



# CENTREPOINT

## Cultural Lessons

**T**HE media has recently been highlighting the concerns of many regarding the management and future of Aboriginal communities.

Located in the eye of this impending storm is Nyangatjatjara College at Yulara, in the village of Uluru in central Australia.

The school was established to develop the educational needs of three closely related Aboriginal communities – Imanpa, Mutitjulu and Kalukutjara.

The Anangu people are the traditional land owners of Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park.

I recently attended a camp for Nyangatjatjara College students, held during their vacation period, in the role of facilitator for physical activities and musical interaction. The intention of my visit was to teach the students life skills. The outcome was that they were the ones to teach me about living.

On arrival, similar to first impressions of all visitors to this unique part of the world, I marvelled at the tremendous beauty and unique mystery of Uluru (Ayers Rock), Kata Tjuta (the Olgas) and the surrounding red soil, all of which can be clearly seen from the college.

However, it was to be my interaction with the Aboriginal adolescent males aged 12-19, attending the camp and staying in the

**TIMOTHY LYNCH presents a different side to life in an Aboriginal community in central Australia**

college's boarding facilities, which left the greatest and lasting impression of my visit.

Our opening duty involved collecting students from Kalukutjara Aboriginal Community (Docker River), 10km from the WA border, a four-hour trip down a dirt and sand road in a 4WD troop carrier.

The scenic drive was one of many "slowing of time" experiences I had for some time forgotten.

Stopping to ponder is a need many of us sacrifice or reject from our busy lifestyles, hence in today's fast paced world my prayer life is unfortunately at times replaced by one of the many other demands.

Taking the time to appreciate the world that surrounds us in its various forms of natural beauty was a disposition of the Aboriginal students, which from our first meeting set the scene for my experience to be one of reflection, growth and prayer, enhancing spiritual development.

Visiting Aboriginal communities and working closely with the boys during the camp enabled me to appreciate first hand the spiritual strengths of their culture.

Prominent features of the time spent with



**Enjoying life:** Aboriginal children play football on the oval at Yulara

the adolescents, in particular assisting with their football training, were the brotherhood and closeness between one another within a community. During a practice football match the boys took great care not to cause harm to one another, as their sense of care extends familial bonds.

Other features manifested included spiritual connections with the land and the non-reliance on material goods.

The Aboriginal culture prioritises family and community life, therefore consumerism carries little significance. Similar to Christian values, focus is placed on needs not wants.

My time in central Australia assisted me to identify the Kingdom of God in the culture I live within metropolitan Brisbane and the

culture of the Anangu people, achieved through linking my faith with the experience I shared with the college students.

My experiences were not supportive of recent media reports, however it would be naive to deny that symptoms of crisis reported within associated communities do not exist.

The time spent with the students of Nyangatjatjara College enabled me to witness the potential and talent of the community members and the charisms of various teachers, often forming a paradox to the media reports centred on self and community destruction.

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