

# A driving need – early intervention for Indigenous people in the justice system

By **Rikki Andrews**, Philanthropy Australia, with thanks to **Judge Peter McCusker** and **Dr Helene Sommer** for content and images.

**I**ndigenous people are significantly over-represented in the Australian justice system. ABS surveys in 2008 note that while Indigenous people make up 2.5 per cent of the Australian population they make up over 25 per cent of the prison population. An ABS 2010 report indicated that there has been a 47 per cent rise in incarceration of Indigenous women. Most critically the Federal Government report *Doing Time – Time For Doing: Indigenous youth in the criminal justice system* highlighted the need for early intervention to reduce this over-representation<sup>1</sup>.

The Palya Fund in partnership with the Anangu people have developed an initiative that may address one aspect of Indigenous imprisonment. The 2010 ABS Prisoners in Australia report found that 4.1 per cent of Indigenous men and 4.4 per cent of Indigenous women were imprisoned on traffic and vehicle regulatory offences<sup>2</sup>. Indeed in some northern Queensland correctional facilities where 75 per cent of inmates are Indigenous, 57 per cent are there for licence related offences. In addition a number of studies have found that Aboriginal people suffer a higher incidence of death and serious injury in road accidents than non-Indigenous Australians and this is attributed to lack of education in driving skills.

Senior Anangu people in Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara ('APY') Lands in South Australia have observed this issue among their own community. Between 1999 and 2003 such offences accounted for 11.9 per cent of recorded offences among Anangu.

## Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara ('APY') Lands

The Anangu on the APY Lands are the most remote Aboriginal community in South Australia and possibly one of the most remote in Australia. The people



Above top: Tjulkiwa Atira Atira, 'Arulya'. Above bottom: Samuel Miller, 'Ngayuku Ngura'.

of this region display a range of social disadvantage indicators including geographic isolation, language (with many only speaking Pitjantjatjara), as well as lack of access to education and relevant government institutions. These along with poor literacy and numeracy and limited economic activity in the region contribute to high levels of unemployment. These factors also contribute to the lack of driver education and licensing among Anangu.

The APY Lands are over 500km from east to west. The population of 3,000 has no public transport and limited access to private transport services. There is a clear need for people and goods to be transported across a wide area so that Anangu may return to country, visit family, attend funerals

and cultural matters, participate in sporting activities, attend medical appointments as well as training and work opportunities. Also the ability to drive is essential for all employment on APY Lands. Lack of public transport means that trying to meet these needs may lead to driving unlicensed, road trauma and associated justice issues.

## The Mutuka Project

Mutuka is Pitjantjatjara for motor car. This project 'seeks to train young Anangu to obtain employment as drivers. The training will be conducted by instructors able to provide nationally recognised certification. That training will include vehicle care, basic maintenance and will offer the chance to hold licences of various types<sup>3</sup>.'



This course will be offered at the APY Trade Training Centre at Umuwa (being built in 2011). In addition a small transport enterprise will be established providing training and employment for graduates of the program. Three vehicles will be purchased and the enterprise run by the senior men and women will be culturally aligned.

The Palya Fund has supported the development of this innovative project through:

- engaging two UniSA MBA students to develop a comprehensive business plan for the project (presented to the SA philanthropic network in July this year);
- representation to the SA state Government to facilitate the development of a modified licensing and accreditation process to enable young Anangu to participate in the project;
- liaising with industry to identify post-training opportunities for Mutuka graduates – estimated at 200 full-time jobs which will complement, not replace, jobs within existing transport businesses; and
- working to raise the additional funds for the project – estimated at \$500,000.

Dr Helene Sommer writes that Palya's success in securing from the Government "both the regulatory aspects and the practical education commitment open up the prospect of enhanced safety and actual employment<sup>4</sup>."



### About the Palya Fund

The Palya Fund is a public ancillary fund established in 2008 with the purpose of supporting the Anangu Arts and Culture Aboriginal Corporation, an Aboriginal-owned development agency for the arts and cultural sector in Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara ("APY") Lands. The aim of Palya is to promote initiative and self-reliance among the Anangu people. Palya was established by a group of private philanthropists. ■

[www.palyafund.org.au](http://www.palyafund.org.au)

Bottom right and bottom left: Simon Dent, Tjunga Palya Art Centre.

1. <http://aph.gov.au/house/committee/atsia/sentencing/report/chapter2.pdf> *Doing Time – Time For Doing: Indigenous youth in the criminal justice system*. P7.
2. [http://www.ausstats.abs.gov.au/Ausstats/subscriber.nsf/0/F3916FB1F45FAF12CA2577F3000F11F0/\\$File/45170\\_2010.pdf](http://www.ausstats.abs.gov.au/Ausstats/subscriber.nsf/0/F3916FB1F45FAF12CA2577F3000F11F0/$File/45170_2010.pdf) ABS Prisoners in Australia 2010. P52.
3. <http://www.palyafund.org.au/projects/default.aspx> The Palya Fund website – projects.
4. Email to Bruce Argyle from Dr Helene Sommer April 28, 2011.