

Welcome to Jilkminggan

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BY: ATJIA

We live in the Big River Country, 130 km's south from Katherine in the Northern Territory. Our family lived and worked on Elsey station, until award wages started in 1974, then an excision of land was given to them to live on.

At first the community was small and most of the family lived off the land, fishing and hunting, purchasing supplies from the town of Mataranka (30km's) and an aboriginal department (Yulngu). But then someone stole a lot of money and the organization collapsed. A few years went by and the community began growing.

Traditionally families will help one another out, this is good in one way - no homeless or people going hungry but now as the community is growing, the need for more healthy food at reasonable prices is more in demand.

The community does have a vegetable garden which when in season is available to mainly the Crèche, and the school and if the community people want they can go and get what they need themselves.

As stated in the Market Basket Survey of Remote Community Stores in the Northern Territory 2005, there is strong evidence that an adequate intake of fruits and vegetables is protective against diseases such as coronary heart disease, hypertension, type 2 diabetes, stroke and some cancers. From surveys conducted nationally it is obvious that Australians in general do not consume enough fruit and vegetables. For people living in remote communities in the Northern Territory, consumption is further compromised because of limited availability and high costs. For these reasons improving variety, quality and affordability of fruits and vegetables is a priority according to the survey.

The inclusion of a variety within the food groups increases the likelihood that one's diet contains all the nutrients required for good health.

Jilkminggan store had a very patchy start, the original shed was erected in the early 80's then it had an extension added in 1991. It ran into trouble with debt but made it back on it's feet again later. The original shed had no insulation therefore it made it almost impossible to shop during the day as the temperatures absolutely soared in the shop/shed. The previous company that leased the Jilkminggan store were asked time and time again to improve stock quality and quantity and reduce prices in the store but they never complied in all the years they were here. While the previous company Pataca were leasing the shop, a Market Basket Survey/District Comparison Report was conducted in 2006 showed that the variety of fruit and veg was practically non existent within the Katherine East region. This survey also showed that for a family of six to buy food here at Jilkminggan shop would cost \$665.00 a fortnight which was the third highest in the Katherine East region. There also was no aboriginal staff employed in the shop at the time Pataca was running it.

Outback Stores is now the current company that is leasing the store, they signed on in July 2008. The general consensus in Jilkminggan is that the variety of everything in the shop is much better than previously. The quality and prices of the fruit and vegetables especially is of a high and most satisfactory standard, and there are now 5 aboriginal employees in the shop. It is heart warming to see that ordinary community people are able to move on from CDEP and get a "real job" within their own community.

Community stores play an important part in lifestyle in remote areas therefore prices should be reasonably affordable for the average family.

Now because more people are being diagnosed with diabetes and other sicknesses related to poor food choices most their life, many find it hard to work hunt and fish for themselves.

Report by the unofficial food relief Coordinator

My name is Anna Godden and my mother ,her sister's and their husbands were founder's of our community - Jilkminggan. It is thus our family's responsibility as guardian's of this land, to look after our community. My family are recognized and respected as mentors and interpreters for the community, by the community members.

Over the years I have been: Crèche Supervisor, Women's C.D.E.P Coordinator, Arts /Cultural Coordinator, Health and Hygiene i.e. laundries', Unofficial food relief Coordinator.

Our house is also used as an unofficial safe house. I have been on the Health Committee, Parent School Committee and assisting my aunties with various other community things.

Our community has a population of about 300. The majority of adults have type 2 diabetes and more than half are children so our community goes through a lot of food. We also have many people, even children who are dealing with chronic depression and various other mental illnesses that families are struggling to deal with. Many are just burnt out - so they turn to alcohol as a "way out".

Since moving back here in 1999, my husband and myself have had to deal with many emergencies, many directly and indirectly linked to our shop. I even started 3 food and nutrition programs to try and get some healthy foods into our children.

The hardest times are during the long school holidays when many of the main carer's of the families' income drops down - as they are on casual wages. The school alone brings in around \$10,000 per month in wages. (The last principal was able to arrange some of the local staff to receive holiday pay.) Because of the very high cost of food, many people struggle to feed their families, even though many go fishing and hunting to supplement their diet. Since 2006 the food basket survey shows that a family of six pays \$665 now it's \$700. This survey doesn't include any cleaning things i.e. soap, shampoo and cleaning things for the house. This works out to be \$17,000 per year and most people's income is \$12,000 - \$15,000.

The other problem is when we are cut off from town when flood water's are blocking the roads. Sometimes the shop would run right out of food. And this is usually when my extrawork begins - supplying food, in the form of soup kitchen's etc. Collecting up voluntary worker's and food from where ever we can maybe the school, crèche or other source's with the cooperation of the various departments.

For over 10 years the people who leased the shop really did not care about the health of our community. Fresh fruit and veg. was basically not available.

When the federal govt. announced that they were coming into the communities to help, this gave me some hope that we might get assistance with the shop (we had been trying but it is very hard when you have no access to the agreement papers - KRAALAS and Fred Hollows had been trying to assist us with the legal side)

So it was a big relief when Ms Carolyn- the GBM of our community, organised for Outback Stores to come in. She organized funding to make the store a bit better and Outback Stores also loaned us some money to start up again.

I am surprised that not more people have died. I put it down to people supplementing their diet with good bush food and bush medicine. Also family member's being alert to when someone is sick. Between my husband and myself we have rushed many to hospital ourselves (Katherine 130km's north of our community) resulting in about saving about 20 people. But other family's have done the same.

In summary, the shop has played a big part in our communities bad health, this in turn has reduced work output and put more pressure upon the health system. We don't really have enough healthy and fit people to look after the old and sick ones! It has also made it hard that the traditional guardians get no official recognition when they have to step in and help the community - i.e. organizing soup kitchen when not enough food. Coming to-gether at a time like that is more than physical - it is also a good boost for morale and emotional support (they feel the community working together and this makes them feel safe and secure.)

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