



NPY Women's Council: Responding to Need



"Women's Council is: Our idea. Our method. Our work. Our achievement. Our way." Tjikalyi Colin OAM.
Staff member (dec.)

Service delivery begins

In 1993 the then Commonwealth Department of Human Services and Health approached NPYWC about running a disability service. The Disability Support Project commenced in late 1993, operating across the NPY region, initially from the old Central Land Council office at Mutitjulu and later from the Women's Council 'tjuka tjapi' demountable office, also at Mutitjulu. By mid-July 1994 the first two Project Officers, Elsie Wanatjura and Angela Lynch, had travelled 47,000 kilometres and identified an initial 74 Anangu with disabilities.

1994 saw the beginning of the Domestic Violence Service *Atunypa Wiru Minyma Uwankaraku: Good Protection for all Women* as a pilot project, also based at Mutitjulu and funded by Human Services and Health, in response to the women's complaints about persistent and at times very serious assaults. In 1994 the same Department commenced Carer Respite brokerage funding to NPYWC (the first ever such cross-border service) to provide relief to relatives looking after the aged and those with disabilities, purchasing mobility aids and modifying community facilities such as clinics and women's centre showers.

In 1994 the Ngaanyatjarra Arts Project began, supporting women's art and craft centres in WA member communities, with tjanpi (grass) weaving introduced initially at Blackstone in 1995. From this would soon emerge what today is the highly regarded Tjanpi Desert Weavers arts social enterprise².

In 1994 NPYWC had begun researching the needs of the aged, documented in its publication *They Might Have to Drag Me Like a Bullock* (1995.) This paved the way for the NPYWC tri-state Commonwealth-funded Aged Advocacy program: *Tjilpi Pampa Tjutaku Wankantjaku* and the state-funded Aged Care Support program on the APY Lands in SA, which both began in 1996. It also led to community-based aged care facilities in the region, run by other agencies. The first was at Docker River NT in 1995, where a building had previously been funded, but not operational costs, and others came later at Wanarn WA and Ernabella SA.

Growth continues

In 1996 the Nutrition Awareness for Young Mothers and Children project (now Child Nutrition and Well-being) began working with mothers and carers to address the high incidence of failure to thrive; a disability employment project began in 1997 (not current.) In 1997 NPYWC also ran the first of its regular Tjilpi Pampa (old people's) festivals on the APY Lands and the first Kungka Career Conference, designed to expose girls and young women to employment options, and engaging prominent Aboriginal women from around Australia to encourage and inspire them.

In 1998 a Mobile Childcare Project³ started and also the Allied Health Project, providing support to families, carers and clinics to look after those with disabilities. After much lobbying, Allied Health would eventually, in 2005, become the Tri-state Disability Service under a hard-won joint WA, SA and NT funding agreement.

In 1999 the Commonwealth funded NPYWC as an Emotional and Social Well-being regional centre, and in 2000 the SA Government granted funds for two ngangkari (traditional healers) to provide services across the NPY region. 1999 also saw NPYWC's entry into the provision of youth services, with the commencement of the Petrol Sniffing Project at Fregon SA. This work would eventually broaden to what is currently the Youth Program. In the same year NPYWC advocated for joint Commonwealth - NT funding to establish a disability respite house at the Mutitjulu community, participating in its administration as well as referring clients, until handing it over to community control following a review conducted for NPYWC in 2002⁴.

Current NPYWC programs (tri-state unless otherwise indicated.)

Tjungu (together): aged, disability, mental health

- Tri-State Disability Support Services
- Disability Advocacy
- Aged Advocacy
- Aged Care Support (APY Lands SA only)
- Emotional and Social Well-being
- Cross-border Carer Respite Service
- Ngangkari (traditional healers)
- Ninti (to know): transitional education opportunities for Anangu children who have a disability.

Youth Program

- Community-based recreation and diversion; individual case management and holiday programs.

Domestic and Family Violence Service

- Legal assistance, advocacy, individual case management and practical help to victims and children in their care.

Child Nutrition and Well-being Program

- Individual case management for failure-to-thrive 0-5 year olds; nutrition education; support in statutory child welfare matters.

Tjanpi Desert Weavers

- Women's fibre art social enterprise.

Emergency relief

- Assistance to Anangu and Yarnangu from the region in immediate need of food, fuel, transport, clothing, bedding or accommodation.

References

- ¹ A women's site near Uluru.
- ² www.tjanpi.com.au
- ³ NPYWC attempted over a number of years to assist with childcare centre establishment as well as playgroups in its region, with limited success. The work was discontinued in the early 2000s.
- ⁴ Now run by Frontier Services for frail aged and people with disabilities in new premises funded by the Mutitjulu Foundation with money raised by Voyages, owners of the Ayers Rock Resort.