

# JANICE'S STORY

## AUSTRALIA



[Watch Janice's Story on Vimeo](#)



**Janice poses for a photograph on Jawoyn Country in Arnhem Land, Northern Territory, Australia.** Photo: Richard Wainwright

Janice, a proud Wagilak woman, is a traditional dancer who tells her family's stories through movements which have been handed down over generations.

Janice moved to a remote Northern Territory community as a young girl, when her mother was offered work in a kitchen near the local clinic.

"When I was about five, six or seven, my father taught me how to dance his culture, and then I had to learn to dance my mother's culture too," Janice says. "When I dance, I feel strong in my heart. It's like my grandfather and my grandmother are here with me."

Like many remote communities, Janice's faces a range of challenges, including few jobs and educational opportunities, financial hardship, lower life expectancy and poorer health than the non-Indigenous population.

Loss of land, language and culture and intergenerational trauma related to the ongoing effects of colonisation, can also contribute to socio-economic problems for young people in remote communities. Many others leave the community in search of work, moving to towns and cities where they may be more vulnerable.

"With many elders gone, we must transfer knowledge, to keep a connection to culture and nurture future leaders," Janice says. "Me and my family, we keep the culture going, we need to keep our culture strong."

With your help, Caritas Australia is able to support Djilpin Arts Aboriginal Corporation, which has been operating a centre for traditional and contemporary Aboriginal visual and performing arts and culture in a remote area of the Northern Territory since 2002. It was established by the late Balang T. E. Lewis – the celebrated movie actor, musician and community member – and has been supported by Caritas Australia for around 14 years.

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Djilpin Arts provides training and employment for young people who work in the art museum and shop. The museum features a permanent showcase of culturally significant West Arnhem Land artworks, while the shop sells traditional wood carvings, fibre art, prints and jewellery.

Elders run pandanus weaving and printmaking workshops, inspired by the colours of the environment, with designs featuring water lilies, turtles and fish. They share their knowledge with the younger generation, and visitors to the centre. Local guides run bush cultural tours and architect-designed tourist accommodation is available for visitors.

Janice has been a Djilpin Artsworker since 2015, performing traditional dances, as a host for performances and as a tour guide in the art museum. Her grandfather's painting is on display there, while her brother runs cultural tours, her son plays the dijeridu for cultural performances and her two daughters work in the shop.

"This is a safe place, a place we come with family and get away from problems. We, here in the art centre, work as a family," Janice says. "It's important to me because me and my brother, we got knowledge from our great grandfather, he told us to take care of your culture. It's even more important for us to work here because we hold our culture here and we love this place."

In 2021, with your support, Caritas Australia was also able to fund the launch of a Djilpin Arts shed in Katherine, to display and store artworks for shipping to online customers. COVID times have been particularly tough on remote communities, however, Djilpin Arts has been able to build up the online element of its business during the pandemic, helping communities to continue to make an income, even when there were few visitors.

"Janice has been a great supporter of Djilpin Arts, as a dancer. She also leads young people, young girls into dancing, and shares the knowledge of culture, and the artworks that the artists do," says Loretta George, Balang Lewis' sister and Djilpin Arts Chair.

"Djilpin Arts, for me it's been a big dream, from my brother. He talked about helping the community to come together, to help younger people get a job, and to bring our culture back to the people, because if there's no elders around and there's no one to teach the younger ones, we will lose all that and it will be lost forever," Loretta says.

Janice believes that Djilpin Arts' work is essential to create opportunities for young people to stay on-country, to share intergenerational knowledge between elders and the younger generation - to promote healing, and to keep culture alive.

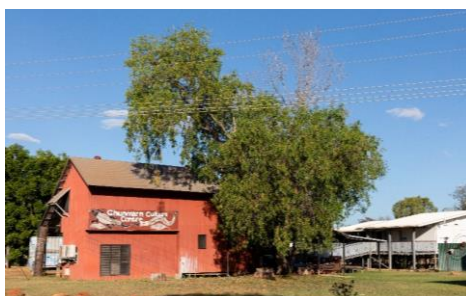


Photo: Richard Wainwright

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### TASK 1: Discussion

- A. How does Janice participate and contribute to her community?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- B. Why is it important for Janice to pass on her culture to the next generation?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- C. Why and how does the Djilpin Arts Centre fulfill an important purpose for the local community?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- D. How has your support of Caritas Australia impacted Janice's community's hopes for the future?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- E. Which Catholic Social Teachings do you see reflected in Janice's story?

### TASK 2: Country

Study a map of Australia that shows our First Nations groups <https://aiatsis.gov.au/explore/map-indigenous-australia>

- How many groups are there?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- Who are the traditional custodians of the land that Janice works on?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- Whose traditional Country is your school on? It will be easy to find the Nation but try and find the clan group as well.



### A CATHOLIC WORLDVIEW (JUDGE)

*"Your culture, which shows the lasting genius and dignity of your race, must not be allowed to disappear. Do not think that your gifts are worth so little that you should no longer bother to maintain them. Share them with each other and teach them to your children. Your songs, your stories, your paintings, your dances, your languages, must never be lost."*

*John Paul II's words in 1986 - which Pope Francis repeated in 2016*

*Pope Francis, Message to Indigenous Australians*

*At Caritas Australia we believe that every person has a right to participate in the decisions that affect them. Read this [Joint Statement on Subsidiarity](#). Summarise the recommendations below.*

### FAITH IN ACTION (ACT)

*Janice believes that Djilpin Arts' work is essential to create opportunities for young people to stay on-country, to share intergenerational knowledge between elders and the younger generation - to promote healing, and to keep culture alive.*

*How can you support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists to keep their culture alive?*