

VISIONS FOR KIJA - JARU COUNTRY

Deidre Ikin

**Healing Our Spirit Worldwide - Pacific Regional
Summit 2004
Cairns, Australia**

This paper is about some of the principles of ways of working, a story about how some of this work took place and some hints on how to use it yourself.

By thinking about how we work, our strengths and limitations and what might be needed we can create a vision and work to make it come alive.

THE PRINCIPLES

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

What is community development? - it is not just about developing communities, it is a way of working. A set of ideas that help us decide how to act.

If you work in a community development way you are looking for strengths, you know that they already exist and you begin to know that you don't know everything. You realise you have some beliefs and ideas that are coming from your culture and where you grew up, you begin to think about these and realise there are other ways to think.

You think about your own power and how you use it, you ask yourself - am I really able to listen to other people, or see through their eyes or hear their story? Can I feel how they might feel, do I know their history, can I see into their hearts? Can I laugh and cry with them or do I stand back with my face turned away?

Can I get involved and get others involved, but in a level kind of way, sharing, getting strong and being able to look after

ourselves more. Community Development ways want people to have more power over things going on and work on local issues in their own way. It is concerned about people who are disadvantaged or are discriminated against.

It wants people to not be so dependent on others or the government and to decide for themselves what their issues or problems are rather than outsiders telling them. When people work in a community development way they do not do things for people in a bossy kind of way, but just help to make things happen.

Sometimes people need to get political and work with other groups they don't get on too well with, and sometimes need to speak up about some of the attitudes or ways power is used by people in charge, especially if you are from a group or place where people haven't been listened to properly or have had a sad history.

Its good to work this way, but when I look around there is still something missing, there must be something more.

The papers and TV seem to focus on problems, particularly in certain communities and groups of people and make them look bad. I wonder how that makes people feel?

There must be more to working with people than just making them feel they are no good. I looked around and found something called Appreciative Inquiry.

APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY

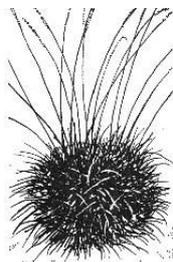
David Cooperrider (1990) had an idea that people or groups of people might grow towards the most positive images they hold of themselves, like plants grow towards the light. He called it his "heliotropic hypothesis".

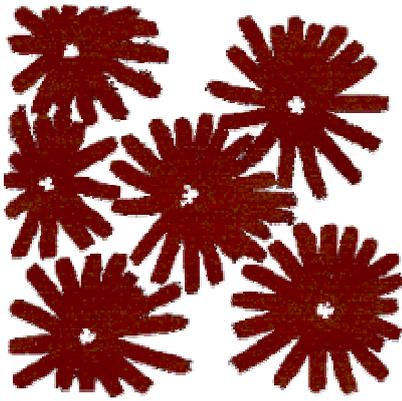
He said people might not even be aware of or talk about these positive images even if they exist. They might be hidden or forgotten.

He said that the stronger the positive images are the more the group can grow into being like that.

When these images are different from what others think or say, or are only partly true, people think of themselves as dysfunctional or no good. Trying to fix them will not work until the image of the group is changed. Appreciative inquiry tries to create a new and better image.

This Visions for Kija - Jaru Country is a story about looking for a new image.





A KIJA-JARU COUNTRY STORY

When my boss said its time to go to Halls Creek and work there for 2 or 3 days a month and then fly back again I had to think about what I'd do. She said to work with other workers and help them to work with drug and alcohol problems.

I thought about what I knew about Halls Creek. People called it Hells' Crack, my old boss from the community in the NT said she would not walk down the street there, even in the daytime, other people said not to stop there at all. TV stations and the paper were showing films and stories that made it sound pretty bad.

Reading the health reports from that place I knew there was a fair bit of work to do.

But I knew this was not all there was. I stayed there one time when I was traveling through and everyone was really friendly.

I had a think about myself. I like going to new places and meeting new people, I am friendly and understand a little bit about culture, I like to bring people together and do things, not just talk. I felt good about the land when I was there

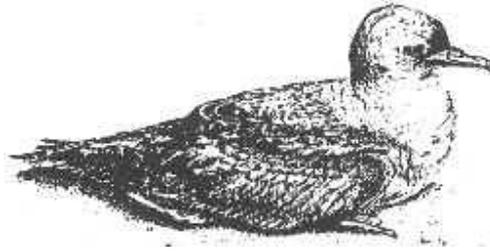
before and I'll be OK as long as I have plenty of food and water. There will be other workers from the team there sometimes so I will have someone to talk to at night. I can work on my own too, the boss won't have to worry about me staying in the hotel room all day watching TV and keeping cool, I will get out and meet strangers.

I didn't know any of the workers from Halls Creek, so it was going to be hard to just turn up like that. I needed to have a plan. It was time for an idea.

It was time to dream. I thought about that place, what people told me and what I experienced myself, it was different. I wanted to see the good things. I will go, say hello and see what the workers have to say. They might like the idea of a positive image. I talked to the workers one at a time and asked questions and listened, some were tired and some had lots of energy.

I thought of the story of the muttonbirds traveling all the way down south. The strong ones fly on the outside and the flapping of their wings makes a cushion of air in the middle. The birds who are tired go into the middle and are carried along on the cushion of air. When they have had a good rest they are strong and go back to the outside and the others go in.

If we are going to try to work together I will need to find which workers are on the outside and which ones need to be resting in the middle.



Maybe the way to find out is to do something together and see how it goes. I dreamed again and asked them, do you want to do something in Drug Action Week? I told them it goes on all over Australia and if we join in we will be joining in with everyone trying to make a difference to the harm from alcohol and drugs. They were interested so we started having meetings to talk about what we will do, who will do it, what we need and where and when.

This is when it can get tricky. Some people might not like working with other people, they might have been disappointed by things that happened in the past. We needed to have a common goal - I said how about trying to get a positive image for Halls Creek? We remembered we all wanted a healthy community. There were differences and strong feelings but by staying positive and respecting our differences without trying to change them, it was easier. **TIME FOR ACTION.**

The time got closer and we had lots of people involved. There were strong muttonbirds in the School Drug Education Team at the Halls Creek District High School and they hosted the Drug Awareness Day, our big day. It was looking good and we even invited another school to bring all their kids and join in. We tried to include as many people as we could. So many people brought their ideas and by talking we found out where we could get the things that were needed, even

extra money to buy things like some display boards to take out to community events such as football matches. We decided everyone could share these and use them later when they needed to.

It was a good day, even the supermarket had a display and the hotel put up some drink safe messages.

Afterwards at the next meeting we talked about it, what was good and not so good and changes we would make next time. Everyone decided they would like to be involved again next year.

My boss then said your time is finished for Halls Creek, I missed that lot and working with them but we had had a good time. I could still send them information and a postcard every now and then.

It was a few months later that I got the news. We got an award from the Australian Council for Health, Physical Education and Recreation (ACHPER) also called the *Governors' Award* for our 'Healthy Active Lifestyle' day in Drug Action Week. The Halls Creek District High School also got a 'Special Commendation' from the Governor of Western Australia. It was a happy surprise.

Thinking about that time I realized that there are some good things about being an 'outsider'. You can come into a place fresh, you don't know all the history or politics of people working together and you can stay neutral and not take sides.

With a bit of effort you can work behind the scenes and bring people together and link them up and support them by listening. You can try to keep a positive hopeful way of being and lift the spirits and energy of tired workers.

You can keep an eye out for all kinds of information if you are closer to towns or cities and send it to them. Information like training, resources, funding, workers who are visiting their area and things going on that they might be interested in. You can be a link for them so they don't feel so alone and far away from everything.

In this story the harms from alcohol and drugs may still be going on just the same, but the community of workers might feel a bit more empowered and strengthened and optimistic that change can happen. We had made a start.

References:

Cooperrider, D.L. (1990) Positive image, positive action: The affirmative basis of organizing. In S.Srivastva & D.L. Cooperrider (Eds.), *Appreciative Management and Leadership* (pp.91-125). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Sheridan & Associates, (1999) 'Appreciative Inquiry' A constructive approach to community development and social change. Workshop manual, BROOME, WA.

Websites:

Appreciative Inquiry: <http://www.appreciative-inquiry.org/AI-MoreInfo.htm>

Community Development: <http://maaori.com/develop/princip.htm>

Images:



Janet Long Nakamarra "Spinifex"



spinifex www.yidaki.com.au

HOW TO USE IT YOURSELF....

APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY - 4 D'S

DISCOVERY - find something really good

- appreciate the best of "what is"
- do not analyze deficits or problems
- think about small successes
- share stories of good things that have happened
- talk about what people most value and want to build on for the future

DREAM - what might be

- challenge how it is now and have a vision for future
- keep it real and based on some of the good things that have already happened
- think of even more that could happen
- share the idea and find people to join in

DESIGN - what should be, the ideal

- decide on something to do so we don't just talk all the time
- think about a way to do it
- find ways to work together to do it

DELIVERY or DESTINY - how to empower, learn and adjust

- sharing positive images of the future
- create it by working together and doing it
- find out what we learnt by doing it
- talk about any changes needed next time

.....and begin to discover, dream, design and deliver all over againkeep on going towards a better future...

Ref: Cooperrider, D., Whitney, D. (1999). *A Positive Revolution in Change: Appreciative Inquiry*. Taos, NM: Corporation for Positive Change.

TRY IT YOURSELF.....

With another person

1. Tell me about a time in your work when you felt excited and happy about something that was going on. What was your part in it?
2. Tell me about what you value about:
 - Yourself
 - Your work
 - Being from your community or place

(Don't feel shy or shame about saying good things)

Now swap over and the other person talks. Take 10 minutes for each person to talk.

This is the DISCOVERY Part - finding something really good and sharing stories of good things that have happened

When there is more time you can go on to DREAM - what might be, DESIGN - what should be, the ideal and then DELIVER OR DO IT.