

Counselling For The Dreamtime: A Training Journey with Aboriginal Women

by Susanne Howlett

Susanne Howlett, Psychodramatist, W.A., has been contracted by a group of urban Aboriginal women of Western Australia to develop a culturally appropriate two year training course in counselling. Susanne shares her journey of learning as together she and the women build a bridge across the cultural chasm.

Susanne's task is to design a training container in which 20 women can learn about counselling and find pride in expressing their Aboriginality as Aboriginal Counsellors. The training process is build upon acknowledgement of Aboriginal spirituality, their network of relationships with one another, kinship, their connection to the land and the impact of Western colonisation on their culture.

The Yorgum Counselling Course is a unique counselling training programme in which the application of the psychodramatic method becomes the bridge between Aboriginality and counselling.

Yorgum

Counselling Course

A creation story of women together; a meeting place for two maps of Australia, for two maps of the world, for two world views.

Yorgum is the name for a large red flowering gum tree in the Noongar language of the Aboriginal people in the south west of Western Australia. The gum of this particular eucalypt has healing properties used for thousands of years in treating diseases of the eyes. Its wood is favoured as firewood as it holds the heat and gives warmth for a long time in the camp fires.

Yorgum is the name the Aboriginal women chose for the Counselling Course and later as the name for their corporation, Yorgum Aboriginal Corporation for Women.

When I asked the ladies how to spell Yorgum they laughed and said it didn't matter, we could spell it how it sounded: "We don't have that. Writing." The ladies also like the name as the first part is close to the sound Yorga meaning woman.

This name Yorgum expresses the Aboriginal women's purpose in becoming Aboriginal counsellors. Yorgum is linked to the image of *The Living Tree* from the Kimberley region of Western Australia. *The Living Tree* embodies the spirit of the Counselling Training Course:

The Great Tree whose roots go deep into the earth, drinking from the underground water, trunk and branches reaching out high in the sky, sustaining many other life forms, replenishing the air; the spirit of Life renewing itself.

Underlying this course is the valuing of diversity; that differentness in individuals, different families, different language groups and people from different places can connect with respect, that human differences are expressions of creativity and the capacity to survive. The women envisaged that Aboriginality can be connected with, valued and bring a unique flavour to their work as counsellors. They see this work as a life giving process and as an expression of their Aboriginal spirituality.

The Yorgum Counselling Course

This is a comprehensive and systematic course of training in counselling for Aboriginal women. Its purpose is to enable Aboriginal women to become competent counsellors in their field of work or in the Aboriginal community. It is a part time, two year training course involving 36 weeks of 4 hour training sessions and four weekend workshops per year.

The women undertaking the training course work in a variety of settings: in women's refuges, Aboriginal child placement agencies, corrective institutions for juveniles,

Aboriginal Alcohol and Substance Abuse agencies, education facilities as well as in the Aboriginal community. The course is the first of its kind in Western Australia and probably in the whole of Australia.

Course Objectives

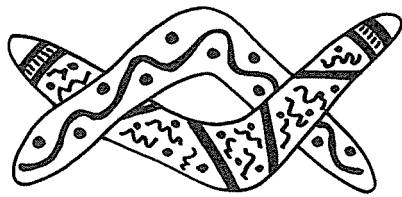
Yorgum Course Objectives are that Aboriginal women:

1. Develop counselling skills.
2. Develop culturally appropriate approaches to counselling.
3. Become confident about their competencies as counsellors and are able to contribute as counsellors in their work place or in the community.

In 1991 many forces from different directions connected and ignited a fire that has become the camp fire for 18 urban women of Aboriginal descent and myself, a wadjella, with a troupe of 5 counselling supervisors, all trained in the psychodramatic method.

For many years Aboriginal people have been calling for opportunities to become skilled in working with their own people. They wanted to bridge the welfare chasm and reclaim their strength, their pride and their great capacity for survival. In the last 8 years Aboriginal women in their conferences have been calling for counselling services and training. Many people reverberated to this call and in 1991 the times was right for the birth of an Aboriginal training course. The Yorgum Counselling Course is the result of many people, Aboriginal and non Aboriginal, saying **yes** and adding their weight to finding a way through the funding morass. Money has been found from four different government sources to fund the first two years (an exhausting miracle of manoeuvring in highly political bureaucracies).

Recently the women became incorporated as the **Yorgum Aboriginal Corporation for Women** and have been assured funding for this course for a further three years. The next dream is for an Aboriginal Counselling Service and plans are underway for a pilot service using trainees from the course beginning in August, 1993.



My own connecting with the momentum began in 1990.

Gabrielle Whiteley, a trainee in the Group Leadership Course which I co-ordinated, told me she had a new dream moving within her and at the end of the course she would know what its form was to be. I had been following Gabrielle's work with great interest as the Co-ordinator of the only Aboriginal women's refuge in Perth. Ever since I came to Australia in 1976 I have had a secret ear out to know more of Aboriginal people. I have always felt attracted by their vitality, their realness and some quality I could not name.

Contacts and connections have been gradually gathering me closer to this Other Australia. Three contacts stand out:

One

Two old friends, trained in sociodrama, working with the Central Desert Aboriginal people – assisting them to take initiative as a community with their youngsters sniffing petrol. Ross Colliver

presented the Petrol Sniffing Project at the 1986 Psychodrama Conference in Perth. During his presentation Ross paused as he told us of the excitement of the Desert Elders as Ross and Bill Genat listened and mapped their experience while the Desert people talked in the meeting. They drew a role diagram, a picture of the community in action on business paper.

“You think like a blackfella!” the elders said amazed, and claimed them as their kin into their community. Ross paused as he told the story. Quite unexpectedly he burst into deep sobbing. From a deep well this huge feeling: a shared community, a coming home, a being seen by a whole community, a belonging on the planet Earth.

I know that Sobbing Place in myself now. Where the heart is bursting to hold and release so large a feeling of connection and acceptance – unknowable in our Western culture, our fragmented industrial communities.

Two

The same year I act as facilitator with the Police/Aboriginal Relations Committee in a session reviewing their functioning as a committee. They are having problems. I myself come from a background of a police family. The police subculture is familiar. The Aboriginal people I feel immediately at home with. Their openness to feeling and easy engagement in group process, their flexibility and talking through story and experience.

The depth of pain and terror I am not prepared for. It is tangible in the room. Individual Aboriginal people leave the room as the exposure and directness of being face to face with police is unbearable. The policemen are puzzled, stiff, well meaning,

doing their best. Some hostility and wounds of their own seep through. They are unable to role reverse, unable not to be policemen, to not “back each other regardless”, to think about complexities. They feel themselves resentfully to be the meat in the cultural sandwich. I have disturbing dreams for three weeks after this meeting. A month later there is an outbreak of ugly clashes between the police and out of control, enraged probably drunk Aboriginals in country pubs. An unending series of deaths in custody. Young Aboriginal men without a way through the void.

Three

In 1990, after a Sunday at home of autumn gardening we enjoy burning the leaves and debris as the sun goes down. Later Terry goes out to check the fire. He finds an old Aboriginal man lying down near the fire, tired out and preparing to sleep. He says he is from Mullewa (200km North) and he has lost his way in the dark, it is a long time since he came by here. He'll find it when the sun comes up and be off. He impresses me as a man of presence, going about his own business. He carries nothing with him.

The Yorgum women tell me now he would be a Featherfoot man on Walkabout. They are scared of featherfoots. These are men of power, not to be trifled with. Their mother used to leave the evening meal on the door steps and jam forks in the door as locks to keep those featherfoot men from bothering them.

In this encounter I realise that the Bridle Path we live next to is not just an old disused railway track which it once was and we now enjoy as a stretch of bush in the suburbs. It is the Bibbulmun track – the Bibbulmun

Songline. A network of walking tracks of the Bibbulmun people on their walkabout cycles. They run for hundreds of kilometres down to Albany in the far South and 200km North to Geraldton. There is another Perth parallel to the constructed, orderly city I know. I feel the ancientness – at least 60,000 years and some think more like 120,000. Alive and breathing still. It breathes me.

When Gabrielle asks me would I train a group of Aboriginal women as counsellors there is an immediate **Yes**. There is no doubt. I know I can begin this process with them and I know they will be able to find a way to be Aboriginal counsellors if that is what they want to be. I decide to make available everything I am and know including a network of quality professionals.

And I am terrified. I know I am out of my depth. This is totally Unknown.

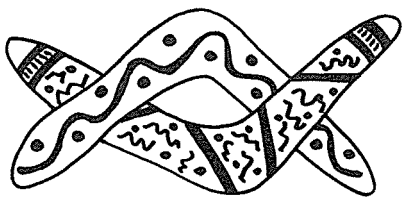
Counselling

Counselling: a Western way of healing only formalised separately to priesting, medicine and judging in the last 50 years. A way that calls for reflectiveness, intuitive attunement, a scientific objectivity combined with life wisdom, and training in managing the counsellors own disturbance in the face of human dilemmas. Most of us doing this work learn to unlearn many family and cultural assumptions, judgements and ways of acting. I wonder what will it mean for these women. I tell them early I can bring the white frameworks, they will have to work out what is useful and discard what doesn't fit as Aboriginal people.

Only 150 years ago Aboriginal people had their own ways of healing, were healthy, with a vigorous, complex community life.

Steeped in a spirituality incorporating social relationships, relationships to the Land, to plants and to animal life. A people who could survive without building cities, sewage plants, rubbish dumps, freeways. A hoarding culture of cupboards, bibles and quarter acre blocks meeting a hunter-gatherer culture of the Dream time with relatedness as its basis and the earth as its home, dirt to industrialised Westerners.

Aboriginal people in Western Australia are struggling with the devastation of their economy, language, culture and kinship systems as the result of 150 years of aggressive European occupation. The injury from loss of attachment to the mother earth through access to the land, active attempts to exterminate some groups, loss of rich and varied bush food sources through pastoralisation and fencing, assimilation policies of governments and racist hatred of individuals has left a legacy of multiple trauma and a cultural grief of archetypal proportions. Life expectancy is about 20 years lower than for European Australians. Funerals are frequent.



The current situation is that 50% of Aboriginal people are unemployed and many cannot break the cycle of poverty. Recent research in Victoria indicates that 53% of Aboriginal people visiting their medical doctor for physical problems have a diagnosed psychiatric disorder – mainly depression and anxiety related disorders. A very small proportion access mental health

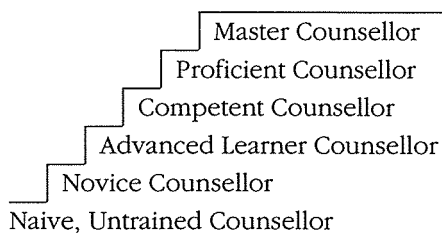
facilities, none of which are oriented to Aboriginal cultural ways. Aboriginal people feel their problems are more likely to be compounded through contact with mental health clinics and hospitals. Our prison system is overpopulated with Aboriginal people who have a much higher rate of arrest (increasing at the present time) and are 29 times more likely to be in police custody than other Australians. 40% of our prison population is Aboriginal. They make up about 2.5% of the population.

Counselling Training

I have taken the view that training in counselling is in many ways not unlike the Aboriginal initiation process. Initiation involves passing through several levels of learning, ability and responsibility. I don't know if this is an accurate metaphor, not being initiated in Aboriginality. However it allows me to go forward with what I know and listen alertly to what comes back to me.

Levels of Learning

5 levels in mastery of the role of counsellor:



I am grateful to Drefus and Drefus, two American computer technologists in sharing a map of the learning process which identifies distinctive levels not unlike Aboriginal levels of initiation.

The Yorgum Counselling Course offers a pathway through three levels of learning. From the Naive level of Counselling, Novice Counsellor, Advanced Learner levels to

Competent Counsellor. Becoming a Proficient Counsellor and Master Counsellor is beyond the level of a basic training course. This framework of levels gives the course some workable boundaries and objectives for each year of training as a starting place.

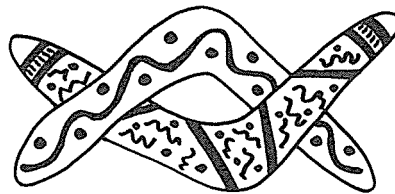
The counselling process itself I liken to an Aboriginal sacred site and ceremony: it is secret, sacred and has special purpose for the individual and their community life. It is protected by some degree of ritual in opening and closing a session, it happens in a special place and offers safety from the normal social corrective forces in order that growth and learning occur. It is based on respect.

Yorgum women have needed to wrestle with issues of confidentiality in respect of the oral transmission of information through a widely effective "gossip" network. Information belongs to the community. The network will let the community know if they are to be trusted or not.

They also wrestle with the notion of objectivity as a counsellor when family, kinship and skin group relationships carry social obligations and consequences. All Aboriginals are related through these systems. Relationships with stranger Aboriginal people are established in respect of family, kinship and known connections. Intimacy is possible once this is cleared. Everybody is related on one of these systems. This is the basis for proceeding and carries with it defined privileges and responsibilities. Differentiating counsellor from friend, family or boss is problematic. We talk about the nature of counselling work as a job when the counsellor might see six people who are troubled every day. How that is different to seeing three or four a week as part of family life.

In coming together to collaborate

with these Noongar, Yamatji and Kimberley women, the first question is **where am I as trainer coming from?** This is what Aboriginal people want to know. They suss the stranger out. There must be respect, acknowledgment, openness to learning and listening to them and no falseness.



I bring my being, my knowing from my own life, my own training, my unknowing and my curiosity.

When I work with Aboriginal people I stand before them very visible, open. They take me as I am. And this is their way. The acceptance of the group touches me at a deep level and the constancy and abiding nature of the acceptance continues to surprise me. This takes me to the Sobbing Place. Their pain begins to be felt within me, their humour to embrace me. Close by the Sobbing Place I discover a Laughing Place of mirth and hilarity. The stories are often excruciatingly funny in exposing the absurdity of human follies. Hoots and belly laughs ripple out through the bush on our weekend workshops.

The favourite stories are retold.

Diane at the railway station, one depressing morning sits next to a white fella in suit and with brief case. Becomes increasingly irate as he opens and takes a bite of her chocolate kitkat lying on the coffee table. Finally she decides to grab what's left, gobble it down and take a big bite out of his bun for good measure before sweeping off; she opens her bag in the train to get her ticket and her kitkat awaits her.

Margaret one dazed Saturday at the supermarket, sees a crowd gathered round a new car being raffled. She hears her name called out. The crowd parts as she cries "I've won it! I've won it!" She reaches the compere who looks at her peculiarly saying "Who are you?" Her daughter drags her away and by the times they have got to the edge of the crowd they are howling with laughter. She didn't even have a ticket.

Jenny's comic retelling of catching her man out unexpectedly at the pub, the night she is usually playing bingo. There he is, snuggling/dancing face to very large Bosoms (he's short) and The moment when he looks up and sees her across the room. Each role is acted out with gusto and leaves us rolling around, tears streaming down our cheeks.

As I listen to the women's stories I enter another world. A world full of bellied laughter and fun, an easiness about mistakes and errors. These aren't life or death. Their's is a world of intuition/superstition and unspoken communion, of sexual abuse and family violence, of harsh racism, of early death, of tenderness at the lostness in their men, of spirit experiences, of being sung and medicine men, of feuding and payback, and irrepressible life – of a group life so sophisticated I am back in kindergarten. They are training me.

Organisation and Structure of Yorgum Counselling Course

We meet weekly for four hours, we have four residential weekends in the bush each year. Each Friday morning as we gather we begin with silence, followed by a Reflection (a song, poem, reading brought by a different

woman each week) and Speaking to the circle, before moving into the structured learning. We light a candle as our camp fire for the circle time. The learning is embedded in our relationships with each other and unfolds into the focus for the week. The women are finding their voices and their names now for their Aboriginal knowing and the Aboriginal Counsellor is beginning to take its own shape.

The Story of The People

*The love for the Aboriginal baby came
from the Spirit of Australia
from the Spirit, from within the land
from the indigenous, from the
beginning.*

*When there is void
to move the void
there was movement upon the void
and it was a wave
and wind
and then life starts coming out of this
void.*

*This wind that was before the void,
you can't see it but you feel it.
It has an impact. It is different when
the wind came.*

*The people are dispossessed, dispersed
In exile.
The midwives who deliver the babies
said "yuk"
The midwives did not welcome the baby
and instead projected their own images
And were disgusted.*

*Counsellors are the breeze of the void
The sky, the waterholes and how they
evolved
the snakes, the animals
are still there
And the ancient footprints
are still there
In the stone.*

*The land is the mother earth
from where the seeds come
And we don't like people digging.*

*We Aboriginal counsellors respect the Land
the Law, the Ceremonies.
We keep the bond.*

— spoken by the Yorgum Group

There is some teaching, some practice of counselling using the one-way mirror and reflection on the learning.

Supervision is in small groups fortnightly.

Guest speakers come fortnightly. They share their maps of life and counselling skills. We bring the old ones in to talk their stories. We bring the young ones in, the university graduates and hear their learnings. We have those special wadjellas come who have been at the interface of the cultures and have something to say. We bring in a few bosses like the Director of post graduate training for psychiatrists to listen and learn and make links. The women and myself draw together the best people from our networks to add to the richness.

Curriculum

We are creating the curriculum as we go, nestling in the structure of the Wasley Centre Counselling Course developed by Robert van Koesveld. Which nestled in the structure developed in the Groupwork Leadership course. Which grew out of the psychodrama training course and training courses for health professionals. This Yorgum course has a lineage.

Skill training in the First Year focuses on:

- Aboriginal identity, Aboriginal history,
- Ways of listening, Ways of seeing, Ways of guiding.
- Weekend themes: working with grief and loss, developmental counselling, working with

families, personal development as a counsellor.

Second Year focuses on Aboriginal experience and process:

- Ways of Naming, Making Maps of Experience, Ways of staying present when a person is in Pain, Indigenous Ways of Healing.
- Weekend themes: working with shame, working with trauma, working with addictions, professional issues for counsellors.

Reflections as a Trainer

It is probably too soon to say anything conclusive about the psychodrama method beyond the fact that it suits Aboriginal people's own styles of learning based on systems of relationships, valuing of spontaneity and creativity, action memory and learning through observation, modelling and practise. It allows for their community process and actively includes what we call surplus reality, which for Aboriginal people is reality. The dreaming is very much alive in their own ways of being and never far away for these urbanised Aboriginal women.

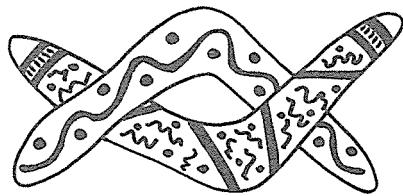
Mainly the psychodrama method has assisted me: having a systems view of the world, exploring the perspective of all the players, awareness of the forming and reforming of sociometric links as the concrete expression of living breathing culture, the delight and freedom of role mapping as a way to communicate about human experience. All these ways of my seeing and tasting life are liberating a pathway for orienting myself in this totally unknown Aboriginal world. Everywhere I see Aboriginal creative genius shining. The spirit of life itself. Irrepressible spontaneity bubbling up from some deep underground

source. Mainly the psychodramatic method as it is now integrated with my own self assists me to be lively, work from my essence and keep my head working creating workable and flexible structures.

Discoveries as a Trainer

I don't have to carry it all myself.

The women shape the course substantially and guide me in the next step in the curriculum. A representative group of women from the class named the Keepers Group meet with me regularly to keep things on track and work out the next move forward.



The training group takes care of its own process.

We can go straight to the learning. I find this an absolute delight having taught in tertiary institutions for many years, a dependency rewarding system of education. These people are independent learners. They watch out for each other. They notice when someone is wobbling. They greet and welcome and encourage spontaneously. They reflect on errors they make in their relating and track down what is going on. They accept people doing what they need to do to take care of their own process. They are available to each other in times of fragmentation. They hang in together. There is a lot of space given when things get too heavy and people move themselves out of the heat. Sometimes the group is so mobile with people coming and going from the room – to have a smoke, get a

coffee, not get bogged in the unbearable pain that is always not far from the surface. Those more free of it continue the work of the group. They make visible/physical what probably goes on in any training group. Even I have learned to relax in this state of ebb and flow.

Aboriginal people understand the principle of 'group protagonist'.

The individual represents the Group and is also their own individual self. They understand that stories and dreams told are for the progression of the Group. They know already that individual life is interactional. They are at home with conflict and do not confront the individual with a spotlight on full beam. They circle around.

It took a while to dawn on me that my *map of the psyche* separating the intrapsychic fields from the interpersonal and sociocultural were unworkable here. All individual action here is viewed through the eyes of the group. Role reversal is with the Group, not with the individual. For Aboriginal people the intrapsychic is experienced in the interpersonal and sociocultural. What's more, the uniqueness of the individual is highly respected and valued in group life. Difference and eccentricity are largely accepted. On the other hand behaviour that breaks sacred Law is punished and the family may be held responsible for the wrong doings of an individual.

These women are *not afraid of the Dark, of the chaos*. Their personal histories of multiple trauma shock me through my own protection layers. Yet they laugh more loudly and more gaily than anyone I know. Their humour is warm and embraces human error. As a person overdosed on perfectionism and self judgement this is an unexpected breath of fresh air. As counsellors the women do

struggle as we do with going to the positive too soon and not staying long with the pain. And the pain for Aboriginal people is monumental. They struggle with the slide towards Blame as a way. The two areas most troubling as counsellors are the pain they share in when an Aboriginal is in pain. And the revenge.

There is *a capacity to attune* emotionally at a deep level with people, they know the Feeling Self and do not have to go through an opening process to access their own individual and collective inner life. This is available to them. They already See the inner Babe. The women tell me than an Aboriginal person Knows what another is feeling, and the other knows they Know. I believe they are speaking of a deeper thing than empathy or sympathy as we know it. This is a kind of collective shared feeling experience that can be tapped. They tell me this is Sacred knowledge and the Old Women say this is not for sharing with white people, it will be exploited. And so much has been robbed already.

Western psychological maps for Shame and Shyness are *wrong maps* for Aboriginal people. In Aboriginal culture Shame is mostly positive, it balances the individual and brings them into line in the Community. They use the word 'Shame!' commonly and freely. It is more of the order of "you ought to be embarrassed" and is often used lightly with humour and warmth. The colder, shrivelling version that Westerners know is usually associated with white judgement upon Aboriginal people. *Shyness* also is not experienced as a painful feeling. It is a natural thing, how you should be when you are young or don't know anything. Not the excruciating sense of self-

consciousness that I remember from my adolescence – more its opposite: a proper protection of innocence. I suspect our maps for addictions, codependency and the function and process of alcoholism are also not applicable.

Aboriginal people have a *knowing about Respect and boundaries* that we have barely begun to conceive of. There is a vast and precise sense of the sacred in human affairs in this culture. We in our culture get caught in cynicism and undifferentiated values. The news system on the whole does not build relationships. Aboriginal people take time to establish the basis for relating. Roles are defined and purposes made clear through action. Permission is sought before proceeding. There is much to learn.

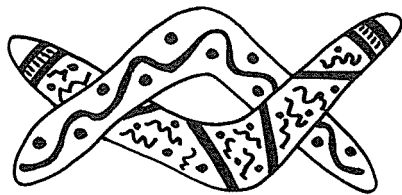
Entry to another family or community or tribal group is carefully negotiated and only proceeds through permission or invitation. The new person always assumes a respectful learner position and is respectful of differences. This has enabled the many hundreds of Aboriginal groups and languages to maintain their diversity and yet be hospitable to newcomers. These people have *respect for diversity*. Their original response to the first Europeans who came was hospitable and welcoming. Resources are for sharing.

One of my European coaches has helped me understand why *Western art forms* of drawing and painting haven't worked so well in Yorgum classes. Traditional Aboriginal people do sand drawing as part of their communication and story telling. They rub out as they go along and the sand drawing expresses the *fluidity* of their experience. The women have responded to using a selection of plain coloured materials

with more spontaneity and expressiveness as a way to concretise their experience. I have also developed the use of a basket of miniature plastic animals for concretising the story, the roles and the meanings made. These methods of externalising the inner without using auxiliaries allow more freedom as they do not invoke spirit experiences through being in another person's role.

I am also learning how footprints are sacred to Aboriginal people and can also be like a family photograph album. The footprint speaks of the identity of the individual and tells a story of the moment it was made. It has sacred meaning. One old Aboriginal lady from the Great Victorian Desert people told us that after she was taken from her people by the Welfare as a young girl, her grandfather would take her little cousin down to the creek bed and show her the footprint of her missing cousin so she would know this one as part of the family. The cousin met her many years later and told her this story and how her parents cried for years and years after she was taken. The community knew her through her footprints.

Techniques in counselling are not required so much as the further deepening of awareness and strengthening of confidence in the women's own capacities that are already developed. The learning is in the area of remaining a calm reflective listener when the pain arises in the other.



What a Counselling Course Can Offer Aboriginal People

My current conclusions

1. A legitimate social role in mainstream culture that gives authority to enter institutions to talk and be with their own people who are distressed or in trouble.
2. A language for some of the unspoken knowing. Naming the feeling life. A language with which to communicate with other professionals.
3. Development of thinking and maps to think with that are directly related to experience. This will enable sufficient separation from the other person's experience so as not be overwhelmed with the pain, which is also their pain.
4. Mapping Aboriginal wisdom in forms that strengthen thinking and Aboriginal identity. Role training, sociometry and systems thinking is fundamental in tracking this evolving knowledge system and protecting the spontaneity in Aboriginal culture.
5. Confidence together in taking their place in mainstream culture.

The Yorgum Counselling Course is an invitation for Aboriginal women to be what they already are and a way to claim what they already do.

The dilemma I am aware of in publishing these reflections is Aboriginal people's sensitivity about white professionals coming into their community, being enriched and then writing papers, theses, and books which earn them status and

promotion. For Aboriginal people it seems nothing comes back to the Aboriginal community. Aboriginal people feel unacknowledged and robbed in this way.

Robert van Koesveld and I have just completed a weekend workshop with Yorgum women on Working with Trauma. The course is now at a stage where the group is speaking Aboriginal frameworks for working with their people and we are recording these for them. The white frameworks are wrong for them. All forms of abuse and trauma are related to through the tidal wave of the Abuse of Aboriginality. This is their experience. The injury to their spiritual essence is experienced collectively, is a shared grief. This deep feeling arises in me also as I open in my work with them. The course is itself a healing vehicle. I do not want the container to be exposed too soon, for the juices to seep out when it has just begun to fill again. This is a tendency I have had with my own self over my life.

One thing that happened for me in Washington and Auckland when I talked about the project was a sense of being a window to a sacred space and in that process I myself became visible in a distorted way. I felt embarrassed afterwards. 'I' was gaining too much attention. Being with the Yorgum women there is not much 'I' around. We are in relationship. I am teacher, they are teacher. There is this learning unfolding. We enjoy.

I have talked to the Aboriginal ladies about the requests I have been getting to speak to groups and to write about the Yorgum experience and share their poems. They responded saying it is alright for me to go ahead with whatever I want to do. They said I don't need to ask any more. They said "We trust you." This

was a very beautiful moment for me.

I am clearer about my purpose in talking to groups and writing. I can make a contribution in preparing the way for other European Australians to make partnerships with Aboriginal people when the opportunity arises. Knowing how to begin and finding a role from which to relate makes the path easier. I know the contact and support I have had from other European Australians who have close links with Aboriginal people has greatly assisted me. So much is new and different and I often cannot read the group process of body language. The ones who have gone there translate. They are coaches and encouragers and point out a few landmarks in this unknown continent. We share the excitement. Beyond that the Aboriginal women coach me. They look out for me in ways I have never experienced before in any training group. They are easygoing with my awkwardness and generous as teachers. They are eager and intelligent learners. We do it together.