ONE week after a tragic and suspicious death in Yuendumu, Cecilia Alfonso, the co-manager of the town’s art centre, is on the phone trying to organise for someone to come and fix her dishwasher.

A major inconvenience for people living deep in the bush is the scarcity and availability of a good tradesman.

But Ms Alfonso remains phlegmatic about it — she knows it will happen at some stage. For her, the rewards of living in the small community offset minor irritations.

Even the death of the town’s pool supervisor, Rick Berry, which she has described as a “brutal” and “unusual” occurrence, will not steer her away from the place she loves.

“He was a safe spot with a big reputation,” Ms Alfonso said. “I absolutely love my job and I came out here because of the challenges and the rewards that this kind of job gives me. But it’s not for everybody coming out to Yuendumu.”

The Tanami Desert community, which the 2011 census lists as having a population of 687, is a tiny spot with a big story.

Known not just for producing more than its fair share of sporting and creative talent — footballer Liam Jurrah and filmmaker Francis Jupurrurla — the community has attracted attention for a string of violent incidents.

The so-called “Yuendumu riots” in 2010 — a vicious family feud sparked by a man’s stabbing death — drove about 100 people out of the town to seek safer ground.

Residents are still trying to shake the hangover it caused and still baulk at the media’s presence in the community.

As one local told the Central Australian Advocate: “These days, if someone even picks up a rock in Yuendumu, the media calls it a riot.”

When 45-year-old Rick Berry lost his life on January 29 this year, police issued a statement describing it as a “suspicious death”.

Mr Berry’s blood-covered body was discovered inside his Yuendumu home. His ute was located 80km down the track, torched west of the Tilmouth Well Roadhouse.

Less than 24 hours later, two youths aged 18 and 16 were arrested in Alice Springs.

Three days later they were charged with murder.

For the first time since dingo trapper Fred Brooks was speared nearly 90 years earlier, a white man seemed to have been killed in the region.

And once more, the bloody modern history of Yuendumu scratched through to the surface, and had the media on the edge of their seats, ready to call “riot” at the first sniff of retributive action.

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The former Victorian life-saver worked hard as caretaker to ensure the pool was a safe haven, a cool oasis amid the dry and sometimes tense environment which waited outside.

“Mr Berry’s death has shaken the community, he knew the little kids on the community’s youngest members.”

Conveners of the Tanami Football League Sebastian Watson, Steven Brown, Alan Dickson and Louie Watson next to a shrine at the Yuendumu Pool.

The people of Yuendumu have come out in droves to pay respect and tribute to this aspect of calm that Mr Berry brought to the town.

In front of the pool’s locked gates, paper flowers created by local schoolchildren were last week taped up to help illuminate a message in five capital letters: PEACE.

Next to it, an equally potent construction was glazed to the tin wall, a purple and yellow design spelling out LOVE.

Below the two words, a colourful pile of plastic flowers lined the doorway.

Laminated letters featuring loving messages from the town’s children were strung up through the gate’s mesh.

Deceased Yuendumu pool manager Rick Berry, served in the Army Reserves. Year unknown. Picture: SUPPLIED

The letters remember a man who was close to the hearts of both the Aboriginal and white populations of the tiny town.

As former police officer and co-convenor of the Tanami Football Club Sebastian Watson explained it: “Kwementyaye was part of Yuendumu community.”

“He was a skin name, Jupurrula, and he was a Walpiri man,” Mr Watson said.

The young indigenous community leader spoke of the impact Mr Berry’s death has had on the community’s youngest members.

“Jupurrula knew the community, he knew the little kids by name. ‘He knew the teenagers. He knew the parents and grandparents of the children.’

For now, in the wake of Mr Berry’s death, the Yuendumu Pool will remain closed.

The Walpiri people will, at some stage according to tradition, organise a smoking ceremony to cleanse the pool and free his spirit.

Until then, and pending what WYDAC decide to do, the decorated gates will remain locked.

“It’s hard to think about replacing him because he can’t be replaced,” said Ms Low.

“But all those sort of things we will think about down the track.”

“He would hate the fact that the pool is closed right now.

“But he would also understand that Walpiri have a way of doing things, and that needs to be respected.”