



Djuki Mala Chooky dancers give back to cyclone-hit Elcho Island community in NT

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The most famous export from a cyclone-ravaged island off the NT coast has donated \$10,000 to efforts to rebuild the tiny community of Galiwinku.

Members of the Djuki Mala dance group, formerly known as the Chooky Dancers, have announced the donation after family members were left homeless after Cyclone Lam and in desperate need of help.

Category 4 Cyclone Lam left more than 200 people homeless in Elcho Island's main community of Galiwinku when it struck in February.

Around a month later, Cyclone Nathan passed over much of the same area.

The dancers hit the news in 2007 after a video shot on a mobile phone of their interpretation of the Zorba The Greek dance was posted to YouTube.

The noisy hand-held video showed a group of 10 young men smeared in white paint and wearing only loincloths dancing to a techno version of the Greek song.

It was filmed to the delight of a crowd gathered at a basketball court at Ramingining, on the Top End's north-east Arnhem Land coast, and as of this week, the video has been played over 2,500,000 times.

It led to television appearances, festival spots and even an invitation to perform in Greece for the descendants of the original dance's creator.

Dancer Baykali Ganambarr said he was not at Galiwinku when Lam hit but was at home with his family when Nathan struck in March.

"It was pretty scary, heavy wind. I had to relax in the dark. I couldn't use my phone, which was boring," he joked on ABC Darwin radio.

Mr Ganambarr's family's house survived, but many others did not.

"There were smashed houses, smashed cars, trees on top of the cars. Roofs a couple of metres away from the houses. Luckily no-one got hurt," he said.

Josh Bond, the artistic director and executive producer of Djuki Mala, said his family, and the families of some of the dancers, lost houses in Lam, which brought 260kph winds to parts of the coast.

"Cyclone Lam came through and was really quite destructive on Elcho Island and the community of Galiwinku," he said.

"But then Nathan came through and totally smashed some of the homelands, which for some people was their option to go to when their home in the community was destroyed.

Mr Bond said he felt angry there was "no mentionable support from the government" and the damage from the two storms had left "quite a large gap to fill".

He said the members of Djuki Mala had helped with the clean-up efforts instead of rehearsing for a tour to South Australia.

"We're really proud to return and be able to give back to our community in another way and help families get back into their homes sooner," Mr Bond said.

"Everyone is taking it in their stride and remaining positive. There has been such an incredible amount of support from the community to clean up the damage and this demonstrates the incredible resilience of our families in remote communities."

Michael Nemarich, the general manager of operations and business development for Arnhem Land Progress Aboriginal

"It will have a widespread impact on the recovery and ongoing support for the people in Arnhem Land," he said.

Topics: cyclone, relief-and-aid-organisations, arts-and-entertainment, dance, milingimbi-0822, nt

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