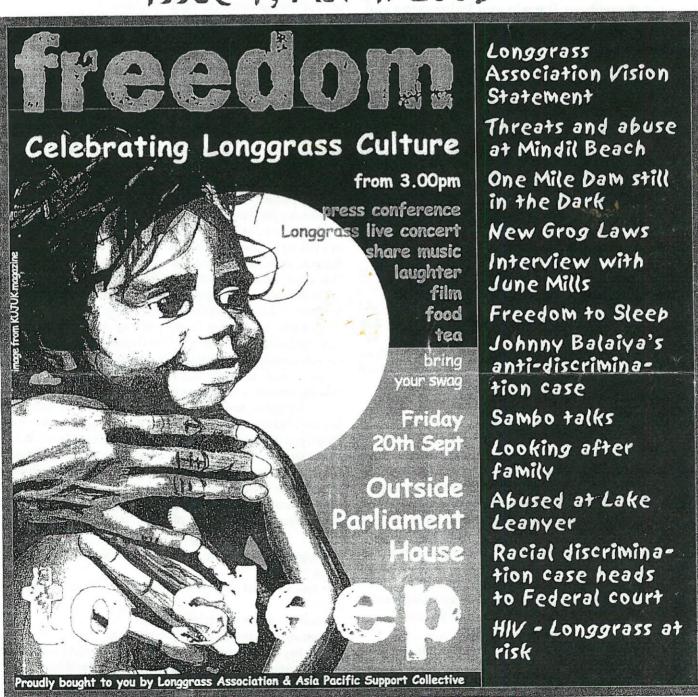


Issue 1, March 2003



LONGGRASS ASSOCIATION Darwin and Palmerston VISION STATEMENT

20th September 2002

Summary

- Amend Darwin City Council by Law 103 which makes it an offence to sleep out between dusk and dawn.
- Amend Darwin City Council By Law 100 which allows Council workers take peoples blankets, bags and personal items that are stashed in public places.
 - Public toilets open for use 24 hours a day
 - · Longgrass Legal Service
- Urgent housing for dialysis patients and their extended families in Darwin
 - · Dialysis machines in remote communities

Located throughout Darwin and Palmerston and managed by longgrass people:

- Overnight shelters with toilets, showers, washing facilities and lockers
 - · Housing for extended families
- Drop-in centres where longgrass people can get information about services and arrange access to them
- Medical bus and coffee/information buses regularly visiting Longgrass camps
 - Councils regularly collect rubbish from Longgrass camps
- NT Government, Darwin and Palmerston Councils and the Night Patrol regularly consult with Longgrass people and the Longgrass Association about the needs of Longgrass people
- The Longgrass population in Darwin and Palmerston is growing, Allocation of space for these people must in included in the present and future town planning for Darwin and Palmerston
 - · Respect for the culture of Longgrass people, not stereotyping

The Longgrass Association

- includes people who camp out at night in the Darwin and Palmerston areas (both Indigenous and non-indigenous), their families and friends
- is an unregistered, unincorporated association which will remain independent of the Government but will work with and through Government and non Government organisations

Camping/Sleeping Out

Since Darwin and Palmerston were established indigenous people from remote communities in the Northern Territory and throughout Australia have been coming to town to camp and will continue to do so. It is part of our culture to camp out – we have grown up living this way and at times prefer this to staying in a house. Approximately 1,000 people camp out every night in Darwin and Palmerston. This includes the very young to the very old and many sick and disabled people.

The Longgrass Association believe that Longgrass culture be respected as a way of life like any other minority cultural group in our community and that the Darwin City Council abolish the fines for sleeping out between dusk and dawn and stop taking people's possessions that they have left hidden in public places.

Public Toilets

Longgrass people are members of the public and have a human right to be able to access toilets and taps for washing and drinking. The Longgrass Association deplores the Council's actions in closing down public toilets or removing roofs and doors. All public toilets should be open for use 24 hours a day.

Housing

Dialysis patients

The first priority is an urgent need for housing for dialysis patients (and their families) who at present need to come to Darwin from remote communities for their treatment. This situation is only going to get worse as health studies predict an increase in kidney problems among Indigenous people. In the longer term dialysis machines are needed in the communities themselves. The Longgrass Association applauds the recent opening of dialysis units in Tennant Creek and the Tiwi islands.

Overnight Shelters

Longgrass people need the option of overnight shelter especially in the Wet. A place where we can rest, get a mattress on the floor, access to toilets, showers, washing machines, cooking facilities and lockers for storing possessions. To ensure that the Longgrass visitors are treated with respect and understanding these shelters should be managed by Longgrass people and maintained by a caretaker. A public phone and access point for essential services would be another important role of the shelter as well as an area for maintaining a fruit and vegetable garden. The Longgrass Association envisages temporary shelters located throughout Darwin and Palmerston.

Housing for Extended Families

The Department of Housing is seen by many Indigenous people as a Balanda (non-indigenous people) organisation operating for Balanda, trying to force Indigenous people to live under Balanda laws which means excluding extended family members from staying in their home. In Indigenous culture family is the number obligation and this includes the extended family. Looking after family members, even if they have a drinking problem is an obligation that cannot be abandoned. The Department of Housing has not accommodated for Indigenous extended families which continues to result in a very high rate of failed tenancies. Territory Housing refuses to disclose any information about these figures.

The Longgrass Association envisage housing for extended families scattered throughout Darwin and Palmerston. Experience has shown that different family groups have different needs and individual family groups must be involved in the process of housing development for the housing to be successful for noise reasons it is preferable if the housing is some distance from neighbours. These houses must be managed by indigenous organizations that have proven effective in operating with indigenous families.

Drop-in Centres

Longgrass people have expressed the need of a place they can go to:

- find out about what government and other services they can access
 - · link the different services together
 - · arrange meetings with service providers

The key to these centres is respect, understanding of individuals and Longgrass lifestyle. Overnight shelters could be combined with drop-in centres.

Medical Bus

The Longgrass Association envisages a bus staffed by a health worker and/or doctor and equipped with basic medical equipment visit Longgrass camps on request or a weekly basis. The health of Longgrass people and their taking of prescribed medication could be regularly checked, and essential health education is made easily accessible to the people who are most in need of it. The bus could also be used to transport people to hospital or Danila Dilba.

Coffee/Information Buses

Volunteers would staff the bus and Longgrass people themselves who can provide information on available services, maintain a network of care and provide assistance where possible.

Rubbish Collection

The Longgrass Association recommend that the Councils regularly collect rubbish from all camps to ensure health standards are maintained.

Consultation/Planning

If the Government, Council and Night Patrol really want to work effectively with the Longgrass people they need to directly consult with them to find out their needs. The consultants would need to be people who can relate to Longgrass people and treat them with respect.

The Longgrass Association also offers itself as an avenue of consultation on Longgrass issues.

We believe that the results of these consultations should then be taken into account in present and future town planning for Darwin and Palmerston

Conclusion

Longgrass culture has been a part of Darwin and Palmerston since establishment and the population is growing. Northern Territory Government and Darwin Council Council need to amend past wrongs by looking at Government and Council policy's that excludes and discriminates against Longgrass people and intrudes upon

Longgrass peoples human rights to exist and function in a community with respect and dignity. This includes the right to access to water, adequate shelter and practice cultural obligations and ways of living.

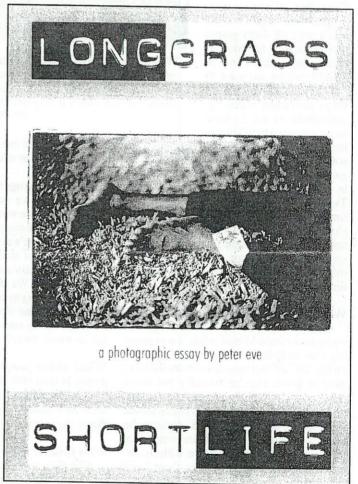
The Longgrass Association hopes that this vision statement can be a tool in educating people about the needs of the Longgrass people.

"We are like our ancestors, sleeping outside, in starlight motel. That's our home. Our ancestors had no roof over their heads, and us, we getting sick and tired of City Council giving us the bill (for sleeping).

We're all human beings. Why can't you just try and help us, instead of locking us up, giving us bills, and busting our grog, and chucking water over fire". DM.

Past events of the Association:

- · Jam sessions, concerts and fundraisers:
 - · Annual "Freedom to Sleep".
 - Film nights at Longgrass camps.
- Website http://longgrass.tripod.com
- Contribution into "Book up" by the Australian Securities & Investment Commission.
- · Media liaison and public awareness.
- Carting water, temporary shelters, collecting firewood, bush tucka outings, cyclone evacuation.
- Liaison with Government and Community organisations.
- Emergency accommodation, showers, food and blankets.
- Production of documentary films about Longgrass issues which have included a Human Rights Art Award, Winner of Fist Full of Films 2001 and used in curriculum at 4 Universities around Australia.
- Helping Longgrass people with Centrelink problems.
- Helping Longgrass people with Public Housing problems and to apply for Public Housing
- Fortnightly Legal Rights BBQ's at Rapid Creek and Casuarina Beach
- Ongoing publication of stories and issues from the Longgrass people in various magazines.
- Ongoing legal advocacy and practical support for older and disabled residents of the Longgrass including shopping, medical attention.
- Health information and education.
- Longgrass Live Concert at Parliament House Sept 2002
- Practical support and public awareness for Dyalisis patients and their families living in the Longgrass.



Thanks to Peter Eve for permission to use images from his exhibition in this magazine.

Thanks to Anna Benlow for the design of the "Freedom to Sleep" poster used on the front page.

Thanks to Marita for the 'Longgrass' title design.

Threats and abuse at Mindil Beach

Interview with Ruby Rose, February 22, 2003.

How are people staying dry this wet season?

RR: For the last couple of months we used to stay at Mindil beach, camping at tennis court, but then city council and police kicked us out. We went to Mindil beach area, camped out there and there, a lot of teenagers throwing egg and threatening us with hammer and knife. And after that we went and slept inside the toilet when it was raining, stop there with that blind man and Mary and Sam and Kain and Edna.

Do you know who the young boys were?

RR: No but Olive, she saw them coming in one night. I got one number plate, it's a yellow sedan, like a Camry. They threw egg from the moving car at old Sam, missed him, lucky that egg didn't hit the blind man.

Is it getting more dangerous camping in open places than before?

RR: Getting dangerous, yeah. Some people from Casuarina, when teenagers go past they swear at them, that's why all them young teenagers turn round start threatening them. There at Mindil, where we used to stay there, people go past, always say good morning, sometimes we ask for time so we can go up to St Vinnies

for breakfast or lunch, go to Salonika for soup and help them two old people Mary and Sam and another bloke. There's nowhere in Casuarina where people can get a feed. That's why people sit down starving all the time, only grog grog, that's why they get sick. When you're at Casuarina sleeping under the carpark people go round there, put spray paint in their hair, smash egg. We had that sort of problem at Mindil two times, getting too dangerous.

What does city council say to you?

RR: They told us to pack our things and move away from Mindil while it was pouring rain, only last couple of days ago. It's alright for Jeff and that other council bloke, they're good, they're friendly but them other two, Grant that tall one, cheeky one and that other bloke giving us cheek all the time, telling us move away. Sometimes he use F word with us, not like them other two, they come there they sit down with us, including those two policeman them light skinned one, Bernie and Sean. They come down, sit down with us talk with us, share our problems with them, they write it down. But them other two, cheeky one.

When they [police] see us drinking they just go down tell us tip it out.

Mindil beach you can drink there anytime, long as you're cooking [on the BBQ]

We always cook before drinking. When everything's cooked then we start drinking. When we go to Bottleshop, bar tender always say you have to be 2kms away from here and it is long distance from there to Mindil. And why the policeman always rip our grog and tip some out? That other mob, when they get grog they drink there near that bottleshop, see, two different [ways].

When we get our grog we go down to the beach and drink there. Why policeman

Washing. Mindil Beach - Darwin. The use of public space is one of the reasons that authorities and longgrassers do not see eye to eye. On Thursday evenings this is one of Darwin's major tourists attractions, at other times it is home to many longgrassers. Pic and caption by Peter Eve.

go there, and tip our grog? Maybe we next to that casino, or what?

How has it changed since the 70's?

In the 70's we used to drink inside the pub and then we want to do take away, we just get our take away and go back to Bagot. Now days there's nothing, no pubs for us.

Been a lot of changes lately for us, me, Mary, Sam, Kain and Edna, we like staying at Mindil. We all saltwater people and we like listening to saltwater coming in and going out, same time feeling the breeze. Why them city council and police always tell us move away?

What about peoples bags being taken away, is that still happening?

Yep. Her bags gone. Me and her come up to St Vinnies to have lunch and we went down there was no bag for her.

Who took it?

Old Kain was there and they wanted to take his things too, and he said 'no these things all mine'. I don't like that Grant, he's too cheeky, not like that other one come sit down with us, share cigarette with us sometime, give us bandage or plaster when we have sore. And then two city council told Kain to take all them

things out from the toilet. He said no, I gotta leave them there cause it's raining outside. 'No, you have to take it out'. And he did, took all the swag out.

What about night patrol?

When they have wet clothes they take them in, dry the clothes, give them bed, keep them there maybe two hours, if you're sober, enough for your things to get dry and then instead of take you back, they make you walk back. Last time I went in there when I was sober, slept there for couple of hours, come

out 5am in the morning and I had to walk all the way from Nightcliff to Mindil. Bit dangerous too, walking at night. You never know you might get raped on the way, or get stabbed. Maybe young blokes going past throwing bottle or can, early in the morning.

Some people are saying that longgrass should go back to their own communities, that you can't camp here.

If they say like that to me, I just say, you too go back to your own country, this is my area, I'm an Australian.

How long have you stayed in Darwin?

Me I've been here for two and a half years. I've

got family at Bagot but they always skin me alive for my pay and when their pay come I don't see nothing from them, that's why I don't like staying at Bagot with my family.

I'd rather be staying with all the drinkers outside from my family and money can always be in the bank. I just go down get fifty dollars, enough for feed, smoke and few drinks that's all, and get town bus.

How are longgrass mob looking after each other?

For mainly at Mindil we always look after one another. Like someone get pay on unemployment week, he'll share and if somebody get pay on pension week we'll share. We sorta like a big family and Saturday, Sunday come we go down beach, eat oyster. Sometimes that old man he go across to Belyuen, old Kain throw net bring back fish, stingray, crab. That's why we all in one group. But ever since last week that city council and policeman told us to move. That's why we moved out, all scattered but we always have feelings for each other. We want to go back and sit in one area. But anyway I like my Starlight hotel. Sleep under the stars but at the moment it's bit raining, that's why we camping at One Mile Dam.

One Mile Dam still in the dark

Story by David Timber, recorded February 19 2003

One Mile (Railway) Dam is a town camp leased to the Aboriginal Development Foundation (ADF). It was given to ADF in 1973 as a special purpose lease for the local Aboriginal population which was living around the outskirts of Darwin at the time. I've been here about 18 years. There are about 30 or 40 people living here at any one time. Most of them are people from Daly region and Belyuen communities and from around town but other people's families live here from outlying areas too. So it serves a purpose. This town camp has to because most people who come in from outlaying areas have nowhere to stay. They can stay here whenever they want. They can stay here for so long and leave any time they want. So One Mile Dam has proved it's standing in the community.

There are about 7 houses here at the moment plus a recreation hall. There are 4 or 5 families living in them at any one time, sometimes there are none.

At the present moment no one is saying anything to us, we don't even get any feedback from ADF as they are the one's dealing with the government, starting with the previous CLP government and we know that the government want this land back for development. They first rezoned this area back in 1997. We protested, there was a protest here, then we had the media. There was media people from everywhere, even overseas media, even the Indonesian mob.

They were here to hear what was going on, they were interested and after that, the CLP government just went quiet.

There are all sorts of proposals they are making. There are several proposals I have looked at. Some of the developments are ordinary open parkland for this area around One Mile Dam, but who can believe this government?

We just don't know which way they're going to turn. They say it's going to be open park but they're probably going to propose something else. That was under the previous CLP government. Anything can change. We don't know what this Martin government is doing now. No one's said anything to us about where we going to go. They just didn't say anything about where they wanted us to go. They just want us to leave, that's all.

I've had a few meetings with some people. I've written a few letters to the Chief Minister, Clare Martin asking what's going on with this land. Never heard anything from them as yet. Even ATSIC are not telling us anything.

All I got was the impression that they wanted us to leave when I spoke to them last

Clare Martin herself, she was one of our supporters that were protesting at the time this land was rezoned for development. Clare was here and the Labour people. Now we don't know what they're doing. They've gone all quiet all of a sudden and Clare Martin was one of our supporters.

We've had problems with the street lights since the day it was built. Once the

street lights goes off and it just stays off. You tell the person who is in charge of looking after this town camp, he just do nothing. We also have a problem with the houses, if you call it a house, where some of the powers get turned off cause of the rats eating into the wiring, where it's dangerous in most of the houses around the camp. We have ablution blocks with communal washing machines but the power's been turned off by the ADF director and the reasons why, he says he hasn't got any funds to fix the problem.

We never paid rent before, we argue with them [ADF] that most houses that you pay rent for have to be up to standard. That's what I believe in. You want people to pay rent, you fix the house properly in the first place, that's what I believe in anyway.

At the moment we have problem with the power being cut off because of rats damaging the power box. People have to run cords from another house where there's power and that's dangerous in itself because some of the houses that the power is being run off have faulty wiring and stuff like that. It's dangerous, there's kids around that are living in some of these houses and you've got a lot of longgrass people coming in and staying in these houses. You know they're homeless people themselves, anything could happen. People at the moment staying in those houses with no power are getting electric shocks or some sort of buzz by running those cords when it's wet. Cause right now it's raining here in Darwin, it's the wet season and it's pretty well dangerous running leads across the floor where there's a lot of water. It's a very dangerous situation, we haven't got any help as yet as to when it will be fixed by ADF who are the boss.

That's just it, we just don't know.

You don't know what's happening, you're just kept in the dark for so long to the point where you don't really know what's going to happen. We know that there's going to be some development around here, we don't know how big it's going to be. I've seen plans of what was being proposed and I don't know whether that's it, if that's what's going to happen, like a whole lot of development or whether they're going to have parks here or highrise buildings. We just don't know. Nobody's saying anything. I've written a few letters to the government about we want to stay here, we just don't want to move anywhere else. It's close to the city.

Continued next page.



Rest in Peace. During the wet season in Darwin carparks become places of shelter. These are places of last resort for longgrassers who receive a lot more harassment from thugs, gangs etc in these places. Pic and caption by Peter Eve

New grog laws - don't get busted

Drinking in public space and public parks is the only place Longgrass people can drink by virtue of their 'homeless' status.

The two kilometre law applies in Darwin. This means you cannot drink in public space that is within two kilometres of a liquor outlet.

Police are the only people who can and do bust your grog, knife you grog, make you tip your grog out or confiscate your grog if you are within 2 kilometres of a liquor outlet. Police can do this by law under the 'Summary Offences Act'. Council workers or Night Patrol or anybody else are not allowed to bust your grog, but they can and do call the police.

The only area in Darwin that is outside of the two



Mob. Pic by Peter Eve.

kilometre law is the tip of LEE POINT, you are free to drink there 24 hours.

There are 'exemption zones' to the two kilometre law where you can drink. You used to be able to drink there 24 hours but no more.

About six months ago the hours that you can drink in the 'exemption' zones changed.

The 'exemption zones' are:

THE ESPLANADE (BICENTENNIAL PARK)
Darwin

MINDIL BEACH

VESTY'S BEACH

EAST POINT, all over except for aero club, gun turret, horse club.

NIGHTCLIFF BEACH FRONT from sunset park (end of Aralia St) right round to Chapman Rd.

The new hours are the same in each 'exemption zone'.

You are allowed to drink from 4.30 pm to 10.30 pm Monday to Friday

On weekends and public holidays from 12 noon to 10.30 pm

You can also get a permit from Darwin City Council if you want to drink outside the new hours and not get busted.

One Mile serves a purpose

From previous page.

We don't seem to get much people talking to us, some government department saying this and that. We don't get many people involved [in supporting us] it's always independent people, not government people.

I had a few visits from ATSIC but you just don't hear from them after you've spoken to them.

I'd like this place to be in our hands -

the people who are living here in this community. One of the things that crossed my mind was a drop in centre, sort of, but it is like a drop in centre now this camp, people just come and go.

In '93 or '94 they had this umpires carnival, it was held at Gardens Oval.

There was a whole football team from Santa Teresa, they had nowhere to stay. My nephew is married to one of them girls from there. He asked me if he could bring the football team here, to stay for a couple of nights. I said yeah, that's alright. You can use the house up the other end. They were happy, they all stayed there a couple of nights, you know, some where for them to stay. There was a whole football team, about 20 plus. They were happy they had somewhere to stay. Then when the umpires carnival was over they left.

One Mile Dam does serve a purpose cause we've had people coming here from other town camps when there's been trouble there. People from other areas going onto this other community and causing fights and disturbances to the original residents to the point where they moved here to One Mile Dam until everything settled down. We sheltered them here. This is just one of the things that we are known for. People just come in to stay here, get protection mainly. This camp One Mile Dam should be run by us here, the Aboriginal people from this town camp. It should stay in our hands not someone else because we know what we're doing.

We know how to communicate with other people, you know, in a cultural sort of way and we know what has to be done and said to make others welcome when they need somewhere to stay. Like I been saying all along and I'll keep on saying it - One Mile Dam serves a purpose.



March against racism, May 1997.

Longgrass Association to be represented at Indigenous Homeless Forum

Larrakia woman June Mills and Longgrass Association member Stella Simmering will be going to the Indigenous Homeless Forum in Melbourne on the 4th and 5th of March..

Here, June talks to Stella about the issues she will be raising at the forum.

The first issue I see to date is government and City Council and relevent bodies - what you call the stake holders - looking at these homeless people as a 'problem' to be removed or swept under the carpet. There definitely is an attitude out there. We're talking about homeless people, people living in poverty, in some instances, people with absolutely no income.

I'll be making efforts to make sure this attitude is addressed. They are people with extremely difficult circumstances. I'm talking extreme poverty and extreme disadvantage in terms of having a different cultural lifestyle and language barrier in some cases, so pulling it right back to the bottom line.

By labelling it the 'Itinerant problem' what's the ripple effect that comes back on Longgrass people?

Well certainly people do not get treated with any dignity or respect, that definitely seems to be the implication. If you are homeless you don't necessarily have rights. You can be abused because you don't necessarily have the ability to defend yourself.

People in the community possibly do not know the impact that certain policies and laws are having on these people. Part of our role as Longgrass Association is to make it very clear on no uncertain terms just what is happening to these people and at every opportunity we get, to put forward their position and to make very aware to the community the way these policies and laws impact on longgrassers.

A big complaint people have is that longgrassers leave rubbish on country. What do you have to say about that?

As a traditional owner of this country, this is my country, people have often said to me, 'oh June, do you see them as a problem?' I would say no! On my country I see a lot of problems. The problems I see are overdevelopment, lack of housing, careless planning, I see the people with the money getting all the top spots. I see the people who are not well off, the low income people, the people who have been here all their lives being pushed to the outer edges of Darwin. I see incredible problems with the community and if we're talking about homeless people, they don't even get a mention on my list of problems here in Darwin. If we're talking about rubbish, they (longgrassers) come and go, they have very



June Mills performing at Freedom to Sleep last year.

little impact on the city itself. Any rubbish that's left can certainly be cleaned up with one garbage bag. It's creating employment for somebody, if not for themselves.

What would you like to see as outcomes of the Indigenous Homeless Conference?

I look forward to meeting with other Indigenous representatives from round Australia. I hope there is a good representation from the grass roots level not just people who are on well-paid government positions, because what's really lacking here is grass roots representation, people who are actually walking the talk and living the lifestyle. If you are from a privileged position with a good income, you cannot possibly imagine what's going on with the homeless people in this country. So I look forward to hear what's happening in other parts of the country.

Things are getting harder and I believe that anyone is potentially a homeless person. So we all have to be concerned with what's happening to the homeless people in this country.

We say Longgrass and we say homeless. In the case of indigenous people in this country, maybe because of circumstance or it's their choice not to live in what the dominant culture calls a place of residence. It is the right of indigenous people in this coun-

try to live the way they have always lived from the beginning of time - That's on the country, living lightly within the country and living the sustainable lifestyle that we all know and is our basic right. Out of all these arguments and issues this is the basic right that has been overlooked. There are some people in this country who will choose to assimilate and choose to live in the dominant culture's style of living, however there will also be indigenous people in this country who will choose to live the way we have always lived, looking to shelter in the country and moving about the country in a nomadic lifestyle. If you go down this road of persecuting people who are so called 'homeless' (I would say without a place of residence) we are denying the indigenous people their basic right to choose the way they wish to live. It's assimilation and integration all over again. It's never gone away, those two dirty words.

As a indigenous person on my own country it is my basic right to choose the way I wish to live, to choose the way I wish to make a living, to choose my religion, I'm talking about Aboriginal spirituality, whatever that means from tribe to tribe. All those basic rights have been denied indigenous people in this country ever since invasion day.

Continued page 10.

ONE NIGHT OF FREEDOM

Freedom to Sleep Concert 20th September 2002

Freedom to Sleep is an annual event put on by the Longgrass Association for the purpose of drawing attention to the human rights and well being of Longgrass families camping out in Darwin and Palmerston.

Longgrass Association is a collective of Longgrass people, their families and friends.

On September 20 2002 Longgrass Association kicked off the event with a Press Conference, launching their vision statement outside Parliament House.

We were on TV News Friday night and ABC radio played interviews and music on their Saturday morning program, as well as inspiring some entertaining letters in the NT News.

The concert kicked off at Sunset with Neil Murray singing his "Longgrass Band" Song.

Many Longgrass and prominent Darwin musicians performed vibrant original songs in celebration of longgrass lifestyle late into the night. New young talent was uncovered stories yarned, speeches made in the spirit of a unique Darwin style community event. About 300 people attended the event at its busiest time. Food was available all night, kindly made by some fantastic volunteers.

Darwin Community Legal Service along with 9 other sponsors from Darwin business and community organisations supported the Freedom to Sleep concert.

The concert would not have been possible without all the people that put the

work in to make it happen from nothing. This includes all the musicians, Longgrassers that inspired the event and supporters including the people who did a live recording of the concert that is now being worked on to produce the "Longgrass Live" CD.

The Longgrass Association has since received \$4000 from the Community Benefit Fund towards producing the CD.

In the next couple of months we will be looking out for you mob to do some more recordings of songs from the longgrass.



Vaughan Williams

We would like to thank all the following Sponsors
Darwin Community Legal Service
Aboriginal Fine Arts
Environment Centre NT
Christo's Restaurant
NT General Store
Dusty Jackets Book Shop
Larrakia Radio
Spotlight
Itinerant Project



Fort Hill Mob

CELEBRATING LONGGRASS CULTURE



Tons

"Councils and Governments to take leadership in reconciling
inequity between
Aboriginal and nonAboriginal people,
and not fuel racism by
a 'blame-the-victim'
stereotyping of
itinerants."

From THE LONG GRASSERS REPORT 22/11/01 Paul Memmot & Associates Chapter 4: The Indigenous Itinerants Strategy page 73

Longgrass culture here to stay

By Cindy

Big families came together, with guitar, eager to perform.

Everyone is a musician with too many songs and stories. Even the kids.

There was plenty of good hot stews and cordial. Everyone was into it.

The waiting list to play was long, but everyone got their turn.

When that music started, the white walls of Parliament House could not help but see that Longgrass culture in Darwin is here to stay.

Music swirled through the dancing crowd to the sea. Songs were swallowed and the crowd joined in by calling out things like, "We are people. We are longgrass people". People felt recognised.

There were many supporters and friends who were invited to share this this one night of freedom. Some performed and shared stories of homeless people in the home towns. It seems everywhere you go, there is peaceful struggle. People living peacefully in a system that punishes and fines

them for not living in a house. But as people talked, I listened and realised how ancient the Longgrass culture is. For thousands of years, people haven't changed but the system has.

Women and men told their stories of being evicted from their government houses because their families come to stay with them.

And I thought, doesn't the government spend millions of dollars a year into advocating family in this country? It seems that aboriginal people overwhelmingly value their family and look after each other in their own ways. And they are kicked out of their home for this?

Then back to the longgrass, where at least they can be together.

I learned a lot that night. Longgrass people know how to have fun and know how to talk. And I reckon they talk a lot more when they think someone is listening. And I think more people are listening.

The Longgrass Association Rocks!

Johnny Balaiya - still talking

Johnny Balaiya has an anti – discrimination complaint against the Northern Territory government for 'failing to provide for his special need as an Aboriginal man. Johnny talks about the process of working through the balanda system of law to try and gain recognition of the discriminatory practice by government agencies that deny aboriginal people the right to live the way of their culture.

Balaiya's my name in the book, that's all he come there and I look. Ah, come to Johnny Balaiya. But I got no houses, they don't love me. Might be somewhere him close, somewhere, man over there sit down somewhere. He say, don't give that boy, that boy he too much drinker, too much fight or you can't give him. You got to give

him white man not black fella.

But we want some Blackfella too that house, we got to sit down the houses, that's all right. Everybody happy or nobody happy - that white man. Because I think might be policeman, he tell 'em - go and pick"em up, so and so, take 'em back to Fifteen mile or take 'em back to Bagot. Ah,

Johnny Balaiya. Has an anti-discrimination case against the Northern Territory Government for failing to accommodate his special needs as an aboriginal man in this community. Pic and caption by Peter Eve.

Indigenous Forum

From page 7.

Centrelink must stop breaching people. Breaching has to be scraped nationally. It has to be stopped. It's inhuman, you are penalising the people on the lowest income who are least able to defend themselves. Particularly Indigenous people who maybe cannot understand the language or what's expected of them in terms of living up to the expectations of government policies of the dominant culture.

We have to have a resource centre. Set up a place where people can come, where it's non denominational and open to anybody. A multi functional place where people can find information and also have showers and wash clothes and get advice.

Who should be in charge of that place?
Homeless people and people who at least know the issues involved with homelessness, who have possibly been homeless themselves or work closely with homeless people.

Part of our role is to push forward the notion of alternative accommodation for everybody. This idea that this is the way we are going to house you and your going to take it whether you like it or not, doesn't serve anybody any good. I think people of Australia and everywhere, humankind deserve better. It's our basic right to be able to choose alternative living patterns. It's in everyone's interest, and government's, to be more open to new ideas about housing, sustainable lifestyle, different options to suit different family set ups, extended family situations. If government is not prepared to listen to the people well then suffer the consequences. Good government needs to be flexible, open to new ideas and geared towards people and not economics. I think we should settle for nothing less.

Our role is to put forward ideas that challenge the mindset. I think people are set in their ways and it's not difficult, it's a matter of being open to ideas and listening, really listening.

that story. But they can't give me that house

But I'm not happy, if anyone got the paper you write em down - no Johnny Balaiya him not happy because I try try try try - nothing and myself I been help em or that girl there. Another said yes yes, we'll give you this one, give him water, we'll make a tap for him first, little house and bathroom and toilet, this on we'll give him the little house himself. Family there outside they might be get tent or something, put em up there. But I still keep on talking, that's what made me happy, keep talking but nah. I'm the different places now.

For some people government they love him, but not me. I love him government but I don't know what Government like? Government is a black man or a white man? But he's a government, he's a hard man. Everybody know him government, but I know him more further and I get that big word there and I come back, come right back and I sit down Longgrass. I won't be go through no more. Paper come - hey you, Johnny Balaiya you here, we'll talk to you now, we want you.

Come come, he can't come closer - government, tell me liar - government been tell you liar because one, two, three or four [people] there or more, another man he write em down easy way, nuther man he'll write em down wrong way or bent one.

Nuther man he been write em down, close down that paper - that's wrong, that's fuckin silly. I can say that. That silly story, I can't listen, just leave him there in the longgrass, I'm stay there.

That not my fault, no no no no, I'm a black man but they the government, they're right in under the ground, big houses they sit down, they got the really clean house but they tell the bullshit story. That's true story that bullshit story - I don't like it.

You been tell liar, you the one now, you should say yes. Because you staying up here Northern Territory. We know it's a Blackfella area, we born. But I don't know where you come from, Queensland or what place? You go back over there. That my heart talking now, true story.

But if you want to think about my word, what I'm talking, make sure you take to the office, you put there some time, the paper, they look - ah, Johnny Balaiya, him go back more more more, him bit hard. I don't know where I get it from, house. Yarrawonga, I can't get it Yarrawonga, but I'm in Juninga.

I'm not frightenen to go to the court, I done that before. I'll still keep on talking anyway. I can't stop talking.

Interview with Sambo

Febuary 12, 2003

Longrassers, they've been walkabout this country all their life and that's all they know, they won't change. Pretty hard for our people to change to white man's way of things. It's going to take a long time for...... Look. How long reconciliation's taken? Same thing, they don't want to push it 'cause it's not to their advantage. If they push it, they'll have nothing.

How do you mean? So it's taking away part of their culture?

Yeah. Black Fella like to go walkabout you know? Don't matters who's country it is, we all own Australia. We are all from Australia, we should be able to walk any country, but long as we get permission from

the people that's living there.

It's alright to walk on that land. Like I went to one place across the harbour there, other side of Belyuen and this traditional owner come and asked me where's my permit? I said I got my permit here. I carry it with me always, my skin colour should be my permit. I down to earth, I talk straight face value. I don't need a piece of paper, I got it - here, look at me. That's all.

How long longgrass people been here

Long time. I remember when I was a kid. I seen them, Countrymen from different parts of Australia walking around the country. You know, come see relatives and relations and do business and whatever, you know.

I know the permit system. Why you need a permit system to go on their land [for] white man, balanda. Cause there's some places you're not allowed to go to, sacred, you know, ceremony ground. You go there, you'll get sick and you'll end up dying. They reckon Black Magic's not strong. It's strong alright, it can kill ya. You do the wrong thing by people and country - you gotta have a bit of respect.

There's talk that longgrass mob aren't really respecting larrakia because of rubbish in camps, humbug for money for cigarettes. What do you think about that?

That's a no no. They lose their self respect, their traditions they were taught to do. I bet you their forefathers didn't tell them to go and beg for money, leave their country, dirty and rubbish and shit like that. They clear it up so it's clean for next time, meeting or whatever, you know?

How we got to get the message for these

people to do the right thing?

I don't know Stella, not my cup a tea. I look after my own country. I see countrymen walk up the street here - keep going, I don't know you. You got no reason to come in here, this is my country, I paid for it. Like you country, you want to go there, you get permit, I just tell you. Yes I know you can come in or not.

Like the other day there was one full



Flag Swag. 'The Freedom to Sleep' protest at Parliament House attracted support from well known Darwinites. Many musicians played, imported and local and hopefully the longgrass association will release a 'Freedom to Sleep' CD. Pic & cap by Peter Eve.

blood came in here and look around. I said, what you trying to sus out the place brother? You didn't see me here did ya, so watch out, I'm always here, keep an eye on my place. This my sacred site, got nothin' to do with you so keep moving.

Government mob seem to be pushing the responsibility back to larrakia. Do you

think that's right?

I think it should be up to every individual, you've got to be responsible for yourself, for your actions. Don't blame the

grog or the gunja, you've got something between your ears called a brain, use the bastard, you can think for yourself. You know how to go and buy grog, know how to go and buy dope. Well respect, that not your country, that's someone else's place. You don't go walk around other people's country, you go see the traditional owners. It works both ways, you respect the elders, the land owners and they'll respect you. If you abuse them, they'll abuse you for sure. You won't be allowed there ever again.

3rd March 2002

Invitation to the Larrakia people

from Bob Bunba and Johnny Balaiya on behalf of the Longgrass Assoc. to attend the next Longgrass Association meeting from 10am Sunday, 10th March At the Whistling trees on the beachfront, University side of Rapid creek bridge.

Johnny Balaiya: Full family Larrakia. Make sure they got to sit down there BBQ, they sit down have good talk. I got to get word for them, what they thinking. Next meeting please, because I'm worrying about to. They got to come make sure they look us because we from Maningrida, from Millingimbi, some from Galiwinku, Ramingining – we all mix. They got to come. We got to listen for Larrakia people; they got to say for Millicent town. I want to get something from them, what they really thinking. That's what I'm worrying about to.

Bob Bunba: We try to get all the people together, so they can tell us. We're from sunrise; we like to see that people, owner of this land. They going to talk and we going to see his face, you know. They gonna listen what we talking, but we from long way. But we like that people from this land and we can see face and what they going to say - so we prove. No good we talk you know, like we different people from Maningrida of Yirrkala, Elcho, you know we different, part of this place and part of top, we try to back up one another.

Johnny Balaiya: And they got to talk. No good we talk, we different people. I'm worrying about they come sit down, talk.

Bob Bunba: We might talk wrong way, they might tell us. They gonna tell us like what we doing. Long as they going to tell us truth or nothing. They got to understand what we talking. They got to talk to, same way.

Like we going to back one another, but white man can tell him - look big house here in this area, Darwin. Even Palmerston, he growing up. But Larrakia people, they going to see what we doing. Even Longgrass people, well we doing, we working, something like that so government try to believe what we saying. No good they listen us mob talking and they see in the TV – we different people.

Johnny Balaiya: We talking proper way please.

'We different from balanda, we look after family'

Interview with Susan Gurrawiwi (Yothu Yindi Family from Gove), 15th Sept 2002

My name is Susan Gurrawiwi. I'm from North East Arnhenland, in Nhulunbuy.

I came here in 1994 to look after my husband in Darwin who is a renal patient and while I was staying in Darwin, the health department gave us a house so we stayed there for 9 or 10 years and we was worrying about our family every time they come in to Darwin and they camp around and make us been worried about them all the time because there had been problems all the time for them.

So, my first priorities while I'm out here - I'm staying at Free Beach with my family and all my relatives, with Galpa and Gumitj people. Myself and my husband, we look after them properly cause we don't want them to get hurt. We want them to stay in one place and not wander out and get hurt or killed by someone else, or get into trouble.

We feed them every pay week or when they get pay they give us money and we buy the food for them. We tell them not to go out when they're drunk cause this area is a restricted area that we stay in. It's only public for balanda people that come out here.

We tell them not to wander off to the other side where the nude beach is. We tell them to sit in one place to drink and when they sleepy they go sleep straight away.

So, me and my husband are very happy to look after these people, our family.

We not tired of looking after them, cause we've got family with us, our grandchildren and our sons and daughters. So as being one big family, we are really happy to stay together away from any trouble.

Why are you camping?

Why we camping outside is because we had this housing com-

mission house and our family used to come here, in Rocklands drive. The family comes in all the time and make trouble and noise, shouting, everything that goes with drunkenness.

That's why we was kicked out from that house, cause the neighbours on both sides, they not good neighbours. They were talking about us, telling us to go back to our homeland. We say 'this our homeland, this is our territory. We belong to here. You balanda. You come here. You are foreigners. You don't belong to this area.'

We used to say that to them. And their complaint got bigger and bigger and they went to the housing commission and reported us. We used to argue every time. And that's why the balanda housing commissioner kicked us out.

At that time we had a lot of funeral business, a lot of crying. Yeah.

What do you think about going back to housing commission?

Um, they reckon we gonna wait for a house for another year, because of the family we have in Darwin here with us, lot of family that comes in and stay with us. That's why we wait for another year. They reckon they looking at all this family staying with us. They want them to go back and they gonna put us into a house. That's what the balanda housing commissioner says.

But my family won't go back, they want to stay here. It makes us angry, you know? Angry and shame what they say to us. But we say to them like this - 'we belong to here, this is our Motherland. We was born here, this is our homeland, not yours. You balanda people you come here, just like a leaf that blows with the wind.'

That's what I always say and my husband says that. He was given a hard time. He tried to talk to them [the neighbours]



Tree. There are still many barriers and a lot of misunderstandings between our respective cultures. For the marginalised the struggle can be lonely, but there is always hope for common sense and compassion to prevail. Pic and caption by Peter Eve.

we nearly had a fight. Upstairs on the left, the neighbour got a stick. I said 'why don't you hit us? If you want a fight then hit us'. Then he jumped over the fence back to his home.

I'm worried for my husband who is on dialysis machine. He's a renal patient. And, we've been thrown out from our house. We been there 14 years. That's a long time hey?

The neighbour on the right, he been there long time. We knew each other. We were friends first. At Easter we give each other presents. But when the second neighbour came he was the one that forced him to make trouble for us. He's the one that hated us. He said that he had yolgnu mother.

But I've seen many other dialysis patients being kicked out of housing commission. My cousin, she used to stay with her husband for four years, [in the longgrass] while she was on dialysis. She was getting tired and sometimes she missed her dialysis, while she was camping. She got tired of going there, back there and back. So she missed life.

She was very sick because of the wind, the rain. And it was Christmas that I picked her up. There was no one there to help her, to take her to hospital. So a family member went to 96 and picked us up and told us she was very sick. I got a taxi and picked her up, took her home, gave her shower and got ambulance. Took her hospital. The doctors told me she was not good. She stayed there for another week then she passed away.

She told me she had problems, she was worried about house, worried about families. That's why she stayed at the beach. Too much stress in the house. Too much family and not enough room in the house so she was worried for the family that came in from Elcho Island. That's why she was kicked out.

When they give a house, really you have to only have immediate family, not relatives. Just your husband, son or daughter or children. Yolgnu families different. We not like balanda, you know? Balanda have a wife and two or three children. We not like that. We got real big family. I'm from Yirrikala, but I got family from Elcho, I have family in Milingimbi, I have family in Ramingining. Yolgnu have extended family, relatives.

We different from balanda, we look after family, like my sister from one mother or my brother, I take them in the house. Like other family, my cousin or my uncle or my uncles sister or brother. They just come and stay there for 3 or 2 nights then they go. But





my close family like my sister that comes from one mother or my husbands family like sister or brother, they stay there. Stay 2 or 3 months and when they're ready they go.

How do you think NT Govt should be looking after dialysis patients?

They should build a big hostel only for dialysis patients. They talk about it. Extended family would come only to visit them, for a day or two then go. But I'd like big house, family house because big family. I want my family to be close so I can see them/and help them. And keep them in one place.

They could give us acre of land for us to stay. We can't go to Bagot, 'cause that's not right cause other peoples staying there, that we don't belong to that people.

I want my people to be in one group. Sometimes there might be trouble over money or drink or whatever, like trouble fighting each other at Bagot, or Fifteen Mile or Kululuk.

Before we came here, we stayed here for a week or two, the conservation didn't know we were staying here. Then once they saw us they came here telling us to move on, you're making too much rubbish, you not allowed to stay here, this is not a camping area. I said "you're wrong". I was the one talking all the time.

We want to be here because we need freedom. Where else you gonna send us?

There's no place where we can stay. With this big family, we stay here. There's no other place that we can go. If we move back to where the lights are, people get killed. Nowadays is silly balanda people. They kill people and they hit them and make them go hospital. So we don't want to get people killed.

We tell our family stay in one place. If sleepy, go sleep. In one place. Don't go past this road. That's what we tell them. They never wander around, make trouble or disturb anyone, cause we've been speaking to them, to control them.

So they have respect for what we saying. We tell them not to disturb any balanda. And as long as we clean up the area.

What would help you?

A service for my family, a medical service because sometimes my family get sick. They don't want to go hospital, they too afraid to go there. So I asked Danila Dilba if they could talk to the hospital and what they could do about it. So every 2 weeks there's a follow up for sick people. First visit would be sick person and they could come and visit the children or a womans visit or the next couple of days they could come and visit the boys. Or to see how we are staying, how good our health is, education.

'Families sitting down together' Moved on, abused and stolen from

Story told by James and his wife at Marrara Hilltop camp,

December 17 2002.

James: We been staying Leanyer for one year straight. Every morning me and my wife walk up to Leanyer lake to have a shower. They close the toilets at 8pm night time and open them at 8am morning.

At the start of December we went to have a shower one morning, that cleaner said to us – 'your putting all the mess here, using bad words, you mother fuckers, you like a pig' – swearing at us. We said don't use that word, you wait I'll report you to legal aid.

He was swearing at us saying we messed up the place, put all the mud on the ground, blaming us for mud. The mud is coming from people using trail bikes riding round the bush out the back, they're cleaning themselves there (at Leanyer Lake).

I was thinking he was joking on me but it was real so we started swearing back on him.

He started first.

I said to my wife, lets shift and go with families, that's why

we moved, staying with family at Mararra creek. We don't want to stay here at Marrara, to much drinking we want to go back to Leanyer.

We want him to say sorry to us for blaming us and swearing at us and I will say sorry for swearing at him. We

want to be able to have the shower at Leanyer lake without being sweared at and blamed for mess.

At Marrara Creek when we sit down in the shade, cemetary side or nature strip near Airport bottle shop or airport side shade, Darwin city council tell us to move. They say we can't sit here they keep on pushing us so we have to hide ourselves in the bushes.

We are families sitting down

 together, why are they doing that? I don't drink but they still tell me to move and other

LONG GRASS Association is looking for the donation of old caravans for homeless dialysis patients who need shelter from the wet season. Can you help?

119561v3

people sitting down sober.

December 22, 2002

Marrara Hilltop Camp cleaned out.

James: Everlyn went back to the camp from sitting down with family, to make tea and it was all empty.

No jerry can, no billy can, (we lost) sheets in garbage bags, box with my bags and food, big stripy shopping bag with all our clothes, medication and ID.

I just seen like a tip truck

must have went through. Other family lost blankets, tents and clothes. That night we went

> back to Leanyer, we where sleeping no blankets, just in the dirt.

Longgrass Association called Darwin city council on Monday to see what they could find out. DCC said they did not take the bags, they said call Dept of Transport

and Works who do clean up on the road verges. Transport and Works gave us the name of a contractor Gimballs Pty Ltd.

When we spoke to Gimballs they said yes they had had a notice to clean from Transport and Works and had done the clean up in the area of the camp that day. They told me they dumped everything at the tip.

Longgrass Association told him that James had lost his medication and other people had lost vital belongings they needed to get by - blankets, clothes, food, ID.

The man felt sorry and said he thought it was just rubbish even though people had their belongings in big bags. He said he would try and be more careful next time and call Longgrass Association if he found anything with a label.

went without medication for 1 week and essential items like blankets and spare clothes.

James: We were just waiting at Marrara till dialysis opened.

Social workers, they told us to stay here for 6 months at Christian Outreach, (after 6 months) maybe we might move out to flats (Territory Housing).

If I wait a long time I might have to go back longgrass, same place.



"Moments later the police and council workers arrived at camp, emaptied their drinks onto the ground, threw their bel; ongings into the water, kicked out the fire and issued fines for illegal fishing, littering and parking."

Racial discrimination complaint heads for Federal Court

Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission has been investigating a racial discrimination complaint made by Longgrass Association against the Darwin City Council. HREOC recognised the complaint under the Racial Discrimination Act 1975 - Section 9.

The Darwin City Council by-laws create a range of offences, which homeless people commit purely by engaging in essential human behaviour in public spaces. In particular, by-law 103, makes it an offence to sleep in a public place between sunset and sunrise.

"How come the City Council they push us - that's wrong. When they see your fire they tip it up water, when you cook something they take it out that saucepan. Everyday they come there, everywhere. They put my name. And they think I'm going to pay fifty dollars. But no. I can't give fifty dollars from me, no!

All the White people, what they doing [to] us mob, all Black people? How come they come and see us they say 'Get your gear and go'. And we pack up and take another place." Bob Bunba

Long grass people reject the label Itinerant (meaning transient). Even the recent Research Project stated that people sleeping out, leading their long grass lifestyle, have been doing so for 5-20 plus years. The Project also recognised that houselessness/ longrassing, "is a reality and a norm"; that is - a way of life.

There are many reasons why people camp in the longgrass.

Longgrass people are tired of hiding, being moved on, and discriminated against. Longgrass people request that the people of Darwin admit and reconcile:

 that there are many cultural/language groups in the longgrass,

· that there are established family camp sites throughout the Darwin/Palmerston area.

· that the continued policing of longgrass lifestyle forces longgrass people further and further away from basic services to the further detriment of people's health and well-being,

 and that any genuine attempts to address human rights and needs of longgrass people remains impossible in the present social, political and economical climate of Darwin.

Longgrass people are here to stay.

A conciliation conference was held on Wednesday February 26, between representatives of Darwin City Council and the Longgrass Assicuation. Nothing was able to be resolved. HREOC indicated that they would now terminate the complaint.

The next step for Longgrass Association is to file the complaint in the Federal Court so that decision can be reached as to whether by-lay 100 (taking people's bags), and by lay 103 (sleeping between dusk and dawn) are in breach of the racial discrimination act.



Council Chambers. The people of the Longgrass present a notice of violation to Darwin City Council. Council workers look on from the first floor. Pic and caption by Peter Eve.

onggrass at risk

Eight new cases of HIV where diagnosed in Territory residents last year.

Two women living longgrass were diagnosed with HIV in Darwin in August.

HIV (human immuno-deficiency virus) is a very small virus that is capable of living and multiplying in a person once the person is infected. HIV will destroy the immune system of the person infected, which means the person cannot defend themselves against infections or cancer.

Dr Jan Savage of NT AIDS-STD program: "People living the longgrass lifestyle are a highly marginalised group of people from all services. Sex is a highly used form of currency for food, shelter, alcohol and drugs."

When people have unprotected sex (don't use condom) they put themselves and other people they have sex with at a very high risk. Longgrass people are highly mobile and it is very important that people have regular check ups in Darwin and when people return or visit communities because HIV and STD'S will travel with you everywhere you go. Northern Territory has the highest rate of STD's (sexually transmitted diseases) and STI's (sexually transmitted infections) in Australia. If you already have an STD or STI you chances of getting HIV is also higher when you are having unprotected sex (don't use a condom) HIV infection is a chronic disease, the average life span of an infected person is 10 to 12 years. So make sure you go and have a check up regularly

and always use condoms!

Most people infected with HIV in Northern Territory got it through having unprotected sex (didn't use condom). HIV is transmitted when infected blood goes from one person to the other. Be careful to cover up sores and cuts with plaster or bandages.

You do NOT get HIV through mosquitoes, sharing toilets or showers, not from sharing cups or plates, not from swimming pools, not from hugging or touching, not from breathing, coughing or sneezing.

Where can I get condoms and have a check up for STD's and HIV?

Danila Dilba Health Service:

Main Clinic & Women's Clinic, 32 Knuckey St, Darwin Phone 89361717.

Men's Clinic, 42 McLachlan St, Darwin.

Phone 89361818.

Clinic 34 (AIDS/STD Unit):

Block 4, Royal Darwin Hospital. Phone 89411711.

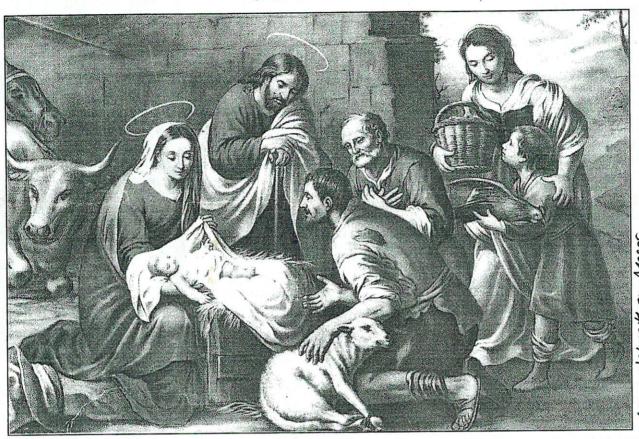
Northern Territory AIDS Council:

46 Woods St, Darwin Phone 89411711.

TO: BILL DAY
PO BOX 419
TOM PRICE.

POSTAGE
PAID
AUSTRALIA

675/



from Johnathon Moses

JESUS
Was BORN IN
THE
LONGGRASS

Longgrass Association C/- Darwin GPO, NT, 0801 Website http://longgrass.tripod.com