

Mt Theo
Yuendumu Substance Misuse
Aboriginal Corporation

Annual Report
2004 / 2005

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Committee

The Mt Theo Program is managed by a committee of elected Indigenous people from within Yuendumu community. Committee members represent a wide range of Yuendumu community organisations and family groups.

For 2004-2005 the Mt Theo Management Committee was made up of the following:

Alec Tasman

Andrea Tasman

Connie Walit

Denis Nelson

Denis Williams

Eddie Robertson

Ernest Brown

Jean Brown

Johnny Miller

Lottie Robertson

Maxine Spencer

Perry Langdon

Robbie Walit

Thomas Rice

Night Patrol

Jaru Pirrjirdi Team

Health Worker

Former Chairperson

Traditional Owner

Council

Traditional Owner

Traditional Owner

Founder, Traditional Owner

PCHAP

School

Traditional Owner

CDEP Assistant Co-ordinator

Community Elder

The Executive:

Eddie Robertson

Jean Brown

Robbie Walit

Alec Tasman

Chairperson

Chairperson

Treasurer

Executive Member



Summary of the Year's Activities:

The Mt Theo Program has continued to strengthen during the 2004 – 2005 financial year. Today, petrol sniffing is a rare occurrence in Yuendumu, in stark contrast to the problem at the Program's inception. The zero tolerance approach that has embedded itself in Yuendumu community culture allows an immediate response to any young person engaging in petrol sniffing, providing a solid model of early intervention.

This year the Mt Theo Program has remained focussed on preventing and stopping petrol sniffing throughout the entire Warlpiri region. Mt Theo Program worked with 53 young Warlpiri people who were sniffing petrol in Willowra, Yuendumu, Nyrripi and Alice Springs, many of whom sniffed only once. The Mt Theo Program has been able to deal with this petrol sniffing behaviour using early intervention strategies. In the last months of this year, the clients have been solely from Alice Springs and the Program has faced the challenge of caring for young Warlpiri people that are not closely monitored by family and the smaller community.

Mt Theo has expanded its activities in Willowra through the placement of a Youth Worker who works with the community to provide a Youth Program of innovative and challenging activities to divert young people from self-harming activities, and in particular, petrol sniffing.

Through the Jaru Pirrjirdi (Strong Voices) Youth Development Project, the Mt Theo Program has continued to work with young people in addressing issues underlying petrol sniffing behaviour and the misuse of other substances. Young people in the Jaru Pirrjirdi Project are strongly emerging as youth leaders, working on community development Projects that help create positive futures for both individuals and the broader community.

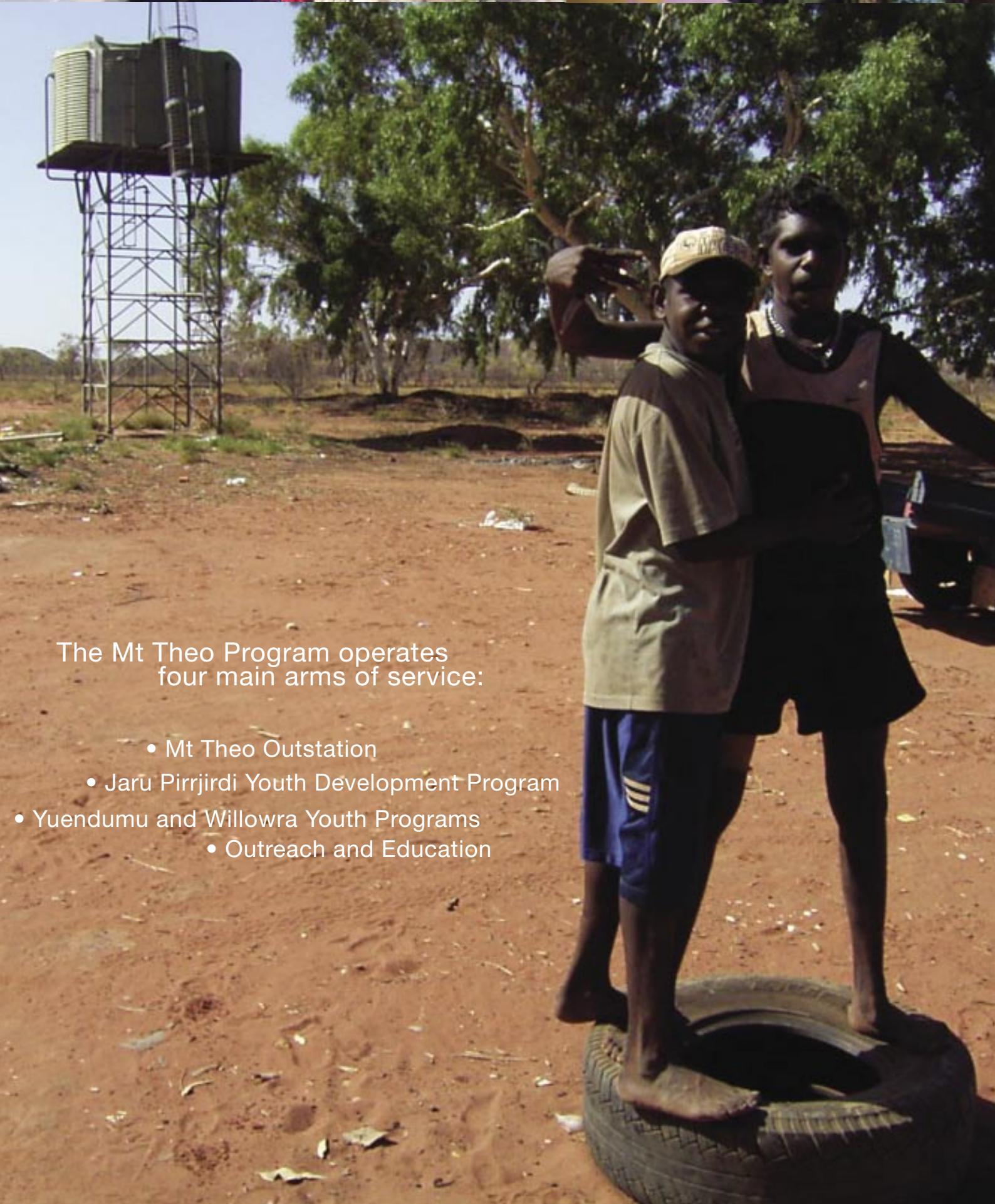
Members of the Jaru Pirrjirdi team continue to run the youth activities in Yuendumu. These young people are working with the perspective of "we used to be petrol sniffers and now are working hard to help make Yuendumu a better place for young people so they don't want to sniff petrol or drink grog".



As part of the Mt Theo Youth Program, Night School has continued to develop in Yuendumu. Born from the Jaru Pirrjirdi focus groups, Night School is a collaborative initiative between the Yuendumu School, Youth Challenge Australia and Mt Theo Program. Night School provides an opportunity for young people in Yuendumu, many of whom are considered “at-risk”, to engage in youth development and educational activities, as a far better alternative to substance misuse. Many past petrol sniffers from Yuendumu and Willowra participate in Night School as a meaningful productive outside school hours activity.

Increasingly, our Program has been providing education and outreach workshops to government organisations, other Aboriginal communities, related agencies and media, regarding community action and strategies used to address petrol sniffing.

This year the Mt Theo Program experienced changes and growth in the team of workers. Early in the year Alan Dickson was appointed Outstation Manager, and works together with Ubik Freeman to ensure Mt Theo runs smoothly. Andrew Stojanovski left Yuendumu early in the year and Karissa Preuss took on overall management of the Program until Susie Low was appointed Manager in February 2005. In May Brett Badger and Natalie O'Connor joined our team as youth workers, and have been able to expand the number and variety of different boys and girls activities.



The Mt Theo Program operates
four main arms of service:

- Mt Theo Outstation
- Jaru Pirrjirdi Youth Development Program
- Yuendumu and Willowra Youth Programs
 - Outreach and Education



Mt Theo Outstation

Preventing Petrol Sniffing Throughout the Warlpiri Zone

Over the last year Mt Theo Program has dealt with 53 petrol sniffers, 14 of whom were not required to go to Mt Theo Outstation.

During the first half of the year Mt Theo was open for one month only, to care for a young woman from Yuendumu who had been sniffing petrol. During the summer holidays there was an outbreak of sniffing in Yuendumu and Willowra and 22 young sniffers from Yuendumu, 8 from Willowra and 3 from Nyrripi were cared for at Mt Theo. Most of these young people stayed at Mt Theo for one month, and six had more than one episode of care. There have been no relapses or new incidents of sniffing in Yuendumu since March this year, and all the young people from Yuendumu are now engaged in productive youth activities in Yuendumu.

Willowra community is determined to deal with their petrol sniffing problem. During this year 19 young Willowra people have been cared for at Mt Theo, and only 3 have had more than one episode of care.

Mt Theo Outstation acts as an important deterrent against young people sniffing petrol in Yuendumu and other Warlpiri communities.

Mt Theo Program dealt with 14 episodes of petrol sniffing in Yuendumu, and 6 in Willowra and through early intervention strategies these young people did not need to go to Mt Theo. The threat of Mt Theo is essential to the success of these strategies and in preventing other young people from starting to sniff petrol.

Mt Theo has this year been able to provide respite for any young person with Warlpiri family, including town based sniffers. If the young person is not from Yuendumu, the Program founders and workers are first asked if the person will be accepted into the Program. If they are accepted, we urge a family member to come and assist with their care. Mt Theo Program is liaising with Alice Springs based agencies such as CAYLUS, Reconnect, and FaCs to develop an agreement for this service, rather than working reactively to daily crises.

This year, for the first time, Mt Theo has been used as a diversion option for young people who have come to the attention of police. As an alternative to charging, five young people from Yuendumu who had been stealing were sent to Mt Theo for one month. None of these young people has re-offended.

The most recent population of Mt Theo Outstation has been three young Warlpiri people sniffing in Alice Springs, two of whom were referred by FACS and the Alice Springs Court; one referred by Department of Corrections for his parole period; and four young people referred by Yuendumu Police for stealing.

Commonwealth Office of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health fund the Mt Theo Outstation and related management activities.



Visitors to the Mt Theo Program this year included:

Senator Aden Ridgeway, who camped at Mt Theo with young people and workers;
Senator Bob Brown, who camped with Mt Theo workers,
Jarui Pirrjirdi members and Willowra Youth Committee at Mt Denison;

Minister Peter Toyne;

Oenpelli Women's Group;

Larapinta Valley Town Camp Women's Group.

Case Management

Mt Theo Program has continued to case manage each of the past petrol sniffers who have resided at Mt Theo. Case files are kept on all clients and updated regularly. However, staff and time constraints limit follow-up of clients who return to Alice Springs. Mt Theo maintains some contact through town based agencies on the progress of these former clients.

Mt Theo has assisted 4 young people appearing before the court for crimes committed while under the influence of petrol. On each occasion the court has allowed Mt Theo to work with these young people as an alternative to detention through either community work orders with the Mt Theo Program or a supervised good behaviour bond.

Two of the young petrol sniffers from Alice Springs now reside in Yuendumu and are actively engaged in the Youth Program.

Mt Theo outstation workers considered carefully before accepting one young chronic petrol sniffer from Mt Allen back into the Program, based on his previous behaviour at the Outstation. However, after a month at Mt Theo, this young man worked conscientiously with the Mt Theo Program in Yuendumu before returning to Mt Allen. Mt Allen community members now describe him as a strong, hard-working and responsible member of their community.

The last chronic sniffer in Yuendumu

During this year the Mt Theo Program has continued to work with the young Warlpiri man from Papunya who was one of the first Outstation clients, ten years ago. This young man has been on numerous court bonds that have placed him under the care of the Mt Theo Program. He has developed a pattern of sniffing petrol as soon as he leaves Mt Theo. Mt Theo Program staff have been assisting this young man in his interactions with the police and the courts, and have worked hard to prevent him sniffing petrol in Yuendumu.

In February this year, on release from prison, he returned directly to Yuendumu and started sniffing. He was taken to Papunya immediately, at his family's request. By March he was again in prison for an alcohol-related crime. In May 2005 when he was released, Mt Theo staff took him immediately to Mt Theo Outstation to be cared for. He will reside at Mt Theo for 3 months, and will remain under our care for a further 18 months probationary period.

Mt Theo Program believes this young man is only alive because of his ongoing periods of care at Mt Theo Outstation. While he is severely damaged by his petrol sniffing behaviour, it must be noted that most of his petrol sniffing contemporaries from Papunya are now deceased.

Jaru Pirrjirdi (Strong Voices) Youth Development Project

The Jaru Pirrjirdi Project has strengthened this year as the major initiative in developing leadership potential in our young people in Yuendumu.

This year Jaru Pirrjirdi has continued its work in assisting young people, many of whom are past clients of Mt Theo, in addressing issues underlying substance misuse. Jaru Pirrjirdi is working with young people to create positive futures for both the individuals involved and their communities.

The major funding sources for the Project are Alcohol Education and Rehabilitation Foundation, Foundation for Young Australians, and the Commonwealth Department of Health's Illicit Drugs Strategy.

Major activities of the Jaru Pirrjirdi Project this year have included:

“strong culture, strong voices, strong futures” initiative

This Project has continued to focus on our young people's goal to “keep our culture strong”, as the priority for building strong futures. The Jaru Pirrjirdi Youth committee organise a three day bush workshop every month, each held in a different site of cultural significance. Young people and elders participated in these trips with young people learning cultural stories from the elders and recording them on film.

The bush trips also provided the opportunity for youth forums to discuss the importance of the jukurrpa to their lives today and ways to address individual and community youth issues. The bush

trips provide a forum for addressing issues underlying substance misuse and ways to address these.

Mentoring for petrol sniffers

During this year, members of the Jaru Pirrjirdi team, who are now emerging as youth leaders in Yuendumu, spent time at Mt Theo as positive role models to the young petrol sniffers residing there. When clients return to Yuendumu, the team continue to mentor and support them as they grow stronger and face their lives without the ‘escape’ of substance misuse.

Leadership Program

The Jaru Pirrjirdi Project has continued to encourage the leadership skills of young people in Yuendumu. Increasingly young people are representing youth at local council meetings and regional youth related meetings, and playing a major role in the planning and development of the Youth Program.

In addition to the regular Jaru Pirrjirdi bush trips, the Youth Committee also took part in the Hamilton Downs Youth Forum. Kintore and Willowra communities held community meetings because of their concern for petrol sniffing, and invited Jaru Pirrjirdi members to speak on behalf of Yuendumu youth.



Community Youth Leaders Conference, Melbourne

The Foundation for Young Australian's funded two Jaru Pirrjirdi youth leaders and the project co-ordinator to attend the Foundation for Young Australians 'National Community Youth Leadership' Conference held in Melbourne in May 2005. Young people from Yuendumu met with youth leaders from all over Australia and participated in workshops and youth forums focussed around building leadership potential and community and youth development. Our two representatives also had the pleasure of meeting Michael Long, and attending an AFL match at the MCG.

Youth leaders running the Youth Program

Young people in the Jaru Pirrjirdi team continue to develop and run the youth activities. This allows the team, many of whom are still 'at-risk', to provide positive contributions to the community. As workers these young people are able to engage with other youth workers and the wider Yuendumu community in a way that values them as being part of solutions to community issues. This year, fifteen young people have been employed on a part time basis to provide youth activities in Yuendumu.

Warlpiri Rangers.

Over the last year Jaru Pirrjirdi Project has assisted young people into various forms of education and employment, notably Warlpiri Ranger Program. The Central Land Council runs Warlpiri Rangers, aimed at enhancing the capacity of young Indigenous

people to manage their land and water resources. Members of the Jar Pirrjirdi team have been involved in a number of important Warlpiri Ranger activities including: baiting for feral animals, removing noxious weeds, tracking and documenting the presence of threatened species, among others. The Warlpiri Rangers Program, in conjunction with Jaru Pirrjirdi is providing productive meaningful employment for young Warlpiri people. It is one example of a Program that assists young people to create stronger futures and therefore reduce susceptibility to substance misuse behaviour.

Art Project

Minister Peter Toyne commissioned the Jaru Pirrjirdi team to paint healthy life images on two large boards to be displayed at the children's ward in Alice Springs Hospital. Supported by CAYLUS, two artists came to assist the young people of Yuendumu in developing their artwork. An art competition was held with the winning images being collated into two large collages.

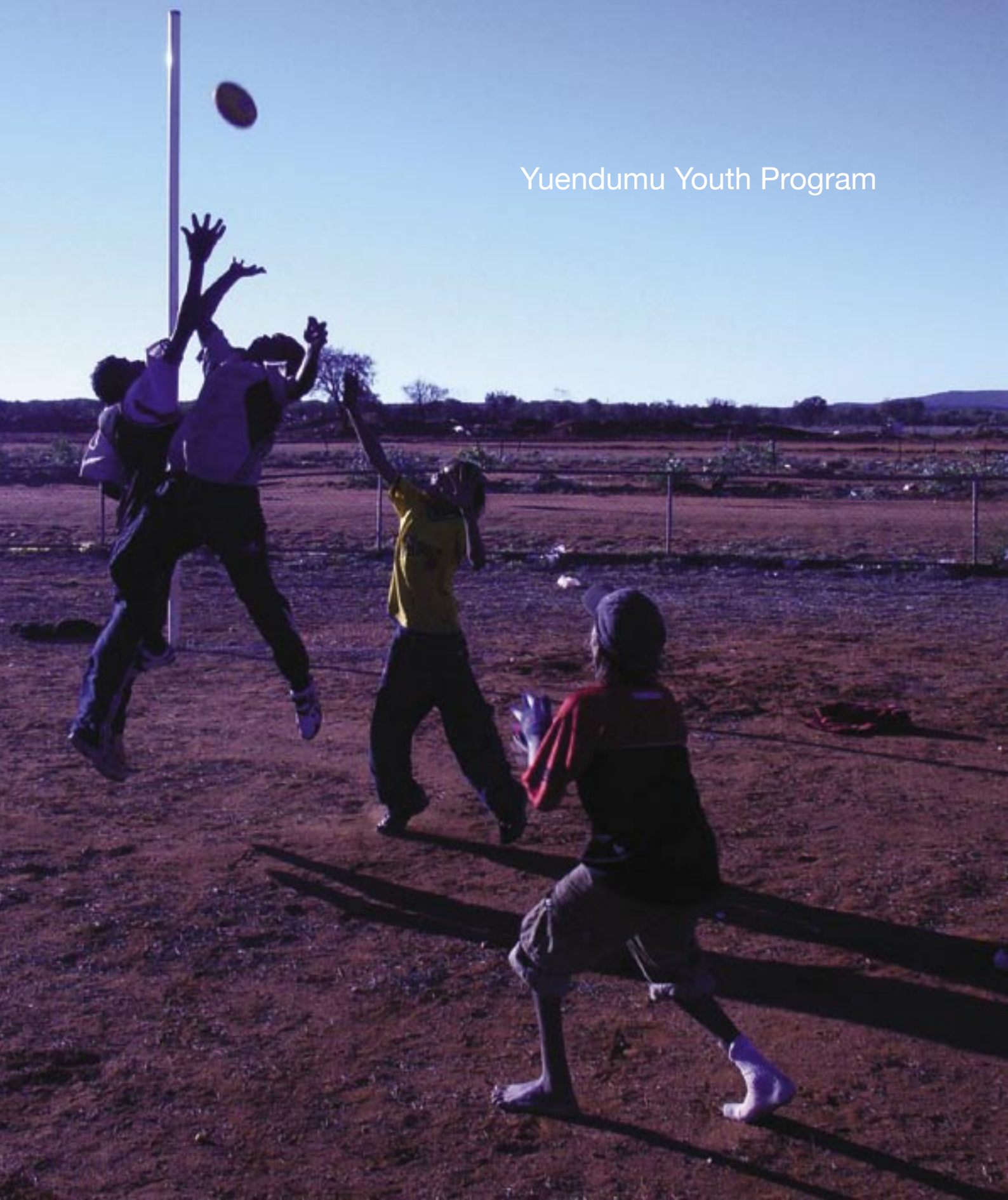
At the opening of the ward, Jaru Pirrjirdi were treated as VIPs, with radio, television and newspaper journalists all wanting to hear their stories.

Outreach to other Communities

During this year the Jaru Pirrjirdi team accompanied Mt Theo elders and workers to talk about the Program in Kintore and Willowra. They also took a football team to Nyrripi for a friendly game and community BBQ.



Yuendumu Youth Program



Yuendumu Youth Program has continued to provide young people in Yuendumu with diverse and vibrant alternatives to petrol sniffing and other substance misuse over the last year. An increase in staff means that the Youth Program now involves a seven night a week youth activities Program in addition to providing school holiday and after school hours activities. Commonwealth Family and Community Services provide most of the funding for the Youth Program through the Outside School Hours Care initiative.

Activities this year have included mural painting, pool, swimming, roller-skating, basketball, softball, concerts, discos, football, video games, film nights and cultural excursions.

Special holiday activities included circus skills workshops, mask-making and jewellery workshops, and the visit of a 9 person gospel rock band that ran music workshops, church and concerts in Yuendumu and Mt Theo. Young people returning from Mt Theo who are considered to be particularly at risk are engaged to work alongside Mt Theo staff and Jaru Pirrjirdi workers in running the youth activities. Working closely with young people in these activities allows Mt Theo Program staff to keep in close contact with youth culture in Yuendumu.

Night School

Night School has continued to evolve during this year. A collaborative approach between the Mt Theo Program, Yuendumu School and Youth Challenge Australia, Night School provides a meaningful and productive alternative to petrol sniffing and other substances, and directly responds to youth forum findings that identified the desire of our young people to further their education.

Night School runs for three nights a week during the school term. Over twenty young people in the 15 – 25 year old age group attend nightly to learn more about English, maths, information technology, music, cooking or to engage with tutors about issues in their lives. Night School remains fluid and responsive to the needs of youth. There are six volunteer tutors and one youth worker present each evening.

Many of the past clients of the Mt Theo Outstation Program are now engaged in Night School as part of Mt Theo follow up and after-care of clients. Through the process of Night School eight young people, four of whom are past clients of Mt Theo, have enrolled in secondary education.

Auskick

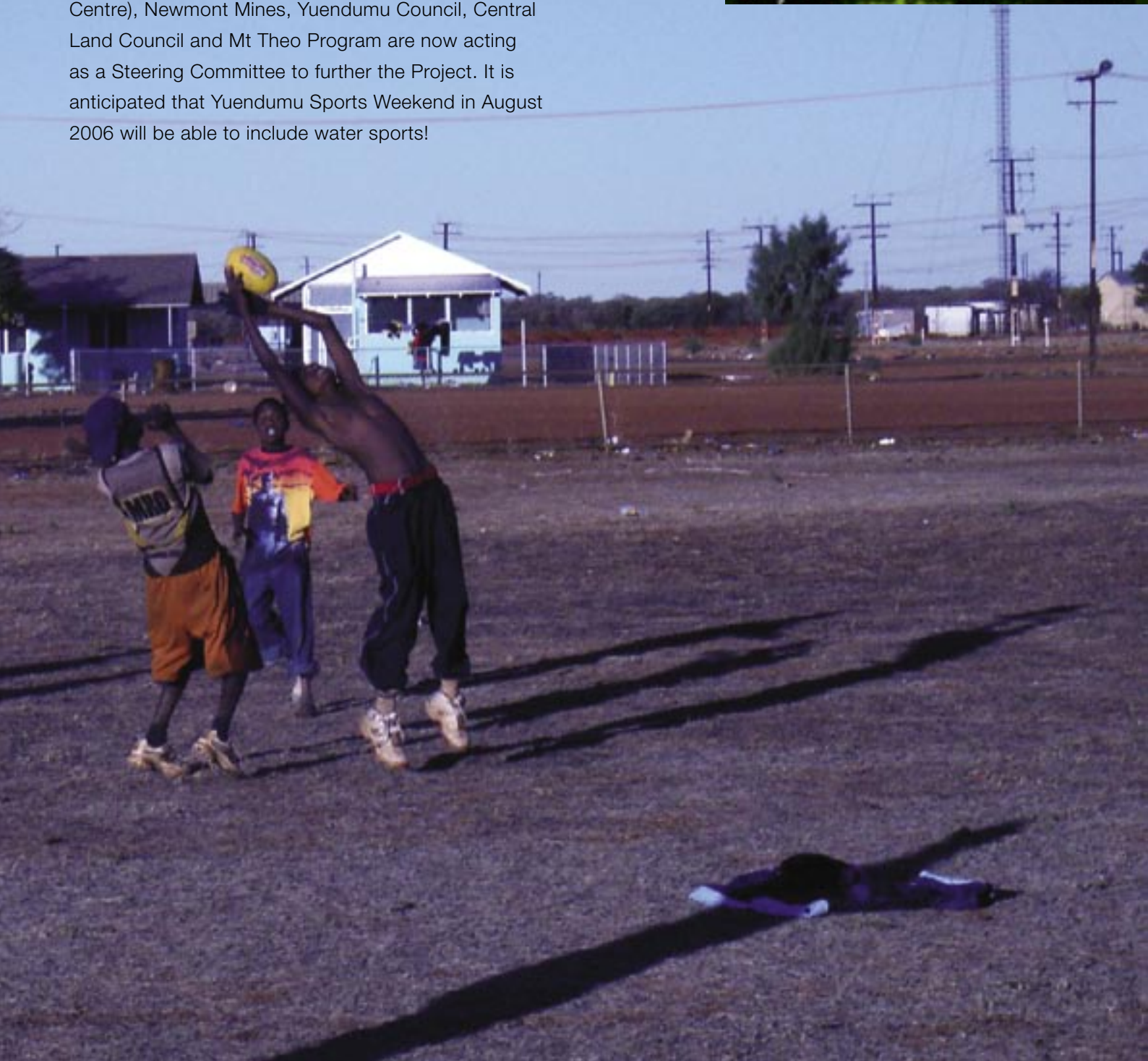
One highlight of the Youth Program was the Auskick Program held during the school holidays. An average of 22 boys aged between 4 and 15 attended the sessions every day for skills training and games, supervised by the Youth Worker and Jaru Pirrjirdi workers. Older football players and community members were also enthusiastic about the Program, and often came to watch our potential football stars. As one elder noted “That’s really good that Auskick Program. It makes them kids busy, be better footballers and learn how to make our community strong”.

As a highlight of the Program, a game was organised in Nyrripi. Mt Theo staff and community elders took a busload of kids to Nyrripi and played against a local team with all the community cheering them on. Mt Theo provided a BBQ lunch after the game. Nyrripi has no youth worker and the community appreciated Mt Theo providing this activity for their young people.

Yuendumu Swimming Pool

Yuendumu has, at last, been given funding through the PIRA (Pools in Remote Areas) Scheme to build a swimming pool. One challenge however, has been to move forward to begin construction, due to the fact that Yuendumu Community Council has been declared insolvent. We hope that this summer will be the last time we need to use the 'bathtub' at the school!

Representatives of Yuendumu community, NT Government and ICC (Indigenous Coordination Centre), Newmont Mines, Yuendumu Council, Central Land Council and Mt Theo Program are now acting as a Steering Committee to further the Project. It is anticipated that Yuendumu Sports Weekend in August 2006 will be able to include water sports!





Willowra Youth Program

In April this year, Mt Theo was asked to manage the Youth Program in Willowra. Alison Gillies, the Youth Worker who had been working in Willowra since February, became part of the Mt Theo team.

After months of consultation, a strong Youth Committee, representative of all the family groups in Willowra and including both elders and young people, was formed to develop and direct the youth Program of activities. Some of the remarkable achievements include:

Youth Centre renovation.

The community identified a derelict building, and with no outside resources, have started to renovate it. The work itself became a focus for community and youth activities with young people, elders and visiting handymen all lending a hand. The centre is now safe and clean, with 3 small lock ups for equipment, a wire disco and band control room, a large dancing space, a small outdoor cinema screen, and clear yard space for gatherings and bush style cooking. This has all been achieved with recycled materials and young people's hard work. The 'before' photos are pictured on the next page.

Apart from entertainment activities the centre will be used as a site for further education, training and job creation. Projects and will focus on literacy, numeracy, Warlpiri language maintenance, empowerment, economic independence and self determination.

Catering Project

Several young women initiated this Project by commencing a small business to cater at youth functions. They currently use the school kitchen, and as payment for cooking for school functions, receive payment in food that can then be used to cater for youth activities.

CAYLUS provided a large freezer, and all cooking is done bush style. The young women want training to further develop this into a viable business, providing good tucker for the school, the shop, and community events.

Multi Media Project

A BRACS room has been established by Warlpiri Media on school grounds. Young people are being trained by Warlpiri Media staff to make films of bush trips and youth events, film clips for bands, and short narratives. The Warlpiri Media Indigenous Film Festival was held at the renovated youth centre in June.



Community partnerships

Strong partnerships have been formed with other community services. The male nurse at Willowra clinic runs young men's clinics and shows videos in tandem with Friday night discos. A film and sausage sizzle was held at the clinic to attract young people to the young men and women's sexual health screening.

Willowra School uses the developing media skills of some of the Youth Program participants to record school bush trips with film and photographs, and also allows the school kitchen to be used for the Catering Project. In return for catering services, the school provides food to be used in other Program activities.

To encourage male secondary students to further their education, Yirrara College now sends a teacher for 6 week blocks every term. A special classroom has been set up and the teacher is flexible to community ways of learning.

Wynhealth supports the Program through funding and facilitating bush trips that focus on specific health issues such as men's health, sexual health, mental health and substance misuse.

CLC Desert Fire Project

This Project was introduced to the community through the youth Program. Desert Fire provided transport and food to take elders and youth out bush to discuss and produce a book on traditional burning. The youth Program will produce a short film on the Project. CLC plan to provide follow up training in GIS mapping when the youth centre has computer facilities.

Education and Outreach

Mt Theo Program has responded to numerous requests for information regarding the Program throughout the year. Nearly every week the Mt Theo Program is called by people wanting to hear the Mt Theo story of hope. Requests come from politicians, newspapers, radio, government agencies or people from other communities trying to stop sniffing.

This year the Mt Theo Program staff, Committee and Jaru Pirrjirdi members have provided presentations to the following:

Medical staff from Yuendumu and Willowra clinics
Central Australian Youth Link-up Conference,
Hamilton Downs
Willowra community
Kintore community
Senator Aden Ridgeway
Senator Bob Brown
Yuendumu school staff
Yuendumu police
Larapinta Valley Town Camp Women's Group
Oenpelli Women's Group
ANTAR presentation, Redfern, Sydney
Alice Springs Hospital – health professionals
Comgas Conference, Alice Springs
Youth Challenge Australia, Board members
West Australian Justice Department
Balgo community youth worker
Northern Territory Correctional Services staff

YSAC International Inhalant Forum, Canada

Jean Brown, Chairperson, and Karissa Preuss, Jaru Pirrjirdi Coordinator, were invited to present the Program to other participants from all over the world. The Mt Theo Program was acknowledged as a unique and innovative approach to inhalant abuse, and strong links were forged with other workers internationally.

Sydney Morning Herald

During December, a journalist and photographer visited Mt Theo Program as part of a story on petrol sniffing initiatives in Central Australia.

“Of Substance” – National Magazine on Alcohol, Tobacco and Other Drugs

The Mt Theo Program was featured in the January edition of “Of Substance” Magazine as part of its edition focused on young people. The Mt Theo Program was shown as a “remarkable success story, which has transformed the lives of a generation of Warlpiri youth in the region”.

Alice Springs Festival

The Jaru Pirrjirdi youth committee was asked to submit work to be showcase in the “youth out bush” multimedia display as part of the Alice Springs Festival. Mt Theo Program again was shown to be a Central Australian leader in working with young people at risk of substance misuse.

SBS 'Living Black' Program

During March, an SBS journalist visited Yuendumu and Mt Theo, and accompanied Mt Theo workers to Kintore for a community meeting. The story highlighted the concerns of petrol sniffing, and focussed on the successful Mt Theo model. The show was broadcast on April 18.

Community Youth Leaders Conference, Melbourne

The Foundation for Young Australian's funded two Jaru Pirrjirdi youth leaders and the project co-ordinator to attend the Foundation for Young Australians 'National Community Youth Leadership' Conference held in Melbourne in May 2005. Young people from Yuendumu met with youth leaders from all over Australia and participated in workshops and youth forums focussed around building leadership potential and community and youth development.

Radio interviews

During the year, the Mt Theo Program team has conducted numerous radio interviews, particularly with ABC news in response to the new legislation on petrol sniffing, OPAL fuel, and the Coroner's Report from the Pitlands. In addition, two half-hour radio shows on the achievements of the Mt Theo Program were broadcast through the National Indigenous Radio network and Northern Territory ABC radio.



Statistics 2004 - 2005

| | |
|--|-----------|
| Petrol sniffers with whom the Program worked | 53 |
| Young people who stayed at Mt Theo | 48 |
| from Yuendumu | 24 |
| from Willowra | 16 |
| from Alice Springs | 03 |
| from Nyrripi | 03 |
| from Papunya & Mt Allen | 02 |
| Young people who went to Mt Theo more than once | 06 |
| Number of referrals from FaCS, Corrections, Reconnect, CAYLUS, Alice Springs Court, Yuendumu Police | 09 |
| Number of young girls who stayed at Mt Theo | 20 |
| Number of young boys who stayed at Mt Theo | 28 |

Capital works Project

During this year, Mt Theo Program has worked with Richard Layton and Associates, Project Manager for the capital works Project, and the architect, Brendan Meney, to ensure the building Project is precisely what the Mt Theo Program founders, workers and Traditional owners want. Richard and Brendan have been regular visitors to Mt Theo and Yuendumu to discuss how the Project is developing.

The feasibility study phase of the upgrade of infrastructure at Mt Theo was finalised this years, and the design and construction phase is underway. The upgrade includes the building of dormitory style accommodation at Mt Theo, including ablution facilities, upgrade of power and water, and renovation of the existing house. The house will be completed early 2006, and the dormitory by the end of the next financial year.

The proposed floor plan for the dormitory and elevation are shown opposite.

Staff housing is to be constructed in Yuen-dumu, and the office will be renovated.

Newmont mines have offered to contribute to the upgrade of facilities, including road grading and providing demountable housing for traditional owners and carers at Mt Theo.

