



2022-2023

AARNJA Annual Members' Report

Aarnja is the Regional Body for Kimberley Aboriginal People



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Our History

Aarnja was developed out of the Kimberley Land Council (KLC) in 2012. We were originally a product of the Browse LNG Precinct Regional Benefits Agreement, negotiated by the KLC on behalf of all Kimberley Traditional Owners. Under the agreement, a commitment was made to deliver a regional benefits package to improve the educational, health, social and economic well-being of Aboriginal people across the Kimberley. A 'regional body' was part of this package, and although the agreement didn't go ahead, the WA State Government committed to fund Aarnja for ten years. We are always actively seeking opportunities to build the organisation's capacity to make a more significant positive impact in the lives of Kimberley Aboriginal people.

Next steps:

This year, government funding for Aarnja expires. In response, we have reassessed our strategic goals to incorporate the following priorities:

Funding

- Establish the Aarnja Foundation to replace the Sponsorship Program,

- Increase the level of annual funding provided by the Aarnja Foundation \$200k to \$500k,
- Find outside funding for community initiatives to the value of \$1m per year.

Expertise

- Develop a training and expert advice talent bank responsive to Kimberley values,
- Ensure community initiatives receive any training and technical advice they need to succeed,
- Find and make available good practice models useful to the Kimberley.

Representation

- Establish lines of communication to government and other outside agencies,
- Make regular representations on behalf of community initiatives,
- Establish Aarnja as the first-stop shop for social investment in the Kimberley.

Evaluations

- Develop an evaluation program aligned to Kimberley culture and values,
- Establish a talent bank of evaluators responsive to Kimberley culture and values,
- Include evaluation in all funding initiatives.

About Aarnja

Self-determination	Partnership	Culture
Development and services for Kimberley Aboriginal people owned, led and controlled by Kimberley Aboriginal people.	Kimberley people, communities and organisations working in unity towards common goals.	Kimberley Aboriginal culture, knowledge and values integrated into every aspect of political, economic and social development.

Vision

We work toward a future where Kimberley Aboriginal people are:

- United and powerful: a nation,
- Taking the lead in economic and social development and services,
- Founded on our culture and values.

Mission

Aarnja's mission is to help Kimberley communities:

- Develop their own solutions to community concerns,
- Make own plans for community futures,
- Get government, foundation or private funding for communities to implement.

Aarnja does so by helping communities with:

- Direct funding: seed funding to communities,
- Proposal writing: assistance in preparing and submitting outside funding,
- Expertise: technical assistance and training,
- Representation: making approaches to government, foundations or companies,
- Evaluations: build the evidence base needed to obtain funds and convince governments.

Our strategic priorities

1. Funding
2. Expertise
3. Representation
4. Evaluations

Chairperson Report

Donna Birch



On behalf of the Aarnja Board of Directors and Aarnja staff we would like to give a warm welcome to our members to our 2023 Annual General Meeting on Balangarra Country and respectfully acknowledge the Traditional Owners past, present and emerging.

Since our last Annual General Meeting held in the Central Kimberley region at Bohemia Downs, Aarnja has invested in shaping up for the future and Aarnja's new direction is for positive change for our Kimberley Aboriginal people. The Aarnja Board welcomed one new director Patsy Bedford (Ngarlu) in 2023 and the remaining Board members were re-appointed. Due to a new governance requirement please note that for all new directors must hold a Directors Identification Number in order to be nominated from their respective cultural bloc which will allow them to sit on the Aarnja Board.

In terms of governance the Aarnja Board has dedicated commitment to the development of the Aarnja's New Strategic Plan and Aarnja's Strategy and Goals for 2023 – 2026 in readiness for the 2023 AGM.

Aarnja CEO, Merrilee Williams, departed from Broome to Queensland for personal family reasons and this meant readjustments for Aarnja. In June 2023 the Aarnja Board appointed Donna Birch as interim CEO until the Aarnja Board advertises for a new CEO. At the time Donna was the Chairperson and she was required to resign from the Aarnja Board to take up the position as a Aarnja staff member. Also, at the same Board meeting the new Chairperson and Vice Chairperson were appointed. Representing the desert cultural bloc Ismahl Croft was appointed new Chairperson and from the central cultural bloc Dickie (Eric) Bedford was appointed new Vice Chairperson.

Since, stepping into our new respective roles as Interim CEO and Chairperson and Vice Chairperson it has been a team effort representing Aarnja on the recent Road Show in June for the Referendum – VOICE campaign and Aarnja supports the YES! The intention from the Aarnja Board was to help raise awareness and allow our Kimberley Aboriginal people the opportunity to make an informed decision based on the information provided at the Referendum roadshow events.

Aarnja also became a member of the KARB – Kimberley Aboriginal Regional Body and continuously supports the Kimberley Aboriginal people's aspirations and journey that arose from the Crocodile Hole gathering which stems back over thirty years.

Aarnja is currently the Aboriginal Representative Organisation for the Department of Communities and the program is in pilot phase until October 2023. The ARO team is fully staffed with Kimberley Aboriginal people: the manager of the program is Janene Bedford, and our Cultural Placement Officers are Sasha Swan and Mirrin Edgar. They recently conducted a roadshow across the Kimberley in July 2023. In addition, to support the work of the ARO pilot, Aarnja has successfully secured a Jawun secondee, Madison Sorrenti, a senior consultant passionate about co-designing with Indigenous communities and understanding the link to self-determination. She commenced on the 13th August 2023. We, the Aarnja staff, welcome her and are excited to have her on Board to help with the work required to ensure that Aarnja is equipped to carry on the ARO work beyond October this year.

Aarnja's Board is exploring new opportunities with the Australian Communities Foundation to adopt Foundation status. This is in line with Aarnja's Strategic direction and cultural protocols and will enable us to continue giving to our mob in the Kimberley. Finally, I would like to thank Cauline Masuda and Theresa Sibosado for their dedication and commitment to their work within Aarnja. It is always a pleasure to work alongside good people who know how to get the job done! In closing thank you to all our members for attending the 2023 AGM.

Yours faithfully,

Donna Birch

On behalf of the Aarnja Board and Staff 2023.

Independent Directors

Dorothy Pawlukowski, David Week



The year since the last Annual General Meeting has seen substantial consolidation of direction for Aarnja, with expansion of its activities.

In implementing Aarnja's new Strategy, we have moved towards work aimed primarily at supporting initiatives proposed by the communities and bolstering our support of Kimberley children and youth.

Over the last few years, we have been running an open Sponsorship Program to fund initiatives put forward by Kimberley Aboriginal individuals, small enterprises, and regional organisations. As the next step, we are progressing the establishment of the Aarnja Foundation. The Foundation is proposed to commence with a grant of \$3 million which will be invested so as to generate earnings that we hope will be able to provide the Kimberley communities with ongoing grants in perpetuity.

The Board is also undertaking investigations and planning to enable increases in this initial funding (from the existing Aarnja investment

grant and investment, both through self-portfolio) and from a broader donor pool. The new Strategy and Three-Year Goals we have planned incorporate additional support of community initiatives, beyond seed grants. These include proposal-writing for long-term support, technical support, evaluation to prove to donors that communities can improve their own livelihoods and social conditions and attracting more social investment to the Kimberley.

Other significant achievements and developments in the past year include:

- Aarnja has been appointed by the State Government of Western Australia to deliver the Aboriginal Representative Organisation (ARO) pilot in the Kimberley. This initiative is critical towards implementing recent changes made to the Children and Community Services Act 2004.
- Aarnja continues to work closely with the Kimberley Aboriginal Children in Care Committee to address the high rates of Aboriginal children in out of home care.

- Aarnja has contributed funding to and has joined with other Aboriginal-led Kimberley peak organisations to design and establish the Kimberley Aboriginal Regional Body (KARB).
- Aarnja has funded and played a key role in providing information about, and advocating for the Yes Campaign ahead of the upcoming referendum on the Voice, so that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people can have a say on the policies and laws that affect our communities.

We have moved toward work that bolsters community-led initiatives and that supports Kimberley children and youth.

Finally, we have had unexpected changes in leadership. Damien Parriman, with the Board's blessing, left his CEO role to contribute through KRED, to better outcomes for Aboriginal communities on a slate of new projects.

Merrilee Williams took over the role very effectively following Damien's departure. Unfortunately, she was called to Queensland due to family commitments, and so could not continue.

Currently, Donna Birch is acting as Interim CEO until an open process finds a replacement—expected later this year. Ismahl Croft as Deputy Chair has stepped into the Chair role in the interim.

Dorothy Pawlukowski and David Week



Aarnja's team, 2023

CEO Report Merrilee Williams



Dear Members,

I am pleased to present this CEO report for our 2022/2023 Aarnja Annual Members' Report. It provides an overview of our recent achievements, ongoing projects, and future plans at Aarnja. Our vision to empower Kimberley Aboriginal people, communities, and organisations remains at the core of our work, and we are dedicated to ensuring a strong Aboriginal identity and equal access to social and economic opportunities in modern society.

One of our significant accomplishments is our involvement in the Aboriginal Representative Organisation (ARO) project as part of the pilot initiative. Being one of two pilot projects across the state, this endeavour allows us to have increased input and support for Aboriginal families and children. It follows amendments in the Children and Community Services Amendment Act 2021 and means we are consulted on placement arrangements once a decision to bring a child/ren into the care of the State is made for Kimberley Aboriginal children. We also participate in the preparation and review of cultural support plans for Aboriginal children. The focus is on enhancing the cultural

connections of our children to their country and community. The project commenced in November 2022, and we are closely monitoring and evaluating its impact. We eagerly anticipate the results, which will be shared once the project concludes on October 31.

"We are dedicated to ensuring a strong Aboriginal identity and equal access to social and economic opportunities in modern society."

Building a strong and capable team at Aarnja has been a significant priority over the last twelve months. We have been actively recruiting and ensuring that we have the right individuals who are dedicated to our cause. I am particularly proud that our team comprises entirely of Kimberley Aboriginal people. This is a testament to our commitment to building capacity within our local community.

We're seeing the younger generation stepping up into leadership roles and honouring the aspirations of the older Traditional Owners who established Aarnja.

Another way Aarnja has worked to build capacity has been through its sponsorship program. From young entrepreneurs to established businesses, the sponsorship funds have played a vital role in their growth and prosperity.

We are currently reviewing and resetting Aarnja's strategic plan and direction. There have been some big changes, and we're seeing the younger generation stepping up into leadership roles and honouring the aspirations of the older Traditional Owners who established Aarnja. This change of the guard also comes with sadness, as we have lost several elders over the last twelve months. It's been a challenging time. In this transitional period, it is important to communicate with our members and the wider community. The board has dedicated significant effort to workshops and discussions relating to our strategic plan, and we will share more details about this and Aarnja's next phase leading up to the AGM.

Looking forward, there are some big-ticket items that will shape the future of our people. We're actively involved in supporting a 'YES' vote in the upcoming referendum so Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people can have a say on the policies and laws

that affect our communities, and we've also been involved in setting up the Kimberley Aboriginal Regional Body (KARB), Aarnja is a member of the Design Group.

I am proud to say that the leadership and governance structure within Aarnja are solid, and this will ensure the delivery of these projects and the continuation of benefits for Kimberley Aboriginal people.

I want to express my gratitude for your continued support and engagement. This will be my last CEO report for Aarnja. Due to family reasons, I have had to relocate over east. Nonetheless, I am confident Aarnja's board and members will navigate the exciting phase ahead, reviewing the strategic plan, and advancing the interests of Kimberley Aboriginal people.

Aarnja is committed to being a voice for our community and ensuring that all our members share in the social and economic opportunities available in modern society.

Yours sincerely,

Merrilee Williams
CEO, Aarnja

Aboriginal Representative Organisation (ARO)

Aboriginal children continue to be over-represented in the child protection system in Western Australia

The WA state government has committed to reducing the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out of home care. To achieve this goal, in October 2021 the State Parliament passed the Children and Community Services Amendment Act 2021.

Enshrined in the act is a commitment for Aboriginal children in care to remain within family, culture and community. It provides for Aboriginal Representative Organisations (AROs) to secure culturally appropriate placements by comprehensively scoping out all appropriate family or community options.

Aarnja was one of two AROs in the state selected to participate in a 12-month pilot program to provide valuable cultural input for Aboriginal children in care in our community. We've been working with families to ensure there's consent ahead of any placement arrangements for Aboriginal children, and helping to prepare and review robust cultural support plans for Aboriginal children.

Although Aarnja is consulted on these placement arrangements we do not have any final authority to decide where children are placed—this responsibility for decision making remains with the department. What we can do, is guide responsible and culturally appropriate decision making.

We're closely monitoring and evaluating the impact of the program, and in October this year, we look forward to sharing the outcomes about its effectiveness with our members and the wider community.



Vote YES for the Voice

Aarnja has travelled the length and breadth of the Kimberley with a clear message: vote YES in the upcoming referendum for a constitutionally enshrined First Nations Voice to Parliament



Voting YES for Constitutional Recognition through a Voice is an idea that came directly from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The Voice will be a committee—made up of Indigenous Australians from every state and territory, including the Torres Strait Islands—that will advise Parliament and Government on issues that affect our community across the nation. This call for a Voice didn't come from politicians. It came from the Uluru Statement from the Heart in 2017.

Throughout June, Aarnja and the Kimberley Land Council travelled the length and breadth of the Kimberley as part of the Referendum Roadshow, holding events in major towns to inform our communities about the importance of voting YES. We heard from filmmaker Rachel Perkins,

Yes23 Campaign Director Dean Parkin, constitutional lawyer Dr Shireen Morris and Member for the Kimberley Divina D'Anna about what a YES vote means and why it is so important.

Essentially, voting YES is about recognition that we are the First Peoples of Australia. It's about celebrating and sharing 65,000 years of history and making a practical difference for the future. A YES vote will make a practical difference because it means lawmakers will have to listen to our advice on the issues that affect us. We know that when governments listen, we get better programs, better services for our mob, and there's less wastage of money.

This financial year, Aarnja has put a pause on our sponsorship and donations program to offer greater support to the YES campaign.



Grants Program

Garingbaar Native Bush Botanicals

Aarnja was pleased to provide sponsorship to Bec Sampi at Garingbaar Native Bush Botanicals to help set up fundamental business structures. Bec—a Wola/Gija woman—is making a superb product through her business. Along with her team of hard-working helpers in Kununurra she crafts delightful bars of soap that are loaded with lush coconut oil and hand-collected goolum (bush lavender). These all-natural ingredients leave the skin soft and clean. To read more head to: <https://www.waitoc.com/members/business-listing/62fe01d3b1c57-garingbaar-native-bush-botanicals>

Empowered Young Leaders - Network Expansion and Capacity Building

West Kimberley Futures - Empowered Communities successfully applied for funding to deliver a range of activities for Aboriginal young people aged 15-35 in eight different locations across the Kimberley. These

activities started in June and will continue until the end of 2023. They're being delivered by the Empowered Young Leaders (EYL) Group, an initiative designed to enable young Aboriginal people to articulate their views and make decisions about matters that affect them. The activities will be centered around the expansion of the EYL network, capacity-building for EYL members, and will help create a number of place based EYL network committees throughout the Kimberley. They'll also allow the EYL Group to ensure its governance processes and communications streams are effective prior to incorporation in the latter part of 2023. Aarnja has a commitment to assisting self-determination and to supporting strong partnerships between Kimberley people communities and organisations. We see Kimberley Aboriginal cultural values and knowledge as a crucial part of political, economic and social development and support projects that fulfil this aspiration.



Over the last ten years, Aarnja has put \$638,208 back into the community through its sponsorship program

'Don't Rob Cars, Fix Cars' - Wyndham Youth Aboriginal Corporation

Wyndham Youth Advisory Council had a brilliant idea: they realised that Wyndham needed a mechanic shop and that the town's young people were eager to learn how to fix cars and engines. This is how 'Don't Rob Cars, Fix Cars' came about, a program designed to enhance education and training opportunities, improve capacity and reduce youth crime and recidivism. Young people are referred into the program by the youth justice team, schools and other agencies. They are supported on this journey by a local Aboriginal trainer and mentor, who has created a culturally safe space in which they can grow into positive members of society, with the confidence and ability to share Aboriginal culture, knowledge and values. Aarnja has been pleased to sponsor this innovative initiative.

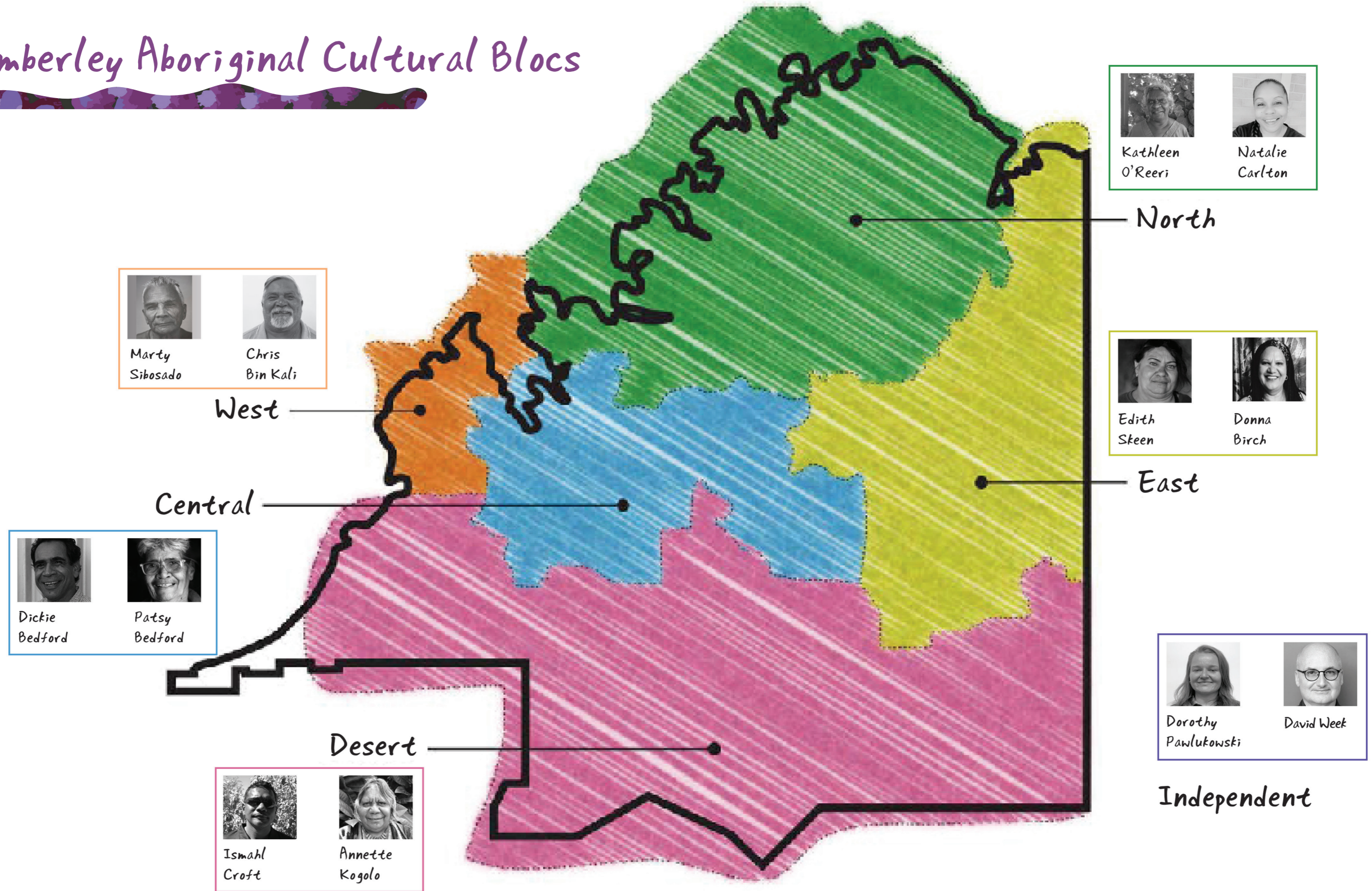
Marninwarntikura Women's Resource Centre - Fitzroy Crossing Flood Relief

In January this year, Fitzroy Crossing and the surrounding communities were affected by devastating floods. People lost their homes, jobs, vehicles, property and livelihoods. The Fitzroy River reached the highest level on record and the Great Northern Highway between Fitzroy and Halls Creek was closed for months. Local Aboriginal organisations and businesses lost revenue and spent months and months cleaning up the mess. To help assist one local organisation with the flood relief, Aarnja gave a donation of \$20,000 to Marninwarntikura Women's Resource Centre. The Centre is a hub of inspiration that provides women and their families a place for positive change and leadership. It does this by supporting Fitzroy Valley women and their families by encouraging safety and well-being, and by fostering leadership and financial independence.



Aarnja has been pleased to welcome a Jawun secondee on board, Madison Sorrenti. It's a great program, with participants contributing a wealth of skills and knowledge.

Kimberley Aboriginal Cultural Blocs



Directors' Meeting Attendance

Apologies

Aarnja Boardroom Broome and Zoom, 18 - 19th August, 2022	Edith Skeen Day 1, Ismahl Croft Day 1, Dorothy Pawlukowski, Christopher Bin Kali Day 1.
Aarnja Boardroom Broome and Zoom, 31st August, 2022	Edith Skeen, Natalie Carlton, Annette Kogolo.
Aarnja Boardroom Broome and Zoom, 12th September, 2022	Edith Skeen, Natalie Carlton, Annette Kogolo.
37 Carnarvon St. Broome and Zoom, 12th October, 2022	Christopher Bin Kali
Zoom, 28th October, 2022	Patsy Bedford Martin Sibosado Eric 'Dickie' Bedford Annette Kogolo Dorothy Pawlukowski
Lily Lagoon Kununurra and Zoom, 1st December, 2022	Patsy Bedford Eric 'Dickie' Bedford Dorothy Pawlukowski

Apologies

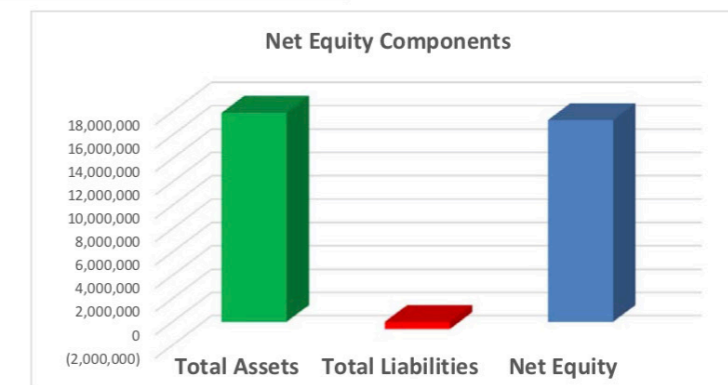
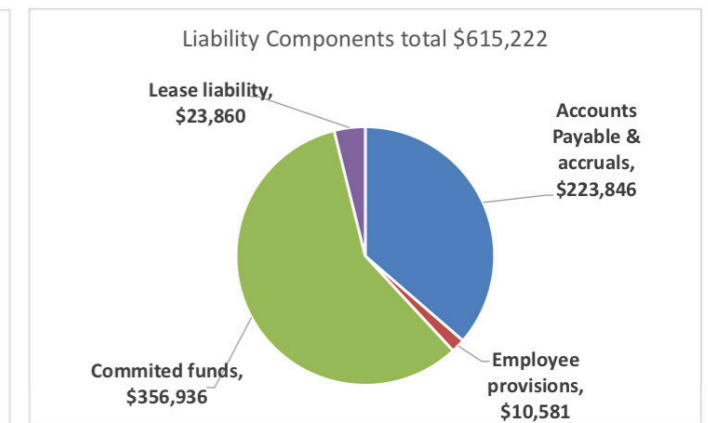
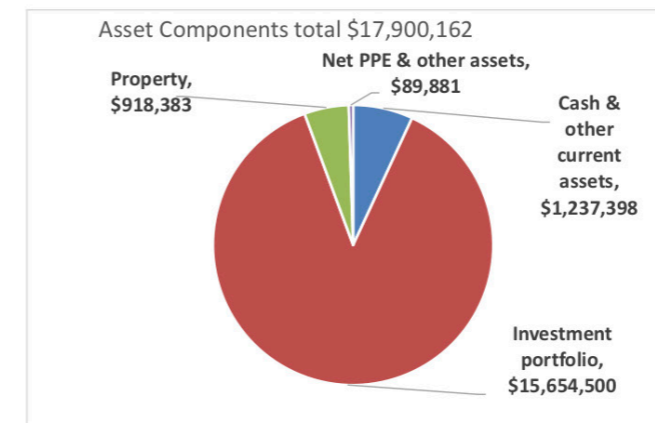
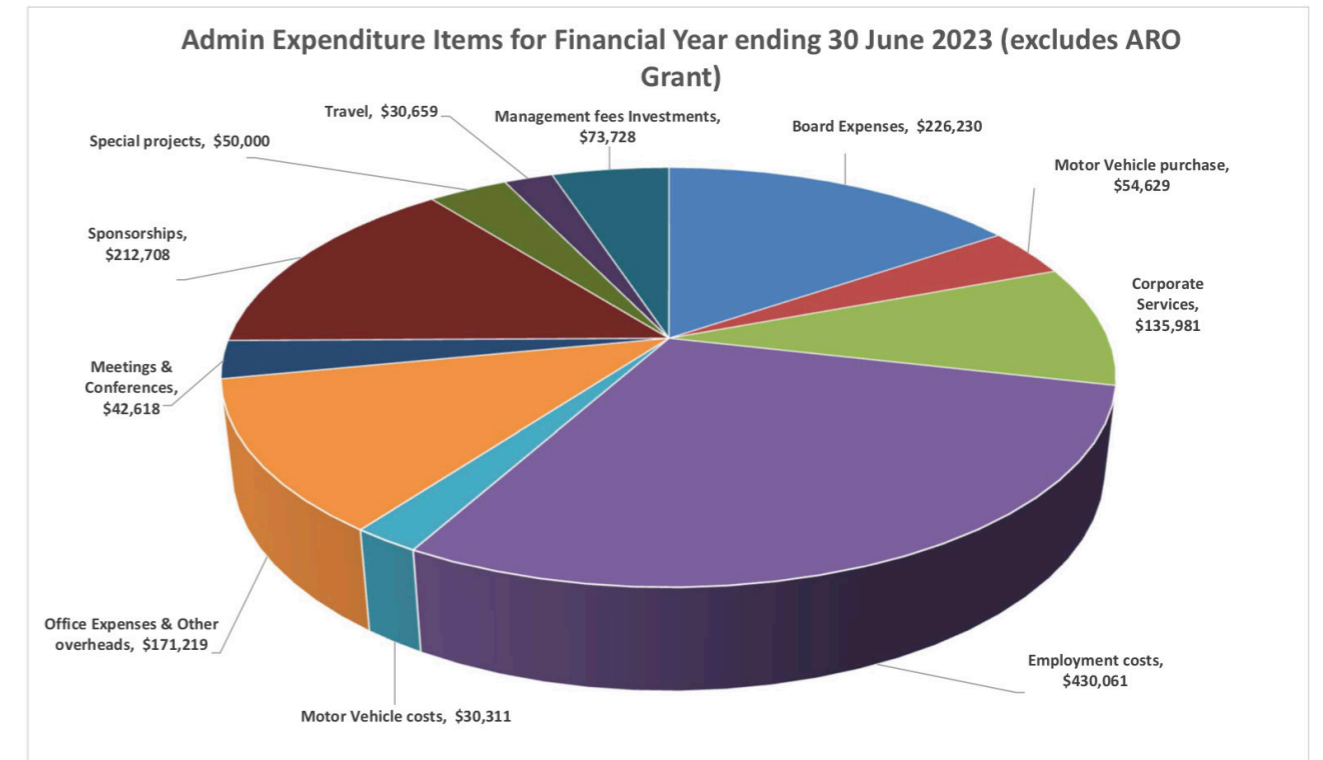
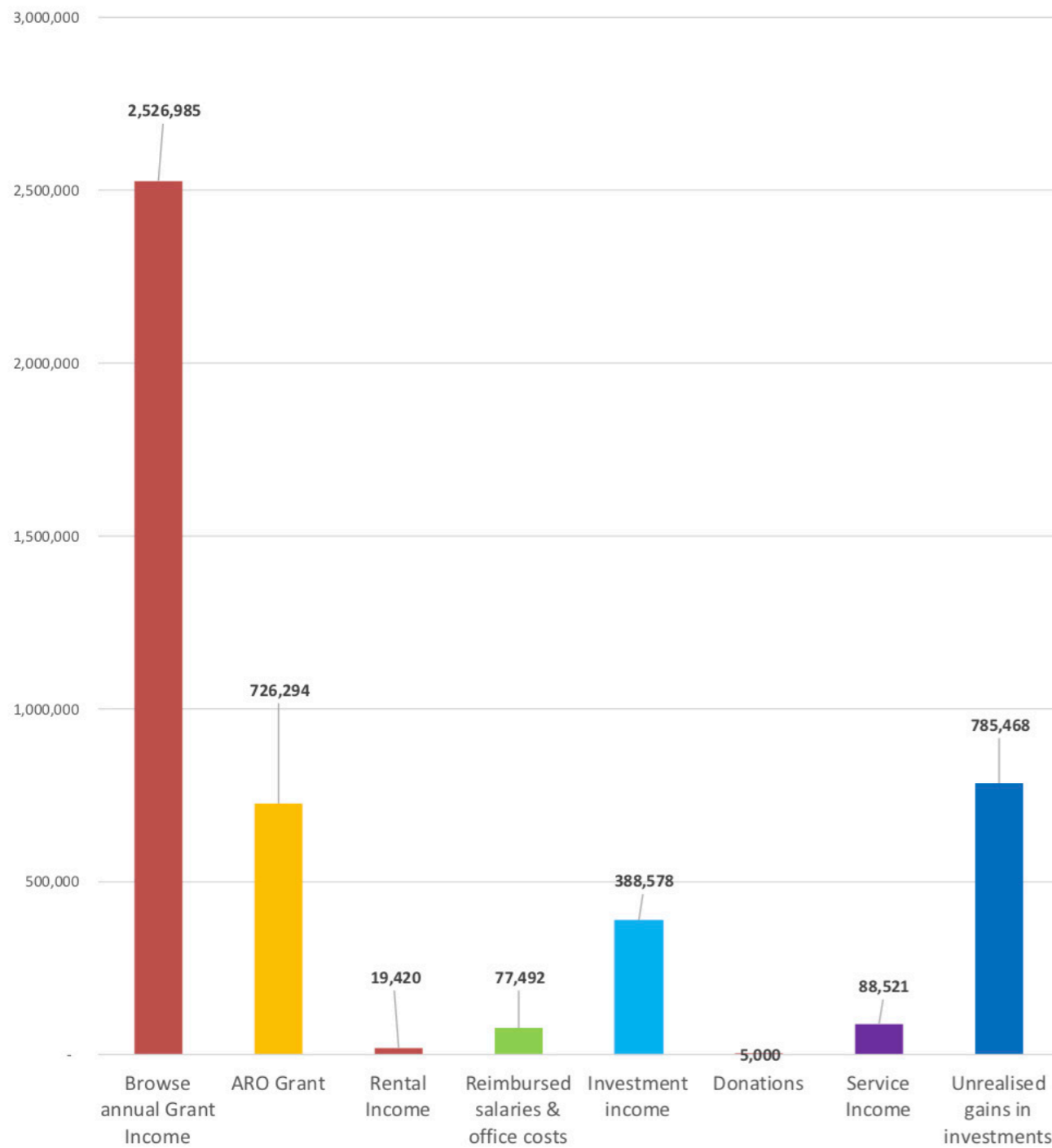
37 Carnarvon St. Broome and Zoom, 8 - 9 March, 2023	Eric 'Dickie' Bedford Day 1, Dorothy Pawlukowski Day 2, Edith Skeen Day 2.
Aarnja Boardroom Broome and Zoom, 27th April, 2023	Christopher Bin Kali
DAHS, 1 Stanley Street, Derby and Zoom, 7 - 8 June, 2023	Martin Sibosado Edith Skeen Natalie Carlton - Day 2 from 8.30am - 1.33pm Annette Kogolo David Week - Day 2 from 2.24pm - 4.30pm

Non-attendance: number of days

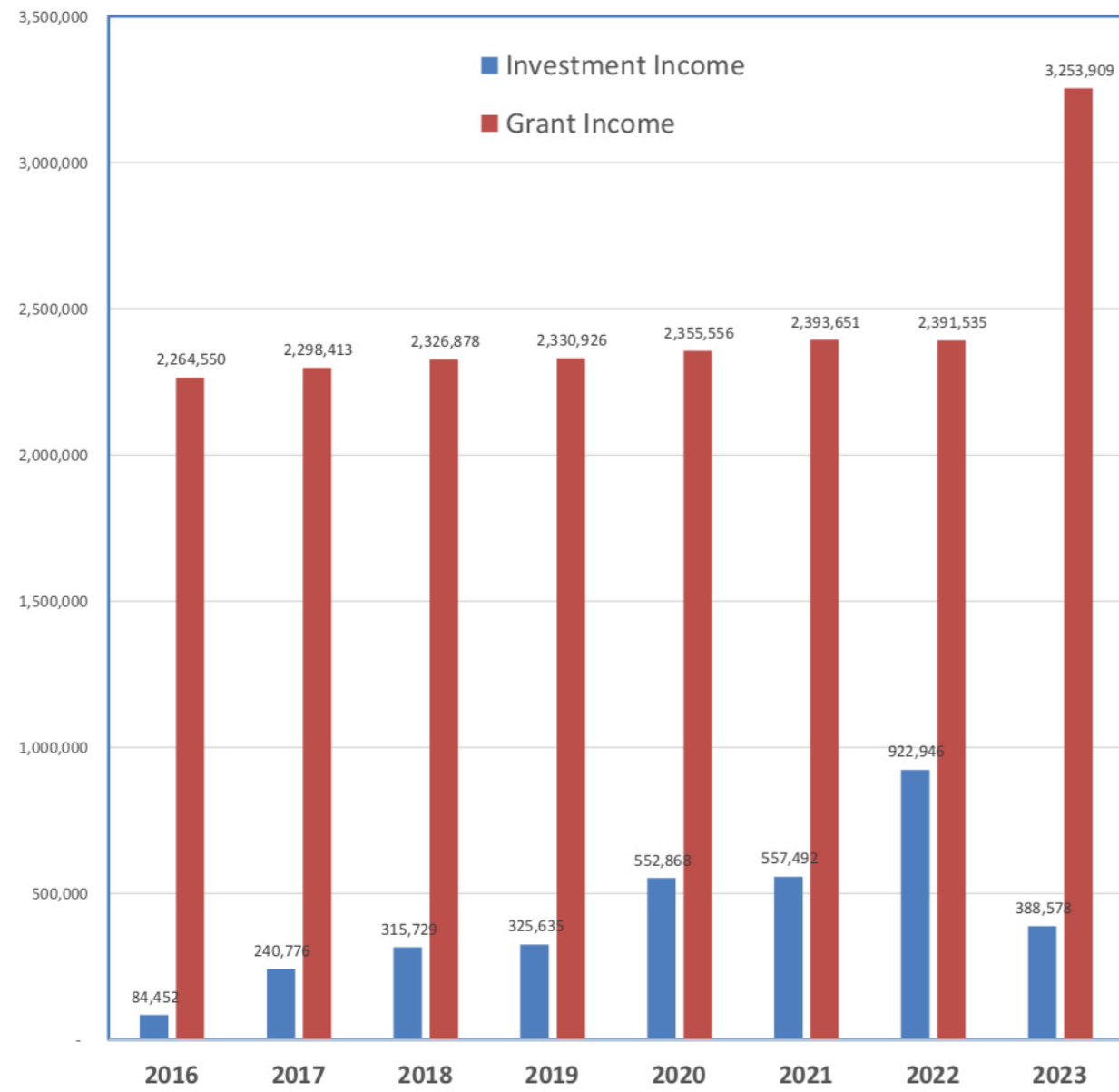
Edith Skeen: 5 days
Annette Kogolo: 4 days
Dorothy Pawlukowski: 4 days
Martin Sibosado: 2 days
Eric 'Dickie' Bedford: 3 days
Christopher Bin Kali: 3 days
Natalie Carlton: 2 days
Patsy Bedford: 2 days
Ismahl Croft: 1 day

Financials

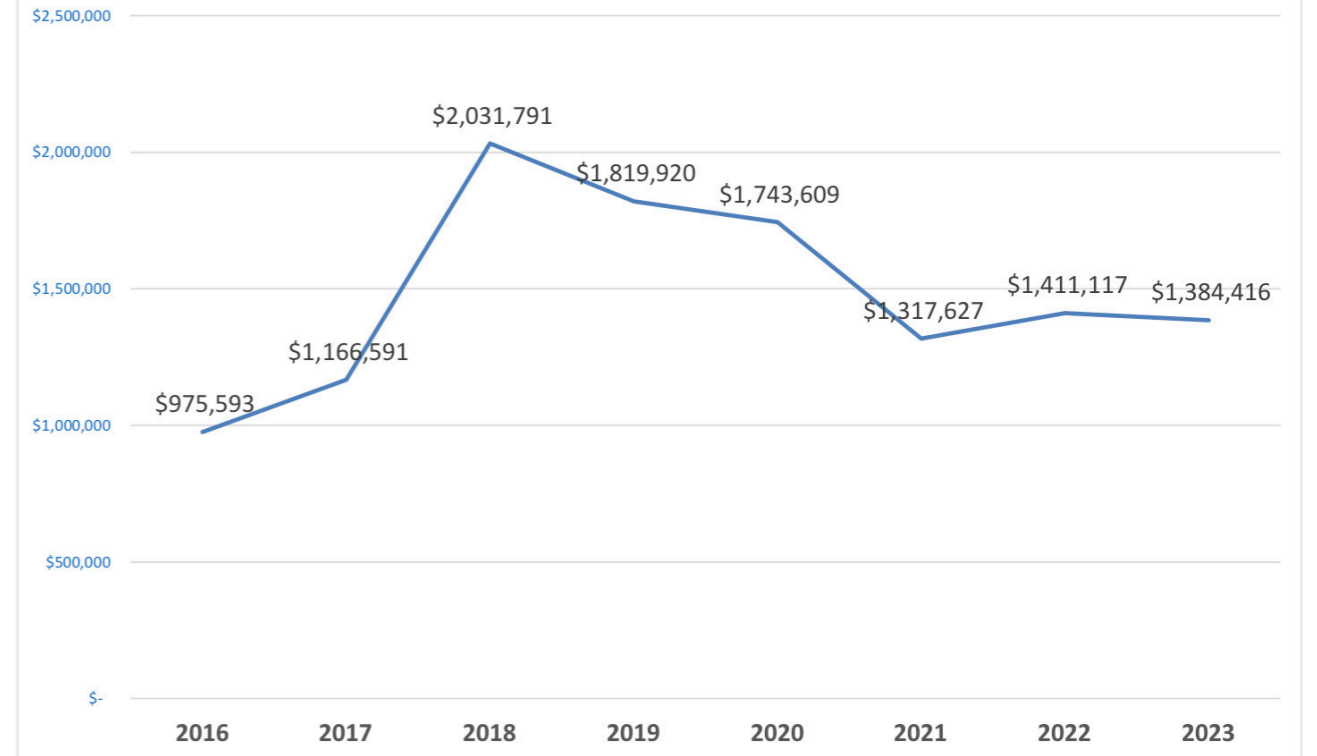
INCOME SOURCES FOR 2023 YEAR



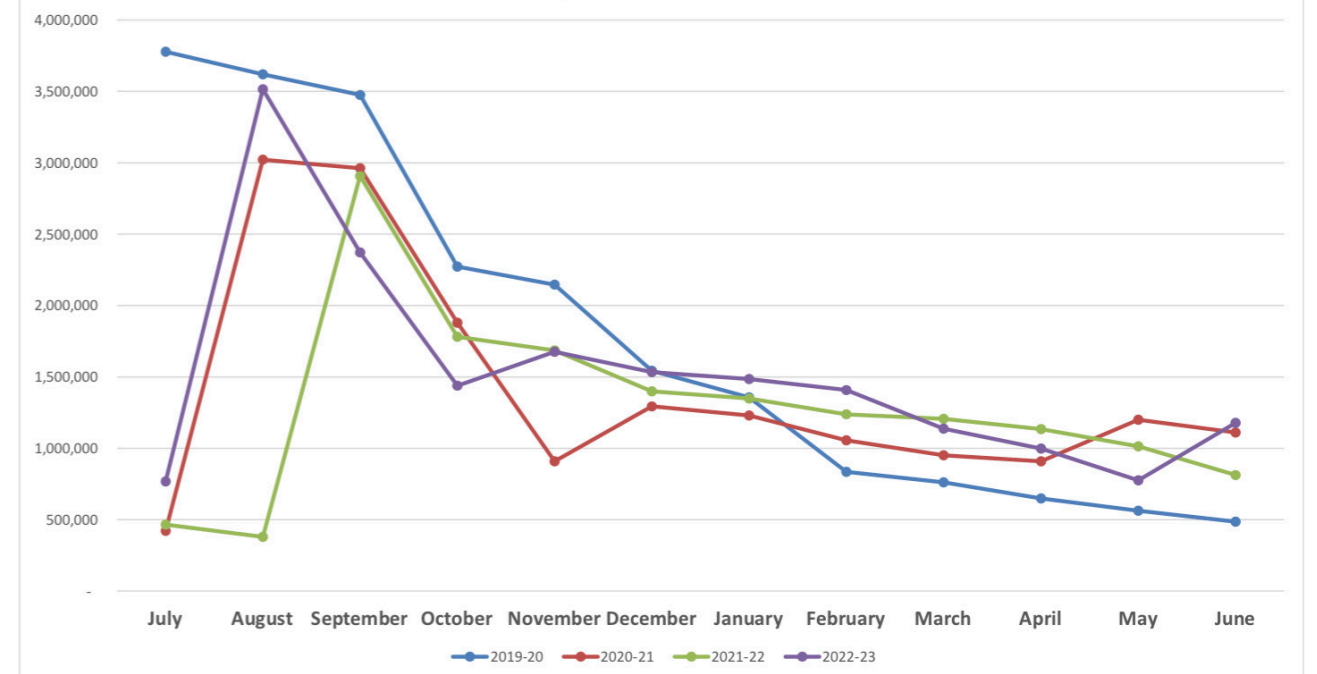
HISTORICAL INCOME TRENDS



Total Historical Admin Expenditure Trends



Aarnja Ltd - Cash Balances





Aarnja Ltd

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