

# **GROWING UP STRONG MARTU CHILDREN**

## **Walta (Family) to School**



# ***Introduction - Martu in Wiluna***

- Strong culture and language.
- Most Walta (families) Kanyini (hold) and bring up their Tjitji (children) in a traditional manner that is warm and loving.
- Tjitji spend their first five years immersed in a Martu world with minimal interaction with the non-Martu world.



# ***Aims of the Workshop***

- Increase your understanding of the issues involved in growing up strong Martu children in Wiluna.
- Gather feedback in how we can do this better.
- Increase your knowledge of successful strategies in growing up strong Aboriginal children to adapt to your local settings.

# ***Ngangganawili Aboriginal Health and Medical Service***

- Aboriginal community controlled health service.
- Only provider of medical services in the Shire of Wiluna.
- Governed by a Martu committee - representatives elected from each family group in the region.
- Provides:
  - health and medical services;
  - Home and Community Care service;
  - Aged Care Day Centre;
  - Alcohol & Other Drugs Counseling;
  - Sobering-Up Shelter;
  - Environmental Health Program and;
  - Parenting & Early Childhood Development Program through the Kid's Centre.



# ***Ngangganawili Parenting & Early Childhood Development Program***

- Started when the Management Committee decided that the Martu Walta needed help with raising their Tjitji.
- Aims
  - To work with the Martu to grow up strong Tjitji and to maintain traditional ways whilst assisting Tjitji to move from Walta to school.
- Services:
  - Supported Playgroup sessions;
  - Education for families in Healthy Eating, Good Hygiene, Safety in the Home, Protective Behaviours;
  - Elders and Little Kid's Bush Picnics;
  - Access to baby bathing and changing facilities;
  - Access to washing machine/dryer for children's clothes;
  - Access to second hand children's clothes;
  - Information on parenting strategies and social support services and;
  - Young women social support group.

# ***Martu Walta (Family)***

PhD research project on Martu child rearing.

- Most Wiluna Martu only moved from the desert between fifty and sixty years ago.
- *Walta*, *Kanyini* (holding) and *Ngurra* (country) are “principles for growing up little kids” that come from *Tjukurrpa* (Law), which lays down all the requirements for a successful *Martu* life.
- *Walta* is a broad group of people including blood and classificatory relatives.
- *Walta* is the most important part of Martu life.
- *Walta* is responsible for growing up their children.
- Martu love and cherish their Tjitji

# ***Martu Walta (Family)***

- Martu Tjitji grow up in a warm and permissive environment where they have an opportunity to learn about Walta, Tjukurrpa and Ngurra from the many members of their Walta.
- The children speak *Mandjildjara* and/or another Martu dialect as their 1st language, including the active use of sign language. English is their 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> language, learnt primarily to communicate with non-Martu.
- Tjitji are given a great deal of freedom and personal autonomy that is a central part of Martu Tjukurrpa. Very early in their lives are able to decide when to eat and sleep and later, whether they go to school.

# ***Martu Walta (Family)***

- Walta is said to be more important than material possessions and many people see this as being one of the major differences between *Martu* and non-Indigenous people.
- By school age Martu children are skilled in and comfortable with all things Martu.





# ***Walta to School Transition***

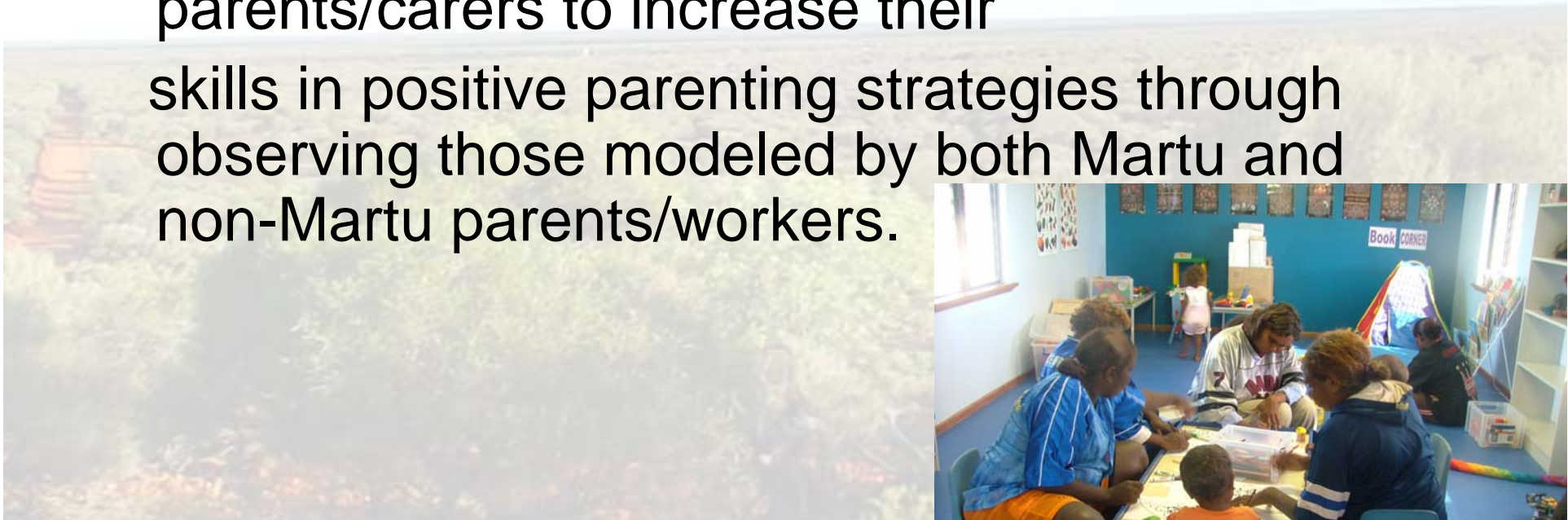
- The Ngangganawili AMS Committee recognised that their Tjitji were not adequately prepared for school. They recognised that the Walta needed help to change this.
- The Kid's Centre was given the job of assisting Walta and their Tjitji to prepare physically, emotionally and intellectually for the non-Martu environment of school.

# ***Getting Tjitji Ready for School – School Issues***

- The Wiluna Remote Community School operates in a Western manner that is not compatible with the Martu culture as:
  - English is the language of instruction;
  - there is minimal Martu involvement and;
  - many teachers are very young and inexperienced in teaching Aboriginal children from a traditional community.
- If Tjitji feel alienated at school, they then exercise their autonomy and choose not to attend school regularly.

# ***Getting Ready for School – the Centre’s Role***

- Martu Walta have difficulty in preparing their Tjitji for dealing with the non-Martu world and entrust their children to the Kid’s Centre and support its role.
- The Centre provides the opportunity for Martu parents/carers to increase their skills in positive parenting strategies through observing those modeled by both Martu and non-Martu parents/workers.



# ***Getting Ready for School – Attendance Issues***

- Martu Walta are required by Government rules to attend the Kid's Centre with their children.
- Many Martu adults consider the non-Martu workers to be better able to prepare their children for school so do not attend with their Tjitji.
- This has both Martu and non-Martu implications:
  - Worker's would be held responsible by the Martu Walta if one of their children was injured;
  - Children are not covered under insurance if a parent/carer is not with them as it is not a licensed child care centre.

## *Example of 'Nanna'*

- Nanna cares for her granddaughter Ny in a traditional Walta where *Mandjildjara* is their 1<sup>st</sup> language.
- Nanna and her Walta want Ny to go to the Kid's Centre so it will be easier for her when she goes to school.
- Nanna actively encourages Ny to go to the Kid's Centre but can't make her go if she doesn't want to as her role is to guide rather than direct.
- Ny enjoys her autonomy and sometimes chooses to go to the Kid's Centre and other times chooses to be with her Walta.

## *Example of 'Nanna' (continued)*

- Most times Nanna finds it hard to go to the Kid's Centre with Ny. When Ny wants to go and there is no other adult Walta who will attend with her, the workers have to choose between obeying the rules and assisting Ny. If they let Ny attend they are left open to problems from both the Martu and non-Martu rules if something goes wrong.
- When Ny goes to school she will have difficulty as there is little freedom, she will be told what to do, have to sit quietly, understand English and survive in what is a very a "foreign" environment.

# ***Discussion***

We would now like to discuss some strategies/ideas that you may have to assist the Ngangganawili Parenting & Early Childhood Development Program to grow up strong Martu Tjitji who are ready for school, recognising that the school is poorly equipped to work in a culturally secure manner.