

**SUBMISSION TO:
'Inquiry into Language Learning in Indigenous Communities'**

Received from:

**Cecelia Edwards
Kalkaringi Community
via Katherine NT 0852**

**Dr Felicity Meakins
School of Languages and Comparative Cultural Studies
University of Queensland
Brisbane QLD 4072**

████████████████████
████████████████

23 August 2011

We are submitting this response to the 'Language Learning in Indigenous Communities' questionnaire on behalf of the communities of **Kalkaringi** and **Daguragu** which are located on **Gurindji** country in the Victoria River District in the Northern Territory.

We are both heavily involved in language work in these communities. **Cecelia Edwards** has been an assistant teacher at Kalkaringi CEC for the last 15 years, and has been involved in a number of language documentation projects. She is a speaker of Gurindji and Gurindji Kriol. **Felicity Meakins** worked as a linguist for Diwurruwurru-jaru Aboriginal Corporation (Katherine Regional Language Centre), and is currently a research fellow at the University of Queensland. She has run a number of Gurindji and Gurindji Kriol documentation projects at Kalkaringi with a number of Gurindji people such as Cecelia Edwards.

Our responses to the questionnaire are as follows:

1. What are the languages spoken in your community?

Gurindji and Gurindji Kriol are the main languages spoken at Kalkaringi because it is Gurindji country and most people are Gurindji. Gurindji Kriol is a mixture of Gurindji and Kriol/English. Some people also speak Warlpiri and small amounts of Mudburra can also be heard.

2. How well are they spoken by children, adults and elders?

The most important language at Kalkaringi is Gurindji. Currently only middle-aged and older people speak Gurindji strongly. Children are growing up understanding Gurindji but are mostly only learning Gurindji Kriol.

Warlpiri is spoken across the generations where people still visit Warlpiri family at the neighbouring community of Lajamanu.

Mudburra is just spoken by some older people who have Mudburra heritage.

3. Describe your group and project.

A number of projects have been underway at Kalkaringi over the last number of years.¹ We have been **documenting traditional Gurindji language and culture**. We have been recording old people telling Dreaming stories and stories about the old days, for example when Gurindji people used to work at Jinparrak (Wave Hill station). We have also recorded the Gurindji way of life, for example collecting bush tucker such as *kilipi* 'bush bananas', *kurlartarti* 'bush oranges', *kurtakarla* 'bush coconuts', *muying* 'black plums' and *wayita* 'bush yams', and medicine such as *kupuwupu* 'lemon grass', *manyanyi* 'medicine plant' and *lunyja* 'snappy gum'. We then write down the stories and make subtitled DVDs of these stories. We are also finishing the Gurindji dictionary. There are around 10 elders involved in this ongoing project and a number of linguists.

Other projects have focused on **Gurindji Kriol**. For example we've been recording five Gurindji children since they were one year old to find out how they're learning Gurindji. We're still recording them nine years later. We are also recording young adults to get a picture of how Gurindji is changing across generations.² There are around 10 young women involved in these projects and linguists from the University of Queensland and the University of Wollongong.

4. What activities do you do to record or encourage the use of languages, including local languages?

These projects are mostly funded through universities and the **Australian Research Council** (see footnotes 1 and 2). We used to have a linguist visit from **Diwurruwurru-jaru Aboriginal Corporation** (Katherine Regional Aboriginal Language Centre), but the organization no longer exists. In this respect, the only support from linguists comes from visiting linguists who work at universities. There is no on-the-ground support anymore.

Currently there's **no Gurindji language program** at the school. Sometimes we have culture days at the school. We teach the children painting and *warrkap* (dancing), and tell the children stories. We also teach them about family lines e.g. skin groups, and what Dreaming they belong to. We divide up the children into skin groups for culture days, and they work in these groups.

¹ This work has been funded by various grants such as the Jaminjungan and Eastern Ngumpin DOBES project (University of Manchester) and the Hans Rausing Endangered Languages Project (HRELP) (University of Manchester). These projects have been facilitated by Felicity Meakins, Erika Charola and Patrick McConvell.

² This work is funded by the Aboriginal Child Language project (University of Melbourne) through the Australian Research Council, the 'Life after death: Exploring the birth of Gurindji Kriol, a new Aboriginal mixed language' project funded by the Australian Research Council through the University of Queensland, and 'Understanding sound patterns in the home environment in a remote Aboriginal community' funded by the Australian Research Council through the University of Wollongong. These projects have been facilitated by Felicity Meakins and Caroline Jones.

Once a year on the 23 August, the community celebrates **Freedom Day** on the anniversary of the Wave Hill walk-off. The school takes the children to visit Jinparrak (Wave Hill station). The *kajijirri* and *marlurluka* (old women and men) tell them stories about *larrpanginyi* (the old days). They *pinarrik* (teach) them about station life. They used work for *kartipa* (non-Indigenous people) as stockman and kitchen hands. They didn't earn much. They were just given *mangarri* (flour), *nalija* (tea), *kurturtu* (sugar) and *lupu* (offal) and *kuyuwarn* (bones). They used to live in *tupa* (humpies) not proper *marru* (houses). These are the stories they tell the children.

Some of the Aboriginal assistant teachers (Cecelia Edwards and Sarah Oscar, Amanda Vincent, Kirsty Smiler) are also doing an 'Own Language' course through **Batchelor Institute**. We are learning to write down Gurindji and create resources to use to teach children.

5. How are your languages, including your local languages taught in school?

The school only teaches **only English** but if children don't understand the teachers get the assistant teachers to speak to them in Gurindji and Gurindji Kriol. When we have **culture days**, more children come to school.

6. What interpreting and translating services are available in your local languages? How useful and effective are they?

The **Aboriginal Interpreter Service** (AIS) is based in Katherine. They provide training for NAATI accreditation and organize Gurindji interpreters in Katherine and Kalkaringi. When someone needs an interpreter in Kalkaringi they use Robert Roy, Kirsty Smiler, Leah Leaman, Rosemary Johnson and Cecelia Edwards. Interpreters are used for the health clinic, the Shire office, bush court, government meetings and Karungkarni Arts Centre. When someone needs an interpreter in Katherine they use Helen Morris and Jessie Brown to interpret at hospital, welfare, NAAJA and court.

It is important to have AIS, particularly to help older people who don't speak any English. However, because they are based in Katherine, it is difficult for AIS to organize interpreters remotely. It would be more effective to have a regional branch of AIS in Kalkaringi.

7. What are the main difficulties facing your project?

At the school they just want English to be spoken. **The school won't support a language program**. This is a problem for a couple of reasons. First the young children don't speak English which why the teachers need the assistant teachers (ATs). The ATs have to translate every the teachers say, especially for the young children. Second, we are worried about losing our language and culture. The children are at school for 6 hours a day. They are too tired after school for extra-curricula language classes. This means we don't have a chance to formally teach the children Gurindji.

Another problem is the difficulty of getting funding to support language and culture. A few years ago we tried to get funding to set up a small **language centre** at Kalkaringi but we were unsuccessful. But we really want a language centre here to

support language programs in the school, act as a branch of the interpreter service (AIS) and teach *kartiya* (non-Indigenous people) our language and culture so they can understand what people in the community are saying.

8. What are you aiming to achieve in the future?

It our choice what language we speak and everybody at Kalkaringi wants Gurindji to be strong in the future for the children. When old people pass away, it is the children who need to continue speaking our language. We are worried that this will not happen. So we want to encourage our children to keep speaking Gurindji. We want to keep Gurindji strong.

But more than that, we want our children to be 'two way strong'. We want them to be good English speakers and good Gurindji speakers.

We also want *kartiya* (non-Indigenous people) to learn our language, Gurindji, when they come to Kalkaringi so they can understand what people around them are saying.