

Social Capital & the Indigenous Entrepreneur



Wilfred ("Willie") Gordon at work, *Guurrbi Tours*, Hopevale

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SUCCESSIVE AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENTS, AT BOTH STATE AND FEDERAL levels, have been challenged for nearly thirty years by the lack of Aboriginal participation in the tourism industry. Yet, despite the articulated desire to encourage Indigenous entrepreneurship, Indigenous participation in Australia's tourism industry has been 'sporadic, small-scale and largely indirect' (Altman 1993, p.2), and most Indigenous tourism enterprises do not progress past the planning stage (ATSIC 1997). In 1997 it was estimated that there were only 200 Indigenous-owned tour operations in the country, many of which were fragile in terms of long-term sustainability (ibid.); and in 2001, out of 250 tour operations in New South Wales offering an Aboriginal product, only 39 were Aboriginal-owned (ATA undated).

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This paper is written in two voices: Wilfred (Willie) Gordon, a Traditional Owner from the remote Aboriginal Community of Hope Vale, Cape York, who had wanted to develop a tourism business for over a decade; and Judy Bennett, who helped him develop *Guurrbi Tours* and continued to assist him during the first two years of its operation. Together they collaborated in a participatory action research project, critically assessing how they went about developing his business, so that others could benefit from their experience.

Their findings demonstrate that the policy focus on developing enterprises, rather than enterprising people, has been detrimental to the growth of Indigenous entrepreneurship. Through experiential learning they show the vital role social capital plays in the development of the entrepreneur, the creation of an enterprise and its sustainability. And they demonstrate how Indigenous tourism entrepreneurship has the capacity to generate social capital, breaking intercultural barriers which have been in place for generations.

The paper also shows the real contribution academia can make in the fostering of Indigenous entrepreneurship through participatory action research, whilst generating a powerful and practical new knowledge which bridges the Indigenous and western worlds, the lived experience and the academic.

Understanding the context: entrepreneurship and social capital

Judy: Although there is no one single definition of entrepreneurship, in the tourism literature it is usually interpreted as ‘the process of creating new touristic enterprises’ (Koh 1996a, p.1) often by assumption rather than specific definition. However, businesses do not just spring up

unaided: they are the creation of individuals with the vision, motivation and determination to drive their dream forward (Bird 1992; Koh & Combs 2000). The vital role of the individual in enterprise creation has been acknowledged by ATSI¹ (1996, p.9) who note that one of the key elements of success in any business is ‘the commitment and effort of one or two individuals’. Even community enterprises that succeed, do so because of,

‘the financial and emotional commitment, enthusiasm and dedication of one or two people in each case. None are community-driven! None rely on an amorphous ‘community’ to get up at 5 am to clean a bus...’ (Burchett 1993, p.25).

Entrepreneurship is about action: it is ‘the ability to create and build something from practically nothing. It is initiating, doing, achieving, and building an enterprise or organization rather than just watching, analyzing or describing one’ (Timmons 1994, p.1). Entrepreneurship therefore requires people who are empowered: individuals who have the confidence and self-esteem to take responsibility for their actions, who believe they can control their own lives and influence change. Entrepreneurs are dreamers who *do* (Smilor 1997).

When I first arrived in Hope Vale, I was immediately struck by a pervading sense of powerlessness in the community – the antithesis of what was required to foster entrepreneurial action. Planning and time management were impossible as people had no idea what they would be doing from one day to the next: meetings were dropped on them from visiting government agencies, ‘helpers’ arrived unannounced and had to be catered for, cars might or might not work, emergencies had to be dealt with, and

1. ATSI – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission

threats of violence and family crises were the norm. Far from controlling their lives – a prerequisite for the entrepreneur - people went where the tide took them, outside forces dominating their actions.

There was a widespread sense of apathy, and the older people despaired of the lack of motivation amongst the young. One of the few active members of the community said, 'People are *tired*...getting people motivated...How do you get people *motivated*?' And a non-Indigenous health worker commented, 'I try to encourage the girls to come and get some work. They just say 'Why?' The desperate lack of jobs, the lack of meaningful work under the CDEP¹ scheme, and three generations of welfare dependency, had worn people down to a state of inertia.

The community was also sadly lacking in social capital – a vital ingredient for entrepreneurship (Johannisson 1988; Fafchamps and Minten 1999; Davidsson and Honig 2003). Social capital, in a western socio-economic context, is generally defined as those 'features of social organization, such as networks, norms, and trust, that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit' (Putnam 1993, pp.35-6). In Hope Vale, displacement, the mission system, welfare and substance abuse, had drastically undermined the culture of sharing and reciprocity, and the kinship structure through which social capital was generated. As a result the township lacked not only the weaker, extra-community ties, or *social bridges*, which help people to 'get ahead', but also the dense bonding networks of family and close friends - the *social glue* which establishes social control and generates trust and solidarity. Both types of social networks are necessary for entrepreneurship: the strong intra-communities ties pro-

vide the emotional and social support necessary to launch a business (Johannisson 1988; Renzulli et al. 1998; Aldrich 1999), whilst bridging ties access new knowledge and resources, and identify opportunities (Granovetter 1973, 1982; Aldrich 1999; Lin 2001). In short, entrepreneurial success is due to 'not just what you know but who you know' (Aldrich and Zimmer 1986, p.20).

Social capital also plays a significant role in empowerment (Wilson 1996) and in advancing the nascent entrepreneur through the entrepreneurship process (Davidsson and Honig 2003), so the concept was of particular interest to us in our collaborative action research project. And although social capital is more commonly regarded as a property of large aggregates, we were interested to see whether we could build social capital at the level of the individual for personal empowerment and entrepreneurship.

At the level of the individual, social capital has been referred to as 'sense of community' (Bennett 2005). Any community – whether a business community or a more general notion of society - is formed through relationships, by the creation of ties between individuals. It is therefore an individual's notion of community, or 'sense of community', which defines the boundaries of a community within which social capital is generated (Anderson & Jack 2000; Bennett 2005). The ingredients of 'sense of community,' in the Indigenous context, we found to be *identity, sense of belonging, and access to (one's own) resources*; all of which are encompassed by the Guugu Yimithirr word *warra* (Bennett 2005).

The following section explains how 'sense of community' was developed in the potential entrepreneur, and gives a valuable insight into the relationship between social capital, empowerment and entrepreneurship. At the same time it follows the development of *Guurrbi Tours* which launched in May 2003, exactly a year after Willie Gordon and I started working together. Willie's

1. CDEP – Community Development Employment Projects – a work for the dole programme.

story, however, begins many years before that.

Willie's story: an idea is not enough

Willie: I am 47 years-old, and I am a Nugal-warra, from the Guugu Yimithirr nation. Nugal is the name of my clan estates which are outside Hope Vale. The word *warra* means *your spirit's place of belonging, or where your spirit began*.

I first thought about starting a tour business a long time ago, because I knew I was living in a beautiful place, and I wanted to show it to people. We had a number of workshops in the community where we found out that Cape York is in great need for Indigenous people to get involved in business and tourism. We learnt that a lot of businesses were running tours in the Cape based on Indigenous culture, but without Indigenous people being involved as a guide or interpreter.

My idea was to combine a tour with the stories which had been passed on to me by my father, and which it is now my responsibility to pass on to others. My father was a great story-teller. He had been selected to carry on the stories that had been passed down from generation to generation. With the help of John Haviland, an anthropologist and linguist, he put together a book called *Milbi* which contains these stories. *Milbi* means 'story' in Guugu Yimithirr.

I thought that the best way to tell these stories was to use the pictures in the rock art on Nugal country, so I had to develop access

to these sites so I could safely take people there on a tour, and to find new sites, just to give people an idea of what the area contained. I talked to people who knew the sites, and someone from Tourism Queensland came to see them with me, and told me there was tourism potential.

As well as the workshops, I was involved in a Hope Vale tourism strategy¹. After the strategy, several years passed and nothing was done, but the thought was still with me about my tour. There were more group discussions and workshops about tourism when a volunteer came to work in Cooktown for a while. Myself and others interested in tourism talked about who would get involved and what type of market we should aim at. A company in Cairns did some market research, and this was when I found that the market for me was more in self-drive. But all these workshops were just about ideas, and I wanted to start working for myself – not just go to workshops and stuff.

What was stopping me?

I couldn't start my business because I didn't know how to. The only thing that I knew was how to be involved in a workshop and planning and making strategies. Apart from lack of knowledge, there were other blockages: lack of support, lack of funds, and the viability question. And fear was stopping me. Business is about making decisions and taking responsibility, but in Hope Vale decisions were always made by somebody else.

1. Guugu Yimithirr-Warra Inc. et al. (1999).

Nobody was given any responsibilities, and we didn't have the opportunity to be involved in the day to day running of the community. Whitefellas from the Mission administered us until 1986, and even afterwards final decisions were always made by a white administrator. We had a few people who were in charge of small work gangs, but even the gangers took instructions from the white managers. I had to choose to start a business, and just deciding to make that choice was a big challenge.

There is also a widespread belief amongst Bama¹ that business is not for blackfellas. This is because all the businesses here are run by whitefellas, and when in the past people in Hope Vale tried to start small businesses, few lasted more than a year. My father was one of these people. He built an iron shed at the back of our house to sell paintings to tourists. He painted on bark with acrylic and water colours, and he would paint some of the images from the rock art. He had the idea of selling things, but he didn't know how to get customers to his shop. This was a problem for other people too. There were people who grew passion-fruit, ran a pie van, made cakes and scones, had a poultry enterprise, made bricks by hand, had a bakery. Why these businesses weren't successful was because there wasn't any support there – nobody to give them any advice. These were businesses built on ideas, but turning an idea into a lasting business is another kettle of fish.

Today, we have become very dependent upon the government. There are virtually no good jobs in Hope Vale, and for thirty years or more we have survived with government payments – either through CDEP or other social benefits people are getting. There is also a lot of rivalry between families, and those who are being oppressed become involved with alcohol and drugs. The

Lutheran Church started to break up our kinship structure, but now Aboriginal people, through alcohol and drugs, are doing it to themselves. They're destroying the essence of our cultural identity and losing respect for our land and our cultural values. We need to maintain our cultural values, otherwise they will just become a Dreaming.

On my tour I talk about the three S's. The first S and the second S are based on traditional Aboriginal society, as it was their Spirituality (the first S) which determined their Survival (the second S). However, today we live in a contemporary society based on the third S which has two strokes through the middle. This is the economic society. Today people need the dollar to survive. But they still need the first S; they still need their cultural values.

Before I started my tour, I was a Life Promotions Officer. I dealt with petrol sniffing; helping people with drug-induced psychosis and suicidal tendencies; climbing mango trees to stop young people suiciding. These people were saying to us that there is no hope. My aim is to create opportunities: if I start a business that will create opportunities; if I become a business man, I can start to create jobs. But this is difficult because of the mentality which people have today about the welfare system. People have become complacent because they get all this money. This dependency has become a threat to our very existence.

My background

Now I'm going to tell you something about me. As a child I grew up in a family of twelve. I sit in the middle. Those times were pretty hard, growing up in a place where there were no options and opportunities for Aboriginal people. My family wasn't in the upper class of Hope Vale. The only way I could think of getting out of this was to do good in school. When I first went to school, Grade 4 was the limit we could go up to,

1. Bama - Guugu Yimithirr for 'person'.

and then we could get labouring jobs as a trade assistant or a fencer or looking after cattle or labouring on the roads. Then somebody decided that we should go on further, so we then went up to Grade 7, attending the school in Cooktown where I made a lot of friends. Then the Church decided to send anybody that wanted, to boarding school down south. I went to Brisbane where I excelled in education and gained a wide experience and knowledge of the types of jobs I could get. On arrival back in the community I started an apprenticeship and became a boiler-maker, and worked in the mines in Cape Flattery and Mt. Isa.

Throughout the years I also got odd jobs around the community. I also became Chairperson of the first Hope Vale Council to take over the administrative duties of the Lutheran Church, and later I was the first Chairperson of Apunipima, the Cape York Health Council, which I worked to develop. I was also involved in many of the land issues, trying to create opportunities for people.

For much of this time the potential for starting a tour business was still in my mind, but still there wasn't a way to get the business started. I was not the only one in the community talking about starting a business. There are still people talking about it today.

Building the entrepreneur: mentoring and mutual empowerment

Developing the relationship

Judy: I first made telephone contact with Willie on 24 May 2002 to explain my research project and my willingness to help him with his tourism plans. He was very enthusiastic, but failed to turn up at a meeting the following week, and it was only after doggedly trying to contact him over the next four weeks that we finally met.

Willie later explained this as a 'typical Bama laissez-faire attitude', and said had I not persevered it was unlikely he would ever have contacted me.

Willie: Judy came with knowledge of having her own businesses and we started to talk together on a one-to-one basis about how businesses are run and the things that you need to develop a business. At first we struggled a little bit as I didn't know who Judy was and I had to get to know her personally. I wanted to find out what values she had. Values are strongly linked to one's spirituality. They are also your ethical values. It's who a person is. I mean, in the community we have got lots of people that come, but we don't know who they are. I wanted to know who Judy was before we could start to build a trusting relationship. Then, together we took the first steps, learning from each other about business and culture.

Judy: Between 24 June and 3 September 2002, we had sixteen meetings, generally lasting between four hours and all day. The meetings were informal, often not pre-arranged, and sometimes tourism was scarcely mentioned. They were mostly initiated by myself, but the pace was governed by Willie. There was much story-telling on both sides: myself yarning about my background, my tourism enterprises, and my father's experiences in business; Willie talking about his background, sharing with me his culture and spirituality, and patiently explaining the intricacies of Hope Vale politics.

Although outsiders labelled me as Willie's mentor, this overlooks the interchanging roles we both played whilst working together to develop his business. Willie was a great communicator and teacher, and he frequently became *my* mentor, seeing his job as helping me to understand Aboriginal culture, cultural values and day to day goings-on in the community. In Willie's terms, we could both be considered 'Elders'

as we were specialists and teachers in our respective areas of expertise. Willie later noted that it helped that I was neither Indigenous nor Australian. Being non-Indigenous I was independent from political issues which gave him the assurance that information would be kept in confidence; being English meant that he could teach me 'from scratch' as I had no preconceived ideas about Aboriginal culture. It was also important to him that I planned to be in the area for at least eighteen months. During the first few months we worked together, on three separate occasions he asked me, 'How long you gonna be here?', and it was only later that I realised how rare my planned length of stay was, as most 'helpers' were fly-in fly-out, staying for a matter of hours, days or, at most, a few weeks.

Conversations also extended to the more personal: our beliefs, dreams, sadnesses, disappointments. These discussions took their natural course - there was no set agenda, no meeting strategy - and in retrospect bore the characteristics of developing a Special Peer relationship, in which 'pretense and formal roles are replaced by greater self-disclosure and self-expression' (Kram & Isabella 1985, p.121). Glen Miller, who is Special Interest Tourism Manager of Tourism Queensland with family connections to Hope Vale, describes the importance of 'exposing one's soft underbelly' in the formation of trusting relationships, and of sharing experiences beyond the realm of business. 'You have to take time to go fishing' (GM 5.4.03).

Later I was to understand that Willie saw my role as helping him to 'marry his culture into the western concept of business', but at the time I simply listened and learned, reluctant to move his business plans forward until I knew how far advanced they were, and how he wanted me to help. After three months we had made progress, but I realised, not without a degree of panic, that we still had not moved past 'Go' on the

Feasibility Study - Business Plan - Funding Application process anticipated by the development agencies. I swore to myself that I would begin the process during the next meeting, but when the time came my instincts dictated otherwise.

A journal entry on 30 September 2002, prompted by a report required for the Indigenous Small Business Fund, reads:

".....what have I really done [in the past three months]? I haven't done any business plans since I've been here; no real structured discussion about how people's business ideas can move forward; no cash flows; no income forecasts; no projected profit and loss; no decision structures; no management structures; no market analyses. Nothing. OK - I did some costings with Willie...(that have yet to be finalised) and done some market comparisons. And there was the workshop. But apart from that what I have done is listened, and listened, and listened. I've passed information around, chivvied gently, tried to keep people focussed, been - I hope - a friend, been a cleaner, been a guinea-pig, given ideas, support, motivated, enthused, maybe given people some confidence in themselves and their plans, enthused some more, listened some more - and maybe even made D___ cut down the amount of sugar in her tea. I've done, basically, what anyone could do..."

Later in the same entry, I noted:

"In retrospect I probably did the right thing. By listening to people rather than bumbling in with business advice, I actually validated their own actions and increased their self-confidence [as potential business owners]. Remember - need to build up the person first rather than the business" (Journal notes 30.9.02).

Willie identified both listening and informing as key to building the relationship. Listening in itself has the capacity to empower, as evidenced by the Sarvodaya grassroots movement in Sri Lanka. Aimed at overcoming poverty, its members have no blueprint for change, but believe only in bringing good listening skills with which to empower the villages in which they work (McLaughlin & Davidson 1994).

By listening, I allowed Willie to control the pace at which we worked, which enabled him to ensure that the development of a trusting relationship took precedence over the development of the business. Indeed, it was not until two months after our first meeting that he took me to the rock art sites which were to become the focus of his tour. Listening was also key as it allowed Willie to control and define the nature of the help he wanted. And by informing me, he was better equipping me to provide that help. He describes the reciprocal nature of our information sharing as 'mutual empowerment', and although I was generally referred to as a mentor, Willie regarded me as part of his team.

Willie: I use the word 'mentor' in this chapter, but really I see mentoring more like a contract, whereas this was a buddy-buddy system, which is much deeper than that. It's much more personal and private: it's based on friendship, because of the information that you've both shared.

It's also capacity-building. The buddy-system concentrates on working on the person who has a passion, and then building on that passion to make a feasible business. For a long time the attention has been put on building businesses without putting the attention on who is going to run it. Looking back you see a lot of businesses that have failed where the focus has been on building that particular business, without identifying the people who are going to drive that business forward.

All the workshops, strategies and plans we'd had, focussed on the business of tourism, but Judy focussed on me. She believed in me, and encouraged my ideas. She gave me direction, showing me how to move forward to achieve my goals, and she got involved, actually doing the job with me step by step. And she gave me an energy. If you want sustainability you need energy from somewhere and somebody. In business you need to be inspired.

But Judy didn't solve my problems for me. This is really important, as I am the only one that can decide what I should or will do. Instead, she gave me options and information, and acted as a sounding-board whilst I worked out the best solution for me. This empowered me to make my own decisions based on our cultural values.

Judy: Giving options is contrary to the way most business consultants behave - and consultants abound on the Cape. Consultants are 'experts' paid to find solutions, unlike educators, whose 'expertise is in knowing *not* to be an expert' (Horton & Freire 1990, p.128). Telling people what to do takes away the power to make decisions. 'There'd be some information shared, but no learning - no learning about how to deal with problems, no sense of responsibility' (ibid. p.130). Noel Pearson, a Hope Vale man, advocates the right to take responsibility (Pearson 2000), but responsibility also has to be given.

One of the few conscious decisions I made when working in Cape York was that I would never, ever tell people what they had to do; I would never solve their problems or make their decisions for them. I would inform and give options, but never decide. As Johannisson (1988, p.89) says, 'An entrepreneur can be told what he *might* do and *should not* do, but never what to do concretely' (emphasis in the original). This, I am convinced, is the most important credo in mentoring. Problem-solving and deci-

sion-making are core attributes of the entrepreneur. Everything about enterprise is about decisions. Starting an enterprise in itself is two decisions: the decision to change from the existing life path, and the decision to start a business (Shapiro 1984). The entrepreneur has to decide *how* to start, whether to take a particular risk, whether to say yes or no to a myriad of options. Every enterprise owner makes dozens of decisions daily in the running of his or her business. If a person is not equipped to make a reasoned decision themselves, then the business will never start, or will soon collapse if it gets off the ground.

It is indicative of the disempowerment of Aboriginal communities that people are not used to making their own decisions. Whilst working on a project in Hope Vale, one participant told me that he was happy with my involvement as I never told them what to do, but explained everything to them so they could make their own decisions. 'Nobody else does this', he said. 'People tell you *what* to do, but they don't tell you *why* you have to do it' (BG 31.1.03). This situation is by no means unique to Hope Vale. The Mindibungu Aboriginal Corporation in the Kimberley is now teaching decision-making as a skill, recognising its importance not only for responsibility-taking, but for giving people the opportunity to learn from their mistakes (ATSIC 2003).

One of the toughest problems Willie had to solve was the issue of the trading structure of his business. Pearson (2000, p.89) raises some of the dilemmas:

'...how do we reconcile communal ownership of assets (the land and natural resources) with individual or family enterprise? How do we maintain our traditional values of sharing and obligation when we engage in private enterprise? I will not attempt to canvass and answer all such dilemmas here, except to say that we need to address them.'

Willie struggled with this difficult issue for the best part of nine months. I believed strongly that this was a decision only he could make, and was astounded when, on more than one occasion, visiting 'helpers' would, uninvited, tell him what he should do, having scarcely known him for more than a few hours! Instead I provided as many options as I could – often based on my own and my family's experience in business. These were not simply the legal options of sole trader, partnership or company, but how decisions would be made, family and clan members catered for, and so on.

Our research into past businesses in Hope Vale played a large part in Willie's final decision. He recalled the pressure the enterprises were under from extended family members who wanted a share in the revenue, and this eventually led to his decision to make the business his own. It was not an easy choice for him to make, and the issue was revisited on many occasions, but, over time, he developed his own interpretation of 'sole trader' compatible with his values, and became increasingly convinced that his decision was the right one.

'Although I'm operating my own business I think as a team. I won't go away from there' (WG 16.5.03).

'I've made the right decision about the business. I had to start it, and then the rest can follow when they're ready' (WG 21.5.03).

Building the business: learning by doing together

The advantages of micro-enterprise

Judy: The developmental stages of *Guurrbi Tours* had significant differences from my own experience in enterprise development, or those identified by Koh (1996b). Koh's study shows opportunity identification is followed by an assessment

of the idea's economic viability (is there sufficient demand and will the enterprise have a competitive advantage) and feasibility (can the idea be transformed into an economic entity) (ibid.). In my own experiences in enterprise development these two stages in the entrepreneurship process are carried out almost simultaneously: opportunity identification (itself linked to demand) is immediately accompanied by scribbled sums on the back of an envelope to make a quick assessment as to whether the idea is worth investigating further. In contrast, the economic viability of Willie's proposed tour was never discussed in the initial stages. Indeed, two months after we had begun talking together, I pointed this out to Willie, who said, 'We'll talk about money later - I'll need your help' (WG 30.8.02) and the subject was dropped.

I made no attempt to force the 'viability question', preferring to respect Willie's priorities. I was able to do this only because we planned to start the enterprise as small as possible. This enabled the initial development of the business to concentrate on the strengths of the entrepreneur, building Willie's confidence and self-esteem and allowing him to grow with the business, controlling the entrepreneurship process throughout and tackling each task when he was ready. Government funding – with its insistence on feasibility studies and business plans – follows the traditional western pattern of business development, and had financial assistance been necessary, Willie would have been required to produce these formal documents, slowing down the entrepreneurship process, forcing long periods of inaction whilst applying for funds, and removing control from his hands.

Because government agencies see the Business Plan as an essential step towards enterprise development and a prerequisite for funding, the Cape is littered with them. In my experience few have been read in their entirety, and most are gathering dust.

They concentrate on building the enterprise, not the entrepreneur; they encourage talk, not action; they overlook the need for flexibility to respond to changes, problems or opportunities as they arise. And crucially, they demotivate by overwhelming people with *what* has to be done, whilst failing to explain *how* to go about it, contributing to the belief that economic enterprise is strictly 'whitefella business'. Even in a western context their usefulness has been questioned: Davidsson and Honig (2003, p.324-5), in their study of nascent entrepreneurs, conclude that 'much of the activity related to training for the small business sector, such as the format and production of business plans, may be missing the mark'.

Willie: I wouldn't read a Business Plan. I wouldn't understand it because I don't have a business mind. I would learn from a *real* story; not one that is hypothetical. For instance, Judy told me about helping to build a small lodge in the Panamanian rainforest. From the photos I could see how hard it was – building the road - which encouraged me to look at building something out of nothing. And looking at the enterprises that used to exist in Hope Vale made me question why these businesses didn't last. I learnt from these past mistakes and it influenced the way I structured my business. Business Plans are too narrow-sighted, because business is not the whole picture as this quotation explains:

'Entrepreneurial activity does not occur in a vacuum. Instead, it is deeply embedded in a cultural and social context, often amid a web of human networks that are both social and economic' (Krueger & Brazeal 1994, pp.1-2, web edition).

Instead of a Business Plan, we had a *Directional Plan*, mainly in our heads, which was informal and flexible. And then, when the business ideas really began to take

shape, we had an *Action Plan*, of what we had to do for several weeks ahead. It is more important to actually *do* the job, step by step. And it was important to be flexible. The plans changed along the way, and there was a lot of brain-storming.

Learning by doing together

Judy: Most entrepreneurs have employment experience, or have undertaken extensive research, in their chosen industry. For most Bama in remote communities there are no such options. Willie's employment experience was as a boiler maker and a government employee, principally in the health sector. His understanding of the tourism industry was limited to several occasions guiding for a tour which operated in Hope Vale briefly during the 1980s, and it was only when he attended a tourism workshop in 2002 that he began to have an idea of the size and scale of the industry, which he found 'a real eye-opener.' The only experience he had of dealing with money was with government funding and his own personal finances. Until starting his business he had never had a cheque book – or written a cheque.

Willie: Everyone has *ideas*. You stand in your country or on the beach, and it's Paradise and you want to share it with people. It's a nice *idea*. But you have no clue as to what is involved. How to bring people up, how you have to be professional - risk management, public liability - and how you've got to be flexible as things change all the time. There is a large amount of paperwork required, and authorisations to be applied for. I had to think about my appearance, my punctuality – being there on time, organising things by e-mail and phone, having a diary to work out of, transportation, reliability of suppliers, being prepared to start up a whole new bank account, billing systems. It's a lot to learn. That's why I think the old method, how our Aboriginal ancestors taught, is still effective. I mean we learn by

looking and doing and it's still an effective method. And working one-to-one is the best way for people to learn; this way they learn a lot faster.

Judy: Given the vast knowledge-divide to be bridged, tackling one task at a time as it was needed, and seeing the completion of each task as a success in its own right (and one to be celebrated) was both realistic and achievable. Learning by doing also encouraged the action required for entrepreneurship, generated much pride and self-esteem, and working together acted as a continuing reminder of the support Willie had in his endeavours. Willie designed his own logo, publicity flyers, advertisement, and put together a PowerPoint presentation of his tour. The wording for his flyers we worked on together. He also learned to keep his accounts, and although he later decided to hand this responsibility over to myself, he did so understanding the principles of accountancy which equipped him for good decision-making.

The sense of achievement gained through this manner of learning was considerable, and, in itself, motivational. The PowerPoint presentation he created was a source of particular pride, and it also gave him considerable recognition within the non-Indigenous population of Cooktown, and certainly challenged some preconceptions. After one presentation he told me:

'People were shocked to think that an Aboriginal person could do that. One tour operator said, 'Your presentation blew mine out of the water,' so I told her, 'I'll teach you to develop one!'" (WG 31.5.03).

In a similar, practical vein, a training tour took place in May 2003, in which Willie and members of the Walker family from Wujal Wujal - also starting their own tourism venture - became tourists themselves for three days. We went on three different tours in the popular Cape Tribulation-Moss-

man Gorge area, three hours drive south of Cooktown. This gave the participants a chance to undertake their own market research on tourists in the region, as well as critically assess their competition. They also devised a list of the information needed to perform a feasibility study on each of the tours they went on, and at the end of the day, having gathered as much information as possible, we worked through the figures to see how we thought each tour was doing economically. This not only de-mystified 'the viability question', but prompted discussions until the early hours of the morning as to how one excellent, but struggling tour could get back on its feet again. It was a graphic illustration of the importance of marketing (Bennett 2003).

Willie's tour to the Nugal rock art sites was totally his own. Rahnema's description of how the spiritual dimension has the capacity to produce 'a staggering contagion of intelligence and creativity' (Rahnema 1992, p.127) describes accurately Willie's brand of entrepreneurship. To have interfered with the tour's content in any way would have been to tamper with the very essence of its authenticity and sense of Other. Only practical advice was ever given, such as the tour's length and the provision of food and water. In order to learn by doing, many practice, or 'guinea pig', tours were run with Cooktown tourism businesses, friends and colleagues, and their feedback was used to fine-tune the product - a process which, at Willie's instigation, continues every time a tour is run. The glowing feedback received on every occasion was both motivating and an enormous confidence-builder.

'It tells me that as Aboriginal people we can do it. I'm on Cloud Ten!' (WG 11.12.03).

Sense of community and empowerment

Judy: It is indicative of the breakdown of social capital within Hope Vale, that Willie was unable to name a single person who provided him with moral support prior to our working together - there were no dense, bonding ties in his personal network. Although it is possible that this isolation may have encouraged him to *think* outside the square, without the sense of a secure base that enables people to take risks, and confront novel or fearful situations, he was unable to regulate his fear of *acting* outside the square (Mikulincer & Shaver 2001). Willie described his fears as:

'...fear of failure, competition, market failure...loss of culture by passing it to others, degradation of land...fear of Council, fear of family finding out and stopping me...' (WG 9.6.03).

Individuals are constrained by their own preconceptions of what it is possible to do (Johannisson 1988), and whilst the nascent entrepreneur may have the capacity to start a venture, unless he perceives himself able, he is unlikely to proceed. The Special Peer Relationship which developed between Willie and myself was therefore crucial as it formed the foundation for this secure base, providing practical and emotional support for Willie in his endeavours.

Willie defined his personal networks by their function, 'Building Willie' and 'Building Business', and he saw myself as facilitator in the development of these networks which he later called his 'sense of community'. The support groups grew over the months we worked together, and, in fact, became a shared support group - supporting myself as well as Willie.

At the time of launching *Guurrbi Tours* there were no members of Willie's family in either group. The Building Business group included two members from the Cooktown

tourism industry, and the managing director of Oz Tours, a Cairns-based business operating tours to the Cape. Some were known to Willie before my arrival, but it became my job to bridge the separation between Cooktown and Hope Vale so that Willie became aware of the support for himself and his business idea that existed. The pres-

Willie: You need to build the supporting network – a sense of community – and the stronger they are, the stronger you are. They cut down the fear factor. And although it was still scary when I started my business, it was a good sort of fear. Like a challenge. It was like walking into an arena to ride a bull. You hope for the best, but if you're skilled

Diagram by Wilfred Gordon.
Not to be reproduced without permission.

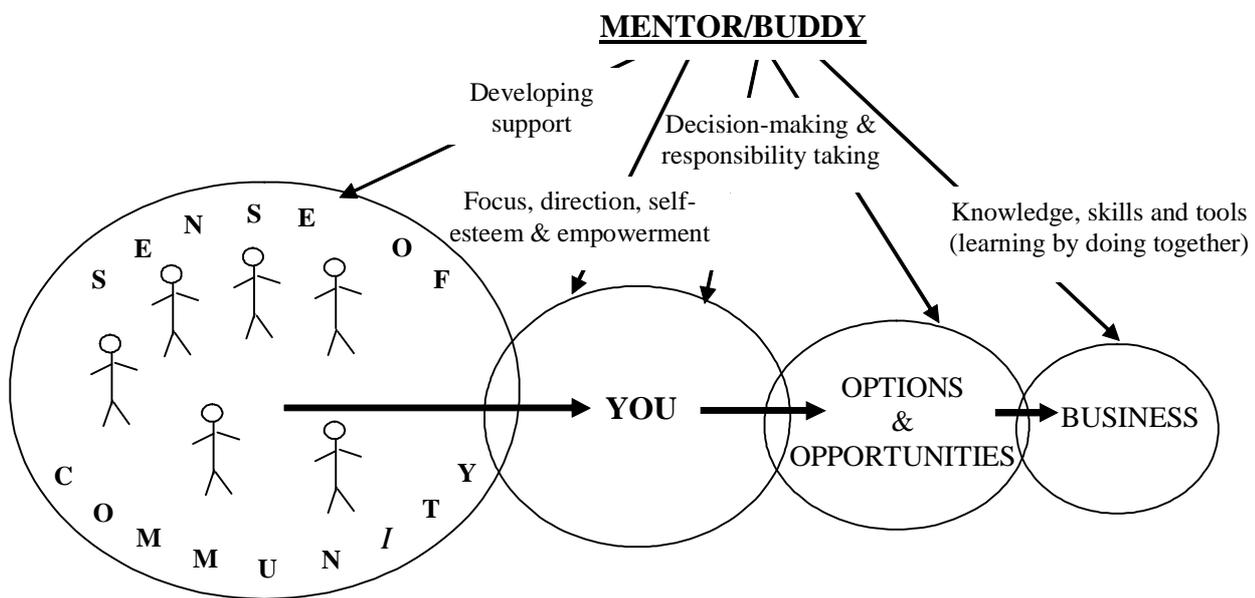


Figure 1: The Relationship Between Sense Of Community, Empowerment And

ence of industry members in the group not only gave Willie practical assistance, but legitimised his tour in the eyes of the local tourism industry.

Willie put tremendous value on both support groups, and with the same reciprocity shown in our relationship, was active in keeping the networks alive, ensuring members of the group felt valued, and acknowledging their assistance. It was because of this reciprocity that, even at this early stage in his business, his networks strengthened, and the locally based members of the Building Business support group also became his moral supporters.

enough you know that you're going to give the bull a hard time. It was this group that gave me the spirit to go forward; I couldn't have done it without them. They made me believe in myself.

The relationship between sense of community and empowerment

Willie: In the diagram above (Figure 1) I have put together the essential ingredients for Indigenous entrepreneurship. The diagram shows how a business has to start with a person (YOU), who is the potential entrepreneur. To find the right person, and to help them, you need to understand where they're at and start from there. The role of

the buddy, or mentor, is to build that person up before building his or her business. You have to empower the individual first.

Sense of Community is the group of people who support YOU's business idea. In my case they provided their experience to help me develop my tour, giving me a range of options and opportunities which I evaluated with the help of the mentor as sounding-board. Their input helped me in the development of a marketable product, and gave me practical assistance, such as providing transport for my tour which meant that I didn't have to apply for funding. The mentor is part of this support network and contributes to its development and growth, forming a bridge between YOU and the support group. It was this group which gave me the energy and belief in myself to move forward.

Warra is the driving force which galvanizes YOU forward to entrepreneurship. *Warra* means *I am*: it is one's spiritual essence, one's identity. To find one's *warra* is to find oneself.

Warra also means *sense of belonging*. You find yourself through your sense of community – your personal support group. It is they who make you aware of who you are, what your values are. Making someone aware of their values is what empowers them. This is not the same as the empowerment received through the mentor-YOU relationship. There is a spiritual empowerment embodied in *warra*; *warra* can only emanate from a group¹.

It's like becoming an Elder. I cannot become an Elder until I am *recognised* as one by my community. And you cannot become an effective leader unless you are

acknowledged as a leader. It is the recognition and acceptance, *the sense of belonging*, that gives you the spirit, or *warra*, to move forward. The ingredients of sense of community, you've got to know where to find them for empowerment.

The importance of being acknowledged by the group has relevance in family, clan or community entrepreneurship. In any such business it is the group that has to recognise who will champion and drive their enterprise. It is this recognition that drives the champion forward. Responsibility has to be given, not just taken.

Options represents both the importance of choice, and the making of my own decisions. For healthy community development there should be a cluster of options for each individual – apprenticeships, employment, higher education, outstations development - of which business is only one. Whichever option is chosen the same process of personal empowerment applies. The mentor's role is to help 'YOU' identify and evaluate the options and make the choice, then gather the relevant knowledge, skills and tools required. The first stage, however, as with entrepreneurship, is to build both the person and their support base, so that they have the spirit to move forward.

The mentor: generator of social capital

Judy: Willie's diagram illustrates why the personal qualities of the mentor are more important than the business expertise they possess. Only one of the four roles is linked to business, and some of the knowledge, skills and tools for enterprise could, if necessary, be provided by a third party with the ongoing support of the mentor. The other three roles require inter-personal skills, focusing as they do on the empowerment of YOU and on the development of the support group.

Although the generation of social capital is clearly key to the entrepreneurship process, the role of the mentor in facilitating its

1. The strong spiritual dimension of empowerment for many grassroots movements has been noted by McLaughlin & Davidson (1994), and Fals-Borda (1991, p.11) describes empowerment as *vivencia*, or an 'inner-life experience'.

development will vary in each case, depending upon the extent of YOU's personal support group. Walker Family Tours in Wujal Wujal provides an excellent example of a tightly knit family, whose champion is recognised by the whole group and given their unfailing support; they therefore have their own sense of community which drives their champion forward.

Using the diagram for effective help

Judy: Everything that has been tried – or is being proposed - to help economic or community development in Indigenous communities can be checked against the diagram to see how effective it is going to be – or why it did not work as well as anticipated.

The diagram shows how the current narrow focus on business development is starting at the wrong end of the development map. By focussing only on the creation of an enterprise the outcome will be, in Willie's words, a 'theoretical business' lacking the very essence which is going to make it succeed. The first step is for the mentor to listen and learn and find out where YOU is at, and progress from there.

Money and goods play no part in the empowerment process. It is social capital, not economic capital, that empowers people.

'Forget about money! You have to believe in yourself or you've lost the plot' (WG Cape York Summit 6.8.03).

This is not to say that access to capital is not required, only that it is best used after the empowerment process. This is recognised by Opportunity International Australia which has thirty years experience in providing small commercial loans to marginalised people in twenty-seven countries. The organisation gives loans with mentor support to entrepreneurs who have already acted - i.e. to people who are already empowered – and have a repayment rate of around 97%.¹

Acknowledging the importance of social capital in the delivery of help leads to an understanding of how best it can be delivered. Help needs to be based in a meaningful social context, with time allowed for the development of trusting relationships and the provision of ongoing support. The importance of learning by doing, is doing it together. Feasibility studies performed by a consultant are of minimal use, unless YOU is part of the team developing them. On several occasions I was made aware of the perception that skilled people should not be wasting their time and abilities by doing practical things to help – such as cleaning the bathroom or helping to organise the filing – when it is precisely activities such as these which build sense of community. Furthermore, these activities represent action, whereas sitting with a clip-board talking about what should be done, does not.

Help which contributes to YOU's sense of community will also be needs-driven. Fly-in, fly-out help is often dropped on people in Hope Vale, mostly by well-meaning individuals keen to contribute, but rarely in response to a specific request. This type of 'help' is exhausting, usually time-wasting, and rarely are the expectations of either the 'helper' or the 'helped' ever met. Willie's diagram amply demonstrates how help can be delivered in such a way that it generates social capital and empowerment, rather than disempowerment and dependency.

Social capital and sustainability

Willie: Starting the business is just the beginning, so the mentor should be a person that is prepared to make a long-term commitment to helping the entrepreneur until his business is sustainable. There is a lot to learn, and I have to be open to constantly

1. For more information see <http://www.opportunity.org.au>.

changing so I can meet the requirements of my customers. There are also a lot of community pressures I have to deal with. People want a piece of my business, but it is still too small. There are demands on my time, and pressure on me to give money and lend vehicles. I have to be very strong. The buddy-system means I always have someone to go to, to talk through problems and evaluate possible solutions.

You also need to be constantly promoting your tour. When you're marketing, even though it's an Indigenous tour, you have to market it just as any whitefella markets his product. This means building bridges with people who will sell your tour. Bridges are about moving forward: it has to be in the right direction, so you don't build a bridge to somewhere you don't want to go. You need bridges where there are reciprocal arrangements with people who will come across that bridge to help you – and help to build new bridges.

Judy: Given the networked nature of the tourism industry, and the remoteness of Hope Vale, the development of bridging networks was vital for the success of *Guurrbi Tours*. Hope Vale is situated 49 kms north-west of Cooktown, and 378 kms north of Cairns, the principal gateway for the Cape. Willie therefore needed the active collaboration and support of Cooktown operators in order to benefit from the existing market in the area. Yet, historically, the two communities have existed almost in isolation of each other. Hope Vale was originally established in 1886 as a Lutheran Mission, and the Church strived to keep the two communities apart for the hundred years they administered the Aboriginal township. Racial restrictions in Cooktown continued well into the 1980s, and although today many Cooktown residents consider the town's relationship with Aboriginal people to be the best in Queensland, it is nevertheless evident that the separation ini-

tially enforced by the mission remains very much in existence.

The assistance of the mentor in the building of bridging networks proved to be essential, and extended beyond the role of 'network broker' suggested by the literature (Johannisson 1988; Dubini & Aldrich 1991). One of the major difficulties facing Indigenous entrepreneurs in remote communities is that they are unused to dealing with non-Aboriginal people on a one-to-one basis; even in the Community Councils there has always been a white person to liaise between the black and the white world. As Willie explained to me, people simply do not know how to go about network building.

'Now C__ needs a mentor. He thinks people have to build a bridge to *him*. He's waiting for a bridge to come and it *won't happen*. They're expecting C__ to build the trust by himself. He *can't*. He can't because he doesn't know *how*' (WG 13.4.04).

Building trust was, therefore, a skill to be learned, and once again Willie learned by doing as we worked together as a team. These bridging networks were developed principally with industry members through our marketing efforts and with the aid of myself as mentor, and it was the face-to-face meetings, and the development of a trusting relationship which led to the most beneficial partnerships, not only providing *Guurrbi Tours* with customers, but also increasing the strength of Willie's personal support group and reaffirming his membership in the industry.

Accompanying Willie on marketing trips and business meetings also helped his transition into the world of business, with its distinct issues and challenges. He was, for example, particularly uncomfortable dealing with situations which required disagreeing with a non-Indigenous operator, or appearing in any way critical of the way

they conducted business – even if this was simply chasing an unpaid bill. On one occasion we needed to ask a driver to no longer accompany Willie on his tour, as his presence undermined the personal relationship Willie builds with his visitors. Afterwards Willie said:

“I couldn’t tell D__ that he couldn’t come on my tour! Not face to face. I would write him a letter. It’s because of Christianity. We were told that it was a sin to speak against authority, and that’s still part of me...It’s the way people have treated us, and I think that’s why a lot of people have failed [in business] (WG 13.4.04).

Developing strong, trusting working relationships was therefore of great importance to maintain the empowerment process and Willie’s self-belief. Working together contributed to this support, as well as demonstrating that issues such as these need not be confrontational and could be settled amicably and quickly.

Entrepreneurship, social capital, and authenticity

Willie: My business is called *Guurrbi Tours*. *Guurrbi* is a Guugu Yimithirr word meaning ‘time of reflection’, and it was used to describe the quiet time spent before *bora* when important decisions were made. On my tour I use the rock art to explain *warra*, and encourage my guests to become part of the story and to reflect on their own identity and sense of belonging. I show them how *warra* is available for everyone, and that by understanding our *warra* we can greater understand ourselves. We go to the Reconciliation Cave, where my Auntie, a half-caste child, was accepted into the clan. I show people her small handprint amongst those of the other children, and I explain that the handprints demonstrate her acceptance, and that for us reconciliation took place long ago. So for me there is no divide.

Nganthaan-un-bi bubu – our land, your land. Spiritually we all share the same community.

Judy: Willie’s tour has particular resonance for Australians, and on many occasions I witnessed discussions far into the night emanating from the tour. One visitor from Queensland said Willie had helped him feel comfortable about ‘who he was’ for the first time, and a young man from Western Australia, persuaded to go on the tour by his partner, told me that the tour had totally changed his previously racist outlook. Cooktown residents have travelled the 49 kms to Hope Vale, often for the first time, to go on the tour; one couple even writing to the local newspaper afterwards encouraging others to do the same (*Cooktown Local News*, June 26, 2003, p.3).

The capacity of Aboriginal tourism to increase cultural awareness and understanding has been noted by Higgins-Desbiolles (2003) who uses the term ‘Reconciliation Tourism’. Certainly, *Guurrbi Tours* demonstrates the ability to break down cultural barriers and facilitate the generation of social capital. Willie explains the importance of Indigenous entrepreneurship in this process.

Willie: The cultural information I give on my tour, I share only because it is my own business. If I was simply a guide employed by a tour company, or even a partner in a joint venture, I would not tell the stories behind the rock art, and I would not take visitors to many of the sites. It would be a disrespect to my culture – it would be like selling the stories for money. But if I *own* the story it’s different. It’s about respecting who you are and all the Elders. My Grandfathers put the stories there for me to carry through. I have to be the conduit. It has to be *me*.

Bama have always been fearful to share their culture. We built a brick wall with our spirituality. We *made* the wall because of exploitation. We made it to protect our cul-

ture. Now we're opening the gate to let people through. When I was younger that gate was there. My father produced two books with John Haviland¹ and showed me that if you want a business, these are some of the ways you can go and get it. Now I tell my guests that if you take a picture of the art, then you must tell your children the stories – that was what the paintings were there for. This is my way of marketing, and of keeping the stories alive. If I have to have a business to protect my spirituality, then that's what I'll do.

Judy: It is an important lesson for both government and the tourism industry that Indigenous tourism entrepreneurship does not just lead to an enterprise, but a product rich in authenticity, as noted in the enthusiastic feedback below.

'It's not just an authentic experience...each person was individually touched. You painted a picture and succeeded in transferring spirituality across to us' (Andrew Fairley, Melbourne. 11.12.02).

'FANTASTIC. An authentic experience and the story-telling truly added to make it memorable' (Ralph Kajet, CEO, Youth Hostel Association, Australia. 30.5.04).

The quality of the *Guurrbi Tours*' product is such that Cooktown's tourism operators quickly recognised its capacity to both attract more tourists to the area and extend their average length of stay. The backpackers' hostel commented on the number of customers who had travelled up from Cairns specifically to do 'Willie's tour', and by the commencement of the 2004 season (less than a year after the business launched) *Guurrbi Tours* was being packaged through the Youth Hostel Association, two major tour operators, and was being

actively promoted by cruise companies, a Cairns-based bus company, Cooktown's four-and-a-half star Sovereign Resort, and others. One of the large operators to Cape York changed its itinerary specifically to include the tour and overnight in Cooktown.

Lessons highlighted

Judy: Indigenous tourism is increasingly seen by governments as a means by which the impoverished economies of often remote Indigenous communities can be strengthened, whilst at the same time providing destinations with a comparative advantage, a 'distinctive sense of place' with which to attract tourists in the increasingly competitive global marketplace (Pitcher et al. 1999, p.4).

The experience of developing *Guurrbi Tours* gives credence to this approach, but, as our research shows, this is not a 'quick fix'. It takes time. First, as Willie's diagram shows, you have to develop the entrepreneur before the business. You have to start with individuals, find out where they are at, and move along with them a step at a time. Starting at the wrong end of the development map may seem a short-cut, but building a business without the entrepreneur is doomed to fail. Overwhelming people with a business not of their own creation, and which they have no experience in managing, simply adds to their sense of powerlessness and perceived lack of self-worth.

Next, you have to start small, and the value of micro-enterprise needs to be recognised. In Australia, funding agencies have consistently shown a marked preference for large-scale projects. With employment targets to reach and resources limited, individual loans are seen to place disproportionate demands on staff for assessment, aftercare and arrears control (ATSIC 1991). Given the predominance of small businesses in the tourism industry this policy is particularly inappropriate, and unsurprisingly most

1. Gordon, T. (1980); Haviland & Hart (1998).

large-scale projects collapse because of their high overheads¹. Research in Israel has shown that public-sector support for small-scale tourism enterprises is more cost-effective than for others, and that even minimal support can yield substantial economic and social returns (Fleischer and Felsenstein 2000).

Willie is now working with myself and others, using the model we have developed to support and encourage other potential entrepreneurs, many of whom have been inspired by the success of *Guurrbi Tours*. But, if the economies of remote communities are to be strengthened, and Willie's dream of providing opportunities to others realised, more on-the-ground, long-term mentors will have to be found; buddies to work alongside people, one-on-one, on an ongoing basis. This is not only to help others develop their own enterprises, but to take advantage of the employment opportunities presented. As Willie has now found, although he is offering employment to others, they lack the self-belief and self-esteem to take advantage of the opportunity. They need their own buddy and personal support network to empower them, and give them the spirit to accept the responsibility being offered to them.

Although the process is slow, in economic terms the cost of providing such assistance is minimal. Willie had no funding to start his business, yet in its first year *Guurrbi Tours* made a small profit, and during its first eighteen months of operation over one thousand people went on his tours. And, importantly, the benefits reaped through entrepreneurship are not simply economic. Willie explains below how life has changed for him since he started his business. He gives a graphic illustration of

how Indigenous tourism entrepreneurship is not only built on social capital, but can become the engine which generates it, breaking barriers which have been in place for decades.

Social capital and the Indigenous tourism entrepreneur

Willie: The fear of starting a business is the fear of the unknown. But once you have established a business it gives you a different perspective. Before, I thought that whitefellas had business all sewn up. Now I know that other operators are in the same situation as I am: they have to comply with the same business requirements as I do, and many of them are struggling to find customers and to cope with the mountains of paperwork. And I know now that there isn't only one way to run a business - the best operators are continually inventing, looking for new ways to improve their product and increase their share of the market. Joining the Cooktown Chamber of Commerce has enlightened me as to the amount of struggle other people are having to keep afloat. In business everybody is doing it hard, and many people lack business skills, so we need to tackle these problems together.

Sitting on the Chamber of Commerce I have become much better informed, and it has opened doors to a wider market. I've also met people that otherwise I would never have met - people from Cook Shire Council, people from other businesses, visiting tour operators, both domestic and international. Now I walk in Cooktown and people, whose names I don't even know, come up to me and say 'How you going, Willie?' This has broken through the fear-factor of starting a business. Before I would never have talked to anybody, but now if anybody wants to talk about my business, I'll go at them left, right and centre! The

1. Source: Personal communication, Manager, Special Interest Tourism, Tourism Queensland, 27.3.02.

people in the bank and the Post Office have known me for years, but I never stopped to have a conversation with them. Now they all want to know how I am and how my business is going, and always have a yarn. Sometimes they have customers waiting, but they still want to talk to me. It's not just about business – we talk about the state of the road, how we managed in the cyclone, and before we never had a conversation. We did our business and that was it. This makes me happy to be running a business. I've become part of the business community in Cooktown, and I'm proud of that. It gives me the network, the opportunity to talk to people, it gives me self-esteem. I am in the same predicament as them – and I realise that I now have an idea of what business is all about.

I am a much happier person now, and I look forward to meeting new people and telling them not only about the Aboriginal sites – the caves – but also about the people that live here, and how we live together. I love what I'm doing and I want to let you know that if you decide to get involved in a business, you need to love what you do. You have to really want to do it. A lot of work is needed to build and grow a business, but it gives me a lot of satisfaction to watch the changes I have made happen, and the challenges I have been through along the way.

tion, Tourism Queensland and the Nugalwarra Regional CDEP group.

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