

NAAJA launches Gunbalanya Cultural Community Resource

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NAAJA, with the assistance of a Law Society Public Purposes Trust grant, has developed an exciting cross-cultural resource, comprising a cultural handbook and film series focused on the community of Gunbalanya, titled 'Karriyolyolme Konda Kunred – Talking About this Country Gunbalanya'.

There was excitement in Gunbalanya on Tuesday 19 May as NAAJA launched the Gunbalanya Community Cultural DVD and Handbook at the Gunbalanya School as part of the West Arnhem College culture week.

Approximately thirty people attended a special screening of the main film including Gunbalanya's traditional owners, community leaders and local service providers. Even the Hon Warren Snowden MP dropped by and attended the launch. Injalak Art Centre has also expressed a desire to screen this film at the launch of their new interactive media space on 10 June 2015.

People who have been to a remote community in the NT will know that there is usually a large number of visiting service providers. Doctors, lawyers, health workers, government representatives, social workers and a host of other professionals drive or fly in and out, often in high volume and with quick turnaround.

Many people, especially those who are new to a community, would like to know more about the place they are visiting. But often they are unsure of who, how or what to ask. Sometimes people are afraid of accidentally causing offence, of asking the wrong question and appearing rude or ignorant. Even if that is not the case, often professionals with high caseloads are often too busy to do all the

research and have the in-depth conversations necessary to learn as much as they would like.

This interest is not purely academic. The more that a lawyer knows about kinship structures, family and language groups, and the history and structure of the community they work in, the more capable they become in taking good instructions, better understanding their clients' needs and working with them in a respectful and effective way.

Similarly, if a legal practitioner knows more about the different services and support structures available in a community, such as work programs or groups of respected elders who can support people, then they are better equipped to suggest culturally appropriate and local referrals for their client during sentencing.

For these reasons in 2012 we spoke with senior community members in Gunbalanya about making a short film that introduces Gunbalanya and Kunwinjku culture. Thankfully, they said it sounded like a good idea for the Balanda (non-Indigenous people) to learn more about Bininj (local Indigenous people) and agreed to help.

With the assistance of independent film makers David Mackenzie, Mayeta Clark and Phil Densen, we shot a short introductory documentary to Gunbalanya and Kunwinjku culture. We spoke with some of the Traditional Owners of Gunbalanya and the surrounding area as well as other community members. They showed us some of their country and provided important insight into the history of Gunbalanya and how it is today. Linguist Murray Garde also shared with us his knowledge of Kunwinjku culture and language.

The Project draws upon the voices of the local community leaders and the Traditional Owners to provide an introduction to the people, place and culture of the Gunbalanya region. The project involved extensive community consultation and enabled a two-way learning exchange in which community members, including leaders and elders, were able to outline the best way for service providers and non-Indigenous people to engage with the community, while also explaining important aspects of Kunwinjku culture.

Local community members have identified that this resource, along with acting as an excellent cultural introduction to Gunbalanya for Balanda people, has the potential to be used as a record of culture for future generations and a resource for teaching their culture to children. Participants wanted to show the film to their family members, and one person suggested that it could be aired on NITV.

The overwhelming feedback from the community has been particularly positive and includes the following comments:

Andy Gunaradj, the Indigenous Liaison Officer from West Arnhem Regional Council, observed “It is a privilege for people to know (the stories from elders)” and “Important for our elders to be honest and empowered to continue to talk and show our kids for future generations.”

Connie Nyangul from the Manilakarr Clan group and a traditional owner of the nearby Mikkinj Valley (East Alligator River area) said “People need to watch the movie so they know about Gunbalanya and our country”.

Kylene Nalorlman said “Fantastic. Good for kids to learn because old people have died and our stories can continue.”

The film and handbook will not make an instant expert out of anyone. However, it provides a solid introduction to the community and the people who live there and hopefully gives people the tools and confidence to ask the right questions, take better instructions and better help their clients.

*If people would like a copy of the film and handbook, please contact **Alex Jones** at Alexandria.Jones@naaja.org.au or (08) 8982 5100 to order a copy.*

NAAJA would like to thank the Law Society Public Purposes Trust for their support as well as the Traditional Owners and entire community of Gunbalanya for agreeing to and helping with this film.