

1983

## **Working with Aborigines in remote areas**

John de Hoog

John Sherwood

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**WORKING  
WITH  
ABORIGINES  
IN REMOTE AREAS**

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John de Hoog

John Sherwood



MOUNT LAWLEY COLLEGE  
A College of Advanced Education  
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## ABOUT THE HANDBOOK

This Handbook has been written to answer an urgent need expressed by people whose jobs involve working with Aboriginal people in remote areas. This includes a wide range of positions in health, welfare, police and law, employment, construction, community advice, missionary endeavour, linguistics and research. Almost all people in these positions have a common need: to gain some background information about Aboriginal people, life in remote communities, and ways of developing good communication with Aboriginal people.

This Handbook aims to meet that need. It shows some of the unexpected results of living with people of another culture, and how easy it is to assume that our way of doing things is the normal and best way. It also discusses some of the main elements of traditional Aboriginal culture, and changes brought about through contact with white people, leading to different Aboriginal lifestyles and problems. Finally, it discusses the worker's adjustment to living in a remote community, his or her job, and common problems in communicating with Aboriginal people.

The needs, problems and lifestyles of Aborigines in remote areas are somewhat different to those of Aboriginal people in the urban and main agricultural area of this State. Because of this we have limited ourselves mainly to remote areas, where tradition still plays a part in Aboriginal life. Roughly speaking, we can define remote area as being outside the south west agricultural area. However, some of the material could also be of use as background to workers in the south west. People in contact with Aborigines who come from remote areas but are currently staying in Perth, will also find that there is something to be gained from reading this Handbook.

### **Using the Handbook**

We have assumed that the prospective reader of this Handbook will have little background knowledge about Aboriginal culture, and no experience in working, living or communicating with Aboriginal people. For this reason we have started at the beginning and built up understanding and information, avoiding unnecessary technical

language. Ideally it should be read as a whole first, even if it appears that some sections will not apply to your situation. After a complete reading, you can then come back and read particular sections when the need arises. In this way you will minimise distortions which could occur through reading individual sections out of the context of the whole Handbook.

Throughout the Handbook suggestions and hints are given for workers faced with particular types of problems. Common sense needs to be applied to these; such 'guidelines' are intended as starting points for thinking, not as ready-made solutions. Every situation is different and suggestions made here may be quite inappropriate in some situations.

This Handbook can in no way replace orientation courses, conducted by employers, for workers appointed to remote areas. Such courses can use audio-visual aids, visual materials, Aboriginal speakers in person, and discussion with experienced workers. Nor can it provide a substitute for the understanding that experience brings. However, we do hope that it will contribute to making your appointment a rewarding experience, both for yourself and the Aboriginal people with whom you will be working.

### **How To Obtain A Copy Of This Handbook**

If you have received an appointment to work with Aborigines in remote areas of Western Australia, you may obtain a free copy of this Handbook by contacting your employer, who has access to copies from the Intercultural Studies Centre at Mount Lawley College of Advanced Education.

If this does not apply to you, the Handbook is available at \$3.50 per copy plus postage from The Bookshop, Mount Lawley College of Advanced Education, 2 Bradford Street, Mount Lawley, W.A. 6050.

This edition of the Handbook is only considered appropriate for use until December 1984. Suggested revisions or appropriate samples should be sent in writing to The Head of Intercultural Studies, Mount Lawley Campus of the W.A. College of Advanced Education, 2 Bradford Street, Mount Lawley, W.A. 6050.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

The authors wish to express sincere appreciation to many people who have made valuable contributions to this Handbook.

The Department of Aboriginal Affairs requested that a booklet be produced to meet the need for preparation of workers appointed to remote Aboriginal communities, and provided funds for the Handbook to be written, trialed, edited, printed and distributed. Special thanks go to Frank Gare, Terry Long and Glen Cornish for their support throughout the project.

Mount Lawley College of Advanced Education readily offered its services and resources. In addition to the Aboriginal Teacher Education Program, the College provided administrative, accounting, staffing and reprographic assistance.

The project was given very efficient impetus in early stages by Mr Don Robertson, the first research assistant, who collected material and wrote much of the preliminary version of the Handbook. Field workers, Aboriginal people and others living in remote communities made valuable comments which have shaped the development of the final copy, and were generous in the hospitality and time given to the two research assistants.

A full draft of the Handbook was sent to about 70 people for trialing, to obtain feedback for improvement. Aboriginal people, field officers and workers in head office in all major departments and agencies, anthropologists, linguists and other people with special experience were included in the sample of trialers. The quantity and constructiveness of the trialers' comments were overwhelming; they enabled the draft to be largely re-written and many useful examples to be included. Draft sections written by Neville Green and Eric Vaszolyi, staff members of ATEP, and Kim Akerman of Community Health Services, provided specialist material. Cartoons and the cover design were drawn by Rick Martin.

Denise Maxwell and Johann Willis patiently typed the many drafts and re-drafts, and assisted in the organisation of the project. Typesetting was carried out by Avon Lovell and staff of Creative Research.

A vital stage of the project was the final editing and proof-reading, over several weeks, by an editing panel consisting of:

Kim Akerman	Anthropologist, Community Health Services
John de Hoog	Research Assistant, Aboriginal Teacher Education Program, Mount Lawley College of Advanced Education.
Astrid Norgard	Anthropologist, Department of Aboriginal Affairs
May O'Brien	Education Department of W.A. and member of National Aboriginal Education Committee
John Sherwood	Head, Aboriginal Teacher Education Program, Mount Lawley College of Advanced Education

The many hours of concentrated work and the suggestions made by the editing panel have made the Handbook far more readable and useful.

However, final responsibility for the contents of the Handbook remains with the authors.

## CHAPTER ONE

### WAYS OF SEEING

#### Definition of an Aboriginal Person

According to the official definition, 'an Aboriginal is a person of Aboriginal descent who identifies as an Aboriginal and is accepted as such by the community in which he or she lives.'<sup>1</sup> This definition shows clearly that an Aboriginal person is not defined by race alone. He or she is part of a community of people, with their own history and lifestyles.

Before exploring the Aboriginal community in detail, however, a few concepts need to be discussed. These are virtually tools for understanding some of the problems we strike when working with people whose culture is different to our own.

#### Culture:

Culture is a word with two quite distinct uses. Normally it refers to the arts: music, painting, drama, ballet and so on. It can also be used in a much wider sense to refer to the total way of life of people in a society. When used like this it may be loosely defined as the way of life of a people, the sum of their learned behaviour patterns, attitudes, beliefs and material things. A culture provides a framework for thoughts and actions that allows people to get on with life, rather than having to make constant decisions about every action. From early childhood we are trained to fit into our culture, and members of another culture are trained to fit into theirs. What is normal in one culture may seem strange in another: behaviour which is very unacceptable in one culture may be acceptable in another.

We do not normally think about culture in the abstract, and because of this, many habits we think of as 'normal' are in fact cultural. Once we do begin to ask how a culture works, and start to

1. Department of Aboriginal Affairs, September, 1978.



observe its patterns around us, and within us, then we begin to see the meaning of events and actions that previously made no sense.

For instance, the interpretation of lateness is cultural. If we were to arrive an hour late for an appointment in an Arab country, we might be thought to be 'on time': an hour is an acceptable leeway, after which a person is 'late'. Most Australians would think that arriving five or ten minutes after the appointed hour would be reasonable, whereas being an hour 'late' would be plain rude.

There are numerous other examples of the way culture patterns influence the way we see, hear, think and act. In fact the way we regard the customs of another culture, often tells us more about our cultural prejudices than the culture we are seeing.

Take for example the Aboriginal custom of rubbing oil into the skin, and the way Aborigines decorate themselves with ochre during ceremonies. Early Europeans, who did not understand the significance of these customs, thought they proved that Aborigines were primitive. But when understood as part of a culture, such customs make perfect sense. Aborigines used the oil to keep wind and water from direct contact with their skin. It kept them warm. The ochre decorations had religious functions, just as the robe and staff of a priest have in our society. Thus understanding another culture also requires understanding our own prejudices and stereotypes.

As a word of warning, workers should beware of one trap in thinking about people, and the way their actions are influenced by culture. We can easily make the mistake of thinking people of another culture are so different they're impossible to understand at all. For example the superintendent of a training institution complained that one of his charges, an Aboriginal adolescent from an isolated desert community, slipped out of the window at night and went home. He couldn't understand why this happened. The boy was well fed and cared for, was learning a job and so on. Because this worker was looking for an obscure cultural reason, it did not occur to him that the boy was simply homesick.

### **Culture Shock**

When people enter into a different culture they often feel disoriented; uncertain of how they should behave, or what to make of the behaviour and lifestyle of the other group. Moreover their normal routines are upset, and there are new surroundings and a new

climate to adjust to. The feelings of insecurity that go with these changes are known as 'culture shock'.

Most new workers will be affected by culture shock to a greater or lesser extent, depending on their personality and experience. Aborigines also suffered from profound culture shock when their land was first invaded by Europeans. In fact the shock continues today for Aboriginal children when they enter primary school, and the following account provides a good example of this:

'The five year old boy admitted to Grade One, at Warburton Government School finds himself cast into a totally foreign environment. Nothing in his years of socialization has prepared him for school. For the first time he finds himself trapped under the roof of a building without the comforting and reassuring contact with his family. He is now neatly dressed in a new grey shirt and smart grey pants with the shop creases intact, while only the previous day he was free to run without pants if he wanted to. He would be expected to sit at a school desk, having never before sat on a chair, be addressed in English, while at home his family speaks only Ngaanyatjarra. Within the classroom he may find people he had been taught to avoid, because of kinship customs. He may be seated alongside a girl of an incompatible grouping, a situation that his family may find disquieting, but they would lack the awareness of how to overcome the problem.'

The many ways in which culture shock can affect the life and work of a person taking up a job in a remote community will be discussed at length in Chapters Five and Six.

### **Prejudice and Stereotypes**

Prejudice is pre-judgement. It means an irrational bias for or against a group or issue. Usually it is taken in its negative sense, taking the form of fear or antagonism towards another group or race. Quite often prejudice is based on ignorance, but it can be complicated by guilty conscience, frustration or insecurity. The plantation owner who exploits his 'native' labourers, for example, may find his guilty conscience soothed by claiming 'natives' are not really responsible enough to handle money. Or someone conscious of his personal failings is likely to think (and say): at least I'm not a negro,

Jew, Aboriginal, etc. As an outback policeman put it:

'When I'm feeling good I call them Wongi, when I've had a bit of a rough day I call them blacks, when I've had a really rough day I call them boongs.'

Most groups of people have common prejudices, and members of the group are expected to conform to them. In fact people even try to anticipate the kind of prejudices others will have. An anthropologist working in the Kimberleys tells this story:

'While I was drinking in the bar of the — Hotel, tourists used to come in and say, 'these Aborigines, pretty drunken lot I suppose!' They were trying to get in with the locals, trying to live up to what they thought would be local attitudes. When I replied that plenty of my friends were Aborigines they would quickly change their tune.'

A stereotype is a belief about a whole group based on the characteristics of only a few members. Stereotypes are dangerous because an individual is made to fit the stereotype when this is not the case at all. This may wrongly prevent, or assist, a person in getting a job or a house, or get him into trouble which he did not deserve.

In order for an idea to be stereotype it does not have to be altogether false; but it is always less than the whole truth. Two examples of stereotyped thinking by a mythical Aboriginal and a mythical white person are given below to show how stereotypes can block effective communication:

'The trouble with all white people is that they are arrogant. To prove this you only have to see how selfish they are about their possessions. They never share, not even with their relatives. And because of that they spend all their time worrying about the future. Their religion makes them unhappy too. One lot say everybody has got to be Anglican. Another say you got to be a Catholic to be saved. Well, as for keeping promises, we all know about that. I suppose they just haven't got the intelligence to enjoy life as it comes.'

'The trouble with Aborigines, blackfellers I call them, is that they're very primitive, from the stone age. They just haven't developed our intelligence and so they're more or less like children. If you don't believe me just look at the way they just sit around not even caring about the future — they just haven't learnt to care about things. They don't even have a religion!

They've got no sense of decency either. Before we civilised them a bit they used to wander around naked. I'd say they must be absolutely obsessed by sex. They're a violent people too, always spearing each other. And as for reliability, they'll just up and go walkabout for no special reason at all. Or you hire them for a job and they leave without any special reason. No wonder they nearly died out. No self respect! Well I suppose you can't really blame them, they just haven't developed the intelligence to cope with civilization.'

Stereotyped thinking is a way of avoiding communication. It is prejudice in action. In working with Aborigines, tolerance and understanding need to be consciously cultivated.

## CHAPTER TWO:

# THE TRADITIONAL ELEMENT IN ABORIGINAL LIFE

### Introduction

This chapter is a very brief outline of some aspects of traditional Aboriginal culture. While no Aborigines live a wholly traditional lifestyle today, many elements of their previous way of life remain important to most Aboriginal people in remote areas. Some customs and beliefs which may directly affect workers are discussed under separate headings throughout the chapter.

### Living With the Land

The fact that Aborigines were semi-nomadic is central in understanding their culture. Because they were constantly on the move in search of food supplies, they needed to travel light, carrying with them only essential implements. Each of these would serve several purposes, so that a *yandi* dish could be a water bowl, a cradle and a winnowing dish. In richer food areas, where a more settled way of life was possible, a more extended range of implements was developed.

Of course, no Aboriginal groups wandered aimlessly over the continent. Over thousands of years of occupation, each group of people developed a very detailed knowledge of plants, animals and sources of water in their own area. The rights of groups to their own 'country' were laid down in religion, and in daily life these claims were reinforced by the presence of sacred rites. Where we may simply see a tree or a large rock, an Aboriginal person might see the tracks of the ancestors who founded the world.

The physical capacity of an area to sustain life reflected the number of people who used it. In harsh periods the group usually consisted of the family, but during good seasons people came together to socialize, trade and carry out religious ceremonies.

Neighbouring groups had common religious beliefs and actually 'owned' segments of ceremonies. These could only be 'whole' when the owners of the segments came together to perform them. In this way harmony between neighbours was encouraged, and hostile action was discouraged. These unique arrangements helped make Aborigines one of the world's few peoples who managed to avoid large scale warfare.

Although Aborigines stayed in their own 'country' most of the time, hospitality was generally offered to refugees from drought. In such cases people could travel hundreds of miles, and remain away from their 'country' for years.

The word 'tribe' has often been used in connection with Aboriginal groups from particular areas. This must be used with caution, as no political organization involving chiefs existed. However, certain groups did recognise themselves as such-and-such a people, sharing a language, acknowledging common rules of behaviour. Such groups were large enough to be self-sufficient, and to provide marriage partners within the group.

Today some Aborigines in remote areas no longer live on their former homelands, and the changes associated with this are discussed on pages 32-34. However, for most Aborigines, attachment to their land is still very powerful. Even those not living in their own 'country' still have deep spiritual bonds with their 'homelands.'

### Sacred Sites

A sacred site may be either public or secret. Depending whether it is a men's site or a women's site, the area is restricted to initiated members of either sex. While a site may be a natural feature such as a land form or a tree, it may also be a painted cave or a stone arrangement. In some cases it may even consist of an area of unmarked land where ceremonies are performed.

Whatever the case may be, access to these areas is restricted, and workers should go there only if they are invited by the responsible custodians. Workers new to an area should discreetly ask community elders which areas they should avoid.

All Aboriginal sites and relics are protected by the *Aboriginal Heritage Act*, which is administered by The Western Australian Museum's Aboriginal Sites Department.

## Kinship

In every society, people have a number of different roles so that they can carry out their functions in life effectively. Examples of such roles include those of father, policeman, husband, daughter and employee. Each of these roles has certain formal or informal rules attached to it. In our society the roles we have as family members are supplemented by many other more impersonal roles. Aboriginal societies, on the other hand, extend family-type relationships to all spheres of life. People not directly related by blood ties were also covered by certain kinship terms or labels.

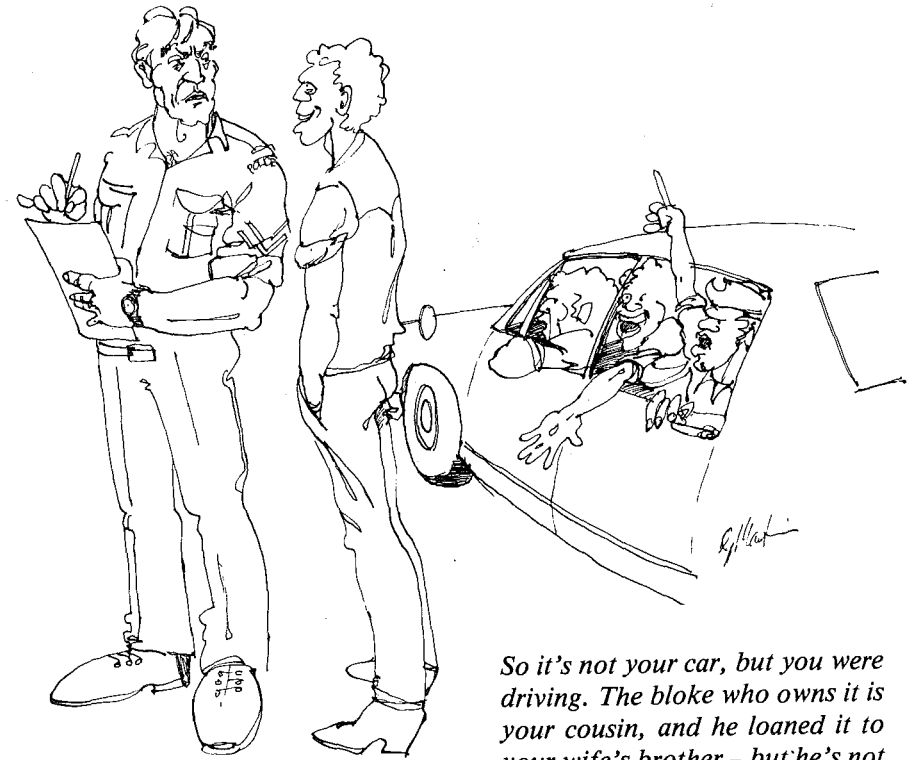
For example two men who called each other brother were not necessarily sons of the same parents. Yet they were expected to act towards each other in certain ways that differed from men who called each other cousins. A man avoided not only his actual mother-in-law, but also all the other women who fell into that category.

Some kin were expected to assist in disputes, while others were expected to interfere. An important pair of relations was the boy or man and his mother's brother (maternal uncle) who was often responsible for a lot of his training and initiation, as well as for providing his wife.

There were a number of different types of kinship systems operating throughout Australia. Some groups focused their roles for behaviour on alternate generations, while others had 'sections' or 'subsections' and/or moities. Still others developed 'totemic' relations. While these forms of organizations simplified day-to-day relationships for Aborigines, most non-aboriginal students of Aboriginal life find kinship a very complex subject. For this reason some of the publications mentioned at the end of this chapter should be read by those who will have close contact with Aborigines in remote communities.

## Changing Kinship Patterns

The impact of contact has led to many changes in traditional kinship patterns. For example, 'section' and 'subsection' systems have been adopted by some Aboriginal groups who did not previously have them. There is also an actual breakdown of kinship obligations in some places, where individuals no longer want to live by the old rules.



*So it's not your car, but you were driving. The bloke who owns it is your cousin, and he loaned it to your wife's brother - but he's not here, right?  
No?!? Your cousin's wife borrowed it from her brother?...*

Breakdown in the system occurs when young people follow western ideas of romance and love in picking their partners. This leads to 'wrong' marriages which cause endless problems in obligations and in fitting children into their categories. Australian law forbids the punishments for such offences (such as spearing in the thigh) which would have been administered in such instances before contact with Europeans.

Some modification to traditional ways is also inevitable when a group has to fit into a car, when children are arranged in a classroom, or men are put together in the same prison cell. However, this is different to a complete collapse of a system of behaviour that governs all aspects of a person's social life. Many Aboriginal people

in remote communities feel that it is essential to revitalize traditions such as kinship if Aborigines are to survive as a people with their own identity.

### **Workers and Kinship**

Awareness of kinship is obviously important for all workers. Those involved with Aboriginal communities over long periods may even be made a part of that system. When a worker is given a kinship label, Aboriginal people can act towards him or her on their own terms. Normally this is a sign that the worker is becoming accepted in that community, though this is not always the case, as some communities give workers an almost automatic classification (see page 66).

Sometimes accepting a kinship label can cause problems for workers. They may be expected to share their possessions, or avoid certain people. This can be particularly awkward when the worker does not know exactly what his or her position is, or when a worker has to have dealings with a kinsperson who should be avoided. In this case it would be wise to consult someone in the community. Aborigines often use 'go-betweens' in this situation.

### **Sharing**

Traditionally Aborigines placed a great emphasis on sharing, which was conducted according to kinship relationships. By following the rules of sharing, people gained respect and trust. Selfish people were treated with contempt. Sharing allowed people to build up a store of 'social credit', both within the local group, and with distant trading partners.

While Aborigines did not emphasise possessions, trade gave people access to things that were not available in their own area. Pieces of ochre, and pearlshell objects travelled widely. Most trade was done in the form of exchanging gifts, which often had religious as well as practical value.

### **The Importance of Sharing Today**

Traditional rules about sharing have been relaxed in some areas, and almost forgotten in others. Yet the basic concept of sharing and gift exchange continues to be an important part of Aboriginal life — and it has been extended to introduced goods such as money, clothing, cars, food and alcohol.

A person who does not share is likely to be cut adrift from other Aborigines. For example, to turn away relatives who come unexpectedly from the country for a month in town, would be unthinkable for most Aborigines. After all, to be surrounded by family and friends is what life is all about. At the same time this can cause trouble with landlords and neighbours.

### **Implications of Sharing for Workers**

The Aboriginal emphasis on sharing runs counter to many 'western' priorities such as personal profit and advancement, and the security of working for future benefits. This creates problems for both Aborigines and workers. For example, Aborigines are often evicted from houses because they will accommodate their relatives: or they may be unable to meet payments for things they have bought because someone in their group needs money.

In such situations non-aboriginal workers can be put in a position where their loyalties are divided (see also p.59). They may recognize that sharing is an important and positive value for Aborigines, but at the same time it causes disruption to programmes in which they are involved. When this occurs, it is probably an indication that the programme is not suited to Aboriginal needs, and that it should be reviewed in consultations with Aborigines. (See page 48 for further discussion concerning consultation.)

### **Conception, Infancy and Childhood**

Traditionally, Aborigines understood the conception of a child to be due to a combination of spiritual influences and sexual intercourse. In a sense intercourse prepared the way for the child's spirit to enter into the mother.

When a woman missed her period or had morning sickness, discussions took place about any unusual experiences that the husband or mother-to-be had recently had. This experience might be a dream, a visit to a place known to be a baby spirit centre, seeing an animal that had behaved unusually, or the food the mother was eating when she first experienced morning sickness.

These factors were carefully weighed up, for they were important for the future identity of the new individual. For example, a child inherited his father's 'country' as a matter of course. But the child

would also have rights to the area where he/she was conceived, and be linked with others who belonged to that area.

The actual birth would take place away from the camp, with the mother being attended by older experienced female relatives. While the newborn child had a spiritual identity, it was not named until it had survived the difficult first few months after birth and its personality had begun to develop.

Infants and children were treated with great affection and tolerance. Mother and sisters (real and classificatory) would indulge them, and breast feeding often continued for two or three years. Even much older children were occasionally given sucks on the breast.

As a child grew its relatives would begin to teach it the rudiments of language, the kinship terms, and the rules of adult behaviour. Toys consisted of miniature implements suited to the child's sex. Children played games like keeping house, mothers and fathers, warfare, hunting and gathering. In this way they developed the physical and social skills they would need in adult life.

Children were seldom punished in cold blood; and parents would allow a good deal of behaviour most white people would consider to be impolite. But occasionally parents would lose their temper, and then the punishment could be severe — a sudden slap or a stream of abuse. It can be seen how strange the behaviour of a non-aboriginal teacher would seem to a child raised in traditional circumstances.

### **Adolescence**

Adolescence brought an abrupt end to the freedom of childhood. Boys and girls were separated, and members of each sex entered into a period of intense training to prepare them for adulthood.

For girls in some areas this training consisted of initiation into womanhood, as well as preparation for marriage.

Youths began a long and often painful series of initiation rituals in which their adult responsibilities were forcefully brought home to them. At the same time they began to be educated into the all-pervading religious life. External signs of initiation may include scars on the chest or back, missing front teeth and various insignia such as woollen or string headbands.

Initiation often took years, but today the rituals have been reduced

to a relatively short time. During initiation youths were kept by special guardians away from other people. Their community regarded them as being non-existent, dead, or as wild animals until they returned as adults.

### **Adulthood and Marriage**

Both men and women were considered to be fully adult only when they were married and had their first child. As men were able to take more than one wife, girls tended to marry younger than men. Where an older man had rights to a young girl, and took her for a wife, this could cause trouble if the bride was reluctant or took a young lover. However, this was by no means always the case.

Occasionally couples who were not marriagable, eloped, and this could be a source of strife involving punitive expeditions and sorcery.

Generally speaking the husband had greater authority than his wife, though she did have quite a say in decisions affecting the family. The husband could take other wives, have extra-marital relations, and beat his wife in domestic arguments. If the husband became unreasonably violent, the wife would be supported by her kin, return to her family, or elope.

Men were generally responsible for matters of law and order, hunting of large game and making tools. As well as caring for the children, women provided the bulk of the everyday diet by gathering seeds, roots and small animals.

### **Old Age**

Traditionally Aborigines made a clear distinction between an older person who remained fully in control of his or her faculties, and the person who had reached senility. For a senile person the rules of middle age were relaxed. Other old people were very respected for their knowledge of ritual and experience in daily living.

### **Death**

To Aborigines death was not the final event. When a person died, rituals were performed to release the soul of the individual, and to allow it to return to the spiritual environment from which it originally came. Life on this earth was seen as part of a cycle of existence, rather than as something with a definite beginning and end. As such, death ceremonies were initiations into another phase of being. For

this reason funerals were very important occasions which all kinspeople attended if it was at all possible.

### **Guidelines for Workers Regarding Age & Death**

**Children:** The freedom enjoyed by children continues to be a theme for many Aboriginal families, even when other traditional elements have faded. Those working with Aboriginal children need to recognise that apparently unusual behaviour could be cultural, and not necessarily a personal problem. Thus a nursing sister could find her working relationship with a community improving if she removed objects children might interfere with, rather than expecting mothers to discipline children.

**Initiation:** Traditionally-oriented Aborigines regard anyone who hasn't been through 'the law' as still a child, at least in some respects. They claim that much of the irresponsible behaviour among Aboriginal men is caused by those who haven't been initiated. At the same time it is becoming more impractical for young men to spend long periods away from the group, and some who have to leave for educational or job reasons may not be able to spare the time. Moreover, initiation is a fearful prospect, and some do their best to avoid it, especially where confidence in tradition has been eroded. The other side of the coin is that Aboriginal youths may consider themselves to be adults by the time they reach sixteen, and regard school as something for children only.

**Division of Labour:** Traditionally-oriented Aborigines still maintain quite a strict division of labour. Men could be insulted if they are asked to perform women's work, and vice versa.

**Respecting Elders:** In certain situations where an elder says something which everyone knows to be incorrect, it may nevertheless be wise to remain silent. The embarrassment caused by the 'loss of face' could lead to problems later.

**Funerals:** These are very important to Aboriginal people, even those who are living a non-traditional lifestyle. People will travel long distances to funerals and drop all other commitments to do so, even when a relative concerned is 'distant' according to our reckoning.

**Taboo on Name of Deceased Person:** When a person dies others in

their group avoid using his or her name. This applies also to other people with the same name, or even with a similar name.

**Age & Sex of Worker:** Though most Aborigines have become used to young workers, it nevertheless contradicts their sense of propriety to have a young worker wielding authority over an older person. The same thing is true for women working with men. Both your age and sex could have an important bearing on what you are able to discuss with a person.

### **Law, Authority and Leadership**

Traditional law was based on custom and backed up by religious belief. As we have seen, obligations and rights were defined by the kinship system, and in disputes certain kin had duties and rights in helping to settle a dispute, or to take sides with one of the participants. Domestic quarrels were largely resolved within the immediate family, although even here certain classes of kin could intervene. Aboriginal society was a public one — arguments could be overheard and consequently quarrels tended to spread, even though this was balanced by the belief that people ought to mind their own business.

The ultimate solution to disagreements lay in a controlled use of violence. Duels were fought with spears, clubs or stone knives, with each of the participants striking the other in turn until one submitted. Where one party was judged to be guilty he might be speared through the thigh or have to submit to some other ordeal. Usually care was taken not to disable a person permanently as the loss of a hunter in a small community could be a serious matter. Even in large-scale raids or battles a sense of prudence and common interest made itself felt and on most occasions the fighting ceased when several men were badly hurt or killed.

While there were no chiefs in traditional Aboriginal societies, there were men who had a good deal of influence, and who commanded a great deal of respect. Such men were fully initiated, wise in the ways of the social and spiritual world, and probably also good at bushcraft and hunting. These elders made decisions about ceremonial matters, and they could secretly judge anyone who offended against ritual laws. Men in this category also made decisions about group movements.

### **Changing Authority Patterns**

Australian law does not recognize traditional Aboriginal laws, and many Aborigines feel bound by two systems of law, each of them often at odds with the other. There have been many cases in the past where the person carrying out a traditional punishment (such as inflicting a wound) has been gaoled for assault. As a result traditional styles of punishment are no longer quite so common, although there has been a return to this style of law enforcement in some areas over the last few years.

There are many other pressures on traditional law, some of which have already been mentioned. Apart from these difficulties, the authority of 'elders' is not so strong away from their own 'country'. Moreover, today there are situations where there is no precedent to go on, as the problems have arisen only since contact. Drinking is one such problem. Because elders themselves occasionally drink to excess, they may not even have the influence of being models of good conduct.

### **Coping With Violence**

Workers are sometimes witness to the use of force in the administration of traditional law, or violence in domestic quarrels or drunken disputes. Many people find this difficult to cope with. They feel they should contact the police or intervene in some way. This well-intentioned intervention could alienate Aborigines, and a number of workers in the past have damaged their working relationships with Aborigines because they interfered in affairs that were considered to be none of their business.

This is particularly true where the worker becomes involved in a domestic quarrel. On the other hand, workers who have gained acceptance and trust, have sometimes intervened positively in potentially violent and dangerous situations.

In getting a perspective on the question of violence it helps to remember that Aborigines might well think that *we* are violent. Stories of violence by Europeans towards Aborigines are still vivid in the minds of most middle-aged Aborigines in remote areas. Moreover, interpretation of cruelty is culturally based. An Aboriginal may well argue that a wound inflicted for an offense would cause pain for weeks or even months, but that a prison sentence

which removed a person from his community for years would cause greater and longer lasting suffering.

### **Religion**

Religion was a deep experience for traditional Aboriginal people. Most acts in daily life had some religious significance, and the physical world was a place of where omens and signs such as the twittering of a certain bird could guide people in making decisions about their movements. As we have seen, physical landmarks were also spiritual landmarks — tracks of the ancestors who laid out the world in the 'dreamtime'. The dreamtime was not only in the sacred past. In certain states of mind brought on by chanting and dancing Aboriginal men claim to be able to return to 'the dreaming'.

Ceremonies were performed for many reasons. Roughly speaking Aboriginal people believed that by carrying out increase rites certain species of plants and animals would increase. Performance of such ceremonies was a sacred obligation to the founders of the world.

Magic was an integral part of Aboriginal religious practice and this could be turned to constructive purposes such as healing, or be used against people in the form of sorcery. Sickness was seen as a spiritual problem and was treated as such, though medicinal herbs and techniques like massage and bleeding were also used.

Spirits were also an important part of religious belief. Children would be warned that spirits would get them if they didn't behave. Illness, accidents, and other misfortunes could also be caused by spirits. However, this does not mean that spirits were evil or harmful in themselves. Problems arose only when people treated spirits carelessly.

### **Importance of Religion for Workers**

Among tradition-oriented Aborigines religion remains a powerful and all-pervading force, and even where Aborigines have been converted to Christianity traditional practices and beliefs have by no means vanished. Because Aboriginal beliefs are different to our own, white people in the past have often scoffed at them. While we may not accept Aboriginal beliefs as true for us, workers need to extend the courtesy of religious tolerance to Aborigines, and to be aware that traditional beliefs may affect the behaviour of Aboriginal people in many situations.



**Healers and Sorcerers:** Certain Aboriginal men (and occasionally women) become healers and/or sorcerers, and occasionally workers are confronted with a problem where sorcery is involved. For example, there was a case in Laverton some years ago where a young man ran off with an older man's wife. The older man (we'll call him Harry) went to try to recover his wife but was unsuccessful. Later he made a second attempt when he discovered the pair had pointed the bone at him to get him out of the way. During an argument he began to feel extremely strange. He picked up a brick and smashed his wife in the head, killing her. He was arrested and sent to Fremantle Prison where he began to waste away — unable to eat, and plagued by attacks of dizziness.

After Harry was examined by the prison doctor and psychiatrist, an anthropologist was called in. Harry begged for a friend of his, who was a kinsman and 'clever man', to be brought down, he being the only one who could help him. The anthropologist was unable to convince the prison authorities and by the time Harry came up for sentencing he was gaunt, just skin and bone. Fortunately he had to attend court in Kalgoorlie, where a more sympathetic attitude was shown. The clever man was called in and Harry was cured almost immediately.

**Accidents or Illness:** When we have a car accident we normally explain it in terms of *how* it happened. 'The kangaroo jumped out of the bush and it was too late to swerve.' Illness is explained in terms of its physical cause. Aboriginal people might be more interested in *why* the kangaroo jumped out of the bush at that particular moment. Was the kangaroo being directed to do so by another party? Or was the illness someone's, or a spirit's way of getting at you?

Such concerns can be vital to Aboriginal people. To laugh them off as ignorant superstition will only lead Aboriginal people to conclude that you do not understand them. While such matters are not usually the direct concern of the worker, it can be imagined that lack of sympathetic awareness of this mode of thinking could give rise to problems and misunderstandings.

**Sleeping and Dreaming:** Waking a person in order to talk to him is not usually welcomed in our culture. For Aboriginal people being awakened is to be taken out of their dreaming, and dreams are important to them. One way of avoiding this in a camp-type situation

is to approach but wait for the barking of the dogs to wake the person. In general it is better to avoid visiting at times when people are likely to be asleep.

**Hunches or Intuitions:** Traditionally Aborigines believed that if a certain part of the body ached, or if they had a particular dream, this had a particular meaning for them. This could mean that an Aborigine who felt, say, a pain between his shoulder blades thought it meant he would get speared.

Aboriginal people generally act on such signs and occasionally this can pose a dilemma for workers. For example, a research worker in the Kimberleys was approached by a man who wanted a ride to Derby, saying his father was sick and about to die. The worker asked him how he got the information, and the man replied he had a sore shoulder blade. He then asked if his father had been ill. The man replied, no, he hadn't been. It was Saturday and eighty miles to Derby and the worker refused. On Monday word was received that the man's father had died on Sunday morning.

While we may not believe in such 'signs' and omens many Aboriginal people *do* and this needs to be appreciated when a worker is confronted by apparently irrational behaviour.

**Sacred Objects:** Just as there are sacred sites, certain objects used for religious purposes are also sacred to Aborigines. These must not be seen by women and children. Sometimes workers have picked up sacred objects in areas where tradition is no longer in force and have unwittingly hung them on their walls or left them sitting around the house. If you suspect you have one of these you should consult an elder.

**Photographs and Films:** It would also be wise not to photograph Aboriginal people without their express consent, and to be careful that consent is not given out of politeness only. In some traditional areas photographs are potentially dangerous in that no mention of the dead should be made, and photographs of a dead person could be a source of conflict and fear. While films are much appreciated and most useful, try to avoid the predicament of one school teacher who showed a central Australian travel film without the courtesy of letting the elders preview it. When the sacred Ayers Rock flashed on the screen the men ordered the women and children from the hall.

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## CHAPTER THREE

### GRAPPLING WITH THE PAST

#### Introduction

Some knowledge of the history of contact between Aborigines and the 'white' community is useful in understanding the situations we find ourselves in when working with Aboriginal people. Unfortunately, a comprehensive history would cover a volume in itself, and for that reason we have picked out a few key points, discussing some of their implications for workers in the field situation.

#### The Colonial Relationship

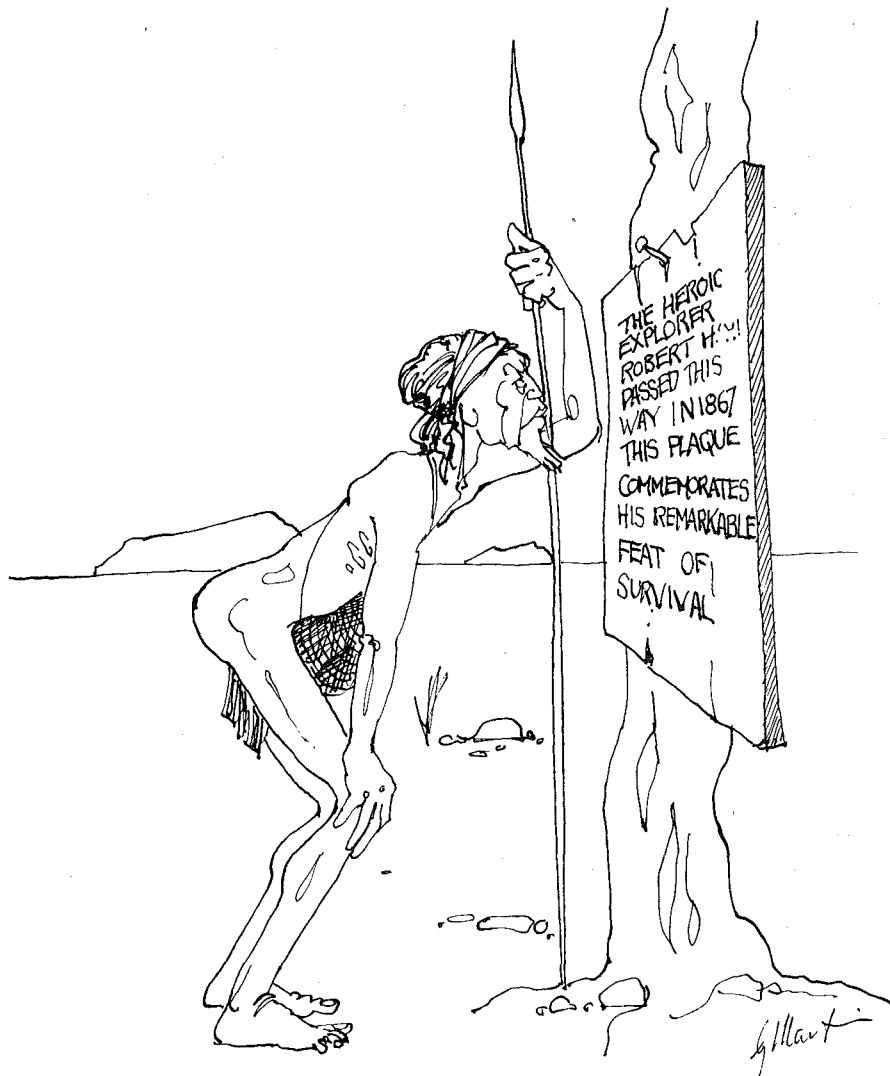
A colonial relationship exists when one group of people hold economic and political power over another. This has been the case in Australia: Aborigines have been forced to respond to white initiatives without having the military power or political organization to resist loss of territory or livelihood. In other words, Aboriginal people have been at the mercy of the white community, and it is only in the last few years that Aborigines have been consulted about their own future.

#### White Responses to Aborigines

During the period of early contact some white people treated Aborigines reasonably well, while others were cruel and bigoted, especially when judged by today's standards. To some extent attitudes which were formed in the nineteenth century still linger on today, despite enormous changes in the outlook of the general public.

#### Early Colonists

- were a little afraid of Aborigines. Massacres occasionally happened because of white fears.
- considered Aborigines to be uncivilized brutes. Some thought their mission was to civilize them, others used their prejudice as an excuse for occupying Aboriginal lands and mistreating Aborigines.
- hoped they would be useful as servants and labourers. This proved to be the case in pastoral areas and Aboriginal labour was vital to



the cattle and sheep industries for over a century.

- believed Aborigines would die out and used the theory of evolution to justify their mistaken belief.
- thought interbreeding was evil, bringing out the worst in both races.
- believed that the only hope for Aborigines was to separate the generations, raising the children in white-controlled institutions.

In part such attitudes were based on ignorance. They were also part of a series of nineteenth century notions of white superiority held by colonists throughout the world, that provided a convenient excuse for the displacement and exploitation of native peoples. Many arguments were constructed about Aboriginal inferiority and some are still held by people today. For example — ‘Aborigines are stone age people who are 25,000 years behind modern civilization. It will take centuries for them to catch up, and for this reason Aborigines cannot hold their own in our society today.’

There is a simple logical error here: culture is *learned*, not passed on through genes or other biological means. Thus Aboriginal children adopted into white families at birth take on the culture of that family — and any problem they may have in adjustment would have to do with family life and the fact of being black in a white community.

### Patronizing Attitudes

Few workers today think of Aborigines as inferior, but to some extent we are all victims of past attitudes. Even when they appear to be positive, old-fashioned attitudes are often paternalistic and condescending. A few examples will make this clearer.

- ‘Aborigines are adorable’. Sometimes this is followed by ‘just like children’, if not in words, then in attitude.
- ‘My Aborigines’ or ‘our people’. When practiced seriously this attitude can be quite tyrannical, implying ownership. No-one likes to be owned.
- The ‘white saviour’ attitude, based on the assumption that the individual concerned has the answer to Aboriginal problems. Since the earliest contact Aborigines have had to put up with white people who thought they knew how to solve Aboriginal problems. The attitude implies that Aborigines themselves are incapable of

solving their problems, and that in some mysterious way we can. This is at least a questionable proposition, though there have been some cases where Aboriginal people have been grateful to individual white people who have thrown their whole energies into their 'mission'.



*Now my Aborigines...*

### Government Policies<sup>1</sup>

For the purposes of a simple overview, government policies concerning Aborigines can be seen as having moved through the phases of protection, assimilation, integration, self-determination and self-management. Obviously there has been considerable overlap in these policies.

**Protection:** As we saw, early colonists thought that Aborigines would disappear as a race. From this arose the famous phrase — 'smoothing the dying pillow'. Broadly speaking, protection was the official government policy from the 1880s until the 1940s. Successive state governments spent as little as possible on Aboriginal welfare, and consequently protection was minimal. In fact, persecution and maltreatment of Aborigines were widespread.

During this period

- Indigent Aborigines received meagre rations which were barely sufficient for survival.
- The Chief Protector of Aborigines obtained legal guardianship of all Aboriginal and 'part-Aboriginal' children up to sixteen years of age. There are still many Aboriginal people today who were forcibly removed from their families during their childhood.
- Reserves for Aborigines were established throughout the state. In some areas reserves were probably appropriate. In others they were disastrous.
- Aboriginal children were excluded from state schools.
- Curfews were imposed on Aborigines in country towns. Perth was prohibited to Aborigines.
- Aborigines were defined as such by an Act of Parliament. Any Aboriginal who wished to be excluded was not allowed to associate with other Aborigines.
- Aborigines were not allowed to drink or vote, and were excluded from social service benefits.
- Cohabitation between Aborigines and non-aborigines was illegal, and intermarriage was only permitted on the specific approval of the Chief Protector.

With the depression rationing was decreased and during the 1930s Aborigines found themselves in a very grim predicament.

1. Details of administration of Government policy are set out in Appendix One.

**Assimilation:** After the Second World War public conscience began to stir about Aborigines, and the new policy of assimilation emerged. Formally set down in 1951 it read:

‘Aborigines shall attain the same manner of living as other Australians, enjoying the same rights and privileges, accepting the same responsibilities, observing the same customs and being influenced by the same hopes and loyalties.’

In other words it was decided that Aboriginal people should be persuaded to take their place in the white community with equal rights and opportunities. At this time it did not yet occur to legislators and policy makers that Aborigines would want to aspire to anything different. However, in 1965 the formal definition was amended to include an element of choice. It then read:

‘The policy of assimilation seeks that all persons of Aboriginal descent will choose to attain a similar manner of living to that of other Australians and live as members of a single community, enjoying the same rights and privileges, accepting the same responsibilities and influenced by the same hopes and loyalties as other Australians’.

During the 1950s and 1960s much discriminatory legislation was dropped, and Aborigines were granted the right to social service benefits, to be counted in the census, to drink alcohol, and to vote in elections. More money became available both for projects to help Aboriginal communities and to Aborigines themselves in the form of award wages and pensions. A slow shift also began to develop in public opinion, and Aborigines came to be seen as equal citizens by a wider cross-section of the public.

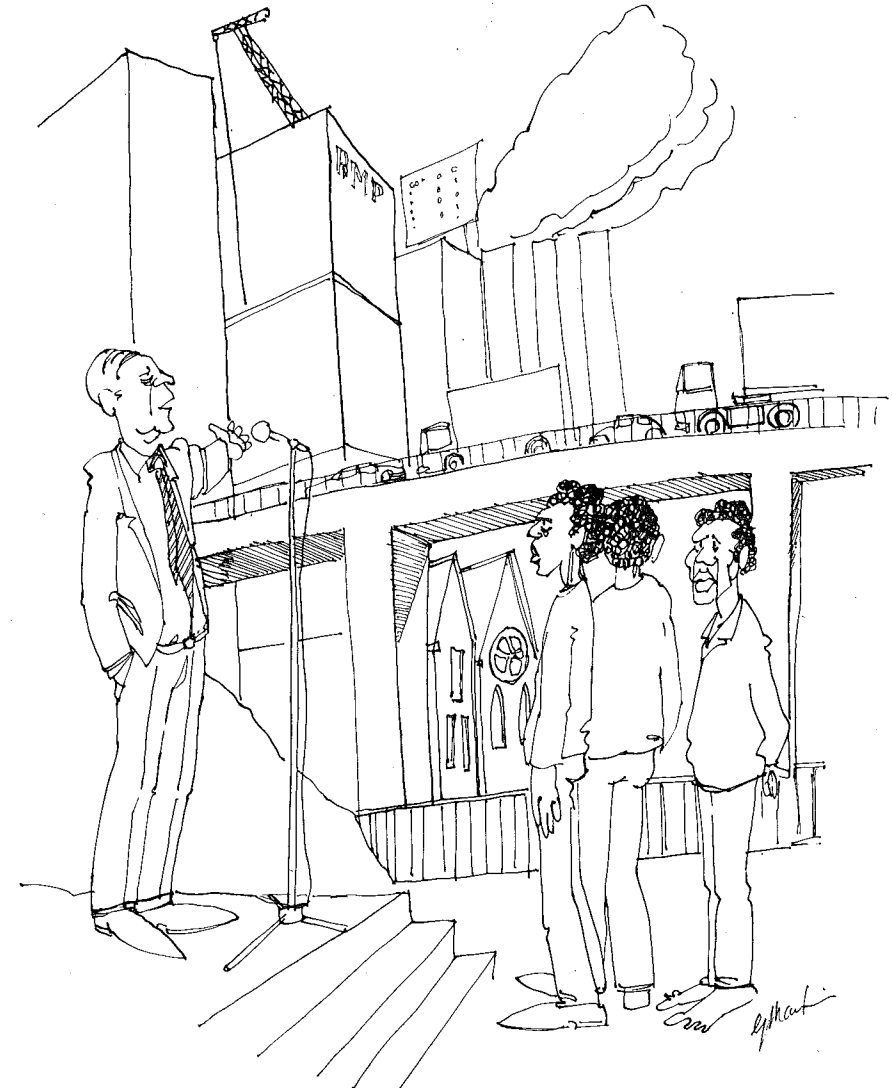
### **Integration, Self-determination and Self-management**

Since the mid 1960s these terms have become much used in Government policies concerning Aborigines. *Integration* puts an emphasis on positive relations between the Aboriginal and white community, while recognising that Aboriginal people may have different needs and aspirations in some aspects of their lives.

*Self-determination* takes these different needs and aspirations further, literally meaning that Aboriginal people should have the

right to choose their own destiny, with Government help in an enabling role, providing finance, technical skills, and social and economic support.

*Self-management*, which is the current Federal policy, has somewhat similar stated aims, but stresses that Aboriginal groups must be held accountable for their decisions and management of finance.



*Our aim is to assist you people to become a part of all this.*

During the last ten years there has been an upsurge of spending on Aboriginal Advancement. For the first time in our history Aboriginal people are being recognised as full citizens with special needs. However, changes in stated public policy can only be effective when they are implemented with honesty, courage and awareness by the individual worker.

### **Aboriginal Responses to Contact**

Aborigines were unable to offer more than scattered resistance to invasion, and so they were forced to accommodate themselves to a 'white' presence. Of course, the way different Aboriginal groups have adjusted depends on various factors, such as length of contact, intensity of contact, and the type of opportunities open to them.

In the south west, for example, the settlers cleared land and displaced Aborigines completely. Many Aboriginal people were massacred. Those who survived found life very difficult, and they were eventually moved to dismal reserves at the edge of country towns, where they formed a pool of casual farm labourers.

On the surface few traditional customs survive in the south west, and the needs and problems of 'Nyoongahs' are similar to those of oppressed minorities throughout the world. However, this is not to say that their destiny lies in taking on the lifestyle and goals of the surrounding white community. 'Nyoongahs' are developing a distinctive lifestyle of their own.

In remote areas the length and the intensity of European-Aboriginal contact has varied considerably. In many pastoral areas local Aborigines settled permanently at stations, known as super waterholes. In this way they kept in touch with their 'country' even though it was officially 'owned' by Europeans, and until 1927 Aborigines had legal hunting and gathering rights on pastoral leases.

In some areas local groups died out, or were reduced by disease and massacre, and other groups moved in to the vacuum this created.

These people generally came from harsher desert country, and were motivated by curiosity, or by drought in their own area. Increasingly they also came for contact with friends and relatives who had moved in earlier on.

Not all the people who tasted 'civilization' stayed on. Some returned to their desert homelands until various circumstances forced them

back to settled areas. As children grew up their initiation and marriage arrangements had to be considered. Others were 'rescued' by well-intentioned, if not far-sighted Europeans.

### **Stations**

Sheep and cattle stations were a major source of employment for remote area Aborigines. Station owners employed Aboriginal stockmen, supplying them and their dependents with rations and some clothing. In this way, each station supported a community of Aboriginal people who generally lived in shanties some distance from the homestead.

For Aborigines, station life had its advantages and drawbacks. Many stockmen enjoyed their work and there were 'slack' periods when ceremonial life could be carried on. Generally station owners did not interfere in traditional customs and this meant that Aborigines managed their own affairs when they were among themselves. On the other hand, some station owners were cruel, and Aborigines were forced to sign contracts (for their own protection!) which put them in a position of virtual serfdom. Wages were very low or non-existent and pastoralists generally resisted the growing Aboriginal rights movement.

In 1935 a Government Commission headed by Dr Mosely painted a rosy picture of Aboriginal life on stations, which ended on the following note:

'It is assumed, notwithstanding the apparently appropriate life of the natives on the stations, that the day will arrive when the blacks will find a place in white civilization, then much more should be done to fit them for such a position...for the present further endeavour to train these station blacks to a higher degree of living seems impractical.'

In the Pilbara area many Aborigines did not see fit to wait to be offered a place in white civilization. In 1946 Aborigines throughout the area went on strike over wages and living conditions. Despite attempts at dispersal by the Police and Native Welfare Departments, the strikers stayed out, shooting goats and hand-mining tin with *yandi* dishes to stay alive. Two communities based on the original striking group still survive, both of them in their different ways having a sense of social cohesion and self-respect rarely seen in other communities.

In 1967 the situation on stations changed dramatically with the introduction of award wages for Aboriginal labour. Few station owners could afford full wages and others preferred to use white labour. At about the same time Aborigines became eligible for social security benefits. More Aborigines were forced on to reserves near towns. While some secured jobs many became more or less permanently unemployed.

Those Aborigines whose homeland was on the station where they were employed, are now homeless, and in some respects ex-station Aborigines are refugees.

### Missions

Outside the main pastoral areas, the early contacts were often with missionaries of a number of different religious denominations. Missionaries were an extremely diverse group of people, some of whom accepted and even admired Aboriginal culture, while others thought Aboriginal religion was the work of the devil. For Aborigines the missions generally provided a refuge against a hostile outside world; many missionaries were popular and they are much talked about even today.

Most missions concentrated their efforts on children, hoping to raise a generation of Christian Aborigines. Education of Aboriginal children was stressed at a time when this was neglected throughout the state, and many of today's Aboriginal leaders were mission-educated. Missionaries were also among the most vocal advocates of Aboriginal rights, although their attitudes tended to reflect those of their particular denomination, and could be seen as patronizing by today's standards.

On the negative side, missions sometimes did little to prepare Aborigines for the realities of the outside world, and it became increasingly clear to many Aborigines that missionaries were very different to other white people. Some missionaries also had little understanding of, or respect for, Aboriginal people. On a few missions a kind of undercover warfare developed, with a tremendous build-up of resentment on both sides, and some very unpleasant incidents of cruelty by missionaries have been revealed over the years. Some of these 'incidents' occurred because missionaries were unsuited to the job, while others were due to the frustrations felt by

the individual missionary in his isolated, lonely and difficult circumstances.

It would be unwise for a new worker to make sweeping judgements about missions. Each situation needs to be assessed on its own merits.

### Mining Areas

The movement of large numbers of prospectors into the eastern and northern goldfield areas around the turn of the century spelt disaster for local Aborigines. Scarce water supplies were quickly depleted, and Aborigines became dependent on the newcomers for their supplies. Few miners brought wives, and sexual unions with miners were often accepted by Aboriginal women, who saw it as one of the few means to survival. Along with sexual unions came venereal diseases, and payments in rum, which lent a momentarily illusion of happiness but often led to alcoholism in both Aborigines and Europeans.

The goldfield economy did not readily absorb Aborigines who were seen as contenders for scarce jobs. Kept out of white-controlled enterprises they sought mutual support on the fringes of mining towns. This situation has continued for over half a century with few basic changes.

### Conclusion

Contact between Aboriginal and European people has resulted in a complex and sometimes problematical situation. The past cannot be undone, but some of the misunderstandings and resentment arising out of past mistakes will face workers in the field situation. In this respect it is worth remembering that while the historical picture may seem grim, changes over the last thirty years have been enormous, and for the most part the direction today appears to be a positive one.

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## CHAPTER FOUR

### ABORIGINAL LIFESTYLES AND PROBLEMS

#### Introduction

Who are Aborigines? What are their lifestyles, and what problems do they confront? In fact, how can we define this much-used word *problem*? These questions are examined in this chapter together with some of the implications they have for the individual worker.

#### Remote Communities

Throughout remote areas, many mission settlements, pastoral properties, and reserves have become semi-autonomous Aboriginal communities. Some of these are virtual townships, containing up to four hundred people, while others have only forty or fifty residents. However, none of these communities have a completely stable population. Rather, they tend to have a 'core' population of older people and children. Younger people, especially men, move about, visiting other communities or relatives or working away in towns or on stations.

There are even occasions when most of the people in a community disperse: community friction, the death of a leader and ceremonial cycles can all have this effect.

A few remote communities have no non-Aboriginal residents. But as a rule there are a few resident non-Aboriginal support people: teachers, a store-keeper, a community advisor, a nurse, a mechanic and so on. These non-Aboriginal residents are normally housed in modern and comfortable housing.

Aboriginal residents may live in a wide variety of structures. Bough shelters or *wiltjas*, tents, humpies, tin sheds and substantial houses may all be present. Facilities also vary, and some communities are served by a single tap while others have well-constructed ablution blocks or private facilities including deep sewerage.

Some communities are associated with an area of land set aside for the specific use of that community, and community-run stations are becoming increasingly common, despite the downturn in the cattle

industry. Traditional food-gathering also continues in some places, but this is limited, as a large number of people now depend on a small area. Manufacture of artifacts for the tourist market is another fairly well-established industry.

By and large, however, people in remote communities have to rely on social service benefits to supplement their resources. Some communities choose to receive their cheques on a communal basis, supplying individuals with money according to their needs, and work performed in the community. In other places cheques go to individuals, though this money still tends to be shared with kin. Benefits received are mainly Child Endowment, Old-Age and Invalid Pensions, and no special benefits are available to Aborigines.

Many communities have become incorporated over recent years, and this involves the adoption of a constitution acceptable to the Department of Aboriginal Affairs. Such communities have governing bodies known as councils, which are responsible for negotiations with outside bodies and also for some internal affairs.

Incorporation enables communities to receive grants from the Department of Aboriginal Affairs for projects such as housing, or the development of local industry. In this respect councils of Incorporated communities are like local shire councils.

Although important decisions have to be ratified by councils, Aboriginal communities tend to be extremely democratic, and meetings of all residents are a regular feature of community life. Aborigines generally like to discuss an issue thoroughly and to reach a final decision that suits everyone, at least insofar as that is possible. European workers used to quick decision-making sometimes find this frustrating. The temptation is to urge Aborigines to hurry up. In this situation it is the worker who needs to see that his or her impatience is based on cultural differences.

In the past, decisions were often made *for* Aborigines, and even now projects are often presented without involving communities in the initial planning. But with greater autonomy, which includes the right to dismiss advisors, Aboriginal communities have become far more vocal about their needs, rights and desires. Because of the importance of consultation in almost all matters, some guidelines for consulting are presented at the end of this chapter.

Some communities have a much happier atmosphere than others,



and the feeling within a community can change drastically over a short period of time. Problems within communities arise out of some of the following:

- Aboriginal communities are overcrowded by traditional standards, and traditional means of controlling anti-social behaviour are only partly effective.
- An imbalance in population exists when many men are absent for work or ceremonial purposes.
- Some communities include people of various linguistic and cultural groups. This can give rise to changes in the traditional kinship system, and often friction between groups.
- A generation gap is evident in many communities, the younger generation ignoring custom and the authority of elders.
- People may alternate between living in a community and living on the fringes of a country town. On returning they are sometimes drunk or bring alcohol with them. As alcohol is often restricted or banned by a community ruling, this can lead to conflicts.

However, it would be a mistake to assume that conflict and tension are the overriding features of remote community life. In most remote communities there is an increasing sense of autonomy and self-assurance.

### **Visiting Communities**

Access to Aboriginal communities is restricted to people who have the community's permission. The first time you visit a community you should write to the community in advance, stating the reasons for your intended visit. Communities often delegate a member to show visitors around and to introduce them to others.

If you are alone or on official business, certain courtesies should be observed. When visiting a specific camp or house it is considered rude to walk right in. While fences may not exist, there is an unseen boundary around each dwelling. It is wise to wait about ten metres away until you are noticed. If no dogs are barking, try a cough or two to draw attention to yourself. The people in the camp or house will decide who should come to meet you. Normally you will then be invited in. If no-one approaches you, then it is clear that no-one wants to see you.

Some workers find this arrangement irritating. The engineer or other technical person may be pressed for time, and even when aware of this custom he or she may decide to ignore this courtesy. The worker may then get a reputation for being 'pushy', and may find Aboriginal people unco-operative. The time saved by the hurried approach will be lost in other ways.

### **Reserve and Fringe Dwellers**

Many country towns throughout Western Australia have an area which is either an Aboriginal reserve, or an area where Aborigines customarily squat. In some places Aborigines use these areas only temporarily, for instance when a group of people are on the move and stop over for a few days. But generally fringe-dwelling communities have reasonably stable populations of people who have spent many years in their communities.

While fringe-dwelling people are generally 'detribalized', some sense of community exists, and a network of friendship and responsibilities operates. Physical conditions in such camps are usually very poor; shanties are built from salvaged materials, or people may camp in the body of an abandoned car. Power is generally non-existent, and quite often water has to be carried by hand for considerable distances. Under these circumstances the washing of clothes and personal hygiene are often neglected.

Fringe-dwelling people are in a position where they have lost touch with their land and much of their tradition. At the same time they have no place in the wider community: local white people often consider fringe-dwelling people to be lazy, drunk and unreliable. In this way fringe-dwelling people are caught in a vicious cycle. They are looked down on, which in turn often gives them a low opinion of themselves. As a result drunkenness often adds to the air of squalor and dissipation that surrounds a fringe-dwelling camp.

Fringe-dwelling people often find themselves in trouble with the police. In many towns fringe camps are patrolled with spotlights at night, and fringe people, having little privacy, may be arrested on charges of drunkenness and disorderly behaviour, which would not draw attention if they had the privacy of their own homes. Because they are a different colour to other people, they also draw attention in townships, not only of the police, but of non-aboriginal residents

and tourists as well. People are quick to notice an Aboriginal person who is walking along the street with an unsteady gait, because they already have a negative stereotype of Aborigines.

In recent years fringe-dwelling people, like all Aborigines, have had access to legal assistance through the Aboriginal Legal Service, and this has begun to change the relationship between Aborigines and the law. Aboriginal people have become more aware of their rights. At the same time discrimination continues in very many ways. In order to understand why many Aboriginal people continue to live apparently disorganized lifestyles, and to hold negative opinions about themselves and their potential, it is worth asking how we would feel:

- if we had been raised in a shack at the rubbish dump.
- if our parents had been in and out of prison throughout our youth.
- if we had been jeered at by white children at school.
- if our teachers (of a foreign race whose language and manner we found hard to understand) let us know that they thought we were basically unteachable.
- if we were often stared at, refused service in hotels, pushed to the end of the queue in stores.
- if we were discriminated against by employers.

Such experiences lead people to feel thwarted, powerless, suspicious and angry. People working with fringe-dwellers can be frustrated as they are not personally responsible for this state of affairs. At the same time workers may feel pity, guilt, or a certain amount of revulsion. Progress in their work is usually slow, and fringe-dwelling people may seem either apathetic or aggressive. Both of these reactions are usually signs that people feel oppressed and are lacking in confidence.

Often workers feel that fringe-dwelling people could do better despite their difficult circumstances. At this stage they either begin to lecture and moralize or they withdraw into cynicism. Neither reaction is very useful to either the worker or to Aboriginal people

Leadership among fringe-dwellers comes from the more outspoken people, and from Aborigines living in the wider community, many of whom have their roots in remote or fringe communities. A number of

country towns now have Aboriginal Progress Associations and labour pools, which are involving numbers of fringe-dwelling people.

### **Urban Aborigines**

Many Aboriginal people living in country towns have a lifestyle similar to the non-aboriginal people around them. From the white point of view these are the Aborigines who 'have made it'. In fact, many urban Aborigines think of themselves as members of the wider Australian community, and friends and neighbours accept them as such. By and large, urban Aborigines are more individually oriented; they have to be in order to maintain this lifestyle. Among the older generation there are some who are self-educated, but there is also a growing generation of young Aborigines who are well-educated in the formal sense.

Urban Aborigines tend to be politically aware and they provide valuable leadership for Aboriginal rights. However, it should not be assumed that individual Aboriginal leaders automatically speak for all other Aborigines.

Many urban Aborigines have a sense of being put on trial by the non-aboriginal community. They complain of discrimination at work and in their social life, and this along with other factors such as group loyalty, and inexperience in planning and saving, sometimes leads them to move back to the fringe-dwelling situation.

Quite often urban Aborigines would prefer not to be singled out for help or special treatment, as this is hurtful to their pride. Workers need to be tactful about this.

### **Aboriginal or White Problems?**

Much has been written about 'Aboriginal Problems'. This is a debatable area because so much depends on *whose definition of a problem* we adopt. Most non-aboriginal people consider that Aborigines have problems in health, education, housing and employment. Very often these 'problems' are defined and tackled from their own cultural point of view. Aborigines may see these same 'problems' from quite a different point of view, and in fact they may not consider a particular issue to be a problem at all. Many projects have come 'unstuck' over differing Aboriginal and white interpretations of a situation.

**Health:** Throughout the period of contact Aboriginal health has been a major concern to both Aboriginal and non-aboriginal people. As we have already seen there was a general assumption that Aborigines would gradually disappear. Until recently infant mortality was very high, and resistance to introduced diseases was low.

Today, special health care units operate in areas where there are a lot of Aboriginal people, and at present Aborigines are generally healthier than they have been since first contact. However, there are still many 'problem' areas in the application of western-style medicine. Aboriginal people generally do not like to be hospitalized, and a number of hospitals built for Aborigines have hardly been used. Aborigines may also see the cause of an ailment in quite a different light, as in an illness caused by a spirit, or when a person has been 'sung'.



*Of course what you really need is a pair of reading glasses*

A more common frustration for the white health worker is when Aboriginal people are unaware of the seriousness of a common health problem. Constant nose and ear infections are a good example of this. Clinic sisters and teachers are often horrified by such discharges from the nose and ears, and while Aboriginal people may not like them, they are often unaware of the problems (such as deafness) which infections can cause. Moreover, handkerchiefs and tissues are seldom available. Thus the clinic sister sees a serious condition while the Aboriginal parent may see a condition that is unpleasant, but which, after all, lasts only until adolescence and then disappears.

Diet is another area where no problem may be seen. The standard outback Aboriginal diet with its high carbohydrate and starch content may be seen as inadequate by the white worker. It also contributes to overweight. Aborigines who have lived on this diet all their lives are unlikely to consider it as problematical. An interesting sidelight on changing Aborigines awareness of a 'problem' can be seen in the area of diet. In some places women's magazines have become popular, and these, with their emphasis on the female form, are beginning to create a demand for non-fattening foods.

**Dependence:** Ever since early contact, many Aboriginal people have been dependent on the white community. Aborigines in many areas have come to expect that white people should help them with problems they cannot resolve. Workers often complain that Aborigines constantly make demands — 'Gimme this' or 'you white fellers got to help us'. It seems to *them* that Aborigines are parasites who have no pride, and that they should learn to help themselves.

To Aborigines the problem might look quite different. Firstly, Aboriginal cultures have no value which says 'every man for himself'. Life is based more on sharing. Thus if a person has nothing to eat he approaches the appropriate kin person. Secondly, white people are seen as having created the problem, and as having unlimited resources to solve it. Thirdly, the stated aim of workers is to help solve Aboriginal problems. To Aborigines the real problem may be in the worker's apparent unwillingness to do so.

**Alcohol:** Excessive use of alcohol is probably the most widely discussed Aboriginal social problem. Alcohol abuse contributes to neglect of children, violence, road accidents and so on. It also has a

bad effect on health, both directly, and indirectly through poor diet and lack of interest in personal hygiene.

Although there is no medical evidence to support this view, some people will argue that Aborigines are biologically vulnerable to alcohol. Others claim that Aborigines drink out of frustration with their situation. It is also argued that alcohol is a way of getting rid of tensions. Traditionally Aborigines had other ways of getting rid of tensions, such as arguments during which the hostile parties waved spears and shouted, while others held them back.

Aborigines may also point out that drunkenness is not a problem particular to them. Alcohol abuse is a major problem in the white community as well. Aborigines may feel discriminated against in that they often have no place to go while they are drinking. They are visible for all to see.

Alcohol abuse is a problem created by the contact situation, which is probably based on boredom, personal insecurity and cultural breakdown. It is also behaviour copied from non-aboriginal drinkers, past and present. Alcohol abuse has a vicious cycle built into it, in that Aborigines are so often imprisoned for drunkenness and related offenses. These punishments, imposed by a white society, often have the effect of creating more resentments, which in turn lead to further drinking.

As Aborigines are seeing more and more clearly that alcohol is a 'problem', so Aboriginal drinking behaviour is beginning to change. Aborigines are setting up their own rehabilitation centres, using methods suited to their culture and needs. Courses have also been established to train Aboriginal counsellors.

Some white people are so worried about Aboriginal drinking that every Aborigine is seen as a potential alcoholic. This can lead to some embarrassing situations, where a host is reticent to offer an Aboriginal person a drink lest he contributes to his downfall. One example of this occurred on a station at the end of shearing. Alcoholic drinks were supplied to all involved except the head stockman who was an Aboriginal. He was given Coca Cola, even though he was not known to be a heavy drinker. Naturally such treatment is resented by Aboriginal people and can backfire badly. Any Aboriginal person who is humiliated in this way is likely to go and get drunk to forget his hurt pride.

The use of alcohol is also of concern to Aborigines, and all shades of opinion about alcohol exist in Aboriginal society. Those who drink to excess are least likely to see alcohol as a problem. Usually it is shared with others and as such it heightens feelings of fellowship. It can make people feel strong and confident where previously they felt weak and powerless. Because alcohol was banned to Aborigines for so long it may also be a symbol of equality.

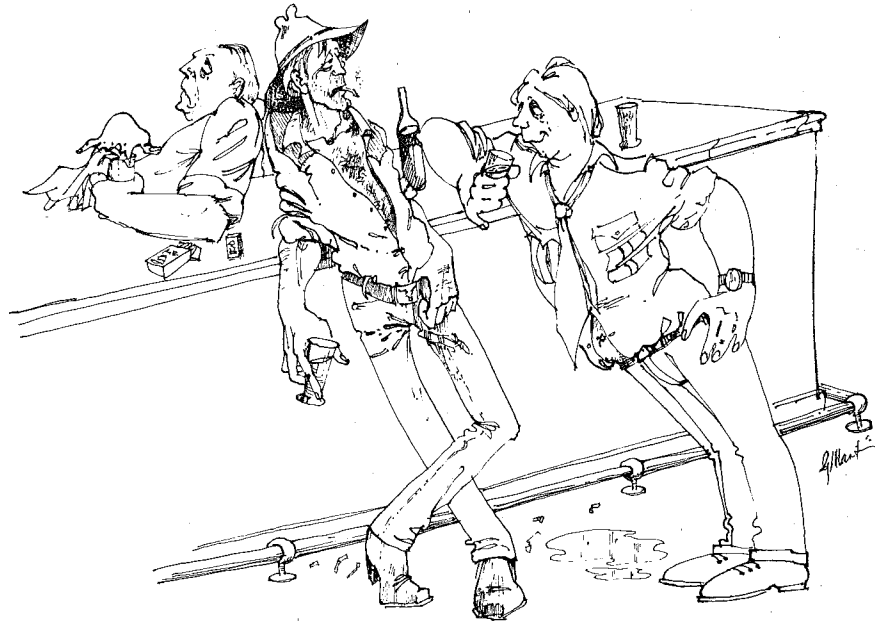
Aborigines who drink might well ask what else there is for them. Their role as hunter has gone, their land is no longer theirs, they are confronted by a perplexing and sometimes hostile white world. Other Aborigines, the tradition oriented elders, and those influenced by Christianity, or assimilated into the white community, may have a different view point. From their standpoint it is obvious that alcohol is an agent of destruction, yet they are powerless to do very much about it.

**Workers and Alcohol:** Aborigines in many remote communities have taken the step of banning alcohol altogether. In this situation Aboriginal initiatives in dealing with a problem has a direct bearing on the behaviour of a worker. Many workers do not consider that their own drinking should pose any problem — especially if they confine it to their own homes and non-aboriginal friends. Thus some workers drink openly, while other do it surreptitiously on the principle of 'what they don't know won't hurt them'. Still others do not drink at all.

A worker who drinks is breaking community rules, thus setting him or herself apart. Effectively the worker is saying 'your rules do not apply to me'. This can lead to resentment from people in the Aboriginal community, and there are a number of examples where conflict and suspicion has been created, especially where drinking has been open, and in flagrant disregard of Aboriginal wishes. The known presence of large quantities of alcohol in workers' houses has also led to break-ins by Aborigines — unpleasant incidents which could easily have been avoided.

No hard and fast guidelines can be given to resolve this problem. In many cases it would be wise to consult community leaders, but here workers need to be careful not to put leaders in an embarrassing position, where the question is framed in such a way that no refusal is possible. For example, if a worker was to say: 'I have a few drinks at

my place now and then, that's okay isn't it?'; then discussion is almost closed. Honest guidelines from the community could be obtained by asking something like: 'What is the community's feeling about people like me having drinks at their house?'



*Only problem with y'Abos is they can't handle their booze.*

**Housing:** Workers and other non-aboriginal people are often appalled by the lack of housing for Aborigines. Because most of us value a house for its privacy, its protectiveness and the way it reflects our personality, lack of a house is lack of a home. But to traditionally oriented Aborigines a house may be merely a shelter from rain and storms. In fact, the permanent occupation and upkeep of a house could be a burden — isolating them from others and cutting them off from the open skies. Moreover, it could further burden if a person dies in one of them, as tradition demands that a deceased person's possessions should be burnt. Even people from traditional areas who have had long contact will often shudder at the thought of going into a house where a person has died.

Housing programmes for Aborigines are often begun in a hasty

manner, with little understanding of Aboriginal concepts of shelter. Aboriginal people are then offered houses which they do not know how to maintain, and for which they are expected to pay rent, something they have no experience or concept of.

**Movement of People:** Aborigines tend to move around far more than the majority of people in the wider society and many workers find this creates problems for them. Teachers, for example, feel children need continuity in one school. When a person moves, files have to be redirected, and so on. When cheques are not received by Aboriginal people, *they* feel frustrated.

Some workers have wanted to resolve this problem by persuading or inducing Aborigines to settle in one place. Aborigines may then feel their way of life is under attack.

There is no simple way to resolve this 'problem' — but some things *can* be done to alleviate it. For example, workers need to be sure they explain the need to register a change of address, and the reasons why this is so. Departmental filing methods can also be reviewed.

**Dogs:** White people are often disturbed by the packs of lean and apparently unhygienic dogs that Aborigines generally keep around their camps and communities. Health workers worry that babies in contact with them will pick up diseases. Station owners despair when they attack lambs, and local shires occasionally send someone to shoot a number of them.

To Aborigines these dogs are not a problem. In fact they love them as pets, and whereas we might want to shoot an old dog because it is weak or crippled, Aborigines are likely to be particularly fond of it. After all, this is the dog they have had the longest — they are most attached to it! As traditional Aborigines have a different view of what causes ill health, the hygiene theory isn't likely to impress them either. The dogs traditionally had a part to play in people's well being, keeping them warm at night and scaring off evil spirits by their barking. Moreover, these dogs are scavengers, eating organic rubbish, often including faeces, which could otherwise cause the spread of disease.

**Consultation:** Because Aborigines often see 'problems' differently to non-aborigines, it is clearly important to consult with Aboriginal people both before programmes are begun, and while they are in

progress. Consultation (the exchanging of points of view and information) can happen both formally and informally.

Formal consultation between Aborigines and Federal and State Governments now occurs on a regular basis (the details of which are set out on pages 85-88). Informal consultation may occur when a worker and Aboriginal people sit down together under a tree.

Consultation is a positive step, recognizing the need for Aborigines to put forward their point of view.

Good consultation:

- is ongoing, preferably with the same people involved over a period of time, so that trust, friendship and understanding can develop.
- is followed by action. If Aborigines are constantly consulted for their point of view, which is then brushed aside, consultation is only 'window dressing'. Aboriginal people will soon become disillusioned, and either withdraw or respond with anger and aggression. Action taken should include dealing with queries and having the facts at hand for a meeting.
- takes place in a setting where Aborigines feel comfortable and free to express their point of view. Consult them about this!
- is conducted in a way that Aboriginal people can fully understand. In some communities this could mean simplifying meeting procedure, helping with the preparation of minutes or using interpreters. Visual aids including blackboards, slides, films and video can be very useful in some situations. Where consultation is informal, diagrams drawn on the ground can be very helpful in explaining something.
- means listening, and learning as well as talking and teaching.
- means giving Aborigines ample time to come to a decision.
- is based on openness, not secrecy. Aboriginal people are often insulted when workers draw individuals aside for 'private' sessions.

#### Further Reading

McQUEEN, H.—*Aborigines, Race and Racism*. Australian Connections Series, Penguin Books, Ringwood, Aust. 63pp.

GILBERT, K.—*Living Black*. Allal Lane, The Penguin Press, Melbourne 1977, 305pp.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### ADJUSTING TO THE NEW COMMUNITY

#### Introduction

In adjusting to their new job in a remote area, workers are likely to face certain problems in common, despite the different circumstances. Job effectiveness depends on the way the worker adapts to possible physical isolation, the local social scene, and on the relationship that develops with the Aboriginal community and other whites working in the same field. In this chapter we will look at the general process of adaptation, including the possible element of culture shock, and then explore some particular aspects of life in remote areas.

#### Preparing for the New Position

Before actually going to the field, most people experience excitement mixed with some uncertainty. In order to avoid a sense of 'let-down' and depression later, some of the following advice may be relevant.

**Background Information:** Find out as much as possible about the area and community you will be living in. It may be worth acquiring some books about the history and geography of the area if they are available.

**Reading:** Read whatever you can about Aborigines. But take warning: knowing about Aboriginal culture, land rights and so on won't necessarily be of great value in actually relating to Aborigines. In fact, some new workers who show off their knowledge in order to impress may find this back-firing on them.

**Facilities:** Work out what facilities are available. If there is no TV what will you (and your family) do during those long silent evenings? If you normally play squash to keep fit, how will you go about it in your new situation? If you are a person who enjoys lots of company,

what will you do when there are far fewer people to talk to? These are quite important questions; if you are using your time well, the whole experience will become more personally rewarding.

This may be a good time to take up some new interest or hobby, or possibly to enrol in some external course of study.

**Family Matters:** How is the situation likely to affect other members of your family? Sometimes the move can be more difficult for a worker's wife, who is removed from her own community, but may not have the compensation of an interesting new working life. During the initial period of adjustment, other members of the family may need extra care and support.

Where the worker is a woman with a family, it is the husband who may feel lost, especially if he does not have a full-time job in his own field of interest.

### **Early Problems**

While some workers settle into their new house and work with few problems, the majority find the early months of their new appointment perplexing and sometimes depressing. Depression may strike immediately, or after a period of initial excitement and enthusiasm. Suddenly it is lonely and the job seems impossible to cope with. Aborigines turn out to be hard to understand, the local white society seems dismal, and the climate abominable.

Other symptoms of stress sometimes develop too — psychological ones like forgetfulness, irritability, sudden changes in mood, fear of things that are not normally bothersome...the list is endless. Physical symptoms like weariness, jumpiness and difficulty in sleeping may occur. Headaches, vomiting and diarrhoea may also be experienced, all resulting in an extreme desire to leave.

While stress may well be an unavoidable part of the worker's situation (e.g. where there is considerable racial tension), it is likely that the many problems of this early period will be passing ones. Most people settle down once their surroundings and jobs are more familiar, and they have come to accept whatever constraints there are on life. If a crisis period develops it will help to remember that everyone in this situation sometimes doubts their ability to cope, even if they don't show it on the surface. Having problems in settling in is not really a problem — it is almost an inevitability!

It would probably help to be able to talk over these problems with your family, recognizing that other members of the family could be feeling much the same way. In extreme circumstances the 'culture shock' experienced can severely hamper a person's working relationships. While Aborigines and other whites alike are aware that newcomers take time to find their feet, others will soon realize the fact that a person is having trouble coping with his or her problems. Problems of adjustment then begin to cause difficulties in working relationships.

If workers feel constantly unhappy or find they are having work problems, they would be wise to contact their employing agency. A person in the field who is willing to share and talk over his/her problems is usually seen more sympathetically by 'the department' than one who pretends everything is going fine, even though it is obvious to others that all is not well.

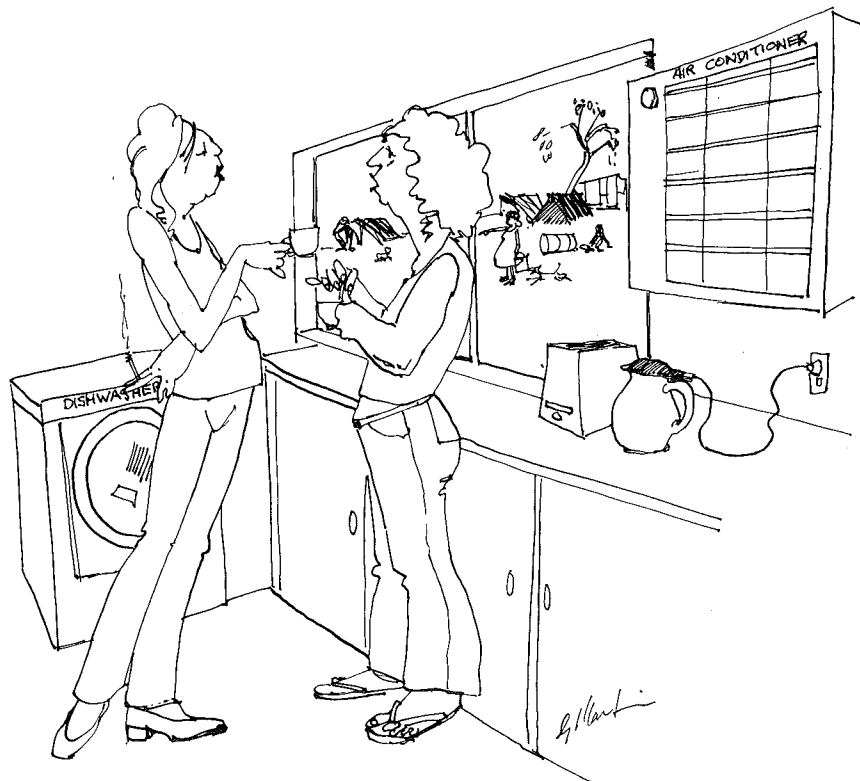
### **Return of Full Confidence**

Workers who overcome the first hurdles of life in remote communities, and go on to have an interesting and rewarding experience, tend to be those who get involved in their communities. Once a person makes friends with people in both the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities, the sense of isolation and of 'marking time' disappears.

Those who do not get involved often become cynical and disillusioned. Some of the possible unsatisfactory types of adjustment are explored on pages 68-71. In order to help the worker find a sense of confidence the rest of this chapter outlines areas where adjustment may need to be made.

### **Enjoying the White Community**

A lot depends on the size of the community in which you are placed. In bigger communities, the individual tends to be more anonymous, with a greater variety of people. In some smaller places consisting of a few families to a few hundred people, the network of relationships (and gossip) flies through the district on a highly efficient bush telegraph. Everyone knows about everything you do or say. The post-mistress may look long and hard at your mail, everyone discusses your weekend visitors, and the storekeeper's assistant discusses your diet, looks and haircut with all her customers.



*My dear, you've no idea of the conditions we have to put up with.*

Some people find this very personal kind of living refreshing, while others feel irritated — as though their every action is being watched and judged. For most people this feeling goes away when they become part of the community.

One disadvantage of very small communities is that tensions can run deep. A worker from a remote community recounted this example:

Every couple of weeks the mail would come in along with the supplies. Mail was our lifeline with the outside world and we all waited for it with baited breath. One Friday evening the mail came and I went to the lady who distributed it. She said she'd give it to me on Monday. I felt a sudden rush of anger, like I could have bashed her. Feelings tend to build up like that and you need to be careful you don't let them get the better of you.

Factions can be a destructive force in small communities. If people press you to join their faction in some conflict, it would be wise not to commit yourself, at least in the early stages. At the same time, it helps to be willing to make friends from the beginning, or you could get a reputation for snobbishness.

### Local Advice

In their desire to help a person get established in his or her work, people may urge the worker to seek advice of certain locals. Such advice can be useful, based on extensive local experience, but it can also be biased hearsay without much depth of understanding. Arguing against such local authorities while you are still 'green' may lead you to be classed as a 'smart upstart'. Better to listen and to make sure all second hand interpretations are tested against your own experience, especially where they have a direct bearing on your job.

### The Pace of Life

Another fact of outback community life is that it tends to move slowly. Even speech may seem flatter and more drawn out. Long delays in arrival of equipment etc. may be irritating until an attitude of calm acceptance takes over from the feeling of having to get on with it. 'Going like a bull at a gate' when you first arrive will not be of much use in the long term, and *staying power* rather speed is required in most things.

In time, many people come to appreciate the more relaxed pace of country life. The small intimate community becomes a very big part of their world. In fact, leaving is often a bigger shock than arriving, and many people find it difficult to readjust to city living. However, isolation can lead to narrowness of outlook, and it is useful to keep up with world events through newspapers, magazines, etc. In fact, a subscription before departure may be a good idea.

### Local Climate

Depending on the area and season, the new worker (and family) may be faced with extreme heat, humidity, freezing nights, sandstorms, insects etc.; a whole host of sensations and trials to test the temper. Air-conditioning helps but caution needs to be exercised in that sudden temperature extremes can lead to increased incidence of colds. When it is possible it helps to arrange the days to fit high



activity with cool periods. Most of all, an attitude of acceptance is important, as fighting the heat, dust and flies takes valuable energy.

### **The Landscape**

The actual landscapes surrounding us can have a powerful effect on how we feel, even though we're not always aware of it. For city dwellers the endless landscapes and the huge outback skies can seem frightening, especially when we're 'stuck' there, perhaps against our choice. The silence too can seem strange and eerie. It helps to have familiar pastimes to turn to; reading, music, games, etc., but it is also important to 'make friends' with the landscape, to learn something of the wild life the area supports, how the plant life survives local conditions, what Aboriginal myths and legends have to say about various local landmarks. All these things will help you to develop a sense of familiarity which will make the local area become a home.

### **Conclusion**

In this chapter there has been one glaring omission: that of adjusting to the Aboriginal community in your area. This subject will be covered in the following chapter along with some overall patterns of adjustment which can cause problems for workers.

## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **THE JOB**

#### **Introduction**

There are bound to be some difficulties in working with people of a different culture: regardless of whether you are providing some professional service or if you are working alongside Aborigines on a construction job. Most of the guidelines provided here will be to do with people providing some support or service, but some of them will be of use to those who work alongside Aborigines in their job. Officers of government departments (whether at Federal, State or Local Government levels) need to be aware of three areas where difficulties are liable to occur.

- They have to function within the requirements of their own Departments: yet be responsive to the particular needs of Aborigines.
- They are working alongside officers of other Departments: but possibly without much co-ordination or communication.<sup>1</sup>
- They are expected to work effectively with Aboriginal people: but often without much previous contact or experience. The following hints and suggestions may be of some use in overcoming some of these difficulties.

#### **Initial Nervousness**

Most new workers are rather nervous at the prospect of relating to Aboriginal people. This fear may take the form of nervousness and uncertainty, or of over-officiousness. Although almost all Aborigines have had dealings with non-aboriginal workers, it is quite probable that the Aboriginal person (or people) you first meet will also be shy, rather reluctant to talk much. Do not mistake such shyness for unfriendliness. Relax; you will survive the situation; try to frame some friendly question. Most Aboriginal people like to talk about their family or their country. It will take time for trust to

1. For details of inter-departmental co-ordination see appendix one, page 81.

develop, so do not attempt to hurry things or get right down to business. This is not wasting time; it is probably the most valuable thing you can do. Familiarizing yourself with people and their community is almost always a first priority.

### **Making First Friends**

In remote communities one person is often given the task of helping the new worker find his feet. This is an ideal situation. However, in some cases it may be that a person who makes friendly overtures in the early stages is unpopular in his or her own community, a lonely person or someone who thinks that a friendship with you will give some reflected glory. In this case the friendship could have some dangers attached to it.

Most workers who have enjoyed their experience in remote areas have made firm friends with Aboriginal people. Naturally there will be Aboriginal people you will feel closer to than others. In time you may develop particular friendships with one or two families. In the beginning, however, it would probably be wise to make a wide range of contacts, especially if different tribal groups are represented in your area.

### **The Official Role**

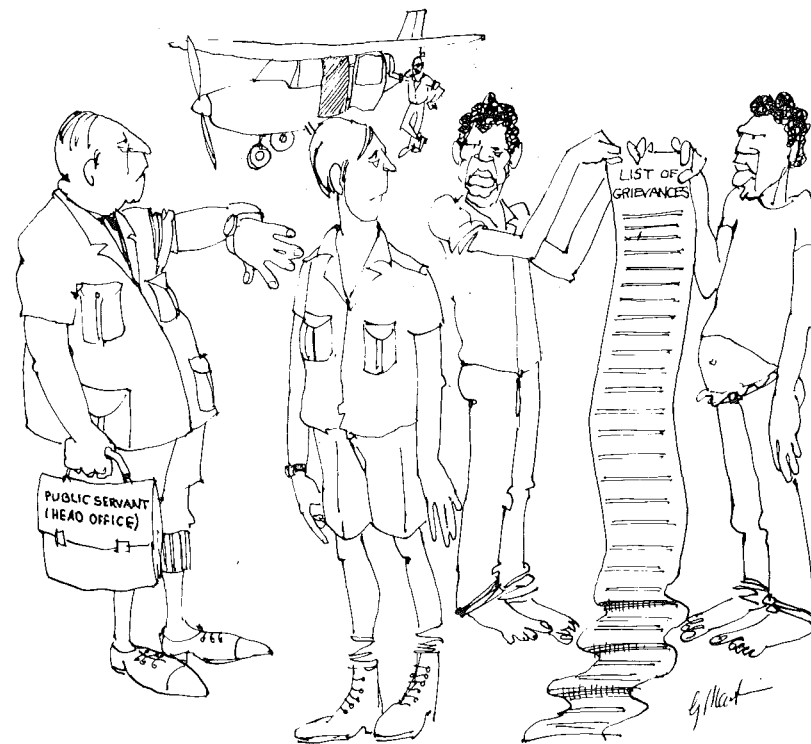
All Departments have rules and regulations. But exactly how these are carried out depends on the individual officer. When the going gets rough there is a temptation to hide behind the rule book rather than to find creative solutions. In these situations, workers also tend to become more officious, using formal language to cover up confusion or to get rid of a person. Rather than admitting a mistake directly it would be easy to say; 'there seems to be some irregularity...'. In such a situation the Aboriginal person is likely to be too embarrassed to press the point, thereby revealing his ignorance in the process. But the frustration and anger will be the greater for that, and trust will evaporate.

### **The Flying Visitor**

Politicians, administrators, experts and researchers all have a way of flying into a remote area for a few hours at a time.

Their hasty visits leave little time for relaxed discussion, and indeed 'flying visitors' often spend all their time conferring with the local

official of their Department, when the stated purpose of the visit might have been to find out about the situation at first hand. In fact, the visitors could be reluctant to meet Aboriginal people at all, especially if they have had little personal contact with Aborigines.



*I've got 10 minutes. I'd like a full report of their requirements.*

Field workers are often disparaging about the 'flying visitor', but such visits are inevitable, and probably necessary if people in 'Head Office' are to get any idea of overall developments in the field. People in the field have an important role to play in helping short stay visitors, who often rely on them for their advice and knowledge of the local situation. Aboriginal people also rely on the field worker to familiarize them with the visitor. The following guidelines, then, may be of use:

- Make sure that local Aboriginal people know well beforehand who the visitor is, and what the purpose of his or her visit will be.
- Try to ensure that the visitor will get as wide a sample of local Aboriginal opinions as possible. This will not only help the visitor, it will also help to develop trust if no favouritism is shown.
- Make sure that background information the visitor may require is at your fingertips.
- Be fair about Aboriginal viewpoints if the visitor asks for your interpretation. Personal opinions and prejudices can influence visitors who have no time to make their own assessments. Rather than saying: 'Don't listen to that Charlie —, he's absolutely hopeless,' it would be fairer to say: 'I personally don't like Charlie —'.
- Make a meeting between the visitor and Aboriginal people a first priority. Aborigines are sceptical about the visitor who spends most of his time at white people's houses.

### **Initiating Grand Projects**

Most people are impressed by visible signs of progress, such as new buildings, roads, factories and so on. The field of Aboriginal advancement is littered with the remains of projects which were the inspiration of white workers, but failed to meet Aboriginal needs.

For example, the building of expensive and sophisticated hospitals may satisfy our sense of progress. However, in many instances these have been little used because planners did not find out what kinds of facilities Aboriginal people would use. Projects such as turtle farming and fish processing have failed for similar reasons.

Often small-scale 'invisible' programmes in community organization are more worthwhile and appropriate than 'grand projects'. While this is not the place to argue the merits of various types of project organization, it is common sense to recognize that the needs of the Aboriginal community are more important than the glory which large projects may reflect on a worker or an organisation.

### **Inter-Departmental Co-operation**

Officers of various Departments often work alongside each other, and in smaller communities they usually meet socially as well. In

some towns, members of one Department may represent another, e.g. Community Welfare people may do some Social Security work. At times, however, workers may find they are frustrated by a lack of inter-departmental co-ordination, an overlap of responsibilities, and even actual conflict of goals.

Aborigines of course, find the same problems and pressures operating on them. They may feel hounded by a horde of government workers, all of them more or less telling them what to do, how to behave, what to eat, what to think, and how to raise their children.

To minimise personal frustrations and to help along the rather cumbersome machinery of government, workers should know the answers to the following questions.

- What problems do people in other Departments face?
- What goals are they trying to achieve?
- What are the functions, responsibilities and limits of power of other Departments and organizations?

It is also very useful to have some idea where funds can be obtained for projects. The local Department of Aboriginal Affairs office is probably the best place to start looking for this information.

In general a worker begins to understand the total picture by being alert, and interested in other people's roles and problems. People love to talk about their job and its problems if the listener is at all sympathetic.

### **Divided Loyalties**

Workers can be faced with a situation where the interests of the Department are different from those of the Aboriginal people they are working with. Teachers are only one kind of officer who commonly face this situation. For example, people in a community may want to take their children with them to ceremonies, funerals or family gatherings. Learning about their own country and being with their parents is educationally important from the Aboriginal point of view. Attending school is important from the Education Department's point of view. In such instances compromise needs to be made by both parties, and the worker has to be prepared to be the mediator.

### Sorting Out Areas of Responsibility

At times the functions of Departments overlap. This can mean that no Department is prepared to take responsibility for a particular problem, as for example, in the case with school truancy where the Education Department, Community Welfare and Police Departments all have some responsibility. Good inter-departmental co-operation can resolve many such problems. For example, at one Aboriginal school children were leaving for lunch but not returning to afternoon classes, the apparent reason being that there was no lunch for them. In this case the teachers and the Department for Community Welfare homemaker organized mothers to meet at a particular kitchen. Sandwich ingredients were arranged. The mothers prepared lunches which were delivered to the school before the lunch break. Mothers paid for the foodstuffs used every fortnight. In this way children were encouraged to stay at school all day.

### Timing Meetings

A convenient meeting time for you is not necessarily a good time for Aboriginal people. Initially meal times and times when people could be asleep should be avoided. Waking a person could be interfering with their 'dreaming'. This is particularly important with men. In some places a visitor at meal time should be given food and a certain amount of embarrassment could be caused by your arrival. Where drinking is a problem, morning visits are usually more productive. Certain days are usually reserved for shopping. Normally these are the days when pension cheques are received, and they are seldom useful for appointments, except when people make a point of visiting the town in which your office is located on that day.

Appointments made more than a week ahead are often forgotten. To many traditional Aborigines this is a 'longtime'. Calendars are seldom used except by westernized urban Aborigines.

### Placing Meetings

Often the place of meetings is determined by your job. In this case, make allowance for the fact that a meeting on your territory (the office) could cause an Aboriginal person to feel uncomfortable. When meeting a person at their own house or 'spot' take note that you are on their territory and that you need to abide by their notions of how to behave. For instance, the whole business of standing and

sitting is important when there are no chairs. The worker may not feel comfortable on the floor or the ground, yet standing could seem to be very formal, especially if the Aboriginal people are squatting or sitting. It is best to take your cues from your hosts. If they stand, you stand. If they sit, you sit.

### Using Gimmicks

Some workers in the past have used gimmicks or tricks to impress Aborigines, hoping that this would make them accepted. There is a story of one worker who took out his false teeth, in order to awe the 'ignorant natives' with his powers. It need hardly be said that Aborigines are generally unimpressed by such ploys.



*I wonder who on earth his dentist is!*

### Name Dropping

Some workers make the mistake of using 'name dropping' as a type of gimmick for establishing links with people. It is important to

begin to get to know people before mentioning the names of other people you know, as a general rule. Otherwise, it is possible to be seen as aligned to the 'wrong people'. This is not to say that establishing common links is not a vital part of developing relationships — it just requires sensitivity.

### Being Seen

As was mentioned earlier, Aboriginal people live a more public life than most westerners, and are available to each other most of the time. The worker who spends most of his early period at home, or in his office will find it difficult to develop fuller relationships with Aborigines. It is important to spend time with local people.

### Drawing the Line

Aboriginal and white opinions about a 'reasonable request' are often different. Workers sometimes feel 'strung out' by constant requests, which seem unreasonable, and sometimes downright rude. The irritation is often added to by a simple language problem — Aborigines asking for something often sound as though they're giving a command. Common requests framed this way include:

'Give me a lift . . . !'

'Buy me . . . !'

'Got any cigarettes?'

'Lend me some money . . . !'

Sometimes Aborigines may be testing your generosity and responses out when they ask for these things. At other times it may be a sign of trust. All the requests mentioned would be very reasonable between most Aboriginal people. But there are Aborigines who would like to see if you are a sucker who can be exploited. In responding to requests it would be wise to avoid extremes. Workers who refuse too many requests will produce resentment. Those who accede to all requests too easily later feel 'used up' and resentful.

One common cause of problems is when workers are called on for help during leisure hours. Concepts like the working day and weekend are not very important to traditional people. While most workers probably err in the direction of over-emphasising privacy, there are many who create their own problems and start to feel 'burnt out' by not ensuring sufficient privacy and leisure refreshment.

### Responding to Aggression

At times workers may be confronted by an angry man or woman, possibly drunk, who demands this or that, or tells the worker exactly what he (or she) thinks of him. While we tend to be hurt and insulted by such behaviour, especially in an office situation, a sudden outburst of temper is not considered to be a sign of rudeness or mental instability by traditionally oriented Aborigines. Although Aborigines prefer peaceful relationships, and often go to great lengths to avoid conflict, a sudden outburst of anger is a common way of relieving pressure and resentment. In this way long-term feuds and grudges are avoided.



*Aggression! Aggression! How to deal with aggression!*

Claims and accusations made in this situation are likely to be exaggerated, and the worker may only be the focal point of anger about many other things. At the same time it is wise to take note of what is being said; such outbursts *do* indicate how a person feels and gives a clue about what things are bothering him.

Obviously there can be no hard and fast guidelines for dealing with anger. People have their own responses to anger. In some situations it might be advisable just to listen as calmly as possible. Where a demand you cannot meet is being made, a firm refusal, together with an explanation is usually the best line to take. Making half promises as a way of avoiding a difficult situation can lay the groundwork for more problems later. It may be helpful to see the person the following day to explain the situation and restore the relationship.

But other responses could be more appropriate. A worker from Central Australia relates how an Aboriginal man lost his temper when he wouldn't lend him his utility. The Aborigine kicked the vehicle and hit it with a stick. The worker responded by rushing over to the man's hut, kicking and hitting it with equal vigour. This resolved the situation. However, such tactics are probably only advisable when the worker is experienced and confident in his role.

Another worker tells a story in which he inadvertently caused a tribal man to become insulted. The man came to his house, rattling spears. In this case the worker apologised, at the same time pointing out how they had a long-standing friendship, had gone hunting together and so forth. The situation was also resolved.

### **Getting Angry**

There are occasions when workers lose their tempers — it happens to all of us in much less frustrating situations. However, it helps if the person or people you lose your temper with understand *why* you are angry. Otherwise they are likely to think you are most unreasonable or even a little crazy. For example, a worker in Central Australia was heading a work team. It was hot and work was progressing slowly. At one point he found three men were sharing an axe, each taking a blow at a tree in turn. He lost his temper. The Aboriginal workers couldn't understand what he was getting upset about, and they walked off the job.

### **Abuse of Power**

There is a rather sad record of abuse of power by white officials in their dealings with Aborigines. Usually it has been justified by the argument that 'they don't understand anything else', or even 'they don't really feel pain'. Such weak excuses hardly need comment, yet the frustration of isolation, heat and misunderstanding can lead

officers to become deeply cynical. Local attitudes may support heavy handed behaviour and patronizing attitudes — and officers who adopt fair minded procedures may even find themselves being made fun of.

This issue can become even touchier when bullying or intimidation of Aboriginal people is being carried out by a superior, a colleague, or a member of another Department. No formula can be offered for solving this problem. Perhaps the most productive approach is to encourage Aborigines to stand up for their rights, both as individuals and communities. In some cases it might be appropriate to refer the matter to the Aboriginal Legal Service.

### **Being a Martyr**

There may be reasons why a worker may sometimes feel that local Aborigines do not appreciate 'special efforts' being made for them — whether in normal working hours or outside. Such reasons include:

- Aborigines feeling that yet another 'whitefella idea' has been tried to assist them.
- The worker's 'martyr complex' often comes in a period of pressure, fatigue or depression.
- The worker may expect appreciation to be shown as in his/her culture. People of all cultures express appreciation in their own time, way and place.

### **Taking Yourself Too Seriously**

A field officer needs to balance a serious approach to his duties (for thoroughness) with humour and lightheartedness. The worker who can share laughter and fun (as well as sorrow or worry) with local people will obviously be consulted more often, and will develop deeper relationships.

### **Making Promises**

A field officer is a long way from where major decisions are being made. But to local Aborigines and others, the worker may seem to be an important person, carrying a great deal of authority.

At times workers themselves get inflated ideas about their ability to make decisions, and make promises they can't keep. This is a very touchy area, and trust has often been lost when workers have failed to deliver the goods. Also Aborigines sometimes think that a sugges-

tion or some programme mentioned as a possibility is as good as done. This may happen because Aborigines, like most people, do not fully understand the workings of government bureaucracy. Or it may happen because of language problems. If a worker says: 'Setting up a playground could be a possibility', this may then be understood as: 'We will set up a playground'.

Therefore it is extremely important to explain *how* a decision will be reached, and what the limits of your influence and authority are.

### **Competition for Aboriginal Loyalties**

In some communities competition develops between workers as to how popular they are with Aborigines. People may say 'but of course, you know the Aborigines don't like Jones'. Or workers may play on their supposed acceptance in the Aboriginal community, mentioning the fact that they have been given a kinship 'skin' or label. In fact, some workers have been known to ask for 'skins' as a sort of seal of approval. While Aborigines may go along with them, they may also laugh at such people behind their backs, or resent them for being 'pushy'.

This kind of competition can be destructive to any team effort, and it is usually a sign that the person who indulges in it is feeling insecure. While workers need not 'cover up' for other workers, or defend them against reasonable criticism, an endless round of gossip and criticism makes for a destructive atmosphere.

### **Expectations**

Workers go out to remote areas mainly because they are hired to do a job, whether it be project officer, teacher, or nurse. After a while it may become clear that the things they expected to achieve in their jobs will not eventuate. This then sets the stage for feeling of frustration, or guilt or cynicism, and it may lead to application for a transfer, resignation or half-hearted involvement.

If you find yourself in this situation the following questions may help to sort out your thoughts.

- Is the pace you and your Department have set for the project a reasonable one? As you will know by now, Aborigines do not usually feel as strongly as we do about achieving goals quickly.
- Does your project involve changing Aboriginal people in some way? Is there agreement among Aborigines that this is a good

thing? Perhaps Aboriginal people are making life hard for you because they do not understand or even approve of what you are trying to do. In this case you need to go back to basic discussions with the Aboriginal community (see Consultation, p.47). This may involve changing your approach and your expectations about the goals you have set yourself.

- How do Aboriginal people see you and your role? If the previous worker had a different way of doing things, Aborigines may have gotten used to the style of that worker. Even if you think your approach is superior, there could be resistance. Time and a gradual acceptance of new ways will usually resolve such a problem.
- Are you taking on problems unnecessarily? Many Aboriginal problems should be referred back to the Aboriginal community. As an example, one worker found too many people on his vehicle, and he found it difficult to remove anyone. Each person he asked accused him of favouritism. Finally he told everyone in the camp that he would lose his license if he overloaded, and that *they* must decide who was going. After this the problem was dealt with by the Aboriginal community.

### **Working with Aboriginal Staff**

In the past, few Aborigines were appointed to the staff of government departments or voluntary agencies, even those working directly in Aboriginal communities. Fortunately, this has begun to change, and most departments and agencies now employ a few Aborigines, mainly as aides (not having full professional status), but in some cases as professional staff. Since most workers in remote areas will be working with Aboriginal colleagues at some stage, the following points may be useful.

### **Appointing Aboriginal Staff**

Aboriginal people are currently appointed for the following types of reasons:

- To improve communication between the organisation and Aboriginal people.
- To enable the organisation to operate more appropriately for Aboriginal community needs.
- To involve Aboriginal people throughout the organisation and within the professions.

- To provide stability and continuity of service in remote areas.
- The selection of the right person for the position may involve some of the following factors:
- English fluency: does the job require a person able to understand, speak and write English?
  - Aboriginal language fluency: Would it be an advantage for the staff member to be able to speak a local Aboriginal language?
  - Age: An older person is likely to command more respect in the Aboriginal community, but may not have much formal education or fluency in English.
  - Tradition-orientation: Some Aboriginal people are oriented more towards Euro-Australian culture, others towards their own traditional culture. Some jobs require a person who has 'been through the Law', because of the respect that this carries, or the understanding it brings. Such an Aboriginal staff member will be aware of sensitive areas and likely complications. Problems have arisen when non-traditional people have been appointed to work as aides with traditional communities.
  - Community standing: Similarly, an Aboriginal person who has widespread connections in a local area is likely to be a valuable worker.

### Training Aboriginal Staff

An Aboriginal who is appointed to a professional position has usually completed a required course of training. It is the para-professional — the Aboriginal aide or assistant — who is in greater need of training. Such training should include a combination of on-the-job supervised experience, and an extension of education in appropriate subjects. The employing authority is generally in the best position to offer the former, and Mount Lawley Campus of the W.A. College of Advanced Education offers two correspondence courses for Aboriginal people in remote areas. These courses are:

- General Education Certificate: To enable Aborigines to continue their education, especially to help in their jobs.
- Advanced Education Entry Certificate: To enable Aborigines to gain skills and qualifications necessary for entry into tertiary courses for full professional training.

Both these courses are conducted by correspondence so that

Aboriginal people can continue to live and work in their home communities. Local tutors are employed to assist in studies (See Appendix Two for details).

### Learning to Work with Aboriginal Staff

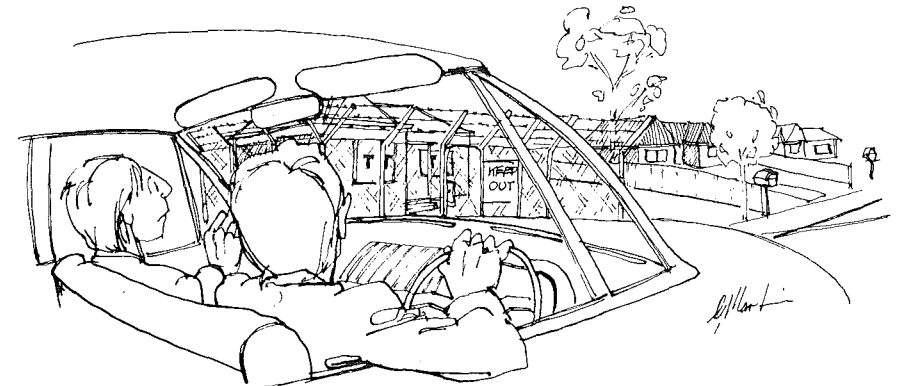
It is not only the Aboriginal staff who have to learn and train. Equally, non-Aboriginal staff need special training, both pre-service and in-service, in order to be able to work effectively with Aboriginal staff.

If the Aboriginal staff are appointed to professional positions, all staff should be beware of:

- Tendency for some staff and outsiders (clients, community members) to regard or treat the Aboriginal professional as a para-professional (aide or assistant).
- Overloading Aboriginal staff who probably take on many community responsibilities and be subject to many unique pressures within their professional work.

If the Aboriginal staff are in para-professional roles, there is a need for:

- A proper teamwork approach, with a wide sharing of duties as well as some specialisation based on cultural and personal skills.
- Allocation of reasonable tasks to the Aboriginal staff, not merely the routine, monotonous ones.
- Development of a sound training course with the components described in the preceding section.



*Last man we had wasn't very outgoing!*



### **Unsatisfactory Adjustments by Workers**

Throughout these last two chapters we have been concerned with some of the problems workers face in their social and working life. While every worker ultimately finds an individual way of adjusting, there are several types of adjustment that can be unsatisfactory in the long term. They include the following:

#### **Retreat Into Family and Home**

This is a very common but unsatisfactory judgement, arising when workers find their social and working situation too difficult. The individual finds that he or she does not really like the company of others in the local white community, but at the same time, he or she does not want strong links with the Aboriginal people. Effectively the person just goes through the motions and looks to the family for warmth and comfort.

This response cancels out the worker's effectiveness. It is also likely to create strains and tensions within the family, or at least give its members a sense of being at odds with others in the community. In most circumstances it leads to the early resignation of the worker. But there *are* cases where the worker will stay on for economic and career reasons. Equally, unwillingness to admit defeat could be the main factor. Whatever the case may be, such retreatism is an unsatisfactory adjustment. This is not to say that the sense of family or even privacy should be frowned on, or even that this kind of retreat is unjustifiable during particularly difficult periods. But in the long term it is detrimental to work effectiveness, and possibly to the emotional health of the family concerned.

**Retreat Into the White Community:** At times a worker finds that the effort of relating to Aboriginal people is too great, or he/she may fear that an open show of friendliness would not be acceptable to others in the white community. This could be a real problem, or something that arises out of a fear of breaking with convention. In order to be more acceptable, some workers may be disparaging about Aborigines when they are in the company of other whites. This is a very common but unsatisfactory adjustment that probably won't create personal problems for workers or their families, but it will most likely create barriers in working relationships. It also means the worker will fail to gain the satisfactions that go with working with

Aborigines. Relationships will be shallow, with little trust or understanding.

**Going 'Native':** Some workers feel strongly for Aborigines, so much so that they wish to identify as completely as possible. In very isolated circumstances this sometimes works, though it has serious drawbacks. For example, a worker at an isolated Central Australian outstation camped with a group of Aborigines for six months. Initially he refused to stay at white people's houses when he went to the nearby settlement of Warburton, feeling that this would cut him off from Aboriginal people.

Probably because of the role he took, Aboriginal people pressed him for the same rights and obligations that they practiced. He was asked for his shirt, trousers, blanket, and vehicle all in one day. He was unwilling to part with these basic possessions, even though he could probably have been clothed and fed by those who were obliged to him if he knew who they were.

The point here is that it is as difficult for a western person to enter into Aboriginal culture totally, as it is for a traditionally oriented person to enter western culture in one leap. The person can easily become a 'nowhere man', cut off from his own culture, but not fully accepted into Aboriginal culture.

Other problems also occur. The major one is that workers who completely identify with local Aborigines and reject their own culture often appear uncooperative, negative and unrealistic in the view of senior officers and other local workers. These workers may find support withdrawn or reduced, or may be transferred to a 'safer' locality.

### **Conclusion**

The answer to adjustment in the new situation lies in finding a balance between extremes. Constantly bending over backwards to help can exhaust a worker, while adopting a formal and distant stance will alienate Aboriginal people. Wishing you were somewhere else will make you feel dissatisfied, while being wholly absorbed in an isolated community can put you out of touch with the wider world. Learning to walk this tightrope can be difficult at first, but is essential.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATION

#### Introduction

Awareness of language problems is extremely important in working with people of another culture. We not only speak our language, but the very nature of our language influences the way we think. So even when people have learned something of each other's language, some misunderstandings almost always arise.

Many other factors also enter into communication. Our eyes, hands and bodies can convey more than words in many situations, and Aborigines use all of these ways of communicating differently to ourselves.

While many communication problems are subtle, and beyond the scope of this Handbook, practical guidelines given in this chapter may be useful in the initial stages.

#### The Nature of Aboriginal Languages

Most 'white' Australians know little about Aboriginal languages apart from the fact that they provide some interesting place names. Some people hold the mistaken belief that there is *an* Aboriginal language, which is primitive, containing maybe a few hundred words, and which really has no future in the modern world.

In fact:

- Aboriginal societies represent an astonishing number of languages and dialects. Many of these languages were unrelated. The size of speech communities varied between 60 and 2,000 people. Many Aborigines are multi-lingual, speaking several languages.
- The grammar of Aboriginal languages is rich and complex, and can express the same thoughts and messages as the languages of so-called civilized nations. Anyone learning an Aboriginal language will talk of impressive and intricate grammatical devices.
- The vocabularies of Aboriginal languages are as elaborate and as large as other languages. However, the vocabulary serves

Aboriginal interest, having lots of words dealing with plants, animals, hunting, religious beliefs and kinship. Lacking words for technical subjects, Aborigines have enlarged their vocabularies by:

- a. Expanding the meanings of words. For example, Wanumbal people of the Kimberley named the aeroplane *kandjal* or eaglehawk.
- b. Borrowing. Thus mission has become *midjin*. In the same way English has borrowed words like spaghetti and kindergarten.

In this way speakers of Aboriginal languages are able to deal with the modern technical world, but still retain the language that best expresses their culture and tradition.

- There is now a widespread recognition that language is an important part of the identity of a people, and that it is important to respect Aboriginal languages.

#### Survival of Aboriginal Languages

While it is clear that Aboriginal languages could function in modern society, it is not certain how much chance of survival they have under pressure of a technologically oriented society.

The Western Desert language and its dialects are an example where speakers stretch over a vast area. In two centres (Warburton and Ernabella) bilingual programmes have been a notable success. Primers and other secular and religious books have been printed in the Western Desert dialects of Pitjantjatjarra and Ngaanyatjarra, raising them to literate languages.

On the other hand many Aboriginal languages and dialects have disappeared completely, while others have only a few surviving speakers. Moreover, some communities contain speakers of four or five different languages and this can cause considerable problems. Finally, Aborigines are more mobile than in the past, and linguistic boundaries are less distinct.

Despite the problems Aboriginal people are becoming more conscious than ever that their languages are important.

#### Language and Everyday Communication

Obviously the best solution to the language problem is for the worker to become fluent in the local language. This is not always

practical, but an effort to learn at least some 'key' words is always appreciated. It shows a level of interest and respect which will have many side benefits. It can also be an endless source of mutual mirth, creating a relaxed and friendly feeling.

In many areas Aborigines speak excellent English, and for some it is their native language. Even so, it can take a while to get used to their distinctive accent. In some places Aborigines speak what is termed Aboriginal English. As happened in most colonial situations, Aborigines learned a kind of simplified English which was partly based on grammatical patterns of their native languages. Many white people thought Aborigines were unable to learn to speak grammatical English, and found Aboriginal English 'cute'. In this way language became another form of discrimination.

This does not mean that every worker has to correct Aboriginal people's English. In fact it is likely that you will 'pick up' some of the common words and sentence structures of Aboriginal English. There is nothing wrong with that. It is when people falsely 'put on' Aboriginal English that Aborigines often feel they are being mocked or condescended to.

In communicating effectively the following hints may be of use:

- Speak clearly and slowly when the person with whom you are speaking is not fluent in English.
- Be careful of figurative speech. Expressions such as 'clear as mud', 'it's raining cats and dogs', can be confusing to a person who is unfamiliar with them.
- Avoid complex constructions. A phrase such as: 'You didn't do that, did you?' may cause confusion.
- Don't lose your temper or raise your voice when a person doesn't understand you. This will only make a person frightened, confused or angry.

If an Aboriginal person laughs when he or she has not understood you, it is probably due to embarrassment, not glee at your misfortune. Of course it *is* possible for an Aboriginal person not to want to understand a particular thing you have to say, but it would be unwise to jump to conclusions. Perhaps there is a good reason for evasiveness that you do not understand. It would be wise to make sure before you take exasperated action.



*So where's this woman b'long you now?*



*You are required, of course, to render us fully cognizant of all the pertinent information as regards your litigation.*

### Specific Problems

**Time:** Some excellent examples of language problems are presented in the South Australian *Culture Training Manual for Medical Workers*.<sup>1</sup> In trying to get a medical history a nurse has the following conversation:—

Nurse: 'Have you been sick like this before?'

Patient: 'Yes.'

Nurse: 'How long ago?'

Patient: 'Long time ago.'

Nurse: 'Can you tell me when it was? Was it more than six months ago?'

Patient: 'Yes, long time ago.'

Nurse: 'Was it perhaps more than ten years ago?'

Patient: 'Yes, long time ago.'

1. See further reading list on p.94.

Without understanding the situation it might be thought the patient was dimwitted or unco-operative. In fact it is simply that time has a different meaning, so that while the individual words are understood, the concepts they stand for are not. Had the nurse been aware that Aborigines identify time by stages of life or historical events, she could simply have asked 'when was it?' or 'was it before the recent flood?' etc.

**Numbers:** Older Aborigines sometimes find western mathematics a problem. Traditionally Aborigines had no need to count beyond five or six; anything beyond that number was 'many'. Fractions were also unknown. In such situations ingenuity needs to be used, or a younger person consulted.

**The Use of Interpreters:** While the use of interpreters may at times be indispensable in your work, a number of possible hazards exist. You will need to make sure that the interpreter knows the exact dialect of the person you wish to talk to. Miscommunication has often occurred because the interpreter gave the general gist of the conversation, but changed some meanings because he did not pick up everything that was being said. In one dialect, for example, the word for 'hit' might be the same as the word for 'kill' in another dialect. Misinterpretation in a police report or court room could have dire consequences. For the same reasons the interpreter needs to speak reasonable English. It is also wise to find out how the interpreter and your client or informant are related. The rules of conduct in how people relate to brother, sister, parents, nieces, nephews, etc. may make it improper to broach certain subjects when both are present.

**Names:** We usually identify people by their christian and surnames, but an Aboriginal man may have several 'personal' names. These may include everyday names, including nicknames for use between kinsmen, and ritual names for use only on specific occasions or in certain circumstances. People can also be referred to by their section name, subsection name or moiety name. They could also be referred to by their cult or totemic name. Or identification could be made by referring to their position in the kinship system, with the individual's relationship to someone else stressed rather than his/her own name.

So depending on the situation involved an individual could be identified in any number of ways. For example, he may be called Kumaranynga (his personal name) by some people, or Tjampu ('left

handed'), his nick name. He may be called Tjakamarra (his subsection name) by others. He might also be referred to as X's uncle or Y's father. These are all appropriate labels, not necessarily an indication that people are trying to be evasive. As was mentioned in Chapter Two, names of the recently deceased are also avoided, so that others with the same name may change their name.

### **Other Forms of Communication**

Language is only one form of communication. The way we look at people, how we hold our bodies, whether or not we touch them: these are all ways of communicating. Aborigines have also developed a form of sign language with their hands which is used in silent communication, and much can be said in this way.

**Communicating With Eyes:** In normal conversation Aborigines generally look directly at each other. However, there are many situations where direct looking is considered impolite. If an argument is going on in a camp situation everyone listens and watches — but this is done unobtrusively.

**Physical Contact:** Aboriginal men touch each other more often than would be normal among white people. Certain kinsmen in particular may walk together hand in hand. Handshaking is now a common form of greeting, but the bone crushing handshake is definitely out and in general hands are held longer than we are accustomed to.

### **Further Reading**

BRUMBY, E. & VASOLYI, E.—*Language Problems and Aboriginal Education*. Aboriginal Teacher Education Programme. Mt Lawley C.A.E. 1977. W.A. 208pp.

## **CONCLUDING COMMENTS**

### **Introduction**

In concluding, it is fitting that Aboriginal people should have the last word. Because of the need for brevity only a few comments have been selected to illustrate, from an Aboriginal point of view, some of the main points made in the previous chapters.

### **Treat Us As People**

*It doesn't matter if a person makes mistakes. But when he is stuck up or talks down to me I get mad inside. Nearly every day I get some little reminder that white people look down on me. Well, you learn to ignore it I suppose. But then it happens when you think someone should know better. I'm a teacher aide, and this morning we were in a group at an in-service course. The teacher treated us like children. 'Put your pens down.' 'Don't touch the blackboard, will you?' I was so angry it was hard to concentrate. Why do they do things like that? We were all grown up people. I am older than she is.*

Teacher Aide

Fortunately some Aboriginal people also have positive experiences with workers.

*There was a new social welfare chap came to town. When he got there he told a few people he was sorry he never worked with Aboriginal people before. He said he's only read books. He didn't talk much and kept to himself a fair bit. We thought he was going to be hopeless. But everybody noticed he was polite. And after a while he made friends with some young fellers. Now they all like him, he says hello to people, he stops for a yarn. It turned out he was the shy one.*

Welfare Aide

### **Teach Us To Do Things Ourselves**

Many Aboriginal people want to be more involved. They want white workers to teach Aboriginal people some of their skills, and to involve them in projects. The Aboriginal manager of one community stated:

*When things are built by people who live here they think of them as their own things. A bloke who helped build a hall will stop the kids from damaging it. He worked hard to build that. But when a contractor comes in and builds things then people don't care. They don't think it's their own. They've got no pride in it. Plenty more where it comes from.*

Or as a man from the Western Desert put it:

*We want white people to help us. They know how to do things we can't understand. But they've got to teach us too. If a nurse comes she should teach some of the women. Or the storekeeper. He could get an Aboriginal to help him. To teach him the job.*

### **Respect Our Authority**

More Aboriginal people are in positions where they have some authority over white workers. In a few cases they have found this authority being undermined:

*In this community people should come to the office before they do anything. There is even a sign up about it. But some people just drive in and take no notice. It would be different if a white person was in charge.*

### **We Have Our Way Of Treating White People**

*When a new worker comes we give him a fair go. The bloke will be nervous for a while. If he works with us someone might ask for a smoke. If he says no people talk about it. If he says yes, we might do something for him. If he's rude we let him know in different ways. We don't talk to him. Sorta keep out of his way. When he asks us something we don't do it. After a while the feller leaves. They gotta work with us, not against us.*

## **APPENDIX ONE**

### **FORMULATION AND ADMINISTRATION OF GOVERNMENT POLICIES**

#### **DEPARTMENT OF ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS**

Throughout Australia the Department of Aboriginal Affairs is responsible for matters concerning Aboriginal people. D.A.A. seeks to encourage and assist Aboriginal people, to act on their behalf in their efforts to improve their situation in areas of housing, health, education and employment.

There are many other departments and organizations involved in Aboriginal affairs and D.A.A. acts as a co-ordinating body developing general policies and guidelines for all the activities of these groups.

#### **Functions of D.A.A.**

The functions of this Department have been established as being to:

- (a) provide for consultation with persons of Aboriginal descent;
- (b) recognize and support as may be necessary the traditional Aboriginal culture;
- (c) promote opportunity for the involvement of persons of Aboriginal descent in the affairs of the community, and promote the involvement of all sectors of the community in the advancement of Aboriginal affairs;
- (d) foster the involvement of persons of Aboriginal descent in their own enterprises in all aspects of commerce, industry and production, including agriculture;
- (e) provide consultative, planning and advisory services in relation to the economic, social and cultural activities of persons of Aboriginal descent, and advise on the adequacy, implementa-

tion and co-ordination of services provided or to be provided from other sources;

- (f) make available such services as may be necessary to promote the effective control and management of land held in trust by or for persons of Aboriginal descent; and
- (g) generally to take, instigate or support such action as is necessary to promote the economic, social and cultural advancement of persons of Aboriginal descent in Western Australia, and to that end to apportion, apply or distribute the moneys available to it.

### **Organization and Structure of D.A.A.**

Now that the Aboriginal Affairs Planning Authority is associated with the Department of Aboriginal Affairs, the two organizations operate jointly.

### **Community Development Work**

Through the Community Development section of D.A.A., advice and support are available to Aboriginal groups and communities. These activities may be of a social or cultural nature such as local advancement groups developing facilities like community centres, or business ventures like market gardens, pastoral properties or fishing activities. It is the D.A.A. officers in the Field Services section who provide this support.

### **Field Services**

There are seven regional offices of D.A.A. in W.A. and each is staffed by:

**Area Officer:** senior officer responsible for the co-ordination of all programmes in the region.

**Senior Community Advisor:** responsible for providing support and advice to Aboriginal groups and communities.

**Investigations Officer:** deals with aspects of funding and management of projects in the area — investigates whether D.A.A. can support projects.

**Field Officers:** Aboriginal people employed to work in all the communities in the region. Usually one field officer per region. Involved in consultation with communities, helps groups work out what programmes they want, etc.

**Clerical Staff:** deal with clerical and other office duties.

### **Community Services**

In some Aboriginal communities a D.A.A. community advisor is directly involved to support, co-ordinate and assist in its various development programmes. Community advisors do not act as administrators and they may be involved in many of the local programmes themselves, seeing this as a means of educating the local people to take increasing responsibility and control over their own affairs.

In addition to providing personnel to support communities, D.A.A. is also able to provide financial support for groups who are undertaking new ventures. To meet the housing needs of Aboriginal people D.A.A. makes funds available to housing societies within communities.

### **Research and Extension Services**

The duties of this section include providing current statistical information researching areas relevant to Aboriginal affairs and making information about D.A.A. and Aboriginal people available to the general public.

### **Funding Role Of D.A.A.**

The Department is responsible for making funds available to communities, groups and organizations for the following reasons:

**Capital Fund:** loans are made available to Aboriginal groups and individuals for approved enterprises.

**State Grants:** State departments and agencies receive funds from D.A.A. to support their activities in meeting the educational, health, housing and welfare needs of Aborigines.

**Direct Grants to Communities:** Aboriginal groups and communities can receive funds directly from D.A.A. to enable them to undertake various programmes at the local level.

**General Grants:** There are other Aboriginal groups which have received financial support for programmes designed to improve conditions for Aboriginal people.

**Contact:** The Department of Aboriginal Affairs

CAGA House

256 Adelaide Tce

Perth, W.A. 6000.

Telephone: 09-325 3511

Postal Address:

P.O. Box N1127

Perth, W.A. 6001.

## **ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS PLANNING AUTHORITY (A.A.P.A.)**

Although the Department of Aboriginal Affairs is primarily responsible for administering the Commonwealth Government's Aboriginal policies; the State Government is also involved in Aboriginal Affairs through the A.A.P.A. The Administrative Head of the A.A.P.A. is also the State Director of the Department of Aboriginal Affairs. In effect the A.A.P.A. is composed of three main bodies. These include:

### **Area Aboriginal Consultative Committees**

There are seven such committees, each of them meeting bi-annually in Perth, Bunbury, Kalgoorlie, Geraldton, Port Hedland, Derby and Wyndham. Committees consist of Aboriginal people and they are involved in:

- a. Funding and programming matters.
- b. Setting priorities for the allocation of funds between communities and organizations within their own areas.
- c. Discussion of general issues concerning policy.

### **Aboriginal Advisory Council**

This committee is composed of fourteen members chosen from the seven Area Aboriginal Consultative Committees. A wide range of issues are discussed in the Council, including matters which cannot be resolved at the local level. Discussions and consultations with State or Federal Ministers may eventuate from decisions made by the Advisory Council.

### **Aboriginal Affairs Co-ordinating Committee**

This is a statutory committee composed of members of most State and Federal Departments which are in any way involved with Aborigines. It meets monthly to discuss and plan a co-ordinated approach.

**Contact:** Aboriginal Affairs Planning Authority  
256 Adelaide Tce, Perth 6000.

Telephone:  
09-325 3511

## **ABORIGINAL LANDS TRUST**

The Aboriginal Lands Trust is a statutory body under the Aboriginal Planning Authority Act of 1972-73. In its Annual Report of June 1977 its role was described (p.24):

'The main role of the Trust is as a land holding body and in this capacity it holds land under various forms of tenure; as reserves, as freehold, as leases under The Land Act and as leases under the Mining Act.'

The Trust endeavours to restrict this role to that of land holding with the management of land, including its usage, being the prerogative of the resident Aboriginal population. It, however, has two functional aspects regarding reserves:

#### a. Reserve Entry Permits

Permits are issued by the Trust after approval has been received from the community.

#### b. Mining

The Trust's role in respect of mining is to consult with the people and act in accordance with their wishes. It forms a buffer relieving Aboriginal communities from the pressure of mining companies and attempts to influence government policy as sought by the people.

In addition to its main role as a land holding body, the Trust also acquires land. It supports requests by Aborigines and provides the administrative service for its acquisition. In this role it seeks funds. It also instigates the acquisition of land where the need is apparent but where there is no vocal current Aboriginal interest. In this regard its aim is to cater for the future needs of Aborigines.

**Contact:** Aboriginal Affairs Planning Authority.  
256 Adelaide Tce., Perth 6000.

Telephone:  
09-325 3511



## NATIONAL ABORIGINAL CONFERENCE

The National Aboriginal Conference was created as a national body elected by, and composed of Aborigines to advise the Federal Government on matters concerning Aborigines.

### Membership

Every three years, elections are held for N.A.C. members. Any person of Aboriginal descent over 18 can nominate for election. One member is elected from each district which are similar to D.A.A. regions. Elections are run by the Australian Electoral Office with help from D.A.A. All Aboriginal people in the area can vote for whoever they wish to become their N.A.C. member.

### Remuneration

Members are expected to work full time for the N.A.C. once elected. They receive a salary and other allowances which help them set up an office and to visit all the Aboriginal people they represent.

### Duties

Every member will do his job differently according to the people he represents and the area he is in. All members must go to the Annual Meeting (usually in Canberra) once a year and participate in their own state branch of the N.A.C. at least twice a year.

Members may also be elected to represent their state on the National Executive which meets several times each year. The Executive also forms special committees to consider vital areas such as housing and employment, which means additional meetings for members of these committees.

Members must also keep in close contact with Aboriginal people, which probably involves visiting outlying areas, consulting with Aboriginal organizations within their area and liaising with government departments which deal with Aboriginal people such as Housing Commissions and Community Welfare.

### Functions of N.A.C.

Through the N.A.C. members, Aboriginal people can:

1. express their opinions on existing programmes for Aborigines (such as housing, medical services, welfare programmes).

2. Say what they think the Government should do in the future for Aborigines by giving guidelines for future policies.

## NATIONAL ABORIGINAL EDUCATION COMMITTEE

The National Aboriginal Education Committee (N.A.E.C.) is a nineteen-member all-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander committee established in October 1976 to provide informed Aboriginal and Islander views to the Commonwealth Minister for Education and his Department. Advice on education matters is also given to the Department of Aboriginal Affairs. The Chairman is full-time; all other members are currently part-time. Every State and Territory, except Western Australia, has now established a State Consultative Group on Aboriginal Education to advise the State Minister for Education and his Department.

**Contact:** National Aboriginal Education Committee

P.O. Box 826,

Woden, A.C.T., 2606

Telephone: 062-89 7204

## OTHER ABORIGINAL CONSULTATIVE BODIES

Channels for consultation with Aboriginal people now exist in a number of departments. It is important that workers assist Aboriginal people to voice their feelings, aspirations and suggestions in the most appropriate ways. This is difficult in remote areas, because most consultative committees are based in the metropolitan area or capital city. It is particularly difficult in the case of traditional Aboriginal communities, who often do not recognise such consultative committees as having any authority, and who operate in different ways.

## APPENDIX TWO

### ASSISTANCE AVAILABLE TO ABORIGINES

#### COMMONWEALTH EDUCATION DEPARTMENT ASSISTANCE

##### Aboriginal Study Grants Scheme

The Aboriginal Study Grants Scheme exists for Aboriginal and Islander students who want to continue their studies after leaving school.

Courses of any length can be undertaken on a:

- (a) full or part-time basis
- (b) correspondence basis at a University, Advanced Colleges of Education, business college, W.A.I.T., or Agricultural College
- (c) other courses of study at other educational institutions are also considered.

##### Aboriginal Secondary Grants Scheme

Grants available to full-time students of Aboriginal or Islander descent who are attending an approved secondary school.

##### Aboriginal Overseas Study Awards Scheme

Up to 10 awards are made available each year to enable Aboriginal-Islander people to add to their skills and experiences through short-term programmes of study, observations and discussions overseas. Preference may be given to those already involved in community work. Programmes normally last from one to six months.

For information on the above schemes direct your enquiries on:

Aboriginal Study Grants, Aboriginal Secondary Grants and Aboriginal Overseas Study

to: The Director  
Commonwealth Department of Education  
6th Floor, 'Lombard House'  
251 Adelaide Terrace  
PERTH, W.A. 6000 Telephone: 09-325 2411

### SPECIAL STUDIES COURSES FOR ABORIGINAL PEOPLE

<b>Western Australian College of Advanced Education</b>	
<b>Mount Lawley Campus</b>	09-272 0444
General Education Certificate Course	09-272 0551
Advanced Education Entry Certificate Course	09-272 0551
Diploma of Teaching: Primary	09-272 0567
Associate Diploma in Applied Arts and Sciences	09-272 0567
<b>Nedlands Campus</b>	09-386 0213
Diploma of Teaching: Secondary	09-386 0213
Associate Diploma in Recreation	09-386 0213
Associate Diploma in Library Media	09-386 0213
<b>Education Department of Western Australia</b>	
<b>Early Childhood Section</b>	
Basic Child Care Courses	09-420 4542
<b>Pundulmurra Special Aboriginal Agricultural School</b>	091-72 1477
<b>Technical and Further Education: Aboriginal Access</b>	
Basic Literacy Course	09-420 4111
Aboriginal Access Course	09-420 4111
Advanced Aboriginal Access Course	09-420 4111
<b>Western Australian Institute of Technology</b>	09-451 4738
Aboriginal Bridging Course	
Liaison Officers Course	
Aboriginal Alcohol Counsellors Course	
<b>Community Services Training Centre</b>	09-444 9888
Residential Child Care Course	
Senior Hostel Assistant Course	

##### For Information on these courses, contact:

Commonwealth Department of Education  
251 Adelaide Terrace, Perth, 6000

Ph: 09-325 2411

## DEPARTMENT OF EMPLOYMENT AND INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS

This Department is involved in special projects for training Aborigines through the National Employment and Training Scheme. Special funds exist for training Aborigines in marketable skills. Provision is made for on the job training, correspondence courses, and enrolment at schools, colleges and universities.

Employers are subsidized for training on the job; Aborigines are paid a training allowance while enrolled at educational institutions. Living away from home allowances are available, as are return fares, which depend on the length of training involved.

For further information contact your local Commonwealth Employment Service Office.

### THE ABORIGINAL LEGAL SERVICE

The Aboriginal Legal Aid Service arranges for legal assistance to be made available to Aborigines and Islanders for:

- (a) representation in courts and tribunals throughout Australia where the Aboriginal has grounds for such representation;
- (b) advice on matters in which the Aboriginal has or is likely to have direct interest, whether personally or as a member of a group;
- (c) assistance in non-contentious matters where this is likely to be of direct benefit to the Aboriginal.

#### Contact:

Aboriginal Legal Service W.A. Inc.  
143 Edward Street  
East Perth, W.A. 6000  
Telephone 09-328 8555

### ABORIGINAL PUBLICATIONS FOUNDATION INC.

The aim of the Foundation is to publish books, pamphlets and other publications for and by Aborigines. The promotional work carried out by the A.P.F. is now under the control of the Aboriginal Arts Board. Membership is open to Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders. Non-Aboriginal people may become associate members.

### Publications

*Identity* — An Aboriginal Journal.

*Forum* — A monthly newspaper for Aborigines and Islanders.

*Australian Aboriginal Culture Project Materials* — (free to school children).

### ABORIGINAL DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION

A Commonwealth statutory authority which has funds for purchase of land for Aboriginal communities, funding of loans for Aboriginal housing and business projects, and other types of assistance.

#### Contact:

Regional Manager  
Aboriginal Development Commission  
Picadilly Suite, Nash Street  
Perth, W.A. 6000  
Telephone 09-325 8399

## APPENDIX THREE

### REGIONAL ABORIGINAL ORGANIZATIONS

#### KIMBERLEY LAND COUNCIL

This organization acts as a liaison group for most Aboriginal communities in the Kimberley area. It is also active as a lobby group for land rights. It is a non-statutory body (unlike its counterparts in the N.T.), and relies on donations from individuals and groups.

#### Contact:

The Chairman  
Kimberley Land Council  
P.O. Box 377  
Derby, W.A. 6728  
Telephone Derby 91 1220

## PITJANTJATJARA COUNCIL

The aim of the Council is to develop consensus on major political and social issues affecting Aboriginal people in central Australia, an area covering parts of Western Australia, South Australia and Northern Territory.

### Contact:

The Chairman  
Pitjantjatjara Council  
P.M.B. Amata  
via Alice Springs

## THE NOMADS GROUP (STRELLEY)

The Nomads group is a traditionally oriented group of 500 to 600 Aborigines living on pastoral properties centre around Strelley Station, 60 kilometres south-east of Port Hedland.

The group was formed in 1942 to provide leadership for the Western desert people and to continue their struggle for their constitutional rights.

The stability of the group has been maintained by policies of non-violence, no alcohol and a co-operative economic system.

The group's independent education programme requires maximum involvement of the community, thus ensuring minimum conflict with traditional law and social structure. At present, six independent Aboriginal community schools are run by this group.

### Contact:

P.O. Box 139, Port Hedland  
W.A. 6721

or

Nomads Charitable and Education Foundation  
18 Kalamunda Road  
South Guildford, W.A. 6055  
Telephone 09-279 4308

## SOME USEFUL PUBLICATIONS

There is an enormous range of literature available on the subjects covered in this Handbook. However, a few publications, some of which have already been mentioned in the text, stand out as being very relevant and easy to read. Hopefully copies will be available in departmental libraries.

Berndt, R.M. & C.H.—*Pioneers and Settlers*.  
Pitman, Australia, 1978, 150pp.

This is a readable and interesting account of Aboriginal cultural orientations, which emphasises that Australian history started long before white settlers arrived. It also contains a brief section on early contact and the current situation. This book avoids technical language and makes valuable reading for any worker.

Berndt, R.M. (ed.)—*Aborigines And Change*.  
Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies. Humanities Press N.J.  
U.S.A. 1967 400pp.

This book has some 28 articles covering a wide range of contemporary Aboriginal issues. These include such things as changing traditional life, economic and health issues, part Aborigines, problems of identity and so on.

Biskup, P.—*Not Slaves, Not Citizens*  
Uni of Queensland Press, Australia, 1973. 270 pages plus appendices.

A fairly comprehensive historical account of Aborigines in W.A. from first contact until 1954. Explores in detail issues mentioned in Chapter Three, and is very useful in providing a background perspective on Aboriginal problems today.

Brody, H.—*The People's Land*  
Penguin, U.K., 1975. 240pp

This book describes and analyses problems between white workers and Eskimos in Canada's far north. There are some fascinating parallels with Aboriginal situations, and though the style of the book is mildly academic in places, the examples given are straight forward and readable.

*Cultural Training Manual for Teachers in Aboriginal Communities*

Written by Gordon O'Brien, Daniel Plooij and Albert Whitelaw, these manuals were published by the School of Social Sciences, Flinders University, South Australia in 1975. Both of them relate to traditionally oriented Pitjantjatjara people. They are organized so that the reader becomes an active participant trying to solve problems that could occur when working with Aborigines. Excellent reading, simply presented.

Gilbert, K.—*Living Black*

Allan Lane, The Penguin Press, Melbourne, 1977, 305 pages.

A series of interviews by an Aboriginal with other Aborigines. Interesting in developing some idea of the range of lifestyles, opinions and aspirations of Aborigines around Australia.

Stuart, D.—*Ibarana*

J.M. Dent & Sons, London, 1972. 100pp.

Stuart, a journalist, wrote this book after spending a great deal of time in close contact with a traditional Aboriginal community. It tells of the life of a young boy and his experiences in initiation.