

# *Welcome to* **Indigenous Ministry in the Top End**

*Cross Cultural Insights*

**Together Building up the Body of Christ Eph 4:12**



Compiled by: Rachel Borneman & Chris Garner



# Contents

For more information about the contents of this publication please contact NTIMAN

## Coordinator

Rachel Borneman, Founder  
NT Indigenous Ministry Awareness Network (NTIMAN) - *a time of learning about culture*  
Mobile: + 61 412 998594  
bornewoman@bigpond.com

## Compiled by

Rachel Borneman  
Chris Garner

## Anthropology Adviser and Copy Editor

Susanne Hagan

## Cultural Consultant

Miliwanga Sandy

## Cover & Layout

Chris Garner

## NT Indigenous Ministry Awareness Network

*Vision unfolds of linking people together with a heart for Indigenous Ministry across agencies, now formalised as TEARlink.*  
TEARlink is a network of Christians working in or with Indigenous communities. It brings people together for times of refreshment, encouragement and stimulation in three different hubs: the Top End, Alice Springs and Cairns. See Pg 36 for details.

## Copyright

This resource has been developed with the help of many partners, Indigenous and Western, who have lived in the Top End, and is freely available without any edit or exclusion of content.

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# Welcome

This is an introductory pack of information to meet the needs of people new to cross cultural work in the Top End of the Northern Territory.

The information in this free resource has been compiled from various sources and from information gathered from people who have worked in partnership with Indigenous people around the Top End.

It has been written and compiled as a support for ministry teams, churches,

Christian schools and individuals seeking to support kingdom work in partnership with Indigenous people.

**We encourage you to use the journal feature at the back to process your own cross cultural journey in the Top End!**

## Acknowledgement of Country

### Please note:

Indigenous people are continually being impacted by a dominant Western society. It is very important to understand their way of thinking, and acknowledge cultural differences as we work together in ministry.

'Indigenous people' is a collective term for different people groups within Australia, as different as if you had gone to Indonesia and were working there!

We hope you enjoy reading and gain more insights for your ministry and cross cultural serving!

### **The Northern Territory Indigenous Ministry Awareness Network:**

Acknowledges that God made the Indigenous people the first caretakers of this land.

Acknowledges the traditional owners of country throughout the Northern Territory and their continuing connection to land and people.

Pays respect to the elders of these strong cultures, and to the strong work God is doing with and through Christian Indigenous elders and leaders in their communities.

## Indigenous Endorsement

"If you learn both ways you can learn to work together. If you only learn one way, that is not much help, you will only stay where you are. I now live in Adelaide learning more of Whitefella way, but I also remember my culture back from Community. This cross-cultural booklet is a great way to learn to understand both worlds. From recognizing the different worldviews, unity and forgiveness will flow from this. I can't live here in Adelaide without friends that have taken time to understand our worldview. Let's fly together like I saw a black crow and white cockatoo do." *Rachael Willika*

## Historical Background

There has been a history of  
western domination, with  
disregard for the  
Indigenous way of life.

Our job is not to take over and make Indigenous people more western. We need to look out for this in our workplaces as we partner with Indigenous people in the same environment yet have different ways.

We need to recognise who God has made them to be and how they understand God through their perspective.

From the time of Captain Cook, the settlers began treating Aboriginal people as animals/savages rather than valuing them as people.

Then, the ethnocentric view that our non-Indigenous way is right resulted in the stolen generation children to 'help' them have our non-Indigenous culture (see *Rabbit Proof Fence*).

Today, Westerners can still be seen as dominating - simply by not being aware of the difference in worldviews and making them match our ways and worldview (even though our intentions are good).

## Good News

The good news is that, when the settlers started to learn Indigenous languages, they got to know the people and their culture. This respect and understanding continued to grow for those who spent years translating the Bible into Indigenous languages. These Westerners contributed *Something of Value* (see the video listed in Resources). This work still continues with AuSIL (50 years of Bible translation in 2012), the work of Coordinate - Supporting Indigenous Scriptures and through the work of ARDS setting up a Yolngu radio and developing other resources. (See 'Work Opportunities', pp. 34-37.)

*"There is a sense of not only a tragedy but of hope. We are in a space where we hold history in our hands but we also hold the future in our hands."* Billy Williams from Jisas Vwantaim <http://vimeo.com/39176002>

It is important that we learn something of Indigenous world view and are careful not to judge what we perceive, saying it's wrong just because it doesn't match our world view!

“

God loves Indigenous people for who they are, they don't need to be a Whitefella to be a Christian.

Rachel Borneman

”

There can be a lot of fear in ministry that we may get it wrong, but this is not necessary. Indigenous people are perceptive and forgiving. The main thing is that we come together as brothers and sisters in Christ, together in relationship, and are aware of our own dominating world view. (A great way to do this is by attending the Katherine Christian Convention the first weekend in May every year).

## Note on Terminology:

### Indigenous and Non-Indigenous

Most urbanised Indigenous people also have other ethnic backgrounds, but what we are talking about in this booklet is not how dark someone's skin might be but a fully Indigenous worldview and way of living.

### White & Black Fella

The terms 'whitefella' and 'blackfella' as used in this booklet are commonly used and accepted in the Top End. These are not seen as racist terms.

Australian Aboriginal culture is very different from mainstream Australian culture.

Being different means ‘not the same’. It doesn’t mean ‘worse’ or ‘inferior’. When you see something different in another culture, take the opportunity to think about what this teaches you about your own culture as well as what it teaches you about the other culture.

We should not assume that what we say will be understood in the same way by Aboriginal people. Similarly, we might miss meanings which are hidden in the way they communicate with us.

Meanings are filtered by the way we see the world, our values and beliefs. By not taking into account other world views, our communication frequently leads to misunderstandings.

How we minister to, and relate with, Indigenous people will be greatly influenced by how much we acknowledge and accept the differences, starting with ourselves! This breaks many barriers so we can work together.

Here are some ways we often see things differently:

World View Tendencies	
Western	Indigenous
Work is future oriented Change is good Time oriented Time is linear Focus on tasks and principles Emphasis on planning and assessment Buy/own & sell land Ownership is earned by individual hard work Leadership is decided by voting Exploit environment Knowledge is shared and challenged Decisions are made to a deadline Security comes from role or title in society Explains mystery Competitive Rational	Work deals with the immediate Traditional ways valued Experience oriented Time is cyclic Focus on persons and relationships Emphasis on actual experience Related to the land Ownership is communal Elders are already within the tribe and clans Adapt to environment Knowledge is owned by people Decisions made by consensus Security comes from interactions within the community Celebrates mystery Cooperative Intuitive

“Everything is simpler than you think and at the same time more complex than you imagine.”  
Johann Wolfgang von Goethe



Many of the Indigenous people we meet everyday in the Top End of Australia live in two worlds: in a traditional world and the modern world.

This section covers some of the differences in our daily life.

Have you ever thought about the way you relax? With people or away from people? Some think this is because of personality types. However, by way of generalisation we could say that Aboriginal people relax with people (as Indigenous people constantly have people in their life), whereas we Whitefellas often relax by ourselves (our comfort zone) due to individualism and need for our 'own space'. *"Whitefella believe in privacy - for us as Indigenous Christian leaders to relax we go away from family (grandchildren) and find our Christian brothers and sisters to have time for prayer - relaxation."* William and Majorie  
*"Aboriginal people like to rest by being in the bush, listening to the birds, wind blowing, cattle, donkeys, all music to our ears or go away to do art and craft away from humbugging. Kids know to leave them alone."*

Aboriginal people in the Top End love 'bush foods' (as well as some modern favourites) such as:

- Meat: Kangaroo, Beef (Kriol word Buligi), Turkey
- Fish, Dugong, Crayfish, Mud Crab, Turtle
- Damper

Other Traditional Indigenous bush foods were the water foods and foods that were dug from the ground e.g. bush potato, bush banana, lily root in billabong, bush fruit, white and red apple, blackcurrant etc.

## Indigenous Foods



A favourite communal activity is going out fishing, hunting or collecting foods for the family.

## Day to Day Differences

“

Preservation of one's own culture does not require contempt or disrespect for other cultures. ”

Cesar Chavez

The clock and the calendar are not the boss

People tend to live outdoors more than indoors, their yards are also their living areas

People often stay at more than one house

Values placed on housing, dress and cleanness are different from ours

English is not their first language

Children have more independence

Meal times are not social times



## Things to Consider

### Seven Commandments



We don't see things as they are,  
we see them as we are.

Anais Nin



1. Go with an open mind
2. Expect the unexpected
3. Remember you are a guest
4. Remember the bigger black and white story
5. Make the most of the opportunity
6. Be a learner
7. Look below the surface

Greg Anderson

### Consider their context of:

Language

Values

Social customs, clothing, food

Beliefs

Relationships

*Each one could be uniquely different to your view, each requiring a relevant response.*

### Make the Gospel Relevant!

Most importantly, when sharing the Gospel be sure to think about the context. All these differences influence how the message we share will be understood.



We can define the nature of myth by stating that the myths of a given social organisation sanctify the formal organisation of that society...

This may be clearer if we compare the ceremony of the stations of the cross, with the repetition of the journey-tracing on the Tjuringa (sacred object).



Malinowski 1926

Here are some ways we manage finances differently:

## Money, Risk & Debts

### Western

Money used only for designated purposes.

Resources saved for a rainy day.

If something is not being actively used the owner will be consulted before it is borrowed.

Budgeting is considered important.

Buy in bulk to save on the cost per unit.

Success through wealth, authority and power through ability, work and education.

Borrow from a bank or credit company. To ask relatives or friends is considered impolite and an imposition.

Want to have money in their pocket at all times but still refuse to lend.

Expected to pay outstanding debts.

The risk of a loan is on the borrower.

The buyer seeks the best price and buys from that seller.

Employers are not expected to provide advances for any personal needs.

Refuse immediate benefit for a potentially larger long-term benefit.

### Indigenous

Money used for immediate need.

Resources are to be used not hoarded.

If something is not being actively used, it is considered available.

Budgeting is not common.

Buy products in small amounts even though more expensive, as people may lack finances to buy in bulk. Also, if there is extra food, others may take it.

Success through personal relationships.

Borrow from a relative or friend or Aboriginal organisation for funerals.

Want to be without money and thus can more easily refuse to lend.

Many people live with outstanding debts that they never expect to pay.

The risk of a loan is on the lender.

The buyer will buy from someone with whom they have relationship no matter what the cost.

Employers should provide advances to employees for family situations.

Will choose a sure and immediate benefit over potentially larger long-term benefit.

Trading as a lifestyle. If they have no money they will make or give something to exchange with a friend or relative for the cost of petrol.



### Practical Point:

Aboriginal people manage money like most things: through relationships. They don't have a concept for budgeting because they go to their family when they have a need. They share and give rather than budget.



# Dreaming

## The Basis of Cosmology

Firstly, the Dreaming is about the creation of things as they are. These stories are the Mythology which gives explanation to the interconnectedness of all beings and their responsibilities. Dreaming stories are not only in the distant past, they are in operation in the present.

Once we understand how the Dreaming stories are constant we see that the Dreaming of a person is connected with their conception.

This means people come from somewhere and will return to it later. It means they are always connected to it, not living independently.

The 'Dreaming' is a vital concept in the Aboriginal way of seeing the world. Essentially it starts with creation stories and then explains the relationship of everything, both in the physical and spiritual worlds.

Relationships are key to the entire way of working in partnership with Aboriginal people. Therefore the Dreaming is always to be considered as a foundation for the world views we may encounter in the Top End.

## Totems

In the Dreaming there are many totemic symbols. Most commonly, these are animals which are assigned to overall clans and then to individuals according to their moiety (see page 15). The totems are to identify the clan groups.

The role of each person is to grow up understanding the individual responsibilities connected to that animal, the 'law' it holds and its place among the seasons as well as its role for the community as a whole.

Each person usually has a different dreaming but it could be the same as someone from another 'country'.

A person's totemic symbol is basic to the spiritual essence of the individual.

# Dreaming

## Oral Tradition

As a person knows more dreaming songs and dances they grow in status towards becoming an elder.

Children will not be allowed to eat their totem but may be allowed to when they have passed through later stages of their ceremonies e.g. Initiation ceremony and their understanding has grown.

The totemic stories in the Dreaming are passed on by oral tradition and through song and art, including body painting.



### Practical Point:

Aboriginal people are often happy to share the dances of the totem that they are allowed to do in public. When they feel comfortable to do so, you can respectfully ask which dance they have done and they may like to say which animal dance it is that they know.

## Sacred Sites

The Dreaming also connects people to the land through sacred sites. These are places of significance in the dreaming 'song-line'. Each child grows up with their song-line, an oral map of their country which traces the travels of the Dreamtime Spirits which splits between the country into the moieties called Yirritja and Dhuwa.

To destroy or damage a sacred site will cause Dreamtime Spirits to seek revenge.

## Traditional Religion

Indigenous people have a strong belief in the spirit world, with no separation between the spiritual and physical.

Because of their strong belief in the spirit world, Aboriginal people are generally more aware of spiritual beings and realities than we non-Indigenous are.

This is why there is great passion that revival will break out again among Aboriginal people as it did in the 70's in the Top End.

To find out more read *Revival in the Outback*, contact John & June Blacket:  
[admin@khesed.org.au](mailto:admin@khesed.org.au)

# Dreaming

## Art

**Desert dot paintings** are Dreaming maps with symbols that are understood by others, often with an aerial perspective of the ground.

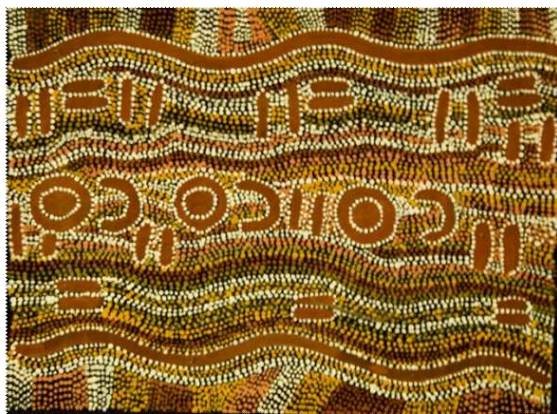
**Arnhem Land paintings** have cross hatching with shapes and colours which represent their clans, law and moieties.

*“Both has a lot to do with our identity and who we are.”*

Traditional Indigenous art is all about the Dreaming; the art represents the traditional stories and knowledge of the Law. Only certain men and women are permitted to paint the sacredness of these subjects and these are passed down to the rightful generation family.



Top End



Central Australia

**For more examples, check out:**

[www.mattstone.blogs.com/photos/aboriginal\\_christian\\_art/index.html](http://www.mattstone.blogs.com/photos/aboriginal_christian_art/index.html)

“

The most important trip you may take in life is meeting people halfway.

Henry Boye ”

## Country

# The Importance of Country

**For Aboriginal people, the land they come from holds the identity for their people, the Law and their culture; this is their 'country'.**

The relationship between land, humans, animals, weather etc is the basis for life.

If we imagine Australia like Europe, Indigenous

peoples are represented across the land like countries, each group tied to their own land. Different countries have their own block of land.

'Country' is what they long for when they are homesick and where they wish to be when they pass away. It is where they feel most connected!

## Connection to Country means:

Country is given by the Dreaming Spirits.

People belong to Country, not Country to them.

It is from Country that people get their identity.

Country is sacred.

Language belongs to Country.

## People are Caretakers of their Land.

## What Country will you be visiting?

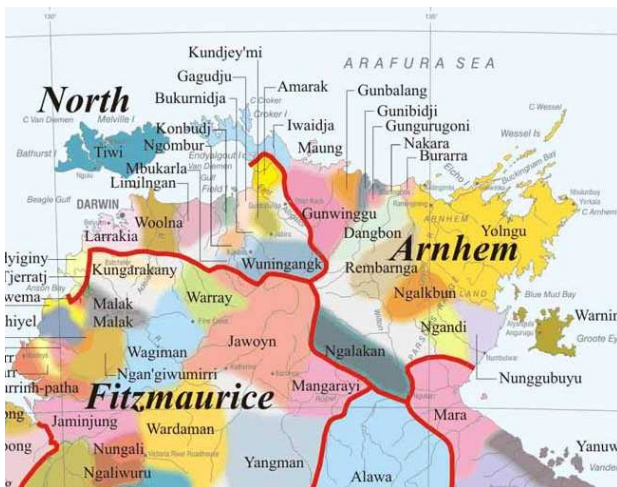


### Practical Point:

Find out the name of the people group, their language and the name of their Country.

For example: Yolngu people of the Gupapuyngu language live in Ramingining, East Arnhem Land.

## Some of the countries & languages in the Top End from the Aboriginal Map of Australia...



Check out the full size map of Aboriginal Australia here:

<http://www.abc.net.au/indigenous/map>

# Kinship

## A Foundation for Life

“

Our loyalties must transcend our race, our tribe, our class, and our nation; and this means we must develop a world perspective.

Martin Luther King Jnr

”

**Relationships are one of the very important aspects of Aboriginal life.**

The way they interact with each other depends on their relationship. You will soon notice the importance of this.

The very fact that we Westerners travel together as an unrelated group is very hard for Top End Indigenous people to understand! They are asking: *why would you leave your own relatives to travel...can we trust you?*

Dogs, along with all of nature, have a place in the kinship system.

A translator thought she would test this point out one day by asking a man if a certain dog was his uncle. The man quickly replied that the dog wasn't his uncle but his cousin!

Dogs were/are used to guard people from evil spirits and others with ill-intent, as well as used for hunting. Dogs are good for finding you when you get lost.

They also protect you from 'cheeky' animals, i.e. dangerous, such as a poisonous snake.

## Everything in Relationship!



“

Brom det taim God bin meigim ola animul. Imin meigim Edam blanga budum neim langa ola animul. Wal God bin meigim jidan Edam bosoba langa olda animul en blanga lukaftum olabat. Wal tudei (hil, riba) garram skin neim du en dei ol jidan anda Yirritja o Dhuwa.

When God created all the animals he asked Adam to name all the animals. God made him the boss of these animals to look after them. All these still have skin names (as do hills, rivers, etc). They all come under the Yirritja or Dhuwa moiety.

”

Miliwanga Sandy, 2010

*Kriol Language*

**Traditional Aboriginal societies have complex systems of kinship rules which divide people into such groups as moieties, sections and subsections, totemic groups, and clans.**

In East Arnhem Land the two moieties determine a tribe's relationships, including marriage rules.

Clans are also important as children inherit their father's land and language through his clan. They also inherit management and ceremonial responsibilities to their father's clan. They usually live on the father's land but have a strong bond with the mother's people and country.

## Kinship - A Social Web

The kinship system is a regular part of Top End Indigenous life and most Indigenous people will have a skin name (i.e. a place in the relationship system).



### Practical Points:

As you build relationships with Indigenous people, they might adopt you into their family by giving you a skin name. This is very special. At that point your family relations and responsibilities involving hundreds of people are established! Your skin name will determine who you can or cannot speak to, who are your family, your responsibilities and who you may marry.

## A Different Family Structure

**Aboriginal people can have many parental roles in their life, not just by direct blood line.**

**When we understand these roles, we can better see how a person grows up and is disciplined.**

Imagine your mother's sisters (who you usually call aunties) as your mothers. However, your mother's brothers are still your uncles. The opposite happens on your father's side. In 'Blackfella way' your mother's sisters are responsible for raising you as well as your natural mother. The uncles, mothers and grandparents are responsible for the discipline.

Also imagine the children of your mother's sisters are your 'brother'/'sister' (not your cousins), whereas the children of your mother's brother (uncle) are called 'cousin'. The reverse happens on the father's side. All the father's brother's children are called brother/sister, whereas the father's sister's children are cousins.



# Kinship

## Moiety - The ‘Skin’ System

For most Top End Aboriginal people the world is divided into two categories called ‘moieties’. The Yolngu people of Arnhem Land use the terms Dhuwa and Yirritja as their moiety names, but other areas use other names. Moieties are a giant classification system which connects nature with human society and maintains a sense of order. People are responsible for relationships, animals and knowledge of the Law within their moiety.

Kinship is a core principle on which Yolngu identity and being are based.

A world without kinship to Yolngu is like a world without numbers to us: the world around us can't be described or related to.

“ Culture enables us to express ourselves ”  
Philip Gilbert Hamerton

In Arnhem Land there are 16 different ‘Skins’ in the two sides of Aboriginal society, Yirritja and Dhuwa:

Dhuwa		Yirritja	
Male	Female	Male	Female
Gela	Galijan	Bulany	Bulanyjan
Wamut	Wamutjan	Gojok	Gotjan
Balang	Beliny	Ngarritj	Ngarritjan
Gamarrang	Gamany	Bangardi	Bangoern

This table refers to the system and names used in Central Arnhem Land

## Poison Cousins

**To protect the moiety structure, traditional laws are in place so that 'wrong' marriages are not supposed to happen.** This kinship system is called 'poison cousins' so Aboriginal people know who they are related to and who they may or may not speak with. When people are called poison cousins they are 'wrong skin' so they are not supposed to get married.

The law says that you must not go near your 'poison cousin'. If you wish to give them something you must pass it to them with your right hand while your left hand is lightly placed near the wrist of your right hand. You may also give it to another person to pass to your 'poison cousin'. Your brother-in-law or sister-in-law are called Banyji (pronounced Bunji) and you also give things to them with two hands like with your "poison cousin". *As Christians, we can respect this system but still pray with, and look after each other as brothers or sisters in Christ.*

## Marriage and 'Right Skin'

In the law, 'Skin' gives a defined structure to the marriage system - each person should be married to a person of the right Skin *in the opposite moiety*.

The Chart below shows the marriage relationships structure as well as parents - children. It includes:

1. Dhuwa (Green) & Yirritja (Blue) relations
2. First (or 'straight') marriage option by a bold line, and second layer possibilities by a dashed line.

Father		Mother	Son	Daughter
Gojok		Gamany	Bulany	Bulanjan
Bangardi		Wamutjan	Ngarritj	Ngarritjan
Gela		Bulanjan	Wamut	Wamutjan
Balang		Ngarritjan	Gamarrang	Gamany
Gamarrang		Gotjan	Balang	Beliny
Wamut		Bangoern	Gela	Galijan
Bulany		Galijan	Gotjok	Gotjan
Ngarritj		Beliny	Bangardi	Bangoern

For a detailed Skin chart including family relationship names and Roper spelling check out:  
<http://whatsthereason.org/aboriginal> - Chapter 1, Pg 9

Kinship repeats itself every four generations. An example of Yirritja cycle is:

**Galijan's** daughter is Gotjan

Gotjan's daughter is Belinyjan

Beliny's daughter is Bangoern

Bangoern's daughter is back to **Galijan**.

In this example Galijan in the first generation (top) and the Galijan in the fourth generation (bottom) call each other sister.

A person younger than  
you can be your  
aunty, daddy,  
grandmother  
or grandfather, etc.

### Note on Terminology:

Skin spellings, or ways of saying them, may vary but the structure always remains the same and will be understood across the Top End. Find out how your Skin name is said in the Community you are visiting!

## Traditional Law

From the Dreaming section, we know that all people are connected by relationships and have a role to play in the Cosmos. The Laws which govern these roles were also given by the Dreaming Spirits and cover every aspect of life.

Law tells a person how to behave, the responsibilities they have towards each other and who a person can and cannot marry.

As we have already seen, relationships are key to the entire way of working in partnership with Aboriginal people. Therefore the Dreaming is always to be considered as a foundation for the world views we may encounter in the Top End.

Traditional Law holds a lot of Aboriginal customary laws. The clan country boundaries and the ceremonies (songs, dances etc) for each clan is laid down in the Law.

For example, the Law determines the way in which food is cut up, e.g. cattle (Kriol word Buligi), and distributed in the community and among families. *This means that the concepts of ownership and sharing are not left up to the individual.*

The Law also specifies who has leadership in ceremonies. In some ceremonies, the leader (Jungai) will be from the opposite moiety, i.e. a Yirritja elder may lead in a Dhuwa ceremony or vice versa with Dhuwa man leading a Yirritja ceremony.

*Refer to page 15 for more information on moieties.*



# Respect

## Remember:

You are going as a guest not a tourist.

Always respect the people and community by asking if it is OK whenever you would like to take a photo or video.

Perhaps only a selected person in the group should take the photos.

## Taking Photos

Aboriginal children generally love having their photos taken and will usually expect to see each photo on your digital camera's screen as it is taken (with great delight!). However, sensitivity is important when taking photos of children with no pants on and of adults. If you are in the photo with them they often feel far more comfortable. (See p31 in *Whitefella Culture*)

*"It's because we Aboriginal people know that we came into the world naked and when we die we go back in the grave yard naked."*

## Feeling 'Shame'

Feeling shame is a big factor in interpersonal relationships. Shame means feeling bad, but also means feeling shy. This form of shyness reinforces the Dreaming aspect of communal society, that all individuals are connected by relationship and not to stand out alone. *Assume that everybody is shy.* To be singled out is a 'shame job' e.g. to praise a child publicly will embarrass them.

Indigenous people fear public humiliation (by other's teasing or laughing) and might turn away or 'clam up'. Rather than single out a person in front of others (for blame or praise), encourage or praise the group of people as a whole. Being good upfront is not a virtue of most young Indigenous people.

*To encourage a young Indigenous person to speak or perform you could say "Don't be Shame, be Game!"*

When Aboriginal people see a 'poison cousin' they will put their head down to avoid eye contact or to be seen looking at that person. A woman will also do this when talking to her brother or when talking to a Balanda in a group. You show your respect by looking down for that person in high authority.



A Port Keats band called 'No Shame' is an encouragement to overcome this feeling

## Moving Around

If you need to go somewhere in the community it is generally OK to walk there for a specific purpose, but be sure to check this with the people who have invited you there. If you want to just walk around you will need to do this with a local person. Always check if there are any sacred sites or places to avoid.

It's best to go in small groups quietly and at a steady pace. Don't be too nosey as you walk around or point at things. Instead of pointing at someone you could point with your chin while talking. Traditionally, Aboriginal people keep their heads down when moving through territory that is not theirs.

# Respect



## Practical Points:

### No Obligation to Greet:

There is no obligation when passing someone to speak. As we pass someone we can be comfortable with silence and no eye contact. We can sit with them in silence for a time before talking to make them feel comfortable.

A common way of greeting is to ask 'You right?' or 'How are you feeling (happy or sad)?' or a more purpose related questions such as 'Where are you going?'. A simple 'that way' with a head nod or pursed lips to point) will suffice as an answer; you might just get a head nod in response as if to say 'yeah ok'.

Greetings and small talk are not part of traditional Aboriginal culture. Refer to p23 in comparison with p29 in *Whitefella Culture*

Depending on the strength of relationship you might get asked for clarification with a 'What for?' to which you can reply with the purpose. Instead of actually answering with where you are going, you would say why you are going there.

*E.g. If you were going to the boat ramp, the conversation could go like this*

Q: Where you going?

A: Fish with my uncle

We all want to do our best at being friendly, but your friendliness may not get the response you are looking for. See 'Being friendly' p2-3 in *Whitefella Culture*.

## Greetings

### Indigenous languages do not have words for formal greetings.

Aboriginal people don't normally use greetings such as 'G'day', 'Hello, how are you?' among themselves. However, today many Aborigines recognise that greetings are part of Western culture and will use them in cross-cultural situations.

## Eye Contact

When speaking with Indigenous people, they will not necessarily make eye contact. This is not a sign of disrespect, lack of interest or that they are not listening. Eye contact is felt to be confrontational.

The main thing is to appreciate that good communication and hearing the message can be achieved without direct eye-contact. Sometimes they do hand signs, lip signs, nodding at a person or sit instead of confronting 'Balanda' (*Whitefella*); being sensitive to body language is vital in cross cultural work and understandings.

When speaking with an Aboriginal person, it helps to follow their lead - be comfortable in looking around and occasionally at each other, as they are doing.

## Always Remember:

Aboriginal land has been private land. It is not Crown land, nor public land.

Moreover, Aboriginal people have a special connection with their land, including responsibilities to safeguard the physical health and the spiritual health of the land, such as the protection of sacred sites.

Like other landowners in Australia, Aboriginal people have the legal right to grant or refuse permission to people wishing to enter or travel through their land.

## Dress Sense

### **Aboriginal people are modest in their dress.**

Women generally wear knee length/long skirts and T-shirts, or may wear dresses. Generally it's OK to wear shorts, as long as they are not too short or too tight, and no exposure of the thighs.

The men wear shorts, jeans or trousers and T-shirts or collared shirts. (See pp. 2-3 in *Whitefella Culture*) Men and women will also wear clothes when swimming.

**To stay healthy it is strongly recommended** you wear shoes or sandals so that you don't get hook worm, or tread on broken glass or other items. Wash your hands before eating or preparing food. In this way you will be less likely to get ill, and it lessens the likelihood of getting Hepatitis A.



### **Practical Points:**

When approaching a person or a house it is recommended to call out or let the dogs warn of your arrival. Don't enter a house or living area without permission.

The living area includes the outside area (yard) where people sit and eat.

## Privacy

An Englishman's house is his castle but an Indigenous castle is outdoors. It is also important to take note of what may be a men's or women's area when parking, walking or looking; follow the lead of your host to know where to avoid.

It is best to avoid opposite sex communication especially when it's one to one. The best solution is for men to talk with men; women to girls and women. This is not so much an issue with children.



# Respect

## Using Names

Names are not the usual way of addressing people. You should never use an old person's name to address them. Say things like 'old man', 'uncle', 'aunty' or 'olgamen' (older woman) instead. People are more likely to address people by their relationships i.e. Daddy, Mummy, Aunty.

Most people will be interested to know who you are so feel free to tell them your name. They may respond by telling you their name. If they do, it will probably be their English names and skin names first so you can refer to them by relationship i.e. Daddy, Mummy, Grandson.



### Practical Points:

Do not press people for their names.  
There are certain Aboriginal customs that prevent people from giving their own or other people's names.

### Even names have relationship...

Some of the reasons for this are that names of the deceased are not used. A deceased person is generally referred to in kinship terms.

Adult brothers and sisters are prohibited from saying each others' names. A married man cannot say the name of his mother-in-law or vice versa. *Just be sensitive and friendly.*

## Material Possessions

You may notice a lot of old cars, bikes, TVs etc that are broken and lying around in Aboriginal communities. There are a number of reasons for this. The first is that more value is placed on people and relationships than on material things.

Secondly, there is little knowledge or skill in maintaining vehicles and equipment. Furthermore, it is generally not seen as necessary to maintain equipment, as possessions are generally bought for a specific purpose. If it lasts for that envisaged purpose well and good; if not, it doesn't really matter.

A vehicle may be purchased to go on fishing trips to the beach for the Dry Season. If it lasts that time then that is good. If it happens to last beyond that time, then that is even better. Whether it lasts a long time or not, there is little sleep lost over it. Life goes on. The car may provide spare parts for other vehicles. (See 'Looking after things', pp. 20-21 in Whitefella Culture).

## We see knowledge differently...

### Acquiring Knowledge

#### Western

Knowledge is open to be discovered by all people - depending on how much effort is made to get it. Questions are encouraged.

It is expected that advanced knowledge is acquired in formal learning situations.  
e.g. University.

Children are encouraged to apply themselves to ask, acquire skills and learn through research and enquiry for future application.  
It is for the good of the child's future to have the skills to acquire knowledge for themselves.

#### Indigenous

Knowledge is owned by the people and transferred when determined by those who hold it - at the culturally appropriate time.

It is expected that advanced knowledge is acquired in the context in which it will be used.

Children observe and imitate what adults do, they learn from doing in real situations. It is for the child's good to acquire skills and knowledge from elders and family.  
Traditionally there is no formal learning to prepare for future application.

### Non-Verbal Communication

Indigenous people have a variety of ways of communicating effectively, both verbally and non-verbally. While our next section deals with communication, it is important to note firstly that our expectations for how we communicate are often linked to how we show respect for people. The way we say a simple 'yes' or 'no' can even be deemed correct or inappropriate. Indigenous communication centers around roles and the Law; this section of 'Respect' establishes that foundation.



#### Practical Points:

##### **'Yes' could be communicated by:**

Using 'click' sound on the side of the mouth. *This is as respectful as saying 'yes' and should be accepted as such.*  
Nodding head (often a single nod).

##### **Direction can be indicated by:**

Pouting the lips while pointing the chin to indicate the direction rather than pointing with hands. Eye contact is not required to show something or to determine if the other person understood.

“

The reasonable man adapts himself to the world; the unreasonable one persists to adapt the world to himself.

George Bernard Shaw

”

# Respect

## Please/Thank You

**Indigenous languages do not have words for ‘Please’ or ‘Thanks’ but have other ways of expressing it.**

Western people expect a 'thank you' as recognition they did something they didn't have to and a 'please' so they could be persuaded to do something for another.

From an Aboriginal point of view, a person does something either because he wants to, or he has some obligation to fulfill because of a specific relationship.

(See pp 24 -25 in *Whitefella Culture*)



### Practical Points:

In one Community, for “please” they say, “Laik aibin dagat yu bingga/feis.” (an instruction to bring) and the words for “thank you” might be an affirmation like, “Yubin kain, gud gel.” (literally, “you’ve been kind, good girl”) or “Ma! Lagijat na!”

Aboriginal people don’t normally have specific words for ‘please’ or ‘thank you’ in their languages. However they may have actions or expressions which say it e.g. kissing the fingers, a pat on the back or a nod of the head as if to say ‘good’.



“

Every man’s ability may be strengthened or increased by culture

John Abbott

”

## Hand Signals

### “Nothing”



A common word used when asking for something or to see if somebody knows where a thing is, is “Nothing” (“Najing”).

“I don’t have it” or “I don’t know” can be indicated by hanging the hand down and shaking it from side to side.

**Note:** Hand signals are also important in calling somebody to come closer. In Western culture we use an upwards curled index finger to say ‘come here’ but Indigenous people will use a downwards curl of all fingers but not the thumb - like a closing fist action. Be careful not to use the upwards curling action as it can have another meaning and be very offensive.

## Hand Signals - Q&A

The pictures below show the two stages of the hand sign that asks a question, then is answered. The context makes which question is being asked obvious. For example: if it was used with somebody who is walking out of a shop or if it was asked to somebody who looked a bit lost, either they are being asked if they bought something or they may be offering help to look for someone. These questions may be asked in close range or over a long distance.

### Question



A quick flick of the wrist is a question sign...

“What do you mean?” or  
“How are you?” or  
“Did you get it?” or “What is it?”.

### Answer



“Don’t worry about it.” or  
“I don’t have any.” or  
“I don’t know.”

# Communication

## Idioms

These are best avoided no matter how well you think they are known and understood, because each language has its own set of idioms, and using them across languages generally gives the wrong meaning or, in most instances, no meaning at all.

Aboriginal people are quite literal and will often take you at your word. If you say “Pull your socks up” they will literally follow the instruction if they are wearing some...or you might get a confused look!

### **Examples of some common English idioms are:**

Pull your socks up.

I wouldn't like to be in his shoes.

He's a pig.

He jumped the gun.

He threw a spanner in the works.

## English as a Second Language (ESL)

### **When speaking with those who have English as their second language it helps to:**

1. Avoid use of difficult to explain words (i.e. jargon or technical terms).
2. Avoid talking in abstract terms.
3. Explain words that are not common or in everyday use in the Community (*couscous?*).
4. Give one option at a time in a question e.g. “Do you want tea?” *not*: “Do you want tea or coffee?” If the answer to the first question is no, then ask, “Do you want coffee?”.
5. There is no word for the English word ‘or’ in Aboriginal languages. Therefore always ask a straight question with one option.
6. Allow time for a person to think about a question in their language and answer in English.
7. Try using shorter sentences than usual. Children hear English at school, but you should not assume their competence.
8. Don't ask questions in the negative. e.g. ask “Did you go?” rather than “Didn't you go?”
9. Slow down if you are a fast talker.
10. Don't correct their grammar but work with their understanding.
11. Be yourself, don't try to speak Aboriginal English to ‘fit in’.

## Consider their perspective in the answer:

In English when asking the question “Didn’t you go?” the ‘yes’ or ‘no’ answer is in agreement with the **actions**.

Aboriginal people find this confusing. In English we would expect the reply “No, I didn’t go” - where ‘No’ affirms the answer.



**But an Aboriginal person might answer in agreement with the question.**

Q. “Didn’t you go?”

A. “Yes, I didn’t go” or “No, I didn’t go” (depends how you answer that person).

Here, an Indigenous person is saying “Yes, you’re right, I didn’t go”.

## Asking Questions

Aboriginal people gather information by observation. This protects and gives people an area of privacy in a close culture. Questions are one of the main ways Westerners use to find information.

**Aboriginal people don’t ask our type of ‘why’ questions.**

E.g. “Why did he get angry?” or “Why didn’t he come back from town?” are best avoided. They probably won’t get answered anyway.

You have to figure out by their body language if they don’t want to answer you.

## Hypothetical Questions

**‘What if’ questions are very hard to handle, particularly across language barriers and worldviews.** A hypothetical question is a subtle form of asking, and looking for, a solution to a possibility but, if not understood that way, it could be taken as a statement and cause confusion.

**E.g.**

“What if the supply truck doesn’t come tomorrow?”,  
*could be taken to mean that:*

“The supply truck will not come tomorrow”



# Communication

## 'Why' Questions

In our earlier section on Culture (pp 4-8), we learned that there can be different world view tendencies and this means even knowledge is viewed differently between Western and Aboriginal people (see chart on page 22).

The traditional view is that knowledge is owned by people, not to be shared or challenged but rather given by that person when they deem it the right moment or purpose to do so. This is generally the reason that Aboriginal people find 'why' questions so uncomfortable.

Aboriginal people also don't like to be asked things twice – once they have given the answer their expectation is that you now know.

In our Western way, the person asking the question expects an answer and it isn't left up to the other person to decide if they will answer based on how they feel. Sometimes you have to listen to the tone of Indigenous voices to first find out how they are feeling about answering you. The tone of their or your voice will determine if, and how, it might be answered.

Do not press people for information. Instead, you may like to offer some information you are thinking about in order to clarify. For example, instead of asking "Why did he go to the hospital?" (to which you might get a pursed lips signal for 'no') you could say "Is he there seeing his Auntie?" and the response might be "Nah, he's getting his eye check."



### Practical Points:

It's OK to ask general questions about family e.g.

*"Where do you live?" or "Tell me about your family.."*

“

Any communication or marketing professional needs cross-cultural research & communication skills to be able to succeed in the future

Marye Tharp

”

Don't forget to respect  
rather than expect!

# Denominations

## Church History

As the North was settled, each denomination was assigned responsibility for the people in the different areas in which they worked. This was done primarily through agreements, as the Top End is geographically too large to be reached by just a few churches. Today, Indigenous families often continue to prefer the denomination that was responsible for their area and to attend that church.

## Working together to build up the body of Christ in the NT:

### Anglican

The Anglican area includes the following communities: Ngukurr, Minyerri, Kewulyi, Numbulwar, Gunbalanya (Oenpelli) and Groote Eylandt. These communities are known for their Bible Camps, and have had a long history of Church Missionary Society (CMS) missionaries working with them.

### AIM (Australian Indigenous Ministries)

AIM influenced Manyallaluk, Barunga, Beswick, Bulman/Weemol and the Katherine areas. Other denominational groups are now visiting various communities in this area.

### Catholic

Catholic areas include Port Keats, Bathurst Island, Daly River and Santa Teresa in the Centre. In recent years, World Outreach has been going into Port Keats.

### Uniting Church

Areas formerly established by the Methodist Church are now known, largely, as Uniting Church areas. These areas across the north coast of the Northern Territory, from Croker Island in West Arnhem to Yirrkala in East Arnhem, are where the Yolŋu Languages are spoken. ARDS (Aboriginal Resource and Development Services), and CSIS (Co-ordinating Support for Indigenous Scriptures) are two organisations working in this area.

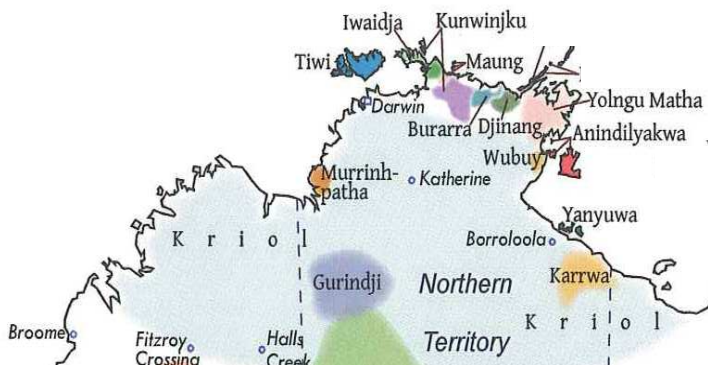
### Baptist

The Baptist church has worked in the Warlpiri area. There is also a Walpiri Baptist Church in Katherine.

In general, please respect, consult and work with the church leaders (both Western & Indigenous) in any Community in which you spend time!

If you would like to build relationship with missionaries in these areas, please email [bornewoman@bigpond.com](mailto:bornewoman@bigpond.com) and we will connect you to them.

# Languages



## Know your Area

What area of the NT are you going to?

Do you want to find out more about any one of these languages?

Do you want to find out about Scripture and other Resources for that language?

Have you learned about that 'Country'? [Order your resources for the Top End from AuSIL!](#)



Shop 13, Gray Shopping Centre  
20 Essington Avenue  
Gray, NT  
08 8931 3133

The Bible Place  
3/38 Elder Street  
Alice Springs, NT  
08 8953 3057

Online indigenous language  
dictionaries and Scriptures at  
[www.ausil.org.au](http://www.ausil.org.au)



## Practical Points:

When Aboriginal people talk about "country" they are referring to areas belonging to different language groups i.e. the Warlpiri, the Djambarrpuyngu, etc. If you meet someone in Darwin a good question to ask is "What's your country?" instead of "Where are you from?"

# Languages

## Language Groups within 'Country'

In the Katherine region there are at least 17 traditional language groups including:

Jawoyn	Warlpiri	Garrwa
Dalabon	Gurindji	Yanyuwa
Mayali	Ngarinyman	Wardaman
Rembarrnga	Waramungu	Wagaman
Ritharrngu	Mudburra	Mangarayi
Alawa	Jingili	

*Kriol is the daily spoken language in this region.*

## Bible Portions/Gospels/Other Scriptures      New Testament & other Scriptures Available:

Tiwi - Tiwi Islands

Kunwinjku - Gunbalanya (Oenpelli)

Anindilyakwa - Groote Eylandt

Murrinhpatha - Wadeye (Port Keats)

Garrwa /Garawa - Borrooloola

Nunggubuyu (Wubuy) - Numbulwar

Djambarrpuyngu - Elcho Island

Kriol (whole Bible)

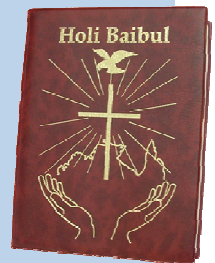
Warlpiri - Lajamanu area

Burarra - Maningrida

Gumatj - Yirrkala, East Arnhem

Pitjantjatjara - Ernabella S.A.

Pintupi/Luritja - Papunya



## Be sure to check out:

**Bibles at:** <http://aboriginalbibles.org.au>

**Indigenous Dictionaries:** <http://www.ausil.org.au/node/3717>

**Further Language Documentation Info:** <http://www.ausil.org.au/node/3718>

**Learning Kriol:** [http://www.ausil.org.au/sites/ausil/files/WP-B-5%20Conversational%20Kriol%20-%20Intro\\_0.pdf](http://www.ausil.org.au/sites/ausil/files/WP-B-5%20Conversational%20Kriol%20-%20Intro_0.pdf)

# Resources

## Videos and Books

### YouTube Links:

AuSIL videos: <http://www.youtube.com/user/AusilVideos>

*Kriol Bible Dedication: (Short DVDs)*

Something of Value: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oHajFzND4Mg>

To the Ends of the Earth: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M8kr0dmAg0k>

Chooky Dancers: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O-MucVWo-Pw>

### Recent films now out on DVD:

*Yolngu Boy* (Traditional and Modern Culture clash affecting Indigenous teens)

*10 Canoes* (Traditional life in Arnhemland)

*Samson & Delilah* (deals with issue of drug abuse in a Central Australian setting)

### Locally produced DVDs:

*Djambarrpuyngu New Testament Dedication*

*Kriol Holi Baibul Dedication*

*Growing up with the Kriol Holi Baibul*

### Some helpful books on mission work in the Northern Territory:

Bain, M. (2011). *Adapting to difference: another look at Aboriginal-western interactions* 3rd ed, Published BookPal, Sunnybank Hills, Qld.

Berthon, P, Hall, M & W, Harris, J, Robertson, A & C. (2008) *We are Aboriginal: our 100 years: from Arnhem Land's first mission to Ngukurr today*, St. Matthew's Anglican Church, Ngukurr, N.T.

CMS, Carroll, P and Etherington, S. *One Land, One Saviour*, seeing Aboriginal lives transformed by Christ, Acorn Press Limited, Available From: Church Missionary Society Australia Inc., Level 5, 51 Druitt St, Sydney NSW 2000

Hagan, S. (2008, 4th ed.), *Whitefella Culture*; AuSIL, Palmerston, NT.

Order from <http://www.ausil.org.au/node/3716>

Harris, J. (1990) *One Blood*, Check out interview with John Harris: <http://publicchristianity.org/library/one-blood-john-harris> and the full book on iBooks <https://itunes.apple.com/au/artist/john-w.-harris/id598152536?mt=11>

Harris, J. (1998) *We Wish We'd Done More*, Ninety years of CMS and Aboriginal issues in north Australia Openbook Publishers, Adelaide

Seiffert, M. (2008) *Refuge on the Roper: The Origins of Roper River Mission Ngukurr*, Acorn Press, Brunswick East, Vic.

Trudgen, R. *Why Warriors Lie Down and Die*, Aboriginal Resource and Development Services Inc, Darwin NT.

Internet orders: [www.ards.com.au](http://www.ards.com.au)

# Resources

## Language & Bible

We believe Christianity is a faith that can  
be at home in all the world's cultures



and **Bible translation**  
provides the most authentic daily food.



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releasing the power of words

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Alice Springs, NT  
08 8953 3057

Online indigenous language  
dictionaries and Scriptures at  
[www.ausil.org.au](http://www.ausil.org.au)





## Personal Basis for Mission

Answer the following:

By what authority were the disciples sent?

What 'needs' were they sent to minister to?

What message were they to tell?

What was God's purpose for Israel? (Ezekiel 36:22-23)?

The Cross was the unavoidable cost  
of God's Mission!

To deal with the guilt of human sin (1 Pet 2:24)

To defeat the powers of evil (Col 2:15)

To destroy death (Heb 2:14)

To remove the barrier of enmity and alienation between Jew  
and Gentile (Eph. 2:14-16)

To heal and reconcile his whole creation (Col 1:20)

*Whose world are we reaching  
out to? Whose mission is this?*

# Acknowledgements

Anderson, G. *Orientation for a group visiting in 2009 to Numbulwar* (CMS Missionary).

Armstrong, J. *Biblical Basis for Mission*.

Booklet checked by: Irene Jungawunga, Verona Dalywater, Miliwanga Sandy, Margaret Mickan and others.

Garner, Chris. Lists compiled from his years of experience teaching Indigenous youth and his written cross cultural training material (*'Working Together'*).

Hagan, S, (2008, 4<sup>th</sup> ed.), *Whitefella Culture*; Australian Society for Indigenous Languages, Palmerston, NT.

Kendino, Rachael (nee Willika). *Indigenous Endorsement*.

Lohmeyer, G. *Indigenous Culture (Powerpoint)*, Received 22nd March 2011 (non-Indigenous Christian accepted as an elder).

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Sandy, Miliwanga. Spokesperson for Mirrattja Clan group and Wugularr community. She is also a Christian leader in her community. She helped translate Psalms for the Kriol Bible.

Street, C. (1987) *Approaching the Aboriginal Community*, SIL, AAIB, Darwin (Murrinhpatha translator).

Tucker, F. (2009) *Tabor Adelaide, Cultural Anthropology Lecture Notes*.

# Ministry Training Opportunities

## Training Opportunities



Interested in culture?

EQUIP does culture.

Need to learn a language?

EQUIP does language learning.

Want people to hear the Word?

EQUIP does translation.

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**Tel** 03 9712 2601  
**Fax:** 03 9712 2678  
[info\\_equip@sil.org](mailto:info_equip@sil.org)

Summer Institute of Linguistics Australia trading as EQUIP Training  
ABN 53 004 706 012 CRICOS No. 01239B

# Ministry Training Opportunities

## Work Opportunities

**DON'T MISS THIS OPPORTUNITY TO SERVE GOD IN THE TOP END!**

*Move to Darwin, Katherine or Alice Springs and work in your secular job while you support the Aboriginal Christians around you*

**OR**

*Move to Darwin, Katherine or Alice Springs as a minister or trainee*

**OR**

*Don't miss this incredible opportunity! Take a risk - go and serve Aboriginal Christians in the Northern Territory with CMS!*

*Come as a CMS missionaries to help train Aboriginal leaders taking their first steps in ministry*

**WILL YOU LET CHRIST TRAIN YOU?** **CMS** [WWW.CMS.ORG.AU](http://WWW.CMS.ORG.AU)

## NT Indigenous Ministry Network and TEARlink

Rachel has had a vision to gather people interested in Indigenous Ministry across the Top End since 2002. She produced a brochure of Indigenous ministries in Darwin region in about 2003. She ran a prayer meeting for indigenous youth in about 2004/2005. Then in 2009 she organised a 'NT Indigenous Ministry Awareness Day' held at Casuarina Baptist where some people learnt and a person went and did the Equip course.

In early 2010 this Cross-cultural booklet vision was begun which is a resource that has been developed by many partners, Indigenous and Western, who have lived in the Top End. Rachel was then excited to hear of TEARlink which is a network of Christians working in or with Indigenous communities. This is like a formalising of the vision she has had over the years. TEARlink brings people together for times of refreshment, encouragement and stimulation in three different hubs: the Top End, Alice Springs and Cairns. See [www.tear.org.au/tearlink](http://www.tear.org.au/tearlink) or on Facebook: <http://www.facebook.com/groups/tearlink/>

Check out the TEARlink Resources <http://www.tear.org.au/resources/items/reconciliation-resource-kit/>

# Ministry Opportunities



# ARDS

Aboriginal Resource and Development Services Inc.

ARDS Inc. is committed to working in Yolŋu languages with the Yolŋu people of north-east Arnhem Land. We provide education in a variety of media for Yolŋu people and those wanting to learn more about Aboriginal culture and language.

Ph: 08 8982 3444    Email: [info@ards.com.au](mailto:info@ards.com.au)

[www.ards.com.au](http://www.ards.com.au)

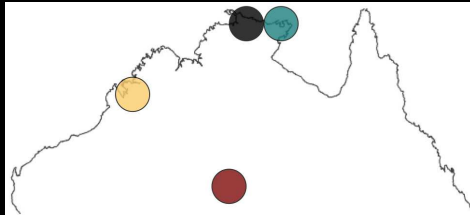
# Ministry Opportunities

## Coordinate - Supporting Indigenous Scriptures



A project of  
Northern Regional Council of Congress (NRCC), and the Uniting  
Church in Australia Northern Synod.

CSIS partnerships support local Indigenous congregations in four regions,  
as they engage in Scripture translation and use.



**North East Arnhem:** Christians are translating into various clan languages, and promoting the Djambarrpuyŋu New Testament.

**-West Arnhem:** the Gospel of Mark is being translated into Maung and Kuninjku.

**-West Kimberley:** church resources are being developed in the endangered language of Worrorra.

**-Central Australia:** a team is resuming translation of the Old Testament in Pitjantjatjara.

*Would you partner and promote Indigenous Scripture work?*

<http://coordinate.org.au>

## Journal

## What have I learned about the People?

[illegible]





## Journal

## What have I learned about Myself?

This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal blue lines. A single red line runs horizontally across the bottom of the page, creating a margin. The lines are evenly spaced and extend across the entire width of the page.