



To the NT Coroner  
Sent via email to [kelvin.currie@nt.gov.au](mailto:kelvin.currie@nt.gov.au)

Thursday, October 15, 2020

Re inquiry into the deaths of Wayne Wunungmurra, Sandra Yunupingu, Jamasaiha Kalakala

Dear Sir,

CAYLUS would like to offer the following information that may be relevant to the cases under consideration. We have followed media coverage of the current inquiry and from this believe that it may be useful if we share with you some of positive examples from our region of intervening in peoples sniffing through the NTVSAP Act and child welfare system.

CAYLUS is a federally funded inhalant substance misuse prevention program that has operated in the southern NT since 2002 – see the attached ‘About CAYLUS’ Document for more details.

Over the time we have operated we have tried to take a flexible, proactive approach and do whatever it is that is needed to intervene in Volatile Substance Misuse at the community level. This has often led to working with individuals who are sniffing, their families and the services that interact with them to implement strategies to deter the behavior.

A number of staff at CAYLUS hold ‘Authorised Person’ status and through this are able to make referrals under Section 33 of the NTVSA Act requesting that person is assessed for potential mandated rehabilitation. This way CAYLUS reports inhalant misusing individuals to NT Health, tracks individuals who are sniffing advocates and assists to try and ensure appropriate responses take place. When children are referred for assessment NT Health often involve Territory Families in developing a response to our referral.

In doing this work we have sometimes come across cases where there is not a suitable treatment option. This can be for a range of reasons, including the young person’s age or unsuitability for rehab due to some other cause.

Following are two case studies that show where this has been resolved by NT Government staff working flexibility with CAYLUS and other agencies to implement a plan. In these cases a key ingredient has been having CAYLUS as an agency outside of Government that is able to advocate for timely action on issues that might otherwise fall between Departments or go in the too hard basket.

It should be noted that CAYLUS is the only non-government agency in our region that makes Section 33 referrals using statutory powers under the VSAP Act. We are not aware of any agency in Top end that plays an equivalent role. When we make section 33 referrals NT Health are required to keep us informed as to their response.

These are positive case examples where NT Health and Territory Families staff have worked collaboratively and flexibly with CAYLUS and other community agencies to provide a tailored intervention and this has possibly saved lives.

### **Case study 1**

A young person we will call John who was born in 2009. He came to attention through sniffing petrol and thinners in Alice Springs, Papunya and Areyonga in Dec 19- Jan 20. He was sniffing every day, in risky situations, at dangerous levels and family were unable to stop him.

CAYLUS referred him under the VSAP Act to the NT Department of Health on 5/12/19. An investigation by the Department's VSA Nurse in Alice Springs confirmed his dangerous levels of inhalant misuse but due to his age the department did not think he would be able to be mandated to rehabilitation. The dept tried unsuccessfully to encourage and support his family in taking him to live in a remote community where he may have stopped the behavior.

Territory Families at that stage did not have him under an order and were engaging with him as part of their Strengthening Families program. After pressing unsuccessfully for a response in other ways CAYLUS wrote to Territory Families on 31/1/20 stating that in our experience the youth was at risk of death and that TF were the only agency that could potentially intervene to save his life, suggesting they place him under a Temporary Care and Protection Order.

In response, Territory Families did issue a Protection Order for three months on 6/2/20 and worked with NT Health to arrange for hospital-based detox of the youth. Following this Territory Families and NT Health were able to arrange for he and two members of his family to attend CAAPS in Darwin. CAYLUS contributed funds towards this plan, being accommodation for one of his family and clothes and other goods to support the placement, plus contributing with TF towards an extra CAAPS worker for John.

The CAAPS placement broke down after a couple of weeks and Territory Families temporarily placed John with a foster family while arrangements were made for his return to family in Alice Springs. Our observation is that this combination of interventions was enough to stop this boys sniffing, which in our joint experience was looking very concerning.

### **Case study 2**

A young women we will call Helen, born 2000, was a long-term inhalant misuser from Balgo WA who was sniffing in Yuendumu in March 2019 and involving lots of other youths in inhalant misuse.

We had been previously involved with Helen both in Balgo and Yuendumu on and off since 2016 and had previously supported her to attend Rehab at CAAPS in Darwin. This rehab placement broke down fairly quickly, she was unhappy there and threatened self-harm. In WA Helen had been engaged in the child welfare system but at 19 was now too old for support and intervention through this system.

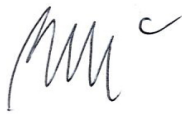
The sniffing in Yuendumu in March 2019 was getting quite active and Helen seemed central to this. CAYLUS worked with staff from The Warlpiri Youth Development Aboriginal Corporation (WYDAC) also previously known at the Mt The Program to gather information and CAYLUS made a s33 referral on 3 March 2019.

NT Health VSA staff were unable to immediately attend Yuendumu to assess Helen but worked flexibly to arrange for local clinic staff to conduct the assessment and towards the end of March 2019 she was assessed as being at high-risk. Her mental state, physical health and previous history with CAAPS meant that she was unsuitable to send to Rehab at CAAPS or the Mt Theo Rehab program near Yuendumu.

NT Health worked with WYDAC and CAYLUS to instead place her in Alice Springs Hospital (and later possibly another NT health facility) for supervised medical detox, accompanied by two family members. This worked for 1-2 weeks and during this time she was ordered through the VSA Act to the Mt Theo program. There was extensive casework done by WYDAC, CAYLUS and NT Health and the Alice Springs Hospital. At one stage she left the hospital and was in the staying with family in Alice Springs and CAYLUS and WYDAC worked with a cooperative police officer who successfully and creatively encouraged her to get in a car to go to Rehab at Mt Theo. She completed the Mt Theo program in June 2019 and returned to WA. She was visibly healthier after several months away from sniffing and the outbreak at Yuendumu stopped once she was out of the mix.

We are happy to provide further information including specific detail of these cases and hope that these case examples assist the inquiry process.

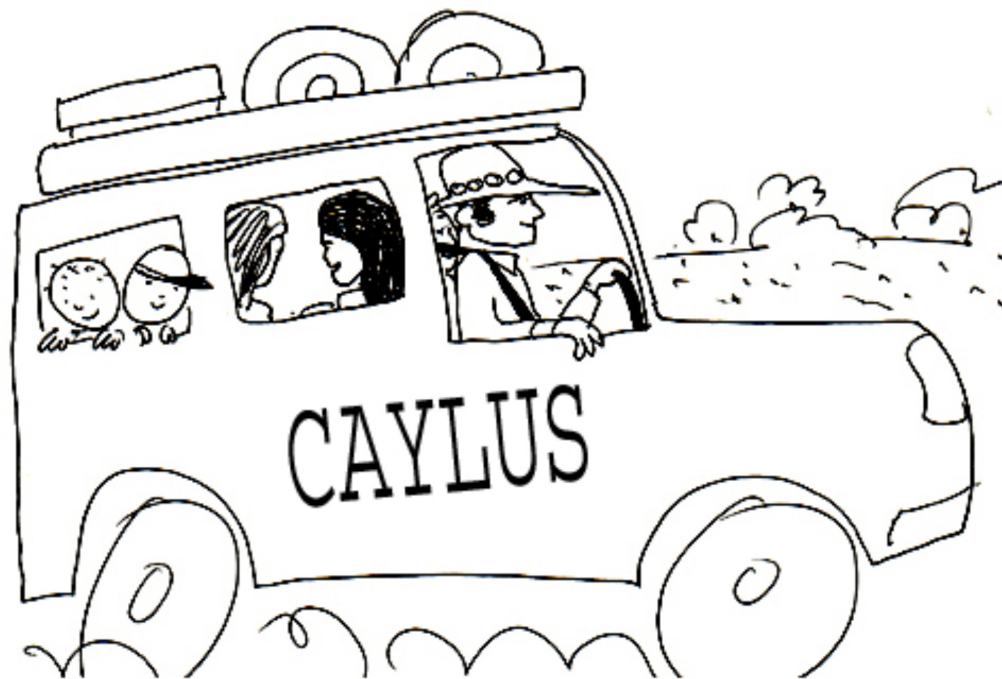
Yours Sincerely,



Blair McFarland  
CAYLUS Operations Manager  
0448526493



Tristan Ray  
Policy and Project Manager  
0427181727



**About The Central Australian Youth Link-Up Service  
Aug 2020**

**[caylus.org.au](http://caylus.org.au)**

## Mission

To support community initiatives that improve quality of life and address substance misuse affecting young people in Central Australian remote communities and town camps.

## Background

CAYLUS started as a petrol sniffing prevention project in November 2002 from funding committed by the Howard government in response to a series of articles about petrol sniffing by the journalist Paul Toohey in *The Australian*. CAYLUS staff work on a mix of community development, policy/ advocacy and casework based approaches.

CAYLUS supported interventions have included rehabilitation projects, youth programs, a responsible retail of solvents program, night patrols, policing initiatives, football carnivals, video and radio projects, and more. Whilst many supply-reduction measures have specifically targeted inhalants, the demand-reduction measures such as development of community-based youth development programs have had a myriad of other health, substance misuse prevention and community safety outcomes.

CAYLUS staff worked closely with families to facilitate access to rehabilitation programs and worked with these services to varying degrees to help develop their programs and services.

### Alpurrurulam

### Lake Nash



CAYLUS was first contacted by Lake Nash (Alpurrurulam) Council in response to outbreaks of petrol sniffing on the community. Some visitors to the community had been sniffing there and some local youth had also started experimenting. Families and workers in the community were concerned and got together on several occasions to move visitors back to Mt Isa and other communities. Mostly this slowed the sniffing for a while and local youth didn't sniff once this had happened. After several outbreaks, community members asked CAYLUS to assist them in getting Opal Fuel. They were also concerned that there were few meaningful activities and opportunities available to young people in the community. Since the introduction of Opal there has been only sporadic sniffing on the community.

There are nearly 250 young people and children in Lake Nash and CAYLUS has been working with government and the council to try and improve opportunities and supports for youth in the community through developing a youth program. There is a sport and recreation program and staff have recently changed over. Anna Flouris is the new worker, and Anna says that

despite limited program resources community members value and support activities for young people and actively engage in running activities for youth. One of the initiatives Anna is supporting is a community newsletter, and she has just finished the second edition.

CAYLUS has been working with the Alpurrurulam community to try and pull together funds for a full time youth worker to work in the community. Our experience is that the minimum level of resources required for a youth program in a community like Alpurrurulam is 2 youth workers with suitable housing, 2 program vehicles and a youth program centre such as a Rec hall and money to employ local casual workers. CAYLUS will continue to support Alpurrurulam in working toward this model, which is the basic level of services needed to start addressing the underlying causes of sniffing.

CAYLUS also helped the community to secure funds through the Aboriginals Benefit Account (ABA) and NT Health and Commonwealth Health to run holiday programs in the community. We engaged Rahm and Meluka from Multivision Media who ran a fantastic program with help from the Women's Centre, Council and store. The program ran for 4 weeks in the winter break and included daily activities for all ages and families.



Anna Flouris



To Contact Anna Flouris,  
Alpurrurulam community  
Sport and Rec worker  
phone 07 476483048.



42



43

## Legislation

CAYLUS staff worked with other stakeholders to advocate to the Northern Territory government for a range of measures including better data collection, better policing around petrol sniffing and better rehabilitation options. This resulted in the introduction of the NT Volatile Substance Abuse Prevention Act 2005 and a complementary investment in support programs by the NT government. One of the most useful outcomes of this legislation is that it gives communities the ability to make possession of sniffable petrol illegal altogether within their bounds, thereby making petrol dealing far more difficult. At the moment the legislation applies only in the Northern Territory, but there is interest from other states with similar issues (e.g. Western Australia) in the VSAP legislation and CAYLUS inhalant abuse reduction strategies.



**Ikuntji (Haasts Bluff)**

Playing in the creek after a big rain



Little one at Allunungo

CAYLUS has been working with Ikuntji for 5 years. There hasn't been much sniffing in Ikuntji but sometimes Ikuntji kids used to sniff at Papunya, some kids from Ikuntji stayed at Ilpurla with Barry Abbott to get off petrol. Ikuntji introduced Opal in 2006 to make sure there was Opal across the region.

This year CAYLUS was asked to help run the youth program. The program is funded by the Commonwealth Department of Family and Children's Services and Indigenous Affairs (FACSA). Nathan Brown and Diana Kirke are the youth workers. Recently more community members are also helping run activities like bush trips.

Nathan had worked first in Ikuntji as a volunteer in 2005 through Youth Challenge Australia he also ran the summer holiday program for CAYLUS last summer. Diana has been living at Town Bore near Ikuntji and worked previously for CAYLUS at Papunya.

The Ikuntji youth program runs regular activities including things like trips to waterholes, football, tennis, computer activities regular discos and movie nights. Activities are run after school with some evening activities Wednesday, Friday Saturday and Sunday nights.



Disco



Young men and Nathan at the emu oarada (egg) waterhole



Nathan and some of the Ikuntji kids



Swimming in the town bore tub



## **Opal/Low Aromatic Fuel**

Staff initially promoted use of aviation gas as a anti-sniffing fuel, along with promoting the use of the Misuse of Drugs Act (NT) to prevent dealing. At the request of community stakeholders workers offered a hotline service whereby community members were able to name dealers of petrol. Twelve dealers were reported to police in this way in the first few months of the service. With the advent of Opal fuel in 2005, it became feasible for the first time to implement a non-sniffable fuel across the region. CAYLUS staff worked with communities promoting the use of the fuel. They also advocated for a change in Commonwealth Government policy, first to allow roadhouses to use the fuel, then to support a region wide rollout and most recently to create commonwealth capacity to mandate use of the fuel using the Low Aromatic Fuel Act 2012. The most current data on the roll out of Opal shows a 94% reduction in sniffing prevalence as a result of the Opal roll out.

## **Governance**

CAYLUS is overseen by a reference group of organizations and key stakeholders from the region:

- Central Australian Aboriginal Congress
- Papunya Community
- The Warlpiri Youth Development Aboriginal Corporation
- Alice Springs Youth Accommodation Support Service (ASYASS)
- Tangentyere Council
- NPY Women's Council
- Waltja Tjutangku Palyapayi
- Pintubi Homelands Health Service
- Mt Liebig community

## **Communities serviced**

CAYLUS services the following communities, which are spread geographically over more than 600,000 square kilometres:

- Alice Springs
- Ali Curung
- Ampilatwatja
- Aputula
- Areyonga
- Bonya
- Docker River
- Engawala
- Epenarra

- Harts Range
- Hermannsburg
- Ikuntji
- Imanpa
- Kintore
- Lake Nash
- Laramba
- Mt Liebig
- Mutitjulu
- Nyirripi
- Papunya
- Santa Teresa
- Titjikala
- Utopia
- Willowra
- Yuelamu
- Yuendumu

In addition CAYLUS has provided occasional assistance to communities outside of this list.

## **Activities**

For many years CAYLUS was the only service that provided support in relation to inhalant abuse to remote communities in the Central Australian region. In recent years some additional Commonwealth and NT funded treatment and diversionary services have started, partly as a result of CAYLUS work. CAYLUS now employs four community development workers, who work with remote Indigenous communities to create education and treatment strategies that address substance abuse particularly by young people. We also employ a caseworker.

CAYLUS support includes:

- development of community plans to address the substance abuse,
- assistance in locating funding to support community actions,
- coordination and funding of training for youth workers and community members,
- work with retailers to support responsible sale of solvents and inhalants,
- education about the consequences of inhalant and other substance abuse,
- linking communities with existing service providers,
- production of indigenous language resources,
- a media strategy to complement other activities,
- advocacy to promote useful strategies to address substance misuse affecting youth, and
- casework to assist individual youth



## **School holidays**

The school holidays are widely recognised as a time of increased substance abuse, violence, self-harming behaviour and injury for young people in Central Australia. As a part of on-going activities CAYLUS has been coordinating resources, staff and money for summer and mid year school holiday programs since its inception.

## **Youth Infrastructure Upgrades**

One of the biggest obstacles in terms of developing youth services is lack of essential infrastructure including houses for youth workers, recreation halls and facilities to work in and program vehicles.

In early 2008 we succeeded in gaining a \$3million contribution towards this need from the Aboriginals Benefit Account (ABA), a mining royalties fund set up under the NT Land Rights Act. We have subsequently completed these works and commenced a second \$7 million tier of works across 10 sites with funding from a variety of sources.

To date CAYLUS has completed renovation of 13 community / rec halls across the region and built 7 houses as a part of this work.

As well as the infrastructure, there is a need for youth program resources, such as computers to improve the literacy and numeracy skills of participants, music and recording equipment to engage the older at risk youth cohorts in positive activities, sporting equipment to promote healthy activity, and a host of other operational needs. CAYLUS continues to work with government and other agencies towards addressing these needs.

## **Workforce development**

A key challenge across all sectors in the region is the recruitment and retention of quality staff. In a cross language and culture environment skilling up new workers requires lots of resources. It is also a high stress environment and that means that the resources programs have invested in terms of developing staff skills and capacity can be lost with alarming regularity. Some additional challenges when working with children include ensuring all safety requirements in terms of criminal history checks and working with children screenings are met.

In order to address some of these issues CAYLUS is working with employer agencies across the region to support youth workforce development initiatives.

Some of our work in this area to date includes:

- Developing volunteer placement as a way of improving the pool of potential workers;
- Making links with universities and partner organisations to develop student placement schemes and encourage appropriate graduates to apply for work in the region;
- Providing a regional coordination point/knowledge base that employers and potential workers can both access; and
- Working with government and employers to improve conditions and support for workers, including provision of professional supervision, counselling and emergency support.