

## **WPS DEVELOPMENTAL NOTE #64**

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### **THE FIFTH TRIAL OF PROVIDING WORK IN A CITRUS PACKING SHED TO YOUNG INDIGENOUS FEMALES FROM REMOTE COMMUNITIES**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

This note introduces the successful trial of providing young Indigenous females with unsubsidised private sector employment packing citrus for Yandilla Park Agribusiness in Renmark, South Australia. The note provides the details of the trial and discusses some of the factors that appear to have contributed to our first success with females. The learnings that have come out of this trial will assist the Work Placement Scheme (WPS) to better manage female behaviour and profile those young females who are suited to this type of work away from home and community.

#### **PARTICULARS OF THE TRIAL**

##### **Participants**

This trial consists of three young Indigenous females who all came forward wanting to join the WPS. All three girls requested that this report refer to them by their real names because they want to be recognised for their achievement.

The first participant is Jamie-Lee Mangolamara aged 16 from the remote eastern Kimberly Aboriginal community of Kalumburu. When she first arrived, Jamie presented as a frightened, shy young girl lacking confidence but very keen to get out of Kalumburu for a better life free of sexual abuse and exploitation. She had no experience at paid employment prior to entering the scheme apart from a bit of CDEP work in day-care and in the Kalumburu council office. She attended boarding school in Melbourne so she had experience at leaving home and community. She was perceived by the CEO at Kalumburu to have no strong attachments to kin. She was raised by her grandparents until they passed away and then she was looked after by her aunt. She has no boyfriend or history of drug or alcohol abuse.

The second participant is Lydia Jack aged 20 from the eastern Cape York Peninsula Aboriginal community of Hopevale. This was her first experience at unsubsidised mainstream private sector employment. She did her secondary schooling in Cairns and Brisbane. She had experience working on CDEP as a receptionist at the Hopevale health centre for a few months. She has never left home or community for any significant amount of time since leaving school. She presented as more outgoing than Jamie, but I sensed she had lower self-esteem. She has no boyfriend and appears to have a moderate attachment to kin. She has a 2-year-old boy that was removed by the welfare department for neglect and failure to protect. The child was placed in the care

of her cousin-sister living in Wujal Wujal. I was told that Lydia had a history of drug and alcohol abuse, although Lydia denies this.

The third participant is Mawella Sagigi, aged 22 years, from the Torres Strait. She has been living in Cairns for the past few years. This is her first experience at unsubsidised mainstream private sector employment. She did have experience working on CDEP at Darnley Island in the Torres Strait. She has left home in the past to live with other relatives. She presented as confident, outgoing and with a relatively mature outlook on life. She has no children or boyfriend and only a moderate attachment to kin. She is a user of drugs and alcohol; most likely a periodic heavy user.



**Jamie-Lee Mangolamara from Kalumbur**



**Lydia Jack from Hopevale**



**Mawella Sagigi from Cairns**

### **Contractual agreement**

This is the fifth trial of young females from remote communities and the first to have completed their 6 month employment agreement or work to the end of the citrus packing season. In this case, they all worked to the end of the citrus packing season which lasted 3 months.

All three girls commenced work with Yandilla Park Agribusiness in Renmark, South Australia on the 20 June 2007. They completed this job on 1 September 2007.

### **Support arrangements**

The girls were provided with flights from their home community to Adelaide, South Australia. From Adelaide, they were transported to the Riverland town of Renmark. They all received the standard one week's food and rental assistance, as required. They were provided with a good quality two bedroom private rental home furnished by the scheme. The house was located within walking distance of the town centre. The girls were responsible for their own cooking and cleaning and regular inspections were carried out.

Their place of employment was located approximately 10 kilometres from the town centre. Transport to and from the packing shed was provided by the scheme at cost.

### **Supervisory arrangements**

One of the conclusions of our earlier trials of females was that an on-site female supervisor is a preferred approach. To find a suitable person willing and able to perform this task was going to be very difficult. To find a suitable Indigenous female was going to be much more difficult.

In the lead up to this trial a middle-aged Aboriginal woman from Cooktown did offer to be an on-site (at work) and off-site (away from work) supervisor of three girls of her choice also from Cooktown. These girls were interviewed and I assessed two of them as unsuitable. They were all in their mid-20's, all known to be heavy drinkers and dope smokers, and they had no work history. A month out from the start date it became clear that this middle-aged woman was also unsuitable as an on-site or off-site supervisor. New girls were chosen and a new supervisor had to be found.

Two weeks out from the starting date, one of our male supervisor heard about our coming-up trial of females and said his wife, named Sitteri, of Papua New Guinea descent, was interested in the on-site and off-site supervision of our three girls. She was assessed as suitable by our Renmark work-group manager and CYP coordinator. Both husband and wife agreed to live in a caravan at the back of the house rented for the three girls. Within the week, the husband and wife defaulted on the agreement, saying they did not want to be separated from their 18-year-old son and demanded a house. A house was found which we provided on condition that the wife spent some nights with the girls - a condition that she never fulfilled.

Running parallel with this, an Aboriginal-Torres Strait Islander living in Mareeba named AA, applied to join the WPS. In his assessment interview, he claimed that he was 20-years-old. I questioned this saying that he looked much older. He then said he was 24-years-old. He had no identification to confirm his age saying that he lost his driver's license for drink-driving. This is not unusual. Most people from remote communities have no identification and some have no birth certificates. AA was approved and sent to our Renmark group. When he arrived in Renmark, he told our manager, Alex, an elderly gentleman of Greek origin, about his girlfriend named NN back in Mareeba. He said that she was interested in working in the Yandilla Park packing shed with the other girls and would provide good support for them. I agreed to send her down for this extra support and backup to Sitteri. I then left for a one month holiday, leaving Alex in charge.

Problems with NN began the moment she arrived. The same day she began her induction, she went to the personnel manager of Yandilla Park saying how she and the other girls had little food and lacked clothes and money for personal hygiene. Four senior Yandilla Park managers called Alex into their office to express concern about our lack of support provided to the girls. They told Alex how they had organised food parcels, blankets and clothes from St Vincent, along with \$100 advance payment to each girl. Alex pointed out that it was unnecessary as NN's suitcases were barely moveable with clothes and personal items and that blankets and all the other necessities had already been provided. He also said that judging by the amount of cigarettes they were buying they had plenty of money. In other words, Yandilla Park managers had been deceive. Proof of this came when two days into their induction, NN declared that the work was too hard and complained of a back ache. She then came out with this story that she had to go home to attend a funeral. This, of course, was nonsense. Then we had the problem of her partner BB.

Alex was initially impressed by BB. He took up the role of cook and was very good at getting the boys up in the morning and keeping the house clean.

While this was going on, we employed a professionally qualified middle-aged cook as a cook/supervisor who was placed in the caravan at the back of the girls' house vacated by Sitteri and her husband. This cook/supervisor only lasted a few days before he was dismissed for prancing around the girls' house drunk wearing only his underwear. He later rang the girls from Mildura trying to set up a date with them all, including the 16-year-old. When the girls told Alex about this, Alex reported him to the police, but they gave the expected response that "*no crime has been committed*" so there was "*nothing they could do*". Alex then rang this bloke and told him, in no uncertain terms, what would happen to him if he ever ventured near these girls. We never heard from him again.

Shortly after this, BB confided in Alex that he was in fact 42-years-old and had a valid drivers licence to prove it. He said he lied about his age to get into the WPS. Alex spoke to the CYP coordinator and it was decided that Alvie would be given the job of cook/supervisor and allowed the use of our bus. This proved to be a major mistake. I had learnt this lesson in 2005 when a participant was given the use of our van. He not only used it for joy trips around the Riverland but took most of the group with him. Two weeks later the engine was destroyed and the van had to be sold to the wreckers. See WPS Developmental Note #5 titled, '*The failure of peer supervision and the need for competent adult supervision*'. BB saw the work van as a free taxi to drive everyone around day and night. The girls loved it for they would ring up BB from work saying they felt sick and for him to come and pick them up. Fortunately, BB decided to return home with his partner NN for two weeks. In the meantime, I had returned to work from my holiday to have BB call me wanting to go back to work. I told him the job was no longer available and he was not suitable for any position in the WPS.

### **Employer arrangements**

Two weeks out from the starting date, their employer, Yandilla Park Agribusiness, informed me that they were delaying the girls' employment for 1 month. They said that this was due to the late season, but they later talked about the company's preference for locally sourced labour. I was then advised that the company wanted to place our girls into a one week induction course funded by DEWR and that they were not going to be paid for this week. When I asked what these girls were going to live on for the week, the Human Resource Officer replied that they could continue receiving welfare payments from Centrelink. The problem was that our girls were not receiving any Centrelink payments. Yandilla Park Agribusiness refused to accept that this was their problem. When asked about placing some more of our young people in their shed, they said that they had a responsibility to assist local Aborigines before young people from Cape York and that these other positions had been reserved for local Aborigines. It then came out that this induction course was set up for local Aborigines and we were to be included in this local course. The problem for them was that only one local Aboriginal person attended the induction. After many years of providing Yandilla Park Agribusiness with a very good service, this had marked the beginning of a steady deterioration in our relationship with the management of Yandilla Park Agribusiness who were no longer as understanding or keen to provide us with the same level of support.

### **RESULTS**

In his report, Alex talked about how the three girls were getting haphazard with their work. Our other supervisor was pandering to both girls and boys, driving them here, there and everywhere. In one working day he clocked up 200 km. The boys were freely visiting the girls and the girls were freely visiting the boys. The girls' personal hygiene was poor and they were arriving at late and intoxicated. The packing shed Staffing Coordinator, again contacted Alex saying that the girls' work performance was poor. Sitteri proved to be next to useless. She would not visit the girls or speak to them without Alex being present. She had little to no interaction with Lydia and Mawella and they, in-turn, showed no respect for her.

The relationship between the three girls then deteriorated. Lydia and Mawella teamed up against Jamie and Sitteri. Jamie was complaining that she was contributing equally to food, but not getting her fair share. Jamie had borrowed a phone from Lydia and then considered it was hers. When Lydia wanted it back she called Lydia an "*Indian giver*". Alex said that Jamie was becoming paranoid talking about how people were always staring at her and how she didn't like them because they were talking about her. Mawella was trying to help in a conciliatory manner but not getting anywhere. At this point, Alex lost his patience and composure and growled at all of them about their behaviour. He told them that if they wanted to go back to their community they are free to go, but if they do they will be "*returning as failures*" and "*in shame at having stuffed up*". He said if they wanted to stay in Renmark, they had to sort themselves out because he was "*no longer going to put up with their crap*". Alex said he was acting more like a father reprimanding his daughters hoping to shock them into submission. The girls remained totally silent and both Lydia and

Jamie had tears running down their face. Alex told me that he walked out of their house feeling that he had really “*stuffed things up*”. The next day he went to the girls’ house and found Jamie doing her washing. She sullenly told him how they talked and they were sorting their problems out. All the girls apologised to Alex for their behaviour. Alex then took over the transportation of the girls to and from work. If they wanted to go home early they were to ring him only. Alex thought things had settled down. The girls were on time for work every day and their behaviour appeared to be improving.

Then came the day Sitteri and her husband was asked to leave the scheme. We found out that he had another day-job on the side which explained why he was always leaving the boys under his charge unsupervised. He was also using our boys to co-work with his son to pick his oranges. This triggered one of our 15-year-old boys to want to leave the scheme and live with Sitteri and her husband while he waited for his mother to send him the money to get back home. Alex soon found out that this young boy went over to the girls’ house and was sleeping with Mawella and she was hiding him away in her bedroom. Alex explained to the girls, particularly Mawella, in no uncertain terms, about the immorality of this behaviour and that there are laws against this sort of thing. I decided to hold-off on reporting Mawella to the police. The 15-year-old boy was sent back home the following day.

When I heard about this incident, I decided to send down an elderly Aboriginal woman who is a qualified social worker, with extensive experience in remote communities as a statutory welfare worker, to visit the girls and assess the situation. The day after she arrived, she rang me to say that it was her assessment that Mawella should be evicted from the scheme as a bad influence and as a warning to the other girls. My question was; “*If we evict Mawella from the scheme, what impact would this have on the other two, apart from serving as a warning to not bring boys into the house? What other roles or influence does Mawella bring to this group?*”

This social worker had no answer to these questions. Her view was that I “*should not molly-coddle them too much*” and that Mawella should be taught a lesson. On the following day, she rang me to say that she had met with the girls and that Mawella was a very nice person and everything was fine.

It later came to my attention that the girls did not like one our supervisors, named Terry, and that he was excused by Alex from transporting the girls to and from work. I later heard the reason for this. According to Terry, one morning, he was transporting the girls to work when they asked him to call by a shop so that they could buy some hot pies for breakfast and then proceeded to keep him waiting in the car for a half-hour. When they returned, Terry made it clear that this is the last time that he will be kept waiting. The girls didn’t like this so they complained to Alex, saying they didn’t like Terry. A similar thing occurred in the second trial when the girls told their supervisor that it was his job to serve them and they would keep him regularly waiting. On that occasion, I spoke to the girls saying that they are confused; supervisors are not there at their beck and call. This resulted in the girls ringing their mothers carrying on about how horrible I was and how they wanted to come home.

Then came a call from the packing shed Staffing Coordinator. She wanted another meeting with Alex. At this meeting, she told him that Lydia and Jamie were to finish up on the Thursday. They were not doing their work, listening or taking directions from their foreman. Alex told Terisa that this feedback was not coming to him and he pleaded for *“a stay of execution”* so that he could speak to the girls over the weekend. Terisa agreed to his request. Alex informed Lydia and Jamie that they had been sacked and they would have to go back home. This had the effect of Mawella coming on side as she didn't like the idea of being left alone. Alex told them that they had one more chance and they had to take direction from their production-line supervisor as if it was directions from him. He said, *“There is no excuse for being rude and lazy”*, and, *“How hard was it to chuck oranges in a box.”* Alex said, work wise, ever since, from this second growling, they have produced good work to the point that they were receiving praise from their production-line supervisor and the Staffing Coordinator is now saying she would re-employ them next season.

On the issue of drugs and alcohol, Mawella admitted to me that they were bringing drugs and alcohol into the home. She said they drank 1 bottle of rum every week, but they only drank on weekends. She said they didn't smoke much dope, only about \$30 worth every week. She said they smoked and drank because it *“brings down the pressure”* and *“it stops us from stressing out.”* Mawella said they were buying the dope from Sitteri's 18-year-old son (the son of their ex-supervisor). There was also the occasion when Mawella went to Mildura with Sitteri and came back blind-drunk; unable to pick herself up off the ground.

Hygiene was a problem with all the girls. It was clear to everyone who came in close proximity to the girls that they were not washing their clothes nor themselves. This problem was rectified when one day Alex told the girls how the *“boys really stink”* and how *“they have made the van stink”* and he *“can't stand it any longer”*. Thereafter, the girls regularly washed themselves.

So what do the girls say about all this. I had put all these issues to the girls for comment. They were reluctant to comment at first, but after some coaching, these were their answers:

Jamie: *“We are more sensible now.”*  
Lydia: *“We pulled our socks up.”*  
Mawella: *“We pulled our head in. We didn't abandon it when things got out of hand. We still stayed.”*

When I asked why they had succeeded where the other girls hadn't, they were more forthcoming. These were their answers:

Jamie: *“We had friendship.”*  
Lydia: *“We got to know other people”.*  
Mawella: *“We were good listeners. We were open-minded. We talked. We had good communication.”*

On an open question about supervision, their responses were:

Jamie: *“Alex is all-right. He buys us extra things.”*  
Lydia: *“I would like a female supervisor, but Alex is good. He takes*

us shopping.”  
Mawella: “Alex is good. We didn’t need supervision but we didn’t mind it after a while. He didn’t have to be strict.”

In answer to my question; who would be a better supervisor - male or female, black or white? They all agreed with Mawella when she said, “It depends on the person.”

I asked the girls if they thought they could have coped by themselves. Their answers were:

Jamie: “No, too shame.”  
Lydia: “No way.”  
Mawella: “I think I could cope, I’m a quiet person.”

Mawella acknowledged that she was the leader of the girls and that she understood them. She said, “They probably looked up to me. If they had problems they would ask me.” Mawella did most of the cooking and they took it turns cleaning.

The big surprise at the end of their job was that none of the girls wanted to go home. They said they wanted another job somewhere else. Discussions took place with Fletcher’s International in Albany, Western Australia, and they agreed to employ all three girls in their abattoir. On the 2 September 2007, they and our new husband and wife supervisor, cook and domestic support worker left Renmark and flew to Albany. At the Adelaide airport, the girls gave Alex a card with hugs and kisses thanking him for his help. It was enclosed with a fridge magnet written “Employee of the Month”.

## DISCUSSION

### Home and community environments

It is very important that we continue trialling females for they make up half the population of all young people in remote Aboriginal communities and they, like males, suffer the same levels of disadvantage, possibly even greater.

Young girls from remote communities will soon have three options open to them after they have completed their formal schooling. The first option is for them to remain in their remote home community on income support to attend some sort of training course or as a job-seeker attending the new ‘community clean-up’ work-for-the-dole program.

The second option, which for many young girls is already the preferred option, is to take up a life of child birth/care and dependency on family, with or without income support. This second option is assisted by the fact that there are very few real jobs in remote communities for young girls and many are not excited by the first option.

The third option is for them to leave home for real mainstream jobs outside their community. This is the option that the WPS is presently trying to assist.

The social consequences of choosing the first two options can be quite awful. Family homes are usually open to extended family. This means that it is not uncommon to have up to twenty people living or coming-and-going in a three-bedroom house with only one bathroom and toilet. These over-crowded, open family homes can become overwhelmed by all-sorts of problems. As the house is used by every-one, often the effect is that it belongs to nobody and therefore nobody takes responsibility. Nobody buys furniture. Nobody cleans up. Nobody carries out maintenance. The house is rowdy and you get little rest or sleep. People steal your food and invade your privacy. On pension day and CDEP payday the drinking starts. Music is turned up full-blast. Intoxication is followed by yelling and screaming, which is followed by arguments. It is not just the males that carry-on; I have seen young girls, mothers, aunts, and grandmothers, staggering around blind drunk and making complete fools of themselves. Then there are the fights; those gruesome bloody fights where everyone beats up on each other for no particular reason. Only last week, the aunty of our Kowanyama boys was beaten and stabbed to death by her drunken partner. While all of this is going on, the children must fend for themselves. Often, they and any non-drinkers must flee for their own safety. There are reports of sober grandmothers being forced to lock themselves in bedrooms with their grandchildren to protect them from being raped. There are reports saying that the majority of girls in some communities have been sexually abused and are caught up in very violent relationships. These reports are backed up by statistics which say that in Queensland between 1999 and 2000 there were 24,886 charges of assault brought before the courts and 47% of male assaults are committed against females. Just imagine the number of assaults against women in remote communities that are not brought before the courts.

When I was a statutory child protection worker working in remote communities, I saw bloodied, battered and bruised children. I can recall the time when I was approached by a distraught drunken old man who told me how "*fucked*" this place was - referring to his home community. He told me how fathers were having sex with their daughters, brothers were having sex with their sisters, and mothers were having sex with their sons. I can't say his story was true, but it was disturbing to say the least and it became even more disturbing when he started naming the people. Four months ago, 13 Kalumburu girls had made major disclosures of sexual abuse. These disclosures resulted in 19 Kalumburu males now in custody charged with sexual offences against children. They included the Chairman, Deputy Chairman, 6 Counsellors, Head Warden (Senior Community Police Officer), Warden (Community Police Officer), Stronger Families Project worker, and a number of other community members, including 3 minors. The victims; male and female, were lured into providing sexual favours in exchange for drugs. The perpetrators were teaching the young girls what to do by showing them hard-core pornography.

Girls, like boys, have spent many years indulging in drugs and alcohol and have little or no experience in learning how to have sober relationships, and how to socialise without drugs and alcohol and how all relationships need not to be sexual relationships. In the communities, there are more and more young single mothers and most of these young girls have no idea of how to care for children. In Kalumburu, many of these children born by young teenage girls were fathered by older men after sexual favours in exchange for drugs.

Knowledge about basic child-care was lost long ago and they have very little support and few good role models. Jamie said to me, *“The girls in Kalumburu walk around like raggedy dogs and they treat their babies like shit; they don’t feed them properly or give them any rest. They have babies after babies and just give them to their cousin-sisters to look after”*. Jamie went on to say that these girls are all *“good for nothing lazy druggies and drinkers, dirty, with filthy mouths and lovers of boys”*. In Hopevale, Lydia’s home community, there have been 27 children removed by child protection services in the last 12 months.

I read in the newspaper that the Northern Territory police sexual abuse taskforce is investigating two cases involving 12-year-old girls who have fallen pregnant. I know parents in Aurukun who allowed their 16-year-old son to bring home this 12-year-old-girl to live with him. The other day a 15-year-old boy from Kowanyama didn’t want to join the WPS because it meant leaving his 13-year-old live-in lover. His mother is an educated person who holds a very responsible position in the community and is unwilling or unable to do anything about what goes on in her own home.

During this trial, Alex had cause to contact The Welfare to request counselling for Jamie. Alex said that he got on to a counsellor but all she said was that Jamie should be sent back home. The counsellor could not or would not accept the reality of the situation. This girl had no family to protect her in Kalumburu and there were no supports or effective counselling services for her. She fled the community in fear of being molested and a desire for a better life, and all this counsellor could talk about was how she should be sent back home.

This is not the first time that counsellors and others in the helping profession have shown their complete ignorance about what really goes on in these remote communities. Although, it’s not always their lack of knowledge that gives rise to their objection to young black people from remote northern communities being assisted to live and work in white urban southern communities. Attitudes can be a real block or filter to facts and logical arguments. Attitudes develop over time and are usually the result of repeated exposure to particular points of view. Social work students or workers who see their teachers or superiors recoil in disgust or reach out in empathy to members of some racial group, social class, gender group or social circumstance are likely, over time, to develop the same attitude. To give an example, years ago, I and many other social workers were given an article as part of an induction course by the Department of Families and Communities Services, Victoria on how to work with Aboriginal children and their parents. This article was titled, ‘Raising Children in the Nunga Aboriginal Way’ and published in the prestigious Australian Child and Family Welfare Journal. It begins with the following abstract:

**“This article provides a snapshot of some aspects of Aboriginal child rearing. It argues that Aboriginal child rearing practices that may be seen in a negative light by non-Aboriginal people are, in fact, effective means for preparing Aboriginal children to deal with the conditions they will encounter as adults.”**

This abstract is followed by an introductory quote by an Aboriginal woman that the authors say “sums up some of concerns of many Nunga Aboriginal mothers”.

*“You know a government worker will come through the door and see that we haven’t got very much and that I haven’t got a sparkling clean toilet or a shiny kitchen. There’s only four cups in the house and two or three knives. There’s only five towels between 11 or 12 people. There’s junk on the floor and chocolate and scribble on the walls. Sometimes a panel in the wall will get broken when one of our relations gets drunk and goes silly. There might be bits and pieces of car in the yard and the grass will probably be long and dry. They might even hear me yelling at Wayne, “Get off the fucking table or I’ll knock your head off ”. These are the kinds of things that government workers will see and turn around and say that maybe I’m not a fit mother. **Because they are only seeing things through their white culture** (bold added). I often wonder why me and my family have to be punished because we are poor because the school never taught my kids to read and write properly and nobody will give them a job. **Why should I be punished because I do things differently to the way white people expect things to be done** (bold added)? Why do I have to worry that my son will get depressed in prison and take his own life? **Why do teachers, police, welfare workers and doctors look down on me because of my Nunga culture** (bold added)?*

The authors named this woman Dorothy and they go on to describe more of her lifestyle and her way of raising children. The authors contrasted Dorothy’s behaviour with that of a non-indigenous woman’s. Differences between the two women and their child care practices are identified and described as cultural differences, rather than general behavioural difference, and hence “prone to misinterpretation”.

What we have here is a misguided effort to create cultural understanding which perpetuates the very problem that we are all trying to eliminate. The article reinforces negative cultural stereotypes and then urges practitioners to be empathic towards people like Dorothy and her abusive and neglectful child care practices. It can be argued that the national Aboriginal child abuse crisis was fuelled by this sort of distorted understanding of what constitutes Aboriginal culture. This distortion has shaped a culturally justified view of child abuse within many Aboriginal communities by defining it as culturally acceptable.

Many professionals will not publicly address this issue of cultural distortion and what is or is not acceptable child rearing practices out of fear of being branded a racist or promoter of those policies or practices that led to the ‘stolen generation’. This has led to a serious deterioration in effective child protection service delivery to Aboriginal people throughout the country.

Dorothy’s story is a story shared by many uneducated, disempowered single mothers dependent on welfare living in outer suburbs or inner city ghettos. What she has here is a drunken relative coming into the family home smashing holes in the wall. She has a dirty, unkempt house lacking in the basic necessities that can be picked up from the Salvos or St Vinnies for free. Her house sits on an overgrown junk yard. She yells and swears at her kids. Dorothy then goes on to say how her kids cannot read and write and portrays this as the fault of the school. There is no mention of her (or

her partner(s)) having any role to play in the education of her children; no mother encouraging, no father pushing - this is seen as the school's responsibility. She then says that she can't understand why her illiterate children can't get a job. She suggests that they cannot get a job because they are poor. We are then told that her son is in prison and feeling depressed and Dorothy is asking why she must worry about this; as if she is an innocent victim in the behaviour of her own children.

None of this is the way of Aboriginal people or has anything to do with culture - this is only about Dorothy - a person with some serious problems and it should not be construed as anything other than this. Shame on those professionals who have acquiesced to even the grossest mis-representation of Aboriginal culture. Readers can simply ask the question - How on earth can this sort of environment and parenting be effective means for preparing Aboriginal children to deal with the conditions they will encounter as adults? - unless Dorothy desires her children to grow up as illiterate, unemployed criminal alcoholics dependent on welfare.

I will leave it to an Aboriginal social worker working in the area of child protection in North Queensland to make the final point.

*“Cultural apology, also leads to planners and child abuse workers developing a two-tiered response between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. Standards for what constitutes child abuse are allowed to drop for Aboriginal people because for some reason there exists a cultural rationale for the problem. Circumstances which would generate a child abuse intervention response in a non-Aboriginal family may similarly in an Aboriginal family not result in intervention (Paper titled: The Way Forward – cultural relevant practice responses to child abuse in Aboriginal communities in North Queensland, 1995, p.8).”*

This is what I am talking about when I say attitudes are often a block or filter to the facts and logical arguments. No matter how much we try to explain to southern service providers the situation in Aboriginal communities, they are still hell-bent on trying to return our participants back home to abusive and neglectful environments and the maintenance of a two-tiered response between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people with Aboriginals receiving a second-rate ineffective service.

Returning now to the big question about why these three girls were successful, one of the truths about this scheme is that older participants are more difficult to manage and less likely to complete their agreement with us and their employer (see WPS Developmental Note #5 and #23). These older people are more entrenched in certain habits and attitudes and their focus is more on how to exploit a situation rather than respect it for its design or purpose. Look at the way NN used the scheme to get a free trip to South Australia. Look at how she deceived the managers of Yandilla Park to get them pay for her living expenses. Look at how she used the excuse of attending a funeral to get out of work and return home. Look at how her partner BB deceived me about his age. In my paper titled, 'Petrol Sniffing on Cape York - An intervention strategy' (2004), I had talked about how many young people and their families have become quite skilled at systematically manipulating programs to meet their own ends rather than the stated end of the program.

This trial appears to have qualified this “truth”. That is to say, it is not an absolute thing; there are exceptions to the rule. This trial used a 20 and a 22-year-old girl and they were both successful, whereas, past trials used 19 and 20 year-old girls and they were unsuccessful. At this stage, we should not be thinking that this means anything other than what has already been stated – the older they are, the *more likely* they will default on their agreement, and the reason why Mawella and Lydia succeeded was due to chance or probabilities only.

My search for any other reason why these girls were successful leads me in another direction. I found it interesting how the girls contributed their success to their communication skills and good relationship with each other and getting to know other people. At first, I had no idea what they were talking about. What have these things got to do with being able to successfully live and work in the mainstream far from home and family? Then on the question about their ability to cope alone, Mawella thought that she could cope because she is “a quiet person”, meaning that she doesn’t need other people around her. This, I think, could be a key. Their ability to live and work in the mainstream away from home and family is defined in terms of relationships. Could what they call relationships be what I call peer support? The girls were not thinking in terms of income, knowledge, skills, job security, career building or social status. Perhaps another way to describe what could be going on here is the distinction between **task behaviour** and **maintenance behaviour** used in group-work theory. This theory purports that most group activities could be classified as either task behaviours, which are those behaviours directed towards the accomplishment of tasks, or maintenance behaviours which are those behaviours that are directed towards facilitating and providing emotional support to each other. Maintenance behaviours include **mutual aid** behaviours. In social psychology, there is a body of knowledge about what makes for an effective group and their potential to serve as a mutual aid system, which is separate to those interactions with the various surrounding social systems; described as task-type behaviours. This has been recognised as a crucial factor for boys and is one of the primary structural components of the scheme. These mutual aid systems include; sharing information, the dialectical process, discussing taboo areas, the all-in-the-same-boat phenomenon, developing a universal perspective, mutual support, mutual demand, individual problem solving, and rehearsal. In other words, the problem with past trials may have been that the group dynamics was all wrong and there was no effective balance in task and maintenance behaviour. I have seen it before with males, with the result that entire work groups have become dysfunctional.

The 2005 Bordertown trial and the Wemen group established that an on-site work group supervisor was not essential for selected participants to maintain their employment as meat process workers in an abattoir (See WPS Developmental Note #29, #69, #38 and #52). This finding led to the establishment of the Wonthaggi group and the Albany group where we have off-site supervisors, cooks and domestic support workers, but no on-site supervisors. The **selected** participants to these groups must have acquired good work skills, have no attitudinal problems and abstained from the use of drugs and have engaged in the responsible use of alcohol in accordance with the WPS rules. It is interesting how these girls managed to survive without an on-site supervisor from the outset.

This is a factor that I have not mentioned in the past; all the past females trials were only provided with off-site support and supervision. That is, we have never provided any additional support to the girls on the factory floor apart from what is provided by their employer. This is significant because there are high number of males that could not function without this initial intensive support and supervision. The reason this high level support and supervision has never been provided to the girls is because I could not find a suitable person willing and able to do the job.

The idea of sending young people from their home community directly to the Wonthaggi abattoir was tried about 6 months ago with three males from Lockhart River but only one was successful. A more careful look at the girls' performance, however, reveals that Jamie and Lydia did in fact get the sack due to their poor work performance. Without the intervention of Alex, their off-site supervisor, the trial would have ended at this point. Fortunately for the girls, Alex managed to negotiate a second chance. It is a fact that the free labour market is a harshly competitive and uncertain place, and those destined to be life-long contestants in the market place must learn to be competitive and for this they need some 'toughening up' before they are exposed to the full force of the rules governing the free market. This is now the purpose of the fruit picking groups. Having said this, I am presently conducting a much larger trial of sending young people from their remote community directly to the abattoirs to see how many can cope and what is the profile of those that can. This trial will also have relevance to girls.

One of our ongoing problems has been the recruitment of suitable supervisors. This trial was no exception. Throughout the course of the trial we used 2 on-site and off-site female supervisors; the first was a PNG woman in her early forties, the second was an Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islander woman in her late thirties. Both proved unsuitable. Through the course of the trial we also used 4 off-site male supervisors; the first was a middle-aged man that turned out to have a drinking and attitude problem, the second fancied himself as a bit of an intellectual who was just out to exploit the scheme for personal gain, the third was an Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islander who regard the scheme like a welfare program and was also out to exploit the scheme for personal gain, and the fourth was our manager, Alex an elderly man with two grown up daughters. It was only Alex that had the understanding and skills or determination to effectively manage the girls' behaviour. He also proved to be an effective protector of the girls against exploitation and unfair treatment. I found it interesting how the girls responded to my question on who would make a better supervisor - male or female, black or white. Their answer was "*It depends on the person*". These girls are right. Their answer also flies in the face of conventional thinking. Most people would say that girls should be supervised by a female supervisor, and most people would also say that young indigenous people should be supervised by another indigenous person. This scheme is not designed around this sort of conventional thinking. This scheme is designed around universal characteristics; behaviours that are in common with indigenous and non-indigenous young people and the overcoming of those real structural inequalities facing young people from remote communities.

The problem with BB as a supervisor was that he provided no leadership; he provided little or no structural or behavioural boundaries. His approach was just a free-for-all or laissez-faire approach. For example, he may not have been buying the participants alcohol, but he was driving them into town which enabling them to buy alcohol. He simply did not put much thought to what he was doing apart from trying to make them happy. This is the problem with many supervisors.

In regard to their employer, Yandilla Park Agribusiness had found a way to use public funds in the form of a grant from DEWR to pay for the girls' induction, which relied on the girls remaining on Centrelink payments for the week. One of the problems with this was that our girls were not receiving Centrelink payments. Normally, private businesses absorb their own induction costs. Yandilla Park Agribusiness said that this special induction course was set up for local Aboriginal girls, but 3 of the 4 girls who attended the course were ours. If this was a trial, it was a poorly conceived trial; ignoring history and everything we know about what works and what doesn't work. In addition, Alex was telling me that the management of Yandilla Park Agribusiness had this attitude that they were doing us a favour by employing our young people, and criticizing us for the problems that they created. After providing Yandilla Park Agribusiness with 3 years of good service, I was disappointed to see them behave in this way. I gave instruction to Alex from now on avoid senior managers and deal only with their recruitment and supervising staff. Thereafter, things did settle down.

Drugs and alcohol proved yet again to be an issue for girls, as with boys. The two girls in the second trial spent a large amount of money on drugs and alcohol and disregarded the rule that they were not to drink in the home. They failed to show up for work on a number of occasions because they were hung-over. In this trial, Mawella proved to be the principal seeker of drugs and alcohol and coming up with the justification as "*brings down the pressure*" and "*it stops us from stressing out*". When they first arrived, Alex could see that the girls were going to work hung-over. This problem appeared to have been resolved with Alex offering a degree of tolerance in exchange for a better work performance. This approach is however inconsistent with the overall policy of the WPS and CYP, establishing the basis for future claims of inequitable and unfair treatment, providing a haven for other problem drinkers (see WPS Developmental Note #23) and creating problems for future supervisors of these girls when they demand adherence to the rules.

One of the other factors in this trial was the separation of the girls from the boys. This is something that I had learnt must be done from previous trials. The girls in the first, second and fourth trial were continually flirted with and teased the male participants; getting into bed with them, wearing skimpy outfits, making suggestive comments and provocative actions. I discussed earlier this issue of girls continually trying to sexualise their relationships with males. By placing the girls in their own house in town well away from the boys is the right thing to do. There was a problem when a young 15 year-old boy was brought into town by his ex-supervisor. The very next day he was sleeping with Mawella. There is also a bit of talk about Lydia sleeping with a 16-year-old participant, but this has not been confirmed.

In past trials, cleanliness and hygiene were noted to be matters that needed attention. These three girls, like the girls before them, were very unhygienic; always spitting, throwing their tissues and ear cleaners on the floor. Stove, fridge, and table tops were not being cleaned and food not covered or put away. This is consistent with their general behaviour back home in the communities. This was less of a problem with these girls. This is an area where an off-site female supervisor could be very helpful.

## CONCLUSION

These three girls were the first girls from remote northern communities to complete the citrus packing season. The reason for their success was a combination of chance and design. The effective design components fall into three broad categories; **personal circumstances, mutual support, and good effective supervision.**

1) **Personal circumstances.** Based upon the experience of boys and the past trials of girls, I chose to take girls with no boyfriends to preoccupy their thoughts and serve as reason for wanting to return home. Girls without a succession of boyfriends are uncommon in remote communities. Like Lydia, many girls have babies at an early age and they have a history of neglecting or failing to protect their child. Many of these girls have been sexually abused and caught up in very intense, volatile relationships. This decision not to take girls with boyfriends proved to be the correct decision. It was also correct to house these girls away from the other male participants in the scheme.

These girls did not have strong attachments to home and family. There was no mother, aunty, cousin or friends calling them back home or buckling under the pressure of their daughters wanting to return home. I think this was another significant factor in the success of this trial.

2) **Mutual support.** Peer or mutual support is the sixth structural component of the WPS (see WPS Developmental Note #20). This was recognised as an important factor for males at the time the scheme was being first conceptualised in 2002. In my report on the original trial I wrote;

*“To help balance this need for a prolonged exposure to new patterns of behaviour and genuine pleas of homesickness, participants will be given the opportunity to be placed along with a family member or friend. These small peer groups will share a common identity, language, lifestyle and needs and provide each other with mutual support. This mutual support during difficult times is an important ingredient to a successful work placement.*

What was a **new learning** was the way in which the girls were crediting their success to their relationship with each other and the making of new acquaintances at work and in the community. This suggests that mutual support could be a more important factor for females than males.

3) **Good effective supervision.** In the beginning, the girls had no effective leadership. Alex’s leadership in the form of reprimands appeared to have pulled the group back together after a very poor start, although it could have easily gone the

other way, in that the girls could have pulled out over claims of inappropriate supervision.

Mawella talked about how she believed that “*they didn’t need supervision but we didn’t mind it after a while*”, and that Alex “*didn’t have to be strict*”. Yet, Mawella’s behaviour was a serious problem, particularly her behaviour towards young boys, drugs and alcohol. She could not see how these behaviours were not only illegal but detrimental to her future employment and position in the scheme. It also explains why her life to date has been anything but successful. This illustrates my point about these young people valuing not just their personal freedom but their licence to misbehave. They savour the unrestricted, unconditional acceptance afforded to them by their own communities and within their own families.

Our young participants need good supervision. This means encouraging and facilitating their growth within clear boundaries. It is not about dictating orders, bellowing abuse, exploiting them for personal gain or gratification, or supervisors being pages’ beck-and-call.

It’s a fact that good supervisors are hard to find. Many people present well in interviews but when appointed to the position they prove to be well below standard. This is a common problem in the human service industry and this trial was no exception. A series of measures have already been developed to improve the selection, training and supervision of supervisors.

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