



# QSA Notes

## people, places & projects

### Women Elders valued and respected

It is dawn in the desert and a small group of women huddle by the campfire with their cups of tea. In addition to those whose swags are nearby, there are women who have come to visit – to share in laughter, gossip, pancakes and ‘growling’, as they say, about events of the day before.

The scene is a typical morning at the Balgo Women’s Law Camp, held at Blue Hill Camp Ground from 27th May to 2nd June 2009. The Camp Ground is situated in the Tanami Desert 200kms south of Halls Creek. Women of all ages from Balgo, neighbouring towns and further afield have come together for a week of ceremony, dancing, culture sharing and talking story. Camps like this have taken place for thousands of years.

For many of the older Aboriginal people from the south east Kimberley, white settlement happened within their lifetime. Since the first contact in 1939 they have maintained their traditional Law and Culture. In spite of constraints over the past seven decades, they have remained diligent and determined and have consistently sought out and secured the resources and support they have needed to teach their valuable cultural knowledge to the younger generations.

In 2008 Quaker Service Australia formed a partnership with the women Elders as they teach their culture to their grandchildren through sand drawings with primary school groups, culture classes for young women on

a fortnightly basis, healing ceremonies and teaching trips to country, as well as other cultural events. In addition to providing transport, equipment and supplies and food, QSA funding allows for the women elders to be paid for their time and knowledge.

From the time that the first campfires are lit each morning, there is movement and chatter. Those tilitja (cultural workers) who had signed up for breakfast duties are responsible for lighting the main kitchen campfires and preparing tea, Weet-bix and damper for the Elders. Following breakfast, there is a burst of activity in kitchen and campground work, whether it is chopping vegetables for lunch, digging pit toilets, or assembling tarpaulins.

Then, usually after lunch, ceremony begins. Elders laugh or discuss amongst themselves

as they carefully paint ochres onto each of the participants in their given skin group pattern. Sometimes a healing ceremony will take place, or lessons in traditional dancing, and stories around a bonfire could go until well into the night.

The camp ends with a ceremony to welcome all the women back to town. Covered in ochre, the women walk gracefully onto the town oval where they are greeted by men, children, some women and a lone camel that just wants to be included. The mood is one of deep respect for and a valuing of women’s traditional Law and Culture. As the group disperses, and each participant takes in the depth of the experience, there is a sense of satisfaction amongst the Elders. The camp was a good one.



**Balgo Women’s Law Camp 2009:** Kapululangu Elders accept the gift of a blanket that Janice Stensrude, and Gina and Lillian Price had created, with help from Perth Quakers. **Photo** by Ochre Doyle © Kapululangu Aboriginal Women’s Association and Zohl de Ishtar, 2009.

QSA is a member of the Australian Council for International Development (ACFID), and is a signatory to the ACFID Code of Conduct. The purpose of QSA is to express in a practical way the concern of Australian Quakers for the building of a more peaceful, equitable, just and compassionate world. To this end QSA works with communities in need to improve their quality of life with projects which are economically and environmentally appropriate and sustainable.

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## Children's Resources

With advice from our partners around Australia, QSA has developed a new Children's Resource on the theme of Reconciliation. If you are planning activities for a Sunday morning with your local Children's Meeting and wondering what to do, why not use the QSA Children's Resources. You can download them from our website [www.qsa.org.au](http://www.qsa.org.au) or call us for a hard copy on 02 9698 9103.

## Visit to Cunnamulla

In the last week of June two Young Friends Peter Kneale and Jo Temme joined Aletia Dundas from QSA in a trip to Cunnamulla to visit David Carline. David, being a Kooma Elder, is a member

of the Kooma Traditional Owner's Association. David was kind enough to invite us to spend time at and learn about Murra Murra / Bendee Downs, the two old sheep stations situated on Kooma land and returned to the Kooma people in 2000. The Murra Murra homestead was built by the Nebine River on a 7km waterhole, and is surrounded by red river gum trees, mulga, red earth, kangaroos, emus, spinifex, and a few grazing sheep. David took us to see the bore head, where the boiling water from the great artesian basin feeds into the bore drains, the old shearing sheds, even older fish traps and ancient tools used pre-settlement. David was a caring and knowledgeable host and was able to provide useful advice on the QSA Code of Conduct for visiting

Aboriginal Communities, which will be a useful resource for future trips. We had a wonderful and inspiring experience.

## The 12 days of giving

On the twelfth day of Christmas, my true love said to me: "Hoorah, the latest Living Gift Catalogue has arrived!" With the QSA Living Gifts Catalogue, you can choose a gift on behalf of a friend or colleague that will make a real difference to a community that we support. It might be: 5 vaccinated chickens, 4 carbon credits, 3 gardening tools, 2 concrete wells, or a Cultural Tutor in the outback. For a complete catalogue of the gift ideas, visit our website [www.qsa.org.au](http://www.qsa.org.au) or call us on 02 9698 9103.



David Carline with Tom-Tom, one of his dogs. Photo: Aletia Dundas