

## Cleaning made easy

**Steven Kelly**, Bundiyarra Aboriginal Community Aboriginal Corporation, WA

Introduction by **Marchelle Rettalack**, CEO, Bundiyarra Aboriginal Corporation, WA

Good afternoon environmental health supporters.

How lucky are we all for being away from our desks and putting our heads together to recognise issues and solutions to further improve the services we are delivering to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, in sunny Cairns.

On behalf of Bundiyarra, we wish to respectfully acknowledge the Yirrganydji people on whose land we are today, and we pay our respects to their Ancestors past and present.

Before I introduce Steven Kelly to the microphone, we wanted to take the opportunity to share with you what Bundiyarra does, to assist people like Steven find a place within today's society.

Bundiyarra was established on 1 May 1998, and is situated on 4.98 hectares of Reserve land which is currently being created into an Aboriginal cultural complex.

Bundiyarra was one of the first Aboriginal Corporations in Western Australia to have obtained a land management order through state and federal government. We are now in the process of working with the Department of Land to have the Reserve transferred to freehold.

Bundiyarra has provided environmental health services to remote communities including Pia, Kardaloo and Barrel Well and to Geraldton suburbs for the past fifteen years.

Since 2014, Bundiyarra has doubled in size and now employs 22 staff.

In addition to environmental health services, Bundiyarra operates the Irra Wangga Language Centre, administration and accounting services, marketing and IT services and Work for the Dole Jobactive programs.

In 2015, Bundiyarra, through community consultation, wrote a pre-training, training, education to employment program called the Learning Journey.

It is a dual highway approach that will bring greater community together, by allowing Aboriginal people to engage in a range of programs and activities, while having the opportunity to recognise and learn more about their history and culture;.

It will increase the number of Aboriginal events and activities on Aboriginal land and allow greater community benefit by being immersed in Aboriginal culture.

Since February 2016, Bundiyarra has assisted more than 100 Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people receiving Centrelink benefits, through our Jobactive and Learning Journey programs. Seventeen program participants have secured part-time work at Bundiyarra in environmental health services, reception, marketing, book keeping and supervisor roles. Three have secured employment with outside agencies.

Steven is a golden gem who has come through the Jobactive

program and now has secured employment as an environmental health practitioner. He is dedicated and passionate.

What Steven is going to share with us today is not new. It has been used by people for a long period of time. Its benefits are already well known.

Probably because of the appearance of the different and modern things that we have right now, the uses of products like bi-carb, vinegar, Bosistos, tea tree, lavender, cloves and many other basic ingredients have been pushed to the side. People have become more accustomed to using modern products.

These new products may seem effective in the beginning because they usually work fast, but this is because of the chemicals that are also included along with other natural items used in creating the products.

Perhaps now is the time when you should look away from this merchandise and check out the forgotten home remedies that are still as effective today as they were a long time ago. They are easy to use, accessible to buy, they are affordable and they work.

Steven's passion and understanding of his people is the driving force behind the success of this program. It is still in the development phase, but I must say we look forward to seeing you all in 2019 to share the success and provide evidence of the improvements occurring in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities throughout the Mid West, Murchison and Gascoyne regions.

I have great pleasure in introducing Steven Kelly to the stage.

Hello everyone!

As Marchelle mentioned, I am an environmental health practitioner from Bundiyarra Aboriginal Corporation in Geraldton, Western Australia.

I, too, would like to welcome you to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Environmental Health Conference here in Cairns and pay my respects to the Yirrganydji people.

I would like to tell you a little bit about myself so you can get a better understanding of who I am. I was born in a small town called Mullewa, just east of Geraldton in Western Australia, in December 1990. From a young age, I've always travelled and lived in many towns, such as Darwin, Broome, Katherine, Karratha, Carnarvon, Mullewa, Northampton and Perth, and in a small remote community called Pia Wajarri. But no matter where I went, I would always end up back in Geraldton where my family and friends are. I also met my partner of 7 years in Geraldton and we now have three beautiful children and couldn't be happier.

For me, employment opportunities usually involved hard labour, and it wasn't very stimulating. I was out of work for about 2 years before joining the Work for the Dole program at Bundiyarra in March 2016. When I first started, I was very shy and didn't talk much (although now I'm the main one talking). I would come in, do the work and go home. It wasn't until Matt, one of the supervisors, saw I had a good work ethic and asked if I would like to help out on a few extra jobs around the yard that this changed. This helped me get to know the boys around the yard a lot better, and I eventually started to talk more. Getting to know everyone allowed me to be able to work in a comfortable environment.

In August 2016, I finished my Work for the Dole contract. I didn't want to leave so decided to volunteer at Bundiyarra. Six months later, in January 2017, after showing initiative and determination, I found myself employed by Bundiyarra in the Environmental Health Services Team.

In January 2017, my partner Bonnie and I became stressed over an upcoming house inspection. If we spent \$20 on cleaning products, we would be left with no money to buy staple food items for our children. That \$20 would allow us to buy items such as bread, milk, butter and cold meat for sandwiches. Bonnie also found it difficult to use the products as they were strong in smell and often left her feeling unwell.

My CEO, Marchelle, recognised I had something on my mind and I explained the situation to her. She asked if I had ever used bi-carb soda and vinegar for cleaning. She explained a few things she cleans with the products and suggested that we give it a go.

I soon learnt that these two simple items can be purchased for no more than \$4! When bi-carb and vinegar are used together, they can do wonders in your home. It's something we now try to promote as much as possible, as the number of things it can be used for is incredible. You can use it for all types of things, such as removing grime and stains from your stove top and inside of your stove. To do this, sprinkle a little bi-carb on the stained area on your stove top, pour a small amount of vinegar on the bi-carb and allow the vinegar and bi-carb to react with each other, fizzing up. The reaction loosens the grime and stains, allowing you to wipe it off with ease. This works on stainless-steel basins and coffee and other hard to remove stains from ceramic cups.

Another use for bi-carb and vinegar is your laundry washing. Having three young kids, we do a lot of washing through the week, and our washing powder never seems to last, so to tackle this problem we wash our clothes with bi-carb soda and vinegar. Add 2 tablespoons of bi-carb and half a cup of vinegar to your load, along with a quarter of the amount of washing powder you would normally use. Vinegar acts as a natural fabric softener so your clothes will come out clean and soft.

Bi-carb and vinegar can be used to clean your toilet too, it helps remove those nasty stains. Pour half a cup of vinegar into the toilet along with 2 tablespoons of bi-carb, let sit for around half an hour and then flush. This will help keep your toilet fresh and clean. It is also a simple solution for cleaning tile floors and removing erosion and build up from showers and taps.

Best of all, we now know that we can clean our whole house for approximately \$150 for the whole year!

My partner and I were happy with the results of the bi-carb, and there was no aroma to leave the house smelling fresh. So we decided to research other natural ingredients that could be added and provide more hygiene benefits. I took some of the made-up products into Bundiyarra and my work mates were impressed.

I spoke with my Coordinator, Janine Wellington, who then suggested we create a natural cleaning range. I put my hand up and said yeah, I can do that, not knowing just what I got myself into and how big this would get. At first, I just saw it as a job, but when I started interacting with community and saw first-hand what a few little home remedies could do for someone struggling, and how appreciative and grateful some people were, it changed my thinking.

I had a lady in a remote community say she was so grateful that a stranger like me would even care to help someone like her, and that made me feel really positive about things. This is when I started getting passionate about the natural products and solutions, and Buuju thanu, Bundiyarra Natural Cleaning Range was born. Buuju thanu are Wajarri words which mean, from bush, I thank my pop for helping me to establish an appropriate language name.

As Marchelle mentioned, the concept is not new, it has been around for many years. However, it is time for service providers of Environmental Health Services like Bundiyarra, to promote these products into the community as a natural, cheaper alternative to merchandise products. By combining different natural products, many home cleaning remedies and pest control solutions can be made.

The main range we are delivering into homes and community are a multi-purpose spray, air freshener, mould remover and carpet deodoriser. We will make these together in a short while.

As part of the development, we researched merchandise products and consulted with our Jobactive team for their opinions and suggestions on what they would find useful to use in their own homes.

We priced the same merchandise that we wanted to make from natural products which would cost approximately \$20. After speaking with Robert Mullane yesterday, he informed us that to purchase these products in a remote community, the cost would be approximately \$32.

We were amazed to discover the types of chemicals in store-bought cleaning products and the health risks associated with them. It was interesting to find that store-bought products do not list their ingredients - and don't have to.

Let me share this quote from the ecologist.org: "Not all labels are easy to look behind. Household products such as cleaners, polishes and air fresheners are not obliged to list their ingredients and from a health perspective this may be a costly omission. In spite of their name, air fresheners do not freshen the air. Instead strong long-lasting perfumes mask odours while other chemical ingredients alter your sense of smell making it less acute."

Let's take a quick look at what these store-bought products state in terms of health risks associated with them.

- "Intentional misuse by deliberately concentrating and inhaling the contents can be harmful or fatal. Help stop inhalation use"
- "Avoid contact with skin and eyes. For advice contact a Poisons Information Centre or doctor."
- From productreview.com: "Disappointing lemon scent. It was so unpleasant that I added some bi-carb soda to it in the attempt to make it better. I managed to finish the bottle but I will not purchase this again."
- "This mould killer may produce severe burns. Attacks skin and eyes. Wear eye protection and gloves when using."
- From productreview.com: "It really gets rid of mould but the fume is terrible. I got sick after using it due to heavy fume that can damage your skin and throat."

Now you probably understand a little better why bi-carb and vinegar are a great alternative to use in and around your home!

When you mix bi-carb and vinegar, the bi-carb acts as a base, and takes a proton from vinegar, which is an acid. The reaction releases gas because when the bi-carb soda receives the proton, it transforms into water and carbon dioxide. This reaction is brilliant for cleaning toilet bowls and drains.

Our focus is on promoting natural solutions and products, to educate the community that there are cheaper and much safer alternatives to help keep your home pest-free and clean. The added bonus is that you can make these solutions and products in the comfort of your own home. The products have been selected to cater to the needs of the community.

I first demonstrated the natural cleaning products at the February Mid West Health Forum in front of Western Australian State Health and other environmental health providers. It was during this forum that our team came to understand how many Aboriginal people are suffering from trachoma, skin diseases and gastro. The City of Greater Geraldton only supplies residents with one bin per household and few recycling facilities, commenced paid tip fees and removed verge-side collection. This has had a massive impact on community. Many Aboriginal homes in the Mid West suffer from overcrowding, leading to more rubbish build-up. The constant build-up of rubbish in homes brings infestations of vermin and debris, both major causes of health effects. The natural cleaning products being explored will provide huge results with little effort required to make them. With that, our environmental health services team are saving huge dollars in people's cleaning bills and costs that should be being met by local and state government. They planted the seed to apply to present at this National Conference, so here we are today!

In June, we went on a trip to a small remote community called Pia Wajarri in the Murchison region of Western Australia. For me, the trip was really exciting because I had lived in Pia as a child for around six months with my nan and pop so to be going back as an environmental health practitioner made me very proud that I would be helping my people clean the community up.

When we got there, we went to the school where we cooked a big BBQ for the whole community, which everyone enjoyed. This gave us the opportunity to talk to the community about their needs for the future. We also gave each of the ladies a natural cleaning pack and a demonstration on how to use and make the products. We gave the kids a demonstration on hand and face washing to show the importance of hygiene and health, which the kids had a lot of fun doing. We also gave a natural cleaning solution pack to each household.

Pia residents were very grateful for these packs as living on a remote community without a general store can be hard when it comes to running out of your general cleaning products and the next town is around 300km away.

In July, Bundiyarra hosted a NAIDOC family day and the environmental health services team set up a promotional stand and delivered product demos throughout the day. WA Minister for Agriculture, Food, Jobs and Trade, Alannah MacTiernan, attended and praised the project and the desired outcomes. The NAIDOC day was attended by approximately 500 community members. Offering the product demonstrations at this event gave me the opportunity to consult with community and talk to them further about health issues in their homes and whether they would take the time to make and use the products to help elevate health effects. The common response was YES!

The squeaky-clean kids program, delivered through WA Country Health Services, supplied a pallet of soap for distribution to communities at risk of trachoma or trachoma resurgence.

We saw an opportunity to pair the soap with a hand towel, a loofah, some face tissues and also a hand sanitiser, creating a hand and face hygiene pack for the kids. We also have some fun stickers to educate and teach kids that hand and face hygiene is important and can be fun.

The Bundiyarra environmental health team created a second pack, with the help of several local dentists who came on board to help make up health and hygiene packages by donating toothbrushes and toothpaste. We have paired the toothbrushes and toothpaste with a hair brush, hair lackeys, a nit comb and two bottles of nit solution. We also make the nit solution at Bundiyarra. It contains conditioner, 2 drops of tea tree oil and 2 drops of coconut oil. When put together, the tea tree oil and coconut oil helps to repel and suffocate the nits, making it easy for you to comb out the remainder. Regular use and brushing will result in having a nit-free head.

Now I've talked about the benefits of bi-carb and vinegar, we'll do a few demonstrations as a group to show how the natural products are made. So let's get started.

Everything you need is either in the paper bag in front of you or in the middle of the table to share with your group. We have filled the bottles with the required amount of water to save time. The first product is a natural all-purpose spray and wipe. You can use this product for your kitchen benches, the kitchen table, your coffee table or pretty much anything wooden or vinyl.

To make this product, you will need your all-purpose spray bottle, and an eye dropper. The ingredients we use are: 750ml of water; now add 2 drops of lavender oil and 2 drops of eucalyptus oil. Once you have added those together, shake well.

It's that fast and simple. The lavender oil is for the pleasant smell and the eucalyptus oil kills germs, being a natural antiseptic. Give it a spray and smell the freshness.

The second product is the air freshener. The air freshener is great for when you want to air out your house and want it smelling good. Take the air freshener bottle from the bag and, again, everything you need is on your table. Simply add 2 drops of tea tree oil and now add 2 drops of lavender oil. Shake well and spray for testing. The lavender oil is for smell and you can use any natural oil or essence of your choice if you don't like the smell of lavender. The tea tree is to eliminate odours in the air and is also a natural antiseptic, which helps with germs in the area.

Our third product is a carpet deodoriser. Simply sprinkle some on your indoor carpets or in your car. It can either be vacuumed up or you can sprinkle and leave it and have your carpets smelling great. It's really useful, too, if you have a cat or dog that's not toilet trained. The deodoriser eliminates odours immediately, as if the smell was never there.

Take the carpet deodoriser container from your bag. Add 250g of bi-carb soda to your container; this is also in your bag. Follow with 2 teaspoons of ground cinnamon and 2 teaspoons of ground cloves. Give it a good shake and that one is done; open it for a smell. At home, we also add a quarter of a cup of dry lavender and a quarter of a cup of dry rosemary. This gives the product extra aroma for longer lasting benefits.

As you can see, the solutions are quick and easy to make. The dry lavender, dry rosemary, ground cinnamon and ground cloves all have their own strong smell but when mixed together give a nice mellow smell. The bi-carb soda helps pick up all the bacteria and dust mites that can be found in your carpet when vacuuming.

The last natural cleaning product we have today is probably the easiest and quickest solution, but is also the most effective, and that's a mould remover. This solution can be used in all the wet areas around your home, so if you have mould growing in your kitchen, bathroom, toilet or laundry, this solution will be great for you. Take the mould remover container from your bag. Using an eye dropper, add 1 drop of oil of cloves. I know 1 drop doesn't sound like much, but oil of cloves is very strong and kills mould. It's important not to put more than 1 drop of oil of cloves. That's it, your products are made and ready for use!

All the products and solutions have been trialled by my family, a few of my work colleagues and a small group within the community, and we have gotten nothing but good feedback.

I have tried to identify the most effective and easy-to-make alternative solutions that suit the needs of parents, people with allergies, children and the elderly, or if you just want a cheaper non-toxic natural solution for your home.

So why are we doing this?

As an environmental health practitioner, we go to homes on daily basis doing pest control treatment, providing easy ways to remove excess rubbish from in and around the home, and conducting plumbing and bathroom assessments. It became evident that, like me, many Aboriginal families are suffering many health effects caused by living in poorly cleaned homes. Why? because, like me, they can't afford to purchase store-bought cleaning products.

Our team provides product demonstrations to educate community on how they can maintain healthy clean living, using non-toxic products which are a lot cheaper than store-bought products, and assists in reducing and removing health issues caused in and around the home.

We believe our solution will see reductions in the number of Aboriginal people suffering with illnesses such as respiratory issues, trachoma, skin diseases and gastro.

As for myself, I've never felt a greater feeling in life than when I'm helping and working for community. I look forward to continuing my work with the environmental health services Team at Bundiyarra. We endeavor to find the relevant partners to make Buuju thanu a sought-after natural cleaning range for our communities.

Thank you for taking the time to make our products, and we look forward to receiving your feedback. This can be done by emailing our marketing coordinator: [marketing@bundiyarra.org.au](mailto:marketing@bundiyarra.org.au).

#### **For more information**

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#### **Glossary**

NAIDOC National Aborigines and Islanders Day Observance Committee