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STORIES OF RESILIENCE

INDIGENOUS RESILIENCE PROJECT REPORT



EDMUND RICE CENTRE
15 Henley Road, Homebush, NSW.

Indigenous Resilience Project Report

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Front cover image:

This is a photograph of the offices of the Yawuru corporate group in Rubibi (the town of Broome), Western Australia. Yawuru people are the traditional owners of the lands and waters in and around the town of Broome. Nyamaba Buru Yawuru is the corporation that manages Yawuru's commercial assets, employs staff, undertakes development and generates sustainable income.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1	Acknowledgements	4
2	Foreword	4
3	Executive Summary	6
4	Project Overview	8
4.1	Introduction	8
4.2	Methodology	8
5	The Concept Of Resilience	10
5.1	What is Resilience?	11
5.2	What is Indigenous Resilience?	14
5.3	The Framework Of Resilience.....	18
6	Resilience Stories	19
6.1	Language Revitalisation: Muurrbay Aboriginal Language & Culture	19
6.1.1	The Vision of the Elders	19
6.1.2	Muurrbay Success	20
6.1.3	Language and Cultural Resilience	20
6.1.4	Wisdom and Resilience	21
6.2	Reclaiming our history and voice: Cherbourg Ration Shed	22
6.2.1	Reclaiming History and Voice.....	22
6.2.2	Adversity, Stories and Resilience	23
6.2.3	Community, Culture and Identity	24
6.3	Mabu Liyan: The basis of Yawuru Resilience	25
6.3.1	Introduction	25
6.3.2	Yawuru Resilience.....	25
6.3.3	Cultural and Economic Resilience	26
6.3.4	Mabu Liyan and Success.....	27
6.3.5	Culture and Resilience	28
6.4	Link-Up (QLD): Reconnecting our People with their Mob.....	29
6.4.1	Reconnecting our People	29
6.4.2	Trauma and Adversity	30
6.4.3	The Spirit of Aboriginality.....	31
6.5	Gubinge: A Cultural and Economic Enterprise	33
6.5.1	Introduction	33

6.5.2	Tradition and Economic Sustainability	34
6.5.3	Social and Cultural Resilience	35
6.5.4	Culture, Connection and Resilience	35
7	Sources of Indigenous Resilience	36
7.1.1	Cultural beliefs, values and practices	37
7.1.2	Connection, belonging and identity	37
7.1.3	Rights to land and natural resources	38
7.1.4	Cultural maintenance and economic growth	38
8	What Did We Learn?.....	39
9	Bibliography	41

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- Link-Up (QLD), Brisbane, QLD.
- The Kimberley Institute, Broome, WA.

2 FOREWORD

Australia's First Nations Peoples are the custodians of the world's oldest living cultures. In all of history, this is one of humanity's greatest achievements by any measure. For more than 65,000 years, Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples developed, implemented and maintained sophisticated systems of culture, language, environmental protection, social life and spirituality. They were able to sustain themselves, their societies and their environment of lands and waters over millennia. This remarkable achievement was characterised by a unique resilience to deal with hardship and difficulty, and to remain steadfast in ensuring that life on the continent of Australia and its surrounding islands could be made sustainable and strong.

In contrast, for the past 240 years since European invasion and occupation of Australia, too often First Nations Peoples have been forced to the margins of their own country through neglect, racism and historical attempts to eradicate Indigenous people from the face of Australia. This has resulted in high levels of incarceration, lower life expectancies, poverty and exclusion from other parts of the Australian society. Racism, of course, has been an ugly historical companion to the experience of First Nations Peoples in Australia since 1788.

Significantly, too many other Australians, and Governments, have seen First Nations Peoples through the prism of 'deficit and disorder', of 'problems to be fixed', rather than as the custodians of culture and heritage older than any other on earth. And, it must be noted, who despite the ongoing dispossession of conquest and colonialism, have survived, and continue to survive in Australia today.

This project is a result of a conversation between Senator Patrick Dodson and Edmund Rice Centre staff in 2018. Senator Dodson suggested that if we could identify the forces of resilience that enabled First Nations to not only survive but flourish and maintain their lives, societies and environments for over 65,000 years, then we could possibly identify a better way to develop policy to deal with the continuing legacy of dispossession over the 240 years since 1788. "What was it that made them resilient?" was the key question, Senator Dodson asked. "Answer that, and you will know the starting point".

If we could identify what enabled this resilience for so long, that sustained people and life, then we would be able to encourage those factors in the present day development of policy and practices that impact on First Nations Peoples. This project has sought to find evidence of such resilience at work in First Nations communities in 2019. The project begins with the assumption that to survive, and build, and sustain life, culture and societies for over 65,000 years in the Australian environment is simply a work of genius. More Australians need to understand that simple fact. This report seeks to assist both that understanding and the promotion of resilience that was always present among First Nations societies historically, to be central to First Nations' policies today.

Thanks to Dr Darryl Cronin for his leadership, vision and skills as principal author and project co-ordinator in bringing this report together. Thanks also to those who assisted – Br. Jim D'Arcy, Br. Pat Lynch, Dominic Ofner and Lily Murphy.



Phil Glendenning AM
Director, Edmund Rice Centre

3 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Resilience is both under-researched and under-acknowledged in relation to the survival of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Australia. Understandings of resilience are often framed within a Western, individualistic lens that focus on the ability of the individual to overcome adversity and thrive due to their strength of character. This approach fails to engage with the association between resilience and historical disadvantage and oppression whereby groups who experience chronic and sustained adversity in the form of dispossession, policies of marginalisation and assimilation, poverty, and racism undertake sustained social transformation to survive and thrive. For Indigenous Australians, this social transformation is evident through communal responses to ongoing processes of colonisation, marginalisation and oppression.

It is important to recognise resilience as a response formed within collective social systems such as families, groups and communities. These social systems both protect the individual from adversity, and provide resources to positively respond to adversity. For Indigenous people, resilience is a feature of the whole community because the individual is linked to the community as well as to the land and environment. Family and community systems are vital to protecting individuals against adversity, and individuals are bolstered to overcoming adversity due to their strong connections to culture, land and the community. Therefore simplistic, individual understandings of resilience fail to grasp the important systemic, collective, cultural and communal dimensions of resilience that have enabled Indigenous communities to survive for thousands of years in the Australian landscape and also survive through generations of oppressive and destructive policies of colonialism.

Enculturation and the revitalisation of Indigenous spirituality, knowledges and practices are vital to processes of resilience. In this report, we tell stories about how Indigenous people through community based initiatives revitalise their identity and culture by connecting to community and country, and rebuilding social and cultural practices. These include reviving language to strengthen cultural identity; rebuilding social and cultural structures, looking after country and creating an economic future; reconnecting stolen generation people to their family, community and country; creating a native fruits industry to enable Aboriginal families to undertake cultural and economic activities on their country; and reclaiming history by telling stories of life under the government's protection and assimilation policies. These initiatives are optimistic examples of self-determination that could have positive effects in dealing

with intergenerational trauma, ongoing social and economic disadvantage including disproportionate incarceration rates.

From the stories of how Indigenous people rebuild or strengthen themselves we identified some key sources of Indigenous resilience. These include:

1. Cultural beliefs, values and practices - the strength of an Aboriginal community or people is found in their belief system, their values and their cultural practices.
2. Connection, belonging and identity - the interconnectedness between a person's sense of self, the community and with country/land enables a person and a community to feel good about themselves as peoples, imbues a sense of responsibility and obligation as well as define their place or belonging in society.
3. Rights to land and natural resources - native title and land rights is crucial to rebuilding Aboriginal social and cultural structures and this enables them to support their families and their community, to look after country/land and create social and economic opportunities.
4. Cultural maintenance and economic development - commercial opportunities that align with Aboriginal culture can improve social and economic outcomes and preserve and promote Aboriginal culture and tradition.

These sources of Indigenous resilience do not occur in isolation but are inter-related and interconnected. They are holistic protective factors that strengthen Indigenous social and emotional wellbeing. Strong connection to culture, land, family and community are pivotal for Indigenous resilience. Further access to economic opportunities not only improve social and economic wellbeing but also contribute to preserving and promoting Indigenous culture and traditions.

4 PROJECT OVERVIEW

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This project conducted by the Edmund Rice Centre in Sydney documents stories of Indigenous resilience as it relates to the ability of Indigenous people and communities to strengthen themselves and their communities through their own knowledges, practices and agency. The aim of the project was to identify sources of resilience critical to Indigenous people and their communities to sustain their identity, culture and way of life so as to pursue their aspirations for self-determination.¹

The project focused on Indigenous community based initiatives where Indigenous people are rebuilding or strengthening their communities. These initiatives were identified through personal contacts that the Edmund Rice Centre has with Indigenous communities and leaders. Critical to the project was the cooperation from Indigenous leaders and community organisations. Community visits were undertaken to hear Indigenous stories and perspectives first hand. The information gathered from the community visits was constructed into narratives and then analysed to identify sources of resilience that are critical to Indigenous people in pursuing their aspirations and responding to the various challenges they face.

The following narratives are documented in this report:

- Language Revitalisation: Muurrbay Aboriginal Language & Culture
- Reclaiming our history and voice: Cherbourg Ration Shed
- Mabu Liyan: The basis of Yawuru Resilience
- Link-Up (QLD): Reconnecting our People with their Mob
- Gubinge: A Cultural and Economic Enterprise.

The project was undertaken by Darryl Cronin and Brother Jim D'arcy of the Edmund Rice Centre. Management oversight of the project was undertaken by Phil Glendenning, Director of the Edmund Rice Centre.

4.2 METHODOLOGY

The project was undertaken as follows:

1. The literature around resilience and Indigenous resilience was reviewed;

¹ While it is preferable to use the term 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' to describe the Indigenous peoples of Australia, I use the term 'Indigenous' interchangeably with the term 'Aboriginal' throughout.

2. There were visits to Indigenous community organisations to conduct interviews with Indigenous leaders;
3. Further desktop research was undertaken to add further context or to clarify issues raised in the interviews
4. Narratives were written about what community based organisations were doing and how that is vital for Indigenous resilience;
5. The information was analysed and factors or sources of resilience were identified.

The project was guided by the Guidelines for Ethical Research in Australian Indigenous Studies of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) in so far as they are applicable to this project.² The consent of communities, groups and individuals was critical and so written consent was obtained for participation in the project as well as for interviews and the use of any information including audio-visual information and this includes photos and images.

The Edmund Rice Centre sought to highlight Indigenous perspectives about the concept of resilience because Indigenous perspectives are critical to understanding Indigenous agency and initiative in dealing with hardship, trauma and deprivation. Further Indigenous perspectives also counter the deficit discourse about Indigenous people as having cultural deficiencies or as being problems. In that regard efforts were made to ensure the project privileged Indigenous perspectives by incorporating Indigenous standpoints and by centring Indigenous concerns and worldviews in the narratives and in the gathering and collection of information.

The information collected from interviews came from a cross-section of community initiatives. Each initiative was chosen on the basis that local Indigenous leaders had instigated and seen as important to their community and was producing outcomes for the community.

The information gathered was developed into narratives in story format. Stories are important for Indigenous people because they give voice to Indigenous experience and they reflect the lived experience of Indigenous people. They also provide a structure by which Indigenous people understand the world because they provide knowledge and insights into how Indigenous people deal with various challenges.

Through the stories we have attempted to contextualise how Indigenous people understand the concept of resilience and bring it to fruition in their communities. In that regard we have presented Indigenous knowledge, histories, experiences and

² <https://aiatsis.gov.au/research/ethical-research/guidelines-ethical-research-australian-indigenous-studies>

perspectives through telling Indigenous stories about what they are doing in their communities to build or strengthen resilience.

The stories were useful in identifying sources of resilience for Indigenous people that are critical to Indigenous people in pursuing their aspirations and addressing the various challenges they face.

5 THE CONCEPT OF RESILIENCE

Resilience is considered to be the ability to withstand and rebound from adversity. The concept of resilience recognizes that individuals do well despite enduring hardship, trauma and deprivation. In that regard the metaphor of resilience is “the ability to rebound from challenges”, or “to recover from and survive difficult conditions” or the “capacity to bend without breaking and, once bent, to spring back”.³ But resilience is not simply a matter of springing back to a previous state. It is a more “dynamic process of adjustment, adaptation and transformation in response to challenges and demands”⁴. Further, resilience does not come from rare and special qualities of the individual but is instead a common phenomenon that arises from ordinary human adaptive processes⁵.

In examining resilience one should be mindful that individualistic understandings of resilience can align with neoliberal discourses and practices of governance that emphasize individual responsibility for their own life choices in regards to social and economic well-being and for citizens to be active, responsible and enterprising.⁶ In the Indigenous Australian context this can have the effect of shifting responsibilities away from government to make people responsible for their own distress and disadvantage. In the neoliberal framework, personal suffering or failure to adapt in the face of adversity can be re-interpreted as the responsibility of the individual rather than an outcome of inequality, discrimination, lack of opportunity and long term structural oppression.⁷ The gender, race and class positioning of an individual impacts their ability to access education, employment, social resources and sources of power. Therefore subtle, divisive and chronic forms of adversity such as poverty, racism and marginality require sustained social transformation to overcome adversity and thrive;

³ Darren Thomas, Terry Mitchell & Courtney Arseneau (2016) Re-evaluating resilience: from individual vulnerabilities to the strength of cultures and collectivities among indigenous communities, *Resilience*, 4:2, 116-129, p. 117.

⁴ Laurence J Kirmayer et al (2011) Rethinking Resilience From Indigenous Perspectives, *The Canadian Journal of Psychiatry*, 56:2, 84-94, p. 85.

⁵ Ann S. Masten (2001) Ordinary Magic, Resilience Processes in Development, *American Psychologist*, 56:3, 227-238, pp. 227 & 235.

⁶ Jonathan Joseph (2013) Resilience as embedded neoliberalism: a governmentality approach, *Resilience*, 1:1, 38-53, p. 42.

⁷ Fran Gale & Natalie Bolzan (2013) Social resilience: challenging neo-colonial thinking and practices around ‘risk’, *Journal of Youth Studies*, 16:2, 257-271, p. 258.

this is different to merely responding to and adjusting to a natural disaster or a catastrophic event where the disaster or event eventually dissipates.⁸

5.1 WHAT IS RESILIENCE?

Although there is no consensus on the definition of resilience there is general agreement that resilience is a capacity to prevent, minimize or overcome adversity. Perspectives of the definition of resilience differ depending on discipline or field of study and the way the study of resilience has evolved. For example, resilience is described as a part of life because it involves working through and learning from adversity and integrating the experience into our individual and shared lives.⁹ It is also equated to good mental health and is therefore seen as '... positive adaptation, or the ability to maintain or regain mental health despite experiencing adversity'.¹⁰ Likewise, resilience is also described as a process where individuals display positive adaptation despite experiencing significant adversity or trauma.¹¹ Resilience is also described as a 'set of behaviors' where disadvantaged individuals exercise personal agency in their interactions with their social and physical environment to access opportunities for personal growth.¹² There are two dimensions to the construction of resilience; "exposure to adversity and manifestation of positive adjustment outcomes". Adversity is also referred to as risk that encompasses negative life circumstances and positive adaptation is defined as behavioral manifestation of social competence or success at meeting developmental tasks.¹³

Resilience is typically individually focused as early resilience research concentrated on individual mental health. The ability to cope and do well despite adversity was attributed to specific traits or characteristics of the individual to overcome hardship, trauma or deprivation. These traits and characteristics include personal and biological factors such as intelligence, hardiness, optimism, resourcefulness, self-esteem, social attachment, positive emotions and so on.¹⁴ For an individual to be considered resilient there must be a significant threat to their development by way of a demonstrable risk

⁸ Natalie Bolzan & Fran Gale (2018) Social resilience: Transformation in two Australian communities facing chronic adversity, *International Social Work*, 61:6, 843-856, pp. 844-845.

⁹ Froma Walsh (2012) 'Facilitating Family Resilience: Relational Resources for Positive Youth Development in Conditions of Adversity', In: M. Ungar (ed) *The Social Ecology of Resilience*, Springer, New York, 173-185, p. 173.

¹⁰ Helen Herrman et al (2011) What is Resilience, *The Canadian Journal of Psychiatry*, 56:5, 258-265, p. 259.

¹¹ Suniya S. Luthar & Dante Cicchetti (2000) The construct of resilience: Implications for interventions and social policies, *Development & Psychology*, 12, 857-885, p. 858.

¹² Michael Ungar (2012) 'Social Ecologies and Their Contribution to Resilience', In: M. Ungar (ed) *The Social Ecology of Resilience*, Springer, New York, 13-31, pp. 13-14.

¹³ Suniya S. Luthar & Dante Cicchetti (2000) 'The construct of resilience: Implications for interventions and social policies', p. 858.

¹⁴ Helen Herrman et al (2011) 'What is Resilience', p. 260.

or adversity.¹⁵ Therefore a typical resilience framework examines how an individual overcomes 'negative life circumstances' (adversity and risk) through their own agency, competence or success (positive adaptation). This approach to resilience involves identifying vulnerability factors (that worsen the negative effects of risk) and protective factors (that positively lessens the effects of risks), understanding the effects of those vulnerability and protective factors and focusing on competence, strength and positive outcomes in respect to adversity.¹⁶

However, resilience cannot simply be characterized as a feature of individual characteristics or personality because it is the outcome of adaptation and transformation processes and operates in the durable, flexible and responsive relationships of larger social systems such as extended families and communities.¹⁷ Individual resilience is affected by societal risks associated with historical disadvantage and is dependent upon societal resources and structures for its realisation. Risks such as poverty, exposure to maltreatment or violence, community trauma, poor health status, social disorder and so on can cause a high probability of a negative outcome. Further, many protective factors originate from within the family, community, culture and the environment. Various supportive social factors increase resilience to overcome adversity, including relationships with family, good community services, sports and artistic opportunities as well as cultural and spiritual factors¹⁸. Therefore, although resilience is often framed as revolving around the individual, it is largely influenced by the quality of social and environmental factors that facilitate positive growth.¹⁹

Resilience has systemic, collective and communal dimensions²⁰ where families, groups and communities contribute to and assist people to cope with, adapt to and transform when experiencing adversity. Research in this regard focuses on the social and physical environment as the locus for personal adaptation and growth. This 'social ecological' perspective recognizes that relational and broader social factors contribute to a greater level of change in the individual rather than just an individual's personal traits.²¹ Therefore, when exposed to adversity:

“...resilience is both the capacity of the individuals to navigate their way to the psychological, social, cultural, and physical resources that build and sustain their well-being, and their individual and collective capacity to

¹⁵ Ann S. Masten (2001) Ordinary Magic: Resilience Processes in Development, *American Psychologist*, 56:3, 227-238, p. 228.

¹⁶ Suniya S. Luthar & Dante Cicchetti (2000) 'The construct of resilience: Implications for interventions and social policies', p. 858-859, 861.

¹⁷ Laurence J. Kirmayer et al (2012) 'Toward an Ecology of Stories: Indigenous Perspectives on Resilience', In: M. Ungar (ed) *The Social Ecology of Resilience*, Springer, New York, 399-414, p. 399-400.

¹⁸ Helen Herrman et al (2011) 'What is Resilience', pp. 259, 260, 262.

¹⁹ Vanette McLennan (2015) Family and community resilience in an Australian Indigenous community, *Australian Indigenous health Bulletin*, 15: 3, 2-7, p. 2.

²⁰ Laurence J Kirmayer et al (2011) 'Rethinking Resilience From Indigenous Perspectives', pp. 84-85.

²¹ Michael Ungar (2012) 'Social Ecologies and Their Contribution to Resilience', p. 16.

negotiate for these resources to be provided and experienced in culturally meaningful ways".²²

When exposed to risks, threats or trauma people learn to adapt if they have adequate resources and systems of support in place. There are both collective and individual approaches to resilience. The individual approach focuses on group or community factors that contribute to the resilience of the individual, whereas the collective approach focuses on the functioning of the group or community in their response to adversity or trauma. At the individual level, agency enables the individual to navigate and negotiate to take advantage of opportunities and exert influence over those opportunities; however it is the families, communities and governments who make resources available in a cultural meaningful way.²³ This is distinguished from resilience at the family or collective level.

Family resilience focuses on the family as a functional unit and its ability to adapt and grow in times of crisis and persistent adversity. Key processes that strengthen family resilience include family belief systems, sharing challenges, having a positive outlook, connection to cultural and religious traditions, cohesive and flexible family structure, kinship and social networks, financial security, open communication and collaborative problem solving.²⁴ Collective resilience is defined as "a group's ability, through a high level of agency and adaptability, to withstand or recover quickly from challenging events".²⁵ Community resilience involves more than a collection of resilient individuals but is collective and meaningful action of the community.²⁶ A combination of agency and adaptability is critical for the group or community to obtain the resources to respond to challenges or to grow stronger and thrive.²⁷

Community or cultural resilience is also described as the capacity of a community or cultural system to meet adversity and reorganise while also retaining its structure identity and distinctiveness²⁸. This understanding of community resilience is applicable to the situation of Indigenous people because it takes into consideration the historical, political, social, economic and environmental realities of Indigenous communities.

²² Michael Ungar (2012) 'Social Ecologies and Their Contribution to Resilience', p. 17.

²³ Michael Ungar (2012) 'Social Ecologies and Their Contribution to Resilience', p. 17.

²⁴ Froma Walsh (2012) 'Facilitating Family Resilience: Relational Resources for Positive Youth Development in Conditions of Adversity', pp. 179-183.

²⁵ Anthony Lyons, Gillian Fletcher & Emily Bariola (2016) Assessing the Well-being Benefits of Belonging to Resilient Groups and Communities: Development and Testing of the Fletcher-Lyons Collective Resilience Scale, *Group Dynamics: Theory, Research, and Practice*, 20:2, 65-77, p. 66.

²⁶ Vanette McLennan (April 2009) *The Role of Family and Community Resilience in Indigenous Wellbeing*, Thesis for Phd in Indigenous Health, Faculty of Health Sciences, The University of Sydney, p. 55.

²⁷ Anthony Lyons, Gillian Fletcher & Emily Bariola (2016) Assessing the Well-being Benefits of Belonging to Resilient Groups and Communities: Development and Testing of the Fletcher-Lyons Collective Resilience Scale, *Group Dynamics: Theory, Research, and Practice*, p. 66.

²⁸ John Fleming & Robert J Ledogar (2008) Resilience, an Evolving Concept: A Review of Literature Relevant to Aboriginal Research, *Pimatisiwin*, 6:2, 7-23, p.3.

5.2 WHAT IS INDIGENOUS RESILIENCE?

Colonisation has had a cumulative and sustained negative effect on Indigenous Australians. Colonisation shapes Indigenous peoples' understanding and feelings about themselves and their emotional and psychological position in the dominant society.²⁹ Discourses associated with colonisation gave rise to assumptions and perceptions that Indigenous people had certain deficits and failings in respect to European society. These perceptions have been influential in determining the historical and contemporary relationship that Australians have had with Indigenous people. Discourses of negativity, deficiency and failure frame and represent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, thereby perceiving Indigeneity as a problem to be solved. These deficit discourses affect Indigenous health and wellbeing and impact Indigenous social outcomes.³⁰

Deficit discourses about Indigenous people in Australia have spawned an array of negative and demeaning attitudes about Indigenous people which remain ingrained in governmental institutions, Indigenous policy making and contemporary public attitudes. These negative attitudes continue to work against Indigenous people and their culture, affecting Indigenous health and wellbeing and acting as barriers to removing injustice. Indigenous people experience and cope with significant trauma resulting from extermination, marginalisation or exclusion, dispersal, racism, forced assimilation and dependency. Despite this, there is very little understanding of how Indigenous people have dealt with and survived such great adversity over many generations. How have Indigenous people survived adverse and traumatic life events such as the loss of their land, their sovereignty, their society and for many people and communities the loss of what it means to be Indigenous?

While Indigenous Australians are exceptional survivors, the concept of resilience is a western construct and is not necessarily associated with Indigenous people³¹ and their struggle to overcome colonialism. The collective trauma resulting from colonisation and ongoing colonising practices is not considered a "legitimate traumatic event" within mainstream Western understanding of trauma.³² The historical Western understanding of resilience is focused on individual harm and damage and the personal strength to overcome such harm or adversity whereas for Indigenous people resilience is embodied in the connectedness and collectiveness of their identity and

²⁹ Taiaiake Alfred (2015) Cultural Strength: restoring the place of indigenous knowledge in practice and policy, *Australian Aboriginal Studies*, 1, 3-11.

³⁰ William Fogarty, Hannah Bulloch, Siobhan McDonnell & Michael Davis (2018) *Deficit Discourse and Indigenous Health: How narrative framings of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are reproduced in policy*, The Lowitja Institute, Melbourne, p. 3.

³¹ Shane Merritt (2007), An Aboriginal Perspective on Resilience: Resilience needs to be defined from an Indigenous context, *Aboriginal & Islander Health Worker Journal*, 31:5, 10-12.

³² Anthea Krieg (2009) The experience of collective trauma in Australian Indigenous communities, *Australasian Psychiatry*, 17 Supplement, s28-s32.

cultures. Indigenous resilience has a communal or collective dimension related to their identity, their values and their connection to each other and the connection with the natural environment. It comes from deep within Indigenous knowledge and beliefs and is expressed through the resilience of Indigenous culture³³.

Research in Canada claims that it is inappropriate to think of resilience as the ability of Indigenous people to quickly recover from centuries of colonial practices that sought to destroy Indigenous society and knowledge. In that regard adapting to the dominant culture because of government policies of forced assimilation should not be equated with Indigenous resilience. An appropriate transformative approach is revitalisation of culture in connexion with social change because it is the Indigenous perspective and understanding of the world plus enduring cultures that sustain Indigenous peoples and provide the cultural resources required to maintain Indigenous communities in the face of ongoing challenges.³⁴

Canadian research shows that Indigenous resilience is grounded in cultural values that have persisted despite historical adversity or have emerged from the renewal of Indigenous identities. These cultural values include the notion of peoplehood and identity anchored in the connection to land and the environment; the importance of language, culture, spirituality and tradition as sources for collective solidarity, strengthening identity and healing; and strengthening individual and collective agency to address their own needs through political activism, empowerment and reconciliation. For Indigenous people resilience is a feature of the whole community because the individual is linked to the community as well as to the land and environment. These connections and relationships are conveyed and encoded through traditional stories as well as ideas about balance, harmony, peace, and friendship. Relating identity and collective experience in this way can contribute to resilience through emotion regulation, problem solving, social positioning, and collective solidarity.³⁵

Although there is limited research relating to the concept of Indigenous resilience in Australia there is a significant body of research about Indigenous social and emotional wellbeing, which is much broader than the concept of mental health because it recognises the importance of connection to land, culture, spirituality, ancestry, family and community. In the Indigenous health landscape, social and emotional wellbeing differs from the conventional understanding of mental health because it has a distinct

³³ Darren Thomas, Terry Mitchell & Courtney Arseneau (2016) 'Re-evaluating resilience: from individual vulnerabilities to the strength of cultures and collectivities among indigenous communities', 4:2, 116-129, p. 120.

³⁴ Darren Thomas, Terry Mitchell & Courtney Arseneau (2016) 'Re-evaluating resilience: from individual vulnerabilities to the strength of cultures and collectivities among indigenous communities', pp. 121-123.

³⁵ Laurence J Kirmayer et al (2011) 'Rethinking Resilience From Indigenous Perspectives', pp. 88-89.

set of principles and culturally informed practices and it is connected to the broader social, cultural, political and historical factors that impact on Indigenous people including injustices associated with colonisation.³⁶ High levels of psychological distress resulting from stressful or difficult circumstances impact on Indigenous social and emotional wellbeing resulting in a range of mental and physical health outcomes for Indigenous people. The risk factors which increase likelihood of psychosocial distress include: unresolved grief and loss, trauma and abuse, domestic violence, substance misuse, physical health problems, identity issues, child removals, incarceration, family breakdown, cultural dislocation, racism, discrimination and social disadvantage. Protective factors that reduce or mitigate the effects of the risk and which serve as reservoirs of strength and recovery include: social cohesion through strong cultural ties and reciprocal relationships, connection to land, culture, spirituality and ancestry, plus connection to family and community.³⁷

One study on the concept of resilience in Indigenous Australian communities found that relationships and connectedness between family and community are significant components of resilience. These vital family and community systems include supportive processes, community cohesion, love and support, role modelling and leadership, affection and sharing, friendship and culture. These systems protect individuals, families and communities against adversity and risk factors such as negative changes in life and disruptions in the community; ill-health, grief, death, alcohol and drug use and historical and continuing racism.³⁸ Aboriginal community perspectives suggest that resilience in Aboriginal children is both innate and also learned or nurtured through positive interactions with family or community to instil strong self-esteem and pride in Aboriginal heritage.³⁹

Many of the social determinants of health which specifically affect Indigenous people are responsible for the inequalities that Indigenous people experience today and are reflective of the political and economic processes of colonisation, marginalisation and oppression.⁴⁰ Colonisation and the relationship of domination by the State is linked to the powerlessness of Aboriginal peoples, providing explanation for the poor social,

³⁶ Graham Gee et al (2014) 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social and Emotional Wellbeing', In: Pat Dudgeon, Helen Milroy & Roz Walker, *Working Together: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Mental Health and Wellbeing Principles and Practice*, Second Edition, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra, ACT, Ch. 4.

³⁷ Kerrie Kelly et al (2009) *Living on the Edge: Social and Emotional Wellbeing and Risk and Protective Factors for Serious Psychological Distress among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People*, Cooperative Research Centre for Aboriginal health, Discussion paper Series No. 10, pp. 16-24.

³⁸ Vanette McLennan (2015) Family and community resilience in an Australian Indigenous community, *Australian Indigenous Health Bulletin*, 15:3, 1-7.

³⁹ Christian Young et al (2017) Perspectives on childhood resilience among the Aboriginal community: An interview study, *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health*, 41:4, 405-410, pp. 408-409.

⁴⁰ Laurence J. Kirmayer et al (2012) 'Toward an Ecology of Stories: Indigenous Perspectives on Resilience', In: M. Ungar (ed) *The Social Ecology of Resilience*, p. 400.

political, economic and cultural health and well-being of Aboriginal communities.⁴¹ Therefore to understand Indigenous resilience and the adverse circumstances that impact on Indigenous people it is necessary to understand the historical relationship between Indigenous people and the settler population. It is also necessary to look at the broader social, political, cultural and economic context of oppression and colonisation, some of which still persist today. Colonisation and the continuing relationship of domination by the state are relevant in terms of how Indigenous people adapt and survive to develop their own ways of achieving cultural revival and self-determination.

Indigenous resilience extends to cultural revitalisation and resurgence based on reclaiming Indigenous spirituality, Indigenous knowledges and practices and sense of communal and/or collective identity. Enculturation or reconstructing cultural identity is regarded as a path to healing from intergenerational trauma in Canada.⁴² Cultural identity improves the health and wellbeing of individuals, and therefore the process of reclaiming Indigeneity through relearning language, cultural practices and traditions is integral to healing and wellness. The strength and power of cultural knowledge and practices embodied in land and Indigenous culture will reinvigorate Indigenous resurgence and renewal. Hence it is the resilience of cultures that has enabled Indigenous communities to survive and will be the mechanism to achieve self-determination.⁴³ Indigenous resilience is therefore concerned with the “inter-connected relationships” in a community or specific place and this requires an “understanding of traditions and sustained relationships with the land”. These relationships are embedded in the land and knowledge about the land and this in turn is tied to personal identity, spiritual development and relationships with others.⁴⁴

In Australia, the evidence suggests that there is a positive association between health, wellbeing and the cultures of Indigenous peoples.⁴⁵ Culture for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people encompasses a range of beliefs, traditions and practices, including: connection to country; cultural beliefs and knowledge; language; family, kinship and community; expression and cultural continuity; and self-determination and

⁴¹ Darren Thomas, Terry Mitchell & Courtney Arseneau (2016) ‘Re-evaluating resilience: from individual vulnerabilities to the strength of cultures and collectivities among indigenous communities’, 4:2, 116-129, p. 121.

⁴² Michel Tousignant & Nibisha Sioui (November 2009) Resilience and Aboriginal Communities in Crisis: Theory and Interventions, *Journal of Aboriginal Health*, 43-61, pp. 47, 57.

⁴³ Darren Thomas, Terry Mitchell & Courtney Arseneau (2016) ‘Re-evaluating resilience: from individual vulnerabilities to the strength of cultures and collectivities among indigenous communities’, pp. 123-124.

⁴⁴ Patricia D. McGuire (2010) Exploring Resilience and Indigenous Ways of Knowing, *Pimatisiwin: A Journal of Aboriginal and Indigenous Community Health*, 8:2, 117-131, pp. 123-125.

⁴⁵ Sarah Bourke et al (2018) Evidence Review of Indigenous Culture for Health and Wellbeing, *The International Journal of Health, Wellness, and Society*, 8: 4, 11-27.

leadership.⁴⁶⁴⁷ The Yawuru people in Broome, Western Australia have a “philosophy of being” based on their cultural values and beliefs and which underpins their understanding of wellbeing. Mabu liyan (good liyan) is a state of being and belonging, a positive sense of self and a feeling of living well according to ones values and beliefs. Mabu liyan arises when one is connected to their family, community, country (land) and culture.⁴⁸ Participation in activities on land, for example ranger programs, where Aboriginal people care for their land through various initiatives has health and wellbeing benefits such as very high life satisfaction and high family wellbeing.⁴⁹

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander resilience is not just about individuals adapting to change or recovering from the impact of adverse change but is concerned with the strength of tradition and culture, cultural and community relationships, and connection to land. These elements enable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and their communities to flourish. Building resilience also extends to cultural revitalisation and recovery based on reclaiming spirituality, knowledges and practices and collective identity. There is a school of Indigenous scholarship in Canada around “Indigenous resurgence”. In cultural terms Indigenous resurgence involves Indigenous people restoring spiritual, psychological and physical relationships with the land to not only feel better about themselves but to construct a culture that addresses the harms of colonisation and which insulate them from the continuing impacts of colonisation.⁵⁰

5.3 THE FRAMEWORK OF RESILIENCE

Rather than look at resilience from the perspective of an individual’s capacity to bounce back to what is considered a normal or healthy state, the Edmund Rice Centre adopted a strength based approach that looks at cultural aspects of resilience. A key focus of this project is how Indigenous people and communities are addressing issues that have manifested from the impact of historical and contemporary colonisation. In this approach, resilience is a positive focus on factors that contribute to the healthy

⁴⁶ Minette Salmon et al (2018) *Defining the Indefinable: Descriptors of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples’ Cultures and their Links to Health and Wellbeing*, National Centre for Epidemiology and Population health, Research School of Population Health, ANU College of Health and Medicine, The Australian national University, Canberra, ACT.

⁴⁷ Roxanne Jones et al (2018) Associations between Participation in a Ranger program and Health and Wellbeing Outcomes among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People in Central Australia: A Proof of Concept Study, *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 15:7, pp. 1-2.

⁴⁸ Mandy Yap & Eunice Yu (2018) ‘Expressions of Indigenous rights and self-determination from the ground up: A Yawuru example’, In: Dierdre Howard-Wagner, Maria Bargh & Isabel Altamirano-Jiménez, *The Neoliberal State, Recognition and Indigenous Rights: New Paternalism to New Imaginings*, Vol. 40, The Australian National University, ANU Press, pp. 98, 100-101.

⁴⁹ Roxanne Jones et al (2018) Associations between Participation in a Ranger program and Health and Wellbeing Outcomes among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People in Central Australia: A Proof of Concept Study, *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 15:7, p. 9.

⁵⁰ Taiaiake Alfred (2015) ‘Cultural Strength: restoring the place of indigenous knowledge in practice and policy’, pp. 6-7.

development and well-being of Indigenous peoples. The project looked at what is working well for Indigenous people, as distinct from what is not working. In this approach, Indigenous people are able to see clear evidence of practices and behaviours that have been implemented and that work. Finally, this approach to resilience encourages positive and protective ways to strengthen the community. In this understanding of resilience, the focus is on rebuilding or strengthening the community or the group in order to strengthen the individual.

6 RESILIENCE STORIES

6.1 LANGUAGE REVITALISATION: MUURRBAY ABORIGINAL LANGUAGE & CULTURE



6.1.1 *The Vision of the Elders*

In 1986, several Elders of the Gumbaynggirr people - Uncle Andrew "Pop" Pacey, Aunties Maggie Morris, Jean Drew, Joyce Knox, Jean Brown (Ballangarry) and Ivy Smith (Long) - aspired to revive their language. They secured the help of Steve Morelli, linguist teacher and formulated a plan to recover the language. This process began with sourcing the last remaining recordings of the language to reclaim the full vocabulary and grammar.

In 1992, after securing federal government funding, these Aboriginal leaders published the very first Gumbaynggirr dictionary-grammar. In 1997 Muurrbay was registered as a Training Organisation (RTO) through Vocational Education and Training Board (VETAB) offering language classes. In 2004, it expanded to become a regional language centre, supporting and teaching a further six languages. Then in 2014, Muurrbay received additional funding to revitalise languages.

Today, Muurrbay Aboriginal Language and Culture Co-operative is a regional language and training centre that provides support to revitalise the languages of seven Aboriginal communities in the Northern Rivers, Mid North Coast and Central Coast of New South Wales (NSW).⁵¹ Muurrbay delivers services in linguistics, information technology and teaching. It publishes grammar-dictionaries, develops teaching resources and employs language workers to deliver community-based language workshops. It also develops research programs for documenting, archiving and publishing language/cultural materials and collaborates with universities in language research and provides professional consultation for council and community groups.

⁵¹ <http://muurrbay.org.au/> [Accessed 6/2/2019]

6.1.2 Muurrbay Success

Since 1998 Muurrbay has been offering two courses, Certificate II and IV in Gumbaynggirr Language and Culture Maintenance. Both courses are accredited by the NSW Vocational Education and Training Board. Hundreds of adult students have participated in these courses. When accreditation lapsed, Muurrbay applied in 2015 to the federal government program ASQA (Australian Skills Quality Authority) for re-registration as a Registered Training Organisation (RTO) and for the accreditation of a new course: Certificate III in Gumbaynggirr Language and Culture Maintenance. In 2016 ASQA granted both RTO status and registration of this course.

The registration of Muurrbay as a Registered Training Organisation (RTO) means there is the continuation of a certification process that recognizes Gumbaynggirr language as a significant part of culture being recovered and promoted. This certification has further enabled the professional training and employment of local Indigenous people in teaching of language. As result Gumbaynggirr is taught both in the local primary and secondary schools. Already, several high-school students have completed studies in Gumbaynggirr language for the High School Certificate. There are also adult language classes for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. By the end of 2017, fifteen Aboriginal students had completed the first year of this two-year course.

Muurrbay has collaborated with local council, government and community groups about the appropriate use of Aboriginal history and names in signage of buildings, streets and parks, for example the hospital wards in Macksville. The naming of the local motorway "Giinagay" which means "Welcome to Gumbaynggirr country" has received popular support in the wider community. Muurrbay enjoys considerable respect from the academic world with universities keen to further linguistics studies through partnership in research. Muurrbay has for years revived and shared Dreaming stories which has resulted in the establishment of story-place signage in the Gumbaynggirr area. The publication by Muurrbay in 2017 of "Gumbaynggirr Dreaming Story Collection – Gumbaynggirr Yuludarla Jandaygam" has encouraged such further signage.

The success of language recovery has led to the expansion of language services for Muurrbay Centre. These now include the teaching of, and the publication of dictionary /grammar books, for another five Aboriginal languages across the Northern Rivers, Mid-North Coast and Central Coast of NSW.

6.1.3 Language and Cultural Resilience

Restoration of Gumbaynggirr language has had a huge impact on people's sense of cultural identity and has motivated the recovery of traditional stories. The recovery of language has been a major catalyst for other cultural expressions which are used in local ceremonies and events such as funerals where the theme of "moving on to a

special place” has special significance. The women’s art group has also been involved in a community project at Nambucca Heads telling local traditional Aboriginal stories. There is also renewed interest in Aboriginal music using Gumbaynggirr language and the use of photography to capture elements of local stories and people.

The recovery of the Gumbaynggirr language, the publication of a vocabulary/ grammar dictionary and a book of stories has had important flow-on effects for the local Aboriginal community. Muurrbay has been led and motivated by key Elders, who have brought a renewed sense of pride in culture and identity for the Gumbaynggirr people. Gary Williams, CEO of Muurrbay, and Elder of the local community, explains that for him, Muurrbay means, “a general feeling of well-being at personal and communal level and a professional pride in the work achieved in passing on language.”

The establishment of Muurrbay Centre to maintain and promote language and its success reveal some remarkable qualities of the local Gumbaynggirr Aboriginal community. The most obvious is the wisdom of elders and the strong sense of community cohesion among the Gumbaynggirr people at Nambucca. The strong respect for the Elders and amongst the whole community displays this cohesion. The community worked together to achieve a common good. Lead by elders they co-operated and collaborated to support the revival of language through story sharing in traditional language using different cultural expressions. The building of the language centre has created a community meeting place where culture and community were re-invigorated through the revival of language, art and music. The sense of community cohesion is reflected in the achievements of the Muurrbay Centre and there is a sense of identity and pride in being Gumbaynggirr people.

The Gumbaynggirr Elders maintained a belief in the strength of their culture. They had a practical vision of the future, inviting their community to share in the vision and inviting professional people to assist revive the language. From there they pursued funding for programs, professional training of local people as language teachers which resulted in Muurrbay being recognized as an RTO. Then, to guarantee Muurrbay’s work into the future, the Elders and community formed a Co-op to sustain the future vision and governance of Muurrbay and its programs.

6.1.4 Wisdom and Resilience

Muurrbay Aboriginal Language and Culture Co-op stands as a proud testament to the resilient qualities of the Gumbaynggirr people, a people with a sense of community cohesion and strong leadership. The wisdom of the Elders who maintained a belief in the strength and uniqueness of their culture and in their community was an important factor in reviving language and connecting to culture. They wanted to pass their

language on because they knew it would lead to reconnection to community, culture and identity.

Strong leadership by the elders with a clear vision of the teaching and passing on knowledge and practices to the young people and families kept the momentum of language revival growing, evolving and reconnecting community to culture. Strategic decision making by the elders and the community enabled establishment of the Muurrbay Centre and the revitalisation and teaching of language. A strong sense of community cohesion among the Gumbaynggirr facilitated cooperation and collaboration to support language revival and language teaching thereby reconnecting the community to their country and culture and in the process strengthening identity.

6.2 RECLAIMING OUR HISTORY AND VOICE: CHERBOURG RATION SHED



6.2.1 Reclaiming History and Voice

Cherbourg is located 265 driving kilometres north-west of Brisbane and was originally started as a Salvation Army Aboriginal mission known as Barambah in 1901. In 1904 it was taken over by the Queensland Government and renamed Cherbourg in 1932. Aboriginal people across Queensland were forcibly removed and placed on the Cherbourg reserve under the 1897 Aboriginal Protection Act of Queensland. Many different clan groups were forcibly removed to Cherbourg to be assimilated into European culture and way of life. Under the protection act people were strictly controlled under harsh conditions. Food rations were dispensed from a small timber shed. A history of Barambah/Cherbourg can be found on the Cherbourg memory website.⁵²

The suffering and deprivation endured by the Cherbourg community has served to fuel the passion of the community to tell their stories of resilience and how they have survived injustice and disadvantage. Elders such as Sandra Morgan, Lesley Williams and Aida Simpson, were passionate about recovering the memory of their community. They approached Cherbourg Council to relocate the old ration-shed building to an area in

⁵² <http://cherbourgmemory.org/decade-by-decade/> [Accessed 6/2/2019].

the heart of the Cherbourg community to preserve Cherbourg's history as a colonial Aboriginal settlement. The ration-shed holds special meaning and memories for Cherbourg people. It was the place where people would queue for their rations of flour, sugar and tea. Cherbourg Council agreed and the ration shed plus the superintendent's office were relocated and restored as a museum with a grant from the Queensland Government.⁵³ A recreational /cultural area was established and this also included the construction of a ceremony ground.

Sandra Morgan and Aida Simpson then lobbied for a permanent "keeping place" where people could tell their stories of what life was like for those who grew up on Cherbourg when it was a place of government control and discipline. They believed that by telling stories it would bring healing and re-connection for their people, which in turn would reconnect their young people to the values of culture and revive pride in what their community has done. This became known as the "Memory Project".⁵⁴

Funding was secured for "The Cherbourg Memory Digital Archive" to tell the story of the Cherbourg community and the stories of people. Since then there have been numerous grants for other programs that tell the history of Cherbourg including the "Boys from Barambah Project" which involved renovating the old dormitories where the boys were once housed at Cherbourg.

6.2.2 Adversity, Stories and Resilience

The ration shed, the superintendent's office and the dormitories are filled with meaning and memories for Cherbourg residents who were interned under protection and assimilation policies. While they suffered loss and grief at their forced removal they also experienced fear, punishment and control. However the museum reflects a positive community spirit forged through adversity and hope.⁵⁵ Like other Aboriginal communities, Cherbourg is still affected by historical and structural injustice. Many older people have the memory of the pain and struggle; when they were controlled and disciplined by the Superintendent and the Chief Protector. This trauma continues to impact on succeeding generations and is evident in contemporary social issues that impact on the community.

The Ration Shed Historical and Cultural Precinct reflects on the history of Cherbourg through the eyes of its people and also celebrates contemporary Aboriginal culture and present-day life in the community.⁵⁶ It provides historical information and research to the wider public, government and the community and also provides space

⁵³ <http://rationshed.com.au/> [Accessed 6/2/2019].

⁵⁴ <http://cherbourgmemory.org/> [Accessed 6/2/2019].

⁵⁵ Murray G Phillips, Gary Osmond, & Sandra Morgan (2014) Indigenous sports and heritage: Cherbourg's Ration Shed Museum, *Journal of Heritage Tourism*, 9:3, pp. 219-220.

⁵⁶ Carly Smith (2014) Post modernising the museum: The ration Shed, *Historical Encounters: A journal of historical consciousness, historical cultures, and history education*, 1:1, p. 37.

for community activities and celebrations. The Ration Shed Historical and Cultural Precinct speaks directly to the resilience of not only the women elders but that of the whole Cherbourg community. This is shown by the positive determination of the Elders to display the history and achievements of their community. As Sandra Morgan explains: "with Cherbourg there have been harder times but when we decide to do things, we do it from the heart."

The importance of story and memory were motivating factors, especially having a permanent "keeping place" to tell stories. Stories of what life was like for those who grew up on Cherbourg under harsh conditions when it was run as a government controlled settlement. Telling the stories bring healing and re-connection for the people at Cherbourg and re-builds a new sense of community. In this way the elders and the community can reconnect their young people to the values of community and culture and a pride in what their community has done.

6.2.3 Community, Culture and Identity

Since its official opening as a museum in 2009, the Ration Shed has continued to grow. Many arts and cultural programs have been conducted at the precinct such as the Shadow Box Project, the Re-fire Pottery Project, the Many Threads Project focusing on women's experiences of family, friendship and well-being, the Aboriginal ANZAC Project honouring those from Cherbourg community who served in the various wars and the HIPPY program - a home-based education intervention program for young mothers and their preschool children.

These projects connect community together and reinforce their sense of identity as Aboriginal people. The establishment of a recreational/cultural area including the ceremonial ground has been especially significant as it has rekindled interest in culture and has enabled Elders to work with young men about learning song and dance. Some young men have even been taught to be "song men" for the Cherbourg community. The Elders at Cherbourg are keenly aware that by passing on culture to young people it will make them strong in heart and spirit thereby strengthening their identity.

The Ration Shed is a source of pride for Cherbourg community. Not only has it been a morale boost for the community, but it is a source of income and employment opportunities for many local people including builders, artists, and staff. It serves as a base for promoting community and cultural events and as such is the main cultural hub where people can gather and meet. The Ration Shed symbolises the resilience of people in Cherbourg. The stories of adversity, endurance and achievement contribute to forging a diverse group of people drawn from many clan groups across Queensland as "one mob" who can look to the future with a sense of purpose and united identity. This is what Aboriginal resilience looks like in Cherbourg.

6.3 MABU LIYAN: THE BASIS OF YAWURU RESILIENCE



6.3.1 Introduction

In April 2006 the Federal Court declared the Yawuru people as native title holders of land and waters in and around the town of Broome in the Kimberley region of Western Australia. The Yawuru were able to establish that they have maintained spiritual, cultural and social connection to their land and waters through their traditional laws and customs.

The recognition of native title has provided a way for Yawuru to rebuild their social and cultural structures to support family and community, to look after country and create an economic future for themselves. Central to Yawuru aspirations to creating their future is their philosophy of mabu liyan (good liyan). Liyan is a feeling derived from touching, eating, feeling, being and doing. It is also about how a person relates to others and to their surroundings and to the environment. Mabu liyan arises from connection to family, community, country and culture as well as a good standard of health and living, safety and respect and rights and recognition.⁵⁷ Patrick Dodson a senior Yawuru person and Senator in the Australian Parliament describes mabu liyan as follows:

“Liyan embodies the interconnectedness between a person’s sense of self, the wider community and the natural landscape. Yawuru people’s connection to country and joy of celebrating our culture and society is fundamental to having mabu liyan (good liyan). When we respect country and look after it we have a good feeling about ourselves as people and our place in the world, and this is reflected in the nature of our relationship and encounters with other human beings”.⁵⁸

6.3.2 Yawuru Resilience

Peter Yu, a Yawuru person and the CEO of Nyamba Buru Yawuru Ltd says mabu liyan “is the fundamental core of Yawuru existence” because it defines relationships within

⁵⁷ Mandy Yap & Eunice Yu (2018) ‘Expressions of Indigenous rights and self-determination from the ground up: A Yawuru example’, pp. 100-101.

⁵⁸ Ros V C Fogliani (2019) *Inquest in to the Deaths of Thirteen Children and Young Persons in the Kimberley Region*, Western Australia, State Coroner, Perth, 7 February 2019, p. 56.

and between families, defines relationships with country and defines relationships with others. Yu states that mabu liyan provides the signs and signals of a pathway in life, a life anchored in responsibilities and obligations under Yawuru law, custom and culture. It is the basis of Yawuru resilience because it gives meaning to Yawuru life through a sense of belonging to Yawuru society. Mabu liyan expresses as emotional strength, dignity and pride.⁵⁹ Good liyan is attained when connected to family, community and country.

Yawuru resilience is reflected in their maintenance of traditional laws and customs since colonization. Like the experience of all Aboriginal groups, the Yawuru were extremely marginalised and when they made their native title claim they were given very little credence. But the native title determination proved there is an underlying Yawuru strength, a continuing belief system and continuing connection to their country. However, Peter Yu insists that ongoing Yawuru resilience is tied to economic success because social and cultural resilience is unlikely to be achieved without economic resilience. He says native title has provided the basis for Yawuru success.

6.3.3 Cultural and Economic Resilience

Two Indigenous land use agreements signed with the Shire of Broome and the Western Australian State Government in 2010 created a range of opportunities for Yawuru. Opportunities, Yawuru would not have had if there was no recognition of native title rights. The agreements cover approximately 5,300 square kilometres of land in and around the town of Broome. As part of the agreements future land development and heritage issues were resolved to free up land for residential and industrial development, tourism, and an airport. In return the Yawuru received monetary benefits for capacity building, preservation of culture and heritage, economic development, social housing and joint management of a conservation estate comprising conservation areas along the coast and a marine park covering much of Roebuck Bay. The agreements also provided land to the Yawuru for development and cultural heritage purposes.

Peter Yu points out that native title has given Yawuru the ability to obtain capital assets and this in turn has enabled Yawuru to give greater definition to the capital value of their country, language, ceremonies and customs. Nyamba Buru Yawuru a private company responsible for generating income from Yawuru's capital assets incorporates commercial success with the philosophy of mabu liyan. Yu says it is not an easy task building and enhancing mabu liyan while at the same time running a commercial business. In the first instance Nyamba Buru Yawuru must deliver benefits for the well-being of the Yawuru community and secondly it must ensure benefits also flow on to

⁵⁹ Yawuru RNTBC (2013), *Walyjala-jala buru jayida jarringgun buru Nyamba Yawuru ngan-ga mirlimirli, Planning for the future: Yawuru Cultural Management Plan*, 2nd Edition, March 2013, 114.

the broader community for the well-being of the town. He is mindful of the expectation from the broader community that Nyamba Buru Yawuru must perform and “pull its weight”. In that regard he says Nyamba Buru Yawuru must operate as a commercial business rather than just be another Aboriginal organisation. He says building relationships with the Shire of Broome and the Chamber of Commerce is part of that commercial success.

Since the signing of the Indigenous land use agreements Nyamba Buru Yawuru has carried out a range of initiatives. One of its first tasks was to set up the Mabu Yawuru Ngan-ga language resource centre to ensure the continuation of the Yawuru language. Today Yawuru language is taught to school children in Broome and there is a study program for Yawuru adults. The aim is to have 20 Yawuru language speakers by 2021. The Yawuru Ranger program was established with the Department of Parks and Wildlife for the training and employment of Yawuru to look after country. Yawuru country managers also work in Yawuru Indigenous protected areas undertaking land and cultural management projects. The Yawuru home ownership scheme has enabled eight young Yawuru families to buy their own homes. Roebuck Plains Station a successful pastoral property on Yawuru country is now owned by Yawuru although it is leased by the Indigenous Land Corporation to run a cattle operation.

6.3.4 Mabu Liyan and Success

A key initiative is the Liyan-ngan Nyirrwa Cultural Healing Centre. The centre will allow Yawuru to deliver cultural and community development programs using their own cultural strengths to empower the community. Programs will be grounded in the philosophy of mabu liyan. Yu describes the Liyan-ngan centre as a contemporary and physical manifestation of reasserting Yawuru values. It will provide an opportunity for senior and young Yawuru people to work together to develop an understanding of the value of mabu liyan and to ensure the transmission of knowledge and understanding on Yawuru terms. A major focus will be on young children in their formative years, 0-6 years of age creating a Yawuru cultural environment for them to grow.

Peter Yu states that operating for commercial success does not mean that Yawuru are succumbing to a Western economic lifestyle along with its associated negative features. The distinguishing elements of success according to Yu, is the interconnecting nature and force of mabu liyan which will drive success in a Yawuru way. He asserts Yawuru are trying to define and reinvigorate mabu liyan as a commitment and purpose in the way Yawuru live their life and, in the way, they engage and do business. This puts Yawuru in control of negotiating their destiny. He also points out that mabu liyan is not just for Yawuru because other Aboriginal groups have a similar belief system.

Dysfunction and marginalisation are consequences that colonised peoples must deal with and for Yawuru the recognition of native title has provided potential opportunities in that regard. Peter Yu explains that Yawuru are trying to build a cycle of success and a key element is unity of purpose in the community. In that context Yawuru must have “modern weaponry” such as corporate structures and expert advice. Equally important the community must accept the responsibility and own the risk of change. But to be able to do so they must have the capacity and the confidence to make decisions about their future plus have accountability mechanisms so there is transparency as well as have an environment in which to conduct respectful discussions if there is dissent or alternative points of view. Yu says this is where mabu liyan is relevant to achieving unity because informed consent is a key element of change.

6.3.5 Culture and Resilience

Building and enhancing mabu liyan has application across the spectrum of life for Aboriginal people in general. It is particularly appropriate to the issue of high Aboriginal incarceration rates. While there is no silver bullet for the high incarceration and recidivism rates, Peter Yu believes the assertion and recognition of native title can present opportunities to deal with such issues. Being able to physically visit country to fulfil cultural obligations can have a dramatic effect on an individual or a community. He argues native title can be leveraged to rebuild social and cultural practices providing a sense of purpose to focus the mind and create a sense of discipline. So that when people reconnect with their country and their language they feel good about themselves and this builds confidence and purpose in life.

Peter Yu has seen the extraordinary growth of confidence of Yawuru resulting from their approach and the incorporation of mabu liyan into their corporate structure. He says Yawuru have been involved in an adaptive cultural process where they have reorientated themselves towards their cultural knowledge and practices but have also embraced the reality of Western economic success. Cultural knowledge and practices such as mabu liyan have always been there, underlying Yawuru life. But due to historical circumstances they have not always been publicly acknowledged and promoted. The native title determination has empowered Yawuru to give greater focus and definition to their knowledge and practices in a contemporary context. This has provided a fascinating juxtaposition in Yawuru development. For the first time in 40 years Yawuru have conducted cultural ceremonies on their traditional country while simultaneously negotiating their first joint venture construction company deal.

6.4 LINK-UP (QLD): RECONNECTING OUR PEOPLE WITH THEIR MOB



6.4.1 Reconnecting our People

In the 1980s, a group of Elders in Brisbane came together to address the issue of large numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people being forcibly removed from families. These people spent most of their lives trying to reconnect with families, communities and country. There was need for a specialist organisation to work with people to find out who they were and where they came from. Link-Up (QLD) has been operating since 1984 and was incorporated as a separate body in 1998. Chairperson, Sam Watson said Link-Up (QLD) is “primarily committed to reconnecting our people with their own mob”. He said past government policies were a “deliberate attempt” to wipe out Indigenous people by destroying cultural bonds, breaking down connections to culture and community, and destroying any connection to land and country. Further, he argues that the Stolen Generations affected “every single Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander family across Australia”. However Indigenous people have been able to endure and remain together as families and communities.

Link-Up provides services to the Stolen Generations throughout Queensland, people who were separated and removed from their families, community and culture because of past Australian Government policies of protection and assimilation. The term “stolen generations” refers to the separation of thousands of Aboriginal children of mixed descent from their mothers and communities. They were forcibly removed by agents of the state or relinquished by Aboriginal mothers who were pressured into doing so by those who thought they knew best.⁶⁰ Sam Watson says Link-Up (QLD) can reach out and help victims of those government policies bringing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people together through the reunion process. These people would not have otherwise had the opportunity to track down their families. According to Sam Watson, Link-Up’s largest achievement has been creating “many and many hundreds of reunions to bring people together again to get people back onto country.” Link-Up provides various services including family history research and family tracing; assistance for family reunions, return to country community or gravesite reunion; social

⁶⁰ Robert Manne (2001) In Denial: The Stolen Generations and the Right, *Quarterly Essay*, Issue 1, 2.

and emotional support; healing activities; community events and education sessions; and referrals to other agencies.⁶¹

Link-Up also supports members of the Stolen Generation in the criminal justice system. They currently have one case worker who provides support in the adult system. There is a real need for more case workers to support people who are currently in both the adult and the juvenile criminal system. These support services contribute towards reducing incarceration rates.

6.4.2 Trauma and Adversity

Protection and assimilation policies have inflicted pain and trauma on Indigenous people. Protection policies were based on assumptions that Aboriginal people were racially inferior therefore Aboriginal spiritual and cultural beliefs were to be undermined and destroyed. The belief was that so called 'full bloods' would die out and Aboriginality could be bred out of the mixed-race children so that Aboriginal people would eventually fade away. The assimilation policy was officially agreed to by State and Territory government in 1937 however its implementation by the State and Territories and involvement by the Commonwealth government happened much later. Assimilation was the method by which Aboriginal people would be accepted by white Australians. In that regard Aboriginal people would be inculcated with white Australia's values and aspirations and conform to the white Australian way of life to become members of the Australian nation. It meant that Aboriginal people had to stop being culturally different and be like white people, having the same customs, beliefs, hopes and loyalties as white people. Further Aboriginal people would be granted the benefits of full citizenship if they assimilated. Under the assimilation policy greater numbers of mixed-race Aboriginal children, were removed from families.

In Queensland colonial protection policies enabled the removal of Indigenous people to missions and government reserves and the removal of Indigenous children from families to be placed in mission dormitories or government orphanages. Although assimilation was not formally implemented in Queensland until 1957, assimilation practices had preceded its introduction, through guardianship powers and expulsion of people from missions and settlements. Under the assimilation policy Indigenous people could be expelled from missions and children could be removed from their families. Children were taken away at any age to be fostered and adopted by white families or institutionalised in missions, government institutions and children's homes. The 1997 *Bringing Them Home* report of the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission stated that during the period 1910 and 1970 between one in three and one in ten Aboriginal children had been separated by either, force, duress or undue

⁶¹ Link-Up (QLD) Website, Our Services <<http://www.link-upqld.org.au/our-services/>> [Accessed 17/4/2018]

pressure from their mother, family and community. The report outlines in detail the traumatic experiences of the children who were separated and the resulting damage they suffered and continue to suffer because of separation and institutionalisation.⁶²

The 1991 report of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Death in Custody delivered some years before the *Bringing Them Home* report investigated the death of 99 Aboriginal people in custody. Not only did it highlight the disproportionate number of Aboriginal people in custody and detention, but it also surveyed the impact of colonialism on Indigenous people. The Royal Commission said that Aboriginal people have a unique history of being “ordered, controlled and monitored by the State” and this is what the Commission found in its investigation of the deaths. The Royal Commission said that from birth to death the State files and documents of those ninety-nine individuals show a “familiar pattern of State intervention into and control of Aboriginal lives”.

Those who died in custody were young Indigenous people who were at the margins of society. They were unemployed, under educated, and whose health status varied from poor to very bad. All had encountered police and charged with an offence in their teenage years. All had been taken into custody for alcohol related reasons. Nearly half of the ninety-nine had experienced childhood separation from their families through intervention by state authorities. The Royal Commission stated that child removal had a profound impact on certain individuals who died in custody. It recommended that funding be made available to organisations such as Link-Up to support Aboriginal people to re-establish links with family and community which had been severed or weakened by past government policies.⁶³

6.4.3 The Spirit of Aboriginality

The pain and trauma of removal remain with people today. Removal and separation from families and community has caused psychological and emotional damage. The effects persist into adulthood and it is also intergenerational because the trauma is inherited by the children of the stolen generation in complex ways. Stolen generation children were denied their identity and their culture, language and their connection to families, community and country was taken from them.

Removal also affected the parents and relatives left behind. This is best exemplified by Dr Valerie Cooms in a speech to mark the 20th anniversary of the *Bringing Them Home*

⁶² Commonwealth of Australia (1997) *Bringing Them Home, National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from their Families*, Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission, 71-81.

⁶³ Elliott Johnston (1991) *Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody*, National Report, Volume 1, Chapter 1 <<http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/other/IndigLRes/rciadic/>> [Accessed 17/4/2018].

report in 2017. She shared the story of her grandmother and her great aunt, Mabel who had been separated and spent time at Cranbrook Place (an Aboriginal Girls Home).

“Sadly we never found Mabel, but my nephew, Eddie, found her daughter in 2003, and we found that Mabel had lived to be 100. It was as if she was waiting for us to find her, but we were three years too late. Typically, as Aboriginal people, we build resilience. This is how we have survived. This is not to say we have not suffered and continue to do so, however, many of us want to see the good from things that have happened. ...that is, despite what has happened, how the spirit of Aboriginality keeps us going”.⁶⁴

Link-Up provides a social and cultural environment where the people feels safe, secure and supported. This protective environment helps people to adapt and move forward in their healing journey. Reconnecting them to family, community and country is an emotional journey of healing as Patricia Conlon recently stated:

“Link-Up (QLD) staff feel our client’s pain, we take them on their journey of reuniting with families, country or community. We take them through their research, filling in the missing gaps in their life”.⁶⁵

Stolen generation people have an underlying resilience because they have endured adversity and survived. In her 2017 speech Valerie Cooms talks about the Aboriginal girls who were sent to the girl’s home eventually becoming domestic servants for non-Aboriginal people. This is what happened to her grandmother and great aunt, Mabel. But despite the horrible experiences they encountered as colonised and subjugated women, Mabel and the other young women were able to learn new skills while living with non-Aboriginal people, learn from each other building effective methods of resistance and survival, and created long lasting connections with each. The connections that were forged in the girl’s home continue today through their families. These women built resilience and imparted a level of confidence to their families. Patricia Conlon, CEO of Link-Up (QLD) acknowledged this resilience:

“We honour the resilience and strength of our people who have suffered terrible injustices because of past government policies and practices and that we have survived those injustices”.⁶⁶

Sam Watson says that in the face of “deliberate and cold-blooded” colonial policies, Aboriginal people were able to “rise up”, “endure and ... remain together as families

⁶⁴ Link-Up (QLD) Dr Valerie Cooms (2017), History of Orleigh Park <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=La8M28v3UuU>> [Accessed 18/4/2018].

⁶⁵ Link-Up (QLD) (2018). *Still Bringing Them Home*, Link-Up Magazine, Volume 30 January – February 2018, 3.

⁶⁶ Link-Up (QLD) (2018). *Still Bringing Them Home*, Link-Up Magazine, Volume 30 January – February 2018, 3.

and as communities". Link-Up recognises this strength and resilience, aiming to help victims of these government policies by reuniting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people "who would have previously had no opportunity to track down and locate their loved ones". Sam Watson says family reunions are an "enormously warming experience"; to have family members embrace each other across the gap of many decades. This he says, is something that makes Link-Up (QLD) more determined to continue their work. By keeping the spirit of Aboriginality alive and strong, Link-Up (QLD) are strengthening resilience.

6.5 GUBINGE: A CULTURAL AND ECONOMIC ENTERPRISE



6.5.1 Introduction

Paul Lane from the Kimberley Institute in Broome, Western Australia believes that potential opportunities in growing and harvesting native fruits and plants will contribute to maintaining and building resilience in Aboriginal communities by improving social and economic outcomes. He has been facilitating discussions and initiatives in the West Kimberley region of Western Australia around creating a regional business hub for a native plants and fruits industry. The objective is to create an Aboriginal supply chain involving all aspects of growing, harvesting, processing, marketing and distributing native plant and fruit products. Profits would go back to communities to build more enterprises and create more jobs. The regional hub would work directly with Aboriginal people on their land and within their communities to facilitate local self-sustaining enterprises that focus on the value of the natural resources, ensure long term stability and preserve and promote Indigenous culture and tradition.

A major focus is the gubinge fruit which grows wild throughout the tropical savannah regions of northern Australia. The gubinge tree (*terminalia ferdinandiana*) and its fruit is known as "gubinge" by many Aboriginal people in the Kimberley region although it is known traditionally by other names by other Aboriginal groups. It is also commonly known as the Billy Goat plum and the Kakadu plum. The fruit has the highest recorded level of natural Vitamin C and also displays antioxidant and anti-microbial properties. For Aboriginal people the fruit is a source of bush food and the tree including the fruit

has been a healing remedy because of its anti-bacterial, anti-viral and anti-fungal properties.⁶⁷

Commercial interest in the various applications of the fruit's properties has seen it used as a preservative for the seafood industry. The red meat processing industry is also developing a similar preservative to extend the shelf life of processed meats. International health and cosmetic companies have included it in beauty products such as cleansers, body lotions, hand cream and lip balm. There are also other alternative uses such as nutritional supplements, hand washes, scabies treatment including tea and health drinks. The poultry industry has shown interest in the leaves of a similar tree as a supplement for poultry food given its anti-microbial properties.

6.5.2 Tradition and Economic Sustainability

Aboriginal families in the Dampier peninsula north of Broome harvest the gubinge in the wild supplementing their income with what they earn. The money is used to buy food and household items including school books for their children. In pre-colonial times Aboriginal people managed and harvested the plants and fruits on country when in season as a normal part of the cycle of life. But it's becoming more and more difficult for Aboriginal people to live their traditional form of sustainability and there are so few opportunities to take children onto country. However, the contemporary management and harvest of gubinge and other native fruits and trees allows Aboriginal people to be on country for extended periods of time doing what they have always done.

Twelve or fifteen years ago, Aboriginal families began harvesting gubinge on a small scale, supplying to cosmetic companies. Since then the wild harvest has grown nationally to around 30 tonnes of fruit per year. It is still a cottage industry and is perfectly suited for family groups and outstation communities. Some people mill the product, by drying and grounding it and selling it as powder. Others sell the frozen fruit, and some sell it as pulp, where they pip it like an olive. As a cottage industry it has developed at a pace determined by Aboriginal people and this has enabled them to work out how they will participate in the industry and how they market their product.

However, in ten to twenty years the scale of demand will be such that it won't be a cottage industry. Therefore, the challenge is to grow the industry to meet increased demand for gubinge but also ensure the integrity of the industry by maintaining the cultural values. Future market demands will require substantial planting of gubinge trees through enrichment methodologies. This requires additional labour and personnel to nurture and manage trees into production. Aboriginal families are also looking at other opportunities to create more value from the gubinge fruit as well as

⁶⁷ <https://www.abc.net.au/news/rural/2018-02-05/gubinge-harvest-growing-despite-setbacks-in-kimberley/9312636> [Accessed 12/2/2019].

looking at what other bush fruits and products can be used. This is where universities and tertiary institutions can work with communities to identify the value of the fruit and tree and match it with a commercial opportunity.

To meet a growing market Aboriginal groups and organisations in Broome and other communities in the West Kimberley have planted around 10,000 gubinge trees in the last two years. To be able to supply the future market Aboriginal communities and outstations will need to plant trees rather than rely on wild harvest. This planting needs to be done now because it takes 6-7 years for trees to come into production. Access to land and water are important but what is critical is the need for partnerships between families and outstation communities with native title entities because the trees will need to be grown over large areas of land. It can only be done in partnership with native title groups who are prepared to commit large areas of their country.

6.5.3 Social and Cultural Resilience

Paul Lane says Aboriginal people are well positioned to develop a sustainable native fruits and plants industry because the value of native fruits and trees has not been exploited or decimated by the colonial outcome. Further, the recognition of native title has provided protection from exploitation and so Aboriginal people now have security of tenure and a product that is desired by mainstream society. However, Lane cautions that the development of an industry must be driven and owned by Aboriginal interests on whose land the product exists. He believes that Aboriginal people can develop economic opportunities from native plants and fruits with a cultural component. Such industry would deliver employment, training, improved management of Aboriginal-held land, and both business creation and development. The overall outcome is that the industry will contribute to building and maintaining social and cultural resilience in Aboriginal communities because it incorporates traditional and cultural knowledge and practices.

6.5.4 Culture, Connection and Resilience

According to Paul Lane, Aboriginal resilience has been the capacity to physically survive over a couple of centuries in accordance with their cultural aspirations. The capacity to survive culturally is related to one's connection to culture, country and community. For Yawuru people in Broome mabu liyan reflects their sense of belonging and being, emotional strength, dignity and pride. Mabu liyan is enhanced by connectedness to family, community and country.⁶⁸ A native fruit and plant industry fits well with cultural aspirations because it will build that connectedness as it enables people to do constructive cultural and economic activities on country. Families can educate their children about country to reinforce sense of belonging and identity, while at the same

⁶⁸ Many Yap & Eunice Yu (2016) *Community wellbeing from the ground up: a Yawuru example*, Bankwest Curtin Economics Centre Research Report 3/16 August.

time have an economic purpose for going out on country. It's an important lever to get young people back onto country.

The combination of traditional and cultural practices with the economic potential opens opportunities for young Aboriginal people, particularly those who are at risk of incarceration or who have been incarcerated. It will provide training and employment outcomes plus a cultural outcome. Paul Lane says the high rate of imprisonment of Aboriginal young people sits parallel with one of the best opportunities to sustaining communities and country. He says that if you align them together you can keep people out of jail, provide them with activities to do while at the same time manage and sustain an industry that can produce real economic opportunities for communities. As a diversionary or post-release programme it will not only strengthen cultural connectedness but also provide economic opportunities for Aboriginal people.

7 SOURCES OF INDIGENOUS RESILIENCE

Paul Lane from the Kimberley Institute in Broome, Western Australia says Indigenous resilience is the capacity of people to sustain and develop their cultural integrity in the context of contemporary society. This means that Indigenous people will be able to sustain themselves as a people while at the same time accommodate the pressures of living in a totally colonised society. A resilient outcome is when children will be able to survive as Indigenous people in the same way they will be able to thrive and develop in a European context.

Resilience is not something that is given to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples by government or the broader society in order to fix so-called problems or deficits in their communities. Resilience comes from within an individual and a community. For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples it is anchored in their identity, cultural beliefs and knowledge, in the interconnectedness of Indigenous societies and in the connections with the natural landscape, and in their cultural responsibilities and obligations. Resilience, therefore is the power and strength of Indigenous people to deal with challenges and adversity in their lives, particularly the ongoing impacts of colonial domination.

The sources of this resilience are the cultural knowledge, values and practices plus other elements that assist Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples collectively and individually deal with challenges or adversity and which also assist with sustaining their identity, culture and way of life. Having access to opportunities and resources are important elements in maintaining resilience, however Indigenous knowledge, values and practices are important protective factors that fortify Indigenous people against

hardship, trauma or deprivation. To strengthen and maintain resilience, Indigenous people use their knowledge, values and agency to take advantage of opportunities and resources in a culturally meaningful way.

This section outlines some of the sources of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander resilience as identified in the stories of resilience. The stories highlight some factors that contribute to Indigenous resilience. These include: (1) Cultural beliefs, values and practices (2) Connection, belonging and identity (3) Rights to land and natural resources, and (4) Cultural maintenance and economic development. This is only a small representation of the sources of Indigenous resilience. There are other factors or sources of resilience, however this project focussed on cultural sources of resilience.

7.1.1 Cultural beliefs, values and practices

The strength of an Indigenous community or peoples is found in their belief system, their values and their cultural practices. A philosophy grounded in their own beliefs, practices and values is fundamental to defining the relationships, responsibilities and obligations Indigenous people have to their families, their community and their country. Such philosophy also provides a pathway for the future. A practical vision of the future is crucial to rebuilding social and cultural structures. Revitalising language, maintaining traditional laws, customs and practices and managing and protecting the land and its natural resources are necessary to counter the ongoing impacts of colonialism.

Further uncovering history through the eyes of Indigenous people and telling stories of adversity, endurance and achievement can bring healing, pride and reconnection within the community and this in turn can create a sense of purpose and unified identity. Community cohesion is critical for collaboration and cooperation in order to achieve a common good. Unity of purpose enables an Indigenous community to make collective decisions and this in turn can build confidence and success within the community.

7.1.2 Connection, belonging and identity

The Yawuru philosophy of mabu liyan describes the interconnectedness between a person's sense of self, the community and with their country. Mabu liyan enables a person and a community to feel good about themselves as peoples, imbues a sense of responsibility and obligation as well as define their place or belonging in society. These connections, responsibilities and obligations must be rebuilt, strengthened or maintained. A strong Indigenous spirit is necessary to protect and insulate Indigenous people from the ongoing impacts of colonialism. Healing from the traumatic experiences of the past and reconnecting with oneself, with community and country is important because it contributes towards a positive Indigenous spirit. Such spirit is forged through adversity, hope and survival.

Stolen generation people have an underlying resilience forged through common experiences of hardship, friendships and social connections, learning new skills and building methods of resistance and survival. Recovering memories and stories about the past plays an important role in building a positive spirit. Strengthening the heart and spirit of young people is vital to reinforcing a sense of identity as well as connecting young people to their community and culture. Important in the process of rebuilding or strengthening spirit is the wisdom and leadership of senior people because they can tell stories about the past, reconnect people to their country and cultural practices, and they can recover and teach language.

7.1.3 *Rights to land and natural resources*

Native title and land rights are crucial building blocks to rebuilding Indigenous social and cultural structures. It enables Indigenous people to support their families and their community, to look after country and create social and economic opportunities. Having secure land tenure protects Indigenous communities from outside exploitation of their land and its natural resources. Ownership and connection to country is important because it enables Indigenous communities to create their own social and economic opportunities. This is not about succumbing to a Western economic lifestyle but about applying traditional cultural strengths to a contemporary life. In that regard Indigenous beliefs, practices and customs underpin social and economic growth allowing Indigenous people to control their destiny.

An improved social and economic capacity will also enable the Indigenous community to contribute to the well-being of the broader community. Ownership of country and being able to connect to country can also heal psychological and emotional damage inflicted by past government policies of separation, deprivation and oppression. Visiting traditional country and fulfilling cultural obligations can have a positive effect on an individual and a community.

7.1.4 *Cultural maintenance and economic growth*

Land ownership is the basis for creating social, cultural and economic opportunities for Indigenous communities. While economic development provides commercial opportunities for the community it can also provide the income to support social and cultural initiatives. Therefore commercial opportunities that align with Indigenous culture can improve social and economic outcomes and preserve and promote culture and tradition.

The harvest of native fruits and plants on country for commercial purposes, for example can provide employment and training opportunities for the community. Importantly, however, it enables families to spend time on country practicing traditional forms of sustainability and teaching children about their country. Aligning commercial and employment outcomes with cultural outcomes can provide productive and sustainable

activities for communities. For example, it can strengthen cultural connectedness and provide employment for young people at risk of incarceration.

8 WHAT DID WE LEARN?

In this report, we have explored through an Indigenous lens how the strength of supportive social and cultural systems contribute to an individual's ability to respond to adversity. Strong connections to culture, land, family and the community are pivotal parts of strengthening identity and providing the individual with the resolve to respond positively to challenging situations. For Indigenous Australians their resilience is evident through their survival, and the endurance of their cultural knowledge, beliefs and values in the face of colonialism.

The stories we have told about how Indigenous communities have revitalised culture, practices and knowledge all display resilience in different ways. The restoration of the Gumbaynggirr and other languages by the Murrumbidgee Aboriginal Language and Culture Co-operative has not only strengthened people's sense of cultural identity but also motivated the recovery of traditional stories. The restoration of the old ration shed in Cherbourg showed how the community used that colonial site to create a space where the community could learn about their history and heritage, sharing stories of injustice, survival and resilience. Link-Up is a pivotal organisation that reconnects individuals to family, community, history and country in a process of revitalising culture and promoting intergenerational healing. These processes of reconnecting all act to strengthen Indigenous identity, spirit and pride, providing important avenues for healing from the past both individually and as a community.

The exploration of resilience in Indigenous communities gives optimism for a way forward in the context of the injustice and disadvantage Indigenous peoples still face today. These important examples of self-determination show how communities are able to thrive, sustaining their cultural values, beliefs and practices within a colonised and capitalistic society. The Yawuru people have managed to sustain their strong values, knowledges and practices, centring on "mabu liyan", which have created the foundation of decision making in commercial dealings related to native title and land use agreements. Native title has allowed the Yawuru people to operate various cultural and land management programs on their land, and on their terms. Looking forward, native title and land rights provide opportunities for social and economic opportunities in a context where Aboriginal autonomy is the key to self-determination. Ownership of country will create these opportunities where traditional beliefs, practices and customs can act as central pillars while aiming toward economic growth.

Further, within these examples of Indigenous self-determination there is hope for dealing with the disproportionate incarceration rates and deaths in custody experienced by Indigenous Australians. To deal with these issues, we need to look at community programs that promote reconnecting with community and country (land). Developing a sustainable native fruits and plants industry would be highly beneficial in creating employment, managing land driven by Indigenous interests, and allow people to do constructive activities on country. Further, utilising these opportunities could provide an important pathway to dealing with incarceration rates.

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