



STORIES OF CHANGE

STORY #9
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XTRA MILE TRANSPORT ESSENTIAL TRANSPORT FOR A REMOTE COMMUNITY



Robert Robertson is a senior Warlpiri man based in the remote community of Yuendumu, 330km's north west of Alice Springs. He is a youth worker, an educator, a mediator, a pastor for the local church, a board member for many local organisations and a father, grandfather and great grandfather. He is a role model for many in the community and his aspirations to start his own business stem from a desire to show young people what self-determination and leadership look like at a grass roots level. He wants to show them that Warlpiri-owned and Warlpiri-run business in a remote community is possible.

Having lived in the Northern Territory his whole life, he also knows just how important accessible transport is to people's mobility and safety on the roads. In Robert's words "too many young people are having accidents and driving cars that aren't safe. And our families have no way to get to community events, funerals and ceremony", events which are often 600km's away on bush tracks in neighbouring communities such as Lajamanu.

Robert's seen the need for a Warlpiri owned transport company for years, and as we say at Community First Development, the good ideas stand the test of time. As a community member, he knows firsthand of the challenges the Yuendumu community face, and his ideas incorporate this wisdom. He intends the business to provide regular transport to/from Alice Springs, charter buses for community events, NDIS patient transport, and ultimately, vehicle recovery. He spent time doing informal needs assessments, hosting conversations and developing relationships with vehicle dealerships and mechanics to learn what would be required. That said, he pinpoints the moment that ideas turned to action as when he first reached out to Community First Development in April 2019.



ROBERT ROBERTSON,
XTRA MILE TRANSPORT

“ I waited 7 years, just talking and thinking about the business, but then I was introduced to you mob, ICV [Community First Development], and that’s when things started to go, started to happen. I wouldn’t have done this without you mob you know, I’m grateful. ”

ROBERT ROBERSTON, XTRA MILE TRANSPORT

Robert was referred to us by the Central Lands Council (CLC) which works in the Yuendumu region. This referral shows an interesting new partnership approach between the CLC and Community First Development that harnesses resources and maximises both organisations’ abilities to support community members seeking to strengthen their initiatives.

The first meeting with Robert and CLC saw him sharing his ideas and progress, then the butchers paper came out to start to plan his dream and a plan for the community-led business. Robert chose Community First Development volunteers, Taffy

(David) and partner Marella, to work with him on his first project with us. Taffy and Marella are long-time Community First Development volunteers who have undertaken more than 17 projects between them. Taffy is a remote transport and business development consultant, with a lifetime of advocacy and planning for accessible and equitable transport, and Marella ran her own business as a bookkeeper and business administrator for small businesses.

With Taffy and Marella’s support, Robert documented his work and ideas in a business plan, registered the business as a company, and applied for his first grant through the local community development fund, the Granites Mine Affected Area Aboriginal Corporation (GMAAAC). This proposal resulted in funding awarded to cover the purchasing of Xtra Mile’s first two vehicles and other start-up costs, a significant achievement.

Following the success of this project, Robert invited us to work with him on two additional projects. Due to COVID-19 restrictions, both projects occurred concurrently and remotely via videoconferencing.

LOGO AND BRAND DEVELOPMENT

Robert wanted to develop a brand and logo that clearly highlighted Xtra Mile’s distinct identity as a Warlpiri owned and operated community transport system. He wanted a logo that could be printed on items such as buses, timetables, and uniforms.

With her extensive graphic design and brand development experience, Robert chose Community First Development volunteer, Marion, to work with him on this project. To start the process, Community First Development Community Development Officer, Maddi, facilitated an initial videoconferencing session between Robert and Marion. Robert spoke about his initial ideas for the logo design and the story he wanted it to convey, while Marion listened and documented these. Over several months, Maddi facilitated videoconference meetings between Robert, his family and Marion to develop the logo and transform his ideas onto paper.



Robert and Maddi selecting the logo

Through a highly collaborative process involving sketches, the development of multiple logo options and many yarning sessions, Robert and Marion finalised the logo. Robert, his family, and community members he has shown it to, couldn't be happier with the outcome:

“ People are so happy about it! I have to explain what the logo is all about, and everyone remembers the story of walking from waterhole to waterhole with our parents. A lot of us have those memories, and the logo helps to bring back the memories as we grew up walking as our main transport. It really tells a story, and it reminds every one of us about our families, and the old ways. ”

ROBERT ROBERSTON, XTRA MILE TRANSPORT

For Robert, the highlight of the project was the entire journey – learning about and seeing his idea transform into a finished logo.

“ To me, it was about the idea, and the whole project was about an idea. Talking about the project, talking to you mob about this project and then working together on it...I've learned lots of new information and knowledge, learning more about how to work with you. I haven't been on this kind of journey before, it's been great. Talking about the logo, learning new information, choosing the colours. ”

ROBERT ROBERSTON, XTRA MILE TRANSPORT

Marion has digitised the logo and created it in several formats to allow it to be adapted for multiple communication purposes.



Robert, his wife, Lisa, and son, Tyrell, celebrating finalising the logo.

FUNDING AND AUSPICE ARRANGEMENTS

After securing funding for Xtra Mile's start-up costs, Robert invited Taffy and Marella to work with him on an additional project. The aim of this project was to secure funding to cover operational costs and finalise an auspice arrangement with a Yuendumu based organisation for Xtra Mile's first one to two years of operation.

With COVID-19 restrictions in place, this project was undertaken almost entirely online. Maddi once again facilitated fortnightly videoconference meetings between Robert, Taffy and Marella to discuss and progress the funding applications and auspice arrangements. Taffy and Marella would often follow-up these meetings with a phone call to Robert to double-check he was ok with what was discussed. Taffy and Marella believed it was important to regularly touch-base with Robert, to make sure they were still on track and working towards his goals.



The Xtra Mile Transport team meeting via Zoom: Robert, Lachlan (Wanta Aboriginal Corporation), Maddi, Taffy and Marella.

“ I think you’ve got to revisit what you’re trying to do because you can get off track. And you may see ways forward that Robbie is not going to agree with or thinks isn’t going to work because he knows the community much better than you do. I think that periodically retouching base is very important. ”

TAFFY, COMMUNITY FIRST DEVELOPMENT VOLUNTEER

Building on research undertaken as part of Robert’s initial project with Community First Development, Taffy and Marella worked closely with Robert to finalise an auspice arrangement to support Xtra Mile with administration and financial support in its first few years of operation. After several meetings and discussions, a three-way partnership agreement was developed and finalised between Xtra Mile Transport and Recovery, Wanta Aboriginal Corporation and Transport Planning and Management (Taffy and Marella). To protect Xtra Mile’s independence, Taffy and Marella registered Xtra Mile as a sole trader again to ensure they could enter the partnership as an entity. Transport Planning and Management’s (Taffy and Marella) role is to plan the services, work through the

transport regulations and provide governance support, with the agreement formalising their ongoing role as mentors and advisors.

Robert, Taffy and Marella also worked closely to develop and submit multiple funding applications. As part of the GMAAAC process, Robert and Taffy were invited to address the GMAAAC committee together. The GMAAAC committee wanted to meet Robert and Taffy and find out more about the project and their intentions, particularly Taffy’s as a non-Indigenous person. As Taffy reflected:

“ It was good to be able to say to the group that we’ve been working on this for more than 12 months on a volunteer basis and we have no long term interest in this apart from the fact that we are going to make it work. I think that reassured people. There is a view that a lot of kardiya based companies come into the community and make a lot of money and disappear again. Whereas this is different as the business will be Robbie’s not-for-profit enterprise. ”

TAFFY, COMMUNITY FIRST DEVELOPMENT VOLUNTEER

Following the presentation, GMAAAC awarded Xtra Mile with a second grant for operational costs. In addition, they successfully secured a Remote Passenger Transport Program subsidy from the Northern Territory Government, as well as some smaller grants to support training and other start-up costs. During the last month, Robert, Taffy and Marella have also secured buy-in from different

agencies in Yuendumu and other places for the planned transport service.

In the spring of 2020, Robert recruited a number of drivers to undertake training to obtain an endorsement to drive a commercial passenger vehicle. Nine participants turned up for training and testing by DriveSafeNT – a high number for a remote community.

TRACKING CHANGE TOGETHER

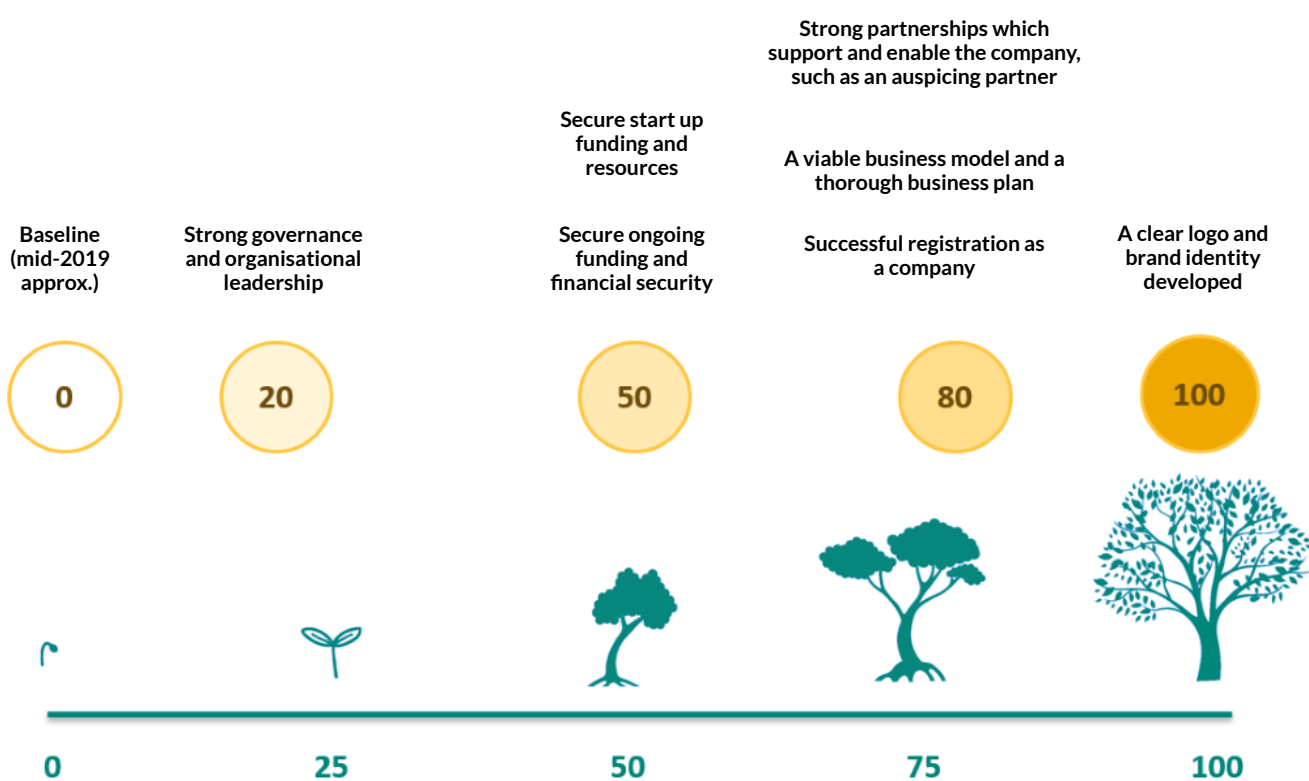
Using a participatory monitoring and evaluation approach, Maddi has worked closely with Robert to monitor progress towards achieving his short-term (project indicators) and long-term (dream indicators) goals. Robert determined a baseline reading for all dream indicators at zero.

In October 2020, Maddi and Robert reflected on progress towards achieving his long-term goals. Maddi combined a yarning-based semi-structured

interview approach with Community First Development's 'seed to tree' tool to facilitate the discussion.

As highlighted below, Robert has made significant progress towards achieving his dream since first reaching out to Community First Development in April 2019. Below is a selection of short to medium term dream indicators which demonstrate change that has been achieved so far.

Select Dream Indicators: Latest monitoring points recorded October 2020



It has been amazing to see how much Robert has achieved, with Community First Development's support, in a relatively short period of time. As Robert remarks, the journey to date has been one characterised by learning, with Robert keen to pass on knowledge gained to others in the future.



Robert, using the 'Seed to Tree' tool as part of ongoing participatory monitoring and evaluation activities.

“ Sometimes I don't believe that it's actually going to happen, that all that hard work has paid off!

I think that working with you [Maddi], Carl [CLC], Marella and Taffy, it's been a really exciting journey of learning new knowledge, I've gained more knowledge now than when I first started. And now, I've learned how to set it up so that one day I can support others coming through. That's something I want to do in the future, when Xtra Mile is up and running and cruising along, we want to start educating our people about cars, about money management, about all this stuff that I'm dreaming about. ”

ROBERT ROBERSTON, XTRA MILE TRANSPORT

NEXT STEPS

Robert is currently preparing to launch Xtra Mile's first service. This includes securing a physical place to hold the buses, and working with Wanta Aboriginal Corporation to undertake risk management planning and establishing policies, procedures and human resource (HR) systems. Robert is keen to learn about risk mitigation:

“ I've been starting to learn about risk management. It's something I always think about, but now I want to really do it properly. You've got to love what you do when you run a business, this helps me to balance the risks. If you love doing what you're doing, it will all be okay, it will be worth it. ”

ROBERT ROBERSTON, XTRA MILE TRANSPORT

Robert has also identified several additional longer-term goals, including operating a recovery service and running driver safety and car maintenance workshops. Ultimately, he hopes that his business will act as a catalyst for change – to inspire people to think differently and demonstrate what’s possible to future generations.

“ I think this business will help motivate people to think differently about starting a business. It’s going to change everyone, from the oldest to the youngest, those ones going to school, people who are out there with unemployment, I think it will change everyone, and that’s my whole plan, to help them young ones think about the impossible, show them that it’s possible. ”

ROBERT ROBERTSON, XTRA MILE TRANSPORT

Xtra Mile is currently finalising negotiations for a licence for the bus service, and with two drivers now qualified to work on a commercial passenger service and securing their first bus, the launch of the service is not far away.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Xtra Mile’s first bus!

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