all tenants, and help to those wanting to buy their own homes. It emerged at a time when the Howard government was moving out of indigenous housing in cities and regions, arguing its priority was to look after remote areas such as the NT, and that the states and mainstream services could look after urban areas. The Rudd Government has put a hold on some of that as it re-examines indigenous housing with the states.

Meanwhile, Rumbalara is preparing an application to continue the program, encouraged by good signs from Canberra.

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Money for repairs and maintenance on Rumbalara's 65 houses dried up under Howard — with nothing coming through for two years, running the housing program into the red. The drought broke two weeks ago, with almost \$1 million of backdated funds materialising, a move Dean and her deputy, Mick Buckworth, hope signals renewed support of regional housing.

They regard houses, with education, as the key to everything else. Buckworth, who has been involved in Rumbalara's housing for 20 years, says he has seen plain evidence of this over those years. Les Briggs is the latest of many locals he has helped into their own homes over that period, "and every single one of them have kept their homes. These are people who had never had work, but who have gone out and got labouring jobs, done whatever it takes to keep it because they know it is the best thing for their families."

A LOCAL report published a couple of years ago included the story of an emotionally disturbed woman referred by Rumbalara clinic to mainstream mental health services for an urgent home visit, and who found the following message on her home answering machine: "Get your black arse in here. The doctor's not coming out to see you, no way." The only surprise the call generated locally was that it had been recorded.

Media coverage of a savage attack on a German backpacker by a group of drunken Aboriginal men two years ago resulted in a stream of invective from Shepparton locals on a *Herald Sun* blog site, posting a picture of a community divided by rife Aboriginal violence and crime. The claims aren't backed up by the observations or statistics of local police. They say a small group of hard-core Aboriginal offenders are responsible for a disproportionate amount of violent crime, but that indigenous crime is not a particular problem, though there are ongoing programs to improve relations and defuse issues such as clan antagonisms.

Both incidents provide a glimpse of the subterranean attitudes that local Aborigines say they confront constantly — though an increasingly multicultural community profile, generational change, and ripples from Kevin Rudd's apology to the stolen generations are identified as factors in seeing some of that dissipate. Paul Briggs cites these as reasons to be optimistic.

Bob Laing, drawing on his own lifetime of observations of New Zealand society, equates the position of Aborigines now with where Maoris were 40 years ago, adding that Maori advancement since then was assisted by much more positive attitudes to them and their culture than Aborigines have enjoyed. "How do I say this nicely," he says. "I think white New Zealanders hold Maoridom in higher regard than white Australians hold Aborigines."

Working with leaders such as Briggs, Atkinson and Dean, he and his council are increasingly active in efforts to address this by building Aboriginal cultural identity, value and recognition. They all list these as priorities akin to health, housing and education programs; without dismantling the walls of cultural perception and disregard, effort on all other fronts crumbles away. They all claim big steps have been made in the past two or three years. "Identity is integral to everything," says Atkinson. "It's not about being absorbed into the community, it's about having a place here, an identity in community."

Atkinson also looks across the Tasman when he tries to imagine what will be required to "close the gaps" between white and black Shepparton, and white and black Australia. He was there 20 years ago, witnessing the early days of the Maori effort towards self-determination.

He vividly recalls the nervousness of the community, and its leaders, in taking the leap from the comfortable constrictions of welfare dependency into self-management and entrepreneurial nation building.

"They looked at themselves first, their cultural identity, at how important it was to maintain that. They looked at social justice issues, at social economic issues, and some of that meant letting go of the paternalistic welfare structure. They agonised over it. But look now, the benefits are there," he says.

"They've got land, they've got agreements with government, they've got appointments in Parliament, they've got their own political party, their own school of business, their own businesses employing their people. They had strong leaders who persisted in saying what had to be done and they did it."

He looks around Shepparton and imagines a future in which Aborigines are visible, integral players in agriculture, water management, and other core elements of prosperity. And it begins for him as the Maori journey did, with a commitment to educating children; to raising them in safe homes; to nurturing leadership; and to building and broadcasting cultural identity.

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Paul Briggs reckons the stirring of much of this is to be seen in the exuberance of the kids training at Rumbalara, the young players watched by family and coached by emerging community leaders. "We're in a holding pattern," he says. "We're encouraging kids and people in our community to have a sense of hope that there can be a good future. But we haven't described what that future is, and to do that, we need non-Aboriginal leadership to work with us, not just as an Aboriginal community, but as the Shepparton community."

Briggs says just bringing government, industry, business and churches to the table for such a discussion has been fraught because for so long Aboriginal issues resided in the world of crisis intervention, "where the broader community felt it had no part to play ... the blame placed on the victims for the position we are in. So it's a cultural shift to even engage in a healthier conversation."

The Shepparton he describes is not so different to the one where he and his brother Les grew up. Though they have long since left the river flats, many Aborigines remain fringe-dwellers, existing outside the social economic structure, white and black still nervous of what each might demand or sacrifice should they venture closer together. "But I don't think there is anything to fear in relationships with Aboriginal people owning and sustaining their culture as part of a broader culture. It's just myths and fears and a lack of leadership holding people back."

It's dark, and the kids have left the sportsground. Time to stop talking for now. "But it's a long conversation," Briggs laughs.

Jo Chandler is a senior writer.

Online Journal Article- History of Rumbalara:

Link: http://archive.healthinfonet.edu.edu.au/html/html_bulletin/bull_6/abstracts/HACC/lenamorris.htm

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Bulletin

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International Homecare & HACC Australia Conference

29 March - 1 April, 1999, Brisbane Convention and Exhibition Centre, Brisbane, Queensland

Morris, L., McKenzie, P. & Sherlock, J.

Rumbalara Aboriginal Cooperative

In 1996/7 the Rumbalara Aboriginal Co-operative and GV Community Options made a joint application for Community Care Packages. The application was based around an agreement that Community Options would employ and train an Aboriginal Worker and allocate a number of places specifically for Aboriginal people. From this beginning, a relationship of trust and mutual understanding was developed.

One of the requirements to access a Community Care Package was the need to be assessed by the Aged Care Assessment Service to determine eligibility. The Goulburn Valley ACAS with Rumbalara and Community Options have worked together to provide a culturally sensitive assessment which is as non-invasive as possible.

From this beginning, the relationship has flourished to such an extent that the local Aboriginal population is now strongly represented in all Community Options programs and the roles of both Community Options and ACAS are recognized and accepted by Rumbalara and the Aboriginal Community.

A short history

Rumbalara's history began on the river flats between Shepparton and Mooroopna in the 1940's.

Large numbers of our people seeking work and dissatisfied with the management and conditions at the Cummergunga Missions station, situated on the Murray River at Barmah, moved to this area and settled.

By the early 1950's, approximately 300 people were living on the river flats, moving to an old tip on higher ground by the name of Daish's Paddock when the floodwaters came. Due to recurring floods, many of the families remained at the Daish's Paddock site.

This unsuitable site, lacking good water supply and pervaded by flies and the stench from the tip produced appalling living conditions. Much comment was made about the situation and complaints were received from various authorities, but little was done to improve it until 1957 when a site, the Blue Moon Fruit Packing Company was selected and obtained by the Mooroopna and District Housing for Aborigines.

The Aboriginal Welfare Board formed in 1956, together with the Housing Commission started the erection of pre-fabricated houses in early 1958.

The housing project was officially opened and name 'RUMBALARA' (meaning rainbow) by the Chief Secretary Mr Arthur Rylah on April 11, 1958 and shortly afterwards the families moved in.

Rumbalara was not intended as a permanent home for the families who moved into it, but as a stage in the plan to rehouse them within the wider community and in the next few years dozens of families went through and were rehoused either in Mooroopna or Shepparton. By 1969 most local families had been rehoused and with no further use, Rumbalara closed and remained so for some five years.

Riverside PARRAMATTA

In the early 70's, the local Aboriginal community, which now numbered 1000 to 1500, were going to establish a Community Centre.

The Goulburn Murray Aboriginal Co-operative, through much persistent pressure, on both the State and Federal Government, purchased the site for a nominal sum in the early 1970's.

With the title in their possession, the way was now clear for the Co-operative to carry out its aims and objectives which were to establish a place where Aboriginals could meet for cultural and social activities as well as provide education, information and support in areas of special need such as health, housing, welfare and culture.

Since Rumbalara's establishment as a Community Centre, many changes have occurred and services have expanded to meet the needs of the growing Aboriginal community.

Aged Care and Disability Service - HACC
Mental Health program.
Councilor and Psychiatric Nurse.
Drug and Alcohol
Recovery House.
Community Justice.
Juvenile Justice.
Youth Program.
Youth Community Services.
Accommodation Project.

Medical centre

Specialists' Services include Pediatrician, Gynecologist, Ear Nose and Throat
Allied Health
Podiatrist
Physiotherapist
Midwives Clinic
Maternal and Child Health Nurse
Psychiatric Nurse
Optometrist

Other services

Community Health Nurses.
Ear Screening Program.
Pregnancy Support Worker.
Eye Care Program.

Presenters

Lena Morris Manager Aged and Disability Services
Rumbalara Aboriginal Co-operative
Rumbalara Rd, Mooroopna
(03) 5825 2111

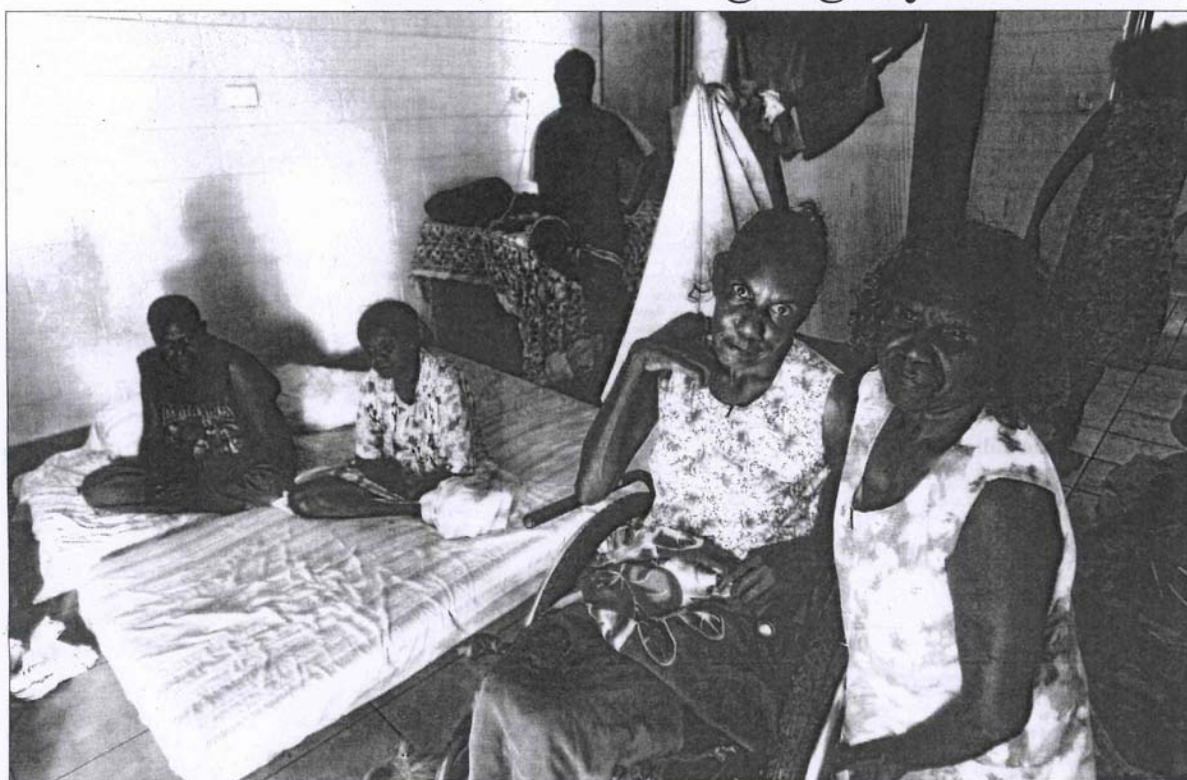
Paul McKenzie Co-ordinator Aged and Disability Services
Goulburn Valley Community Options
102 Corio Street, Shepparton
(03) 5831 6192

Joanne Sherlock Previous Manager,
Goulburn Valley Aged Care Assessment Service

Newspaper Article:

The Weekend Australian: August 15-16 2009

After a life of loss, a housing legacy of shame



Heavy cross to bear: Gayangwa Lalara comforts her 14-year-old niece Rosanne Mirmyowan in the Groote Eylandt property that is home to nine adults and four children

Picture: Renee Nowytagar

TONY KOCH



Henderson survives but put 'on notice'

ABORIGINAL politician Alison Anderson yesterday labelled the \$672 million indigenous housing program the biggest scandal she had seen in her political career, as Labor narrowly avoided being thrown from power in the Northern Territory.

Chief Minister Paul Henderson survived a motion of no confidence that had been triggered by the resignation of Ms Anderson, the former indigenous policy minister, after he agreed to an extensive list of demands put by the independent MP

Gerry Wood, who held the casting vote. Ms Anderson said her experience as a minister in the Labor government had left her in despair.

"I believed the Labor Party cared about Aboriginal issues, that Labor was the party for the Aboriginal cause. After four years in the system, I know that I was wrong. Labor lives on the Aboriginal vote, it talks constantly about Aboriginal people, but what it is really good at is spending Aboriginal money." Full story - Page 8

SPECIAL REPORT

THE INDIGENOUS HOUSING CRISIS

Reports, photographs - Pages 8 and 9

Editorial - Page 16

On-the-ground investigation

Inquirer, Page 17

Alison Anderson's speech

Inquirer, Page 24

Stunning pictures in multimedia presentation

www.theaustralian.com.au

A TINY, black-skinned woman on remote Groote Eylandt, off east Arnhem Land, her shoulders slumped from decades of pain and unimaginable hurt, looks shyly down as she speaks in a whisper of "blame and shame".

Yet the battle this amazing Aboriginal woman has dealt with through all her life marks her as one of the most courageous humans alive today.

It is hard enough to live in a community in the grip of a hereditary degenerative disease for which there is no cure.

But the hardship of life on the island is compounded by the empty promises from government to indigenous Australians living in remote communities in conditions that locals correctly

describe as "below Third World".

Just over 18 months ago, the federal government announced a \$672 million allocation to the Strategic Indigenous Housing and Infrastructure Program in a massive assault on the accumulated disadvantage. But as *The Australian* revealed last month, not one house has yet been built under the program.

Bureaucratic red tape, a confusion of organisations, the employment of

"consultants" with their endless visits to the communities and a creaming off the top by the Northern Territory government has delivered the usual result: nothing. What most defies belief is that the federal and Northern Territory governments know that the lack of appropriate housing on remote and regional communities is critical.

Commonly, three-bedroom houses with just one toilet and shower have to

accommodate more than 20 people, including the elderly and the newborn.

The houses cannot cope, and neither can the occupants, who usually have nowhere else to go. On Groote Eylandt, there are families living in tents on the beaches because they can no longer live in the homes. Yet they still have \$30 a week deducted from their wages or dole payments to meet the "poll tax" for

the shameful housing, even though they are not living under a roof. The heart-wrenching example of Gayangwa Lalara must soften the most cynical political heart. In reality, it should be enough to see Kevin Rudd strap on a nail-bag himself and help somebody whose degree of need almost defies belief.

Gayangwa is 65, a proud and intelligent Warnindiyakwa woman revered in her island community for the strength of character and family loyalty she exhibits.

She nursed her father for the 20 years he took to die when afflicted by the mystery "Groote Eylandt Syndrome".

It is a cruel way to die, with the brain fully alert but the body functions and muscle control gone.

There is no cure for what has now been identified by medical researchers as Machado-Joseph Disease, a hereditary neurodegenerative condition in the disease family that includes Continued - Page 8

Continued:

After a life of loss, a legacy of shame

From Page 1

Huntington's disease, and for which there is no cure. MJD is an inherited autosomal dominant disorder, which means each child of a person carrying the defective gene has a 50 per cent chance of developing the disease.

The first signs are the child, youth or adult developing a "drunken sway" gait, and mobility and muscular control degeneration follows. Within a decade, the patient is confined to a wheelchair, incontinent and without any control over limbs or muscles, unable to sleep and awaiting death, which in most cases can take up to another decade.

Gayangwa's three brothers saw their father die. They were in turn diagnosed with the disease and died, as did her two sisters and a young nephew. A niece, now 14, is already confined to a wheelchair, having been confirmed with MJD as an 11-year-old. The mutation of the disease when passed to the next generation — the anticipation effect — means symptoms appear eight to 10 years earlier and are more severe. Medical experts estimate that 300 Australians, mostly living on Groote Eylandt and several other Northern Territory communities, will develop MJD.

The disease is thought to have been introduced to Groote in the 16th century by Portuguese sailors. Yet despite Territory and federal governments knowing of the dreadful disease for four generations, little real attention has been paid, particularly regarding the provision of MJD-specific infrastructure.

Gayangwa lives with eight adults and four children in a two-bedroom house. The residents include her wheelchair-bound niece, Rosanne Mirnyowan. The small lounge room has a string across the centre with sheets hanging from it so an improvised bedroom can be made for four adults, who sleep on mattresses on the floor.

They each pay \$30 in rent for the house, which has recently had added a purpose-built disability shower and toilet block. The younger family members have lived with older adults dying in the house and know the stark truth that one morning they could wake up with "the drunken walk" — and face 20 years of undignified suffering before death.

Although a blood test would confirm

beyond doubt whether they are to become MJD sufferers, the young people are frightened to know the result. They live a life of horror and fear.

But the house, like so many on the island, is a wreck. It is not vandalised — just worn out because a single house with one bathroom and a small kitchen cannot cope with the needs of the number of family members who need to be housed there because of the accommodation shortage on Groote Eylandt.

Gayangwa points to the overcrowding, and speaks again of the "shame" she has of showing outsiders the living conditions. "All I want is a house like white people, with enough bedrooms for my family to live in properly," she said.

She cannot understand why she and other families like hers — the traditional owners of the land — have to live in such conditions, and is tired of the endless political promises that do not change the sad ratio of Aboriginal people to available accommodation.

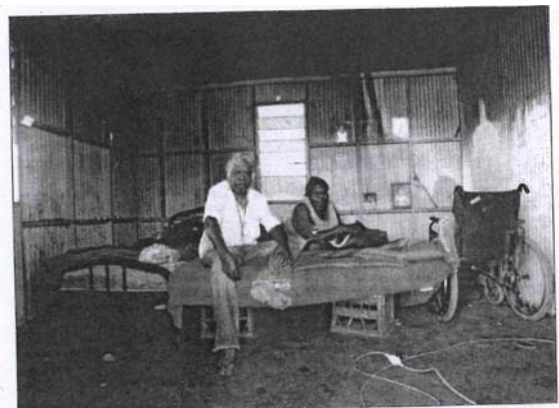
An example of government ineptitude and dismissal of the plight of the seriously ill and elderly on Groote is the aged care respite centre constructed there. It has eight beds and facilities for MJD sufferers and others, and it would be ideal for such patients to stay there overnight or even for extended periods, which would give all parties involved a much-needed break. But it is usable only during the day because there is no housing available for staff, who would have to be employed if it were a 24-hour facility.

When governments speak of taxpayer funds being spent on "priority housing", there cannot possibly be more deserving people in this country.

Gayangwa is vice-chairman of the MJD Foundation. The chairman is occupational therapist Libby Morgan, a non-Indigenous woman who was raised by missionary parents on Groote and returns periodically from her Brisbane home to ensure whatever help is available is rendered to these souls.

She is every bit as remarkable as her close friend, Gayangwa, and is an outspoken advocate for help and facilities to be provided to the MJD sufferers throughout Australia's Top End.

Information for donations and support of the MJD Foundation can be found at www.mjd.org.au



Awaiting change: Frank Anderson and Mary Johnny live in a tin shack at Wuppa



Where do the children play? The Mulga town camp in Tennant Creek

Newspaper Article:

The Weekend Australian August 22-23 2009

The new stolen generation

Caroline Overington

WELFARE workers have swooped on the opal mining town of Lightning Ridge in northwest NSW, removing more than 40 Aboriginal children from decrepit homes in shanty towns.

Those removed included a four-day-old baby who had barely learned to suckle when taken from his mother's breast, while she was still in the local hospital, recovering from giving birth.

Aboriginal women, stunned by the removals, say it amounts to a "modern-day Stolen Generation", but the most recent statis-

tics on child removals show Aboriginal children are being taken from their parents in numbers much greater than the Stolen Generations.

Official figures from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare show there are now more than 9000 indigenous children in state care — a figure that far outstrips the number that were taken in the 1920s and 30s.

Both NSW, with 4316, and Queensland, with 2085, have this year set records for the number of indigenous children taken from their parents.

In both states, Aboriginal children are being taken at 10

times the rate of white children.

Nationwide, Aboriginal children comprise just 4.4 per cent of all children, and yet make up 24 per cent of all children in care.

Vanessa Kirk, of Queensland's newly formed Aboriginal Women For Change, said: "The Stolen Generation hasn't stopped."

She argued that children are being taken today for exactly the reason they were last century: poverty.

Helen Howlett helped to form the Wirringah Women's Group

Continued — Page 6

More reports — Page 6



Outrageous case*: The parents of a baby taken by welfare when he was only four days old

Pictures: Renee Nowyarger

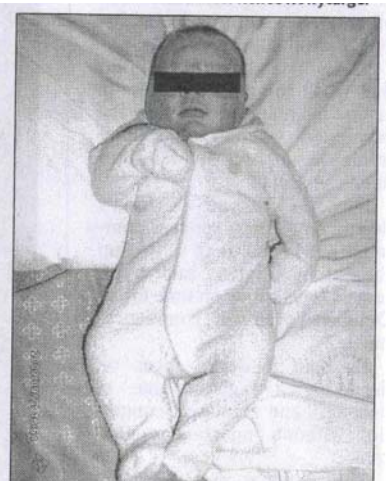
Riverside

PARRAMATTA

Continued:



Squalor: The family's home in Lightning Ridge



In care: The baby taken from hospital

Another generation of despair

From Page 1

in Lightning Ridge after local mothers counted 41 children removed from the opal fields, and the surrounding towns of Walgett and Wee Waa. "The effect of the removals is just shocking," Ms Howlett said. "Everybody is just stunned."

The group believes that welfare workers "have heard all the stories about sexual abuse in Aboriginal communities (and experienced the outrage at the death of an Aboriginal toddler, Dean Shillingsworth, whose body was found in a suitcase in a duck pond) and now they are spooked into just taking all the kids".

The Wirringah group has demanded a meeting with the NSW ombudsman's office, which will send four workers to Lightning Ridge on Monday. They will meet parents, and lawyers attached to the Walgett Children's Court who are likewise concerned about the number of children being taken. The meeting has been convened under the banner "Bring Our Children Home".

The Ombudsman's office would not comment, citing concerns about the privacy of the parents who had lost their children.

Ms Howlett said the mother who had an infant taken from her breast, who cannot be named for legal reasons, has dozens of supporters in town, including nurses, lawyers and elders. They say she and her husband are "wonderful people who would not harm their children".

There is no doubt they lived in what urban Australians would call squalor.

The children's father, who is not indigenous, staked a claim outside Lightning Ridge and digs for opals.

Their home was a hand-built shanty-style dwelling. They had no running water, just a garden hose pipe attached to a water tank and there were serious hygiene problems, particularly in the kitchen.

The mother told *The Weekend Australian*

Weekend Inquirer

As politicians and bureaucrats head north for another round of definite responses to the chronic crisis in indigenous health, there are hundreds, perhaps thousands, of failed programs and projects that disappeared without evaluative trace, reports of commissions and inquiries consigned to administrative oblivion, inconvenient service reviews and more

Ernest Hunter

— Page 24

welfare workers got in contact with her family when one of her daughters, who also can't be named, told a teacher her father had hit her with a stick. He has since been charged with assault.

The teacher reported the assault to the Department of Community Services, as is required under mandatory reporting guidelines. Welfare workers went to the site where the family lived and saw they did not have water or sewerage, and the rooms were filthy. They asked the other children if their father ever hit them; two of them said yes.

The five children were immediately taken and separated into different foster homes, many hundreds of kilometres apart.

The mother, who was pregnant, went into labour soon afterwards. Two days after the baby was born, welfare workers turned up to remove him, but *The Weekend Australian* understands nurses turned them away, saying it was inhumane to remove a suckling baby from its mother. The workers returned on day four to take the child. The baby is now with foster parents in Dubbo. His parents are making the eight-hour trip three times a week for access visits, and to deliver him fresh breast milk.

"It really is the most outrageous case because these are wonderful people," Ms Howlett said. "It is the case that has really pushed the community over the edge."

The NSW Children's Care and Protection Act specifically says poverty alone is not a reason to remove children. There must be abuse, neglect or an "immediate risk" of harm.

Vaughan Bryer, a community volunteer in nearby Walgett, said: "They are taking babies from their mothers because they don't like the way they live. That's the reason they were removed (during the last Stolen Generations)."

Mr Bryer said it was not clear to anyone who worked on the most recent case how the child was at "immediate risk" of serious harm. "They are a very loving, supportive and well-liked pair," he said.

"It is safe to say that all the people in their community who have had dealings with them find this situation incredible. There is no drugs, no alcohol, just an alternative lifestyle."

He agreed there were "serious social problems" in Lightning Ridge. "Some children do need to be removed, and that's what the department is for, but the recent examples have amazed the community."

The parents in the most recent case are understood to have sworn affidavits that they did not hit their children and to have consented to the children going into care, but their supporters say they did so only because they believed they stood a better chance of getting them back if they agreed their standard of living was poor and moved from the opal fields. They have since taken a place in town.

In Queensland, where a record 2259 indigenous children are in state care (compared with 660 in Victoria and 467 in South Australia), opposition child safety spokesman Jack Dempsey said he, too, feared "another Stolen Generations being created".

"Time and time again we have heard of families who have asked for help from child safety workers only to have their child removed and put into care," he said.