

**SHAYNE AND LURLEEN BLACKMAN
AND BREAKING THE DOT**



'It was once said by Mahatma Gandhi that poverty is the worst form of violence. I would like to add that poverty is also the worst form of terrorism. We as Indigenous Australians have unceremoniously experienced the worst form of terrorism for most of this century.

I hardly need mention the events of the first half of the century that shaped the unfortunate destiny for succeeding generations of Indigenous people. The latter half of the century, and the new, has seen little improvement in the emotional terrorism felt by Indigenous people.' (NATSIEC 'Hearts are Burning' event in Townsville, May 2005)

- these words of the **Rev. Shayne Blackman** are not merely an accurate assessment of the continued failure of Australia to overcome the violence experienced by its Indigenous peoples. Still less are they a mere lament or a plaintive cry for help. Instead, they are the background to a story of inspiring achievement of community development in which Shayne, a patron of DOV in Australia, and his wife **Lurleen Blackman** have been involved.

Creating Shalom



'Welfare makes us sick and we are sick of welfare' says Rev. Shayne Blackman, *'Although welfare has its place when it comes to basic provision we have to move away from the dependency that has resulted from welfare, and education is a key to this.'*

On what, only a few years ago, was a barren piece of land full of wild scrub (land donated by Hank Young, a Melbourne businessperson and philanthropist, and a member of the Reformed Dutch Church), an impressive miracle of community rebuilding has been taking place. This was led by the creation, in 1989, of *Shalom Christian College*. One of Australia's most encouraging success stories in Indigenous education, today the college has about 200 students in residence drawn from approximately 37 Queensland and Northern Territory towns and communities. Many Shalom students come from communities which endure great violence, disintegration and abuse. Formal academic education and personal growth are impossible until students find themselves in an environment free from harmful distractions that are part of so much community life. This is what Shalom provides.

Training for the future

In addition, the complex at Townsville's Thuringowa Central also houses several other initiatives: including a drug and alcohol rehabilitation centre, an elders' retirement village, 'Black Ink' (an Indigenous book publishing business) and the recently opened *Yalga-Binbi Institute*, which provides community development training for students from many different Indigenous communities. As Lurleen Blackman, the Director of Yalga-binbi Institute, affirms: *'we hope this course will help people tackle the causes of inequality, disadvantage and poverty and go beyond and challenge traditional welfare responses towards Indigenous issues.'*



SEEDS OF PEACE

The work of the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress



Shayne is National Administrator of the *Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress* which, since its inception in 1985 in Townsville, has run a range of progressive and culturally appropriate initiatives addressing Indigenous disadvantage. For, within each State, Congress has an effective presence that has permeated the social fabric of many Indigenous communities and families. As Shayne says:

In Townsville alone, with our other initiatives such as Shalom Christian College, we collectively inject \$15 million into the local economy, and provide jobs and pathways for Indigenous people: positive change not expounded through popular rhetoric but through faith and solid accomplishment. I am sure there are other notable Indigenous achievements delivered through other organisations. God is indeed working in the lives of Indigenous people, but we also need to come together collectively as one and support those established pathways that are providing a better quality of life for our brothers and sisters.

Breaking the Pot



A fertile metaphor for overcoming the violence experienced by many Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities, is that developed by Shayne and Lurleen in their work with the *Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress*. In Shayne's words:

'Imagine if you will a plant in a pot whose roots have been constrained for years by the confines of that hard pot. Indigenous people have been that plant whose deep reaching roots have been constrained by the confines of a system.'

The Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress works to develop formulations and responses to break this symbolic pot so that Indigenous people can reach into their deep spirituality so that they can bear good fruit.

Roots that reach to the core of Indigenous spirituality bear the marks of Peace, Order and good government. The system of Law. Assent. Culture. The word of God. Consistency, Values, Character formation, Beliefs. The fruits that are borne from roots that are awakened and nourished in Indigenous spirituality include Justice, Community Development, Fellowship and Prosperity to name but a few. Indeed the fruits that come from a nurturing of this spirituality are some of the richest gifts a nation could ask for. Gifts that contribute to a contemporary Australian society born from Indigenous soil and spirituality while retaining the unique identity of their creators.'

Sources and more information

UAICC <http://nat.uca.org.au/uaicc>