

# Stories of working with community in Western Australia



Transcript

Interviewed and Recorded by Dave Palmer & Jennie Buchanan

## Cyril Archer

Kabayji Booroo Hostel, Derby

8th October 2003



**DP** Well here we are in downtown Derby with Cyril Archer in early October, I think it is about the 8th.

**CA** Yep. It happens to be my birthday.

**DP** Oh fantastic. Happy 33rd.

**CA** Oh well you can just about double that.

Cyril Archer, pictured outside of Hostel in Derby 8th October 2003.

**DP** I hope you have got some big celebrations planned?

**CA** No. No. Those days are gone.

**DP** Can I start by offering my sincere thanks for agreeing to be involved in this project. It is a terrific part of the world to be in and I always enjoy coming to Derby. It's lovely to meet someone that I have heard so much about. Can I ask you to begin by telling your own story of your involvement in community development?

**CA** Well I became interested in community development back in the early seventies when I was given the opportunity to do some study at the Institute of Technology in South Australia through the Aboriginal Task Force. I was lucky to be sponsored by Community Welfare together with Abstudy to make it easy for me to live. On completion of obtaining my Community Development Certificate plus my Associate Diploma in Social Work I went back to Community Welfare in Perth and in 1976 I commenced working with the Fringe Dwellers in Midland as my first approach to Community Development. I assisted them for two years in giving them an opportunity to gain empowerment to look for a future for themselves in terms



of better accommodation and a future for their children outside of the fringe dweller camps in the Midland area.

I was in charge of a project fostered by the State Government, through Community Welfare, that allowed me to work with each individual camp to come together looking at all aspects of selection of land, agreeing on those issues and agreeing on house design. It took many, many meetings, it wasn't easy and I saw it up to the stage of where the people were ready to move into their accommodation. Then I took a backwards step and allowed somebody else to come in to take the next major step with the group.

**DP What was happening around that time that prompted the State Government to consider this an important area?**

CA I really think there was major development taking place in the Swan Valley Area. Those people that were in the fringe dweller camps had previously gained employment yearly on vineyards, that employment had diminished and people didn't return back to their homelands of Moora, Kellerberrin and those places. They opted to stay in the Swan Valley area for a number of different reasons and they stayed in real third world conditions where there was no running water, no sanitary services and no services at all. But they lived happily in that environment and they were collectively supportive of one and another in that I was able to inform them of options for lifestyle and during the next two years we looked at what was going to be their next step. I sort of empowered them with ideas, information and everything else that goes with Community Development. They made their own decisions and working in with the State Government they created Cullacabardee Village.

**DP OK. So that was your start in community development?**

CA That was my introduction to Community Development. I then transferred, through Community Welfare, to Halls Creek

and worked with the Homeland Movement which had just begun.

**DP This was at what point?**

CA This was back in 1980.

**DP What's the Homeland Movement?**

CA The Homeland Movement was where people who had previously lived in their traditional country moved into Halls Creek for a variety of reasons. Mainly because employment on stations had diminished and stations didn't want to support them anymore anyhow. They came into Halls Creek, became very disillusioned with town life, their children weren't coping with town life environments and the old traditional people wanted to move back to their homelands. They felt a strong desire to return to country.

And they were looking for people like myself, and others, to assist them in making a true stance, moving back to their homelands and being given an opportunity to get their resources together. They were fun times in those days.

They were really good community development days, pretty raw where you had to cart water, cart tucker, people lived in tents but they were all happy in that arrangement. Today, they've all got their own homes built on their traditional lands and got their own community stores, schools, very much more developed now in a very short period of time of twenty years.

**DP So in 1980 there were a range of different people coming in, living where, in Halls Creek?**

CA Yeah either living in and around Halls Creek in make-shift arrangements or within the Homeswest accommodation, shar-



ing with other relatives. But it was an era of raw community development I would say.

**DP What do you mean by ‘raw community development’?**

CA Because it was, there was nothing fancy, people could rough it, they were prepared to rough it but they wanted to set up in traditional areas on traditional homelands. The three years that I worked in Halls Creek were very enjoyable to me, to see people wanting to make a future for themselves back in their traditional homelands.

You may recall the Gordon Downs incident where the Aboriginal community was driven off the station by the station-manager. Well that took place when I was actually in Halls Creek in that era and I worked with that community to actually go out and peg their current site with government officials and that and work with the traditional leaders in those early stages and to see them move from Halls Creek back to their Homelands now and be on top of things, it is quite enjoyable to remember.

**DP Where is Gordon Downs?**

CA Gordon Downs is east, south east of Halls Creek.

**DP And why did the manager push them off the station?**

CA Well it was quite an eventful situation where he actually fired shots into their accommodation and destroyed their dogs and all that. They took refuge in Halls Creek for quite some time until the government and Community Welfare were able to look at where they were going to be actually placed because they were all displaced at that stage. Not knowing how and if they could actually go back to Gordon Downs and the government intervened in that, and of course the community had a win.

**DP So for those people not familiar with what was going on beforehand, these were communities of people who were living on country, and had been living on the traditional country, practicing law and customs?**

CA That’s dead right.

**DP From time immemorial until...**

CA Until displacement and they had that

**DP Which was from 1969 through to that time?**

CA Yeah. There were a couple of Community Welfare representatives prior to my going to Halls Creek who actually commenced assisting community groups in the Homeland Movement. They had already created quite a bit of good interest by groups to continue the struggle to go back to their homelands and I was fortunate enough to follow in their footsteps.

**DP Who were some of those people?**

CA I am just trying to remember their names now. There was a chap by the name of Edwards and I can’t think of the other fellas’ name, they both worked for Community Welfare and they had good community development skills.

**DP And this was before the Kimberley Land Council was formed?**

CA No the Kimberley Land Council was actually involved in the Gordon Downs incident. They also assisted the government in looking at the placement of the Gordon Downs people, traditionally known as the Kundatdjaru Mob. But it was good community development to work with that community and to assist them to kick off with nothing. I haven’t been back there for quite some years but I am told there is quite a development out there now with adequate housing and school and commu-



nity story and culture is getting strong. The younger ones are more involved with their own community in assisting with development through education and things like that but I feel quite proud to have been involved with that Halls Creek lands movement.

**DP On any given day, what sorts of things would you have been involved in as a community development worker?**

CA One of the main things is not to, it is very hard not to get yourself fully involved, you have to take a backwards step but you must feed your group you are trying to assist with plenty of information and options. They have to make a decision. Sometimes you know that this decision may be wrong but the group has got to experience that errors can be made. It becomes hard times or a back step. But it has got to be a learning process where the community must make the decisions and learn from their mistakes. You can only empower a group with the correct information and allow them to make their decisions of their own accord. You have got to generate them with plenty of planning time, some decisions can't be made in a month, they may be longer. Things have got to take their own pace, especially if you are dealing with traditional people. There is a lot of law and culture stuff that interweaves with decision making processes.

**DP How does that happen?**

CA Well generally if it interlocks with both men's and women's law you have got to ensure that you understand that the correct people have to make decisions and they will make a decision in terms of the whole group. There are other decisions that the whole group can make as a whole so there are little touchy areas in terms of when you are working with traditional people in Community Development Projects. Yeah.

**DP OK. So from Halls Creek, where to from there?**

CA I was with Community Welfare for about twenty years, from Halls Creek I joined Aboriginal Hostels Limited. I felt that accommodation services for Aboriginal people was a priority for me because there were hardly any hostels in the Kimberley area, other than educational hostels. People need a stepping stone in times of crisis where they need to be able to take advantage of accommodation that is available and give themselves some breathing time to make informed decisions as to the future for themselves and their children. I felt that Aboriginal Hostels Limited was a progressive type of national body. It was looking after people at the grass roots, employing Aboriginal people to do the job, and making very good decisions for the Aboriginal people throughout Australia.

**DP So when did you join Aboriginal Hostels Limited?**

CA In 1984 and I have been with them ever since.

**DP So you had been with the Department for Community Welfare for twenty years from 1964. Can we now step back to your involvement with community development which you say began when you went to Adelaide. When was this?**

CA In 1973.

**DP You had been with the Department which would have been called something different?**

CA I joined the Department when it was the Native Welfare Department. So I was able to have a good grounding in terms of Aboriginal Affairs through the Native Welfare Department system.

**DP What sort of work were you doing for that ten years previous?**



CA I was mainly working in, like I was government employed, but I worked within the community of Derby in terms of being involved in sporting activities and other things. I am still very much involved with different activities in Derby now.

**DP Would you describe that sort of work as community work?**

CA Well I think if you have got proper community development skills they come naturally, some community development skills you can't be taught because if you haven't got the natural flair to do things in a community development model, if you can't do that naturally you can't be taught it.

**DP What are some of those skills?**

CA Well I believe with true community development you have got to allow groups to make their own informed decisions. You need to feed the group as much information as possible because it is all an education process and people have got to be informed of different options, the likelihood of where mistakes can be made and then they take that information away and they make a decision. Whether the decision turns out to be immediately a prosperous one or whether there is a small failure, the group needs then to deal with the failure to turn it into a positive. You can only guide the group, otherwise if you are making decisions for the group, well it is not true community development. You have to take a backwards step when that decision is being made. Every aspect of living is part of community development you know education goes with health, health goes with employment, and everything has got to be interwoven. I think there have been a lot of errors made by community development officers by not having a interwoven blueprint by all the government departments working with the community.

**DP So you mean just focussing on, for example, employment?**

CA Yeah I think all your resources have got to come together rather than all competing against one another. You know there is no good community health going out, trying to improve their health if they are not involved with the overall model of where that community is going because there could be welfare problems involved. There could be housing problems involved. There could be enterprise problems involved. Everything has got to come together as one. All those agencies have got to work together. A lot of them work too much independently now.

**DP So is that another skill of the community development worker?**

CA I think the community development worker, or whatever term you want to use for that particular person, has got to have the skills to be able to draw all those resource agencies together so that they are all working for the one cause. You know it is no good the left hand doing something without the right hand knowing and I think that is where a lot of problems today are happening. Either the government agencies haven't got sufficient time to come together or it is sort of piecemeal tokenism in terms of information.

**DP Other skills of the community worker?**

CA I think you have got to quickly judge your group in terms of who are your strong members and those that contribute really well to the group. You will find that every individual has a trained part in any process of development. However, there are some who will have a greater depth of knowledge on a particular thing and they can assist the other group in learning. But the community development officer has got to weigh up the group in terms of each individual and what worth they are to the group if you know what I mean and utilise the skills of



each individual person so that they actually grow and gain from the overall experience too.

**DP What are some of the ingredients for success in community development? Let's think about the Halls Creek example. what was the recipe for the success of that community?**

CA I think to start off with your small goals, ensure that they are easily obtainable at the beginning to allow the group to experience some positive feedback from decisions that they are making.

**DP Can you think of some examples of that happening perhaps in the Halls Creek instance?**

CA Are you talking about the Gordon Downs one?

**DP Yeah Gordon Downs.**

CA The first major one was to ensure that the older people came out with government agencies to actually peg out the property. A major thing. Only a small thing to do but the involvement of having your traditional leaders go out with government officials. Government officials are important to the process but the traditional people are important to the next step.

**DP So this was on the Gordon Downs Pastoral Lease, the property?**

CA Yeah.

**DP Where there had been...?**

CA Chaos, conflict prior, negotiation took place between the government and the lease holder of Gordon Downs and came to a decision to make an excision of land available for the community to move back to. Because you can understand the horrific change that happened to that community group when they

moved into Halls Creek. They were initially sheltered under tarpaulin tents just on the outskirts of town with a couple of running water taps and that is where they were supported in their efforts to get back to their homelands from there.

**DP So how long were they there?.**

CA I just can't remember the full period of time but it was months. It was something like seven or eight months I think. So you know for a community to come in a long distance of travel into Halls Creek and then to be hit with all the town life, you know, and drinking and alcohol and that sort of thing, it destroyed a few people but the government could only work as fast as the decisions were being made at that time.

**DP And how did this come about given that there was a volatile manager of a pastoral lease, why and how was that person brought to the negotiation table?**

CA Well I don't know about the background information. That was something that took place between the Minister, and I guess the Head of the Community Welfare of the day too was involved, but they were able to get movement made within that seven month period which wasn't too bad.

**DP And your initial task that on the face of it seems like a small one, was a large one**

CA A big step

**DP Did it involve work with the 'old people'**

CA And we had the local Halls Creek Aboriginal Organisation, Ngoonjuwah Council heavily committed in that process and Kimberley Land Council assisted as well. That is where you have got to get all your good resources together so that you don't have to work alone on those types of issues. Kimberley Land Council was really tremendous in assisting that community and to ensure that the right area was chosen, that tradi-

tional people were happy, that everybody could move back to that particular area and community welfare and Ngoonjuwah Council assisted the whole community to move back.



**DP And what were some of the other small steps, what was your involvement after that?**

CA Well I actually left and joined Aboriginal Hostels

**DP OK, getting back to some of those other ingredients for success in community development, say in the case of the Gordon Downs example, what were some of the things that led to their success?**

CA Well you have got to look at what resources you can bring into the group. Obviously in Gordon Downs we had Kimberly Land Council and Ngoonjuwah Council was very strong in those days because there was a lot of Gordon Downs people that actually live in Halls Creek you know. So there is a real link between Gordon Downs, I shouldn't say Gordon Downs, Kundatdjaru is the proper name and Halls Creek there is very strong links you know and links go out to Balgo and all that sort of area. But yes, just be aware of what resources and ensure that those resources you bring into the group can actually assist the group in a meaningful manner not just window dressing. Your resources have to be fair dinkum in assisting the group.

**DP Can you tell me briefly about those two other organisations, the Kimberley Land Council and the Ngoonjuwah Council?**

CA Yeah, Ngoonjuwah Council is the local Aboriginal organisation within Halls Creek itself, they were a resource centre for all community groups outside of the Halls Creek township. They were assisting in the Homeland movement. Originally Community Welfare did a lot of the hard yakka in terms of assisting groups with clean water and food, doing store runs

and that. When Ngoonjuwah Council came into being they took over that role and they actually assisted each group in terms of being able to get their stores and water into each group. They also became the resource agency a little later on to handle all types of social security arrangements with monies and things like that.

**DP When were they set up?**

CA They were set up in the early eighties. Still going now I believe. Their role has changed a little bit, but they are still much the same.

**DP Are there similar resource agencies throughout the Kimberley?**

CA You will probably find there is. There are two in Derby, that is Winin Ngari Resource Centre and Emama Nguda Aboriginal Corporation.

**DP And do they service different regions?**

CA They service different community groups.

**DP And there are likewise a couple in Broome?**

CA Broome has got a couple as well.

**DP Mamabulanjin Resource Centre is one.**

CA Mamabulanjin Resource Centre is one of the major ones.

**DP And there is one in Fitzroy?**

CA Marra Worra Worra is the one in Fitzroy.

**DP And so these resource agencies all grew around the same time?**



CA Very similar times because there was a need to ensure that community groups that were active in the homeland movement going back to traditional country were able to get, to continue to get their proper social security payments. You know pensions and all those sorts of payments because up until that stage most of that backup was given by Community Welfare Officers in each town which was a traditional handover from the Native Welfare days so that role continued on until those resource centres were established.

**DP And would you describe those resource centres as operating using community development approaches?**

CA They do have a community development model to assist in their groups basically because most of them have got direct links to each community, either by the form of a community bookkeeper, who is a member of the community who actually goes to the resource agency to overview the business of their communities.

**DP So those resource agencies, are they managed by representatives from those different communities?**

CA They used to be. I don't know whether they still are but they used to appoint a rep at AGM times, some of them have grown a little bit further from those early days now because they have gone into other areas of a little bit of enterprise and things like that through the CDEP Programmes.

**DP CDEP is?**

CA Is all governed under those organisations, those resource centres.

**DP What does that stand for?**

CA Community Development Employment Projects.

**DP And they are the earlier version of work for the dole?**

CA Yeah and that is still the main source of income for community groups.

**DP And how does that operate?**

CA Well people have to work x number of hours a day to be able to get their unemployment entitlement and there is a little bit more extra top up because they are actually supposed to be doing projects within their community that are assisting their community to make a little bit of growth.

**DP So a community identifies a project, or projects, and then x number of young people, or unemployed people are invited to get involved?**

CA Will work in those little projects. Yep.

**DP What are some examples of CDEP Projects in Derby?**

CA Well some of the CDEP Projects around town now are actually doing things for the Shire here in Derby where the Shire has a contract with the resource centre. So they are actually getting that little bit more money going into the coffers if you know what I mean. There are other things. Where there is other Aboriginal Organisations requiring some gardening to be done or landscaping or there is a special event coming up and they need what's a name well CDEP participants will assist those organisations.

**DP The other major resource in the Halls Creek days was the Kimberley Land Council. Tell us a little bit about who they are?**

CA Well the Kimberley Lands Council is now one of the most important bodies to assist with Native Title. They are used by many Aboriginal bodies around the Kimberley to assist tradi-



tional people to gain full entitlement to their traditional land and as you probably are aware there is a lot of opposition to various groups getting hold of their Native Title deeds for different reasons. Maybe enterprise or whatever by mining giants and all that. The Kimberley Lands Council has grown in status to be able to handle all those affairs now for whatever the Aboriginal body wants to use them. But they started off at humble beginnings and I think they have been truly representative for the Aboriginal people in the Kimberley anyhow.

**DP Where were there beginnings?**

CA The Kimberley Lands Council actually operated here out of Derby but they were elected by groups throughout the Kimberley in terms of their executive committee and they employed staff according to whatever budget they had. In the early days a lot of people worked for nothing only because of the true interest that they held.

**DP When was the early days and why?**

CA Oh goodness I don't know, let me go back now, oh it is a long way back.

**DP But go back past, earlier than Nookanbah?**

CA It only just started in that era from my memory.

**DP Darryl Kickett will be able to tell me about that won't he?**

CA Kickett he will tell you.

**DP He was here in Derby at the time heh?**

CA But he studied with me at the same time in Adelaide too so it would have been, it started off in the mid-seventies and then Daryl came in after it commenced. But I was involved luckily

at the beginning I was on their accounts committee when they first kicked off.

**DP Oh really.**

CA Yeah. So I have had a little bit of involvement with them but I have always respected their interests in looking after traditional people and doing things properly.

**DP And why were they established?**

CA I think there was a great need for a body like Kimberley Land Council to be established to speak on behalf of traditional people and to push for true traditional rights to their homelands. Goodness me. I think without them everybody would have been just pushed aside to this very day now. The Kimberley Land Council has shown a lot of muscle in terms of looking after people's interest and I think they will continue to do that too.

**DP So both Ngonjuwah Council and Kimberley Land Council were important in the Gordon Downs movement?**

CA Oh very much so yeah. That was one of the most vigorous type incidents that ever happened up in the Kimberley, in recent times, in terms of conflict between the station manager and Aboriginal people, there had been a lot of unwritten history things in the past but in recent times that was well documented.

**DP And again that was the early to mid to eighties?**

CA That was the early eighties.

**DP Around about the same time as the Nookanbah?**

CA No. No. After.

**DP After. So it was the Court government that intervened?**



CA Yes.

**DP My South Australian history doesn't always take me there. Any other things that were important in this case?**

CA Well it really depends on the types, or it really depends on your community group. If members of your community group are unsophisticated you have to assist them with approach. You know what I mean. If your group is well educated and that you deal with them differently you know. They already have an understanding of the types of etiquette in responding to government and things like that. You have just got to be aware, if you are dealing with old traditional people you have got to be cautious in terms of respecting traditional custom and decision making in the traditional sense and a little bit of the western style of approach. They can come together if you give the right type of information to every individual. If you are dealing with a town community that has almost lost their traditional culture things are going to be different again how you approach. You have just got to be aware that each group differs in their dynamics and you respond in accordance to the dynamics of that group.

**DP Earlier you said that you thought that perhaps some of the skills you 'just have'?**

CA I'll stick by that, you have either got it or you haven't.

**DP What is it, what are those particular skills that you have or you don't have?**

CA Observation skills. You have got to have good observation skills you have got to be aware all around you all the time of different things to pick up on, it might be a bit of a wink on the side or something you know. But you have got to be really well aware of, and be observant with your group and your group dynamics. You don't allow one person to dominate too

much. Allow everybody to have an opportunity. Bring out the best in your weakest person, allow them a say just so that they feel part of the group because every person has something to give. It doesn't matter what type of or piece of knowledge that person has got or information he has got, he will be able to contribute something in some way.

Do things at the pace of the group. Don't just speed things along. Make sure you set small goals first. Obtainable, because winners will create winners. Allow people to learn from each step that has been taken. Analyse everything. Go over things each time you have meetings. Ensure that you keep correct information, present the right information when you are having meetings.

Correct yourself if you have made a mistake, you know, no one is going to pull you to pieces. Honesty. Be very honest with every individual. If you do one step wrong then you are out.

**DP So are those not things you can learn?**

CA Observation skills, I don't know, some people just haven't got them. No matter how much you can teach them they still can't learn those sort of things.

**DP Some of us can't say we are wrong when we are wrong?**

CA Yeah. There are a lot of people that want to be the top dog. You are only there to assist the group. You know. You don't go doing things for the group. The groups can do them themselves. I have seen that many people just flogging themselves to death doing the tasks and for the sake of obtaining the goal for themselves. It has got to be a community effort. It has got to be done by the group.

**DP Who were some of the people that you worked with during that first twenty years? What sorts of people were they and what sorts of things did they do?**



CA Well

**DP I am happy if you want to name names.**

CA Well one of the people that pushed me to go a bit further in terms of qualifications was a lady by the name of Freda Bender and she was an un-qualified social worker that worked in Midland. She just worked great with the fringe dwellers from the early days. She knew every individual and their children as well and she was doing community development work in those days, trudging around vineyards and looking for families and that you know. If she was a young person today she would probably be one of the leading community development officers in the state.

**DP When was she working?**

CA Well I came in at the wrong end of the scale too because I only moved from Derby down to the metropolitan area in the early seventies, she could have been working with the department long before that. I think she actually worked for the Native Welfare Department in Kellerberrin and regions and doing community development in those towns.

**DP And what did she do that you particularly remember**

CA I just took note of how she worked with people. She had a very open style of working with people. She was a community developer, she was the Child Welfare Officer but she didn't present herself like one. She was more of a friend type of person. She got the results by taking a friends approach to things and allowing people to make their own decisions that way.

**DP In contrast to?**

**CA You know coming down on people treating them like rubbish.**

**DP Being an authority?**

CA Being an authority figure yeah. She got great response from all her clients. I took notice of how she dealt with people and the respect that she got and how she had great observation of everything around her. So she was probably my best one I reckon. I think it depends on how you are brought up too. You know what sort of an environment you are brought up with, whether it is, I don't know, it's just innate I think, innate skills. (chuckle) Put it that way. I have always liked, I have always been interested in helping people, even from teenage days, I was always involved in something. I never wanted to be anything really great but I was always there in a helping capacity in everything I have been involved with. Yeah. And I always like to be involved in dealing with, what would you call it, help the down and out people you know come up to a much higher standard of lifestyle, living. Give people enough information to take their next step in life, whether it be a vocation or whatever, I have always assisted my own family, nieces, nephews, friends whatever in all sorts of steps in their lives. I think it is just natural. A god given gift. I don't know.

**DP Can we now turn the story towards your time at the Aboriginal Hostels Limited?**

CA I was fortunate enough to come in and join Aboriginal Hostels in the mid 1980's and I have had the opportunity to work in various capacities within the Company. I was regional manager in Alice Springs. Regional Manager in Sydney, New South Wales. I had three years in Canberra in the operations section and I have decided to see my years out as Hostel Manager here in Derby. But I have come in and seen a lot of change take place within this Company. It operates a little bit different than other organisations. We actually have got a Board Of Directors. Each state is representative in that Board



of Directors and they are the hub of the company, we are a company in our own right and we get our funding through the ATSIC portfolio but we spend our money in our own individual right.

There are 56 Company operated hostels throughout Australia and we fund another hundred organisations who have got an accommodation component for Aboriginal people in their programmes. It might be a church programme, it might be a prisoners release programme or aged persons hostel but we are very much involved in all those sorts of things. Decisions are made in terms of community development I guess, where we are always making decisions in terms of need. The group that is going to be provided with the accommodation, it might be for women in crisis, it might be multi-purpose, transient, there are particular needs but it has always been that the decision is always made to allow people to grow and either get back into their own community as an individual or they get accommodation through the rental market or through Homeswest. Basically our stay is limited for three months but there are some residents within the hostels who cannot go into other forms of accommodation through handicap or they have had their third go at Homeswest and been unsuccessful so there is a sprinkling of long term residents.

**DP So the company's a not for profit organisation?**

CA No, government gives us top up in terms of the deficit we operate. Most of our income covers everything bar the wage component so government subsidise us in accordance to the deficit created in the year. A very stringent Company to work within, you have got to work within a budget of, like Derby I have got to feed a person for a week on \$29.00, that is me budget for me food but when you put 46 people together at \$29.00 you can buy a lot for \$1,500 worth of money can be spent wisely on food.

**DP That is three meals?**

CA Yeah everybody gets a cooked breakfast here, every day of the week, a light lunch, a main meal at night and every second night sweets. Everybody who stays at the hostel must pay for their accommodation. Basically it is \$140.00 per week for an adult person and \$35.00 a week for a child. But it is governed on a person's income; an employed person pays much more. There are some lower income scale people who pay a little less and of course if they are on Abstudy and things like that it is a student rate.

**DP And what sort of issues and needs do people present with?**

CA Well here in Derby a portion of our hostel is our bed component set aside for use by medical transients. They come in to use the services of the hospital or the Aboriginal Medical Service for a whole range of health issues.

**DP From communities?**

CA From communities, outlying communities. We also get referrals from Fitzroy, Halls Creek, Kununurra and Wyndham in terms of women coming in for antenatal needs. Derby is the regional centre for birthing and we are also lucky to have the component of the Royal Flying Doctor Service. So a lot of referrals from the hospital for outpatient type of arrangements because it is cheaper for them to stay here for \$35.00 a night than to stay at the hospital where with overheads it is probably a couple of hundred a night. So when this hostel was created the needs for medical transients was taken into consideration and we have a wing with wheelchair access for medicals.

We also have a lot people come in and use the hostel for legal purposes where they have to attend to legal matters. They may have to go to court for representation on somebody's case or anything. We are used for that. Sporting groups use us when they come in for carnivals but there is a general turnover of transient people from outlying communities. We have an occasional visitor from the eastern states or down south but basi-



cally we are pretty well full with our own clientele within the Derby area.

**DP So when was this organisation set up?**

CA It has been set up, it is thirty years old now, we set up in 1973.

**DP And it was a national organisation?**

CA It is Commonwealth. The Commonwealth company.

**DP So during Whitlam's era?**

CA Our Board of Directors have got to make decisions in terms of new initiatives and where the next need for a hostel is required. Everything is researched thoroughly. The board members make a decision as to who will get the next hostel because, as you know, sometimes to create a hostel we have got to close one that is no longer required or it is not operating viably any more, the need may have diminished. So a hostel may be closed down in Sydney but the need might be at Kununurra so they are always juggling the needs around for hostels.

**DP And how many hostels in the Kimberley?**

CA There is only two being run by the company. That is this one here in Derby and the renal hostel that is operated in Broome which has only just started but we fund about six others I think.

**DP Right.**

CA One in Kununurra for education and apprentice needs because that has got a link into the Argyle training arrangements.

**DP And who is the organisation that is responsible for that one? Is that an Aboriginal organisation?**

CA It is. We fund the alcohol rehab centre in Broome. Milliya Rumurra.

**DP Yep. That is out at Four Mile.**

CA We fund the aged persons hostel here in Derby because of the higher percentage of Aboriginal clientele that uses that hostel. And we fund, the same arrangement, the aged persons hostel in Fitzroy Crossing. That is the only ones that we are funding at the moment but I believe there is a new request for Halls Creek for a similar type of transient hostel like we have got here but on a smaller scale.

**DP And would you describe what you do as community development work?**

CA Well I actually do with my resident welfare arrangements at this hostel I believe I am still using the dynamics of community development but on an individual basis you know.

**DP OK. Can you give me an example of how?**

CA Well with residents that come in and use our services here I ensure that they are using all the resources that are available to them. I assist them to go and, if they want to take another step in Homeswest, well I assist them with the information and the resources to be able to go to Homeswest to help them to fill out the application form if they are unable to do it and if they need transport to get to any of the resource centres I try and provide it. They then make an informed decision as to which way they want to go when the time comes up, whether they are able to make the next step, or they want to go back to their community or stay with relatives because the deadline here is really for three months, a twelve week period, so you can do quite a bit for an individual or a family within that twelve week period.



**DP And do any individual hostels have community connections beyond the staff that work in those communities, are there formal reference groups?**

CA It differs from location to location throughout Australia. I actually link in very closely here with aged care here in Derby. Every month we have the Munungul Seniors come here for an activity for morning tea, a chat and it is an outlet for the old people to sing a few old traditional songs and that sort of thing.

**DP Munungul Seniors, that is an organisation?**

CA No it is just the name of all the Aboriginal seniors within the town of Derby, it takes in Numbala Nunga Nursing Home, Ngamang Frail Aged Hostel, the old people out of Mowanjum Community which is a little bit out of town plus the town people themselves so they all come together here. We have about forty-eight and we've got the show on with them next week on a Wednesday. We take our turn in providing a morning tea with five other groups around town.

**DP So not only is this a resource for those people needing accommodation in the community but it is also resource for community groups?**

CA Yep. People come here and use my facilities for meetings. We sometimes do catering if they like morning tea or something.

**DP You've got what looks like an impressive, almost commercial kitchen.**

CA It is. Fairly commercial yeah but what I have always tried to do within my hostel is have it as part of the community. It is here for the community use. If we can help out in any way for a community function or whatever I will make it available. I don't like to have any barriers. I want people to come and go as if it is their home.

**DP And you were saying that depends on the hostel and where it is around the country?**

CA Oh it depends on individuals I think. You know some people don't want to put in an extra hour here and there, come five o'clock they want to knock off and go home. I'm a bit different. I operate a bit differently and you have got to have good staff too. I've got good staff who are all that way inclined.

**DP How many staff?**

CA Nine. I got nine staff.

**DP Nine. And who is responsible for catering, cooking?**

CA We have got a cook, kitchen hand. The kitchen hand assists the cook and the kitchen hand does all the dishes, clean up after.

**DP And cleaning?**

CA Cleaning, I've got a domestic and a handyman/gardener and a night porter. And then I got separate weekend staff. So it is not a bad little ship and we can take 46 here.

**DP It is a beautiful place. What is the name I noticed out the front?**

CA Kabayji Booroo Hostel.

**DP Kabayji Booroo.**

CA It is in Nykina and it means Grandmothers place. One of the things that hostels don't do anymore is allow hostels to take the name of people because there has been a little bit of dis-sention here and there and so we thought that Grandmother's Place wasn't a bad type of, relaxing type of name and we are not causing any waves for anybody with that. (chuckles)



**DP** It reminds me of my Grandmothers place. Booroo is place?

CA Booroo is place. Sometimes you might see it, in some of the other community groups it is spelt 'b-u-r-u', same thing.

**DP** Do you think that community development in this part of the country would be significantly different to community work in other parts of the country? In other words is there something unique about community development in the Kimberley?

CA I think there is. I think there is a lot of difference working with groups up in the Kimberley area up here primarily if you are dealing with Aboriginal people. Community Development in traditional areas, where people have gone back to their homelands and commenced the development of their community in housing and things is quite different, because you are not only dealing with traditional people and their customs and that but it is because of a slower type of pace that has got to be given if you know what I mean? Probably your group dynamics would be a long way different because a lot of people wouldn't know what all their resources are. Less educated type of individuals maybe. People in Aboriginal communities up in the Kimberley area are not expecting great, great big things. How can I put it? There is just a different pace to everything up here which makes community development a long way slower process. I think if you are working with a group in the metropolitan area in Perth the dynamics would be so much different, the composition of the group would be so much more enlightened I guess of what resources they could come to use and I think their expectations would be much greater. Community development up here just steady, steady pace, little steps, small goals, just keep chipping away until you are looking at a big picture I think. I think it is a great older generation type of involvement here in the Kimberley.

**DP** So more of an emphasis on the elderly?

CA Well people are not yet full what's name with technology. You just think of the computer for instance, it will be the young generation of kids going through school now who can go back to their community and have a wealth of knowledge in the computer but they will be the only person in the community that will know it. You know what I mean, whereas if you are dealing with a group in Perth probably all the members of that group would probably have all the knowledge of the mechanics of a computer and that is the different level I guess of individual growth.

**DP** What about the issues, the hurdles if you like for community work in the Kimberley? What are the greatest challenges?

CA I think your greatest challenge is that you have to bring in a lot of your resources and they are just not on hand.

**DP** What do you mean when you are talking about resources?

CA Like in the metropolitan area you have got all your resources there only five minutes away sort of thing. If you want to, what is something that we can focus on, if you develop a programme of equipment at Wangkatjungka, which is Christmas Creek, where are you going to get all your material from? Do you know what I mean? You can't just go down the road and say, go to the hardware shop and say we want this, this and this,

**DP** Christmas Creek is how many kilometres from?

CA Oh my goodness it is that long, Yeah it is about 200kms

**DP** South of Fitzroy?

CA South of Fitzroy but you have to go off the main road and then down.



**DP Five, six hours?**

CA Oh it would be four hours

**DP To Fitzroy?**

CA On unsealed road first and then get onto the bitumen and that is distance and resources

**DP How far is Fitzroy from Perth?**

CA Oh my goodness a couple of thousand, two and a half

**DP Two thousand six hundred maybe**

CA Yeah.

**DP Perth is the most isolated capital city in the world ...**

CA Isolation in terms of getting materials and all those types of resources.

**DP And the costs associated ...?**

CA Heavy costs. I guess that is the main things. You sometimes have to almost invent our own resources or you have to think through. There will be resources around but you have got to have a good list in your head as to who is going to help you on that project?

**DP Can you give me an example of a community inventing their own resources?**

CA Oh instead of having a playground they could build their own little bough shed from local resources you know, bush timber and wire netting and spinifex and that sort of thing instead of the grandeur of a sail type of finish with a flash looking canopy on top.

**DP Or the bush mechanics tradition?**

CA Yeah that is another one. Yeah, bush mechanics. But that is the type of hurdles you have got in terms of a lot of your resources have to be found locally and work within the limits of your resources that are available. I am talking about manpower types of services and even with your health, not every community has got a health person quickly connected to it. There might be a weekly visit or something like that. You can have a person appointed within the community to look after the health but it is not the same as having a qualified person there, you know what I mean?

**DP So distance and isolation brings with it challenges?**

CA It is the biggest hurdle, biggest hurdle.

**DP Time?**

CA But that is not necessarily a bad thing too you know in community development.

**DP Any other challenges?**

CA Well one of the biggest difficulties of course is the climatic conditions, the wet. Communities have got to plan ahead in terms of anything to do with the wet season. You have got to ensure that you have got all your food resources and anything else that is going to be done within the wet period has to be there prior to the wet coming because otherwise there is the chances of being cut off from civilisation in terms of the rivers running a banker or whatever, cyclones don't seem to affect us in this side of the Kimberley but certainly in the Broome area downwards they have been affected by the cyclones pretty dramatically in recent years.

**DP So how long might a community be locked up?**



CA Well there has been months associated with the Lake Gregory this last wet, they were completely isolated for months, they had to food drop at one stage.

**DP And how far is Lake Gregory from other places?**

CA Well that is not all that far from Christmas Creek if you are going through the desert but it is a long way to go all the way to Halls Creek and then down.

**DP I would really like to end with what you think are the unique strengths of community work in the Kimberley.**

CA Well the unique strength is that you have got to work with small resources and those types of hurdles are really strengths because you have got to come up with other options to deal with those things. If you haven't got iron to build your sheds with you are going to have to use bush timber and that sort of thing you know. That's why not the having the iron there is not a hurdle it is actually allowing people to use the natural resources of what is available and I guess that is one of the good things of working in the Kimberley is that you have got to use the natural resources around you and you have got to work within the confines of your climatic conditions.

The other good thing is that I think you have got lots of resourceful people in the communities, it doesn't matter what, it can be all types of different skills whether it be on the traditional side or, there is always strong women in every community group, strong men. There is a real good sprinkling of young people now who are almost ready to take over the operations of their communities through natural individual growth, better education, health, and all that is taking place. I think in another ten years time there is going to be another direction in community development in the Kimberley area where communities are going to be ready for the next serious step of developing.

Taking all the information technology that is coming in now, computers will well and truly be able to be handled by individual communities. I think there will be more strength in terms of doing their own bookkeeping and everything and maybe some of the resource centres may not have to be depended upon any more, but it depends really on whether those young people are going to stay within their communities. If they don't there will be a decline, if they do, I think there will be real growth and there will be more imagination coming in, new fresh ideas and I think at the same time there has been a real increase in traditional learning, culture.

There has been a big increase all round even in Derby here in terms of traditional dancing, song and dance and everything is all coming back. There seems to be more ceremony activity taking place, interaction between communities, where that that takes place, one community comes in and sees what another community is doing and if they see any new things happening there, that information will be transferred back so there is sort of interaction of information happening more often now.

I think the Kimberley might be in for some exciting times in the next ten years. I think sports have had a lot to do with it to. Community groups are coming together as one and making decisions whether it be land decisions or coming together for a special purpose meetings on assisting other groups. I think that things are going to be good.

**DP On that note can I thank you again? Thanks for your hospitality and thanks for your profound wisdom and sharing your experience of community development.**

CA Well I hope that I may be helpful in spreading the gospel according to community development but I think there will always be a need for community development whether it be in a local environment or in the metropolitan area, urban type of situations in towns or communities in the Kimberley area. But I think it is happening all over anyhow and I think it is pro-



bably community development comes in different ways at different times and I think in the Kimberley area it is going to be a fairly constant type of way with the new style of approach coming up so I wish you all the best young Dave.

**DP Thank you and Happy Birthday.**

CA Thank you.

End of Interview