

Yarri Wada

Strong for Country



Puppet Project

NEWS

The Zonta District 23 Yarri Wada Puppet Project is co-ordinated by the Zonta Club of Perth Inc
www.zontaperth.org.au

'Yarri Wada' - how friends can help friends turn a vision into a reality...

Yarri Wada is a Ngarinyin phrase meaning 'many dreamings'.

Senior Law women of the Ngarinyin, Wunambal and Worrorra clans have one thing in common - a deep love of their country and the people within it. They dream of finding a way to guide their communities out of the cycle of poverty, domestic violence, child abuse, alcohol and drug abuse, disease, youth suicide, poor education and unemployment.

They dream of communities regaining pride in their culture and respect for themselves and each other. They dream of their children enjoying good health, good education and a safe living environment.

Together, these women decided that they could use puppets to best apply their strengths in art and story telling, to help men and women make positive changes in their communities...all they needed to get started, was a little help from their friends

The women approached their friends from the Zonta Club of Perth, with their idea - and the Yarri Wada Puppet Project was born.

Zontians successfully sought partnership with the EON Foundation, the Spare Parts Puppet Theatre, the Union Internationale de la Marionnette (UNIMA) - the world puppetry body, Million Puppets Project, St Catherine's College (University of Western Australia) and several private individuals to realise the aims of this unique project.

The Senior Law women want to support young women and men within their communities to:

- Take on leadership roles to reduce violence against women and children
- Encourage young people to pursue an education
- Enable young and old to teach each other how to reduce disease and poor health in their communities
- Encourage women and men to say 'no' to violence and encourage healthy relationships
- Provide women and men with an additional means to preserve Law and culture and make it relevant to modern living
- Build self esteem and confidence through creative design and performance.



Puppet makers, Leah Umbagai (on ladder) and Anika Rastus, erect the 5m high 'Jilinya' puppet at the World Puppet Festival in Perth, April 2008 - Jilinya features in the Yarri Wada Puppet Project logo

The programs in Yarri Wada are developed by Indigenous people for Indigenous people and therefore are able to speak in a way that is culturally meaningful. This newsletter describes the journey so far.

Why puppets?

In Aboriginal culture, stories are handed down through generations and if the next generation is not interested in the story, it dies and so too does a part of the culture and heritage of the community.

The puppet will never die, so a story can remain in the culture long after the generational chain has been broken.

Puppets

- Puppets can deliver sensitive messages in a light-hearted way
- Puppets are colourless, classless, apolitical
- Puppets are cheap to make
- Puppet theatre gets the whole community involved making puppets, creating scripts, finding venues, advertising, performing and watching
- Puppets tell stories people remember because they make you laugh, cry and capture the imagination
- Puppetry is entertaining and healing - it can be used to help small children discuss their feelings and problems with adults

Major sponsor



EON Foundation Inc

ZONTA



INTERNATIONAL
DISTRICT 23



Stage 1: Puppetry training - Kimberley style

There are two stages to the Yarri Wada Puppet Project.

Stage one involved a series of workshops held 'in country' to teach the art of puppetry and collect traditional stories around which future health and education messages will be framed.

The principal sponsors of this stage were the EON Foundation, Spare Parts Puppet Theatre, the UNIMA 2008 Million Puppet Project and the Zonta Club of Perth.

Over 50 women attended these workshops with their children (and pet dogs). It was a great intergeneration mix - with at least three generations of women working, teaching and learning together.

A number of puppets were created, included a 5m high female Gwion Gwion.

The Gwion Gwion are the spirit people of the Ngarinyin, Worrora and Wanambal tribes, created by the Wandjina, and responsible for teaching the people of the tribes their Law and culture, including their art and dancing.

It is appropriate that these figures were the first puppets to be made, as they were the first people of the Kimberley.

From them will come the creatures and characters that will be fashioned into puppets to tell health and education stories in a way that is culturally appropriate and meaningful.

Nineteen women who attended these workshops received a TAFE Certificate 1 in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Cultural Art.

The educational outcomes of the puppet project have been realised from the very start!



Karen Hethey, Puppeteer from the Spare Parts Puppet Theatre facilitates the bush workshop. Stories are shared, drawings made, different materials trialed and slowly the designs take shape. Local materials are collected to paint and decorate the puppets.



Left: Janet Oobagooma shapes a dragonfly from local materials

Right: Rattan is soaked and shaped in the billabong (waterhole) - the kids like this bit as the water is cool



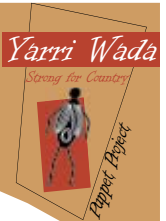
Below: Fabric is shaped over the frame...



The bush workshop is an opportunity for the children to be connected with their culture...here they use ochres they collected from the riverbeds to paint their faces in the traditional way.



Right: Leah and Mary Lou with the 5m high Jilinyina puppet at the Perth Concert Hall for the World Puppet Festival



Stage 2: Formation of Yarri Wada Puppet Troupe

Stage Two will see the formation of the Yarri Wada Puppet Troupe. It is intended that the Yarri Wada Puppet Troupe will be an ongoing, stand-alone entity providing professional development and employment opportunities for young Indigenous women and men of the Kimberley region. No such theatre group currently exists.

This stage will see the training of puppeteers, the creation of puppets and scripts, and their performance.

Each creation and performance cycle will form a module. Each module will address specific issues identified by the Elders and young people. It is anticipated that one module will be completed each year.

Each year the theatre group will develop performances that will address community issues, and performances aimed at cross-cultural education. The former will assist community building and inter-generational understanding, while the latter will be open to the general public to promote cultural

understanding and raise funds for the troupe.

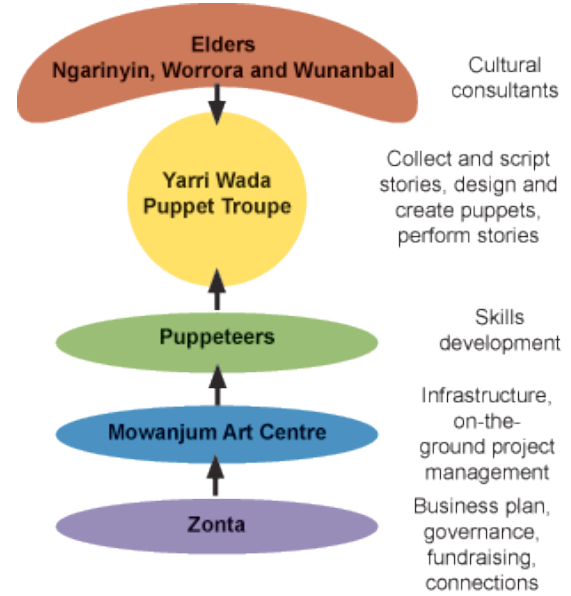
Each creation and performance cycle will be filmed to provide a permanent record of the project, to preserve cultural heritage and to be made available as a teaching and learning aid in schools and other community centres.

The outcomes of the project will provide a means to enhance social and economic equality for hundreds of Indigenous people in the iconic Kimberley region, particularly women and children.

The project provides women Elders and leaders with a means to articulate and share their stories, experience and skill at building healthy communities.

It also provides a means by which older women can offer younger women a way to express their identity, find their own voice and take responsibility for the well-being of their children.

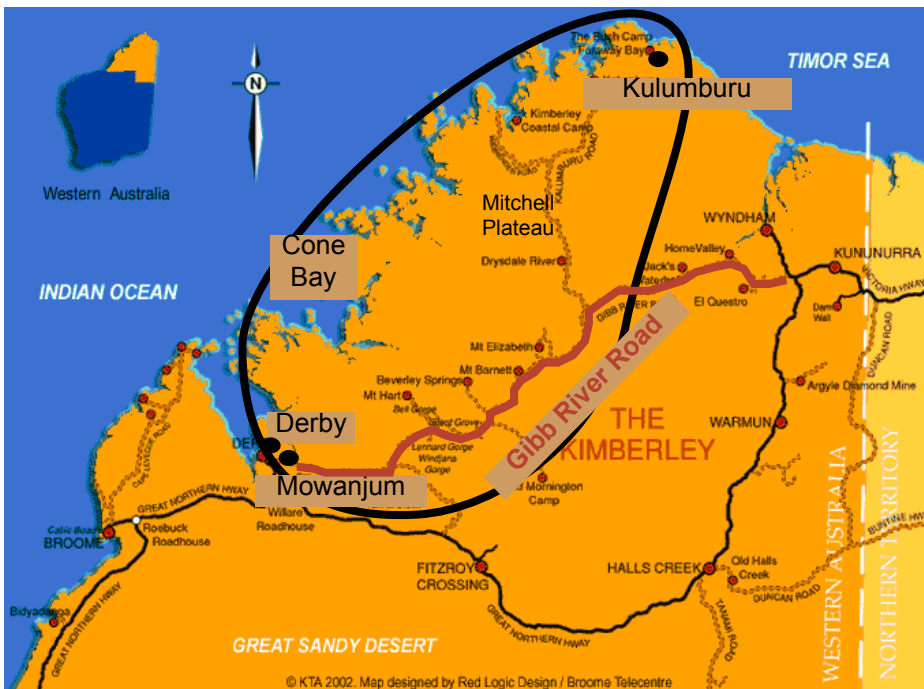
The Yarri Wada project seeks to empower women to profile and address some of the injustices that mark their



A diagrammatic model of the project

lives: the higher than average mortality rate of Indigenous children, reduced life expectancy of adults, disease load, unemployment, displacement and social isolation of Indigenous people in Australia.

Where will the Yarri Wada Troupe go?



The Ngarinyin, Wunambal and Worrorra clans have lived in the Kimberley region of North Western Australia for over 60,000 years. The people are the custodians of the oldest figurative art in North West Australia and guardians of the Wandjina spiritual sanctuary. Their homeland covers 200,000 square kilometres.

The area covered in the project will include the whole of the west Kimberley, south of Kulumburu, the Mitchell Plateau area, along the Gibb River Road, out to Cone Bay, and as far south as Mowanjum, near Derby.

The Gibb River and Kulumburu Roads are the two major roads in the region. They are dirt roads that pass through many rivers that do not have bridges. In the wet season, the rivers rise and the roads become impassable and people are unable to move out of communities for up to three months. This is tough, remote, but beautiful country.



How did the Zonta Club of Perth make friends with the Senior Law women?

The women Elders have established a strong and mutually respectful friendship with the women of the Zonta Club of Perth. This has been built over time and on the premise that friendship and collaboration lie at the heart of all contact between the two groups.

Five years ago members of the Zonta Club of Perth were invited to meet with women from the Ngarinyin, Worrora and Wunambal clans of the West Kimberley to share stories, mutual concerns and possible means to collaborate on community projects.



L-R: Pansy Nulgit, Senior Ngarinyin Law Woman, introduces Zontians Carole Theobald, Judy Tennant and Lyn McArthur to Ngarinyin culture at Donkey Creek in 2004.

This invitation came through Kathy Charlesworth, a photo-journalist who has lived and worked in the Kimberley for over thirty years, and who was familiar with the work of Zonta and the desire of the women Elders to address issues facing their communities.

Zonta is a service organisation that exists to advance the status of women worldwide and brings together business and professional women to pool their skills and resources to achieve this aim.

Eleven members of the Perth Zonta Club spent a week in the Kimberley learning about the lives and culture of their Indigenous hosts.

Since then, contact between the two communities has been maintained through regular conversation and further visits to the Kimberley and Perth by members of each group.

From time to time requests are made by the Indigenous women of the Kimberley to assist them address



Inset: Kathy Charlesworth

2007: Senior Law Women Yvonne Burgu (sitting 4th from left) and Nancy White (standing front right) get ready for smoking ceremony before teaching children at Donkey Creek. Zontians, Sciona Browne and Fiona Crowe standing at rear.

the needs of their communities. Through the process trust has developed and friendships have formed.

All projects are initiated and carried through by the women of the region, with Zonta providing the skill-set of its membership as needed.

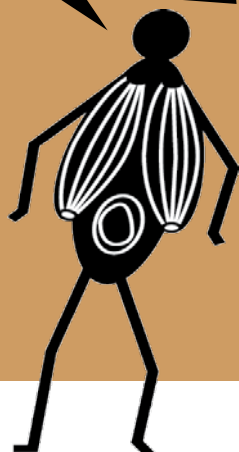
It's all about women, helping women as friends.

Help Yarri Wada by Adopting-A-Puppet...

The Yarri Wada Puppets need people to support them.

They need lots of 'parents' to keep them out of the cupboard and in to the communities where they can do most good.

Please adopt me!



Donations to the Zonta District 23 Yarri Wada Project can be made by cheque or direct transfer into the bank account of the Zonta Club of Perth Inc. Sponsors completing the Adopt a Puppet form will receive newsletters, DVDs and certificates.

Direct payments into the bank:

Please help us to identify your donation on our bank statements. For example:
YWPP Name of sponsor
e.g. YWPP ZC Bunbury would be a donation to the Yarri Wada Puppet Project from the Zonta Club of Bunbury.

The bank details are:
Zonta Club of Perth Inc
BSB 036038
Account 154851

Cheques:

Cheques should be in Australian dollars and made payable to the Zonta Club of Perth Inc.

The postal address is
Zonta Club of Perth Inc
PO Box 237
NEDLANDS WA 6909
Australia

Keep in touch with Yarri Wada at www.zontaperth.org.au

The Yarri Wada Team would like to thank all sponsors and friends for their financial, professional and moral support in Stage 1 and look forward to a successful Stage 2.

- Many thanks go to the
- EON Foundation,
 - Spare Parts Puppet Theatre,
 - UNIMA 2008 and the Million Puppets Project
 - St Catherine's College, UWA
 - Zonta Club of Perth