

Traditional Methods – Modern Problems Kowanyama Aboriginal Community Fights to help itself!

Kowanyama is the Kokobera word for 'Place of many waters' The Kowanyama Community is (6 hours) north of Normanton, (9 hours) from Cairns and is located on the western coastline of Cape York, in the far north of Queensland. Since settlement there have been a host of events celebrating culture and maternal and child health. In the early 90's the Chalaly Doula project drew knowledge and experience from the women of Kowanyama and other Cape York Communities about antenatal health and mothering, and annual baby competitions were held.

In 2005 a rebirth in celebrating maternal and child health was initiated by Shaun Edwards, founder of the Kowanyama Festival, through the Rio Tinto Child Health Partnership, Queensland Health. With a lot of community consultation and assistance the festival was coordinated through the Kowanyama Justice Group and the Kowanyama Mothers and Babies Centre. This inaugural festival proved such a success that it motivated Shaun and the community to coordinate this a festival for 2006, with the theme of "Our Children our Future"

The 2-day festival, October 4-5, brings together support from Philanthropic and Government agencies, big business and the local community as elders guide mothers and families in the use of traditional methods of treating very real modern problems of:

- Foetal Alcohol Syndrome & other development disorders
- Rota Virus;
- Child abuse; and
- And other preventable life threatening diseases not currently caught by or effectively managed by modern methods. Helping current community and future generations.

The festival is both a celebration of the family & tradition and a learning experience for the entire Aboriginal community as participants learn to work with and beyond clinical agencies and services to solve very real problems, including facing issues of child abuse and recent deaths from preventable or curable disease.

The encourages information sharing to assist parents in making well-informed choices for the betterment of their families and provides health promotion to adolescent girls, potential mothers and grandmothers with information relevant to local ways of learning and to provide resources relating to maternal and child health and emotional and social health.

The project was aucpiced through Mookai Rosie Bi-Bayan, with 'in-kind' support from the Kowanyama Mothers and Babies Centre, and the Kowanyama Shire Council. Funding was made available through Ian Thorpe's Fountain for youth, the David Morawetz Social Justice Fund, Rio Tinto, Aboriginal Foundation, Australian Department of Health and Aging. Donations of product were received from Aesop, Johnson and Johnson Pacific, Dale Jones-Evens, Neeming Australia, Quiksilver, Great Adventures, Lush and Hand Made Cosmetics. Volunteer staff from the Mitchell River Watershed Management Group, Queensland Health, and the Royal Flying Doctor Service assisted with logistical preparations. Live performance from SistaShe of Melbourne.

For the First time the Cape York District Health, Medicare Australia, www.apunipima.org.au Cape York Health Council and LuvBub www.luvbub.com.au Olympian, Nova Peris promoted the Child Health Checks provided information and spoke to families about their health and needs for the future.

Due to the ongoing concerns in the community for the children and the future generations suffering from suspected foetal alcohol syndrome, other neuro-developmental disorders and child abuse, the importance of the Festival is recognised in providing educational advice and material that will assist in avoiding any increased incidents.

To assist in reducing these incidences and concerns discussions are being held to develop specific training around care and support for birth defects and foetal alcohol syndrome. This training will be available for parents and industry/community staff. This initiative will be run in conjunction with International partners, scheduled for 2007.

The Next Baby Festival will be held in Normanton, located in the Gulf of Carpentaria and is scheduled for August 2007.

For details and more information please contact:

Shaun Edwards Kalk

mobile 0401304148

www.shaunedwardskalk.com

shaun_edwards@hotmail.com