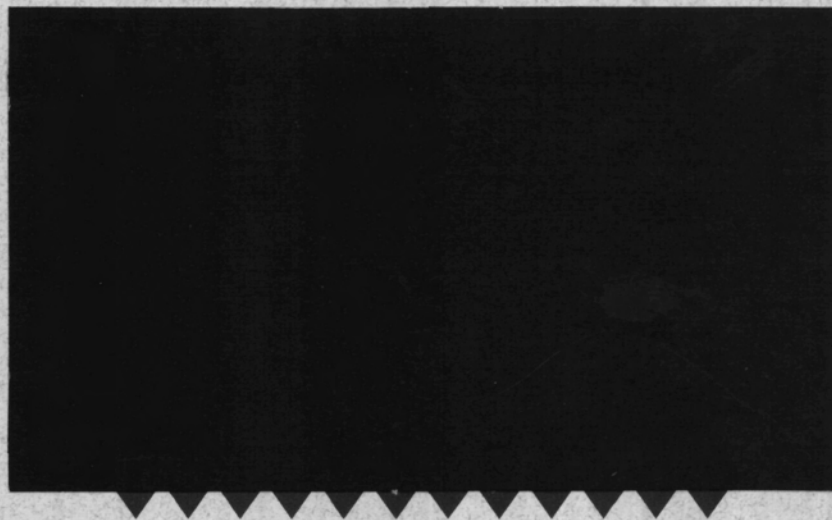


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**R**esearch

Discussion Paper



**'Working for CDEP': a case study  
of the Community Development  
Employment Projects scheme in  
Port Lincoln, South Australia**

**D.E. Smith**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP) scheme has been subject to a plethora of government reviews, but there are few published case studies of its operation in remote communities, and no accounts of urban schemes. This paper describes the organisation of the CDEP scheme in Port Lincoln, South Australia; one of the first urban CDEP schemes. The Port Lincoln scheme has been held up by both the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody and by the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs as an example of 'self-determination in practice', generating employment and training opportunities, and creating dramatic changes within the town. The Port Lincoln case study describes the organisational structure and practices developed by the urban CDEP scheme, considers the socioeconomic and cultural background within which it is operating, and presents a detailed examination of employment and other outcomes. The paper concludes with an assessment of national program and policy objectives informed by local outcomes and perspectives.

## **Acknowledgments**

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The Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP) scheme has been in operation since 1977 and since then has become the major initiative within the Commonwealth Government's Aboriginal Employment Development Policy (AEDP). With an estimated budget allocation of \$260 million in 1993-94, and an expected expenditure in 1994-95 of \$280 million, the scheme is the single largest program administered by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) and has expanded into a number of rural and more recently, urban centres. By June 1994, there were 229 CDEP communities with a total of 24,204 participants.<sup>1</sup> The scheme is undergoing further expansion under Commonwealth initiatives: from 1994, ATSIC will receive an additional \$109 million over four years for its development, including \$66 million for 'improved management and support'. In turn, ATSIC is expected to provide 1,250 new participant places per year, raising participant numbers to an estimated 30,000 by 1997-98 (Commonwealth of Australia 1994a: 137).<sup>2</sup>

While the scheme has been subject to a plethora of government and departmental reviews (see Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu 1993: Appendix 3), there are few published case studies of its operation in remote communities, and no accounts of urban schemes. This paper aims, in part, to fill that gap by describing the operation of the CDEP scheme in Port Lincoln, South Australia; one of the first urban CDEP schemes. The Port Lincoln scheme has been held up by both the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (RCIADIC) and by the House of Representatives Standing Committee report on the needs of urban indigenous peoples, as an example of 'self-determination in practice', generating employment and training opportunities and creating dramatic changes in social attitudes within the town (Commonwealth of Australia 1991: 45-8, 428; 1992: 116-17). Port Lincoln presents a case study not only of the organisational structure and initiatives developed by an urban CDEP scheme, but of one that has been singled out as being particularly successful. It affords an opportunity to assess national program and policy objectives against local outcomes and perspectives, in the context of the socioeconomic circumstances of an urban Aboriginal population.

### **Field research**

This paper is based on two weeks field research with Kuju CDEP, the Aboriginal organisation co-ordinating the scheme in Port Lincoln, between 15-28 May 1994. The research is part of a larger project to examine the circumstances of urban CDEP schemes. Permission for the field study was given by the Aboriginal Board of Kuju CDEP. During the course of the research, discussions were held with the manager and chair of the Board about the history, structure, objectives and policies of the organisation; with administrative staff about funding and employment contract issues; and with a small number of participants about the

organisation and outcome of work programs. Kuju management also made comments on a draft of this paper.

Discussions were held with senior staff of the Port Lincoln Aboriginal Organisation (PLAO), an organisation which has been closely involved in the early development of the CDEP scheme. In an effort to understand the local and regional context, informal interviews were held with officials from a range of local and State government agencies (see acknowledgments). Discussions were also held with ATSIC staff in Canberra, Ceduna and Adelaide concerning the scheme in general and the Port Lincoln scheme in particular. A comparative view of issues affecting the operation of CDEP organisations in the ATSIC regional council area was sought through brief discussions with the management of the CDEP organisation in Ceduna.

Because of the brief field period, the research focused on the organisational context and outcomes of the Port Lincoln scheme. This paper cannot reflect either the range or particularity of participants' viewpoints. Further, the research hasn't been able to consider the position of those local people who have not joined the scheme, or who had left it at the time of fieldwork. While it could be said that discussions were held with individual staff and participants who were the most positive about the scheme, opinions expressed by government and agency officials commonly reinforced their views. Undoubtedly, a longer-term study would better highlight outcomes for individuals and families, and more fully consider the impact on the scheme of local and regional politics.

### **The CDEP scheme: national objectives and expectations**

Under the CDEP scheme, members of an indigenous community collectively forego their individual Job Search or Newstart allowance in exchange for wages paid for work initiated by the community in which they reside. At the local level, the scheme is co-ordinated by an incorporated organisation which receives a block wages grant roughly equivalent to the welfare entitlements of the participating members. Additional funding is obtained by each community for recurrent costs such as project administration and employee on-costs, and capital funds for the purchase of equipment and assets. These funding components are based on actual participant numbers. The wages component is formula-driven, on an average per participant funding rate that is tied to changing participation levels monitored by quarterly ATSIC participant schedules.<sup>3</sup>

The national objectives of the scheme are to provide employment for indigenous people in locations where there are limited alternatives, to reduce reliance on welfare and to 'improve elements of their social, cultural or economic life which enhance self-management' (Commonwealth of Australia 1994b: 150). In many respects the scheme is an enigma; criticised for its deficiencies, yet lauded for its apparent success.

CDEP schemes vary greatly from one community to another. Such diversity is characteristic of contemporary Aboriginal social and political formations, but has also been facilitated by ATSIC attempts to decentralise program funding and control to the regional council level (Smith 1993a, 1993b). The scheme's most radical innovation has been that it allows for an 'Aboriginalisation' of work: the community organisation responsible for managing the scheme, together with participants, are able to determine wage rates and the type and conditions of work, with the result that there is considerable local control over employment priorities and outcomes. While local idiosyncrasies in the scheme can be taken as evidence of self-determination in action, it is nevertheless the cause of a certain 'administrative anxiety' (Rowse 1993: 270). This anxiety, fed by the complexity of program issues involved, has led to frequent review of the scheme and periodic resort to freezing its expansion. Yet despite having seemingly contradictory objectives and contested priorities (Altman and Sanders 1991; Sanders 1993), the scheme continues to have wide appeal amongst Aboriginal communities, especially now that it is available on a project basis to urban indigenous organisations.

Increasingly, the scheme is being constituted by both ATSIC and government as a labour market program that will develop 'a sustainable ... economy' for indigenous communities, and facilitate the transition of individuals into full-time employment in the mainstream economy (Commonwealth of Australia 1994b: 50, 70; 1994c: 12). Expectations for remote CDEP communities are beginning to be distinguished from those for urban participants who are seen to be more attached to the mainstream economy and, therefore, more readily able to establish access to urban labour markets. It was with such an assumption in mind that the House of Representatives Standing Committee (Commonwealth of Australia 1992: 120) argued for the introduction of a 'sunset clause' for urban communities. This suggestion has been taken up by the recent review of the AEDP, which recommended that CDEP communities 'incorporate time limited plans ... to contribute to the staged progression of each community towards maximum self-sufficiency ... and transition plans ... to move into the primary labour market' (Commonwealth of Australia 1994b: 71).

The scheme thus carries the burden of great expectations. The AEDP review argued for its pre-eminent position as a labour market program, stressing that its 'strategic importance ... to the employment prospects for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander individuals' could not be overstated. It is increasingly seen as crucial to 'the economic development prospects' of indigenous communities (Commonwealth of Australia 1994b: 68). This would appear to be confirmed by estimations that in 1991, scheme participants constituted over 25 per cent of the indigenous labour force; and between 1986 and 1991, accounted for about 60 per cent of new jobs for indigenous people (Taylor 1993a: 3, 21). But by and large, participation in the scheme has generally meant part-time, low-skilled employment, rather



than the creation of full-time jobs. Questions have also been raised about gender equity, the degree of substitution funding involved, and whether the scheme is effective in meeting AEDP objectives of increasing indigenous income levels (Altman and Sanders 1991; Altman and Smith 1993; Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu 1993; Sanders 1993). There have been concerns expressed as to whether the scheme will provide a 'stepping stone' to 'real employment' in mainstream labour markets (Altman and Daly 1992; Commonwealth of Australia 1994b: 50, 69). An associated concern is that CDEP employment represents a 'false economy' generating artificial work; dependent upon public funding and primarily creating employment in the Aboriginal service sector, which is itself dependent on public funding (Commonwealth of Australia 1994c: 7; Perkins 1992). These issues are discussed below in order to discern what the 'strategic importance' of the scheme might be at the local level.

### The CDEP scheme in Port Lincoln

In South Australia, there are 26 communities participating in the CDEP scheme with a total of 1,989 participants and funding of \$21 million in 1993-94 (see Map 1). New urban schemes are being established in Adelaide and Port Augusta, bringing to six the total number of urban communities on the scheme in South Australia. The Port Lincoln scheme was the earliest of these, established in 1988 by PLAO, becoming operational in April 1989. The scheme quickly became co-ordinated under a separate incorporated organisation known as Kuju CDEP (hereafter referred to as Kuju), with the stated objective of providing 'all eligible unemployed Aboriginal people resident in Port Lincoln with employment, on-the-job training, self-esteem and confidence'.

**Table 1. Wangka-Wilurrura Regional Council's CDEP budget allocations, 1991-94.**

CDEP community	1991-92	1992-93	1993-94	Community total
Kuju <sup>a</sup>	1,653,876	1,406,407	1,413,671	4,473,954
Yalata	1,680,566	1,652,320	2,009,082	5,341,968
TWT <sup>b</sup>	1,427,915	1,353,447	1,391,565	4,172,927
KACC <sup>c</sup>	553,564	662,779	631,479	1,847,822
Regional total	5,315,921	5,074,953	5,445,797	15,836,671

a. Kuju CDEP Incorporated, Port Lincoln.

b. Tjuthunaka Worka Tjuta Incorporated, Ceduna.

c. Koonibba Aboriginal Community CDEP Incorporated.

Source: Ceduna office, ATSIC.

## Map 1. CDEP communities, South Australia, 1994.

### Adelaide: Patpa Warra Yunti Regional Council

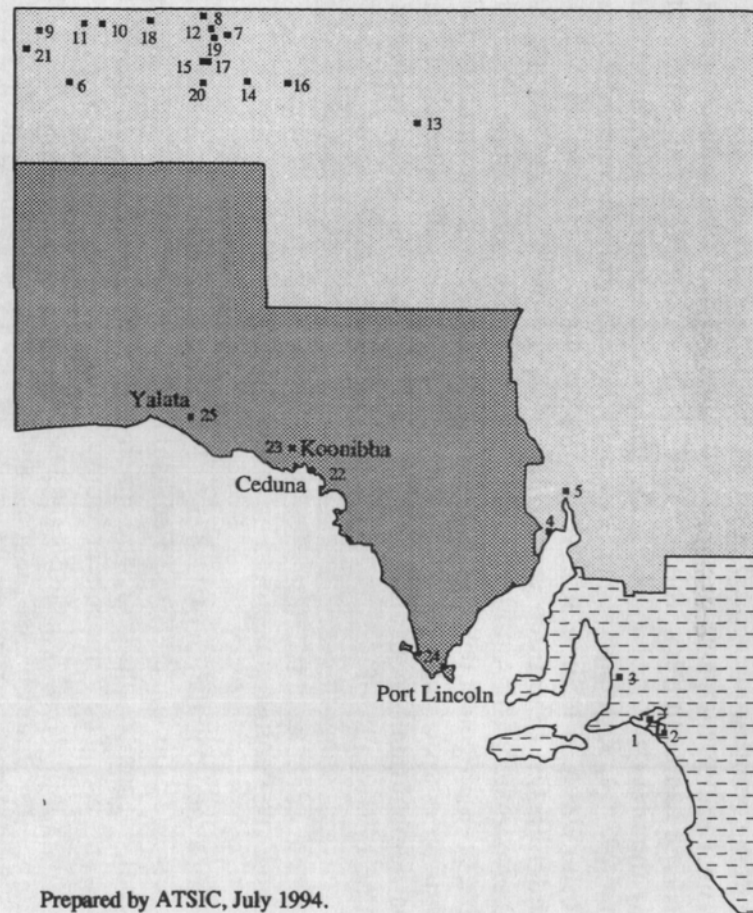
1. Port McLeay Community Council Inc.
2. Narrandjeri L.P.A Inc.
3. Aboriginal Employment and Training Centre Corp.

### Port Augusta: Nulla Wimila Kutju Regional Council

4. Whyalla Aboriginal Community Centre Inc.
5. Davenport Community Council Inc.
6. Watarru Community Aboriginal Corp.
7. Yunyarinyi Community Inc.
8. Tjurma Homelands Council Aboriginal Corp.
9. Pitjantjatara Homelands Council Aboriginal Corp.
10. Nyapari Community Inc.
11. Murputja Homelands Council Aboriginal Corp.
12. Pukatja Community (Ernabella) Inc.
13. Dunjiba Community Council
14. Mimili Community Inc.
15. Kaltjiti Community Aboriginal Corp.
16. Iwantja Community Inc. (Indulkana)
17. Irintata Homelands Council Aboriginal Corp.
18. Amata Community Inc.
19. Anilalya Council Aboriginal Corp.
20. Watinumu Community Inc.
21. Pipilyatjara Community Inc.

### Ceduna: Wangka-Wilurrara Regional Council

22. Tjutjunaku Worka Tjuta CDEP Inc.
23. Koonibba Aboriginal Community Council Inc.
24. Port Lincoln Kuju CDEP
25. Yalata Community Inc.



Prepared by ATSIC, July 1994.

With a commencement staff of six and 30 participants, the scheme steadily grew to 80 participants by mid 1990 when ATSIC files reported that the scheme had been 'very well received by the local Aboriginal community'. By the first quarter of 1994-95, the scheme had a total of 140 participants. In 1993-94, Kuju's total budget (including wages, recurrent and capital costs) was \$1.4 million, to cover participant numbers ranging between 125 and 130. Over the three years from 1991, the organisation has received approximately \$4.5 million in funding from ATSIC (see Table 1). During that time, its percentage of the total regional CDEP scheme funds of \$15.8 million has in fact declined, from 31 to 26 per cent, though its total participant numbers in June 1994 of 124 are the same as that recorded in June 1991.

### **The Eyre Peninsula regional economy**

With a total population of 11,821 in 1991, Port Lincoln is the major service town and port on the Eyre Peninsula. The Peninsula produces cereals, wool, fat lambs and beef, and much of the semi-arid land is leased for pastoral use. The Peninsula economy has suffered a series of crises in the primary industry sector during the recent recession. Unseasonal rains, dust storms, mice and locust plagues, and land degradation have led to low-quality grain, a fall in cereal grain prices and depressed farm incomes (Primary Industries South Australia 1994: 13). The collapse of wool prices in 1990 and the west coast prawn industry in 1991-92 have exacerbated the region's economic difficulties and there is the prospect of a third, below average season in 1994.<sup>4</sup>

The impact of the recession and rural crisis on employment levels has been substantial. The casual workforce used by local farmers has been progressively shed and is now regarded as being 'the absolute minimum needed' for farms to remain operational. There are estimates of a 12 per cent loss in full-time employment affecting both males and females in the rural sector between 1988 and 1993 (Smailes 1993: 49, 58). Inevitably, the Port Lincoln economy has experienced a corresponding downturn, with employment losses owing to public service downsizing and the failure of some local businesses. Notable closures include the local abattoir and the Port Lincoln Ship Construction Company which closed down in 1993, leaving approximately 150 local people unemployed.

The resilience of the tourism and fishing industries in Port Lincoln has partially offset the impact of regional economic decline. Port Lincoln is home to Australia's largest commercial fishing fleet, with 90 per cent of the national tuna catch managed from the town. Improvements in the tuna industry have seen the total catch value rise substantially from \$10 million in 1991-92, to \$37 million in 1992-93 (South Australia Research and Development Institute 1993: 45). The new aquaculture industry has grown



from an estimated \$8 million in 1993, to \$15 million in 1994 and is a welcome source of more stable employment for the town's non-Aboriginal population. In comparison to the largely seasonal work available on local fishing boats, the farms require a continuous and much larger workforce. Even so, the Port Lincoln Commonwealth Employment Service (CES) estimates current unemployment levels in the town to be 15-16 per cent, but points to the seasonal character of employment (because of seasonal employment in fishing, construction and grain handling at the local South Australia Cooperative Bulk Handling terminals), with summer levels of unemployment around 12-13 per cent. These levels are consistently above the State unemployment rate of 11.7 per cent (Taylor and Roach 1994).

### **Aboriginal people in the Port Lincoln economy**

The Aboriginal population of Port Lincoln include the Wurrungu, Mirring, Kokotha and Pangkala peoples, who trace traditional affiliation to lands on the Peninsula, the west coast of the State and to Point Pearce on the York Peninsula. Other Aboriginal residents have ties to lands to the north and a number of families have come from interstate, in particular from Western Australia.

1991 Census data put the Aboriginal population of Port Lincoln at 466, a net increase of 74 persons, or 19 per cent, from 1986.<sup>5</sup> Data collected in June 1992 by local Aboriginal people as part of ATSIC's National Aboriginal Housing and Community Infrastructure Survey, put the figure at 609 (Wangka Pulka Regional Council 1993: 11). The Aboriginal population represents between 4-5 per cent of the town population, and has undoubtedly grown as a proportion of the State's Aboriginal population, in line with the long-term trend towards urbanisation noted by Taylor and Roach (1994). The regional plan prepared by the ATSIC Wangka Pulka Regional Council refers to the impact of transient Aboriginal migration to the region and of intra-regional movements between Yalata, Ceduna and Port Lincoln, especially on demand for services and resources.<sup>6</sup>

The Port Lincoln Aboriginal population has grown at a time when the total population of the town fell slightly between 1986 and 1991, from 11,949 to 11,821 owing to a reduction of 63 persons among the non-Aboriginal population; indicative of the job losses incurred during the recession. These relative trends were also apparent among the working-age population of Port Lincoln, with the Aboriginal working-age population of 238 in 1991 increasing by 6 per cent from 1986 (representing an additional 13 people), and the non-Aboriginal working-age population of 7,231 declining by 1 per cent (representing a loss of 74 people).

The Aboriginal population of Port Lincoln does not stand apart from the regional economy, having a long history of employment, albeit casual and

seasonal, in various local industries (Davies 1991; Davies and Harrison 1993; Gale 1964). But it does stand in a particular relationship to that economy; namely, one of continuing socioeconomic disadvantage and significant demographic differences. According to 1991 Census data, approximately 50 per cent of the total Aboriginal population in town were aged 15 years and under; in comparison with the non-Aboriginal population of which 24 per cent were aged under 15 years. Only 11 per cent of people were aged 40 years and over, in contrast to 38 per cent of the non-Aboriginal population, and 1.5 per cent were aged 60 years and over, again in marked comparison with 28 per cent of the non-Aboriginal population.<sup>7</sup> This extremely youthful Aboriginal age structure has economic implications for Aboriginal families arising from high dependency burdens, and future implications for labour market programs and service provision.

In 1991, 68 per cent of Aboriginal income earners received annual individual incomes of \$16,000 or less, in comparison to 58 per cent of the non-Aboriginal population. More marked was the difference in the higher income brackets where only 2.5 per cent of Aboriginal people had incomes above \$30,000, in comparison to 9.5 per cent of non-Aboriginal income-earners. The Aboriginal population is reliant (86 per cent) on State Housing Commission homes, with a small number, only 3 per cent, owning their own homes.

Prior to the drought and recession of the late 1980s and early 1990s, the main areas of Aboriginal employment were with the abattoir, railways, the grain co-operative, and with seasonal work on the surrounding farms. Historically, there has been little employment in commercial fishing (probably owing to the capital investment required from owner-managers for licenses and equipment) and little ongoing work as boat hands in the local industry. Past employment niches have significantly diminished, if not disappeared completely for local Aboriginal people.

The labour force profile of the Aboriginal population available from 1991 Census data needs careful evaluation. It must be remembered that these data, whilst indicative of general trends, have deficiencies in the Aboriginal labour force variables owing to the large percentage of Aboriginal people who did not state their occupation (28 per cent), industry of employment (39 per cent), industry sector (32 per cent), and the numbers of hours worked (18 per cent). The census records a total of 104 Aboriginal people employed in Port Lincoln with the largest proportion (41 per cent) in the private sector. The Wangka Pulka Regional Council plan (1993: 14, 86) suggested that the majority of this employment is almost exclusively in the Aboriginal community service sector. Between 1986 and 1991, the overall employment rate of Aboriginal people in Port Lincoln showed signs of improvement, rising from around 30 per cent to 46 per cent (Table 2). This positive trend should be considered in the context of

the wider labour market where corresponding employment figures for the rest of the town's working-age population showed only slight improvement, from 61 per cent to 63 per cent. Thus, while there has been a convergence in employment levels between the two groups in recent years, as indicated by the higher ratio of Aboriginal to non-Aboriginal employment rates, nevertheless, the rate for Aboriginal people remains at a level less than three-quarters that of the rest of the population. Table 2 also points to a significant decline in the Aboriginal unemployment rate in Port Lincoln at a time when the non-Aboriginal rate has risen. This relative shift is indicated by the fact that the Aboriginal rate fell from being 3.6 times higher than the non-Aboriginal rate in 1986, to only 1.7 times higher in 1991.

**Table 2. Change in labour force status of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians, Port Lincoln, 1986-91.**

	Aboriginal (1)	1986 Non- Aboriginal (2)	Ratio (1/2)	Aboriginal (3)	1991 Non- Aboriginal (4)	Ratio (3/4)
Employment rate	29.7	61.2	0.48	46.2	63.1	0.73
Unemployment rate	47.4	13.1	3.61	27.3	16.0	1.70
Participation rate	55.7	70.5	0.79	63.5	75.1	0.84

All figures exclude those who did not state their labour force status (7 per cent of the working-age population).

Source: 1991 Census data.

To what extent do these positive changes in Aboriginal labour force status in Port Lincoln reflect Aboriginal participation in the CDEP schemes? In 1994, a total of 543 people participated in CDEP schemes in the ATSIC Wangka Wilurrura region, including: 197 people in the Yalata scheme, 144 in Tjuthunaka Worka Tjuta (Ceduna), 140 in Kuju (Port Lincoln) and 62 in Koonibba.<sup>8</sup> In the 1991 Census, working CDEP participants are thought to have been classified as part-time employed and located within the local government or private sector. It is not clear how 'non-working' participants have been classified in the census, though it is likely that they are defined as 'not in the labour force'. Using Taylor's (1993a: 3) 60:40 ratio to delineate CDEP workers from non-working participants, a minimum of 275 CDEP participants in the ATSIC region were likely to have been recorded as employed in the 1991 Census; making the scheme the largest employment sector in the ATSIC region.



The Port Lincoln CDEP participant schedules suggest the reasonableness of Taylor's ratio, though elevating it for working participants. In July 1991, there were 124 participants, of whom some 88 were working participants, giving a ratio of working to non-working participants closer to 70:30.<sup>9</sup> These participants were likely to have been classified as employed in the 1991 Census. This represents a net increase since 1986, at which time the scheme had not been initiated in Port Lincoln. In other words, these CDEP participants account for a massive 85 per cent of the total employed Aboriginal population (104 people) recorded by the national census.

The likelihood that CDEP initiatives have served to enhance the relative labour force status of indigenous people is further suggested by their much higher rates of intercensal employment growth compared to other residents of Port Lincoln, albeit from a much lower base. Between 1986 and 1991 Censuses, the number of Aboriginal people in employment grew by 41 (from 63 to 104), representing an increase of 65 per cent and more than 30 times the rate recorded for the rest of the population.

In 1991, just over half (54 per cent) of the new jobs for Aboriginal people in Port Lincoln went to females. Because of their far fewer numbers in the labour force, however, Aboriginal women experienced a much higher rate of employment growth (Table 3). This is consistent with the general gender pattern of job growth in the State (Taylor and Roach 1994), though it is likely that the increasing number of women participating in the Kuju CDEP has played a significant role in this positive employment growth for women. It is also worth emphasising that non-Aboriginal males in Port Lincoln experienced negative overall growth in employment at a time when their Aboriginal counterparts gained slightly.

**Table 3. Employment growth among Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians by gender, Port Lincoln, 1986-91.**

	Per cent employed		Change	
	1986	1991	Net	Per cent
Aboriginal				
Males	62.0	55.8	19	48.7
Females	38.0	44.2	22	91.7
Total	100.0	100.0	41	65.0
Non-Aboriginal				
Males	61.0	54.6	-236	-8.6
Females	39.0	45.4	326	18.7
Total	100.0	100.0	90	2.0

Source: 1991 Census data.

The message for policy makers is clear. Without the CDEP scheme, the number of Aboriginal people recorded as employed would have declined between 1986 and 1991. In the deteriorating labour market conditions of the early 1990s, one important impact of the CDEP scheme in Port Lincoln has been to ameliorate potentially far worse unemployment statistics. Information about the actual nature of employment generated by Kuju CDEP enables this 'statistical' success to be more closely evaluated.

### **Kuju CDEP organisational structure**

Kuju is administered by a Board and a full-time manager. The Board is responsible for developing administrative and employment policy, with an executive committee acting on its behalf. There are currently eight Board members; five men and three women, with one elected as chairperson and membership held for a period of up to three years. All Board members are now Aboriginal and must be working on a CDEP employment program. In previous years Kuju had, as Board members, representatives from other organisations and agencies. However, the decision was made that Kuju would benefit from having Board members who were working participants and prepared to undertake training in skills pertinent to their responsibilities. Board members themselves have said that this policy has considerably improved their cohesiveness and effectiveness.

The organisation has a 'staffing committee' consisting of the manager, chairperson of the Board, the Administration Officer and two Board members who interview and hire staff. A 'planning committee' of similar composition assesses employment and training programs. Both committees have female members, though this is not a formal requirement. Office staff are supervised by the Manager and include: a full-time administration officer who co-ordinates all funding, budgeting and wages requirements; a full-time employment officer who co-ordinates participant involvement in the work programs; CDEP participants who work as office secretary and trainee receptionist; an information officer who is currently receiving CDEP training in his position; a works manager, supervisor; and an understudy foreman.

### **Kuju CDEP participants and work programs**

Between 1993-94, the total number of CDEP participants in the scheme has fluctuated between 120 and 130. There is also a waiting list of around 25-30 people. Of total participants listed with Kuju at the time of research (May 1994), 85 were working participants (comprising 52 males and 33 females) of whom 57 were married, 20 were single and eight were sole parents.

Because of contract periods and participant changeovers, it can take as long as six months to get onto the scheme, though this varies according to individual skills and experience, as well as demand. Potential participants are assessed by the employment officer who obtains information on their educational, work and skills experience; older participants must have a medical certificate before entering the scheme. Final approval is given by the manager. Recommendation to dismiss a participant is taken by the manager to the staffing committee of the Board. The spouse or de facto of a working participant has a waiting period of three months before he/she is registered, usually as a non-working participant, and eligible for the 'spouse allowance'.

New participants are officially registered with ATSIIC via a 'commencement form' that requires basic identification information, a copy of which is sent to ATSIIC State office and to the local Department of Social Security (DSS) office.<sup>10</sup> The DSS section of the form clarifies the participant's eligibility for continuing Family Allowance Supplement (FAS), for health and rental benefits, and for an employment entry payment. The participant also fills out an employment declaration for the Australian Taxation Office. Each new participant also completes a 'sign on' form for Kuju's own purposes, listing personal particulars, educational and work experience, and credit repayment arrangements.<sup>11</sup> An individual's written agreement to participate in the scheme, to withdraw from CES registration and to attend any training as directed by the manager on behalf of the Board is also obtained. At this stage a copy of the organisation's work policies are handed to each participant.

Employment on the scheme is co-ordinated via a series of separate work programs in which a group of participants form a work gang. Kuju has developed a 'service contract' which requires participants to sign on for thirteen-week employment periods. The contract outlines a participant's employment duties, the work hours required, the nominated work days and an agreement to abide by work conditions and training requirements. These contract periods form the basis of all Kuju employment programs.

The onus is on the participant to notify the Kuju office if he or she would like to change to another program area; otherwise the contract is automatically renewed. This changeover usually only occurs at the end of each quarter, and only if there is a position available. After trying a number of alternatives, Kuju found that this contracted work period facilitated the management of different programs and the establishment of a work routine. It recognises that participants move to other communities for many reasons; and some people are now said to be tailoring their travel to the phases of these contract periods. The Ceduna and Port Lincoln schemes have attempted to co-ordinate their contract periods so that mobility between the two towns, especially in relation to the football season, can be accommodated.



Employment is offered in a number of programs, including: the automotive services program; the wood yard; the women's art and craft group; welding; landscaping; Mallee Park grounds maintenance; and carpentry and painting as part of the home maintenance program. Kuju also offers placements as Aboriginal education workers (AEW) in a number of kindergartens, primary and secondary schools in the town; and as receptionists, cleaners and clerical staff at the Aboriginal Health Service and at PLAO. There are also Kuju youth workers at PLAO's Gidga Club (an after school child-care centre located near the PLAO office). The structure and operation of these programs are detailed in Appendix A. The first five have operated since Kuju's establishment. An artefact program is also being developed. Efforts to develop a furniture removal service were halted because of the expense of getting items insured, and a haycarting service was discontinued as a result of the rural crisis. Kuju rents office space in the town and has a separate property which operates as a works depot housing a garage, carpentry workshop, works manager's office, welding area, screen-printing area and a vegetable garden run largely as a social activity for older members of the community. The labouring gangs begin and end their working day by signing on and off at the depot.

Each work program is handled as a separate budget line and any income generated is generally kept within each budget area. As a result, workers in programs that are generating income can request additional work, thereby increasing their wages with what is called 'top-up' money. Payment is required by Kuju for the automotive services, yard cleaning, wood supply, carpentry and home maintenance programs. Many participants and their families avail themselves of these services and Kuju link repayments to a formalised credit arrangement where participants' CDEP wages are garnisheed. This enables people to make regular repayments and assures the organisation that services are reliably paid for.

### **Kuju CDEP rates of pay**

CDEP wages at Kuju are based on the non-remote average per participant (APP) weekly rate received from ATSIC, which in Kuju's case is \$164.<sup>12</sup> The payment covers a two-day working week of 15 hours paid as a set 'weekly' wage to all workers irrespective of age, sex or marital status; that is, all participants earn approximately \$328 a fortnight. The exceptions to this are the leading hands of work gangs who receive an additional loading of about \$100 per week. A number of these people are qualified tradesmen who supervise work performance and safety within their respective gangs.

The key distinction made by the organisation is between married participants who are workers and their non-working spouses who are also participants in the scheme. In October 1990, the Board established a policy in regard to its working participants of 'no work - no pay'. As a result all participants classified as 'working participants' must work a two-day week

in order to receive their weekly wage. The spouses of workers receive a 'spouse allowance' equal to the weekly working wage of \$164, which spouses can elect to have paid separately or together. However, such participants are not required to work, but can if they want to (though few couples seem to take up this option). A married working participant is required to produce a copy of his or her spouse's pay slip to verify current income levels, before payment of the spouse allowance is approved. In this manner a married couple receives a combined fortnightly wage of approximately \$656, but may have only one actual worker.

Under ATSSIC guidelines, a ceiling is placed on pay levels obtained from CDEP wages money: a single participant cannot be paid more than twice the remote APP rate and married participants cannot be paid CDEP wages more than four times the remote rate. This also applies to income from other sources. Effectively for a married couple, this means they could earn a combined weekly wage of up to \$669, and for a single person up to \$334, if the co-ordinating CDEP organisation is able to make additional wages available (e.g. through wages savings from non-working participants), or if they are able to gain additional employment outside the CDEP scheme. The restriction on income earned outside of CDEP employment seems to constitute an unnecessary disincentive to CDEP organisations and individuals in regard to initiating profit-generating employment programs and enterprises.

Sole parents on the scheme obtain the same working wage as other participants under the condition that they work two full days each week. Sole parents receiving a DSS benefit must inform the DSS of income earned under the CDEP scheme so that an income test can be applied to their current benefits. Often CDEP participants who are sole parents continue to be eligible for a part-pension and associated concessions. Kuju estimates that these sole parents are in the vicinity of \$50 per fortnight better off on the scheme, but also cite the increasing number of sole parents who are joining because they want access to employment and training opportunities, and see participation as an effective transition to work even while still having dependant children.

### **Kuju CDEP employment policies and training**

Since its inception Kuju has been quick to frame and reformulate a series of policies concerning work conditions. Changes to work practices must be agreed upon by participants and the Board. The 'no work - no pay' rule also requires participants to present for work sober, to obtain medical certificates if sick, and to have the manager's approval to leave town for periods of time affecting their work participation. Failure to comply with these responsibilities may result in wages being withheld. If a participant leaves town for a period of over two weeks without notice, they can be taken off the scheme.

If participants miss one of the two nominated days, they cannot make up time and their pay is lowered accordingly. Similarly, if a married participant does not work, the couple receives only the spouse allowance for that week; so that effectively, 'no work' by a married working participant means half pay. Policies have been established by the Board to cover occupational health and safety; leave entitlements for sickness (10 working days), funerals (4 days), special leave for the illness of a family member (2 days) and maternity leave; regarding the use of vehicles and boats; the death of a participant; and the use of a credit system. All participants are entitled to 6 weeks holiday leave per year (but no leave loading). These policies were formulated to encourage stable work patterns and to ensure equitable work entitlements for all participants.

Participants have commented on the benefits of training, both on-the-job and additional to their work through the local TAFE. All participants are contracted to undertake occupational health and safety courses and encouraged to gain driving licences. Participants are offered access to vocational training and to basic literacy and numeracy skills if needed. However, the organisation is highly critical of the fact that participants cannot access Abstudy for training, in addition to their CDEP part-time employment. Currently, participants must undertake Abstudy-funded training during their work periods, or go off the scheme for longer training periods.

Kuju has consistently linked the development of its work programs to training, and has gained access to a range of funding through persistent and effective submissions. The organisation has established a successful working relationship with the Aboriginal education unit of the local TAFE which offers competency-based courses with graded progressions, often divided into short modules of 40 hours or so. The TAFE has developed a 'curriculum matrix' to suit the specific needs of Aboriginal organisations such as Kuju, whereby individual students and trainees can select units from established courses, to create packages suited to their current or future employment needs. An advantage of such flexibility is that courses can be completed over longer periods of time and are responsive to organisational objectives.

To date, training undertaken by participants includes understudy for specific office positions, first aid, child-care, education worker training, welding, accounting and book-keeping, preparatory education in literacy and numeracy, supervision workshops and word processing. The two key management personnel have participated in the Aboriginal Integrated Management System certificate, run via the Flinders University with Kuju (Abraham 1993). In the first year, training blocks were run over a six month period, with an Adelaide-based trainer travelling to Port Lincoln for follow-up sessions of two days per month during the first year, and one day



per month during the second year. In-depth training was given in management techniques relevant to the needs of a CDEP-type organisation, in decision-making and planning, administration skills, program review techniques, policy formulation, enterprise development and budgeting. Participants received a certificate at the end. The manager is currently also undertaking a diploma course in management and marketing, and the office administrator has attended a six month diploma course in office accounts and administration. The works depot supervisor and the training officer are undertaking a course in small business management and two clerks have received their office traineeship certificates at the local TAFE. Board members appear extremely positive about the benefits of their TAFE-based training module. They are taught skills in conflict resolution, planning, office administration, program monitoring, decision-making and meeting procedures. The training is closely linked to Kuju's employment and economic initiatives; for example, the development of a future enterprise strategy is being carried out via a Board training program where assessments are made of local economic opportunities, skills availability, and training and funding requirements. The organisation's administrative effectiveness is clearly related to the calibre of its highly trained management.

### **Benefits of the Kuju CDEP scheme**

The CDEP scheme at Port Lincoln is five years old and in that time Kuju has made significant improvements to the way the scheme operates and in the outcomes for individual participants. It has developed new programs, extended its membership, formulated work policies and developed management structures at a pace which appears to have maintained local involvement. Kuju now has a small number of stable work programs, some of which are generating additional income to provide further employment wages for some participants.

This research project raises the question of how success is to be determined in such a program. Bureaucratic assessments are usually based on information about the administrative and financial efficiency of the local CDEP organisation, the type of employment created, and the stability of participant numbers and work routines. A range of more nebulous perceptions about the 'dynamism' and innovativeness of the co-ordinating CDEP organisation, and its ability to expand into local mainstream labour markets, also inform ATSIC assessments of CDEP schemes. This bureaucratic view is itself multifaceted, reflecting different views at central, state and regional ATSIC office levels.

In 1991, the South Australian ATSIC office rated Kuju CDEP 'a very successful project' in terms of effectiveness, 'which satisfies the objectives of most participants'. It was lauded as 'a role model for CDEPs in general

and for urban CDEPs in particular, [having] benefited from a long-establishment lead-time, good training and a sound management structure at the board and administration level'. Similar views about the social and economic benefits of the scheme are held by individual participants. Such comments are made as self-assessments and assertions of the positive outcomes that they see in the wider Aboriginal community. Individual opinions are important local reflections of the scheme's perceived impacts and revealing statements about the daily experience of being Aboriginal in the town. The following consideration of the benefits and challenges arising from the Port Lincoln CDEP scheme focuses primarily on the opinions of Kuju staff and participants, the staff of other local Aboriginal organisations and of government departments.

#### *Local perception of benefits*

A range of benefits associated with CDEP employment are referred to by participants, ranging from the strictly economic to those of a more social nature. One participant noted that CDEP employment was not simply about wages and skills, but that self-esteem and confidence (for individuals, families and the community) had been considerably enhanced: 'When people ask, are you on UB?, a person can say, 'No, I'm working for CDEP'. Individuals feel they need no longer be accused of being 'dole bludgers'; they work for wages. This aspect of the scheme, though intangible, should not be underrated. Regular CDEP employment is said by some local people to have encouraged stability within families and, as a result, is even said to have improved attendance and retention rates amongst school children. This outcome is said to have been facilitated by the number of CDEP Aboriginal education workers employed in schools around town. Pride in Aboriginal identity is also seen to have been enhanced as a result of the success of particular work programs within the wider population: Kuju operates an efficient firewood service to the whole town, an effective yard maintenance and repair program for Aboriginal houses, and a successful grounds maintenance program at Mallee Park where sports facilities are used by the town and visiting sport teams, and is regarded with pride by local Aboriginal people.

These Aboriginal perceptions are reinforced by a number of government departmental staff. An employment officer from the local CES who has been involved with the scheme from its beginning is of the opinion that it has worked 'great wonders' within the Aboriginal community in Port Lincoln. He points to increased individual assertiveness, confidence, and enhanced job interviewing and employment skills. More generally, there are said to be fewer people with pronounced drinking problems and less of a public face to drinking activities. The availability of CDEP employment and Kuju's policy of withdrawing pay from participants who report to work drunk are said to have played an important part in this.

### *Employment benefits*

As noted previously, the Port Lincoln CDEP scheme has effectively created another employment sector in the local economy; one which provides job-relevant training and for some, has been a transition to full-time employment. ATSIIC files report that the scheme 'has paid a lot of attention to facilitating mainstream employment and has had a reasonable success rate here', with 14 people over a two-year period (1990-91) moving off CDEP to permanent employment. This employment is mostly within the Aboriginal community service sector, for local employment opportunities in the private and public sectors are few and strongly competitive. However, the scheme has also been successful in gaining an important government contract with the state Housing Commission and runs other programs which are becoming economically viable. The scheme has begun to establish an employment skills base within the Aboriginal community. The CES has found over the last five years that there is a difference in work skills (for example, interviewing skills, stability of work attendance, literacy, numeracy, communication skills, personal presentation) between CDEP participants and those remaining registered as unemployed with the CES.

In this local context one must question the validity of the characterisation of CDEP employment as 'make-work'; not 'real employment'. A frequently heard Aboriginal opinion is that 'before CDEP' there were very few jobs for Aboriginal people in Port Lincoln and that it was hard to get work. As noted previously, Aboriginal employment in the Peninsula region had been historically restricted to largely casual and seasonal work which has all but disappeared. In these circumstances, small employment gains and increased work skills are significant achievements in a town where the pre-CDEP unemployment rate amongst Aboriginal people was 47 per cent and post-CDEP was 27 per cent (as measured by intercensal statistics).

### *The Aboriginalisation of work*

Work priorities and routines have been subject to Aboriginal determination under the scheme: employment conditions, policies, and wage rates have been established in direct response to local circumstances. But not without difficulty. For many Aboriginal people in Australia, their interaction with the mainstream labour market is characterised by recycling through intermittent employment and training, and with multiple spells of unemployment that effectively constitute long-term unemployment (Smith 1991a). Cultural factors influence these patterns, as do historical work trends, ongoing low levels of education, lack of job skills and proficiency in English, and discrimination against Aboriginal people. Many of these issues have had to be considered by Kuju in its efforts to establish employment opportunities.

In Port Lincoln, the organisational framework for CDEP employment has emerged from Aboriginal processes of discussion and negotiation, not



simply in response to bureaucratic requirements. CDEP work is not only an economic endeavour, but is part of a social process which is pre-eminently Aboriginal. Simply put by one participant, people who work together on particular work gangs and programs *like* to work together because of their long-term friendships and family connections; so that important social ties reinforce the stability of particular work gangs. Increasingly, the CDEP programs form part of the Aboriginal community's economic and social fabric. From this perspective, the 'strategic importance' of the scheme referred to at the beginning of this paper, may have as much to do with cultural and social factors, as employment and income status.

#### *Income and credit benefits*

The opinion expressed by Kuju staff, confirmed by some participants, is that incomes are reasonable under the scheme, in the sense that married couples can obtain the 'spouse allowance' and sole parents can obtain part-pensions from DSS and access to FAS. It is not clear how many single people feel that their CDEP-income constitutes a reasonable wage for a two-day week. Some single and married participants are able to gain additional income within work programs generating profits. Some others are effectively working full-time as a result of gaining additional employment through the Aboriginal service organisations. While some participants may well want more work and higher wages, the organisation argues that part-time employment suits the personal and social needs of other participants who seek to balance the desire for higher income levels against those needs.

The social and welfare objectives of Kuju are highly valued by management and Board. Of benefit to many is Kuju's credit agreement system. Initiated as a means to secure the payment of costs incurred by the clients of its services, the arrangement is also available to CDEP participants to pay their rent and electricity bills. A large number of people have availed themselves of this service and have been able to establish a credit rating with town businesses as a result. ATSIC estimates that in 1992 some 140 people had established credit ratings as a result of the credit system and having reliable CDEP incomes. Some participants commented that this has improved their lifestyle and enabled them to purchase consumer durables in the knowledge that they can maintain regular repayments.

A number of Australian Aboriginal households are economically disadvantaged in comparison with their non-Aboriginal counterparts; being characterised by larger family size, overcrowding, low and erratic levels of income and higher levels of childhood dependancy (Smith 1991b, 1991c; Daly and Smith forthcoming). For some families, these economic burdens are aggravated by substantial debt difficulties incurred through hire purchase and 'book-up' arrangements (Commonwealth of Australia 1991:

402-3; Westcombe 1990). In such circumstances, Kuju's credit arrangements constitute an important service.

### *Gender equity*

While, in the opinion of the administration officer, Kuju was initially more oriented to engaging male participants, this has changed with more married, single and sole parent women coming onto the scheme. In mid 1993, one-third of participants were female. While these women tend to enter as non-working spouses, a growing proportion are working participants in their own right. Indeed, at one stage in 1993, the number of female workers (31) was slightly higher than those who were registered with the scheme as non-working spouses (28). The majority of working women are entering the AEW program, the women's group and as health workers. While the number of women on the scheme has steadily increased, women outnumber men as non-working spouses (28 female as opposed to 8 male dependant spouses). However, flexibility introduced by Kuju into the scheme enables a switching between spouses in the case of changing family circumstances, so that some women become workers as their husbands become non-working participants. The increasing number of women entering as working participants is reflected in their positive intercensal employment growth.

### **Emerging trends and future challenges**

When the CDEP scheme began in Port Lincoln in 1989 there were no ATSIC guidelines or policies for its operation in urban areas. Kuju has developed its own approach to many key issues. Its total participant numbers currently represent 55 per cent of the town's Aboriginal working-age population, so that its objectives will inevitably intersect with wider community interests. The organisation has had to consider the characteristics of the local Aboriginal community; how best to represent a population often dispersed across suburbs; how to negotiate the steps required for entry into the wider labour force; whether to service the needs of all elements of the Aboriginal population (for example, individual, family and organisational); how to negotiate with non-Aboriginal business and private interests in the town; how to manage participant mobility between different communities; and how to develop employment projects that are also income-generating. These are key issues undoubtedly common to many urban CDEP schemes, and trends are already emerging in Kuju's approach. A number of them are considered below.

### *Kuju CDEP in the Aboriginal domain*

Kuju must be viewed in its local Aboriginal context. Its activities and objectives are expressed via its role within a small, but influential group of Aboriginal service organisations in Port Lincoln. These organisations have developed in parallel and have a considerable impact on Aboriginal lives in

the town, representing the institutional expression of local Aboriginal politicking with government and other funding and service delivery bodies. In conjunction with other Aboriginal organisations, Kuju is involved in establishing an umbrella Aboriginal council for the community which would co-ordinate service and funding requirements. It is thus an important part of the decentralisation of Aboriginal decision-making that is giving local effect to the national rhetoric of self-determination.

As noted already, the CDEP scheme in Port Lincoln is more than a labour market program. Kuju offers financial, educational, cultural and personal assistance and advice to participants, regarding these as legitimate functions. Also, its local objectives are increasingly determined by the financial decisions of the ATSIC regional council of which the Port Lincoln community is a part. The council is based at the ATSIC regional office in Ceduna and has 11 representatives: four from Ceduna, four from Port Lincoln and three from Yalata (none from Koonibba); the chairperson is a councillor from Ceduna. Politicking for regional council funds is keenly felt by all communities and organisations, especially as more funding is allocated by the regional council. At the time of writing, the regional council continues to see the CDEP schemes as separate community programs under specific budget lines. It has not encouraged CDEP organisations to tender for the provision of services funded under other program areas (thereby providing further employment for CDEP participants), nor has it used the CDEP organisations as a means of co-ordinating the overall employment and training needs of the region as a whole.

The developing role of CDEP organisations within the Aboriginal domain has been highlighted by the recent strategy of a number of families in the region to become legally incorporated as separate associations and so gain access to services, funding and a land base. This development is particularly apparent in Ceduna where several families are currently incorporated and separately receive ATSIC funding for the establishment of what are called urban homelands.<sup>13</sup> More are in the process of incorporation and there is intense competition for funds. The trend is emerging in Port Lincoln. Currently, there are no ATSIC policy or funding guidelines dealing with the development of urban homelands.

The urban homelands movement presents a challenge to the region's CDEP organisations. For example, will the employment and training needs of these family associations be co-ordinated by the community CDEP body, or will they establish separate schemes, competing for limited funds from the regional council? Do the existing CDEP organisations have the resources necessary to co-ordinate employment programs for these small disparate groups? In Ceduna an increasing number of homeland groups have opted to establish associations and have family members work solely for them as CDEP work gangs, under the co-ordination of the Ceduna



CDEP organisation, Tjuthunaka Worka Tjuta. Kuju, on the other hand, is resisting the idea that it become a broker for supplying and managing participants for these incorporated family groups and is reluctant to spread its limited resources amongst an expanding number of separate family interests. Rather, it is hoping to co-ordinate the collective funding needs and priorities of such groups via the proposed umbrella community council; emphasising community, rather than family development objectives. The future role and direction of Kuju will be linked to such economic and political developments within the Aboriginal domain, and to its relationship with Aboriginal organisations, including the regional council. This organisational context appears to be the major forum within which local Aboriginal socioeconomic and land aspirations are being expressed and negotiated.

#### *Managing flexibility*

While the development of the Port Lincoln scheme has not been without difficulties, Kuju has negotiated the difficult establishment phase common to many CDEP communities and developed at a pace matched to the changing circumstances of local Aboriginal people. The frequent changes to CDEP guidelines and administrative requirements introduced by ATSIC, together with the dynamic nature of local organisational and community politics (both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal) have made flexibility crucial in the organisation's effectiveness.

Kuju takes a 'program realism' approach. It has attempted to maximise employment prospects by allowing participants to exit the scheme for short periods to take up casual and seasonal work available through the CES, and return to the scheme upon its completion. It uses the skills of the local CES to obtain additional employment and work experience for participants. But such flexibility has had to be carefully managed. For example, while overall participant numbers are fairly stable, there are significant flows of people through the scheme. Over the four quarterly ATSIC periods comprising 1993-94, 33 participants left the scheme and there were 89 new entrants, comprising a total of 122 changes of participant status over that period; though a proportion may involve the same individuals. While the flow can be seen as a natural result of population mobility (common to CDEP schemes), it creates an additional administrative workload.

There is currently disquiet amongst Kuju management concerning the potential impact on this flexibility of the introduction of industrial awards into the scheme.<sup>14</sup> The payment of different wage rates (related to comparable South Australian awards) created problems amongst participants in the early stages of the scheme and was one of the reasons why a full meeting of participants decided (by majority vote) to establish a flat rate for a set number of working days, applicable to all participants regardless of age and gender. The effective result is to guarantee a uniform minimum income to all participants. This arrangement differs only in the

payment of an additional weekly bonus to leading hands and 'top-up' wages to some participants. Kuju is adamant that it does not want to establish a work hierarchy in which certain programs, or types of work, are seen as more highly valued and paid than others; except where it directly reflects additional hours worked.

A major concern is that participants will find themselves working under different pay rates and so having to work varying hours to gain the same flat rate. Office staff are concerned at the additional workload that will be created with the range of awards (especially with participants changing across programs at the end of contract periods) and about the possibility that certain types of CDEP work will be classified as award-based, but others not. The Kuju Board and management feel strongly that any attempt to extend full award coverage to its participants will jeopardise its flexibility, undermine its employment programs and its Aboriginalisation of work, and seriously threaten the viability of the scheme. It remains to be seen whether Kuju will be able to negotiate its own preferred 'industrial style' within an enterprise bargaining framework.

*From the comfort zone to the battle zone?*

Considerable pressure on Kuju derives from the bureaucratic expectation that it will be able to achieve, and preferably within a 'time limited plan' (Commonwealth of Australia 1994b: 71), what ATSIC, DEET and Aboriginal affairs in general has found extremely difficult to achieve for Aboriginal people; namely, a sustained breakthrough to employment in the mainstream labour market.

Kuju Board and management are aware of the difficulties of getting participants past what they call the 'comfort zone' of the scheme. This is the stage where individuals are satisfied with a two-day working week and associated level of income and, accordingly, are reluctant to move off the scheme to full-time employment within the wider labour market. The organisation remains committed to such a shift, but recognises that there are significant structural barriers limiting Aboriginal access to mainstream jobs. Firstly, there are a limited range of employment opportunities in the town and region. Secondly, employment opportunities are highly dependent on basic literacy and numeracy skills, and previous work experience. Thirdly, success in gaining employment is also influenced by the local network of personal contacts and preferences operating amongst mainstream employers. Fourthly, for many CDEP participants, the most receptive (and often most desired) mainstream employer is the Aboriginal community service sector and this constitutes the most immediate exit from the CDEP comfort zone.

For all these reasons then, the nature of the articulation between the CDEP scheme and the local mainstream labour market is complex. Realistically, participant exit from the scheme will be slow and undoubtedly via the

Aboriginal community services sector, unless jobs within the substantial employment niches in the town (namely, the private and public sectors) can be targeted as part of the initiatives under the AEDP, or through labour market programs for the long-term unemployed initiated under the Commonwealth Government's 1994 White Paper. Developing links with local government will be increasingly important to the expansion of the scheme. However, to date, Kuju has not been able to gain a foothold in local government contracts which are highly competitive and tend to be monopolised by non-Aboriginal interests. These linkages will become even more desirable given the recent decision made by the Eyre Regional Development Board to consider the feasibility of a CDEP-type scheme for non-Aboriginal people in the town. With the backing of local business interests, such a scheme would almost certainly secure access to local government contracts and as such, would immediately compete with the Aboriginal CDEP scheme which is trying to expand into the same employment areas.

However, the barriers to shifting CDEP participants into the non-Aboriginal labour market are not just structural. Nor are they solely associated with a lack of relevant skills or attitude to work. The social environment of the work gangs is fundamental to the attractions of the 'comfort zone', and some participants have been reluctant to move into non-Aboriginal employment as a result. Whilst this culturally-based proclivity might be seen as a barrier to participants leaving the scheme for full time employment, it is also a major strength of the scheme.

*Economic self-sufficiency: dream or reality?*

As CDEP objectives become further linked to AEDP goals, there is growing pressure on organisations to develop income-generating enterprises to move the schemes and by association, local Aboriginal economies, to greater economic self-sufficiency (Commonwealth of Australia 1994b: 70). There are well-documented difficulties involved in enterprise development in Aboriginal communities. ATSI's evaluation of its own enterprise assistance programs in 1991 concluded that the success rate of Aboriginal small businesses was low, and that many were not commercially viable (Dillon 1992: 99). While market research, business training, secure capital funding and joint venture arrangements can encourage better financial outcomes, there is no evidence to support the assumption that Aboriginal communities can become economically 'self-sufficient' and 'sustainable', any more than non-Aboriginal communities (which are equally dependent on the public purse).

But there is a world of difference between an unrealistic expectation of 'self-sufficiency', and the legitimate desire within Aboriginal communities for greater self-determination over their own economic lives. In this sense, 'local control', rather than 'self-sufficiency', within the local and regional economy may be the more realistic objective. The Kuju management and



Board recognise the advantages of establishing income-generating projects, but are also aware of the pitfalls. The organisation is currently initiating its next stage of development: an expansion into larger business ventures. There is a strong feeling that this stage should continue to emphasise the 'community' aspects of the scheme and that initially, economic ventures should not be set up for the benefit of specific families. Partly, this is a recognition of the difficulties within the Aboriginal domain in being seen to promote the economic interests of one or two local families over others. It is also to do with the emphasis within Port Lincoln Aboriginal organisations on 'community' and 'community development', and implies a divergence between organisational and family aspirations.

Kuju hopes to establish a separate business arm co-ordinated by management and Board, comprised of senior members of local Aboriginal organisations and assisted by an advisory committee of business, education and government representatives. But it is mindful not to flood the organisation with additional administrative and managerial workload, and is keen to link expansion with training, funding and staff components. With this in mind, the organisation is writing a three-year operational plan. However, there are frustrations that there is no equivalent three-year block funding cycle.

#### *Sunset clauses and the CDEP life-cycle*

Not only are there challenges in creating realistic exit options for CDEP participants, the notion that an urban scheme such as in Port Lincoln will be able to establish a 'sunset clause' as it develops towards economic self-sufficiency is problematic. Firstly, there is the issue of the remaining pool of unemployed. Mid-1994 CES data indicate there are currently 131 Aboriginal people registered for work; not all of whom are eligible for unemployment benefits.<sup>15</sup> According to the CES, a number of these represent the most difficult employment cases: over half are long-term unemployed; some have substance abuse problems. For many, continuing case management will be required by Kuju CDEP and the CES to develop basic employment skills.

Secondly, the extremely young age structure of the Aboriginal population indicates large increases in its future working-age population. On the basis of Altman and Gaminiratne's (1993) projections of the national Aboriginal population of working age, to the year 2001, it is likely that from a 1991 base of 238 people, the Aboriginal working-age population of Port Lincoln will increase by one-third by the turn of the century. Inevitably, large numbers of young people will continue to seek participation in the scheme and this will result in its further expansion over the next decade. Kuju's future objectives may become more determined by the need to focus on employment and training options for younger participants. Recognising the need to facilitate the exit of young participants into full-time employment, Kuju is already assisting in piloting some government labour market

programs (for example, the Inwork traineeship program and the Australian Vocational Certificate Training System).

If some CDEP wages are being used as a job subsidy to mainstream employers (whether they be local Aboriginal community organisations or private businesses) to encourage the employment of CDEP participants, then the organisation may need to consider a time frame, beyond which those employers would be expected to retain CDEP employees independent of the wage subsidy. But it must be remembered that the pathways into the wider labour market are tenuous in Port Lincoln. Subsidised employment within the local mainstream labour market offers invaluable full-time work experience for many participants who have had little or no previous employment. Establishing a sunset clause on such subsidies may simply close those employment avenues. Clearly, urban CDEP schemes such as Kuju develop through stages, and these may be common to a more general CDEP life cycle. At the moment, however, there is little sign that the Port Lincoln scheme would benefit from a sunset clause on its operation. On the contrary, there is every indication that with the youthful Aboriginal age structure and Kuju's apparent success in training and work creation, demand for its services will continue to expand.

## Conclusion

The current hallmarks of Kuju's areas of success are the capacity of its management and administrative staff; the effectiveness of its Board; its preparedness to assess its employment policies and practice; and its ability to harness vocational and management training to its individual and organisational objectives. Because of their expertise, the Kuju manager and administrative officer have been asked by communities in South Australia to conduct workshops on the structures and procedures most effective in establishing a new scheme. This consultancy work offers an important service for new CDEP communities and appears to fill a vacuum within ATSIC's operation of the scheme. Urban schemes in other States may benefit from a similar orientation service. At the same time, the organisation may find itself vulnerable to changes in current management who are highly trained and experienced.

It is at the local level that the importance of the CDEP scheme is becoming apparent, for it is at this level that it is being incorporated into Aboriginal community life, thereupon becoming more than the sum of its bureaucratic parts and imbued with a life of its own. The impression given by participants is of a scheme which, with all its difficulties and administrative requirements, is making a positive contribution to individual and family wellbeing, and to community life.

The organisation's employment outcomes are a significant achievement at a time when the local economy has seen increasing levels of unemployment

amongst the non-Aboriginal population, and when some CDEP schemes are experiencing difficulty in maintaining viable employment programs (Deloitte Touche and Tohmatsu 1993: 146, 149-50). The notion that CDEP work is not 'real employment' has to be reconsidered in the Port Lincoln context, and perhaps in other communities.

A future challenge for the organisation will be the impact of external perceptions of its success by ATSIC and other government agencies. Where difficulties for the organisation could arise is if it is pushed prematurely into enterprise expansion. At the moment, Kuju has not been able to extract employment concessions or contracts from the private sector or local government, though its potential is evident and the subject of deliberation. When moves into the local economy are initiated, they may well consist of ventures which aim to maintain community control and expand the Aboriginal power base. That is, while ATSIC and government focus on the performance outcomes of the scheme, at the local level, entering into the mainstream labour market will be as much about negotiating power relations and overcoming discrimination, as about generating jobs.

Urban CDEP schemes may well differ significantly from those in rural and remote communities. Whether 'sustainable' or 'self-sufficient' economies are feasible in urban communities remains a moot point. The assumption that they are more closely attached, or have more ready access, to the mainstream labour market is also problematic and fails to account for continuing discrimination and low levels of education. In which case, the increasing pressure on urban schemes to move towards sustainable employment in mainstream labour markets could not only be deleterious to those schemes, but unrealistic. Continuing flexibility in ATSIC program guidelines is required if urban organisations such as Kuju are to decide the pace of their future expansion; for crucial questions have to be answered at almost every stage about the priority of certain objectives over others. Furthermore, ATSIC policy in this program area will need to be refined to acknowledge the different socioeconomic circumstances and initiatives being generated within urban Aboriginal populations.

#### Notes

1. These figures are based on fourth-quarter ATSIC participant schedules for 1993-94, provided by CDEP communities. This is a minimum total, as other communities are in the early phases of establishing the scheme.
2. A further \$40 million over four years will go to the Department of Employment Education and Training to provide 'targeted places' for indigenous people in training and employment programs, to which CDEP participants will have access (Commonwealth of Australia 1994a: 137).
3. In 1993-94, ATSIC organised its CDEP budget on funding estimates for communities that included a wages component and an additional component to



cover recurrent and capital costs. The wages component in the second half of 1994 was based on average per participant rates (APP) for communities that were classified as either 'remote' or 'non-remote'; the former rate being \$167.28 and the latter being \$150.66. The capital and recurrent component of the CDEP grant to each community was based on an allocation of approximately \$2,650 notionally required for each participant; including \$1,500 recurrent allocation (based on an estimated 20 per cent of annual wages entitlement adjusted progressively over the CDEP organisation's funding year) and \$1,150 annual capital allocation per participant. During 1994-95, the full appropriation that ATSIC receives from the Department of Finance will be passed on (by the end of the financial year) to respective regional council offices; being recurrent funds based on 20 per cent of wages and annual capital funds of \$1,224.12 per participant. The APP will increase to \$152.01 for non-remote and \$168.79 for remote CDEP communities. The CDEP scheme is now referred to by ATSIC as a 'regional council program', with ongoing CDEP funding being channelled through the appropriate regional council office. Many councils are choosing to retain the existing 'per participant' bases for allocating CDEP capital funds, but it is possible for a council to redirect capital funding away from one participating community to another.

4. Davies (1991: 12) notes that by mid 1991 some 200 Eyre Peninsula farms were for sale because of the rural crises. A recent report by Smailes (1993) reported that in the eastern Eyre Peninsula area alone, some 139 clients (farmers) of the Rural Counselling Service accounted for a total debt of \$48 million. The increasing demand for rural counselling provided by the South Australia Government reflects the continuing financial difficulties experienced by farming and pastoral enterprises in the region (Primary Industries South Australia 1994: 29-30).
5. Census data is a less than ideal indication of Aboriginal population levels. It is reliant on self-identification and may therefore under- or over-enumerate, depending on the willingness of people to identify themselves as indigenous and to answer all the census questions. There are also problematic issues regarding the cultural appropriateness of certain census questions and concepts (Smith 1992). Therefore, census data should be taken as a sample, indicative of socioeconomic trends and at best, an estimate of total population numbers.
6. In late 1993, changes to ATSIC regional council boundaries resulted in the redrawing of the Wangka Pulka Regional Council area and it being renamed the Wangka Wilurrura Regional Council. A significant change was to include Yalata and Maralinga lands within the new boundary. Port Lincoln was located within the former and is now located in the latter region. As a result of the boundary change, the regional planning document prepared by the former council only covers part of the new council area and will undoubtedly have to be updated.
7. This ATSIC region as a whole had the lowest proportion of elderly people of all such regions in 1991 (ATSIC 1994: 5).
8. These CDEP figures are based on the most recent 1994-95 first-quarter participant schedules.
9. Unfortunately, it is not possible to be precise about the impact of CDEP scheme participation on employment change. The CDEP data are drawn from an ATSIC administrative database which is not strictly comparable with census data. It is also not known to what degree CDEP participants identified themselves as such and were classified as employed in the 1991 Census (see Altman and Daly 1992 for a discussion of these issues for the 1986 Census). If anything, the estimate of the CDEP scheme's contribution to intercensal employment growth is likely to be a minimum figure judging by early returns from ATSIC's newly instituted CDEP census (Taylor 1993b: 35-6).

10. Information requested by ATSIC for participant commencement on the scheme includes the name of the community, sponsoring organisation, participant's name (Aboriginal and English), date of birth, gender, prior CDEP history, proof of identity (such as benefit cards, birth certificate, tax notice, bank books) or equivalent referee reports if such documentation is unavailable.
11. This information includes name, age, sex, marital status, dependant details, driving licence, proof of Aboriginality, work preference, medical conditions and recommended treatment, and a request for medical certificates to be provided in the case of a medical condition, history of any workers compensation claims, tax file number and banking details, a declaration for credit payments to be deducted from wages, educational and employment experience, and any personal references.
12. When the APP was introduced by ATSIC in 1991 it was based on the number of all children in a participating community. As a result of Port Lincoln's youthful demographic profile, it was assessed at the rate of \$164, while Ceduna was then assessed at the APP rate of \$136. This basis for estimating the rate changed with the introduction on a 'remote' and 'non-remote' APP rate on 1 July 1993. When the APP rate was first introduced CDEP schemes that were receiving more than the new rates were not disadvantaged, but were held constant, at the higher remote rate, so that Ceduna now operates with a 'non-remote' rate of \$150, while Port Lincoln's rate of \$164 is effectively the same as the 'remote' APP rate of \$167 effective at December 1994.
13. There are significant differences between these urban homelands and the remote homelands established by the outstation movement in the north of the State and across the north of Australia. In the latter movement, small Aboriginal kin groups have left centralised settlements to return to lands with which they have traditional affiliations. The land rights movement in the Northern Territory and in the Pitjantjatjara lands has greatly facilitated this decentralisation movement. The urban homelands movement in the area of Ceduna and Port Lincoln is similarly being generated by small urban family groups, but more often than not, the land has been bought freehold as private property (see Davies 1991; Davies and Harrison 1993). In some cases the family groups do not have traditional affiliations with the purchased land, though they may have historical ties with the region and particular communities within it. Other incorporated family groups establishing urban homelands have come from interstate. These urban homeland groups are heavily reliant upon the availability of freehold land and of funding from ATSIC for its purchases. In 1993-94, major acquisitions of farming properties occurred in the Ceduna area for incorporated urban homeland groups, including a 4,000 ha pastoral property about 100 kms west of Ceduna for Scotdesco Inc. (purchase price of \$340,000); a 2,687 ha farm between Ceduna and Smokey Bay was purchased for Tia Tuckia Inc. (\$208,000); and a 420 ha farming property near Smokey Bay was purchased for the Koongawa Dundey Association Inc. (\$108,000) - all from ATSIC regional council funds.
14. See Altman and Hawke (1993) and Deloitte Ross Tohmatsu (1992) for an account of unionisation and industrial award issues with respect to the CDEP scheme.
15. This CES figure is in excess of Aboriginal unemployment in Port Lincoln recorded by the 1991 Census, but it must be remembered that this disparity is generally the case. The census and CES are different kinds of databases (the latter has no indigenous identifier) and use different definitions of employment and unemployment, with the latter being a more accurate reflection of joblessness. Registration with the CES is a precondition for receiving unemployment benefits from DSS which assesses individuals via income and work tests. The result is that some fail to receive welfare support because their spouse is employed or in receipt of a benefit. CES unemployment figures include people who may be classified as

'not in the labour force' by the census. The 1991 Census recorded 39 unemployed, 95 people of working age as not in the labour force, and listed 16 Aboriginal people as not stating their labour force status; totalling 150 people who are effectively jobless.

## Appendix A: Kuju CDEP work programs, May 1994

### *The carpentry program*

This program is based at the Kuju works depot and performs small carpentry jobs, cabinet-making, home repairs and renovations and the building of pergolas and kit form erections (such as sheds and garages). Standard labour rates of \$20 per hour apply and materials are costed at trade prices. Customers who are CDEP participants use the credit agreement with a \$200 credit limit for this service. The program has a qualified carpenter as lead hand and four other participants. The lead hand works two days on CDEP wages, with three days 'top-up' to enable him to co-ordinate the activities of individual participants whose work days are staggered to provide him with offsidiers for a five-day week. When this gang works for PLAO on renovations at the Poonindie Aboriginal mission site, PLAO covers the top-up.

Kuju has recently succeeded in securing a contract with the South Australian Housing Trust (SAHT) for this program to repair and renovate Aboriginal-rented SAHT houses, of which there are approximately 86 in town. There is also housing rented by Aboriginal families through the General Housing Unit of the Trust, totalling some 50 houses, but to date, Kuju's contract applies only to the Aboriginal-funded houses. This is a significant breakthrough and Kuju's projected income for 1994-95 under the contract is \$46,000. Importantly, it means reliable, income-generating employment and gang workers have the opportunity to do top-up work. It is also said to be a development welcomed by many Aboriginal tenants who feel that Kuju carries out repairs more quickly. Realising the value of this contract, Kuju is integrating its painting and carpentry programs, and planning to expand its training program (to cover plumbing, welding, fencing, glazing, tiling and landscaping) to extend the SAHT contract.

### *The painting program*

This program began in 1993 with small jobs and expanded with the SAHT contract. A service fee of \$20 per hour applies and a credit agreement also applies. The gang consists of a qualified painter as lead hand and one worker. Kuju is trying to become competitive within the wider community and to train two apprentices to become qualified tradespersons.

### *Landscaping program*

This program provides gardening, landscaping, lawn mowing and rubbish removal services, and includes the maintenance of Mallee Park Oval owned and operated by PLAO. A community service of free lawn mowing and yard cleaning for Aboriginal pensioners is also offered. Service rates are \$16 per hour for lawn-mowing and \$15 for rubbish removal and yard cleaning. The program generated close to \$6,000 in additional income in 1992-93, enabling a new storage shed to be built. The yard program operates with a lead hand and eleven workers. To date, most income has been generated through the lawn mowing and yard cleaning services to CDEP participants and other Aboriginal families in the town. Kuju acknowledges that a major problem in the past has been in maintaining set working days and the non-attendance of some workers. In 1994, the Kuju manager and Board conducted an assessment of this and all other work programs, to pinpoint strengths and weakness. As a result, it has initiated landscape training through the TAFE, and is trying to expand services to the nearby marina development. Kuju's hopes to link this program to the SAHT contracts.



### *The automotive services program*

This program provides mechanical repairs and servicing for Kuju vehicles, small plant and machinery (such as lawn mowers and chainsaws). There is also an emergency service during working hours. The program has a full-time qualified mechanic as lead hand and four workers, including one working as a car detailer. The fee for service is \$20 per hour, plus parts at trade prices. A credit agreement is available for clients, with a limit of \$200. The program is generating income (\$6,500 in 1993-94), enabling top-up wages for some workers. Customers are primarily CDEP participants and Kuju is attempting to upgrade its equipment in order to service recent model cars, and extend service to the wider community.

### *The woodyard program*

A successful firewood service is provided to the entire Port Lincoln community, selling wood at \$60 per tonne. The program has had a total capital outlay on equipment and vehicles of \$24,000 up to 1993 and Kuju has negotiated a long-term contract with PLAO to collect and sell timber from the Wanilla Forest at no cost, in return for CDEP workers assisting PLAO to maintain a fire-safety regime in the Forest by clearing dead timber and undergrowth. The program has a lead hand and six workers, and operates from the main depot in the town. With a competitive service, a long-term contract with PLAO and high-grade wood, the program is now consistently generating income to provide top-up to workers according to a roster system. One obstacle for the program lies in the small number of participants with driving licences (Kuju estimates only 15 of its total participants have licences) so that the program is dependent on a small number of workers who can travel to the Forest.

### *The women's group*

This work program currently consists of seven women and a non-Aboriginal arts trainer producing children's and adults' clothing, as well high quality silk-screen materials. One woman receiving Kuju's dependent spouse allowance has chosen to work in the program. The program has won small local contracts to supply local schools with wind-cheaters, local sports teams with uniforms, and the hospital with small articles for nursing uniforms. Kuju is currently trying to gain ATSIC regional council funding to develop the silk-screen work.

### *Aboriginal education workers*

Kuju has 18 of its participants in this program placed in schools and kindergartens throughout the town. The program supervisor and works supervisor are both males, with 13 female and three male workers. The largest number of sole parents are working participants in this program; at one stage six of the thirteen females were sole parents. One participant has obtained teaching qualifications under TAFE training and now has full-time employment teaching in Ceduna. Another has left the scheme after obtaining a full-time job as an Aboriginal education worker at a local high school. The program is an example of the flexibility Kuju tries to maintain. In one case, a husband 'replaced' his wife as the working participant when she became pregnant; in another, a husband on the scheme gained full-time work with Correctional Services in town and his wife replaced him as an AEW.

### *Office workers*

Kuju has 18 participants placed as workers in various Aboriginal organisations around Port Lincoln. Seven are working for the Aboriginal Health Service, some for two days and others working a full week by obtaining three days of employment from AHS. Recently, some participants have left the CDEP scheme, having successfully obtained full-time employment with AHS. Their CDEP 'apprenticeship' with AHS enabled them to gain the necessary skills and experience in the health area to competitively apply for permanent positions. Two participants work in the Kuju office and another two as receptionists and clerks at Kuju's work depot. Kuju has also placed five office workers and cleaners with PLAO and one participant has been placed with the Offenders Aid Rehabilitation Service.

### *Smaller programs*

Kuju has a number of participants placed in smaller work areas, including two workers on an artefact production program, a courier for AHS, two drivers at the depot and main office, an office cleaner for the main office, a bus driver for the kindergarten, and three workers for the Gidja Club run by PLAO as a child-care and youth centre. Kuju has also supported the move of one of its participants into employment in the private sector in a locally-owned transport company, by continuing to pay his CDEP weekly wage for two days, with the employer paying the remaining three days wage.

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