



2022 Strong Women for Healthy Country Forum Report

20-22 SEPTEMBER, EASTERN ARRERNTJE COUNTRY, NORTHERN TERRITORY



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Executive summary

In recent years, women caring for Country in the Northern Territory have made a consistent effort to gather with women across different organisations and communities. In 2019, Rembarrnga, Dalabon, and Mayili Elders invited women caring for Country from across the Northern Territory to meet at Bawurrbarnda in Central Arnhem Land. Here, women from 32 ranger groups articulated their shared vision:

“We are strong Indigenous women of the Northern Territory. We stand united as one strong voice. We commit to a network that gives equal power to the rights of all our women. Strong Women means Healthy Country.”

Today, this network is known as the Strong Women for Healthy Country Network. In May 2021, over 260 women from across the Northern Territory met at Banatjarl on Jawoyn Country for another Strong Women for Healthy Country Forum. Elders, healers, artists and community workers joined women rangers at this forum, and together we set out how we want to support each other to achieve our vision through strong advocacy, collaboration, communication, and governance.

In 2022, over 200 of us women gathered for our third Strong Women for Healthy Country Forum on Eastern Arrernte Country, to design a strategy to achieve these goals together. We agreed all women are welcome to join our network and walk side by side with us. We also nominated a steering group of Indigenous women caring for Country in the Northern Territory called the Message Sticks Group, who meet online twice a month. We mapped out how the Message Sticks Group, community-based women’s spaces, as well as Indigenous and

non-Indigenous women, will support each other to advocate, communicate, and collaborate as a network. We identified priority actions to achieve these goals:

- continue Northern Territory-wide forums
- support Indigenous women working as mentors in their communities and organisations
- make a communication plan and tools for our network, including a website, newsletters, and a database for photos, videos and language resources
- advocate for dedicated women’s spaces in communities
- facilitate women’s caring for Country exchanges
- support regional women’s healing camps
- join a national forum for women caring for Country
- formalise a transparent governance structure for our network
- create best practice guides for employing women caring for Country
- secure training and support for women to advocate for themselves and our network
- develop ethical sponsorship and partnership policies for our network.

In addition to these achievements, we learnt about Eastern Arrernte Country from our generous hosts, produced bush medicines with the expert guidance of the Akeyulerre Healing Centre, created self-care plans with the Alice Springs Child and Youth Mental Health Team, contributed to important conversations about preventing violence against women on a systemic level with Our Watch, produced a third art piece in a series of works created at our forums, and wrote a Strong Women for Healthy Country Song together with Shellie Morris and Danielle Caruana!



2022 Forum logo story

Therese Ryder hosted the 2022 forum on her Country. She is an accomplished and celebrated artist. She generously painted this logo for the 2022 forum, and shared her knowledge with women travelling to Eastern Arrernte Country:

“Parakeelya is a plant that’s grown in the desert. Aboriginal people survived in the desert, by sucking the water from the leaves of the parakeelya plant. That’s how Aboriginal people survived. There are other plants as well that have got water in their leaves like pigweed, and others. When it’s in flower it looks so beautiful: plenty of them all together in the desert, on the sand hills. It looks so beautiful.”

“Because my uncle, surviving in the desert, that was one of the plants that he told me about, that got water in the leaves, as well as pigweeds.”

“Parakeelya’s got big long ones, leaves. Pigweed’s got little round leaves, and their stem is real thick, orangey colour, it spreads on the ground, little

white flowers. In the root part, there’s food there, in the roots. People eat the roots.”

“Another water story he told me: there were two blokes walking from the camp, went hunting out in the desert, and found themselves a long, long way from the camp, and would have run out of water. They were told by the old people ‘if you think you run out of water, you look around for any birds. If you see a few finches sitting in the tree, stand in the shade and watch where they fly, because they show water. When you see them fly, you might see another group fly in the same direction. Then another mob, big mob. Study it and see where they fly. They might fly and land on the treetop. See them scooping down, onto the ground. Go have a look what’s there’, and they would see a spring, or a puddle of water. That’s how finches show you water.”

“So, Aboriginal people survived in the desert in so many ways.”



Above: Our 2019 forum at Bawurrbarnda

Right: Hosts of our 2021 forum at Banatjarl together with the hosts of our 2022 forum at Ross River



The growth of our network

Ross River is a special place for many women in the caring for Country movement. It has been the site for important ranger events in the past, including the Northern Territory Indigenous Women's Land and Sea Management Forum back in 2010. Here women made it clear that *"...looking after Country is our responsibility too!"*

In recent years, women caring for Country in the Northern Territory have made a consistent effort to gather with women across different organisations and communities. In 2019, Rembarnga, Dalabon, and Mayili Elders invited women caring for Country from across the Northern Territory to meet at Bawurrbarnda in Central Arnhem Land. Here, women from 32 ranger groups articulated their shared vision:

"We are strong Indigenous women of the Northern Territory. We stand united as one strong voice. We commit to a network that gives equal power to the rights of all our women. Strong Women means Healthy Country."

Today, this network is known as the Strong Women for Healthy Country Network, is proudly hosted by Mimal Land Management Aboriginal Corporation, and has doubled in size. In May 2021, over 260 women from across the Northern Territory met at Banatjarl on Jawoyn Country for another Strong Women for Healthy Country Forum. Elders, healers, artists and community workers joined women rangers at this forum, and together we set out how we want to support each other to achieve our shared vision through strong advocacy, collaboration, communication, and governance. We formed our Message Sticks Group to meet every two months, maintain communication across our network, and plan our next forum.

In 2022, we gathered again on Eastern Arrernte Country, to celebrate and build on these accomplishments. Some women remember coming here with their elders 12 years ago when they first started working as rangers!



Planning our forum

We would like to acknowledge the sudden passing of one of the Ltyentye Apurte women rangers who helped plan our forum. Because of her sudden death, we postponed our on Country planning meeting at Ross River until May 2022. We are grateful to her grieving family for enabling this meeting, as our third forum would not have been possible if women from Central Australia and the Top End did not meet in person on Eastern Arrernte Country in advance. This planning meeting affirmed women's commitment to work together, and the urgency of their work to support each other in the face of their struggles. It was also the first time for the women from Top End ranger groups to meet with Eastern Arrernte Traditional Owners and healers, and these relationships were vital for the success of our forum.

From 16-18 May, 22 women working for the Ltyentye Apurte Rangers, North Tanami Rangers, Muru Warinyi Ankkul Rangers, Anmatyerr Rangers, Mimal Land Management, Tjuwanpa Rangers, Yugul-Mangi Rangers, and the Akeyulerre Healing Centre, as well

as Eastern Arrernte Traditional Owners, worked together at Ross River to finalise the collaborative art, healing, and music workshops for the forum. Therese Ryder, the senior Traditional Owner, also showed all women important women's sites surrounding Ross River, and shared her knowledge with participants. After this meeting at Ross River, Top End women drove back to Mparntwe to meet with the wider group of Ngangkari working at Akeyulerre Healing Centre on 19 May, as well as the team of support staff at the Central Land Council on 20 May.

In addition to these in person meetings, women caring for Country from over 20 different communities contributed to planning our 2022 forum at online Message Stick meetings. Women met online every two months for an entire year leading up to the forum. They talked to women in their communities and organisations, and shared what they would like to learn from other strong women in the Northern Territory. They recommended experienced facilitators they like to work with, and helped their network



coordinator put together a facilitation guide. They also compiled a code of conduct for facilitators and notetakers to help all women feel safe and supported at the forum.

These facilitators met twice in the lead up to the forum to prepare their facilitation approach, and carefully plan how they would help women unpack the issues raised at Message Stick meetings step-by-step. They worked as a team, applying their range of skills and experiences to support different aspects of the forum. They agreed to work closely with notetakers and the network coordinator to document conversations at the forum so that this report tells a full story!

Above: Women from Yugul-Mangi and Mimal Land Management visiting women from the Muru Warinyi Ankkul and Anmatyerr ranger groups and their support team at the Central Land Council in Mparntwe
Photo credit: Central Land Council, 19 May 2022

Below: Ltyentye Apurte Rangers, Eastern Arnernte Traditional Owners, North Tanami Rangers, Muru Warinyi Ankkul Rangers, Anmatyerr Rangers, Mimal Land Management, Tjuwanpa Rangers, Yugul-Mangi Rangers, and the Akeyulerre Healing Centre discussing the vital role of healers at their upcoming Strong Women for Healthy Country Forum in September
Photo credit: Fiona Webb, 17 May 2022



Where we travelled from





WOMEN FROM THESE ORGANISATIONS ALSO HELPED MAKE OUR FORUM A SUCCESS:

Akeyulerre Healing Centre
 Anandiliyakwa Land Council
 Arhem Land Fire Abatement NT
 Australian Wildlife Conservancy
 Babbarra Women's Centre
 Banatjarl Strongbala Wimun Grup
 Bush Heritage Australia
 Children's Ground
 Central Land Council
 Conservation Management
 Karrkad Kandji Trust
 Miyalkburra Strong Women's Group (Anandiliyakwa Services Aboriginal Corporation)
 Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Women's Council
 Northern Land Council
 Northern Territory Government – Alice Springs Child and Youth Mental Health Team
 Northern Territory Government – Department of Environment, Parks, and Water Security
 Northern Territory Government – Fisheries Division
 Our Watch
 Territory Natural Resource Management
 Triptic
 Vogue Australia
 Word Wildlife Fund – Australia

WOMEN FROM 30 RANGER GROUPS JOINED OUR FORUM:

Akityarre Rangers (CLC)	Murnkurrumurnkurru Gurindji Rangers (CLC)
Anangu Luritjiku Rangers (CLC)	Muru Warinyi Ankkul Rangers (CLC)
Anmatyerr Rangers (CLC)	North Tanami Rangers (CLC)
Aputula Rangers (CLC)	Tiwi Land and Marine Rangers (Tiwi Resources)
Arafura Swamp Rangers (Arafura Swamp Rangers Aboriginal Corporation)	Tjuwanpa Women Rangers (Tjuwanpa Outstation Resource Centre Aboriginal Corporation)
Bulgul Rangers (NLC)	Uluru Kata Tjuta National Park Rangers
Crocodile Islands Rangers (Milingimbi Outstations Progress Resource Aboriginal Corporation)	Utopia Rangers (CLC)
Djelk Rangers (Bawinanga Aboriginal Corporation)	Waanyi-Garawa Rangers (NLC)
Garawa Rangers (NLC)	Wagiman Rangers (NLC)
Gajerrong Rangers (NLC)	Walungurru Rangers (CLC)
Kaltukatjara Rangers (CLC)	Wardaman Rangers (NLC)
Ltyentye Apurte Rangers (CLC)	Warddeken Rangers (Warddeken Land Management Ltd)
Malak Malak Rangers (NLC)	Warlpiri Rangers (CLC)
Mardbalk Rangers (NLC)	Yirralka Rangers (Laynhapuy Homelands Aboriginal Corporation)
Mimal Rangers (Mimal Land Management Aboriginal Corporation)	Yugul-Mangi Rangers (NLC)

Forum program

Monday 19th	Tuesday 20th	Wednesday 21st	Thursday 22nd	Friday 23rd
Travel	Breakfast			
	Forum opening	Strong Women for Healthy Country Strategy co-design Processes and actions	Strong Women for Healthy Country Strategy co-design Priorities, roles, and responsibilities	Farewell Pack up Travel
	Strong Women for Healthy Country Strategy co-design Purpose and targets		Group photos	
			Sharing knowledge about Country with Therese Ryder	
	Lunch			

Arrive Check-in Set up camp	Presentations from strong women			Presentations from strong women
	Bush medicine making with Akeyulerre Healing Centre	Changing the Picture with Our Watch	Practicing self-care with Alice Springs Child and Youth Mental Health Team	
	Strong Women for Healthy Country Song writing with Dr Shellie Morris and Danielle Caruana			
	Dinner			
Welcome to Country Therese Ryder and family	Fireside yarns			Completion and launch of third collaborative artwork
	Fireside yarns			Strong Women for Healthy Country perform their song



Welcome to Country

As the sun set over Eastern Arrernte Country the night before the forum, more and more women gathered around the stage in anticipation. Some women had travelled hundreds or even thousands of kilometres to be there. Therese Ryder and her family waited patiently for the last bus to arrive before welcoming the crowd to their Country.

Rosario Young and Carol Turner then guided their family in performing sacred dances they had carefully prepared in the lead up to the forum, and shared their ancestral teachings with us.

On the first day of the forum, these women learnt of the sudden passing of a close family member. We are so grateful to them that despite this tragic news, they supported us to continue with our forum on Eastern Arrernte Country. We all worked hard to make the most of the opportunity they gave us.

To keep us safe at the forum, Traditional Owners worked with the Akeyulerre Healing Centre to smoke all women who had travelled to their Country. We are deeply thankful to Therese Ryder: despite struggles with her health she stayed strong for us and kept returning to the forum throughout the week to watch over us and keep us safe on her Country.



Forum processes and outcomes

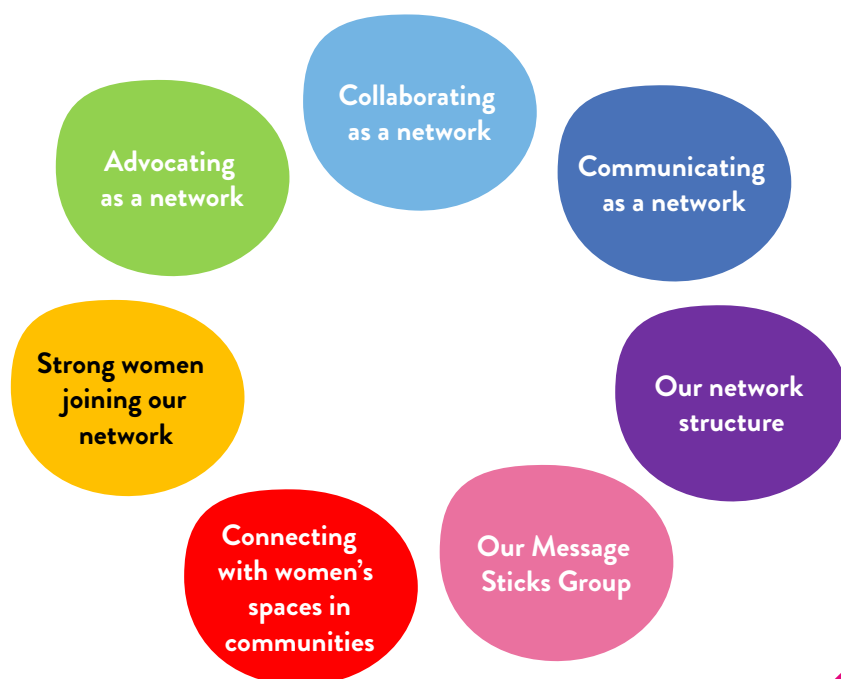
DESIGNING OUR STRATEGY

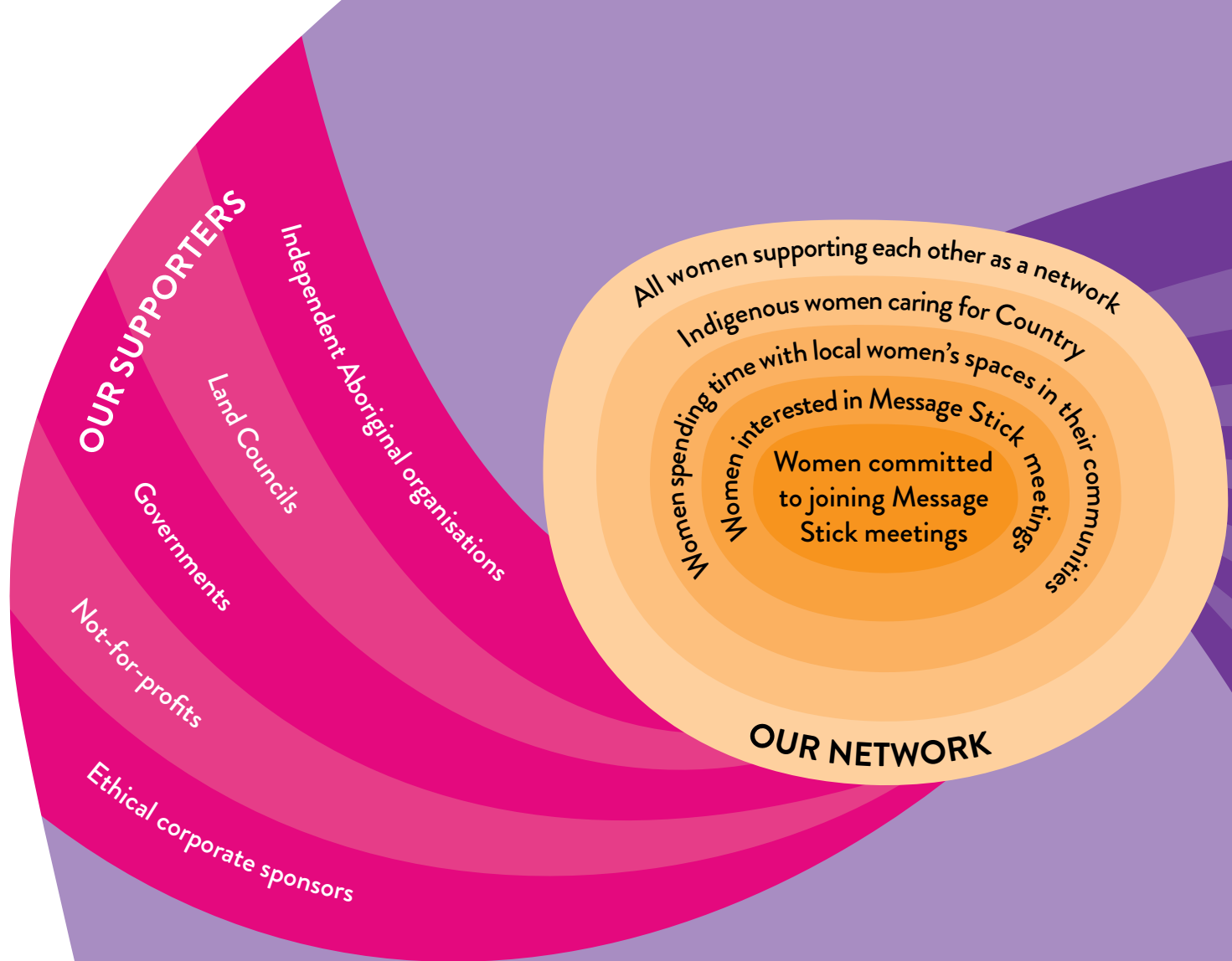
Each morning of our forum, we worked together to design a strategy to achieve our vision, building on our work at previous forums. This part of the forum was supported by an experienced team of facilitators who were nominated at Message Stick meetings, because of their strong relationships with women in our network. Kim Webeck, Alys Stevens, Kylie Burn, Billie Scott, Fiona Webb, Jody Kopp, Sam Kendall, and Dr Jen Ansell generously agreed to share this responsibility.

Each of these women facilitated a yarning circle about issues raised by women at past forums and Message Stick meetings. Three of the yarning circles focused on the purpose of the network: why women seek to collaborate, communicate, and advocate together as a network. The other yarning circles focused on the different layers of the network, what responsibilities women should have if they join them, and how we can work together to achieve our goals. These yarning

circles explored who the network is for, how it can connect with existing women's spaces in communities, what the purpose of the Message Stick meetings is, and started important conversations about the network's structure and decision-making processes.

On the first day of our forum, women were able to regularly switch between these different yarns, and build a clear understanding of their purpose. On the second day, women were able to spend more time contributing to the conversations that interested them the most, and work out actions and processes to achieve our goals together. On the final day, women went through all the actions they had proposed so far, and set priorities for the next year, 3 years, and 10 years. We also committed to different roles and responsibilities within our network to support each other to take these actions and realise our goals and vision.





STRONG WOMEN FOR HEALTHY COUNTRY STRATEGY OVERVIEW

**OUR
GOALS**

OUR ACTIONS

continue Northern Territory-wide forums

support Indigenous women working as mentors in their communities and organisations

make a communication plan and tools for our network, including a website, newsletters, a database for photos, videos and language resources

advocate for dedicated women's spaces in communities

facilitate women's caring for Country exchanges

support regional women's healing camps

join a national forum for women caring for Country

formalise a transparent governance structure for our network

create best practice guides for employing women caring for Country

secure training and support for women to advocate for themselves and our network

develop ethical sponsorship and partnership policies our network

Advocating
as a network

GOAL: Women caring for Country across the NT are standing up for each other as a united voice, spreading their shared story and effecting real change on Country.

OUR VISION

"We are strong Indigenous women of the Northern Territory. We stand united as one strong voice. We commit to a network that gives equal power to the rights of all our women. Strong Women means Healthy Country."

GOAL: Women caring for Country across the NT are sharing their successes, learning from each other, and staying informed about their network.

Communicating
as a network

GOAL: Women caring for Country across the NT are working together and supporting each other.

Collaborating
as a network

Network goals

Collaborating as a network

GOAL: Women caring for Country across the Northern Territory are working together and supporting each other.

We know we are achieving this goal if:

- We are collaborating with women from different places and with different experiences.
- We are collaborating with women across different generations.
- We are collaborating with different service providers in our communities.
- Our mentors are supported and have opportunities to connect with each other.
- Traditional Owners and Elders are guiding our work.

WORKING AS A TEAM TO SHARE KNOWLEDGE TWO-WAYS

To us, collaborating means working together as a team, and sharing and receiving knowledge through two-way teaching and learning. This means more than just sharing information: it means working as a team to bring different worldviews together, so we can create new ways of understanding or doing.

At our forum, we reflected on some of our past collaboration experiences that have allowed us to do this:

- ranger exchanges that are supported by Elders, involving women from different places visiting each other's communities working together and sharing stories out on Country
- women's healing camps, which have allowed some of us to share knowledge across generations and cultures, learn how to make bush medicines, and celebrate our strength and achievements
- rangers, schools, and Elders working closely with each other to deliver learning on Country activities for children
- regularly joining our Strong Women for Healthy Country Forums
- sharing our stories and experiences at other forums and workshops with women from different places.

We agree that these collaborations have allowed us to work together as a team, and share knowledge two-ways, because they involved women from different places, generations, and experiences, and were guided by Traditional Owners and Elders. This made us feel safe and supported. In these collaborations we were not just giving information for someone else to use in their story: instead we were sharing stories and creating new stories at the same time. Being together face-to-face at events specifically organised for us as women is essential for this kind of two-way collaboration.

KEEPING STRONG WOMEN CONNECTED

The role of our network is to support opportunities for women to collaborate with each other. Collaborating as a network is an important way to build relationships with each other and strengthen our voice, connections, knowledge and support for ourselves and our communities. It is also an important way to leverage our skills and strengths from each other and influence our workplaces, families, and communities.

This can be challenging. At our forum, we discussed how our ranger groups and organisations are very different in size, capacity, governance structure and leadership. This means we have a lot to learn from each other, but also that it can be difficult to organise events together. This can be especially difficult if some groups or communities lack suitable accommodation, are difficult to access, or have limited internet and communication infrastructure. We see a role for our network to help us organise collaborations across different communities and organisations, and hope we can work together with land councils, independent ranger groups, and other community-based organisations to achieve this.

Our goal to collaborate extends beyond women employed as rangers: we want to work as a team with our Elders, children, learning on Country students, trainees, junior rangers, as well as support staff and caring for Country project partners. In fact, we don't just want to collaborate within formalised caring for

Country programs, but seek to include strong women working in our language and art centres, aged care facilities, safe houses, healing groups, health services, schools, and other community development groups. We also discussed reaching out to strong women living outside of our communities in rehabilitation centres and prison programs. We look to researchers, NGOs, and governmental organisations such as National Parks and the Fisheries Division not just as opportunities for support, but also for genuine two-way collaborations.

Our forum is a key event where women can meet face-to-face in a dedicated space to keep relationships with each other strong. We agree that our network could also help us build on our relationships and support each other by:

- supporting women's exchanges between ranger groups as well as other community-based organisations
- supporting regional women's healing camps
- creating online support groups, such as online forums, social media groups, and regular catch ups over Zoom between women from different places
- continuing our Strong Women for Healthy Country Forums, and building towards a national forum for women caring for Country.

MENTORING IS COLLABORATION

We see mentorship as a vital form of collaboration: sharing and learning between people. When thinking about what it means to be a mentor, we reflected on our experiences of both being a mentor and being mentored. We define mentorship as not just being a teacher or a leader, but also as having an influence

on another person, making an effect on their way of seeing something or the way they do something. It is also about how we carry ourselves, and how we stay strong and confident. To be a mentor, you must be someone that is trusted, respected, and builds good relationships.

We talked about how mentoring is happening every day, and how Indigenous people mentor each other in a lot of different ways. We recognise women are mentors to other women not just in our ranger groups or other workplaces, but also in our families, communities, cultural roles on Country and in our wider connections like this network. Mentors play a crucial role in supporting young women professionally, such as encouraging them to become rangers, but also supporting them to be more involved in work in community and on Country. Mentors for women can be family members, Elders, ranger coordinators and other colleagues. We also discussed the important role mentors play in building cultural awareness with new staff, partners, and visitors to our communities, supporting two-way learning and guiding new people to work with our communities in the right way.

We also recognise that mentoring roles hold a lot of responsibility, and it can be challenging for women to stay strong when they are under a lot of pressure or are not able to find the right support or balance. Women mentors also want to keep growing their skills, have access to their own mentors and become stronger themselves. Women saw a role for their network in both advocating for support for mentors themselves, and linking mentors with appropriate mental health support and each other.



Communicating as a network

GOAL: Women caring for Country across the Northern Territory are sharing their successes, learning from each other, and staying informed about their network.

We know we are achieving this goal if:

- We have tools and places to communicate between ourselves and share our story with others.
- Communication across our network reaches our remote homelands as well as our big communities.
- The work of our Message Sticks Group is understood across our network and anyone in the network can communicate with the Message Sticks Group.

SPEAKING INSIDE AND OUTSIDE OF OUR NETWORK

We have defined communication as the ability to speak to each other inside our network, to share the stories and achievements of the network with our communities and supporters, and to advocate for our priorities in the highest places. We all agree on the importance of learning from and sharing knowledge with each other, and the role of our network in helping to create opportunities to do so. Sharing our own experiences with others has been a way to build our confidence to speak in public. Learning about the achievements of other strong women and groups has given us inspiration, and has made us feel strong.



“Listening is the other part of communication.”

– Kitana Shaw

We have identified places in our communities where we can share information from our network, including women’s safe houses, services hubs, youth centres, art centres, local language centres and other workplaces (see pages 24-25). Most of us feel most comfortable communicating face-to-face, on Country, and in a women’s only space. We see our Strong Women for Healthy Country Forum as an essential space for communicating, learning and growing together:

“Forums are the place for sharing, talking and listening to each other. If we’ve got no communication, we’ve got no network.”

– Madeleine Dixon

NOBODY IS LEFT OUT

We agree communication is working well when ‘nobody is left out’. At first, we discussed internet-based tools such as our Facebook page, a website and video. Soon though, we were thinking of our homelands where these services are not available. To include these places, we need more basic communication tools, but also improved IT infrastructure for the future. We also suggested communication from the network could be shared in Kriol as well as English. It will be up to us to translate these messages further into our own languages for our communities.

UNITED STORY

We see our Message Sticks Group as the most important way to communicate about the bigger actions and activities of the network. We want to know what the Message Sticks Group is working on, and to be able to communicate directly with its members. Not all women at the forum knew what the Message Sticks Group was, and what it had been doing in the lead up to our forum. Many women have enjoyed the Message Sticks Newsletters, and acknowledged they can take lots of work to put together. We would like to see simple short summaries soon after Message Stick meetings with the more comprehensive newsletters coming just a couple of times a year. Message Sticks Group members said a short summary would jog their memories and help them speak to other women in their workplaces and communities about what the group was working on. Some of us suggested occasionally having meetings in remote outstations with the theme of ‘nobody is left out’, even though we acknowledge the effort involved in organising such events. We also suggested Message Sticks Group members create a dedicated email address to share with the rest of the network.



Advocating as a network

GOAL: Women caring for Country across the Northern Territory are standing up for each other as a united voice, spreading their shared story and effecting real change on Country.

We know we are achieving this goal if:

- Our Message Sticks Group has enough support to act as the united voice of our network.
- Our Message Sticks Group is accountable to the network and tells a united story.
- Members of our network are empowered to advocate for themselves.
- Our advocacy as a network creates real change for women on Country.

We said our Message Sticks Group will be strongest when they are a team that values and upholds understanding, respect, safety, support and reliability. Women with less experience in advocacy should be able to rely on more experienced women within the Message Sticks Group for mentorship, and should be able to reach out to trusted Elders within communities.

“If you have got young women who want to join in, you have gotta support them, no matter what.”

– Gennivea Alpin

SUPPORTING A UNITED VOICE

When women in our network stand together and speak as one voice, our advocacy will be more powerful. Women at the forum agreed the Message Sticks Group will be the united voice of our network. Advocacy involves many pressures and can be difficult.

“It’s not easy to be a representative, you must support them.” – Daphne Huddleston

Beyond mentorship, our Message Sticks Group should be supported with formal professional development opportunities, such as training in public speaking, communication and other leadership skills. We understand that creating change requires an awareness of how systems work, how policy and decisions are made, so we know where to direct our influence. We want our Message Sticks Group to learn about bureaucratic language and political jargon, so women can focus on our own priorities without feeling overwhelmed.



SHARING A UNITED STORY

Strong advocacy is based on a united story, built from, and understood by, the wider network. Whether it is the Message Sticks Group or individual members, speaking in the name of the network requires accountability to the whole network. The positive impact of the network stands to be undermined if stories are confused or are not shared by everyone. The flow of information between the Message Sticks Group and the rest of the network is necessary for everyone to understand what is going on and being said. Clear and concise words, and good communication, help to have everyone telling the same story to each other.

“One network is all we need. It can be all in there to follow and to share with each other.”

– Marilyn Kerinain

SELF-ADVOCACY

We also see a role for our network in helping us to become more powerful self-advocates in our own lives. Women face many compounding challenges in their lives at work, home, in community, and bureaucracies can leave women ‘stuck in the mud’.

“We are stuck in the mud, no more playing around, help us get out of the mud.” – Marilyn Kerinaiaua

We want more opportunities to build strong voices to advocate for ourselves and others we care for. There is more than one way to deliver this, such as mentorship, professional development, and also opportunities to publicise our perspectives. For example, women at the forum began to collectively develop guidelines for their employers to better support them. These guidelines would help back the story of women advocating for themselves. Strong women are stronger together.

GETTING THE STORY OUT THERE

Creating real changes for women on Country is the ultimate measure of effective advocacy and it comes when priorities are recognised and supported in real ways. Our united voice needs a microphone: we will use the media and our own communication tools to share these priorities. Getting the story out there helps attract the right partner groups that align with our values and who can make the united voice travel even further. Speaking face-to-face with people is powerful and persuasive way to win support, whether in community at a local event, at conferences or meetings with politicians. We see our forum itself as an advocacy tool, because it proves what women can do together and puts the need for dedicated women’s spaces in the spotlight. We also seek to advocate for local women’s spaces within our communities, which is discussed further on pages 24-25.





Network governance

Strong women joining our network

At our forum, we discussed how the different layers of our network will work together to take the actions we prioritised to achieve our shared goals and vision:

“We are strong Indigenous women of the Northern Territory. We stand united as one strong voice. We commit to a network that gives equal power to the rights of all our women. Strong Women means Healthy Country.”

Our shared vision clearly articulates that the purpose of our network is to support Indigenous women in the Northern Territory. However, when we collaborate as a network, we use a two-way approach combining different worldviews (see pages 16-17), and many of our non-Indigenous colleagues and friends share in our goals and vision, as do many women living or originating outside of the Northern Territory. There are also Indigenous and non-Indigenous men who want to support us.

Our network is currently hosted by Mimal Land Management, we have no formal membership, and we simply describe the size of our network by counting how many women are joining our activities. However, as we are working toward building our own independent organisation to share responsibility and control over our network, women at our planning meetings agreed it is time to start asking ourselves who can join our network, how they can join our network, and what roles and responsibilities network members should have. Having these yarns at our forum, led us to describe different types of membership our network should have to stand on our own feet.

LEADING MEMBERS

We agree that decisions about our network should be made by the people who the network is for: strong Indigenous women of the Northern Territory. We want this part of our network to include good strong leaders, women who work as a team, and support their communities to stay strong. We also want to include Indigenous women looking to learn from others, build their confidence, and find mentors.

At our forum, we agreed that you should not need any prior experience or qualification to access this kind of membership, as long as you are an Indigenous woman living in the Northern Territory, and are over 18 years of age. We agree that there should be different ways to apply for this membership, so that it is accessible to all women. We would like to see both online and paper forms shared via email, social media, a website, the post, or in person at forums. We want forms in both English and Kriol, and would like our Message Sticks Group (see pages 26-27) to help women complete their membership forms if required.

We agreed that all members of our network should be willing to pay an annual membership fee, and suggested 30 AUD as an annual fee for our leading members.



This fee would give leading members access to a membership pack with:

- invitations to network events
- opportunities to influence and participate in decision making within our network, by nominating for the Message Sticks Group and/or providing feedback on their work at forums, meetings, and through surveys
- a password protected login for our website, with full access to photos, videos, member contact information, and chat facilities
- a subscription to our newsletter
- merchandise such a shirt and bag.

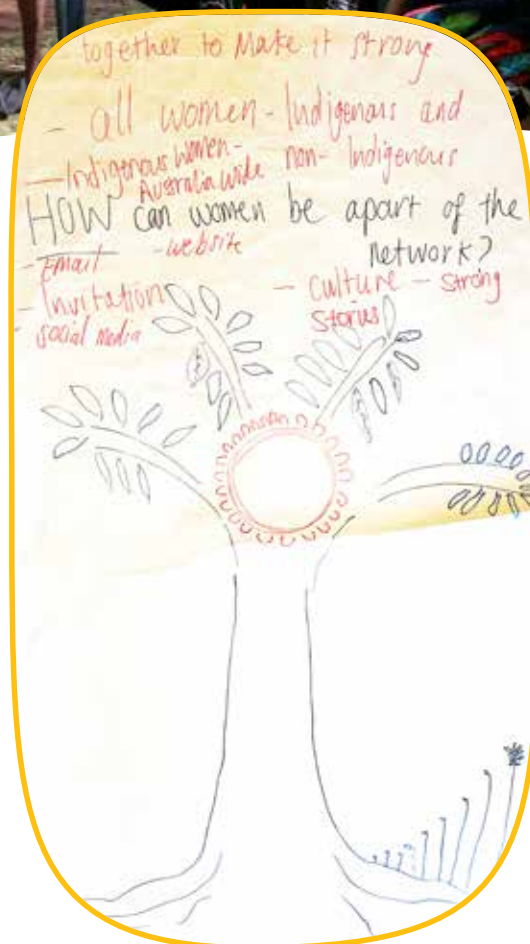
LISTENING MEMBERS

At our forum, we agreed we want to walk side by side as Indigenous and non-Indigenous women. We want women all over Australia to be able to stand with us in solidarity, and help us amplify our united voice. We believe we will be stronger if we let our supporters join us in our network, not as leaders or decision makers, but as listening members, who are willing to learn about our worldview and approach.

We agreed that listening members should be able to join our network for an annual membership fee of 50 AUD. While we don't want any non-Indigenous person to be able to simply buy access to our network events, we do agree that this fee would give listening members a membership pack with:

- a password protected login to our website, with access to some of our photos, videos, and platforms to raise issues with leading members
- a subscription to our newsletter
- merchandise such as bags and t-shirts.

While we welcome the support of the Indigenous and non-Indigenous men in our families, communities, and workplaces, and acknowledge that these men need our support as much as we need theirs, we agreed at our



forum that our Strong Women for Healthy Country Network is not the right space for this. We want our network to be a dedicated support structure for women, to create both physical and online spaces and events for us to speak freely.

OTHER SUPPORT FOR OUR NETWORK

Yarning about our supporters joining our network to demonstrate their solidarity got us thinking about our corporate supporters, partners, and funding bodies. We agreed that – like our individual members – any future corporate supporters, partners, and funders should share our values and be aligned with our vision. While we are proud of our partners supporting our network and forums so far, a simple set of guidelines or a policy statement could be useful to support the Message Sticks Group in making decisions about sponsorship, partnerships, and funding agreements, and would clarify the values and ethics we are hoping to uphold in these relationships.

Connecting with women's spaces in communities

We started this yarn about connecting with women's spaces in our communities, by identifying different types of women's spaces such as women's shelters, women's centres, women's cultural sites, women's healing groups, women's camps, and women's ranger activities.

We then mapped our existing women's spaces that we would like connect with through our network.

SUMMARY

DIFFERENT TYPES OF WOMEN'S SPACES

1. SAFE HOUSE - escape DV
- bag stay if needed
WOMEN'S SHELTER - emergency care
→ open to any woman during the day
2. WOMEN'S CENTRES
- place to do activities, discuss issues, ask for help, solve problems, learn new skills
3. WOMEN'S CULTURAL SITES
- visit, pass on knowledge, camp there, look after them, remember the elders stories
4. WOMEN'S HEALING CENTRES
- bush medicines
- rub you, smoking ceremonies
5. CAMPS & ROADTRIPS
- time to think, have fun, relax



OUR WOMEN'S SPACES

who has them?

- Bulman's Women's Centre (Harold been open for long time)
- Santa Teresa Duckbush
- Tennant Creek - Karla Karla, Kunjara, Women's Centre
- Dinnijau's Women's Group
- Tea Tree Art Centre, women's Sugar Sister, safety house
- Ntaria - Palm Valley Women's Camp - women's rangers office
- Tiwi - Wangatunga Strong Women's Centre
- Nhokulla Art Centre, CDF Women's Program + Women's children's group
- Mwendu Women's Centre, Southern Ngalm Dance Group
- Mili Kapiti Safe House
- Borroloola Women's Shelter
- Garden Point Women's Centre
- Yulkahoti Women's Centre
- Anindilyakwa Strong Women's Group
- Papunya Art Centre,
- Anpekeke Young Mums DV Centre
- Katharina Women's Shelter
- Wosca Women's Safety Shelter - AS
- Alukere - ASprings
- NLC CFC Branch Women's Centre
- Barrunga Women's Football League
- Ngukurr Safe House
- Lajamanu Women's Safe House
- Antsoarra Arts Centre

Planaranga Idia Women's Centre
Hortz Range Camps on Country

These dedicated women's spaces in our communities give us shelter from violence, and emergency care.

“Women need safe spaces from domestic violence, like women's shelters.” – Amy Nelson

They also offer some respite from the intense pressures and responsibilities women face day-to-day in their lives.

“To shelter and feel safe we need a lot of women's spaces in our community, to talk about women's things, to relax, get way from humbug.” – Helen Wilson

They give us a safe space to talk about our body and our mental health, and can help us with women's health check-ups, but also customary healing and rituals such as smoking ceremonies.

“We need women's spaces to keep them away from depression to keep away from bad spirits.”
– Salbena Cleary

Women's spaces can help us connect with our families and our culture. Women spending time together on Country is vital for us to be able to share knowledge with the next generation. We want to be able to teach our children about bush tucker, bush medicine, hunting, seasonal calendars, weaving, skin groups, moieties, kinship systems, totems, the right way and time to do ceremonies, body markings for Dreamings, and sacred sites. Some of the knowledge we have cannot be shared with men, and it is important for us to have time on Country without men.

“We need cultural spaces to support girls developing into women.” – Solodi Buthungguliwuy

At our forum, we also spoke about the importance of women's only spaces at work. This is not only a safety issue: when we feel comfortable at work, it is easier to speak our mind, build our confidence, and learn new skills. When it comes to our caring for Country programs, we want to learn new skills to tackle new threats to our Country, such as invasive species and climate change. We also want to see women in leadership and governance roles. To support us to do this, we need safe spaces for women in our offices, as well as women's ranger camps, and opportunities to do ranger activities without men.

Not many people from outside of our communities understand how important our dedicated women's spaces are. Many of our women's spaces are under resourced to be able to provide reliable transport, adequate infrastructure, IT resources, two-way



language resources and interpreter services, or equal access for people with disabilities. Some of our communities no longer have dedicated women's spaces at all! This means that some women are left behind, and cannot access emergency shelter, critical mental health and wellbeing support, or engage in urgent intergenerational knowledge transfer.

We see a role for our network and Message Sticks Group attracting more support for our women's spaces, by articulating their immense value to us. Not only can we draw more attention from external funders and Governments to our women's spaces to increase available resources, we can also play a key role in connecting different groups that support women in our community to each other, such as connecting our health providers, cultural healers, and bush doctors. We can also talk with people involved in building two-way programs in our communities (such as learning on Country programs at schools, ranger programs, or language, arts, and music programs) about the importance of dedicated spaces for women, so they might support us by organising events or activities that are just for women. This is especially pressing in communities that do not have safe spaces for women to spend time together!

We agree that part of being a strong woman in our network, means spending time with our local women's spaces in our communities, to share what we have learnt at our forum, and reach out to women to join future Strong Women for Healthy Country activities.



Our Message Sticks Group

At the 2021 forum at Banatjarl, women from over 20 communities put their hand up to maintain communication across our network, and to plan our 2022 forum, at online Message Stick meetings every two months. Women agreed that we need to decide what the role of this Message Sticks Group should be beyond our 2022 forum, what values we need women in this group to uphold, and what the process should be for joining this group.

THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF OUR MESSAGE STICKS GROUP

At our 2022 forum, we agreed that our Message Sticks Group should continue to be responsible for maintaining communication throughout our network, and planning our forums and other network activities and collaborations.

“Message Sticks is an important thing to get communication back to the group, we don’t want to lose it.” – Shantelle Miller

However, we agree that as our network continues to develop, the responsibilities of our Message Sticks Group will also continue to grow.

At our forum, we therefore entrusted our Message Sticks Group with additional responsibilities:

- making decisions about our network up until our next forum
- working closely with Mimal Land Management to build our own structure and transition our network into our own organisation
- working together as a united voice, advocating for our network.

WHO DO WE NEED IN OUR MESSAGE STICKS GROUP

During our yarns about our Message Sticks Group, we agreed that we want this group to include both Elders and young women, women who are formally employed as rangers and women who are not, women from different regions across the Northern Territory, and women from different clan groups and skin names. We want every Indigenous woman caring for Country in the Northern Territory to have someone in our Message Sticks Group that they know and trust.

We also want women in our Message Sticks Group to be confident, outspoken, respectful, compassionate, reflective, and supportive. They need to have basic IT skills and be politically savvy. We need women in our Message Sticks Group to be committed to building two-way collaborations, upholding our Law, supporting women in our communities, and focused on our shared goals and vision.



WHO IS IN OUR MESSAGE STICKS GROUP UNTIL OUR NEXT FORUM

We talked to women about joining our Message Sticks Group every day of our forum, and encouraged women to sit down with the women they travelled with, and talk to them about the Message Sticks Group's role and responsibilities. On the last day of our forum, we stepped into different concentric circles, to symbolise our different roles and responsibilities within our network (see pages 28-29). Kitana Shaw, Jody Kopp, Helen Wilson, Dianne Stokes, Madeleine Dixon, Charmaine Mingirrirr, Julie Roy, Sheila White, Karen Noble, Gennivea Aplin, Rosemary Potts, Sophia Simon, Virginia Nundhirribala, Serena Bara, Nikita Puruntatameri, Marbine Austral, Gladys Meilberr, Solodi Buthanguliwuy, Charlene Bangarr, Nyemburr Mununggurra, Andrea Andrews, Josephine Brinjen, Shantelle Miller, Vanessa Murray, and Jasmin Daly all stepped forward as our new Message Sticks Group. These women addressed all women at our forum.

"So, first of all, I just wanted to say that first and foremost, I am a grandmother. So, it's my responsibility, like each and every one of you Aboriginal women here – our responsibility – to continue to practice grandmother Law, and it's through forums like this, and when we go out and we do our bush trips and we do the transferring of cultural knowledge. But also teaching, our next generation. But also, those people that are in the gaps, our stolen mob, that don't know who their family are. It's about teaching because we made a commitment to each and every one of us here at this forum, that we will leave no one behind, and we will walk together as one. We will be transparent, we will be inclusive, and we'll also be humble, and we'll be kind, and we'll guide with love. Because that's what Aboriginal women do. We lead with love, because we are grandmothers, because we are mothers, because we are sisters, and that's how we lead. We lead with love, kindness and care. I'm so so proud to be in front of all of you. I'm an open book people, anything you want to know, you ask me. I'm an Eastern Central Arrernte woman. I know that when I walk, and when I talk, it's not just me. I have a cultural responsibility, just like all of you mob: to stand up, for my grannies, my grandmother, my great grandmothers. I know that when I walk, I walk in their footsteps, and together on that journey we will all walk as one, with one footstep."

– Jody Kopp



Our network structure

We want to design how we want our network to function and what decision-making processes should support this, before deciding on a legal structure to underpin our network. Mimal Land Management is proudly auspicing our network while we work this out. This gives us an opportunity to build rules and policies that work for us, uphold our Law, and support our goals and vision.

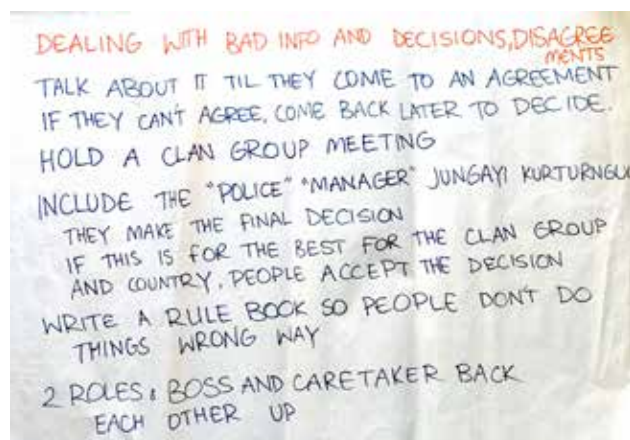
“From the ground roots up, that’s how we can make things happen.” – Serena Bara

At our forum, we started yarning about what good decision making looks like. We talked about our customary decision making processes, and our Law that we want to uphold in our decision making today. We agree that good decisions are made when Elders and young people can mentor each other, when people from different Countries work together to share responsibility for their decisions, and when decision makers are good listeners, are open minded and can work with people with different worldviews.

“We don’t need cultural advisors. They have the cultural advisors within themselves.”

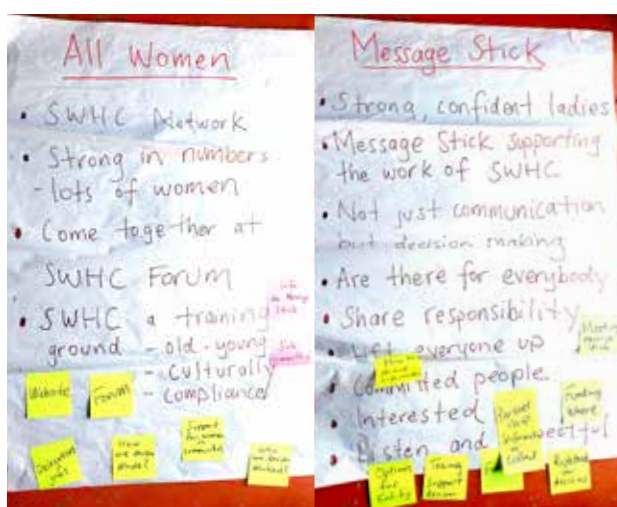
– Andrea Andrews

We also reflected on different strategies to approach disagreements.



We then started talking about all the different decisions we may need to make as a network, especially as we transition our network from Mimal Land Management to our own organisation. Eventually, we were able to start assigning different kinds of decisions to the different components of our network.

We recognise that we will need to further develop our governance structures as our operations grow and our needs become more complex. We did discuss how in the future our network could include working groups and subcommittees to take on specific tasks within our network.



At our forum, we placed our trust in the Message Sticks Group to work closely with Mimal Land Management to further develop our plans for our own organisational structure, and expect them to report back to us at our next forum.

On the last day of our forum, we physically acted out how the different layers of our network will support each other to address our priorities, achieve our goals, and realise our vision. Under the close supervision of Annette Miller – Elder of the Rembarnga and Dalabon peoples from Central Arnhem Land and a key instigator of our network – we joined hands in a circle of 200 Indigenous and non-Indigenous strong women. We all committed to walking side by side, supporting each other as part of our Strong Women for Healthy Country Network.

All Indigenous women then took a big step forward towards the centre of our circle. All Indigenous women committed to spending time and sharing information with our local women's spaces in our communities then took another big step forward.

All Indigenous women interested in online Message Stick meetings took another big step forward. Finally, all Indigenous women committed to coming to every single online Message Stick meeting every two months took a big step forward.

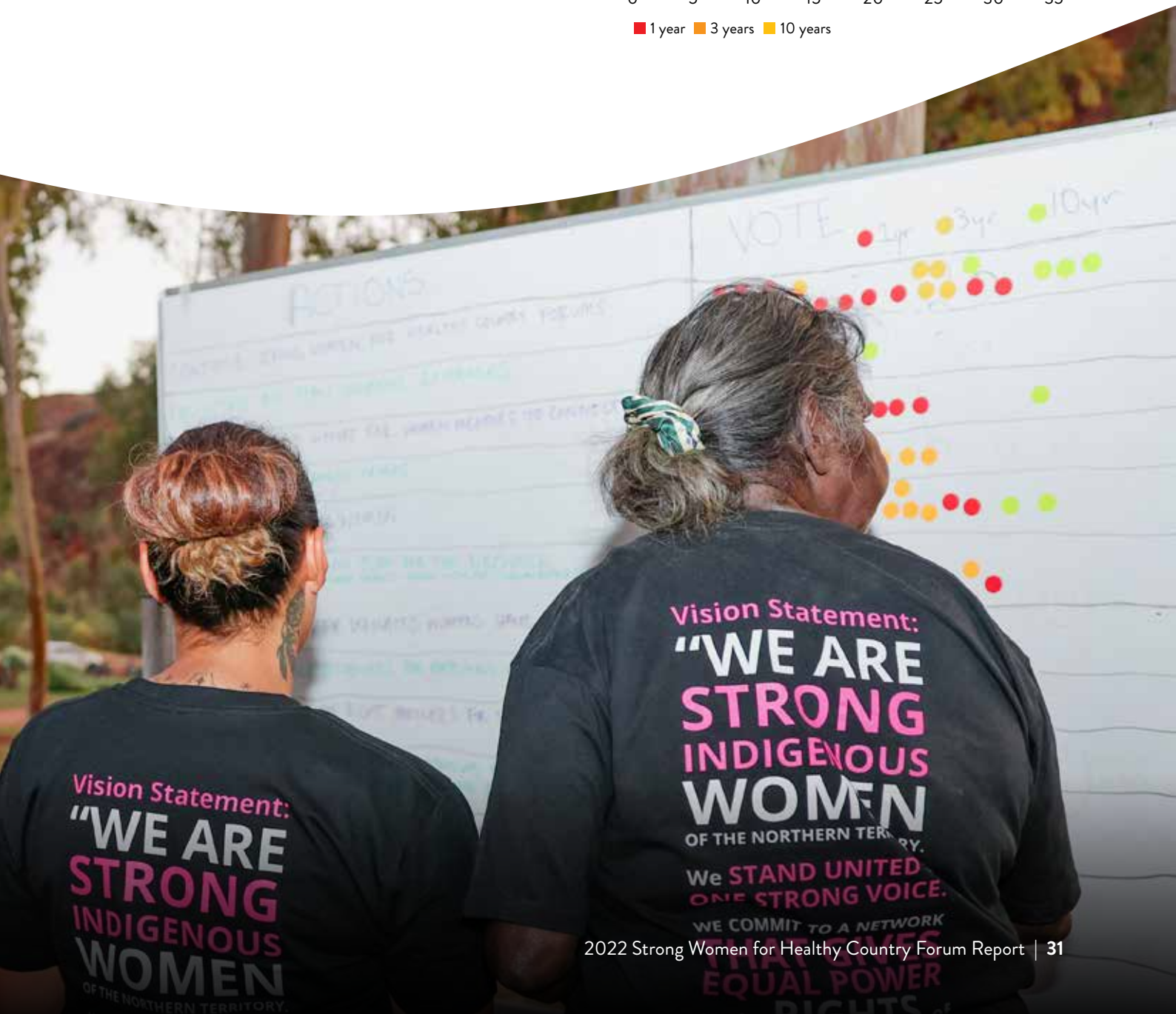
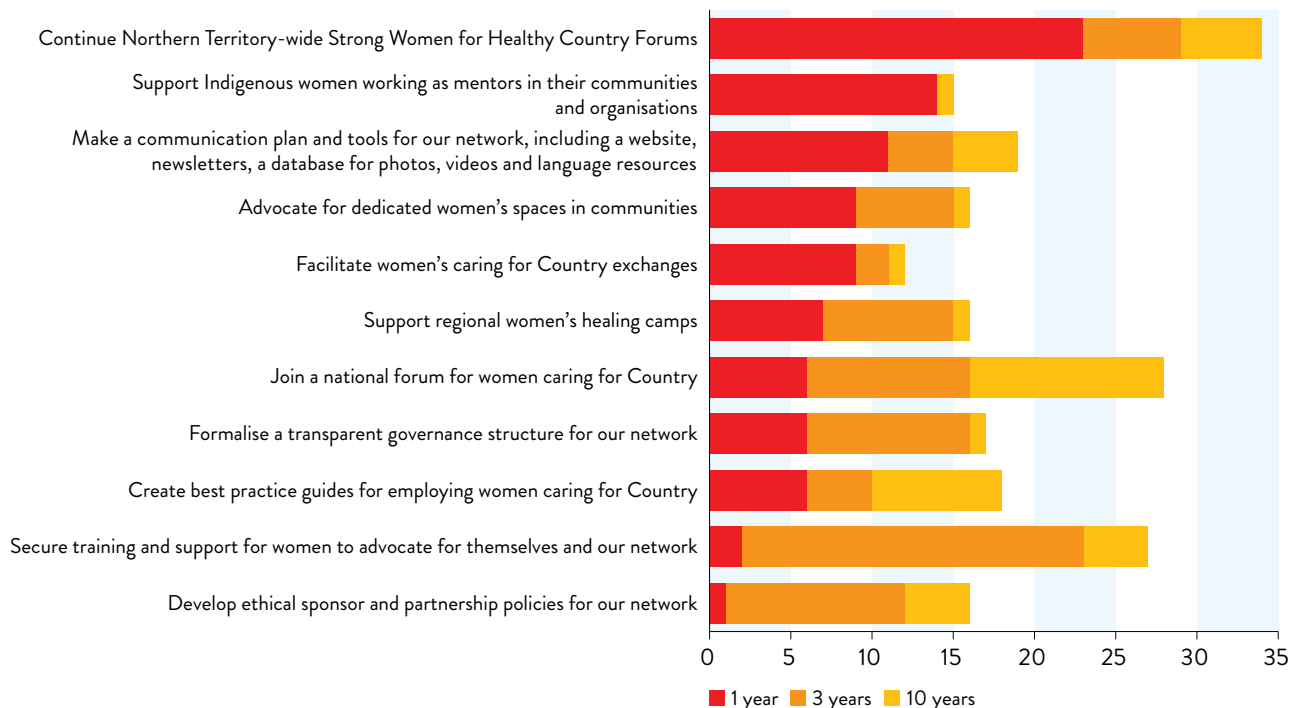
All the concentric layers of this circle represented the different layers of our network: all were formed by strong women, taking on different kinds of responsibility within our network to support each other. We discussed what values and skills we want to see in our Message Sticks Group, checked with everyone whether there were enough women across different generations and areas in the centre of our circle, and importantly whether everyone recognised someone there who they know and trust. Once we were confident that these were the right women to support us as our Message Sticks Group, Annette asked them to sit down. Everyone at the forum burst into an applause!

“We took together as strong women. I see young women can lead and continue to develop strategies to help us with the struggles that we have faced. What I'd like to say in spirit is: we need to stand up and be counted. See the light at the end of the tunnel, and just don't worry about things as we take when we do our forums. You know, just be happy, and keep working together. This is how I feel about you ladies coming together: it means a lot to me. I see young women coming together here, at this forum. Coming together from different parts of the Territory, and seeking that help for what we face in our communities. I hope that one day, one of you ladies, from your communities, will become strong, confident, and a leader, to lead your community coming to this forum, such as this, and continue working together.” – Annette Miller

Our priorities

All the recommendations we made during our yarns about collaborating, communicating, and advocating as a network were synthesised into eleven actions. These were listed on a white board and presented back to us at the beginning of the final day. We had the whole day to visit the whiteboard and sort our actions into short-, medium-, and long-term priorities with help from our teams, facilitators, and notetakers. We used red stickers to mark actions we prioritise within one year, orange stickers to mark actions we want to take within three years, and yellow stickers to mark actions that we want to take over 10 years.





CONTINUE NORTHERN TERRITORY-WIDE STRONG WOMEN FOR HEALTHY COUNTRY FORUMS

We see our Strong Women for Healthy Country Forum as the penultimate opportunity to communicate, collaborate and advocate with women across the Northern Territory. Women 'standing up and speaking out' is inspiring, it fills us with good feelings and pride to see so much action by women on Country. We also agree that time away from other responsibilities allows us to focus on making new ideas and collaborating with others towards real outcomes without distraction. We value a forum program that includes a combination of structured spaces such as workshops, as well as less structured spaces such as our art space, as this has allowed us to collaborate and communicate effectively with each other. We also see our forum as a powerful platform to advocate for action: our forum is an expression of us standing together as a network. Sharing our forum story widely across the Northern Territory and Australia will help generate recognition for women caring for Country and ultimately support for our priorities, bringing us closer to realising our vision. Continuing our forums is key to achieving all our other priorities identified here.

SUPPORT INDIGENOUS WOMEN WORKING AS MENTORS IN THEIR COMMUNITIES AND ORGANISATIONS

We see a key role for our network in attracting more support for our mentors, and connecting them with appropriate mental health support and each other. At our forum, we suggested we could work together as a network to:

- draw attention to and encourage remuneration for the difficult and important work women mentors are already doing in the workplace, such as guiding younger women to build their workplace skills and cultural knowledge, and inducting new staff and visitors to communities
- promote and link up effective mentoring programs for workplaces, such as the Central Land Council's mentorship program
- provide safe spaces for mentors to connect and share their experiences with each other, such as online support groups, or dedicated workshops for mentors at our Strong Women for Healthy Country Forums
- provide leadership training, mentorship training, and wellbeing support to the Message Sticks Group.



MAKE A COMMUNICATION PLAN AND TOOLS FOR OUR NETWORK, INCLUDING A WEBSITE, NEWSLETTERS, A DATABASE FOR PHOTOS, VIDEOS AND LANGUAGE RESOURCES

We want to communicate as a network, so women caring for Country across the Northern Territory are sharing their successes, learning from each other, and staying informed about their network. We want to make sure that communication within and from our network is culturally responsible and that there are processes and tools in place to make sure no one is left behind. Our communication plan should strive to include:

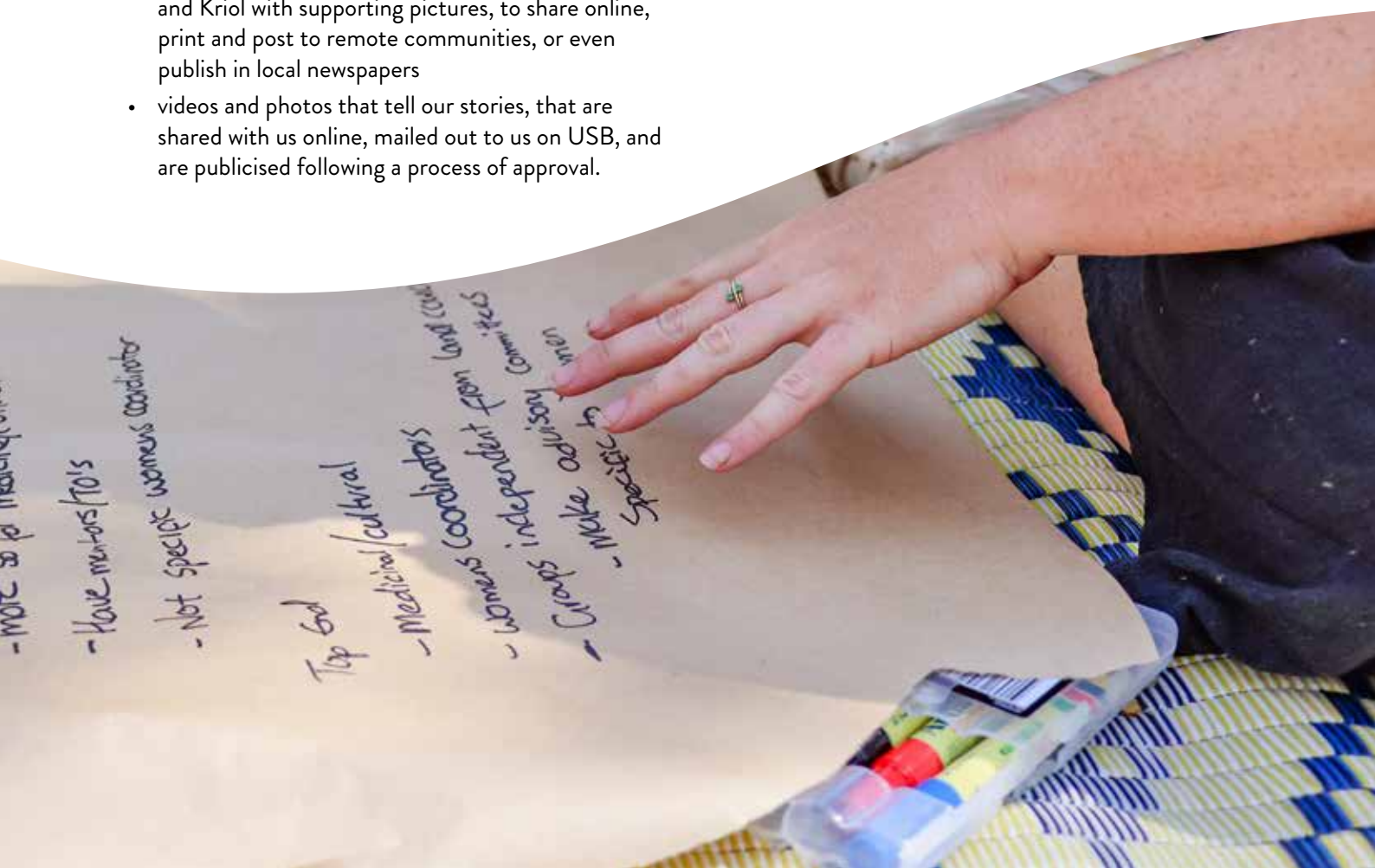
- a website that promotes our network and activities, stores information and photos from forums, holds contact details for members, and hosts a 'member portal' for women to manage their own information and activities
- an up-to-date Facebook page that promotes our work
- chat facilities such as Facebook Messenger and Microsoft Teams
- a dedicated Message Stick email address
- in person Message Stick meetings in remote communities
- newsletters that are shared online and printed and posted out to remote communities
- one-page informative posters to summarise outcomes of meetings or key events, in English and Kriol with supporting pictures, to share online, print and post to remote communities, or even publish in local newspapers
- videos and photos that tell our stories, that are shared with us online, mailed out to us on USB, and are publicised following a process of approval.

ADVOCATE FOR DEDICATED WOMEN'S SPACES IN COMMUNITIES

Many of our priorities outlined in this report include creating dedicated events and activities for women caring for Country. However, at our forum we also identified existing women's spaces within our communities such as women's shelters, women's centres, women's cultural sites, women's healing groups, women's camps, and women's ranger activities.

These dedicated women's spaces in our communities give us shelter from violence, respite from community pressures, support for our wellbeing and confidence, and can help us connect with our families and our culture. They give us a safe space to talk about our body and our health, including our mental health. They are vital for us to be able to share knowledge with the next generation, especially knowledge that can only be shared with women such as stories for women's sacred sites.

Not many people from outside of our communities understand how important our dedicated women's spaces are. Many of our women's spaces are under supported, and some of our communities no longer have any space that is just for women. We see a role for our network and Message Sticks Group in articulating the value of our women's spaces, and attracting more support for them.



FACILITATE WOMEN'S CARING FOR COUNTRY EXCHANGES

We see exchanges between ranger groups and other community-based organisations as deeply valuable collaborative experiences. Women want their own employers to have greater capacity and responsibility to organise regular exchanges between different regions and organisations, as part of their work plans. Our network can support this, by:

- lining up women's caring for Country exchanges at our Strong Women for Healthy Country Forums
- sourcing funding through strategic partnerships, such as the WWF-Australia Women's Exchange Program
- assisting women and their employers to organise travel, accommodation, or other logistics if required
- developing a planning tool to match caring for Country exchange participants, asking women and their employers to consider what they are hoping to achieve with an exchange, how they will support participants, how they will involve Elders, who else needs to be involved, and what support they need.

SUPPORT REGIONAL WOMEN'S HEALING CAMPS

We want more opportunities to camp on Country together. Being on Country brings us strength. We want our ranger groups and land councils to continue to support camps on Country, but see a role for our network in connecting women from different organisations to camp together regularly and across different regions. We also want our camps to extend beyond ranger groups, to include women from all different ages and generations working together. In addition to using our camps to build our land management skills, we want to work with our Elders to keep our healing practices, knowledge, culture, and Law strong.

JOIN A NATIONAL FORUM FOR WOMEN CARING FOR COUNTRY

A national forum would enable us to collaborate, communicate, and advocate with women from other places and would help us realise our vision. A nation-wide forum would also showcase the strength and success of all women involved, and would be a powerful microphone for our united voice. We consider this a long-term aspiration to work towards and understand that a national forum requires research and development building on our own Northern Territory-based network and forums. We hope to work towards a national forum by:

- supporting caring for Country exchanges with women beyond the Northern Territory
- extending our communication plan to include women caring for Country beyond the Northern Territory
- supporting women in the Message Sticks Group to join interstate forums and talk to other women about our network and forums, and learn about theirs
- seeking funding opportunities to support the development of a national forum.



FORMALISE A TRANSPARENT GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE FOR OUR NETWORK

Our ambition is to first design how we want our network to function and what decision-making processes should support this, before deciding on a legal structure to underpin our network. Mimal Land Management is proudly auspicing our network while we work this out.

This gives us the flexibility to use this Strong Women for Healthy Country Strategy that we have designed at our forum as a foundation to build rules and policies that work for us, uphold our Law, and support our goals and vision. At our forum, we placed our trust in the Message Sticks Group to oversee this work.

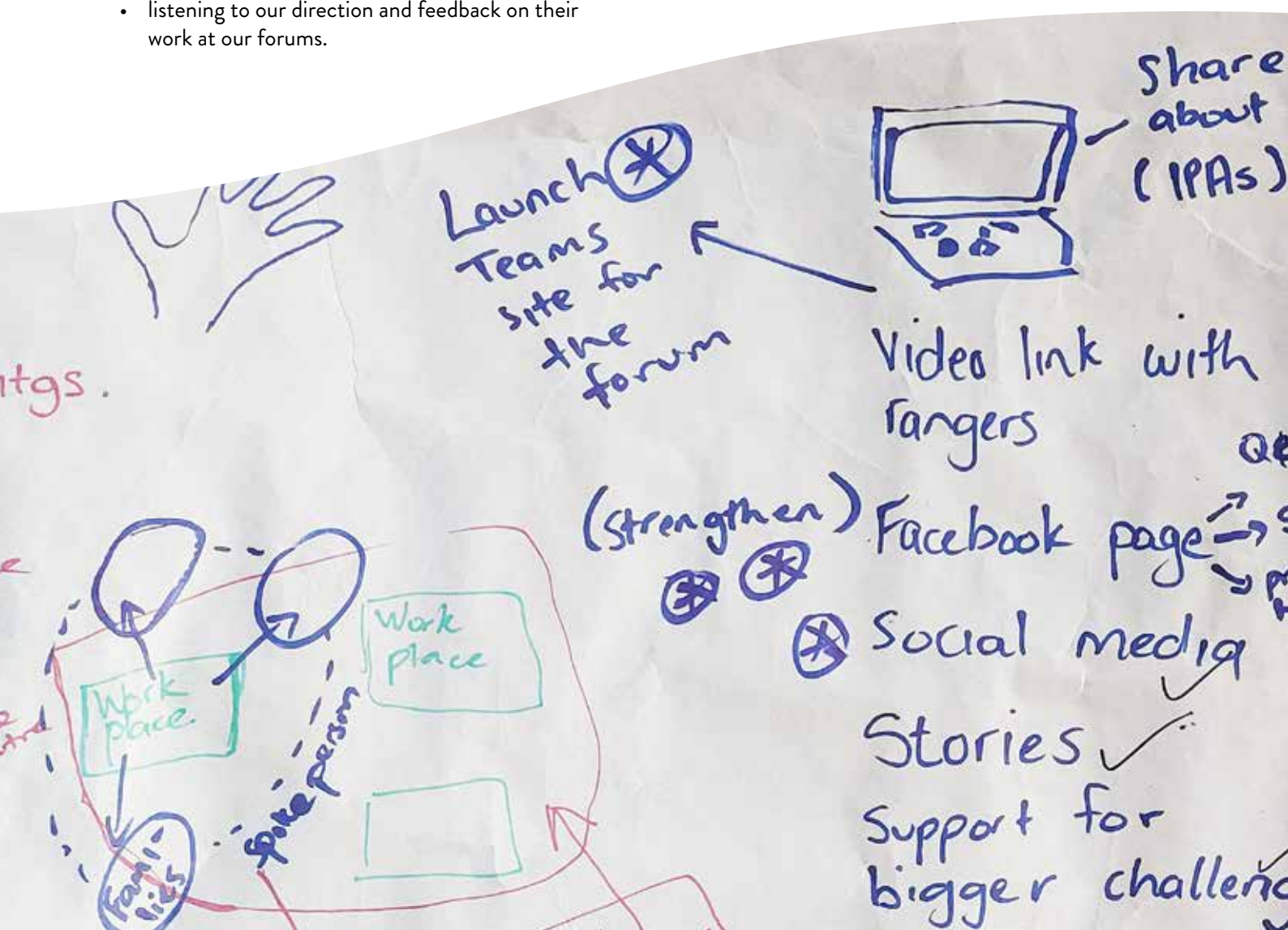
For their work to effectively support our collaboration, communication, and advocacy goals, we need to have a clear understanding of how our network functions and what our Message Sticks Group is working on. Women in our Message Sticks Group will keep us updated and informed by:

- spending time with local women's spaces in their communities, and telling women in their organisations about their work
- sharing summaries of Message Stick meetings in emails and newsletters
- listening to our direction and feedback on their work at our forums.

CREATE BEST PRACTICE GUIDES FOR EMPLOYING WOMEN CARING FOR COUNTRY

We see an opportunity to influence our employers, by working together to create workplace guidelines for employing women. These guidelines would be a useful tool both for employers looking to support women caring for Country, and for women looking to advocate for themselves in the workplace. Women at the forum suggested these guidelines should outline approaches to:

- understand systemic barriers in the workplace to women caring for Country
- promote women's safety in the workplace
- raise cultural awareness among non-Indigenous employers and colleagues
- support mentorship by women for women
- provide dedicated professional development and training opportunities for women
- support women in understanding and negotiating contracts, workplace expectations, workplace rights and where to go for help
- monitor and evaluate how supportive a workplace is for women caring for Country.

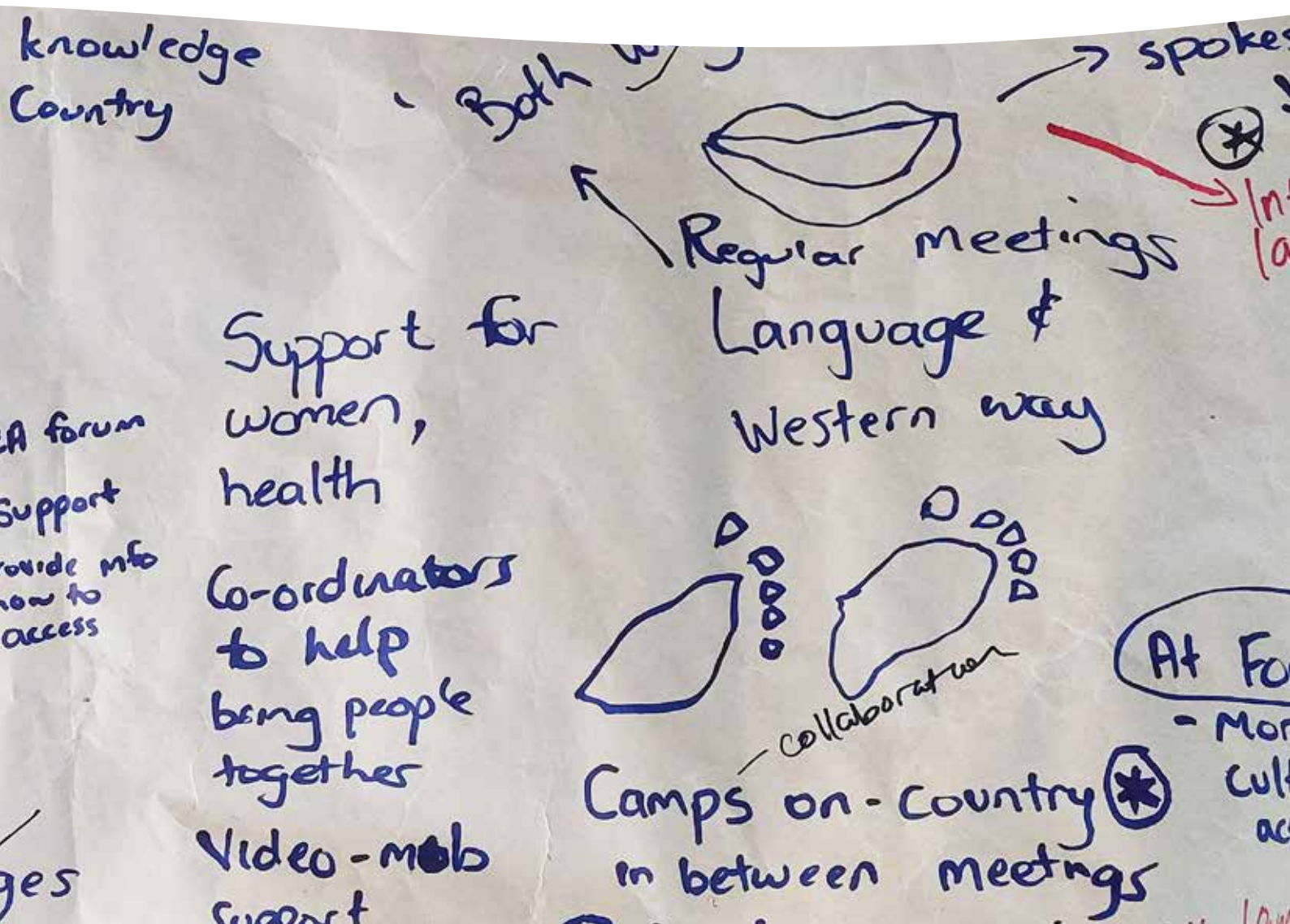


SECURE TRAINING AND SUPPORT FOR WOMEN TO ADVOCATE FOR THEMSELVES AND OUR NETWORK

Many of us are already advocating for ourselves and our communities. We would like to improve our advocacy skills and see more women standing up for themselves. We want to build our own skills to lead and self-advocate, but also to advocate for each other and our shared goals and vision. We see events like our forum as opportunities for this kind of professional development. Giving presentations and speaking up in front of a crowd have been effective ways to improve public speaking skills and confidence. Some of us have participated in leadership programs and want to see other women having the same opportunities. We also want to mentor each other in self-advocacy, so strong women can learn from strong women. We agree that feeling strong in oneself and being able to speak up can enable women to make better decisions for themselves, their families and their communities.

DEVELOP ETHICAL SPONSOR AND PARTNERSHIP POLICIES FOR OUR NETWORK

Women at our forum understood that sponsorship, partnerships and funding are all necessary to the functioning and strength of our network, to achieve our shared goals and vision. We consider nurturing relationships with sponsors, partners, and funders as a key responsibility of our Message Sticks Group. We are proud of our partners supporting our network and forums so far, and many women at our forum commented about feeling this way. However, women noted that future sponsors, partners, and supporters, should also share our values and be aligned with our vision. Women at our forum suggested a simple set of guidelines or a policy statement could be useful to support the Message Sticks Group in making decisions about sponsorship, partnerships, and funding agreements, and would clarify the values and ethics we are hoping to uphold in these relationships.





SHARING KNOWLEDGE ABOUT COUNTRY WITH THERESE RYDER

Eastern Arrernte women generously shared their knowledge about their Country with us throughout our forum. They taught us that the true name of the forum site is Inteye Arrkwe. They showed us which hills are safe to walk on, and which areas to avoid. They looked after us on their Country.

On the final day, Therese Ryder, the senior Traditional Owner, invited us to join her to visit important Dreaming sites on her Country. After a few radio checks, she led a convoy of dozens of cars into the dazzling afternoon sun!

At our first stop at the Lighting Dreaming, Therese challenged us to look at her Country differently:

“When I say ‘colours in the rocks’: an ordinary person looks at a hill like that, and hears me saying ‘lovely colours in the rocks’, and some might think ‘oh, there’s only one colour there!’ But to me, my eyes can see different colours. Because I’m an artist, I am a landscape artist.”

As we moved on to the Dancing Lubra site, she taught us that women have always gathered on her Country from far away. Her ancestors danced together at this place.

Finally, she took us to the mouth of N’Dhala Gorge, or Irlewetye. All the young women piled out of the four-wheel drives and trailed into the gorge, with Eastern Arrernte women leading the way!



*Senior Traditional Owner Therese Ryder
guiding the convoy with her radio*





MAKING BUSH MEDICINE WITH THE AKEYULERRE HEALING CENTRE

“Akeyulerre Healing Centre, owned and operated by Arrernte people, was set up in Mparntwe Alice Springs in Central Australia by Arrernte Elders to support and strengthen Arrernte culture and community. Still today we are keeping our language and culture strong and healing our families and communities by making bush remedies and supporting traditional healing for Arrernte families and communities.”

Amelia Turner, Tisha Carter, Virginia Perkins, Eva Hayes, Janisa Ryder, Julie Hayes, Marina Hayes, Marita McMillian, Patricia Webb, Roslyn Ryder, Shanta Turner, Shirleen Hayes, and Tiziana Turner from the Akeyulerre Healing Centre shared their knowledge and practices with us throughout the forum.

Many young women were drawn to these workshops, where they learnt to prepare different medicines under the expert supervision of Elders. These sessions were also special, because there were healers from all over the Northern Territory who were able to share knowledge with each other and connect with the Ngangkari from the Akeyulerre Healing Centre. By the end of the forum, we all had some bush medicine to take home with us!

Amelia and Tisha also shared their experience in building up a social enterprise based on Arrernte knowledge and Law, called Itentye. To read more about Itentye, visit: www.akeyulerre.org.au/itentye

To learn how to support the Akeyulerre Healing Centre’s incredible work, visit: www.akeyulerre.org.au/support-us

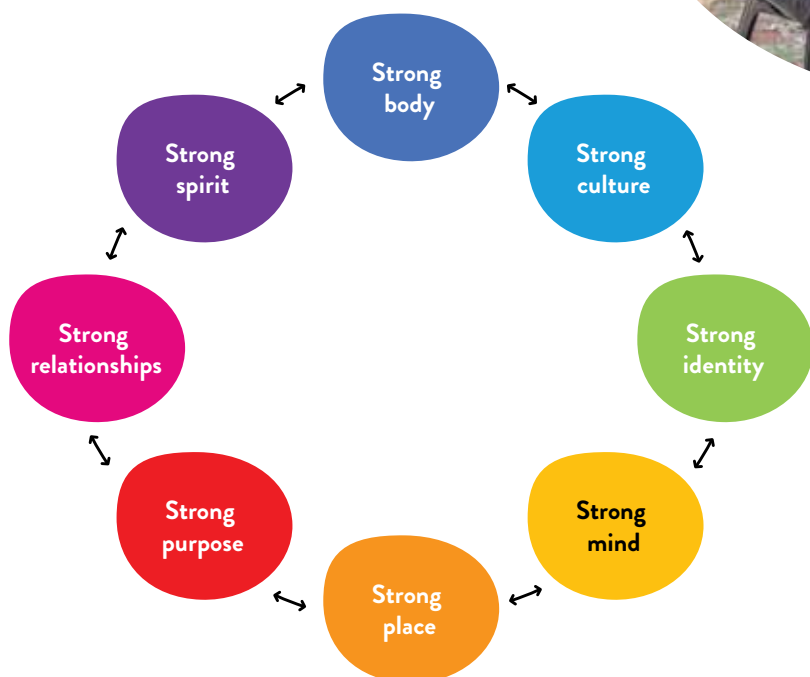


Amelia Turner from the Akeyulerre Healing Centre yarning with Jean Tiati from the Banatjarl Strongbala Wimun Grup



PRACTICING SELF-CARE WITH THE ALICE SPRINGS CHILD AND YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH TEAM

In this workshop, Tania Kells, Matilda Herben, and Stephanie Cochrane from the Alice Springs Child and Youth Mental Health Team supported women to draw on their connection to culture, spirit, and mind to build a self-care and wellbeing plan. They also invited women at the forum to share their ideas with each other, and their support staff and employers. Women shared the following ideas for staying strong across different aspects of life:



Ideas for keeping a strong body:

- eating and gathering bush tucker
- eating healthy food and avoiding junk food
- making and using bush medicine
- visiting Country and homelands
- doing a smoking ceremony
- doing exercise like firefighting and running
- getting plenty of sleep
- going to the clinic regularly for check-ups
- stopping smoking

Ideas for keeping a strong spirit:

- respecting our beliefs and spirits of our Countries
- calling out to and listening to ancestors
- spending time on cultural practices
- listening to Country
- listening to birds
- listening to other strong women
- bush walking
- enjoying quiet time
- traveling and visiting other families

Ideas for keeping a strong culture:

- being on Country
- spending time out bush and camping
- singing and dancing
- practicing ceremony
- teaching children about Country
- finding ways of respecting other cultures and two-way approaches
- showing respect and listening to Elders
- helping and supporting family

Ideas for keeping strong relationships:

- encouraging family and making them feel confident
- learning from other people
- keeping ourselves strong
- reaching out to friends and family for support
- building and maintaining communication skills
- speaking to good friends from different cultures and helping each other out

At the forum, women were also able to talk to Tania, Matilda, and Stephanie privately in the safe space, where they shared their professional assistance, support, and advice.

If you need ongoing mental health support, the following services are bulk billed and available over the phone if you have a referral from your clinic:

Big Sky Psychology – Online Psychology for Darwin & Remote Areas

www.bigskypsychology.com.au
info@bigskypsychology.com.au
0473 010 904

Remote Therapy Telehealth Psychology

www.remotetherapy.com.au
admin@remotetherapy.com.au
1300 813 307

The following services are available without a referral 24 hours a day, every day. If you need urgent assistance, please contact:

Emergency Services

000

Mental Health Assessment Team

1800 682 288

Lifeline's phone counselling service

13 11 14

Beyond Blue's phone counselling service

1300 224 636

Suicide Call Back service

1300 659 467

Thirrili's support for families impacted by suicide

1800 805 801

Yarnsafe's confidential over the phone yarning for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in crisis
13 92 76 (13 YARN)

Ideas for keeping a strong identity:

- passing on caring for Country knowledge and practices between Elders and young people
- being a strong leader and a good role model
- knowing our position – where we are from and who we are
- learning about Songlines and kinship
- laughing
- spending time with our peoples
- maintaining a job, like working in a ranger team
- doing things that make us feel more confident and less worried

Ideas for keeping a strong mind:

- remembering the old people's teachings
- being reflective and open minded, developing self-awareness
- listening to music
- making our own music
- singing traditional songs
- meditating
- volunteering or helping someone
- painting and weaving
- reading a good book
- avoiding drugs

Ideas for keeping a strong purpose:

- passing on strength to younger generations
- advocating, ensuring those around us have care and support
- working as a Djungkayi
- working as a ranger
- learning more about our jobs, reaching out for support at work
- being involved in education around language and culture
- going out bush and working on Country
- being a strong mum
- looking after our communities, workplaces, families

Ideas for keeping a strong place:

- doing ceremony
- practicing culture
- going out bush and being by ourselves
- being near the ocean
- working with plants
- storytelling
- visiting important places
- fishing and hunting
- learning more about where we come from
- living in community
- cleaning up and keeping community tidy



CHANGING THE PICTURE WITH OUR WATCH

Our Watch is an independent not-for-profit, and a national leader in the primary prevention of violence against women and their children. Our Watch works to challenge harmful attitudes, stereotypes, behaviours, social norms and practices on a systemic level. To learn more about Our Watch, visit: www.ourwatch.org.au

In 2018, after consultation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men and women across Australia, and with the guidance and advice of 11 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women on an advisory group, Our Watch compiled *Changing the Picture*. *Changing the Picture* is a national resource that contains a set of clear roles and actions that are needed to address the many drivers of violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women. To learn more about *Changing the Picture*, visit: www.ourwatch.org.au/resource/changing-the-picture

Our Watch is supporting the growth of a community of practice that applies the principles in *Changing the Picture* to prevent violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and their children. At the forum, Tracy Minniecon – a Gubbi Gubbi and Vanuatu woman – and Catriona Elder – a non-Indigenous woman – from Our Watch shared the *Changing the Picture* framework with us over four workshops. They focused on violence prevention in the workplace and wanted to learn more about what that looks like for women working as rangers. Together, we unpacked terminology such as ‘primary prevention’ and ‘intersectionality’.

We also discussed different drivers of violence in the context of ongoing settler colonialism, and what we can do to prevent more violence.

Tracy and Catriona reflected on their experience at our forum:

“We found the interactions and conversations to be rich and informative and were grateful that so many of the women seemed comfortable listening and were extremely generous sharing their knowledge and stories with us. Most of the women came to the workshop with other women from their community or workplace. We delivered in English and at times we would stop talking as our words were translated for women. There were young, middle and older women, and they were well aware of what family violence looks like. It was clear to us that as rangers they are already doing prevention work, especially with young women and men. Many asked for our details or to be able to take posters, fliers, copies of Changing the Picture Executive Summary with them. We had copies of all materials expecting to share. Many women stayed after the workshop to offer us guidance, share their resources and learn more about Our Watch.

We have kept in contact with some of the women and hope to keep in touch with Strong Women for Health Country and continue to share and learn.

*Thank you,
Tracy and Catriona”*

The key messages Our Watch wanted to share with us were:

- *Changing the Picture* is a resource designed for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and organisations.
- The material and actions in it come from communities, and women at the forum already have a deep understanding of the ideas it outlines.
- Many women caring for Country in Northern Territory are already doing prevention work at the same time as they are doing crisis or early intervention work.
- *Changing the Picture* can be adapted to meet the needs of specific communities or places.
- Intersectionality is an approach to prevention work that is designed to support the work in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Tracy and Catriona encourage you to get in touch with them directly to continue this important conversation, and to connect with other organisations working to prevent violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children:

Tracy Minniecon
Aboriginal and Torres Strait
Islander Lead
tracy.minniecon@ourwatch.org.au

Catriona Elder
Senior Advisor, Intersectionality
Catriona.Elder@ourwatch.org.au



STRONG WOMEN FOR HEALTHY COUNTRY ART SERIES

This year, we contributed another collaborative art piece to our Strong Women for Healthy Country Art Series, including the Gundung Mural from 2019 and the Message Sticks from 2021.

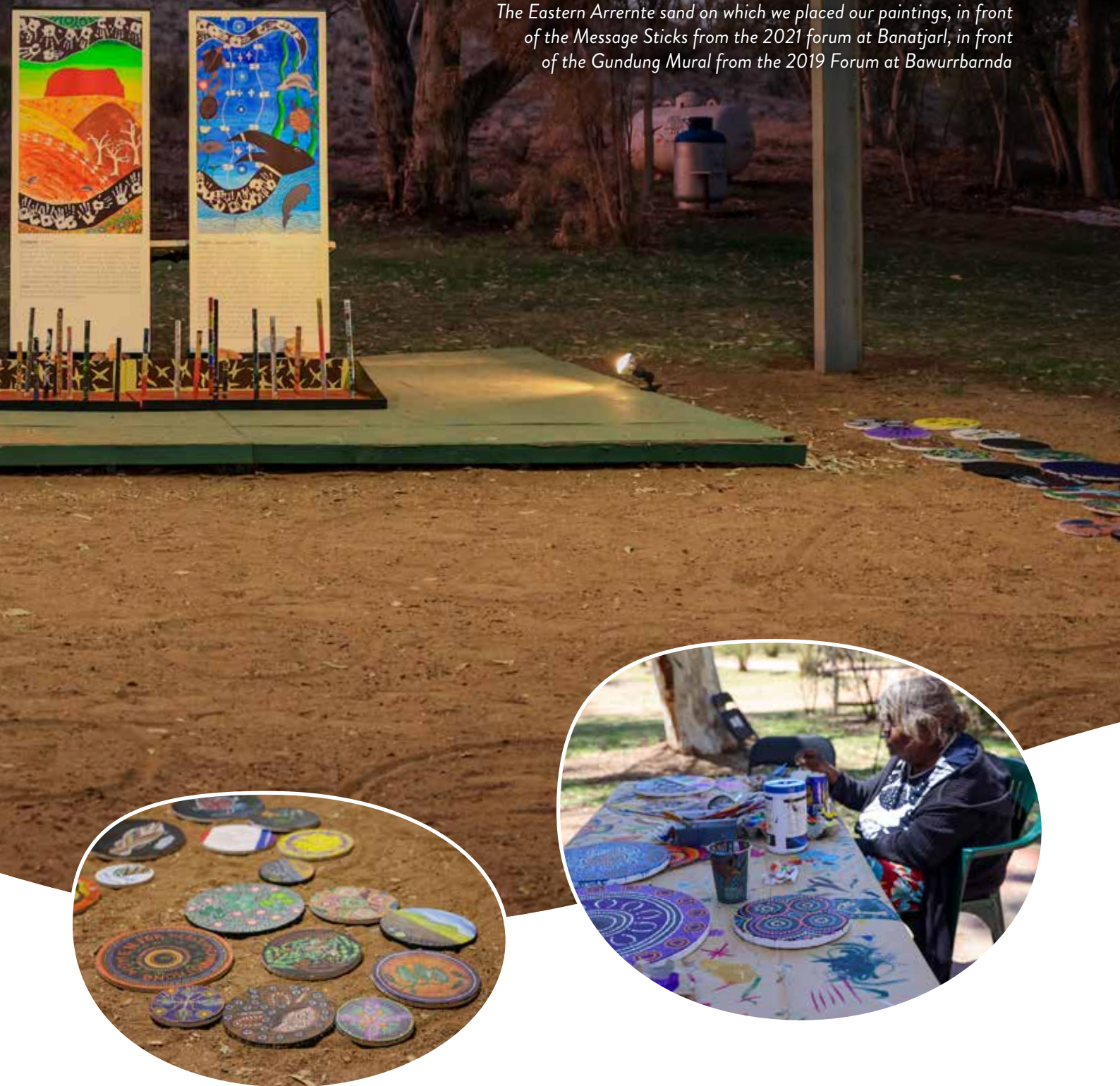
Gundung is the name of the mural that was created by women at the 2019 forum at Bawurrbarnda in Central Arnhem Land, with facilitation from Shantelle Miller, Shantae Mundul, and Karla McGrady.

“Gundung, in our language Rembarrnga, represents the sun that brings together the five elements of the sources of life: Gorl Gorlhk – night; Ngurra – fire; Muta – sun; Godgork – earth; Dularh – water. The rainbow serpent is the creator of all five elements and as us, belongs. Gundung unites people as one voice and one people. It connects women as one strong voice in Aboriginal society.” – Annette Miller

At our 2021 forum, we created the Message Sticks art piece to symbolise our enduring commitment to maintain communication with each other.

“The idea for the message stick art piece came from fellow artist and collaborator Shantelle Miller. Message sticks are a symbol of going back to old ways of communicating, the traditional cultural way. It’s how knowledge was shared. They were traditionally used as a mapping tool as well as passing on messages between clan groups, they gave direction, people would share information such as what you can expect along the journey, how to know where you’re going, the things you need to get to where you’re going. Women talked about how us Aboriginal people have used message sticks while painting them at the forum.” – Karla McGrady

The Eastern Arrernte sand on which we placed our paintings, in front of the Message Sticks from the 2021 forum at Banatjarl, in front of the Gundung Mural from the 2019 Forum at Bawurrbarnda



The idea for this year's collaborative artwork came from women who met at Ross River in May to plan the 2022 forum. There were women from Central Australia, including Eastern Arrernte women, and also women from the Top End. They wanted to be able to paint something that belongs to their Countries or themselves onto a circular canvas, and then connect all the canvases.

More than 100 women at the forum contributed a canvas to this artwork, with the support of Ziian Carey from the Babbarra Women's Centre. On the final night, we arranged these canvases in the sand in front of the Gundung Mural and Message Sticks, under the guidance of Shantelle Miller, an accomplished artist who initiated the 2021 artwork, and Helena Buzzacott, a custodian of the land on which the forum took place.

STRONG WOMEN FOR HEALTHY COUNTRY SONG

When women from the Top End and Central Australia met at Ross River to plan this forum in May, they agreed they wanted to create a Strong Women for Healthy Country Song. They were excited about inviting music stars who work with remote communities and promote women's voices. These music stars turned out to be excited to work with Strong Women for Healthy Country too! The replies from Dr Shellie Morris and Danielle Caruana included:

"I have been asked to collaborate with Danielle Caruana (Mama Kin) in a three-day song writing workshop to work with the women to create a new song that speaks to their aspirations and becomes an anthem for the Strong Women for Healthy Country Network."

"Last year, I was part of the event and saw the impact elevating the voices of these women and giving them agency over their own solutions for country and community. I firmly believe in this process as a way forward that will have flow on effects to the greater community."

– Dr Shellie Morris

"A forum like Strong Women for Healthy Country where women can drive change through the lens of their own experience, that is designed and delivered by the women themselves is incredibly powerful in itself, but we value add when we allow time to unpack the historical issues and create opportunities for shared experiences through song writing and performance."

– Danielle Caruana



Over the course of three days, we managed to write and perform this powerful anthem:

*We are strong women
From this Country
Standing together as one
Shouting out to the Spirit
To heal, to heal our land*

Chorus

*We stand united
Red, yellow and black
One blood one dream our voices
Taking our power back*

*Green, blue, white
Red, yellow and black
One blood one dream our voices
Taking our power back*

*Sending our stories
To all the women
All around the world
For our children, for our people
Fighting for our freedom
And our rights*

Chorus

*Marningnyu, Kungka, Daluk
Miyalk, Kama, Nawalang
Calling women's voices*

*Ji-Bardi, Galgagara,
Yirrudarringga, Li-Nanawah*

*All women crying
Mulliye crying*

*Hear the struggles of
Strong black women*

Time to hear us

Time to see us

Hear the journey of us

Strong black women

See the tears we've cried

From our eyes

We stand united

*Red, yellow and black
One blood one dream our voices
Taking our power back*

*Green, blue, white
Red, yellow and black
One blood one dream our voices
Taking our power back*

*We stand united
Red, yellow and black
One blood one dream our voices
Taking our power back*

*Green, blue, white
Red, yellow and black
One blood one dream our voices
Taking our power back
Taking our power back*

Reflecting on the song writing process, Solodi Buthanguliwuy from the Crocodile Islands Rangers said:

"It just touched my heart and I almost had to cry because there's a whole lot of strong women that are gathered here for this 2022 forum in Eastern Arrernte Country near Alice Springs. It's just lovely to see strong women standing, and gathering up, and sharing knowledge and information of what they do, and passing on to other people. It's just so amazing."



The Strong Women for Healthy Country Network is deeply grateful to the Eastern Arrernte Traditional Owners who hosted our forum, shared their culture, and watched over us throughout our stay on their Country.

We thank the Ngangkari from the Akeyulerre Healing Centre, for working so hard to make this forum a success, and for sharing their sacred knowledge and practices with us.

Our forum would not have been possible without the dedication of such skilful catering, facilitation, notetaking, logistics, site management, media, and healthcare teams. We would especially like to

thank the many incredible volunteers who joined these teams from right across Australia: Julie Pettett, Steph Thompson, Bonnie Gelman, Mandi Stewart, Ridhi Gupta, Hser Wah Po Kyaut, Deb Gillespie, Karina Smith, Alys Stevens, Julie Weston, Lille Madden, Mal Waters, Jacqui Arnold, and Jazz Jones.

We thank Mimal Land Management for their leadership in supporting us to grow our network and organise our forums. We would also like to thank all the land councils, independent ranger groups, and community organisations who supported women caring for Country from across the Northern Territory to join our forum.



The forum was hosted by Therese Ryder and her family

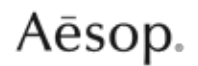


Volunteers travelled from across Australia to form a catering team



Facilitators and notetaker's team

We are grateful for the generous financial and in-kind contributions from our committed supporters:



Mimal and friends



Over 200 women caring for Country from across the Northern Territory contributed to the 2022 Strong Women for Healthy Country Forum Report, with facilitation from Kylie Burn, Alys Stevens, Kim Webeck, Billie Scott, Fiona Webb, Jody Kopp, Sam Kendall, and Jen Ansell. This report was prepared by Kate van Wezel, Alys Stevens, and Kylie Burn, with photographs by Marley Morgan. It was designed by Carly Cord-Udy, reviewed by the Message Sticks Group, and published in Darwin, Australia, by Mimal Land Management.

**“WE ARE
STRONG
INDIGENOUS
WOMEN
OF THE NORTHERN TERRITORY.**

**We STAND UNITED as
ONE STRONG VOICE.**

**WE COMMIT TO A NETWORK
THAT GIVES
EQUAL POWER
to the RIGHTS of
ALL OUR WOMEN.**

**STRONG WOMEN means
HEALTHY COUNTRY.”**

Strong Women for Healthy Country Vision Statement