Language Learning In Indigenous Communities – New Federal Parliamentary Inquiry on Indigenous Languages, August 2011.

Submission No.37

Submission from Why Warriors Pty Ltd and the Arnhem Human Enterprise Development (AHED) Project

Introduction to the Region and Languages of the Region:

Why Warriors and the AHED Project focuses its work in an area where Indigenous languages are the first language of the majority of the population in North East Arnhem Land. Although there are up to 12 distinct languages in the N/E Arnhem Land region, there is a common Indigenous language that is spoken across the whole region that is generally known as Dhuwal Matha, or its sister dialect, Dhuwala Matha, which closely resemble each other.

The effectiveness of current maintenance and revitalisation programs for Indigenous languages

Why Warriors and the AHED Project works with Indigenous people where Indigenous languages are living languages. Our experience has been that these living languages are not adequately supported, and there appears to be a focus by Government on languages categorised as being at risk or high risk. While we applaud the support for languages in these categories, if more is not done to value and support living Indigenous languages *now*, these languages will soon fall into the category of being at risk as well. We are not seeing real Government policy being applied to Arnhem Land to support living languages, and steps by the NT Government to cut support for bilingual education is a backwards step from all that has achieved so far.

The benefits of giving attention and recognition to Indigenous languages

The sophistication and depth in Indigenous languages is often not recognized. Our practice in the use of these Yolngu languages has shown that there can be effective education and dialogue, a deep sharing of knowledge and intellectual discussion in the areas of governance, land rights, health/chronic diseases and economics.

We find that the use of Indigenous language is essential in explaining modern dominant culture knowledge. It is the lack of access to this knowledge that is fundamental to the difficulties that Indigenous ESL (English as Second Language) speakers face in the areas of health, education, economics and engaging with governance systems. The key to giving recognition to Indigenous languages in remote regions such as N/E Arnhem land is the practical use of them as the medium for communication. This requires the development of educational media and resources in the local language and the practice of dominant culture staff learning and utilizing Indigenous languages in their work place.

> *Policy-makers too are severely disadvantaged by this communication breakdown because they cannot hear in dialogue what the people are saying – or even that they are asking intelligent questions. Government committee after government committee and consultant after consultant goes out to consult with Yolngu, but each one returns with very little because they cannot really hear the people. Some English is spoken during these meetings, but it is usually a simplified form. The visitors accept these simple English words are being the people's deep, complete thoughts because the dominant culture tends to see the people as simple. But what the people say in English is just a faint echo of the powerful knowledge and information they want to share. So the world loses the chance to hear wisdom that is thousands of years old while the people are passed off as an almost muted race.*[1]

The Yolngu people, as a people group, are in the process of charting/mapping the English language, and abstract and intangible English terms tend to be poorly understood by Indigenous ESL speakers. The lack of attention by the dominant culture to develop and chart the Yolngu language and develop resources, such as English to Yolngu Matha dictionaries for these intangible terms, leaves people without a pathway to achieve full and professional English literacy. Full English literacy cannot be achieved without the dominant culture engaging with, or understanding Indigenous languages and charting the connections between English and Indigenous languages to create such resources. This requires a commitment from the Australian Federal and State Governments to the long-term development of resources for charting, exploring and mapping living Indigenous languages through regionally based language centres.

The key to giving recognition to Indigenous languages in remote regions such as North East Arnhem land is the practical use of them as the medium for communication.

In N/E Arnhem Land, as is the case in many remote areas in the Northern Territory, North Queensland and Central Australia, Indigenous languages are the first languages of the people. When thinking about the use of Indigenous languages it is often thought that their use is in enabling ESL children to achieve English literacy. Herein lies the implication that Indigenous people must "move on" to the use of English as their dominant mode of communication. This is not dissimilar to the implication that was made in the 1800's that Indigenous people themselves would inevitably die out. This has not proved to be the case, nor will it prove to be the case with their languages in areas where Indigenous people are the majority. In regions like N/E Arnhem land, Indigenous people continue to interact in Yolngu Matha within their communities and only resort to English when necessary, that is, when engaging dominant culture personnel.

> *Apart from casual and superficial conversations, very few Yolngu understand and speak English with any degree of confidence or competence. From a Yolngu Matha point of view, English is still predominantly a foreign language. Even those Yolngu who seem to*

[1] Richard Trudgen (2000) *Why Warriors Lie Down and Die* p77.

be very competent in English can get into great difficulties when more complex English is used.[2]

What we do see however, is the loss of the intellectually powerful concepts as people transition to a Creole which is often an intellectually impoverished version of Indigenous and English languages. While we can expect that Indigenous languages will gradually begin to incorporate English, we need to ensure that Indigenous languages are supported so that this occurs in a way that allows them to incorporate cognitively effective English terms e.g. adult academic and professional level terms.

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The contribution of Indigenous Languages to Closing the Gap and strengthening Indigenous identity and culture

We see that valuing and supporting the use of Indigenous languages is vital to "closing the gap" – and indeed, that the gap will not otherwise ever be closed. We see the valuing Indigenous languages has enormous impacts on health outcomes – and all areas of life for Aboriginal communities – governance, social cohesion, economics and a sense of empowerment to control their own future.

We need to respond to today's Indigenous languages in a way that makes use of the deep knowledge that they hold and respects their potential for empowering Indigenous people. We use Yolngu language to teach a whole range of complex topics, for example:

Health and Chronic Diseases

- The Cause of Diabetes - including the interactions of insulin with body and blood chemistry in order to help people to manage and understand their Diabetes.
- Heart Disease - including understanding the function of oxygen in the body, the circulatory system and athroscrylosis (the underlying cause to ascemic heart disease).
- Acute Diseases
- The Causes of Cancer - at a cellular level.
- Contagious Diseases, Infections and Germ Theory.
- The Immune System - and its function in the body.
- Antibiotic Resistance - and its causes.

Governance

- The Constitution and the Dominant Culture Legislative System.

[2] Richard Trudgen (2000) *Why Warriors Lie Down and Die* p68

- The Roles of Members, Shareholders and the Executive.

Economics

- Debt Equity Ratios.
- Dominant Culture Accounting Systems - including assets, expense liability and income.
- Trade and Contractual Relationships.

We explain all these subjects using Yolngu linguistic concepts.
Some examples include:

Health

- The anatomy of the human body can be fully described using Yolngu terms. All the organs of the body have Indigenous names but Yolngu do not traditionally know their function, so much of our health education explores this with people.
- *Nir'* - This term describes the breath and the life in the breath which is transferred to the blood, and is highly useful for explaining the circulatory system and the function of oxygen in the body.

Economics

- *Balanydja* – Payment for goods or services rendered. This traditionally describes the repayment of a debt incurred due to providing valuable items or services to another clan.
- *Djugu* – Contract. This term describes an agreement between two parties, particularly for the exchange of goods or services and is essential to education on trade and economic relationships. Many people in previous years have not understood the English term contract which has led to misconceptions and cross cultural blunders.

Governance

- *Luku Rom* – This is the generic term for the foundation and source of law for any particular corporate group e.g. Clan or jurisdiction of law. There are many other terms that make reference to this concept and all these terms are helpful in understanding the way the dominant culture establishes its law, particularly through the use of constitutions.
- *Rom-wathangu* – Literally the owners of the law. This is a particular category of people recognizing the Yolngu system of law. This term is used to talk about membership in non-profit organizations.
- *Rom-djagamirr* – Literally the caretakers of the law. This particular category of people who recognise the Yolngu system of law have the responsibility to manage the exercise of an expression of Yolngu law. This term can be used to explore and explain the executive roles in dominant culture corporate and legal structures.

These are just a few of many examples of how Indigenous languages can be used to teach important dominant culture topics at a deep level.

Poor communication stops people receiving almost all news or knowledge from outside their language and cultural domain. This includes day-to-day news and general information. It also includes what may well be life-saving information from health professionals. It stops them knowing what they are giving consent for, how to comply with medical instructions and how to intervene in their own health problems. In this way, poor communication directly impacts on high mortality rates.

Similarly, poor communication ensures that advice from legal professionals is misunderstood or just not heard, negating Yolngu hopes of a 'fair go'. It destroys Yolngu attempts to acquire meaningful education and training, thereby preventing them from gaining control of their future. Even worse, it gives them a distorted view of themselves and the world. The comparative absence of much meaningful information from the outside world leaves the Yolngu people marginalised to a point where they lose control of their communities, homeland estates and resources.[3]

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The benefits of including Indigenous languages in early education

Literacy is far more effective when the basic skills are done in the first language. The research supporting this is overwhelming…. Where the government and educational system promotes only the dominant culture language and does not make space for or actively discourages the legitimate roles and use of local languages, this has been shown to contribute significantly to lack of self worth, marginalization, and for some, active resentment.[4]

We have seen strong evidence in working in the communities of N/E Arnhem Land, that children engage more thoroughly and genuinely show more interest in any education provided in their own language. It is clear that locally, since the reduction of bilingual education in schools, that attendance has not improved but rather *decreased*. Teaching and instruction using Indigenous languages has immediate benefits for ESL Indigenous children in any classroom. We have piloted the development of interactive e-learning modules for gaining English literacy skills using the local Yolngu languages. They demonstrate that the use of Yolngu Matha was essential to engagement in understanding literacy concepts, such as the use of symbols to represent sounds and syllables. Parents and local instructors were able to use the e-learning tools as points of interaction and instruction of young children in learning reading skills and transferring these to English. Interestingly, we found that these e-learning modules also worked well for adults with the additional benefit that they could self-learn.

[3] Richard Trudgen (2000) *Why Warriors Lie Down and Die* p69.
[4] Charles E. Grimes (2009) *Indigenous Languages in Education: What the research actually shows* p5

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Language Development in Children:

Children's language skills develop from the moment they begin to identify sounds as babies. Children begin to learn from their parents, peers and extended family how to hear and speak and how words fit into the context of life. They are learning language, culture and a way of seeing the world as a natural outcome of family life. It cannot be denied that this early learning forms their identity and is also the basis on which later education must build. Children do not come to the classroom as empty vessels. They come, even in preschool, as humans with knowledge and perspectives that form the framework onto which they incorporate new knowledge. Their Indigenous first language is a fantastic tool for building future competency in the classroom. Any attempt to teach English without using this existing knowledge is an attempt to rewrite the child's history, whereas their first language already provides a framework for teaching English, mathematics and any other subject matter.

In addition to recognizing that Indigenous language is the foundation on which to build, we also need to understand that the idea that a child must transition from their first language to English is not helpful. Competency in their first language and in English needs to proceed, hand in hand, throughout their schooling.

- In the early primary years – the current bilingual models seem to be appropriate where there is a gradual transition to English.
- In the upper primary years (4-7) – added benefits could be achieved by the greater use of Indigenous first languages. Currently we see a drop out of kids in the years that coincides with the transition to English only, in most bilingual models used in the Northern Territory. The continued use of first language as the language of instruction in most subject matters is needed to maintain children's concentration, positive self-image and to allow them to intellectually engage with the more abstract and intangible concepts that are developed in these years.
- The use of deep conceptual terms from their own language connects their home reality to the school environment and connects their ways of thinking/head space to the new concepts that are being taught. Education must intentionally connect new knowledge with the concepts that Indigenous young people already have.

We can see that the use of bilingual education in early childhood education has great benefits for achieving literacy outcomes in primary school years but we believe the most significant failures in education in remote communities is occurring in the upper primary and high school years. What we are seeing, in our experience, is a failure to intellectually engage students in the subject matter. With the proper mapping and exploration of Indigenous first language concepts, such as those examples given

above, these concepts can be used to explore dominant culture knowledge such as science, social science and even English studies in a way that the student can fully comprehend the relevance and usefulness of the new information that they are being taught. Without resorting to the removal of children, it must be recognised that a majority of a child's education and ways of seeing the world occurs in the home - thus we must continue to build on this throughout their education.

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The benefits of Indigenous languages in effective adult education and the transfer of knowledge

Because most of the knowledge that children are learning in school is new knowledge, that is, dominant culture knowledge which is new to the local Yolngu culture, there tends to be a gap between what the child is learning and what the parent and senior leaders of their Clan know. At times the worldview of the parents will clash with the knowledge received in the classroom across a range of different subjects. For example, children learning about microscopic organisms, germs and bacteria in the classroom may be re-educated by their family.

According to Yolngu cultural knowledge, things which are too small for the naked eye to see do not exist, because they have not received the education to fill this gap in their knowledge base. The result is that the child either accepts their parents knowledge, or their frustration with their parents lack of knowledge has a negative impact on their self identity i.e. They may begin to think their parents are 'stupid'. Another example is that parents that only have basic literacy often do not value reading and writing because they are not able to acquire deep, interesting, comprehensive information from written sources. Their children are likely to adopt a similar attitude to the written word. Parents need to be engaging with English concepts at a deeper level for them to value reading and writing, and so pass this on to their children.

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in the Arnhem region are all ESL speakers and consequently, it is almost impossible to do effective training without the use of first languages. Adults demand logical and comprehensive answers to their questions. Gaps in their knowledge about the dominant culture can often only be filled by reference to their own cultural concepts such as those that were described earlier.

While many ESL Indigenous adults are quite fluent speakers of English, we find there are major gaps in abstract and intangible English concepts. Intangible concepts are usually those cognitively effective words used to communicate specific and accurate information about a given topic, whereas tangible words usually only bear superficial or obvious meaning, ie. They describe things that can be seen, heard, tasted or touched.

Some examples of these intangible concepts include:

- Economics – contract, budget, product, liability, income, assets, management, interest.
- Health – bacteria, immunity.
- Emotions – guilt, sympathy, satisfaction, hope, depression.
- Governance – guilty, executive, legislation, constitution.
- serious/effective/system/ (special category of descriptive words).

In communities where English is the second language, the people are always attempting to discover more about the English language and the dominant culture world and are gradually increasing their vocabulary of English terms. However, intangible terms prove extremely difficult to discover their meaning accurately. In this process of discovering English terms, ESL speakers map the new terms against their own first language terms. This is a process we call charting a new language. Intangible terms are very difficult to chart because in the majority of cases they cannot be mapped directly to terms in the first language. These intangible terms are conceptual, requiring mapping against multiple first language terms and first culture concepts. The result is that today in remote regions, where people have had between 60-100 years of contact with English speakers, very few English intangible terms have been charted by the people.

The challenge for training teenagers and adults with English as a Second Language is to be able to overcome the communication problems that can occur when using these intangible English terms that have not yet been mapped against their own languages. For any intangible term that Indigenous culture has not properly charted, the meaning people will receive when they hear this word will be absent or confused. The result is very poor outcomes in training where specific cognitive effective terms are required to describe new concepts accurately and communicate new information safely. For example, it often takes years of work to find a way to translate a term like 'guilty' and we are still not sure if we have the right ways of translating it into Yolngu Matha.

While the current focus of using Indigenous languages at primary school level is important, clear strategies are needed to incorporate the use of Indigenous languages to ensure effective communication and training of *adult* Indigenous ESL speakers. We

know that school students can usually only succeed in language competency to the level of their first language.

> *People who can function competently in both the national (dominant culture) language and the local (Indigenous) language tend to 'succeed' in both worlds. They are the ones who become respected community leaders within the community, can represent the interests of the community to outsiders, and can also participate fully in mainstream society. In contrast, members of indigenous communities who are not fully competent in either English or their own Indigenous language(s), tend to be frustrated. They do not have a complete or mature cultural or linguistic framework for problem-solving.*[5]

The challenge for training in ESL teenagers and adults is to be able to overcome the communication problems that can occur when using these intangible English terms that have not yet been mapped against their own languages.

Achieving Professional Level English Literacy/ Measures to improve education outcomes in those Indigenous communities where English is a second language

It appears that the standard of training outcomes for training of ESL Indigenous people in the Northern Territory that is accepted is well below the level of competency achieved in mainstream education. 'Indigenised' roles in the workplace have become a mechanism for incorporating poorly trained Indigenous people into the workplace. Often Indigenous workers in fields including health, policing and teaching have not received the quality of training that they require. We believe that the solution to overcoming this is to provide quality professional level training using first languages and first culture knowledge as the basis for building a much higher standard.

An example of the impact of poor training on Indigenous Health Workers:

In N/E Arnhem Land we have worked with Indigenous health workers who have not learnt from their training about the function of the heart, that blood circulated through the body, or knew nothing more about the kidneys than that they cleaned the blood. As a result, some Indigenous health workers had little understanding of the causes of the diseases they were supposed to be treating. Indigenous Health workers doing a course on kidney disease who were taught about protein leakage from the kidneys believed that the protein was leaking into the body cavity rather than the urine, and had absolutely no concept of what protein was. Underlying these problems in training outcomes in health workers was a poor standard for the provision of information and a failure to accommodate the language barrier. Furthermore we believe that the attitude that underlies the poor standards in training is a belief that Indigenous people are unable to understand complex subjects - however this is in no way the case when the

[5] Charles E. Grimes (2009) *Indigenous Language in Education: what the research actually shows* p6

person's first language is used. It is a consequence of the difficulties people have in discovering the meaning of intangible English terms.

Measures to improve Indigenous language interpreting and translation services.

It is often asked why intangible terms are such a problem for professional level training of Indigenous people when it is not a problem for immigrants to Australia. The answer is simple - most immigrants carry with them, in their professional duties and in their professional development courses, a simple tool for them to overcome these issues. In most cases they have a dictionary that translates English terms from their profession into their first language. Unfortunately, these tools and other resources to learn English are rare for Indigenous peoples. The languages of the Yolngu people are some of the most studied in Australia but there is only one English to Yolngu Matha dictionary available for Yolngu professionals - and it is only relevant to medical anatomy (ARDS, 2010). These tools enable adults to teach themselves at a level beyond what they are learning in the various training course available to them. The creation of these tools is critical to enabling ESL Indigenous people to enter and remain in the workforce and it is critical to the transfer of knowledge to the younger generations.

> *The linguistic analysis between Yolngu Matha and English has only been going on for about 40 years. If we compare this with the many centuries of linguistic work between European languages, we can see the problem. The analytical work between European languages, and even between European and many Asian languages, has allowed comprehensive dictionary development.*[6]

Our experience is that interpreters are not being trained in Yolngu language to a level where they can interpret complex concepts. As a result they are interpreting complex concepts using very basic training, without reference tools such as dictionaries or professional development courses to able to achieve this level of understanding of Yolngu Matha. Language centres need to be funded which are able to pay people to explore language at a deeper level and use resources to reach a level of language for professional use. The creation of dictionaries and e-learning self-training tools for Indigenous people with English as a Second Language must also be supported to enable them to access these important language tools themselves.

We believe that the solution to overcoming poor quality training outcomes is to provide quality professional level training using first languages and first culture knowledge as the basis for building a much higher standard.

Educational and vocational benefits of ensuring Indigenous language competency amongst staff

[6] Richard Trudgen (2000) *Why Warriors Lie Down and Die* p89

As we have elaborated earlier, the benefits of ensuring Indigenous language competency amongst Indigenous staff will have far reaching effects on every aea of life. However, we also advocate for stronger support for dominant culture personnel working in Indigenous communities where English is the Second Language to learn , or at least attempt to learn the language of the community they are working in. This is essential to ensure the longevity of staff – our experience has been that staff who are not supported to learn local language do not stay for the long term, as they do not come to understand how the local culture works – learning that often goes hand in hand with learning the language.

> *Unless you understand a person's language, you can't understand their culture, their way of thinking, their identity, their reasons for being and doing.*[7]

[7] Ted Egan AO (2005) Administrator of the Northern Territory.

Federal Parliament Inquiry into language learning in Indigenous Communities

Questionnaire Response from Why Warriors Pty Ltd and the AHED Project.

1. **What are the languages spoken in your community?**

Most of our work occurs in the community of Galiwin'ku but we work across NE Arnhem Land. In Galiwin'ku there are about 21 tribes, most of which have distinct dialects. Sometime the differences are very small and related only to the naming of that tribe's Law. The linguistically distinct languages in the region are classified by Yolŋu[1] by the word they use to mean "this/here". Using this broader classification there may be 12 distinct living languages in the region. Of these only 6-7 are likely to survive to the next generation. The region's diversity means that almost all local residents are multilingual, speaking 3-4 Indigenous languages. The lingua franca of the NE Arnhem land region are the sister languages of "Dhuwal and "Dhuwala." Variations "Dhuwal" are spoken by Djambarrpuyŋu, Liya-Gawumirr, Liya-galawumirr, Gälpu, Rithaŋu and Dätiwuy. Variations of Dhuwala are spoken by Gupapuyŋu and Gumatj tribes, among others. "Dhaŋu" is also common in Galiwinku, spoken by Golumala, Waŋgurri and Warramiri.

2. **How well are they spoken by children, adults and elders?**

All age groups speak the lingua franca languages well and usually their mother or father's language. However, those languages that are not spoken across the region are rapidly being lost, being replaced by the "Dhuwal" or "Dhuwala" or English in some places. More important than the loss of whole languages is the loss of the deep conceptual and abstract terms that elders in the community hold dear. The younger generations are not using many of the deep concepts. For example, the word *Märr*, has many senses and meanings, it is a powerful concept that refers to a person's inner power, strength and their indebtedness to others. It is a concept that helps people to understand the dependency that is affecting our community. They speak of welfare making them *märrmiriw* - powerless and indebted. However, many young people do not know the word or use it. This actually creates a conceptual gap. And these conceptual gaps remain when they learn English. The children of this younger generation are learning an impoverished form of their native tongues, despite the prevalence of Indigenous languages in the region.

3. **Describe your project.**

Why Warriors provides two main services: 1) training of Dominant culture personnel in cross-cultural and communication skills, and; 2) the Arnhem Human Enterprise Development Project (AHED). Previously we have also provided cross-cultural educators to various organizations, particularly ARDS. All our field workers are trained to speak a local Indigenous language. The education we provide to Yolngu people is in this language. We are also working on the development of e-learning English literacy tools.

[1] The People of NE Arnhem Land. Including the communities of Milingimbi, Ramingining, Galiwin'ku, Gapuwiyak, Yirrkala and parts of Numbawarr.

Our cross-cultural training focuses on giving Dominant culture people the attitudinal, conceptual and communication skills to work more effectively with Indigenous people. An important part of this is helping personnel to understand the relevance and usefulness of learning an Indigenous language. We have seen the number of dominant culture language speakers in the region increase over the nearly 10 years we have been providing such training. But the Government is still not very interested in requiring or even supporting staff working in Indigenous communities to learn the local language.

The AHED project is a service we provide to the Galwin'ku community to support locally driven development. We place and train Faciliators to help people overcome the economic, social, cultural and linguistic barriers that they face when they try to achieve major goals or develop enterprises (social, political or economic). Our Facilitators are gradually trained in the local language and culture and much of their role is resourcing and education. Often this education and training is achieved through finding experts in a given subject to come and teach people in the community, with the facilitator acting as interpreter and intermediary educator. They help transfer concepts from the Dominant culture world across to the Yolŋu world.

There are no other services like this in Arnhem Land and we saw that people were desperate for services that support their own ideas from their own cultural and social context. Most other training and business development projects required people to come into a dominant culture space where English is the only mode of communication. These projects required people to fit dominant culture feasibility pre-requisites that were often unrealistic. People were asking us for support because we understood their language and culture. And this drove the creation of the AHED project.

We are working with approximately half the clans in Galiwin'k and have 18 clients developing enterprises, including some large groups of 12 or more people. 35 different enterprise ideas have been shared with us of the 2 years we have been providing this service.

The majority of our clients are 35 to 65 years old but we work with some individuals who are over 70 and as young as 18.

4. **What activities do you do to record or encourage the use of languages, including local languages?**

It is the process of our dominant culture staff learning Indigenous languages in order to provide accurate information to our clients that has the greatest impact on the use of languages locally. Through our service, people can learn how to develop a business or social enterprise or improve their health, using their own language (and at the same time discover new English concepts). This allows people to develop their community in a space that honours their language and their intellectual capacity, which is expressed in their language. In English, people know that they may come across as sounding simple, but in their own language they sound powerful, revealing the intellectual capacity they hold within. This we think it the most effective way to value the Yolŋu languages.

As we said above, our training for dominant culture personnel explores the reason why it is essential for dominant culture staff to learn indigenous languages, for improved communication and education outcomes.

We receive no funding from Government for these projects - our training is fee for service, but the AHED program is provided free to Yolŋu clients in Galiwn'ku, with the help of funding from Rio Tinto Aborignal Fund, Arnhem Land Progress Aboriginal Corporation and individual donors.

We are seeing Indigenous owned, controlled and managed projects and even organisations starting to grow into sustainable enterprises. Unlike the previous era, where the management ofAboriginal organisations in this region was English dominated, our clients' enterprises' internal operations are part of an Indigenous linguistic and cultural space that they determine.

We have seen gradual improvements in the attitude of Dominant Culture personnel toward Indigenous languages. Many wish for the opportunity within their work space to learn the local language. We hope that our training has had something to do with this. We know that our book *Why Warriors Lie Down and Die* by Richard Trudgen has had much to do with this, as many people often tell us how it has inspired them.

5. **How are your languages taught in schools?**

We do not work closely with the school. However, parents often tell us that the school undervalues their languages. The local school has worked hard to retain bilingual education in the first three years of schooling, despite removal of funds by the NT Government for bilingual education. But interest in schooling for children in the community seems to drop off as they get older. High school years in particular fail to engage students. I believe that the English only environment contributes to this. Dominant Culture teachers at the school are not given enough training in the local language, despite the fact that many want this training. As a result, many often give up and leave after a year or two. All these issues also impact on the retention of local teaching staff. The school seem to be struggling to retain Yolŋu assistant teachers. Over the years we have observed that this is due in part to the lack of control they have in the classroom and work place because the school environment is dominated by English.

6. **What interpreting and translating services are available in your local language? How useful and effective are these?**

The Aboriginal Interpreter Service based in Darwin provides a number of Yolŋu interpreters both in Darwin and in the communities.

Interpreters are often highly skilled in translating every day conversation, however, their ability to translate intangible terms and professional level English is poor (see our explanation of problems with intangible terms in our submission). This is because not enough work has been done to train these interpreters and that not enough work has been put into charting the Yolŋu languages so that they can have access to English to Yolŋu Matha [2] dictionaries for health, legal and economic fields. Underlying this training failure is a cultural assumption that Indigenous People who are fluent in speaking English and their own language therefore have a full and accurate vocabulary. See the report by ARDS Inc. "A lack of Mutual Respect " [3]for some example of the misunderstanding that occur in the legal system despite the use of interpreters.

[2] Yolŋu matha = languages of the Yolŋu people.
[3] See page 20 – 35 http://www.ards.com.au/print/Absence_of_Mutual_Respect-FINAL.pdf

7. What are the main difficulties facing your project?

Training new staff takes time in an environment where government and other personnel are moving at a rapid pace, driven by the media, the election cycle and the "white man's" need to "save" the Indigenous people. The linguistic, cultural and learning needs of the whole community come second to this false urgency that the people themselves experience as a burden. This leaves us trying to train our facilitator to support our Yolŋu clients, while our clients are missing out on opportunities, because things are changing too much.

Funding is also difficult to obtain because most grants and funders do not value programs that train dominant culture personnel to use Indigenous languages. This is not seen as important or even relevant by those that do not work on the ground. The common belief is that Yolŋu can somehow chart the complexities of both English hand their own language without help from English first language speakers.

8. What are you aiming to achieve in the future?

We would like to see our facilitation and support services delivered in all the communities in Arnhem Land so that people can be enabled to successfully build their own enterprises, while using and valuing the power of their own languages. At the same time we see a need to expand training in local language to provide this to Dominant culture staff beyond our own. We hope that as English first language staff start to use the local languages in their work places, that Yolŋu people will be more empowered in those spaces and have more opportunity to learn Dominant culture knowledge - not to mention the relational benefits that arise from the two cultures understanding each other.