

A personal *journey*

Cathryn Farrington

I am one of the Project Coordinators of Mukulyanytjulu Walykumunu Kanyinma in the Ngaanyatjarra lands in Western Australia. Mukulyanytjulu Walykumunu Kanyinma is the name given to the Project by the Blackstone Community Members we work with. It approximately translates as “Looking after everyone we love really well”.

Travel and exploration has loomed large in my family for some time. We are a very peripatetic bunch, moving often. Our bookshelves are crammed with anthologies of travel writing and littered with *Lonely Planets*. Our conversation generally centers round where we are going to go next, what we’ll do when we get there, and where we’ll go after that. We love maps, although are hopeless at reading them, and we also have a keen fascination for anything to do with explorers. My eldest son is particularly taken with Antarctic explorers! He refers to “The Boss” Earnest Shackleton and his “epic voyage” in hushed and somewhat reverential terms. He was thrilled to visit the Museum in Adelaide recently and spent almost as much time in the Mawson exhibition as Mawson and his men did in their hut at Commonwealth Bay in the South Pole waiting for a ship back to Australia!

To me it seemed only natural that this fascination with travel and explo-

ration would so much inform how I perceived myself and become a metaphor for Mukulyanytjulu Walykumunu Kanyinma. In fact as I was writing this address the hot feature on MSN was “meet seven amazing women explorers” – Ida Reyer Pfeiffer, May French Sheldon, Mary Henrietta Kingsley, Isabella Lucy Bird Bishop (who circled the globe three times), and Cathryn Farrington . . . well, no, actually my name wasn’t there, but it should have been because I really do believe that I am an explorer and that Mukulyanytjulu Walykumunu Kanyinma is my expedition!

I would now like to share my journey with you.

When interviewed for my position I was reading Sarah Murgatroyd’s “Dig Tree” the story of Burke and Wills. When I received a telephone call telling me that I had been successful in my application I remember glancing at the book’s cover and the words “nothing now but the greatest good luck can save any of us” jumped out at me. And there have been times when this is how I have felt – when I have despaired at the project and been disappointed beyond belief that no one has attended a meeting or participated in an activity.

There were also times when I felt myself lost and unable to make any



sense of what rather ominously came to be known as “The Schedule”. When Outputs and Milestones and Timeframe Deadlines for Completion of Outputs (Output Dates) danced dizzily before me. I have felt myself gasping for breath struggling to keep afloat in a sea of Key Performance Indicators, Operational Project Work Plans, Risk Assessment and Management Strategies, and Progress Performance Reports that must detail progress against the Milestones, Strategies and Outputs specified! With my head barely above a paper sea I have looked around me and like Scott surveying the South Pole have thought “Great God! This is an awful place!” At the height of a blizzard, Oates (one of Scott’s companions) remarked: “I am just going outside, and may be some time.” He left the tent and was never seen again. I too



When Sir Richard Burton sighted Lake Tanganyika for the first time: “He forgot the toils, dangers and the doubtfulness of return, and felt ready to endure what he had endured.”

have contemplated leaving the tent never to be seen again because sometimes Mukulyanytjulu Walykumunu Kanyinma just seems too hard.

However, like the travellers described by Baudelaire my temperament oscillates between hope and despair, child-like idealism and cynicism. Yes there has been suffering, endurance and misery! But like so many expeditions Mukulyanytjulu Walykumunu Kanyinma has also allowed me moments of exaltation and splendor!

There have been times when activities organised or meetings arranged have all come together and “worked”; when on completing a report, finishing a newsletter or receiving some positive feedback I have felt like the explorer Samuel Baker and his wife Florence who both discovered the source of the White Nile and com-

mented “it is impossible to describe the triumph of that moment”.

When Sir Richard Burton sighted Lake Tanganyika for the first time: “He forgot the toils, dangers and the doubtfulness of return, and felt ready to endure what he had endured.”

At times when everything goes to plan and it all falls into place I feel so happy in my position that, like Burton who forgets the toils, dangers and doubtfulness of return, the frustrating stuff just washes away and I know that I have the best job in the world.

I take stock and realise just how lucky and privileged I am to be part of such an exciting expedition and it’s in these moments that, like the poet Thomas Gray on his walking tour of the Alps in the early 18th Century, “I do not remember to have gone ten

paces without an exclamation that there was no restraining”. Like the precipices, torrents, and cliffs that Gray surveyed, everything that happens in Mukulyanytjulu Walykumunu Kanyinma is pregnant with religion and poetry.

Two Coordinators were appointed to Mukulyanytjulu Walykumunu Kanyinma. I was given the rather fancy title of Project Coordinator Clinical while my colleague Anna Szava was known as the Project Coordinator Development. Two coordinators, I can hear you all thinking. That’s a recipe for disaster. But like Lewis and Clark and the Corps of Discovery, who set out to find and map a transcontinental water route from Missouri to the Pacific Ocean, it works. Captains Merriweather Lewis and William Clark are considered among the few effective co-CEOs in organisational history. Both equal leaders of their expedition they have been described as commanding cooperative confident and complementary, just like Anna and me.

But the journey that best symbolizes my own is John Bunyan’s Pilgrim’s Progress. I am Christian who embarks on a journey from the City of Destruction to the Celestial City for a greater glory than ever known.

Christian was discouraged by his neighbors Pliable and Obstinate from



making his journey. I had friends who were dismissive of Mukulyanytjulu Walykumunu Kanyinma and their comments rang in my ears: "Strengthening families. What does that mean? . . . More money wasted by the Government . . . Oh God, haven't we got enough of these Projects . . . It's all been done before . . . It won't work." Like Christian, I encountered the slough of despond and nearly floundered.

Christian met the Interpreter, a man who showed him many visions and explained their meaning to him. I was introduced to our AIFS Training and Support Worker, Richard Munt. Richard made sense of Evaluation Frameworks, Aims, Goals, Strategies, Key Performance Indicators, and was at the end of the telephone when I felt that I had well and truly lost my way.

Christian navigated the Valley of Humiliation and the Valley of the Shadow of Death. I attended Project Steering Committee meetings and

prepared annual reports for funding bodies.

Along the way Christian meets Hopeful. I met Anna. When Christian and Hopeful join up and set out they are kidnapped by Giant Despair and held in the Doubting Castle. On their escape they must cross the dark river where Christian suffers a devastating lack of faith and nearly drowns. It is Hopeful who keeps him afloat. I think it is fair to say that Anna has kept me afloat on a number of occasions when I have sunk into the mire of despondency and questioned the point of what I am doing. I think it is safe to say that this support has been reciprocated.

In fact Hopeful is the embodiment of a number of people who have encouraged me in my journey and offered their support: Nancy Bineham, our Project Officer from FaCS; Douglas Josif, the Manager of the Ngaanyatjarra Health Service which oversees Mukulyanytjulu Walykumunu Kanyinma; my partner

Steve, who will tell you that he puts up with an awful lot; and Steering Committee members like Rhoda Watson and Valerie Foster who, when I am uncertain about the direction I'm heading in, say simply "you are on the right track".

Like Pilgrims Progress, Mukulyanytjulu Walykumunu Kanyinma has been a series of climactic moments quickly followed by moments of peace. The obstacles faced have at times been awesome and traumatic, and the journey undertaken with great difficulty and forbearance.

Like Christian, I have found and taken wrong paths forgot the way and a few times followed poor advice. Christian had his belief in the Lord and his convictions about the Celestial City to help him on his journey. I have the eight Principles underpinning all Stronger Families and Communities Strategy projects as my guide. They have helped me in my journey, and when I have felt that I am losing my

WHAT CAME OUT OF THE WORKSHOP?

NEW REFERENCE GROUP

The Stronger families Learning Exchange has been working hard with many of the Stronger Families Fund projects to help them to establish a reference group. We see reference groups as being an important mechanism for increasing participation in projects and bringing in extra skill and expertise to guide the work of the project.

At the Strong Families Fund National Workshop, we invited people who were interested in joining a SFLEX Reference Group to put their names on the wall newspaper. Since then we have made submissions through our management at the Australian Institute of Family Studies and received permission to start our own reference group, which we are greatly looking forward to.

We will be inviting projects that indicated interest, SFLEX team members, and external people with specific expertise to be part of our reference group. Hopefully in the coming months you will see some more information about the development of this group on the Stronger Families website, or in the Bulletin.

If you are interested in receiving information about the SFLEX Reference Group, or would like to be involved, please contact Kelley Johnson on (03) 9214 7817.

REGIONAL WORKSHOPS

Part of the role of the Stronger families Learning Exchange is to provide training for Stronger Families Fund projects. At the National Workshop, people asked us if we would consider doing regional workshops focused on

a specific theme or topic, instead of having another national workshop.

We thought that this was a fantastic idea, and so we are in the process of planning a series of regional workshops to be held around Australia, between September 2003 and June 2004. We will design these workshops in response to the needs of, and requests from, the projects and the department of Family and Community Services (FaCS). While we already have some of these planned we would be very interested to hear new ideas and thoughts about themes or topics for workshops.

The first regional workshop will be about "Action Research in Your Organisation", designed for project teams (workers, managers, reference group members and community members) and FaCS workers.



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way I have referred to them. As you all know, the Principles are:

- Working together in partnerships
- Encouraging a preventative and early intervention approach
- Supporting people through life transitions
- Developing better integrated and coordinated services
- Developing local solutions to local problems
- Building community capacity

tions to local problems and building community capacity.

On 10 February 2003 Ross Cameron, the Parliamentary Secretary for Health and Ageing, said that: "As the Senate goes through the estimates process asking the purpose of each line item and whether it is achieving its purpose . . . It is easy to indulge in the temptation that we are more powerful and . . . that we have the lever, the capacity to manipulate things in such a way that we can solve

all these human problems. But the challenge isn't about implementing some new Government program or creating a new bureaucracy. It is working out how we can fan the spark of self-reliance and community engagement."

If Mukulyanytjulu Walykumunu Kanyinma is my Pilgrims Progress and I am Christian then it is fanning the spark of self-reliance and community engagement that is my Celestial City, the greater glory than ever known!

Cathryn Farrington is one of the Project Coordinators of the Mukulyanytjulu Walykumunu Kanyinma (Stronger Families Fund project) in the Ngaanyatjarra lands in Western Australia.

If you have any ideas about topics for workshops, we would love to hear from you. This could be an issue you are trying to work through, something you have learned and want to share with other projects, a resource you are interested in developing – the possibilities are endless!

Please contact Katrina Bredhauer on (03) 9214 7873 to talk about regional workshops.

BRINGING PROJECT TOGETHER

At the workshop we started the process of talking about and sharing some of the work that Stronger Families Fund projects are doing, including what has worked, what has not worked, and what the projects have learned.

The aim of this process is to document what has been learned from the work

of the projects in a way that will be useful for future policy, program and project development with families and communities.

CROSS-CULTURAL ISSUES

There was a diversity of participants and presentations at the workshop. Some issues arose around levels of inclusion and participation, and there were a range of reactions to some of the presentations throughout the workshop.

To explore this further, a meeting was held during the workshop with several Indigenous participants. This was a productive learning experience for all involved, and from it several actions have been planned.

Later this year there will be three regional workshops for projects

working with Indigenous communities. Several Indigenous participants indicated interest in joining the SFLEX Reference Group. There will also be action research findings produced about working with Indigenous communities and people.

It was fantastic to have such a diverse attendance at the workshop, and to have presentations that stirred our emotions and our thoughts, and sparked us into action.

You will hear more about these things as time progresses, but if you have any inquiries in the meantime please contact Kelley Johnson on (03) 9214 7817.

