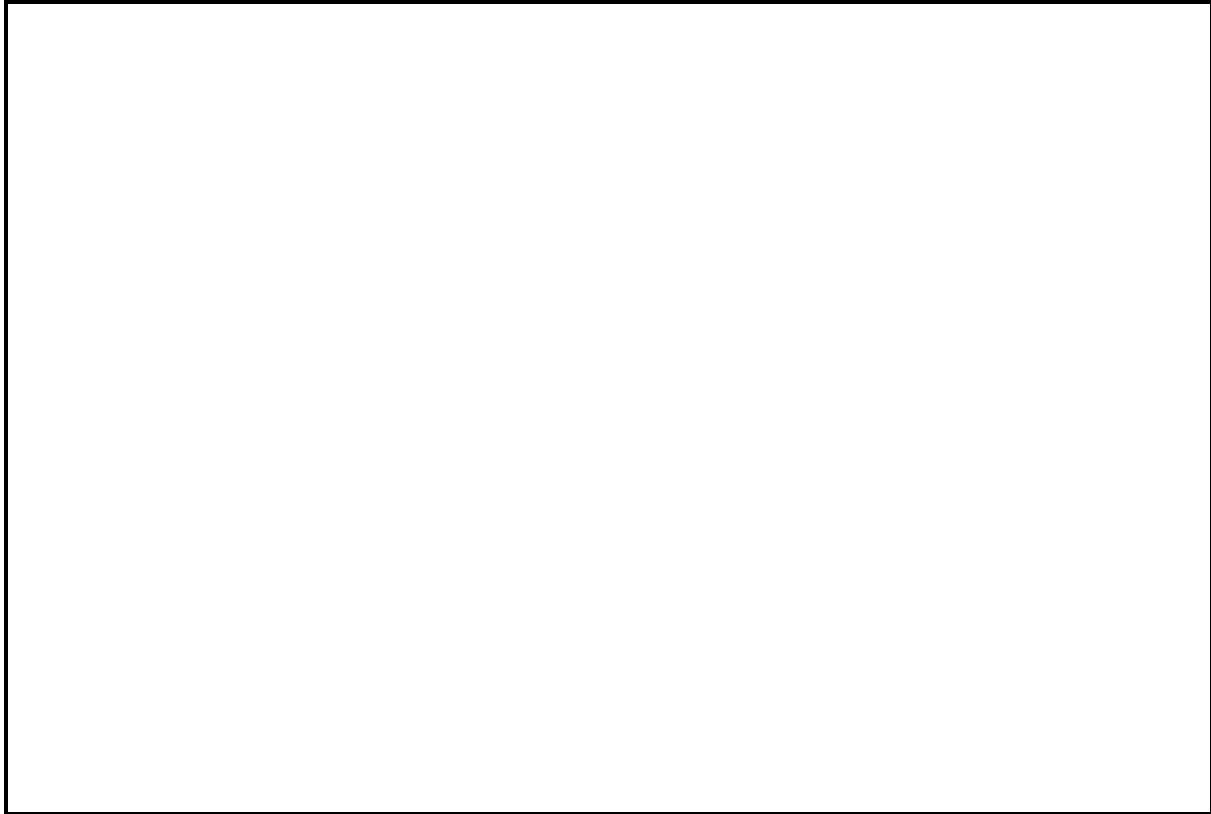


**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES STANDING COMMITTEE ON
ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAT ISLANDER AFFAIRS
INQUIRY INTO LANGUAGE LEARNING IN INDIGENOUS
COMMUNITIES**



Young Inhaadi class students visiting a traditional site, July 2011

*“In terms of cultural heritage, the loss of Indigenous languages in Australia is a loss for all Australians. For the Indigenous peoples whose languages are affected, the loss has wide ranging impacts on culture, identity and health. Cultural knowledge and concepts are carried through languages. Where languages are eroded and lost, so too is the cultural knowledge. This in turn has potential to impact on the health and well-being of Indigenous peoples. There is now significant research which demonstrates that strong culture and identity are protective factors for Indigenous people, assisting us to develop resilience.” **Australian Human Rights Commission, Social Justice Report 2009***

*“Languages, with their complex implications for identity, communication, social integration, education and development, are of strategic importance for people and the planet. There is growing awareness that languages play a vital role in development, in ensuring cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue, but also in attaining quality education for all and strengthening cooperation, in building inclusive knowledge societies and preserving cultural heritage, and in mobilizing political will for applying the benefits of science and technology to sustainable development. It is thus urgent to take action to encourage broad and international commitment to promoting multilingualism and linguistic diversity, including the safeguarding of endangered languages.” **United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) Atlas of Indigenous Languages***

Response from

INHAADI ADNYAMATHANHA NGAWARLA CLASS

c/Taoundi Aboriginal Community College, 1 Lipson Street, Port Adelaide, SA 5015

August 2011

Inhaadi Adnyamathanha Ngawarla Class (IANC) is an extraordinary achievement originating from one woman's desire to save her family's dying language. Like many of her generation, 37 yr old Gillian Bovoro grew up hearing Adnyamathanha spoken by her Elders, but social pressures and community fractures prevented her from actually learning the language.

After living away from traditional Adnyamathanha country for twenty years Gillian was so moved when she heard Elders speaking Adnyamathanha Ngawarla at a funeral that she vowed to learn to speak it herself. To pursue this dream Gillian partnered with Eva Hornung from Australians Against Racism four years ago to start up a weekly class for students of any age to learn to speak and write Adnyamathanha. Adnyamathanha (Yura Ngawarla) is currently listed as a severely endangered language by the Foundation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Languages and Culture (FATSILC) in their National Indigenous Language Survey Report 2005 and definitely endangered in the UNESCO Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger.

The class was named Inhaadi Adnyamathanha Ngawarla Class (IANC). Inhaadi roughly translates as 'here and now', Adnyamathanha means 'people of the rocks' and Ngawarla is the Adnyamathanha word for 'language'.

Many other Adnyamathanha families that had migrated south to live in Adelaide were delighted at the opportunity to learn and practice their traditional language and became regular students at the weekly Inhaadi classes. Some class members had lost their Adnyamathanha language skills as a direct result of an early Australian government policy. Upon moving to Adelaide in the 1950s, their parents had been required to sign an exemption from the Aborigines Protection Board in order to access education and employment within mainstream society. This exemption required a renunciation of traditional lifestyle, including the passing on of any Aboriginal language or culture.

Since its start, IANC has overcome many challenges. There weren't any relevant resources to teach Adnyamathanha Ngawarla with and no qualified Adnyamathanha teachers were available. Undaunted, Gillian and Eva created their own resources, and Gillian recruited Uncle Buck McKenzie, a fluent speaker with decades of experience running educational programs with the Dept of Education and SA Museum, to teach the eager classes.

A need for two classes, one for adults and one for children emerged. Students ranged in age from infancy through to Elders in their sixties. Class curriculum was developed from scratch and adapted to the unique needs of mixed age classes. Gillian and Eva, along with other class members acquired unpublished word lists written by linguists and produced basic booklets and worksheets to increase literacy and reinforce the verbal learning happening in Uncle Buck's engaging classes. Other Elders with language skills living in the country have regularly been invited down to Adelaide to visit the class and enrich the students with new opportunities to practice and learn language.

Another key factor in the success of the classes are the Elder camps. Twice a year the class hires a bus and travels up to traditional Adnyamathanha country in South Australia's northern Flinders Ranges. There the class visits with Elders, practices language and learns culture. These experiences integrate

the IANC students' classroom-based learning and cement Adnyamathanha students' cultural identities. Specialised resources are created for the camps that focus on the particular locations and activities being included. Most activities and Elder visits are filmed in order to retain precious knowledge and experiences for posterity.



Some of the Adnyamathanha Elders visited by IANC in April 2011

Participation in learning their traditional language, re-connecting with country and receiving cultural knowledge and instruction from Elders has been uniquely enriching for the Adnyamathanha students of IANC. They report increased social esteem, cultural pride, strengthened sense of community. The links made between the urban class and Adnyamathanha people in the country and in remote areas has reinforced kinship ties and community belonging. The experience of acquiring a language has improved child and adult students learning aptitudes and understanding of linguistic processes. Overall, IANC has significantly increased the possibility of Adnyamathanha Ngawarla being saved from complete extinction.

Financial support for the IANC initially came through the fundraising efforts of Australians Against Racism, but since that organisation folded in 2008, and the IANC has been successful in gaining funding from The Department of Environment, Water, Arts and Heritage's Maintenance of Indigenous Language and Records Program.

An exceptional outcome of IANC is the production of 'Wadu Matyidi' a short animated film in the Adnyamathanha language accompanied by five short documentaries. This project resulted from IANC collectively writing a short story as a homework assignment, then contracting film professionals to raise a budget of \$256,000 and realise the story as a short animated film.

The Wadu Matyidi story is a fictional tale of three young Adnyamathanha children in the time before contact. The young siblings set out for a day of exploring around their camp and make a startling discovery that will change their lives forever. IANC appointed a Cultural Committee of Elders to oversee film production and ensure accurate language usage and cultural representation over the two years the project took to complete. Child IANC students trained intensively to be voice actors for the animation which is entirely in Adnyamathanha Ngawarla with English sub-titles. The Australian Children's Television Foundation (based in Melbourne) is currently developing an educational package about Adnyamathanha people and culture that incorporates Wadu Matyidi.

The IANC coordinated a public launch of the completed film in Adelaide in July 2010. Many Elders were brought down to the event at Tandanya Arts and Cultural Centre and free copies of the film were distributed to all known Adnyamathanha people. Wadu Matyidi has since screened on National Indigenous Television and at the Adelaide Short Film Festival and has gone on to win Audience Favourite Award at the Sydney International Animation Festival (Aug 2010) and Best Indigenous Resource at the Australia Teachers of Media Awards (Melbourne, Oct 2010).

IANC members have been invited to present about their experience producing Wadu Matyidi at the Indigenous Animation Forum at the Sydney International Animation Festival and at the Puliima

Indigenous Language Conference (Brisbane, 2011). The film has had a resounding impact on the Adnyamathanha community, endearing itself to Adnyamathanha speakers who've never before witnessed a sophisticated production in their own language. It is also completely engaging for Adnyamathanha children who love the humorous characters and recognise the familiarity of the context and language.



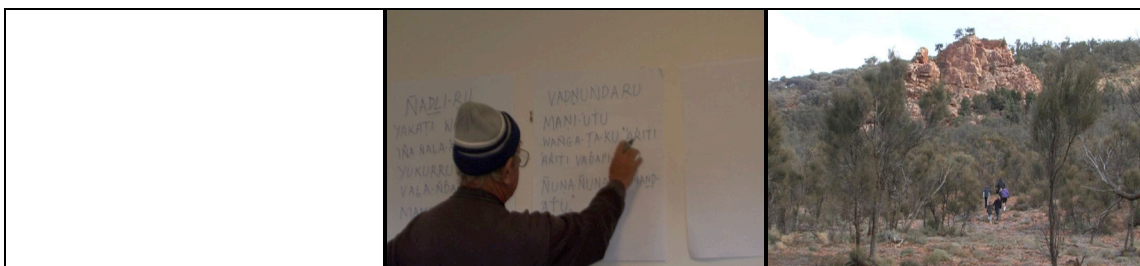
Scenes from Wadu Matyidi

In acknowledgement of the broad value of the Wadu Matyidi project IANC has undertaken to produce another more extended animated film using the popular Wadu Matyidi characters to further explore and illustrate early South Australian history from an Adnyamathanha perspective. The class is well into scripting and is beginning to look for professional support and funding for this exciting project.

In addition to developing innovative media resources and compiling curriculum resources, IANC continues to run weekly sessions for an average of ten to twenty students. Long-term IANC students are now establishing strong vocabularies and beginning to show signs of basic fluency.

Although outcomes from the four years of IANC's existence are very impressive, its future is not at all secure. At present the class only continues through Gillian's considerable voluntary efforts. In addition to working full-time and parenting four children, Gillian's commitment to her traditional language requires her to apply for and report on short-term funding for IANC and organise and transport class resources to the temporary weekly class venue. Finding appropriate teachers is also an increasing struggle as the health concerns of many fluent Elders has greatly reduced available teachers.

IANC urgently needs broad-spectrum support to continue and expand. It would benefit tremendously from long-term funding, teacher training and a permanent venue for classes.



Learning language and culture in IANC