

Lost between two worlds

More Indigenous kids in remote Australia are killing themselves than anywhere else in the world. In the space of just one generation, the problem has gone from virtually non-existent, to endemic. It is devastating families and leaving a tidal wave of grief and despair in its wake. These are the people trying to pick up the pieces.

By Stephanie Zillman

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CHAPTER ONE

The answers come from within



PHOTO: Loma Hudson says young people in her community of Derby, WA are losing their sense of identity and worth.

(Supplied: Culture is Life)

It is a rare coalition, and one of which nobody would volunteer to be a part. The condition of entry? A community devastated by suicide of its young people.

Elders from communities across Australia are banding together to lend their voices to one central question: why?

The answers could not be more unified. A death of culture is leading to

In the only report entirely seeking solutions from within Indigenous communities, the Elders' Report into Preventing Indigenous Self-harm and Youth Suicide sought the experience of elders on what can be done to stop the deaths.

Lorna Hudson has been there to see it all.

From her home in Derby, WA she says young people in her community do not know who they are.

"They have been cast aside from the mainstream and they see themselves as no good," she says.

"When you are nobody, what's the use of living? That's when our people turn to alcohol and drugs to forget about what has been going on."

CHAPTER TWO

Boom and bust



PHOTO: Banduk Marika says addictions are having an impact on the lives of young people in Yirrkala, NT

(Supplied: Culture is Life)

Banduk Marika is from Yirrkala, just a short distance from the former mining town of Nhulunbuy in the NT's East Arnhem Land.

She remembers a time not long ago that was free from self-harm. She sees the anger and despair brought by alcohol, petrol sniffing, and drugs.

"There are two sides up here: Balanda [white people] coming and genuinely supporting and helping Aboriginal people, and there are Balanda's that literally want to come in and make what money they can and then move on for economic purposes."

What's left is nothing



PHOTO: Andrew Dowadi from Maningrida, NT is urging those who need help to speak out.

(Supplied: Culture is Life)

Andrew Dowadi from Maningrida is issuing the invitation to anyone who wants help.

"Come and talk to the parents, go out to outstations. Go to the communities, they will talk to you," he says.

"Come and find out what we need to heal our young people. Come and look deeply, not from the outside, but from within. Don't give us things that aren't useful. Right now, we feel that Balanda [white people] are just using us."

Road to hell is paved with good intentions





PHOTO: Joe Brown says connection with culture is key to finding a solution for young people.

(Supplied: Culture is Life)

Joe Brown from Fitzroy Crossing agreed with his fellow elders that culture heals and protects young people.

He believes non-Indigenous people have been involved in trying to solve the issues, and while well-meaning, are failing.

Elders want to reclaim their power and influence to lead the healing process.

"If they lose language and connection to culture they become a nobody inside and that's enough to put them over the edge," Mr Brown says.

CHAPTER FIVE

We survived 40,000 years



PHOTO: James Gaykamangu, Millingimbi NT. Senior Leader for Gapapuyngu in North East Arnhem.

(Supplied: Culture is Life)

From Millingimbi, senior leader for Gapapuyngu in North East Arnhem James Gaykamangu says by any measure of time, his people have

survived.

"There is a policy too by the government saying 'we're the parents of the children'," he says.

"They should leave parental problems to the parents, grandparents, within the system, within the culture.

"People are undermining our responsibility — standing over us, and taking our parental responsibility and attitudes towards our children. There needs to be education in the crossroads."

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