

ABC RADIO HEYWIRE ABC RADIO COMPETITION WINNER

My name is Polly-Anne Napangardi Dixon. I am 22 years of age. I live at Yuendumu community 300km north-west of Alice Springs in the Northern Territory.

Back in 1993, when I was 13, I used to sniff petrol. It made me feel good but I know it was bad for me. I used to get a hiding from my family – they used to hit me with a nulla nulla (traditional Aboriginal weapon). They used to send me to Larjamanu to live with my father – but I had to come back and sniff petrol again because my friends were sniffing petrol. In 1994 my mother sent me to Kormilda College in Darwin. I had to stay there for two years. Every holiday I used to come back and sniff petrol again.

There were lots of young people sniffing petrol in Yuendumu then – about thirty or forty. But its not good sniffing petrol – petrol makes you go mad. It will make you forget everything – forget your family and your country.

Lots of young people used to go to the outstation Mt Theo because they were sniffing. People from Yuendumu wanted the sniffers to go out bush to stay away from petrol. Petrol sniffers have to be there for one month where they go out hunting with Traditional Owners.

Life was difficult at that time. Now I don't sniff anymore. We don't have any petrol sniffers in Yuendumu.

Now I'm working with 'Strong Voices' Project. We try to help young people not to sniff petrol and make our community better for young people and everybody. Every night young people walk around – not doing anything, they might end up being a sniffer or getting drunk from grog or gunga. We don't want young people to forget their culture and family. To stop young people getting into trouble we run disco and do basketball competitions and softball for young girls. We want our community to be strong.

Every month we take young people out bush and we talk to them about strong voices – we stay out bush, near sacred sites, for about three nights. We talk about our lives, what we like and don't like about Yuendumu and how we can make Yuendumu better for young people and young people love it.

I like living in Yuendumu with my family and close to my country. When we live in town we get into trouble – drinking all day – smoking gunga – out bush we can go hunting and our grandmothers tell us stories about the old days and we love it.

We want young people to help us with 'Strong Voices' to keep the community strong.

We want to share our strong voices with other people outside Yuendumu too so they can learn what life is really like for Yapa (Warlpiri Aboriginal people) and we can all share stories about life.

<http://www.abc.net.au/heywire/stories/2002/nt/pand.htm>