

The following is an excerpt from a submission to the Heart Foundation for funds to document aspects of the Mapuru food coop (July 2004).

Over the past four years outstanding achievements have been made by the Mapuru Homeland community. These achievements have resulted in beneficial impacts on both on the psychological and physical health of all Mapuru residents as evidenced by;

- increase access to nutritious food to community's 120 population
- enabling more Indigenous people to live in this healthy environment
- reducing total stress levels for a group of Indigenous people by enabling them to live in their homeland environment because of increased access to a range of foods and goods
- enabling Indigenous people to live on their custodial lands therefore being able to make decisions about the future for their people and their community i.e. enabling people to live where elders have control and authority, and because they have control this results in no substance abuse, no domestic violence or youth suicide which is prevalent in surrounding large communities. These people are choosing to live in this Homeland to avoid these things, despite lack of services.
- increasing sense of identity and self esteem through a successful enterprise run solely by the local people which will in turn, lead to improved health outcomes for the population
- to providing opportunities for Indigenous people to actively engage in western society, including use of bank accounts, internet banking, EFTPOS machines, cheque books to order and purchase foods leading to enhanced self esteem and independence
- increasing the literacy, numeracy, health and enterprise understandings and skills

It is now time to tell others about the Mapuru experience, so that Mapuru can be an inspiration and provide practical advice to other Indigenous populations around Australia. If successful grant funds will be used to document this project by the production of a DVD and website.

Background

Jackie Nguluwidi and his family live at Mapuru. Mapuru is a Home-Land-Centre located ten minutes charter flight south of Elcho Island. Jackie and his families live at Mapuru because they have custodial rights on this land, and see that they can build a future only when they can living on their own land. This is in stark contrast to the vast majority of vast people living in the nearby township of Galiwin'ku (Elcho Island).

The Elders started a community food cooperative so they would not have to charter planes to Elcho Island. They sell only to themselves and are non-profit. The Mapuru Cooperative is the first time the Indigenous people of Mapuru have meaningfully engaged in Western financial systems. Although they have little or no English literacy of oracy they now after almost four years independently managing this cooperative, they order all food, run the EFTPOS machine, banks accounts, cheques book, Visa card and daily undertake internet banking, and everyone is healthier.

There are no soft drinks, sugar-based cordials, oils, butters or margarines sold from the Coop. Foods low in fat, sugar and salt , high in fibre and Omega 3 are purchased. These are mostly non-perishable foods including tinned fish, fruits in natural juice, tinned vegetables, lentils, low joule cordial. Other goods included tooth brushes and tooth paste, garbage bags for collecting rubbish and hoses to establish gardens. There are also yam digging sticks, fishing lines, hooks, sinkers and other hunting aids available in the cooperative, thus enabling the inhabitants to be active hunters and gatherers.

The nurses at the clinic on Elcho Island said recently that the children are in far better health than their counterparts living in the Elcho Island settlement. The parents are able to purchase nutritious food, have more disposable income because they are not spending the bulk of their money on charter flights to buy food and generally feel they have more control of their lives.

The NT Dept Community Development, Sport and Cultural Affairs heard of the projects success. Officers from this department are extremely enthusiastic about the project and see it as a unique example of self-help. They invited Mapuru representatives to talk at the Indigenous Economic Forum to be held in May 2005. The inhabitants of Mapuru are Aboriginal people who, although they speak approximately twenty Indigenous languages, speak little English. The grant from the Heart Foundation was sought to assist them tell their story.

Project outcomes:

Document the outstanding achievements of the Mapuru Home-Land-Centre community by recording on video and still images the key factors that made this initiative a success. This video will be recorded in Djambarrpuynu the most widely spoken language in North East Arnhem Land. There are over 6,000 people who speak and understand Djambarrpuynu. The text will then be translated, with English subtitles used to produce a DVD based on browser technology.