

T-TRIM in January

By Louise Macdonald



The first block for the Cross Cultural training program T-TRIM happened in January. In a five day program which covered Living and Working in Community and Languages we worked with a wonderfully engaged group of participants across many different church backgrounds and work contexts. The participants seemed to appreciate the interactive learning approaches with the emphasis on self reflection and practical information. Starting with a role play where the “Majorians” attending a fabulous “Minorian” celebration. Karen from Nungalinya led us in an exploration of world view, getting us to put on the different lenses required to operate in diverse cultural contexts. Rachel and Carl led us in exploring relationships, kinship and Demand Sharing and how to make friends. Then Rachel and I looked at personal security in community looking at



travelling in the bush, etiquette, dress codes, gender roles, health and self care. Other topics looked at roles and expectations, team building and an intro to Indigenous Spirituality. We finished up with Karen and I unpacking Culture shock and stress and working with mentors. Then Cathy Bow from CDU, our

own Mally McLellan and Kathy Dadd from AuSIL spent a day and half exploring Indigenous language and language learning. We finished up with a fabulous night Kangaroo tail feasting and fellowship lead by a variety of church leaders from Kriol country, Baggot community and East Arnhem Land.



“Living in Two Worlds” in Aboriginal Australia

By Margaret Miller

After having lived in an Aboriginal Community for 7 years, I took a trip to Africa to visit my sister and her family, who had just begun serving in Botswana.

I received a wonderful welcome, and got to meet my sister's African friends and helpers. It was not long before they commented to me, not about my family resemblances, but rather 'how relaxed I was' in their company. They asked me; "Where do you usually live?" and "Why are you so relaxed and at ease with us?" So I shared of my home in an Aboriginal community, and explained how I found their cultural lifestyle similar in many ways to the one I am living in; ie. Australia. They were surprised to know that there were Indigenous people who lived in Australia!

As I showed them photos of my home it was new to them that Australians could be a similar skin shade as they were! But the colour of the people wasn't all we discovered that was similar...

their focus on relationships was just as strong, and the importance of time was just not there, just as in 'my' community back in Australia. I was happy to be at ease with their 'time' and to learn how alike many of the Batswana values were to Aboriginal Australian values.

It was only some 10 years later, when my sister and her family had returned to Australia, that she visited me in my Northern Territory home. After a day or two of settling in, she remarked; "This is just like Africa!" I was delighted that she was 'feeling' the same way I had in Africa, and confirmed my experiences.

BUT... the greatest reflection for me was considering the differences that had existed in the preparation and training offered to each of us. My sister's mission agency gave her and her family a good year of preparation, training, conferences and 'retreats' to work through, before they embarked on their cross-cultural experience...

Meanwhile, I received good advice in my search for a career path for school teaching in the Northern Territory. I took up a three year Government course that contained 4 unique units on Aboriginal Studies in Canberra. I received an orientation package in Darwin on my arrival, BUT then I had to take the initiative and find any further help, namely experienced colleagues, as there was no comprehensive process by my employer to prepare me to live and work long-term cross-culturally...and I was a lucky one to find that help!!

It has sadly been the experience of many who have embarked on a career in an Australian Aboriginal community, to have little or no preparation by way of cross-cultural training before arriving... after all, aren't we in Australia ...we are not going 'overseas'?!

I have been privileged to live and work with Yolngu people in the Northern Territory for 41 years. English is not their first language, and their cultural values are very different to my Western cultural values ...I have witnessed many people struggle with their entry into an Aboriginal community, some leaving far too prematurely, from the stress of not being well-prepared. ... Surely it is time for change, to encourage, train and support those wanting to engage with one of the most diverse cultural situations possible in our world.

That is why I have been passionate to assist 'Missions Interlink' with developing a course in 'Living in Two Worlds' that is particularly focused on skilling those entering Northern Territory Aboriginal Communities towards cross-cultural competence. This course was held online on two Saturdays in April 2021, joined with a hub that met face-to-face at Nungalinya College in Darwin. I joined a team of presenters; Rachel Borneman, David Turnbull and Carl Musch.

Already in January, Mission Interlink delivered other units of work to 18 people, interested in working and living in Aboriginal Communities by a different team. Some participants have already established a role in a community, others are closely connected to the Top End life and work, and others are considering the 'north' as a possible future.

One participant writes of their recent April unit: "If I was ever tempted to think I could just 'feel my way' through cross-cultural interactions with Aboriginal Australian, 'Living in Two Worlds' helpfully dispelled that illusion. The course opened my eyes to the profound differences between Western and Aboriginal worldviews and gave me an invaluable toolkit for starting to engage in that space."

