

PRINCE GOES WALKABOUT

PHOTOS: DAVID FOOTE, AUSPIC

Prince Charles was given a rapturous welcome when he visited North-East Arnhem Land in April.

The Rirratjingu welcomed him to their land.

The Prince was given something that is priceless to them and is now of great importance to him – a bark painting symbolising the Rirratjingu's ownership of Nhulunbuy and Yirrkala.

It was prepared by Traditional Owner, Wanyubi Marika, whose late father Milirrpum took on the local mining company in the great

land rights case Milirrpum v Nabalco.

The painting portrays the story of Wuyal, the Dreamtime creator who named features of the Rirratjingu landscape.

"It shows our ownership of the country," Wanyubi says.

Prince Charles acknowledged the importance of the artwork by hanging it in Buckingham Palace.

"He felt a warm welcome," Wanyubi told the NT News. "If we welcome him with open arms, positive things are going to happen for us."





PRINCE CHARLES RECEIVES THE RIRRATJINGU PAINTING

"I THINK PRINCE CHARLES WAS WILLING TO UNDERSTAND THERE IS A COMMON GROUND BETWEEN LONDON AND YOLNGU."

"I think Prince Charles was willing to understand there is a common ground between London and Yolngu.

"We have ownership of the core, the soil and river. It's our skin, our blood and our bones."

The significance of bark paintings goes back to the origins of land rights.

The land rights campaign is recognised as having properly begun in 1963 when Yolngu people presented bark petitions to the Australian Parliament after Nabalco was granted a mining lease on the Gove Peninsula.

The petitions failed to stop the bauxite mine opening, but the Rirratjingu went to court, culminating in the great *Milirrump v Nabalco* case.

Again the case did not stop the mining, but it was a crucial step towards the 1976 Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act.

A year after the Act was passed, the Rirratjingu presented a Djang'kawu digging stick to the Minister of

Aboriginal Affairs to celebrate the final acknowledgement of their land rights.

The stick is displayed alongside the Yirrkala bark petition in Parliament House.

A traditional Wuyal ceremony was held in Prince Charles' honour at Mt Nhulun, a major sacred site to the Rirratjingu clan.

He was presented with a woven dilly bag by Rirratjingu Aboriginal Corporation chairman Bakamumu Marika.

The Prince was escorted by dancers wearing traditional dress and ochre paint, and holding spears and woomeras.

Mr Marika then delivered the Welcome to Country.

About 400 people, including dozens of schoolchildren greeted Prince Charles at Buku-Larrnggay Mulka, one of Australia's leading Indigenous arts centres.

CULTURE: OUR GREAT STRENGTH

RIRRATJINGHU PERFORM THE YARRAPAY CEREMONY. PHOTO: PAZ TASSONE



The Rirratjingu people are enormously proud that they have owned their land since time immemorial.

The Djan'kawu sisters created the law, people and places, and the spirit being Wuyal walked through the Gove Peninsula with the Wawilak Sisters, naming the land. Rirratjingu are also conscious that to

control their own destinies they must stay strong. And the source of their strength comes from one thing: culture.

Clan leader Bakamumu Marika, whose late dad Roy Dadaynga Marika MBE is known as the Father of Land Rights, says everything stems from a strong culture – prosperity, good health, education, connection with the land and respect for tradition.

He admits to being frustrated sometimes by bureaucratic government

organisations that slow the rate of progress for his people, but he focuses on the positives of his people's strong connection to land and tradition.

"We expect things to happen quickly, but they don't – they go slowly, slowly. There is still much to do.

"We can focus our attention on maintaining our culture, language and our need to educate our kids about Yolngu culture.



RIRRATJINGU OPEN THE NO MORE CAMPAIGN BALL TO RAISE MONEY TO REDUCE FAMILY VIOLENCE

“WHEN WE DID THAT WE USED LOCAL MUSICIANS, PERFORMERS AND DANCERS AND GOT THE COMMUNITY INVOLVED TO JOIN WITH US. THAT IS HOW WE TEACH CULTURE AND HOW WE DEVELOP SO MANY TALENTED PEOPLE.

“Lots of young Aboriginal people don’t fully celebrate their own culture. We want to bring them back to their own culture. Some communities are strong at doing this, some are not so strong. We must all work together to preserve our way of life.”

The Rirratjingu Aboriginal Corporation, which represents the Traditional Owners of the Gove

Peninsula, uses the profits from its successful business enterprises to empower their local people.

Rirratjingu Aboriginal Corporation organises events to help close the gap on issues of national importance.

They coordinated the Aboriginal Family Violence Policing Conference together with the NT Police, which was held in Yirrkala in June, and

was a resounding success.

Following the inaugural conference in Alice Springs last year, the Rirratjingu invited police to hold the second event in Yirrkala.

Mr Marika says: “Family violence tears communities apart and we must be doing all we can to rid Aboriginal communities from this scourge. It’s important in maintaining a strong

culture to reduce negative social issues, to allow the culture to thrive.

“Our social programs use culture to make positive social change.

“This is about creating cultural and institutional change throughout society and we look forward to working with the NT Police and all organisations to make this change happen. That is how we close the gap.

“We have our culture and nobody can take that away from us, as long as we keep it strong and teach our next generation.”

Senior Rirratjingu Traditional Owner Wityana Marika, who spoke at the conference, says: “We have been able to reduce family violence by 27.9 per cent in Yirrkala. We did that by

holding lots of alcohol-free community events and by communicating our message through those activities.

“When we did that we used local musicians, performers and dancers and got the community involved to join with us. That is how we teach culture and how we develop so many talented people. And close the gap.

“There are many world-class musicians in North-East Arnhem Land. Music is a huge part of Yolngu life – we use music in everything we do to press home a positive message.”

The corporation supports many talented musicians, including bands East Journey and Barra Westwind, as well as singer-songwriter Yirrma. Barra Westwind and Yirrma will

perform at the National Indigenous Music Awards in Darwin on August 11.

Sport is another way that cultural change is reinforced for young Yolngu people.

The Rirratjingu Aboriginal Corporation has enjoyed some of its greatest successes empowering Yolngu people by using sport to create positive social change, to stay away from grog and gambling, and instead invest their energy in positive social activity.

The Djarrak Football Club, which is in its third year under the Rirratjingu Football Program umbrella, also has a strong anti-domestic violence message.

Program Coordinator and Djarrak Football Club Senior Coach Hayden Rickard says the whole concept –



RIRRATJINGU MUSICIAN YIRRMAL MARIKA PERFORMS AT THE NATIONAL INDIGENOUS MUSIC AWARDS: PHOTO: PAZ TASSONE

“THERE ARE MANY WORLD-CLASS MUSICIANS IN NORTH-EAST ARNHEM LAND. MUSIC IS A HUGE PART OF YOLNGU LIFE – WE USE MUSIC IN EVERYTHING WE DO TO PRESS HOME A POSITIVE MESSAGE.”

Better People Make Better Players – was devised because of the damage family violence, alcohol and other drug use and anti-social behaviour were doing to the community.

“The Better People Make Better Players concept was created to give our playing group a goal and target of what success looked like,” he says. “Not only football success, but cultural and social success.”

Strict standards and behaviours are laid down – no alcohol at club functions, no domestic violence, improved social outputs and greater positive engagement with the community.

“If we expect the best from our people, we need to put the best support in place,” Mr Rickard says. “In order to do that, we studied what other high-performance teams are doing and made it work for us.

“Since the program started we have seen improvements across the board, from family violence and alcohol reduction to improvements in motivation, fitness and community engagement. Football is only a small part of our players’ lives – leaving the community in a better state



DJARRAK FOOTBALL ... PLAYING A CRUCIAL ROLE IN MAKING BETTER PEOPLE. PHOTO: DAVID WILLIAMS

is a compelling calling for our group.

“This has transformed the lives of young people in our community, improving their lives and the lives of those around them. It’s empowering our people.

“It’s significant that a Corporation is thriving on business success and using its own profits to win social outcomes. It demonstrates to other corporations, with similar business ventures, that you don’t need to dig into the government funding well to deliver sustainable projects.”

The program is now looking to expand and develop employment pathways through local employers, and further pathways to the NT Thunder Academy system and the Geelong Cats Next Gen Academy. Thus far 2018 has produced six NT players and two coaches from the program.

Culture is used as the bedrock for improving lives and it is actively shared throughout the community, to even the youngest of members.

For school students, it is also in their formal education, through the Rirratjingu Aboriginal Corporation’s

support of the Clontarf Academy and the Yirrkala School.

Langani Marika, who is in her seventies, is the oldest living member of the Rirratjingu clan and until her recent retirement helped the school pass on cultural knowledge while getting a more modern education.

It’s called Learning on Country.

“When we’re not here the children need to know what to do,” she told the ABC. “They need to learn the culture, what we do, and how we do it. They are our future, the people’s future.”

Ms Marika uses song and stories to tell children about how Yolngu people were created during the Dreamtime.

Art also plays a pivotal cultural role in Rirratjingu society.

In fact, so many Marikas have been world-class artists that Wally Caruana, the former curator of Aboriginal art at the National Gallery of Australia, likens the clan to the Boyd dynasty, a long line of great Australian artists from the same family.

Many of the best Rirratjingu artists,

such as Mawalan, Mathaman and Milirrpum Marika, have also been tireless advocates for Indigenous rights.

The Rirratjingu Aboriginal Corporation builds the grassroots music and culture events that do so much to bind a community together.

The first I Love Yirrkala Festival, held in June this year, continued the annual Yarrapay Concert held at the Roy Marika Stage.

The free, alcohol-free family day celebrated the pride, strength and culture of Yirrkala and its community, while the Yarrapay concert assembled the best of the regions music talent, to ready them for bigger stages across the country.

The line-up featured the likes of Yothu Yindi, Yirmal and Barra West Wind.

Yothu Yindi starts another Australian tour in July, while the other two release new albums during the same month.

More music accolades are destined to come from the line up. And little Yolngu children went home walking tall.

RIRRATJINGU PERFORM SACRED DJAN’KAWU CEREMONY AT PARLIAMENT HOUSE TO CALL FOR A REDUCTION IN FAMILY VIOLENCE

