Workshop marks a number of RNLD firsts

The workshop in Fitzroy Crossing this month was very significant for RNLD as an organisation, marking the first time an all Aboriginal training team has delivered our training. It was the first workshop where every person there, trainers and participants included, was Aboriginal. Trainers Hiroko and Ebony’s first encounters with RNLD were as participants in our Flex training and our Professional Development training, so this was also the first time we have had past participants of our training be co-trainers for RNLD. We are very proud to have so many firsts for the organisation in just one workshop!

You can read more about this workshop on page 11.
Spring is in the air and with it comes the natural tendency for renewal, growth and change.

It is the time that we re-evaluate the challenges for the next twelve months and plan for new workshops and new projects. RNLD has a busy time ahead with some exciting new partnerships and projects now underway, with the Breath of Life project and the new Professional Development program being two of the bigger ones.

This time also highlights that RNLD is no different to any not-for-profit in that the sustainability of the organisation and long-term growth – reassessing our goals to ensure we are meeting the needs of community, balanced with fostering innovation and creativity – are key issues that we need to understand and explore. Such planning is crucial if we want to maintain relevance, and to ensure that new partnerships and projects are the norm and not a dream for the future.

In addition it is the time we hold our Annual General Meeting. This year we had the sad task of saying farewell to Jenny Green as a Director. Her contribution over many years and her advice and wisdom have been invaluable. We wish Jenny well and say a big thank you. We also welcome Faith Baisden as a new Director to the Board and appreciate the depth of knowledge and experience she will bring. We look forward to working with Faith.

And finally as the year comes to an end we wish all our friends, family and communities a happy and restful “festive” break.

Megan Broome
CEO
Hello from our Training Director

While RNLD trainers spend a lot of our time on the road, travelling around the country to support people’s language work in their own town, community or workplace, we do love having visitors come to see us in our office in Melbourne, as well!

Over the last few months, the office has been a hive of activity and visits. People travelled from South Australia and Queensland to join us for our learner’s guide reference group meeting (you can learn about this project on pages 14-15 of this issue). This was an inspiring and productive week of learning and working for all involved.

Some of our staff were lucky enough to be inspired by morning tea with some of the bilingual education team from Yuendumu school: Barbara, Nancy and Gretel were in town on other business and took the time to show us some of the amazing Warlpiri language and culture curriculum development. We learnt so much from you all - thank you!

We also had lunch with Vicki Couzens, Tonya Stebbins and Kris Eira, authors of the important book Living Languages and New Approaches to Language Revitalisation Research, published earlier this year. This was a great opportunity to learn from the important work the three authors do and think about how RNLD’s programs fit into the broader context of decolonising research and linguistics and re-focusing on community priorities and control.

Of course, the travel hasn’t subsided just because we are also busy at the base camp: check out some of the great photos and stories from our time on the road over the last period.

Thank you to everyone who has invited us to train with you this year, or visited us in Melbourne, shared your time and knowledge or supported us in many other ways: we have gained immensely from the many collaborations and conversations.

Emma Murphy
DRIL Training Director
DRIL trainers Ebony and Amy were in Far North Queensland from 17-20 September, running a workshop at the Umagico Indigenous Knowledge Centre with Des and Rose from the State Library of Queensland. We were working with ladies from different local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language communities, some of whom were just starting out on their language journeys. It was a productive week searching online databases for language information and resources; looking at grammars and language resources for the first time and exploring how to use them to learn language; creating lesson plans and designing a draft curriculum for teaching language at school; and practising immersion language learning and teaching methods to pass on language. We had such a lovely time working with the ladies, all at different stages in their language journeys, and we’re looking forward to following their progress. Special thanks to the State Library of Queensland for funding the workshop!
In September, DRIL Training Director Emma had the pleasure of meeting Julie Turner, a Wakka Wakka woman studying a Charles Darwin Uni linguistics course through Batchelor Institute. The pair spent a few hours looking at the alphabet in her language, Wakka Wakka, and finding example words with each sound so Julie can practise pronunciation, and also explain how the sounds are made to other learners. RNLD is looking forward to working with Julie in the future, supporting her plans to revive her language, which comes from the Burnett region of Queensland.
RNLD Training Director Emma and DRIL trainer Andrew returned to Kununurra in early October for another workshop with the language workers and the Language Nest Team at Mirima Dawang Woorlabgerring (MDWg), the Miriwoong language centre. It was fantastic to see the Miriwoong Language Nest go from strength to strength, and all the terrific projects the language workers are involved in.
Everybody worked hard on putting together a group presentation about the work that the language centre does and its importance to the Miriwoong people and the wider community. On the last day of the workshop they presented to other language centre staff and other special guests from out of town, sharing their stories and experience about working hard to preserve Miriwoong language and tradition. We also tried out some fun new language immersion games – incidentally learning a bit of Spanish along the way – that the Language Nest team might try out next time they’re taking Miriwoong language into the schools around Kununurra. Warany!
As a side note, RNLD is very pleased to pass on the news that the participants of the 2-year Yawuru language course mentioned above graduated on Friday, 2 November. Congratulations!
Amy headed to Brisbane in October to work with long-term DRIL participants Aaron James (Pitta Pitta) and Sandra Delaney (Jandai).

Amy and Sandra spent two days together working through some of the complexities of revitalising a language using old records: deciphering amateur spelling systems, dealing with inconsistencies, and assessing different theories surrounding language relationships and dialects.

Aaron has been working with RNLD as a community consultant on our Learner’s Guide Template project and he spent a day with Amy testing the “nouns” section of the Learner’s Guide template by completing it for Pitta Pitta. This included revising things like noun phrases, case-marking and transitivity in order to convert information from a very complex grammar into a simple text for learners.

Amy was also very lucky on this trip to accept copies of Sandra’s newly published Jandai language story books for RNLD’s library. Sandra developed the first of these stories in a RNLD workshop, and it’s so wonderful to see them both now in print with her beautiful illustrations! Thanks for the wonderful donation, Sandra!
Thanks to the Kimberley Language Resource Centre, we got to hold a workshop in Fitzroy Crossing, WA on the 13-15 of November. DRIL Trainer Ebony Joachim along with Hiroko Shioji and Coco Yu (Yawuru teachers from Nyamba Buru Yawuru, in Broome) were our trainers for this workshop. The three days focussed on language learning and teaching - with Bunuba, Gooniyandi and Walmajarri speakers with various work backgrounds joining us throughout the workshop. The group enjoyed getting to learn and share new skills with one another. Having participants from different language groups, some participants from Halls Creek and trainers from Broome, networking was one of the things participants really enjoyed. We had a bit of presentations done by Hiroko and Coco, and also one of our participants Valma, a worker from the Kimberley Language Resource Centre. They all shared with the group the language work they have been doing on their countries. This workshop had learners of their language working with Elders and strong speakers to learn more. The intergenerational transfer of knowledge is always a highlight of our workshops and it was very apparent in Fitzroy Crossing.

We would like to thank Hiroko Shioji and Coco Yu for joining us as guest trainers on this workshop and hope they can join us again in the future.
Meet a language warrior...

RNLD wants to share some of the great stories we hear from, and work we see being done by, our many training participants around the country! For this newsletter, DRIL trainer Andrew caught up with Veronica Arbon in Adelaide.

Veronica Arbon is an Arabana woman and former director of Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education. She currently holds an adjunct Visiting Research position at the University of Adelaide, spending much of her time on Arabana language. Andrew spoke with Veronica when she participated in a RNLD workshop facilitated by the Mobile Language Team at Adelaide University in June this year.

Can you introduce yourself?

Antha Arabana udyurla. Anthuna pidla Veronica-nha. So I’m an Arabana woman and my name is Veronica.

Can you tell me a little bit about your language? Where it is and was spoken?

My language is named Arabana just as our society is. It’s spoken from Marree, about 700km north of Adelaide right through to, in the old days, the Macumba river which is probably 50km north of Oodnadatta and west to Coober Pedy. So, we had three clans within that area that spoke slightly different dialects. Today, most people speak Wangkakupa which is the language around what became a mission at Finniss Springs.

Can you tell me a bit about your experience with the language growing up and later in life?

I guess my experience has been quite limited, sadly, because my mum had a white father and he didn’t appreciate my mother and all her sisters and brothers speaking language. Although my nan was fluent in Arabana, Arrernte, Wangganguuru and a couple of other languages, so what I do know was from my nana. She was a fantastic storyteller who would use both English and Arabana in her storytelling with us.
What about, more recently, what are you doing with the language?

About 25 years ago I decided to do some research and put some firm understandings about what happened to Arabana people throughout the colonial process. That was after a trip when I was about 16, when we went on the Ghan which ran through Marree and Oodnadatta which sort of piqued my interest. So in my 30s I came back through there with one of my sisters and a carload of kids, and we connected to country but also got in contact with some language speakers who I could work with, on that research while trying to understand my language more. From then I got a bit busy in my life. It wasn’t until 2006, when I decided in my PhD to understand my philosophical position as an Arabana woman, that I came in contact with a huge number of elders who said, ‘If you’re going to worry about our Ularaka you gotta know your language’, so since then I’ve been trying to learn my language.

In the last 3-4 years, I’ve been working with the Mobile Language Team (MLT) and we’ve been able to set up a language website, so that wherever our people are, they can hear our language. We’ve been lucky in that our elders have been visionaries and many recorded our language in the 70s and 80s with Luise Hercus and then later with Greg Wilson, and in the last three years with myself and Eleanor McCall from MLT. So we do that, we also run language clubs and I skype with my grandchildren in language, because I’ve got three generations below me now who are coming through and we want some of them to know the language.
In 2017, RNLD received funding from the Commonwealth Government Indigenous Languages and Arts program to create a resource for people who want to write a learner’s guide of their own language.

In late October, the second of three workshops was held with reference group members and RNLD staff working on the project. RNLD volunteer Bron Peddington-Webb and Volunteer Coordinator Freya Scott discussed the project with Ebony Joachim and Emma Murphy from RNLD, and reference group member David Moon, a Boandik man working on his Bunganditj language. (Other reference group members are Aaron James, a Pitta Pitta man from Queensland, and Sharon Edgar-Jones from NSW, who works on the Wanarruwa and Gathang languages.)

The aim of this project is to develop a “how to” guide and template for people who want to write a learner’s guide of their own language. This template will attempt to use accessible language to explain linguistic concepts, helping the user decode their more academic grammars to make a resource that is accessible to their community. We hope it will be applicable to languages right across the country, but are especially targeting the Pama-Nyungan language family, which includes the large majority of Australian languages.

David explained that, at present, there are a number of factors which can prevent individuals or communities from completing their own language work. Some of these include: reliance on old documents often written by Europeans who were not part of the associated culture, highly technical language used in available resources, and a lack of time and funding to gain the skills needed to decipher such documentation.
The team has identified a gap where reclamation languages, or those that are sleeping, often have very limited resources available, and those attempting to revitalise such languages face huge challenges which often cost time, money and energy. This project aims to start filling the space between having access to those original written materials, and being able to start speaking the language.

Illustration: Where the learner’s guide fits within a reclamation process

During our interview, Ebony pointed out the role of the learner’s guide template in assisting communities to regain ownership of their languages, since this tool will not need to be completed by a linguist.

“It’s a huge job, but it’s been great to be a part of”, Eb said.

Research for the tool has involved speaking with other community members, language workers and linguists as well as consulting other learner’s guides. The reference group has members from Victoria, New South Wales, Queensland and South Australia: their languages all come under the same broad Pama-Nyungan language family but also all provide different examples of requirements for the learner’s guide template.

Having members from such different areas of Australia presents its own challenges (especially in finding a time to come together to work on it!), but the team have found themselves feeling very motivated and being very productive while working on it together, as they learn from each other’s experiences and compare features across the languages.

“We know that the need is there”, Emma says.

“There is a need, and people do want it”, Eb agrees. “And people want to take control for themselves... I think it’s a good time for it to be happening...”

This project will be launched towards the end of 2019. It will be an online document (with printed copies also available), without any fees or copyright, so that collaboration between community members and RNLD staff will be possible remotely. The learning tool will then be able to be exported for printing.

In the future, this project has the potential to expand to become a digital platform such as an application or a series of sound recordings to accompany the document. Also, there is the potential for the project to be transformed into a training package, so that RNLD trainers support individuals or communities to use this resource to develop a learner’s guide.

We look forward to sharing it with you!

Thanks to our volunteer Bron for writing this piece!
At the beginning of the year a fundraising trivia night was held in RNLD’s honour. Rosey Billington and Katie Jepson, postgrad Melbourne Uni linguists, have run a number of trivia nights in RNLD’s honour over the years, with the proceedings being donated to our organisation. In the past, we have used the money to run competitions for participants, for prizes of Zoom H1 Handy Recorders with accessory packs.

This year we thought we would put the donations towards running a competition for the opportunity to win one of two Master-Apprentice Resource Kits. Over March and April 2018, RNLD opened up the competition to people that have been a participant of our workshops and have done training in the Master-Apprentice language learning program with us. Once applications were closed, we then sent through the applications to Rosey and Katie to do the honour of selecting our winners.

In this newsletter, we are happy to announce that our two winners of the Master-Apprentice Resource Kits were the graduate group of our Certificate II in Master-Apprentice language learning program, at Far West Language Centre in Ceduna, SA, and the staff at the Kimberley Language Resource Centre, in Halls Creek, WA.

Congratulations to our winners, we hope the resource kits support the learning and teaching of all the languages you work with. Thanks to all that submitted an application for this competition, we wish you all the best in your future language work.

F Freya from the RNLD team putting the kits together!
The inaugural Margaret Florey Scholarship

RNLD is excited to be funding the first ever Margaret Florey Scholarship! Named for our co-founder and longtime director Margaret Florey, who retired in 2017, the scholarship honours her many years of hard work and passion in the service of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages and their speakers.

For the inaugural scholarship, RNLD has decided to support one Indigenous language worker to attend the International Conference on Language Documentation & Conservation (ICLDC), from February 28 to March 3, 2019 in Honolulu. The conference brings together linguists, students, and community activists to share resources and research, and discuss important issues in documenting and revitalising the world’s endangered languages. Emma, Amy and Freya from the RNLD team will be in attendance.

After a difficult selection process, we are pleased to announce that Nathan Schrieber will be receiving the scholarship. Nathan represents the Gurugulu Gunggandji people of Yarrabah, where he teaches language and culture in the state school with support from his Elders/Community. He is also a recent graduate of the Master of Indigenous Languages Education program (MILE) at the University of Sydney. Nathan will be presenting a paper at ICLDC, focusing on the topic of ‘Country’ as a source of knowledge. We very much look forward to hearing it!
Welcome Hugh!

This year, Hugh Coldwell-Ross joined RNLD’s growing volunteer team to work with the exciting Learner’s Guide project (see page 14 article). Hugh is studying linguistics at Monash University, and has been working as a publicist and marketer for more than five years: he is combining these two areas as he works on the layout for the learner’s guide and thinks about the best way to package it for its target audience.

Hugh is passionate about linguistics - particularly syntax, language endangerment, and Australian Indigenous languages - and is very happy and grateful to be part of the team working on the Learner’s Guide.

Farewell Yu-Ting!

We are sad to be farewelling one of our amazing volunteers, Yu-Ting, who joined us in April this year and finished her position at the end of October. During her seven months at RNLD, Yu-Ting contributed her time and skills to several projects, including RNLD’s resource and information sharing with our networks, Language in the News and Music Monday social media posts, language-learning resource creation for DRIL workshops, website content, newsletter article writing, research for language documentation resources, and workshop administration support.

A big thank you Yu-Ting for your unwavering commitment, diligence, enthusiasm, and creativity. We will miss you, and we wish you every success for your future endeavours!
This October, some of our wonderful volunteers joined us at the office for a special Volunteer Afternoon Tea, which was an opportunity for us to say thank you for all their hard work and commitment, and for them to meet other volunteers and staff members. We shared a time-honoured RNLD tradition of eating cake, and one of our volunteers, Yu-Ting, baked some delicious cookies with the initials of every staff member and volunteer at RNLD.

RNLD is very fortunate to have such valuable volunteer support. We currently have five wonderful volunteers, who do everything from writing ‘Language in the News’ and ‘Music Monday’ social media posts, to updating resources on our website, researching and managing fundraising initiatives, creating learning resources for workshops, and updating databases. RNLD could not do the work we do without their fantastic support.
In this season’s edition of our newsletter we will be sharing with you a description of *Sounds and spelling in Aboriginal languages*. Sounds and spelling in Aboriginal languages is one of our Flexible Documenting and Revitalising Indigenous Languages (DRIL) non-accredited training modules.

Sometimes participants in our workshops are trying to learn their languages from written records, and may not have speakers to teach them about the different sounds. In this module we help people learn to pronounce the sounds of their language by talking about where and how they are made in the mouth, and by practising making the sounds and saying words out loud.

In this module we can also look at the different ways of writing sounds in Aboriginal languages, and why language workers or linguists may have decided on particular letters in the writing system. This can also help language groups make informed decisions about their writing system. Participating in this module may be the first time some participants have used their writing system, and it can be a good place to start learning to read and write in their language.
Upcoming Workshops

We are currently planning our workshop schedule for 2019. Stay tuned for the announcement of our program on our website, and in the next newsletter.