

WALK A WHILE NEWS – FEBRUARY 2017

Heavenly Rain in the Desert

Happy New Year Faithful Friend.

We are extremely grateful for your support throughout the past year. You are helping us make a huge difference in the heart of Australia.

We've just come back from Alice Springs and Haasts Bluff, where they are having one of their biggest wet seasons ever. Rain brings abundant life to the desert and (as you can see from the photo above) the outback is looking very lush. In fact, I've never seen it quite so green as this.

We would like to take this opportunity to correct some misinformation that was recently aired via an ABC News story.

The ABC may be misleading people by inferring that the Cross being erected in Central Australia is the vision of Ken Duncan. It was not my idea. My only involvement is to try and help the community at Haasts Bluff, because they have asked for my help as a friend.

No project has been more tested by the Central Lands Council than this one, to confirm it is what the community wants - that it's their vision.

It is denigrating to the indigenous people when we fail to acknowledge their hopes and their plans, and when we try to attribute their vision to others. The land where the Cross is being built is their land and they should be allowed to do what they want. No wonder they lack hope and suicide rates are so high. These are highly intelligent people, and they know what is best for their community. It is time for people to stop telling them what they think the indigenous people should do.

The ABC is not reflecting the view of the people of Haasts Bluff, at a time when remote communities need as much support and hope as they can possibly get. The ABC had footage of community elders explaining their support, but refused to use it. Instead, they attributed leadership and vision to Ken Duncan.

Any project that has the potential to bring hope to our indigenous communities needs to be embraced not attacked. This is the only way we will see reconciliation and understanding.

But raising the Cross is only one aspect of the work Walk a While is doing with remote indigenous communities. Walk a While was born out of a desire to equip indigenous youth in remote communities with tools and skills in the creative arts, so they can tell their stories into the future. We have been conducting ad hoc workshops with the youth of Haasts Bluff and surrounding communities for many years.

And now we are very close to having a formal agreement with the NT government which will permit us to use the local GBM facility as a Creative Arts & Technologies Centre. We will soon be able to install equipment to help educate and train the young people out there. You helped us with funds to fit out the bedrooms, so it's starting to look pretty good. It won't be too much longer before we are ready to receive visitors who will be part of the education programme.

We are very thankful to a private donor who has paid for music and sound equipment. After consultation with Gordon Butcher (the original drummer for Warumpi Band, who toured with Midnight Oil on the Blackfella/Whitefella Tour in 1986), we sought expert advice on the best gear for the community's needs. We have placed the order and are looking forward to the gear being delivered within the next month.

Another donor purchased a BBQ which is a huge help when we have dinner with the families out there. And another donor sent colourful, hand-made bibs for the young babies. We've also recently received donations of clothing which will soon be sent to the Day Care Centre at Haasts Bluff. We are grateful for all these donations, which will be put to good use.

Microsoft have supplied 4 computers which we're also very grateful for. We plan to take those out to Haasts Bluff very soon and get them set up in the Creative Arts & Technology Centre. Other well-known corporations have also promised equipment for the Centre. We'll tell you more about that once we've got agreements in place.

In the meantime, we would love hear from any companies – or individuals for that matter - who might like to be involved in providing tools (hardware and software) to help train young indigenous people in the creative arts.

Then the next thing we'll be needing is someone to fill the position of Technologies Centre Manager. We are in the process of defining the job description, so we can call for applications.

Last month, we told you that Leo Meier, is making prints available of his beautiful print, ***Between Heaven and Earth, Kurrkalnga*** (pictured below). But we forgot to tell you, that these are Limited Edition Prints. There will only be 200 signed and numbered prints available.

And we need to correct the price of that print too! Last month we told you it was \$450, which is incorrect.

Your special Walk a While Supporter's price is only \$350, which includes delivery anywhere in the world. By purchasing one of these prints, you will be helping Walk a While help the people of the remote Haasts Bluff community to become more self-sufficient. You will be giving them a hand up - not a hand out. You can order your print on the Shop Page of our website.