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MILIBUD



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Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge Aboriginal people as the traditional custodians of the land of Australia and pay our respects to their Elders past, present and emerging. We particularly acknowledge the Kija and Jaru people, the traditional owners of the Country upon which the Shire of Halls Creek is located.

A CONVERSATION WITH MUSA MONO: COVID-19 AND HALLS CREEK

Musa Mono, Director of Health and Regulatory Services from the Shire of Halls Creek, recently sat down with Olabud Doogethu to talk about the threat of COVID-19 and the importance of vaccinating to protect your loved ones.

With the Delta Variant recently causing havoc in the Eastern States, particularly in Sydney, the threat of Coronavirus entering the remote Aboriginal communities in the Shire of Halls Creek is a genuine concern for everybody.

Musa Mono, Director of Health and Regulatory Services leads the health portfolio in the Shire of Halls Creek.

He recently sat down with Olabud Doogethu to share his concerns about Coronavirus and why it is important to vaccinate as a way of protecting families and communities in Halls Creek.

The following is a transcript (edited for clarity) from the conversation Musa had with Olabud Doogethu:

The major point of concern is, there seems to be vaccine hesitancy in the population of Halls Creek. That is a major point of concern considering the pandemic that we have at the moment, and the fact that the fourth wave of the pandemic seems to have entered Australia and is now spreading in the community. It is most severe in the Eastern states, but it is now within the community and being transmitted from person to person.



Musa Mono is the Director of Health and Regulatory Services at the Shire of Halls Creek. He has been a Health Practitioner all his life working in the environmental health and public health for the past thirty years across different countries across Africa, the United Kingdom and Australia.

I think the Federal Government and the State Government of Western Australia is doing a good job in trying to control this. There is a lot of sacrifice they are making in terms of economic growth and development. There's a lot they're sacrificing to try and contain this. The current control tools are closing the borders, limiting international travel, quarantining people from outside the country, lock downs – for the places that are already affected – and contact tracing... That is what the governments are doing to help the community in Australia. But in all cases, where you have a disease outbreak, there are several stakeholders who must take action.

While the governments are taking the right course of action, we need the community to do the same.

While the governments are taking the right course of action, we need the community to do the same. What is lacking in Halls Creek is the community's part in controlling this, in making sure that we don't get devastated by the outbreak. Social distancing, washing your hands, maintaining good hygiene, and wearing a mask, using QR codes or registering in public places are some of the ways the community can help prevent the spread of COVID-19. But the most effective tool for the control of this disease is vaccinations.

Health experts talk about "herd immunity" where a population achieves a certain amount of immunity against the disease and that tends to prevent outbreaks, or severe infections and deaths in populations.

Currently, the estimate is that when we have 70-80% of the adult population vaccinated, we will achieve herd immunity.

But the big fear now is that we can reach 70-80% of the Australian population, when actually within our own Shire, we are way less than 30-40% in terms of people vaccinated.

There is a lot of information circulating. Let's face it: misinformation is spread through social media. Every time we see something sensational on Facebook, we share it. If you are sharing misinformation, then more people will be reached with that misinformation.

There is a lot of information circulating. Let's face it: misinformation is spread through social media.

The problem is that the media puts so much emphasis on that one case of a vaccinated person who gets side effects, that it begins looking like everybody will get it. We have hundreds of thousands of people that have been successfully vaccinated, and only a handful who have gotten blood clots or side effects, for instance.

Those hundreds of thousands of people are protected from severe COVID-19 disease, and yet, there is so much emphasis on the one person who gets side effects. We should note that our medical services can manage the reactions and side effects from the vaccines.

One of the arguments that I have heard is that the vaccine is new and we don't know if there are any long-term side effects. Those are good arguments. Both the vaccine and disease are new and yes some medications do have long-term side effects.

At the end of the day, do you want to take the risk of suffering from COVID-19 without any protection, which could mean you get severe

disease and may die, or take the vaccine with a risk of long-term effects which might not exist anywhere. It is a calculated risk which people should take after having received good information about COVID-19 and the vaccines.

I'm not sure why and how people can feel so invincible, in the light of more than four million deaths right now in the world due to COVID-19 disease. Deaths were high in a lot of rich countries, like in Italy. You're talking in the thousands of elderly people dying. By the time it got to the United States, you had both elderly and middle-aged people dying.

I'm not sure why and how people can feel so invincible, in the light of more than four million deaths right now in the world due to COVID-19 disease.

When we talk underlying conditions, people think it means serious diseases or conditions. Simply obesity, undernourishment or even being a smoker can be a problem. So there is no ways you can say 100% you are invincible to severe COVID-19 disease, and I think the safest thing people can do is to get the vaccine.

The vaccine does not stop you from getting the infection, but it does stop you from getting severe disease. It also makes the people that get infected, transmit the disease less than they would if they were unvaccinated.

The Delta Variant is a very infectious disease. They tried to contain it in Sydney, but it spread to Victoria, regional NSW and maybe even New Zealand. It has now affected Aboriginal communities in New South Wales, where there was a death in a community yesterday.

That there is a group of people that are immune and not vulnerable is a

conclusion drawn out of misinformation and possibly the success of the WA Government in closing the borders to prevent entry of the disease into WA. How long can we keep the infection out using border closures? We have seen people driving through the Tanami and Duncan, while police are struggling to close those roads.

How long can we keep the infection out using border closures? We have seen people driving through the Tanami and Duncan, while police are struggling to close those roads.

The local community should consider the option of vaccination. It is a responsible thing to do for ourselves, our families and our community.

For more information on COVID-19, visit www.wa.gov.au; and to receive your vaccination please visit Yura Yungi Medical Service Aboriginal Corporation.



Musa Mono believes the most responsible thing to do for ourselves, our families and our communities is to get the vaccination against COVID-19.

MIBALA LEARNING: THE JOURNEY BEGINS

In August 2021, Olbud Doogethu began its pilot of 'Mibala' ('Us Together' in Kimberley Kriol), an alternative education pathway for children that have disengaged in schooling.



Thomas Farrer (Kija), Case Intervention Officer, carving up some wood to be used to craft cultural artefacts, such as clapping sticks (right).

In Halls Creek, education remains one of the toughest policy challenges. For years, the education system has lagged behind, failing to prepare the children of Halls Creek for a future in the 21st century.

Research from the Bankwest Curtin Economics Centre 'The Early Years: Investing In Our Future' report released last year has shown that Halls Creek ranks as one of the most disadvantaged communities for early childhood education and development in Australia. In Halls Creek, 75% of people are Aboriginal. For many children and young people living in Halls Creek, English is their second or third language. Having an education curriculum that fails to adapt to the local cultures and languages makes it more challenging for children.

As a response to this, Olbud Doogethu began the development of 'Mibala: Learning Country', a nationally-accredited certificate that will seek to draw on the timeless strength of Aboriginal culture as a tool to support young people's development and instil confidence and sense of identity.

Most importantly, Mibala has been developed by local Aboriginal Elders and community leaders in Halls Creek, which highlights the urgent need for a localised approach to education.

'We're still in early days, but it's been fulfilling to say the least. We have kids who left the mainstream education system for years now, so it's difficult to try and get them into a routine. So we work around them, we

have had to tailor our approach to them and try to alter our expectations,' said Thomas Farrer, a Kija man that has joined to support the Mibala program.

When it comes to engaging kids, it's all about understanding who they are. 'Our first few days, we actually just observed how they behaved when we took them out on to Country. Who were the leaders, who were the followers, and what would motivate them,' said Arron Little, a Kija man and the Mibala Learning Coordinator.

'Delivering our teaching with flexibility is key. Working in a routine, like in a traditional school, is difficult for these kids. Because they likely grew up in an environment that was unstructured and unpredictable themselves,' said Arron.



Arron Little (Kija), Mibala Learning Coordinator, hopes that a stronger connection to culture and Country will support local children and young people into wanting to get back into mainstream education or job pathways to start their careers.

'Every group of kids that go through Mibala will be different. These are the kids that the schools have left behind, and these are kids that have fallen through the gaps. For a lot of them, they don't feel like they look forward to a lot of things and opportunities. But through Mibala, we hope they learn more about the strength they have, who they are, where their tribe is from, and that we - as Aboriginal people - are resilient people who are the oldest living culture in the world. We can do anything, because we've always adapted,' said Thomas.

'Our greatest strength as people who are leading this program is that we ourselves have gone through similar experiences that the kids have gone through. We can relate on a level that no Kardiya can understand, and I think that's what makes Mibala unique. It's done by local people and our Elders, who have lived these lives too. We were just fortunate to find our own strength through our lives, and now we hope we can pass this on through our connection to culture and Country,' said Arron.

Mibala is also guided by Dean Mosquito, Kija and Jaru man, who is the Executive Officer for Culture and Transformation. Dean oversees all of Olabud Doogethu's cultural activities and ensures that all programs and operations follow Aboriginal culture and protocols.

'When I left school at 15 years old... I helped the teacher translate the lessons to the kids and help break down the English, since most kids were from out of town,' said Dean.

'Mibala will be teaching kids cultural stuff. We'll try to get them ready [for life]... to identify who they are, where they're from... because most of our kids don't know who they are and they're missing out on what's really important - which is our identity and culture,' said Dean.

'I hope when they come out of Mibala, they feel proud of themselves, what they have achieved, where they're going in life and learn how to respect their land, their culture, and their language,' said Dean.



Dean Mosquito (Kija and Jaru) started his career helping teachers in the classroom to support the learning of Aboriginal students. Today, he oversees Olabud Doogethu's projects and operations to ensure they are culturally-appropriate and follow Aboriginal cultural protocols.

KUTJUNGKA: LAUNCH OF PROSPECTUS

The desert communities of Wirrimanu (Balgo), Mindibungu (Billiluna), Mulan and Kundat Djaru (Ringer Soak) met for their first governance committee meeting and also launched their prospectus at the East Kimberley District Leadership Group in Halls Creek.

The Kutjungka ('as one' in Kukatja) project is an Aboriginal-led initiative to improve the livelihoods of remote desert communities, fix local issues and keep the government and service delivery providers accountable.

In late August, the Kutjungka leadership governance committee met in Halls Creek which involved the community leaders from Mindibungu (Billiluna), Wirrimanu (Balgo), Mulan and Kundat Djaru (Ringer Soak). This was the first governance committee meeting, since it was established earlier this year in April.

In his opening remarks, Dennis Chungulla welcomed all the community leaders: 'We've all worked hard to get here. We want to see our family and kids benefit from this project. Let's make it work for our people, together.'

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- Dennis Chungulla

The Kutjungka governance committee finalised the Kutjungka prospectus, which identified all the key strategic priorities that were shared but also on a community level.

Noel Mason, CEO of the Shire of Halls Creek, briefly joined the Kutjungka governance meeting and evoked the importance of the project for the future ways of working in remote Aboriginal communities.

'Kutjungka is the project that shows them that we need to change the way we do business in remote Aboriginal communities. For far too long, governments have had too much of a say in the lives of those in remote Aboriginal communities, without the people benefiting at a local level. Kutjungka is an opportunity for us to practice what we preach,' said Noel.

'Kutjungka is an opportunity for us to practice what we preach.'

- Noel Mason

Margaret Glass, Director of Youth and Community Development at the Shire of Halls Creek, also helped to chair the first governance meeting: 'We have come here to have a bigger political voice and so the government can hear the voices from the local level. So the idea is to get this leadership committee strong, do the advocacy in Perth and Canberra - wherever you need to go - but you mob doing it for yourself, for your communities,' said Margaret.

Julianne Johns from Mulan shared why she was a part of the Kutjungka project: 'We'd like to see a better community, see what happens and help our young people,' said Julianne.

Peter Wein from Kundat Djaru (Ringer Soak) also emphasised that remote Aboriginal communities are left out and Kutjungka would be able to have their voice heard: 'We really want our communities up and running. We can't just talk; we need to see action. Ringer Soak is always left out. Our community is really lost. So we're joining together with this project to make a future for ourselves.'

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- Peter Wein

The Kutjungka community leaders also presented at the East Kimberley District Leadership Group, which included senior government officials from different agencies (such as the Department of Justice and Department of Communities).

The Kutjungka project is being rolled out in the coming months and is funded by the National Indigenous Australians Agency.

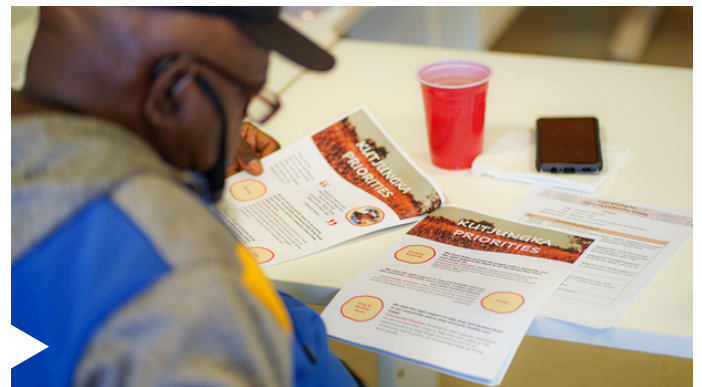


The East Kimberley District Leadership Group operates across Western Australia and meets regularly to explore local issues and initiatives. In Halls Creek, the Kutjungka community leaders met with them and presented the new Kutjungka prospectus which outlines the key priorities of each community in Mindibungu (Billiluna), Wirrimanu (Balgo), Mulan and Kundat Djaru (Ringer Soak).



Councillor Rosemary Stretch and Director of Olabud Doogethu provided a Welcome to Country to start the East Kimberley District Leadership Group meeting.

Bede Lee, an Elder from Balgo and a Kutjungka Governance Leader, reading the Kutjungka prospectus.



Julianne Johns from Mulan who is a Kutjungka Governance Leader.

COMMUNITY JUSTICE: REDESIGNING JUSTICE IN HALLS CREEK

Olabud Doogethu has begun redesigning a new justice system in Halls Creek, guided by the expertise and world-leading research of Dr Harry Blagg, The University of Western Australia.

In Halls Creek, Olabud Doogethu has begun the journey to redesign the justice system that is based on the concepts of community justice (also known as 'restorative justice'), which allows communities to 'own' their own problems and play a key role in resolving them without using the courts and criminal justice system.

In partnership with Dr Harry Blagg from The University of Western Australia, Olabud Doogethu have begun to recreate the justice system in a way that is based in local Aboriginal law and culture, community-led solutions and strategies, and creating culturally-appropriate pathways for prevention, rehabilitation and support.

Dr Blagg visited Halls Creek and met with Olabud Doogethu earlier this year in April, which began the project of creating a new community justice system.

This initiative is being led by Olabud Doogethu's human rights team, which consists of Larry Smith, Dennis Chungulla, Donald Butcher, and Reginald Ramos.

'We live and breathe on Aboriginal land, so our systems should also reflect this reality. There is no Aboriginal ownership or involvement in how justice is done, and by creating the right mechanisms - we can work in a more culturally-appropriate way,' said Larry Smith.

At the core of Olabud Doogethu's community justice initiative is putting the community back at the centre of dealing with local issues.

'Our community knows about the problems that we face and we also have the solutions. It's important for us to come together, to consult with our Elders, and most importantly for government and services to listen to us - how they can support us in the best way possible so we can create a better community for our children,' said Dennis.

Olabud Doogethu looks forward to working closely all key government agencies and stakeholders to create a better justice system in Halls Creek.

Olabud Doogethu's Human Rights Team (left to right): Larry Smith (Kija and Jaru), Dennis Chungulla (Kija and Walmajarri) and Donald Butcher (Kija and Jaru).



SHIRE APPROVES MEN'S TRIBAL CENTRE

The Shire of Halls Creek has approved for Olabud Doogethu to begin creating a Men's Tribal Centre on the old Halls Creek golf club, which is traditional Aboriginal ceremonial grounds.



Olabud Doogethu has begun the process of creating a Men's Tribal Centre, following approval from the Shire of Halls Creek in late August.

The Men's Tribal Centre is a community-led initiative where men can come together and learn from each other, as well as the local Elders.

Olabud Doogethu is currently working collaboratively with key Aboriginal Elders throughout the Halls Creek community to shape the future direction of the Men's Tribal Centre.

The prospective site will be located on the old Halls Creek golf course, which has been identified as a traditional ceremonial ground for Aboriginal people.

'Men haven't had a place for themselves to come together and yarn. We hope this would be a space that can bring all tribes together, and help connect young people with their culture. It's a way for us to work together on community issues, but also for new people to come to the town and learn about culture from our Elders and our community,' said Larry Smith, Human Rights Officer who is working on developing the Men's Tribal Centre.

If you're interested in learning more and being a part of this process, contact Olabud Doogethu.

Larry Smith (Kija and Jaru), Human Rights Officer, hopes that the Men's Tribal Centre will be able to help people and come together.



JESSICA

BRADSHAW

Case Intervention Officer

Now, Jessica, a lot of people don't know this but you've actually worked for Olabud Doogethu before. Can you introduce yourself and what you used to do?

Yes, my name is Jessica Bradshaw. I am a Ngardi and Walpiri woman. When I first joined, I was doing the night patrol work to help the kids go back home last year. I was doing that work for a couple of months.

Why did you get involved with Olabud Doogethu in the first place?

My biggest thing was that I wanted to do something for the young people. As a child growing up in Halls Creek, we used to have all these youth services - so I wanted to help our community and help our kids to become the future generation.

So you grew up in Halls Creek. Can you tell me what was that like?

Everybody in the community connected - it doesn't matter where you came from but we're all family in this one community. But as we get older, and we've got our own kids to look after, it's pretty different to how I used to grow up. Looking at the kids today, made me think of my childhood and how things are so different for them today... but looking at the kids, they're our future.... I feel like everybody has forgotten about them.

When you were growing up, would you say you were similar to the kids growing up today?

It was different, because we had youth services back in the day. We used to do a lot of things - I learnt how to play basketball and got trained by a youth service worker.... not only that, but I used to play all these different sports like indoor cricket at the hall. It was really fun. Now the kids don't really have that. I don't know but the biggest thing for me to join Olabud Doogethu was to help the young people, help them find out who they are and what they'll become in the future.

Today, you're a Case Intervention Officer. For people who don't know what that is, can you tell us what you do?

I work with the girls and working around them and their well-being, in and out of school and home just to see how they are going and if they're attending school every day, you know? Some days

are tough, but some days are good.

For you, what's the biggest challenge with working with the girls?

It's tough for me because I don't want to see any of the kids get left behind... I have seven clients. They're good and kids are kids. As a Mother, I have two boys. Quincy is 17 and Scotty is 12 years old. So being a Mother, when I take care of clients, I can understand the kids. Some kids have probably missed out on a Mother figure, and so me just being there for the other kids is important. Everybody has their own story, but through my job I just want to try to help them through their situations and problems they're going through.

Now as a Ngardi and Walpiri woman, does this help you with your job, particularly when connecting with people in the communities of Halls Creek?

Yes, I can understand Walpiri and Jaru more but once you know one language, you can connect with the others easily. I know Jaru, Kija, Kukutja, Walpiri, and Gooniyandi... and English!

How would you describe working with Olabud Doogethu, during your time before and today?

It's like this one big family, hey. When I first came, I was a bit shy. But that's not who I am. I felt welcome and I felt like - well, as a woman, you have to lead as well as the men. That's how I see myself, leading my people.

Do you feel any pressure? Since Olabud Doogethu has more men than women in the workplace.

No, not really. Sometimes I feel pressure, but I know that I just have to be strong in my culture and respect people for who they are, not what they're made of.

What are your hopes and dreams for the future of Halls Creek?

It won't take a day, but it's going to happen slowly. So we have to start today to build a good future for our future generation. And they can see us as role models - as leaders - who can show them the way. Maybe one day they'll have my job and take over. That's what I hope for. And not only in Halls Creek, but also in Balgo, Billiluna, Ringer Soak and Mulan. I want that for everybody.



Olabud Doogethu Aboriginal Corporation

For more information, please visit

www.olabuddoogethu.org.au