



# **GURRUMUL YUNUPINGU FOUNDATION**

## **2025 ANNUAL REPORT**



# BUSINESS OVERVIEW



Business name: Gurrumul Yunupingu Foundation (GYF)

Business structure: Australian Public Company

ABN: 25 163 166 283

ACN: 163 166 283

Registered address: 23b/90 Frances Bay Drive, Stuart Park, NT 0820

Date established: 16 May 2013

## Directors

Damian Trotter (Chair) appointed 2015 as Director, appointed Chair 6 June 2024

Donald Wininba Ganambarr (Deputy Chair), appointed 2023 as Director, appointed Deputy Chair 6 June 2024

Michael Hohnen appointed 2013

Rob Collins appointed 2018

Professor Fiona Stanley AC appointed 2014

Paul Ah Chee 'Ngala' appointed 2023

Jennifer Nixon appointed 2023

## Committee of Management

Michael Hohnen appointed 2013

Paul Ah Chee 'Ngala' appointed 2024

## Services

The Gurrumul Yunupingu Foundation offers a service that supports cultural and art-related programs and activities aimed at engaging and assisting young Indigenous Australians, particularly in remote communities. These initiatives focus on leveraging their strengths and providing future opportunities.

# VISION STATEMENT

The Gurrumul Yunupingu Foundation's vision is to alleviate poverty, ill-health and substance abuse, disadvantage, lack of education and employment opportunities, bullying and youth suicide in remote communities.

## MISSION

The Gurrumul Yunupingu Foundation's mission reflects its service, which to carry out and achieve its vision by engaging young people in remote communities in activities that build on their strengths, enabling them to contribute to culturally vibrant and sustainable communities and give them hope for the future, through approaches which include:

- Engaging young people by supporting community-initiated and managed programs;
- Supporting artistic, traditional, and contemporary community projects and developing artistic partnerships with mainstream industry bodies;
- Building on the strengths and existing skills of young people in the visual arts, music, dance, social media and IT, sport, cultural knowledge, and languages;
- Assisting young people with income generation and social support;
- Respecting community approaches to learning and the dissemination of information.

# KEY PRINCIPLES

The Gurrumul Yunupingu Foundation believes that positive change can be achieved through adherence to key principles as points of difference from much current service delivery. All the Foundation programs must:

- Be community devised and driven, with long-term planning and longevity always the goal.
- Value the importance of community languages, the inherent cultural knowledge they embrace, and celebrate their use.
- Employ Indigenous artists and trainers, especially from the local communities involved in the program, alongside guest/visiting artists, specialists, and trainers.
- Ensure that guest program leaders have appropriate cross-cultural awareness and knowledge, and the support of local language speakers on the ground.
- Build community capacity to continue activities, so skills remain in the community and ultimately lower the cost of delivery in remote locations.

## Goals and Objectives

- Find new approaches and solutions to the well documented, serious social effects of poverty, disadvantage, ill health, limited education, and employment opportunities in remote Indigenous communities.
- Enable community involvement in the development of Gurrumul Yunupingu Foundation funded programs, to determine what they want, and what they are interested in.
- Commit to long-term relationships and programs within communities, avoiding the one-off or ‘fly-in fly-out’ delivered outside local perspectives and needs.
- Ensure all Gurrumul Yunupingu Foundation activities and programs are informed by the needs and aspirations of young Indigenous people and community leaders.
- Provide opportunities in areas where young Indigenous people might excel and build on existing knowledge and capacities such as multi-media, IT, dance and music, arts and design, land care and conservation, cultural tourism as well as languages/interpreting (since most are multilingual).
- Compile evidence on social outcomes and benefits, collected from community networks, the wider community and service providers (e.g. local schools and health clinics).
- Provide evidence that young people are devising and initiating their own activities and engaging with community networks to secure their delivery by the Gurrumul Yunupingu Foundation.

# BOARD OF DIRECTORS

## **Damian Trotter (Chair and Director)**

Damian is the Managing Director of Sony Music Publishing Australia; a director and former Chairperson of AMCOS and a Non-Executive Publisher Director; current Deputy Chair of the APRA Board; and a Director of the Sony Foundation. Damian is proud to have supported the late singer Gurrumul to reach national and international audiences. He continues to actively support Indigenous musicians.

## **Donald Wininba Ganambarr (Deputy Chair and Director)**

Don, a senior Yolŋu man from Galiwin'ku and Gurrumul's brother-in-law, is a cultural leader (Djungaya) responsible for his family's cultural matters. He recently co-directed the performance piece called Bungul, inspired by Gurrumul's album Djarimirri (Child of the Rainbow). The performance, which blends Yolŋu and European music and dance, received positive reviews.

## **Jennifer Nixon**

Jenny is an Amnatyerr, Kaytetye, and Alyawarr woman from Alice Springs. She currently serves as the Director at the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) for Central Australia. Over the years, Jenny has developed expertise in navigating education, social services, law, governance, and health between two cultures. Her professional experience aligns with her commitment to enhancing opportunities for children, families, students, and the broader community. Additionally, she is strongly motivated to promote the inclusion, recognition, and integration of Aboriginal cultures within education, health, support, and communication networks.

## **Paul Ah Chee 'Ngala'**

Paul, a First Nations Arrernte Elder from Alice Springs with Aboriginal, Chinese, and European ancestry, has worked in sport, business, and music. He aims to create opportunities for economic self-sufficiency and help others make informed choices about their future. Recently, Paul re-entered the creative art industry, focusing on music and film. He recorded his first solo EP in 2022.

## **Rob Collins**

Rob, of Tiwi Island descent, was born and raised in Darwin. He graduated from the National Institute for Dramatic Arts in 2013. His theatre credits include playing Mufasa in The Lion King's national tour and Lysander in Sydney Theatre Company's A Midsummer Night's Dream. Rob won the 2017 TV Week Logie Award for Best New Talent for his role as Jack in The Wrong Girl (2016). More recently, he starred in ABC's Total Control (2019-2024), The Drover's Wife (2021), and Limbo (2023), for which he was awarded Best Supporting Actor by the Film Critics Circle of Australia.

**Michael Hohnen**

Michael has over 22 years of experience in music and teaching in the Northern Territory, working with more than 20 remote Indigenous communities. As a classically trained double bass player, he coordinated the VET Contemporary Music Certificate at Charles Darwin University, delivering courses to these communities. He co-founded Skinnyfish Music Pty Ltd with Mark Grose, producing several ARIA award-winning albums, including Gurrumul, Saltwater Band, and Nabarlek, and received an ARIA nomination for Producer of the Year in 2008. Michael was awarded Australian of the Year (NT) in 2013 alongside Mark Grose.

**Professor Fiona Stanley AC**

Fiona is the Founding Director and Patron of the Telethon Kids Institute, a Distinguished Research Professor at the University of Western Australia, and a Vice Chancellor's Fellow at the University of Melbourne. She has expertise in maternal and child health, epidemiology, and public health, focusing on childhood illnesses like birth defects. An advocate for Aboriginal social justice, she was named Australian of the Year in 2003 and became a UNICEF Australia Ambassador for Early Childhood Development in 2006. Fiona was elected a Fellow of the Academy of Social Sciences in 1996 and received Australia's highest civil honour, Companion in the General Division of the Order of Australia.

**Fact 1: About Galiwin'ku - Gurrumul's Birthplace**

Located about 550km northeast of Darwin and 150km northwest of Nhulunbuy, Galiwin'ku serves as the main town and central hub of Elcho Island. While often used to describe the community, the name Galiwin'ku actually refers to the entire island, which is situated at the southern end of the Wessel Islands group. The area boasts a picturesque setting, positioned between the Arafura Sea to the west and the Cadell Strait to the east.



# CHAIRPERSON'S REPORT

I am very pleased to report that the year kicked off on a high note for the Gurrumul Yunupingu Foundation, as we were privileged to receive the ticket proceeds from the **ABC's 2024/25 New Year's Eve concert**.

Significant progress was made on our **Small Arts Development** project. We finalised all core documentation—including grant guidelines, application and reporting forms, and grantee agreements—alongside **Easy Read** versions to ensure the program is accessible to everyone. While we are still working toward launching our pilot phase, the foundational structure is now ready.

We also formalised two critical pillars of our operations:

- **Gender Equality and Recognition Policy:** A framework to eliminate bias and ensure equity across our projects, staffing, and community programs.
- **Fundraising Policy:** A commitment to ethical engagement with all donors. This ensures our partnerships remain culturally appropriate and directly support our mission of empowering **remote Indigenous youth** to reach their full potential.

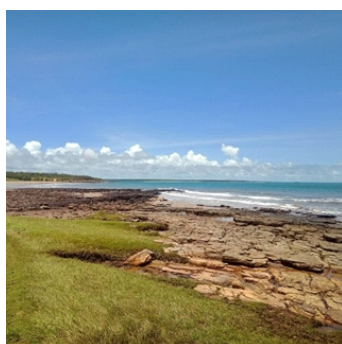
Running a small charity is a team effort. I would like to thank our Executive Officer Alessandra Superina. Although she departed her role in October, we are pleased to have her support in a volunteer capacity. I would also like to thank our Board of Directors, our dedicated donors and supporters and the businesses who provide pro-bono work. Together, we continue to build on the legacy of Gurrumul, ensuring young people in remote communities have the tools to realise their full potential.

Damian Trotter

**Chair and Director**

**Gurrumul Yunupingu Foundation**

## Fact 2: About Galiwin'ku - Gurrumul's Birthplace



Galiwin'ku is the home of the Yolngu people, a name that translates to "Aboriginal person" across northern Arnhem Land. This group consists of several intermarrying clans spread across Galiwin'ku, Milingimbi, and Yirrkala. While residents speak various closely related languages—including Galpa, Gumatj, and Warramiri—Djambarrpuyngu is the primary language used and understood throughout the community.

# 2025 YEAR IN REVIEW: GURRUMUL YUNUPINGU FOUNDATION

## Program Development: Small Arts Development Project

We have reached a major milestone in the development of our **Small Arts Development Grants** initiative. To ensure the program is both professional and inclusive, we finalised a comprehensive suite of governance documents, including Grant Guidelines, Application and Reporting forms, and formal Letters of Agreement. Notably, we developed **Easy Read** versions of these materials to remove barriers to entry and enhance accessibility for all applicants.

We continued to consult and work in partnership with Indigenous communities, in particular Galiwinku, the birth place of Gurrumul. This collaborative approach ensures that our programs are culturally safe and directly reflect the **needs and values** of the young people we serve.

Before the full launch of the Small Arts Program, we will invite two young Indigenous people or their community to apply for a pilot grant.

While the pilot program remains in the planning phase, the operational framework is now complete.

## Governance & Policy Advancement

To strengthen our institutional integrity, the Foundation ratified two essential policies this year:

- **Gender Equality and Recognition Policy:** Establishes a formal commitment to addressing gender-based disparities and bias across all community projects, grant allocations, and staffing.
- **Ethical Fundraising Policy:** Outlines our standards for engaging with individual, corporate, and government donors. This policy ensures that all partnerships are culturally appropriate, mutually beneficial, and focused on our core objective: empowering **remote Indigenous youth** to build culturally vibrant and sustainable communities.

## Strategic Highlights & Partnerships

The Gurrumul Foundation was selected as the beneficiary of the **ABC's 2024/25 New Year's Eve concert**. This high-profile partnership provided vital funding and visibility for our ongoing mission.

# REMEMBERING GURRUMUL – A PERSONAL ACCOUNT

By Donald Wininba Ganambarr

I first met Gurrumul when he was just a young boy, maybe thirteen or fourteen years old. He was born in Galiwin'ku, and I was born in one of the Laynhapuy Homelands. It wasn't until later, when I married his sister, Jennifer Djapu Yunupingu, that I became his brother-in-law.

Back then, Gurrumul was already singing in the community and playing guitar. His grandfather had bought a music box that Gurrumul would listen to all the time. He was a natural; he could pick up any instrument—bass, drums, lead guitar, keyboards—and just play. A man named Frank Yamma, who was is a brilliant guitarist, started playing with him. Frank taught him a lot.

Gurrumul's musical journey really took off when he joined Yothu Yindi. He was able to join because of the close family connection he had with the lead singer, Mandawuy Yunupingu. In our way, they were brothers by the skin name Gudjuk; both of their mothers were from the Galpu clan. The whole family and all the Gumatj people (Gurrumul's clan) were so proud of him, a blind man travelling the world and sharing our culture.

After Yothu Yindi, he played with the Saltwater Band alongside Manuel Dhurrkay and his best mate, Lloyd Garrawitja. They were like a young family group, talented and full of energy. But eventually, Gurrumul wanted to branch out on his own. He started writing his own music and connected with Mark Grose and Michael Hohnen from Skinnyfish Music.

Beyond the fame, Gurrumul's heart was always in ceremony. He would sit with the old people, listening to their stories and traditional songs. That is where he found the words for his own music—the cultural names and the deep history of our people. He had a dream that he would become big, and he talked to Michael and Mark about starting a foundation to help other young people with their music, arts, and cultural development. He was so pleased when that foundation finally became a reality.

As for my own life, I am the Deputy Director of the Gurrumul Yunupingu Foundation now, but I also have a very important traditional role. Gumatj is my mother's clan, and I am the Djungaya. This means I am the manager responsible for overseeing ceremonies. I make sure the boys are painted and ready for traditional ceremony, which is our Law. I've been doing this for a long time. When I was younger, my uncles told me, "You are now a leader," and since then, I have stood up to manage the land and teach my younger brothers how to run ceremonies and do the traditional body painting.

I see things improving in our community. Now the young people are singing—sometimes in ceremony, sometimes recording traditional songs on their phones. They hope to be famous like Gurrumul, though they still need more resources.

I think people all over the world love Gurrumul because of his voice, but also because of what he sings about. He sings about country, nature, and how the land was created. He sings the songlines of the sea, the sunset, and the tides. People can feel that music deep inside them when they listen.

### **Fact 3: About Galiwin'ku - Gurrumul's Birthplace**

Based on the 2021 Census, the population of Galiwinku is 2,199. It is the largest Aboriginal community in Northeast Arnhem Land, with approximately 89–92% of residents identifying as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander. The community has a young demographic, with about 44% of the population under 20 years old.



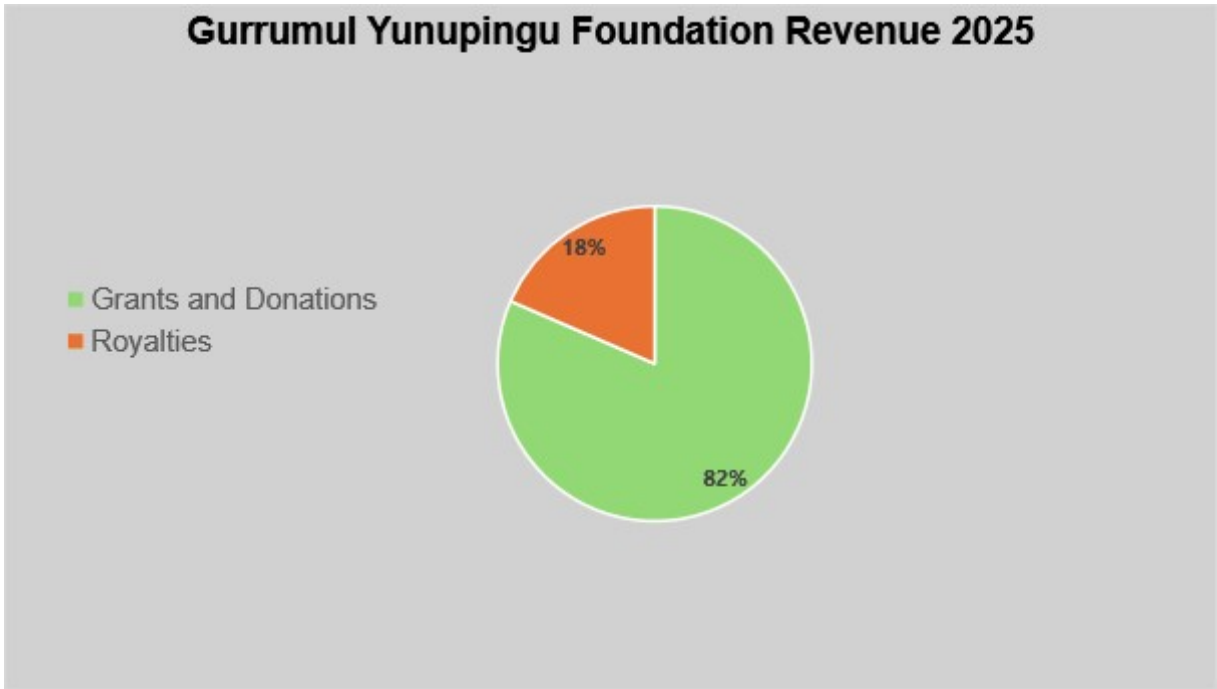
# FINANCIAL REPORT 2025

The Gurrumul Yunupingu Foundation (GYF) finished the 2025 financial year with a surplus of \$39,892 (2024: \$42,271 deficit); the net equity position was \$280,374 (2024: \$240,482). GYF’s cash position as at 31 December 2025 increased to \$281,532 (2024: \$245,548).

## Revenue

Overall, the Foundation’s total revenue for the year was \$97,246 (2024: \$40,940), which was **137.53%** higher than the previous year.

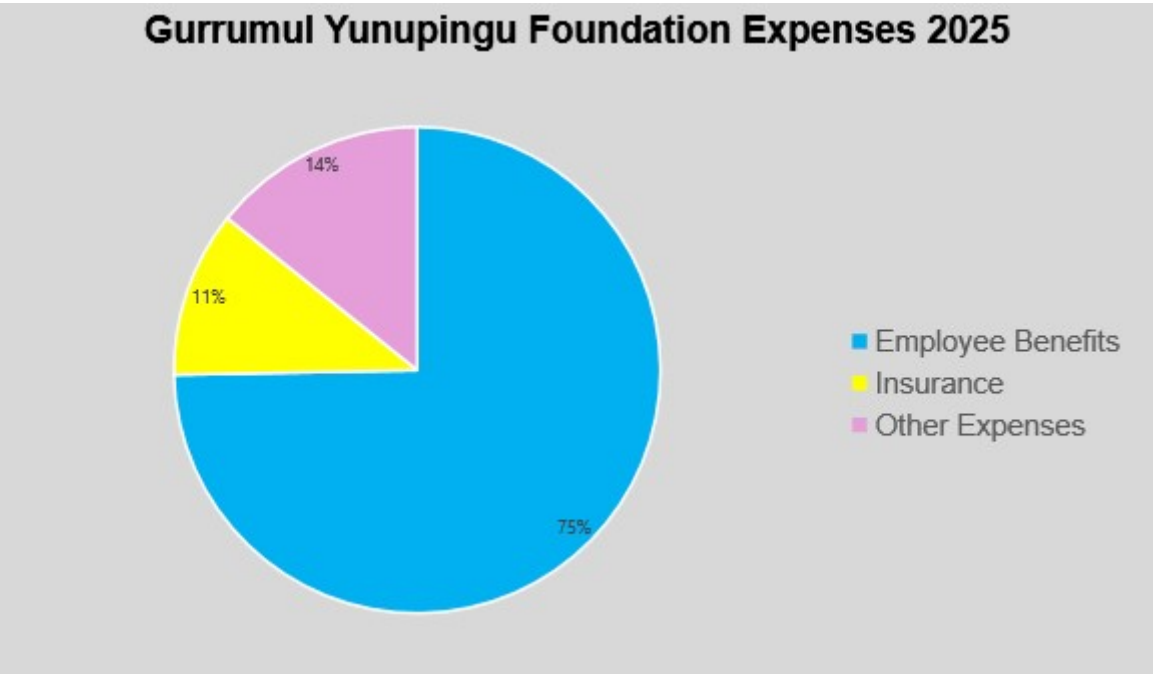
In 2025, grants and donations accounted for 82% of total revenue, with royalties contributing 18%.



## Expenditure

**Operational expenditure** for the Foundation totalled: \$57,354. This was a 2.78% decrease from the previous year (2024: \$58,997). In 2025, funds were directed towards: the Executive Officer’s wage, superannuation, essential software, GYF insurance, WorkCover Insurance, annual website costs, bookkeeper fees, payroll tax, travel and accommodation costs for a board member.

The highest expenditure (75%) was for the Executive Officer’s costs: \$42,840, insurance costs (11%): \$8,175 and the remaining costs (14%) included website costs, essential software fees, travel and accommodation for a board director and bookkeeper fees.



### Fact 4: About Galiwin’ku - Gururumul’s Birthplace

The township is now home to people from many different clan groups collectively known as Yolngu. These clans share a unique social and religious system that sets them apart from their neighbours. Identity for a Yolngu person is layered: they belong first to their family, then to their clan and language, and ultimately to their ancestral country. This society is structured into two halves, or moieties: Yirritja and Dhuwa. An individual inherits their father’s moiety and must marry someone from their mother’s moiety.



The Gurrumul Yunupingu Foundation extends its sincere appreciation to the following contributors to our work;

- *Australian Broadcasting Corporation*
- *Sony Foundation*
- *Sony Music Publishing*
- *Donnelly Garner Foundation and*  
*the wonderful members of the public who donate to the foundation.*

A huge thanks also to:

Nico Liengme, Gap Road Design Co.

Paul Ryan, Arwana Design

Page Harrison & Co, Accountants

Duane Preston, Photographer front cover photo

**You can make a real difference for Indigenous youth in remote communities by donating through our secure site here:**

<https://gurrumulfoundation.org.au/donations/donate-today/>