Gatherings and ceremonies were, and still are, a very important part of life for Gumbaynggirr people. Although some types of ceremonies no longer take place, ceremonies performed by the Garby Elders include those for birthing, rainmaking, healing, initiation and burial.

Gumbaynggirr people are known as 'the sharing people' because their land is plentiful, and they are happy to share their food with other clans. Large celebratory gatherings therefore took place when the land was fertile and food was abundant. Men would often use sea urchin spines as 'message sticks', marking the rocks at Arrawarra Headland (Ya waarra, or the 'meeting place'), to tell other people about the plentiful ocean and land in the area, and tribes would travel from all around, coming together at the headland for feasting and ceremonial activities.

Ceremonies were also used to commemorate births, celebrate initiation into adulthood, and to honour deaths and burials. Pigments of various colours, obtained from the ochre sources at Red Rock, were used to decorate the body. Particular hues were selected according to their meanings and properties.

Did you know?
The Garby Elders believe that the brolga (jugaan) was taught to dance at their corroborees. For this reason, the brolga dance is still performed today, and the men of the Garby Elders keep dancing so they never forget the steps.

Sacred Sites
There are powerful traditional sites associated with becoming a man or a woman within Gumbaynggirr territory. Uncle Tony Perkins says that these sites can be named, but full details should be withheld from both the wider community and the children of the Garby Elders: “Information is progressed on these sites at different ages to the child because that runs in line with [the] passing on of knowledge and culture.”

White pipeclay, or girriin, was used to keep spirits away after someone had died. Red ochre, or magay, was worn into battle. Ochre was also believed to hold special healing powers, so it was used in healing and smoking ceremonies during which the patient was painted with ochre and special gum leaves were burnt to bring them back to health.
**Ceremonial Song**

*Buwaarr gilinggal nyaagiling ngiina*
Baby I gave birth to you
*Baabangundi jagunda*
In the home of your fathers true
*Giingana ngujawiny gurray*
Everyone of you be happy
*Yilaami Gami! Yilaami! Ngaji*
Come on nanny, come on poppy
*Waaqaymbala waagaymba!*
Make a fire with smoking wood
*Gurraada ngiyaanyaw nyurruguwa!*
To clean and make our bodies good
*Waagaya maarra wiigunda!*
At the fire warm your hands
*Buwaarr buurrwa guuyumba*
Rub to help the baby stand
*Barwaya ngiinda! Daariwa!*
Make the baby big and strong
*Jaalbarr ngiinda daraa*
Arms be strong, legs grow long
*Ngaalgan miil bularrri milinda*
Ears and eyes be very wise
*Jalaany gayi darruya*
Mouth speak what is good and true
*Ngiyaala ngiina guunumba!*
All of us give life to you

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**Women’s Business**

The Widow Tree is a Bloodwood tree that Gumbaynggirr women can use to prove that they do not need a man. They must climb the tree, cut a branch off, and stay up the Widow Tree overnight. If the woman is successful, she will be free from the man she has been promised to.

**Men’s Business**

Arrawarra Headland is a sacred men’s site, and Aboriginal women are forbidden from walking on the headland. Men held gatherings on the headland, including rainmaking ceremonies when the land was dry, and initiation ceremonies when young boys entered into manhood.

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**Photo**
Garby Elders often prepare for ceremonies by painting themselves with red and white ochre collected from Red Rock.

**Illustration**
Brother Steve Morelli wrote this ceremonial song to celebrate birthing ceremonies.

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“People would visit our land from all around. When they would come and visit, we would have a welcome ceremony where we would say the welcome speech. Every now and then we would have a big celebration, if there was lots of food, like at Easter. Usually, we would go to Arrawarra, because it is the ‘meeting place’, and people would come from all over.”

*Milton Duroux*

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**Photo**
Garby Elder, Uncle Milton Duroux, painted with ochre, and performing the brolga dance.

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