

THE DHARUG CONNECTION

A special weekly focus on local Indigenous affairs and services



Rodney Matthews

Program Manager for Closing the Gap (ITC) Program

www.nepeancommunity.org.au

Jason's story – closing the gap in life expectancy

The “Closing the Gap” ITC program works with Aboriginal people across the region suffering chronic diseases such as cancer, heart, renal, respiratory diseases and diabetes. The team links patients to essential medical support to improve health outcomes – extending life and quality of life. This happens through case management, cultural support and transport to walk with clients on their health journey. This team is slowly changing the unacceptable life expectancy gap between First Nations Australians and mainstream Australia in the Nepean area.

We thank Jason for agreeing to

share his incredible story.

Jason suffered a massive heart attack in 2015. He was referred to ITC program for health support. Jason was allocated a Care Coordinator (a Registered Nurse or Aboriginal Health Practitioner) to manage his complex medical needs. An Aboriginal Outreach worker also worked with Jason to provide transport, cultural support and help understand and prioritise his many appointments.

Through this process Jason was diagnosed with multiple chronic diseases including asthma, sleep apnea, obesity, congestive cardiac failure, atrial fibrillation, and Type 2 diabetes.

Jason's heart stopped many times throughout our time working with him. Resulting in multiple resuscitations and hospitalisations. He spent many years unable to leave his bed.

The team referred Jason to specialists at St Vincent's Hospital. He initially had a defibrillator implant followed by a LVAD (mechanical heart). Jason began the long journey of working on his medical conditions in the hope of getting onto the heart transplant list.

This took great strength from Jason, as it required the achievement of many milestones of meeting health improvement over many years. He was now fit

enough, and on 10th of February 2023 Jason received his new heart and is currently in St Vincent's Hospital making a miraculous recovery.

Jason is the father of two girls and we are all elated that the transplant surgery was a success and that Jason now has the opportunity to spend many active years with his family.

We acknowledge the huge team of dedicated medical staff across many teams who also supported Jason on his journey.

Closing the Gap (ITC) can be contacted for referral on 4706 0299. This program covers Hawkesbury, Penrith, Blue Mountains and Lithgow.

‘Over the Black Dot’ and ‘Yokayi Footy’ return

National Indigenous Television (NITV) has footy fans covered with the return of ground-breaking weekly sports programs ‘Yokayi Footy’ and ‘Over the Black Dot’ in March.

First up, ‘Over the Black Dot’ returns on Tuesday, March 7 at 8.30pm. Legendary National Rugby League (NRL) player and proud Anaiwan man Dean Widders will lead a new-look ‘Over the Black Dot’ program alongside Dual International Timana Tahu, and Bo de la Cruz, a proud descendant of the

Gudjula and Erubian people and a multi-award-winning Touch, Rugby Union and Rugby League player.

This season will be full of surprises and with plenty to talk about as a new Queensland team joins the NRL. With off-the-cuff conversations and community yarns covering the top level of rugby league, and all levels of the code including community sport, the series will feature an array of talent and guests, focusing on

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Widders and Tahu will review and preview matches, with recurring guest de la Cruz, sharing opinions and tackling hot topics. From grassroots games to the bright lights of the NRL, this program is for fans that live and breathe rugby league as well as those that want to learn more about the game.

In partnership with AFL Studios and Typecast Entertainment, ‘Yokayi Footy’ returns at 8.30pm on Wednesday, March 15. Hosted

by former Richmond and Collingwood player and proud Mineng and Yinggarda man Andrew Krakouer, and proud Warumungu/Yawuru woman and fitness

‘Yokayi Footy’ continues to cover everything Australians love about AFL through bold yarns, powerful monologues, compelling community stories and exclusive interviews with Indigenous AFL players.

‘Yokayi Footy’ is excited to welcome Tony Briggs, a proud Yorta Yorta / Wurundjeri man, as its new Executive Producer. His career spans over thirty years in the film and television industry. Best known for creating the hit film ‘The Sapphires’, he brings a wealth of experience and knowledge and will be a great asset to the ‘Yokayi Footy’ show.

Head of Entertainment, Events and Sport, NITV and Gooreng man, Adam Manovic, said: “We’re eager to start the season strong for both AFL and NRL fans with ‘Yokayi Footy’ and ‘Over the Black Dot’. The end of last year’s AFL season left much to talk about and we’re looking forward to bringing viewers another year of insights, analysis and banter through a First Nations lens.

“We’re proud to produce another season of ‘Over the Black Dot’, particularly off the back of the Indigenous All-Stars match in Rotorua recently.

Support and momentum for our talented mob is high and we are gearing up for what will be a huge year, with the introduction of the Dolphins to shake things up. Our hosts are rearing and ready to go.”



Andrew Krakouer and Megan Waters.

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Sara Hayek
Nepean Community & Neighbourhood Services

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Challenge can help close life expectancy gap

Bulbulwul Mob is a 10-week Health Challenge Program aimed at weight loss to help reduce the risk of chronic diseases which effect Indigenous community. Commencing this week, it will be the fifth time the program has run – and participants can achieve an incredible 10-20kg weight loss in 10 weeks. 60 Aboriginal community members meet up on three afternoons a week, as well as access to the gym at any time. It's the fun group sessions that keep everyone motivated.

Heart disease, respiratory disease, cancer, diabetes and

renal disease are the top five chronic disease areas that attack the community, taking 25 years off an Indigenous person's lifespan.

Indigenous people are born with 25 years less lifespan due to generational trauma. Having one or more co morbidities results in early death rates.

Bulbulwul's program is about prevention and education on healthy lifestyle. We encourage Community to complete a 715 Check (Aboriginal Health Check) with their GP to identify any underlying chronic conditions. We help them connect to medical services and provide a nutri-

tion guide for eating well. The program's success is due to social and cultural support, community leadership, and the high quality, evidence-based program.

Past participants say that they enjoyed the increased health and vitality achieved through the weight loss and strengthening programs – individually tailored by a personal trainer and an Aboriginal Health practitioner. Weekly check-ins and tracking help everyone stay focused. Donations from the local community provide incentives for weekly prizes which is also a great motivation.

This is community looking after

community – to close the life expectancy gap, achieve individual and group goals; health and wellbeing and a sense of achievement.

Prize money from previous winners of Western Sydney Aboriginal Health Challenge have chosen to pay forward so another 60 participants can receive the benefits of a healthy lifestyle.

Thanks to our sponsors:

Mumma's Move & Fitness, Game Change Personal Training, Nepean Community & Neighbourhood Services, NXT Set Health & Fitness, Maxx Tatts.

Maddison Williams honoured for dedication

Maddison Williams has been named Aboriginal Health Professional of the year at the NSW Health Excellence in Allied Health Awards.

Williams recalls first feeling inspired to study social work after learning about Aboriginal people and culture at school.

"When I was in Year 12, I was doing the unit called society and culture, and in that unit we were focusing on inequality and difference in Aboriginal people," she said.

"I had known that I was a Wiradjuri woman, so learning about Aboriginal people, I would come home, because I was raised by my mother and maternal grandmother who identify as Aboriginal, I loved learning about that at school and then coming home and hearing gran's own experiences firsthand."

She began working at Nepean Blue Mountains Local Health District seven years ago as part of the NSW Health Aboriginal Allied Health Cadetship program, and transitioned into her dream job as the Senior Social Worker at the District's Mudang Mudjin (Building Strong Foundations) and Wilingali (Aboriginal and Maternal Infant Health Service) services at Cranebrook Community Health Centre in 2021.

"I just love being around mob and being around the Aboriginal community," she said.

"It's what I wanted to do, just working with my people, feeling a connection with them, and I'm also able to work around other

really strong Aboriginal women in my team."

After being named Aboriginal Health Professional of the year, Williams was filled with joy, and honoured to be recognised.

"It was so overwhelming and so exciting," she said.

"I wasn't expecting to be named as a finalist, let alone to get the award, so it was super exciting."

Though she wants to continue working in her current team, Williams hopes to in the future work on writing more academic articles as her career progresses.

– Cassidy Pearce



Maddison Williams.

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Uncle Bryan
and Uncle John Boney

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Cousins share their history through art

Today we meet cousins, artists, and teachers Uncle Bryan and Uncle John Boney.

John Boney is from the Muru-wari nation, near the town of Goodooga.

He remembers spending his childhood years with the old people, walking out on country and learning the old stories. These stories he weaves into his art. The animals telling their stories. John is self taught, painting since he was seven.

John works at Muru Mittigar teaching art, doing some work with SRAC and will be working in the gaols to pass on culture through art. John says art has "kept him out of trouble. It's good for the mind; if you feel stress, feel

sad - pick up art and everything negative is gone."

Uncle Bryan Boney is a Gami-laroi man from Coonamble, Mother from Gulargambone, Dad from Pilliga. His parents were taken to Angledool station/mission where they worked on the station for basics - flour, tea, sugar.

The family travelled by horse and sulky looking for work - shearing and droving, and domestic duties. A hard life! Government and church policy forbade the teaching of their traditional language.

When Bryan was 10, the family moved to Coonamble, the family lived in tents near the river bank - back then the white people didn't welcome them, so they moved

from place to place.

He remembers one formative occasion as a child sitting with the old people around the campfire as darkness fell, the old people singing in language and dancing around the fire.

Bryan says the old people told him never to worry where you walk, there is always someone following you, looking after you.

He didn't start drawing with paper and pen till he was 13. Before that for years as a child he would draw in the sand, starting with kangaroos - capturing the way the animal moved in his sand drawings. Doing this trained his eyes to see things differently.

Life back then was hard, there was enormous racial abuse and stigmatism

Bryan came to Sydney when he was in his early 20s to find work - and travelled the world as an Aboriginal dancer. After that, he studied fine arts for six years, and then worked for TAFE for many years. He is currently teaching at Kooly on Thursdays.

Aboriginal people don't seek perfection in their art - but when you look at the symbols and the colours it's beautiful.

It doesn't matter if the lines aren't perfect, the story is what matters.

Bryan's message is that anyone can paint, it's just about opening your mind and practicing.

Sitting down to paint with John and Bryan is guaranteed to lift your spirits. You can see the cousins' work all over western Sydney.



History + Education
with Muru Mittigar

www.murumittigar.com.au

Important background we should all know

The Dharug peoples

The Dharug peoples are the Traditional Owners of Sydney; it was the first part of Australia to be colonised and is now the highly urbanised home for a very multicultural population.

Dharug Country covers the Sydney Basin, from the Hawkesbury-Nepean in the north to the Georges River in the south and west to the Blue Mountains

The Penrith region has an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander population of 7,745 people (nine per cent of the total population), only 255 of them aged 65 or above and over 34 per cent under 15 years (Penrith City Council 2018).

While Dharug people are the Traditional Owners, Dharug culture has been suppressed by colonialism, though a resurgence is underway now.

The area has also attracted very many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people from across Australia, with Wiradjuri, Kamilaroi and Bundjalung people common among them.

Muru Mittigar

Muru Mittigar is a not-for-profit Dharug social enterprise.



Muru Mittigar seeks to create a better understanding of the Dharug Aboriginal culture in the wider community, create new jobs, develop workplace skills training, and increase sustained employment opportunities for Indigenous Australians.

The organisation achieves this by providing quality contracting and consulting services to

Government and businesses in Land Management, Education and Tourism and through investing in the well-being and financial support services for the Aboriginal and the wider community. Muru is split into three divisions Culture, Community and Country.

Culture

Muru Mittigar provides authentic professional culture services for over 20 years. Our cultural programs are delivered by Traditional Owners of the Sydney basin, the Dharug people and other Aboriginal people who live in Dharug country.

The cultural team are guided by Dharug elders and hold collectively over 60 years of experience.

Community

Muru owns and operates a Community Finance Hub in High Street. We built this hub to be a comfortable place so people can come to get assistance. Some of the current services we offer are:

- Providing no-interest loans
- Providing financial counselors
- Financial literacy workshops
- Community service facilitator
- Food hampers

Country

Muru's land management division offers the following services:

- Landscape construction
- Landscape maintenance
- Bush regeneration and bush-fire hazard risk mitigation
- Arboriculture.

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Introducing Uncle Wes Marne

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Active at 100 and soon to celebrate 101

Uncle Wes Marne has been enriching the lives of western Sydney residents – both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal – who his stories and community service have touched.

Uncle Wes is a Biduginbul elder and has lived on Dharug lands for many decades.

He is the hardest working centenarian you will meet, without a doubt.

You will always see him out and about, in community, telling stories and sharing culture, including at many Penrith events.

In 2022 – the year of his centenary, he published his book of poems *Through Old Eyes* – an important collection of poems reflecting on history, colonisation, family, Dreaming and traditions.

Uncle Wes has lived the history of colonisation – from childhood living traditionally on country in Queensland, to being removed from his lands and taken to a mission to work.

Uncle Wes grew up in southern Queensland in a riverside tribal setting, a place he told the ABC in 2013 was “my happiest times...

when I lived on the river in the old tin camp”.

As was the case with many tribal residents in the mid-1900s, Uncle Wes was moved onto a mission in NSW aged 10 and soon after began work carrying water, working as a tobacco picker and in tannery and chicken factories.

Having little formal education himself, Uncle Wes then moved to Sydney where he committed himself to ensuring his children and grandchildren were better off.

Jie Pittman makes the point that his generation owed their

lifestyles to elders like Uncle Wes.

“We’ve got people that are from country today that are so much stronger for longer because of people like Uncle Wes who have come from another community or another country to this community and... bring back his dreaming,” Pittman said.

“It’s just a beautiful thing that... he still has his smarts about him, still has his heart about him.

“He’s just a reminder of the magic of the way of our lifestyle of being black fellas.”

Penrith says thank you to Uncle Wes!

Panthers reveal new Indigenous NRL jersey

Panthers has launched its 2023 Indigenous jersey – recognising the land, animals and people of the Dharug Nation.

The jersey was designed by Natasha Fordham in collaboration with Panthers Indigenous Wellbeing Officer Glen Liddiard.

Fans have been pre-ordering the jersey in recent weeks after it was revealed through the club’s social media channels.

For the first time in the club’s history the club colours on the sleeves of the jersey have been replaced with the colours from both the Australian Aboriginal Flag and the Torres Strait Islander Flag.

A significant part of the club’s jersey range in recent years, the 2023 Indigenous Jersey has a number of features which are consistent amongst fan favourite designs of the past, including male and female totems of the Dharug Nation, the fruit bat and ring-tail possum as well two handprints representing gender equality and the role males and females play in Rugby League on and off the field.

Two black cockatoo’s ‘Garmit’ overlook the land in which we unite, three kangaroos ‘Badagarangs’ as well as a platypus and eastern long neck turtle ‘Kutuklung’ are depicted swimming in the Dharug Nation river systems highlighting the vast array of fauna which occupy the land we are on.

Track marks surround the river leading to the meeting place of BlueBet Stadium, a place in which we unite in passion and pride to celebrate the club and

game we love.

Emblazoned on the top back of the jersey is the word ‘Warami’ meaning Welcome.

This follows the unveiling of the Warami Community Centre as a permanent feature of the developing Western Sydney

Conference Centre precinct on the Panthers site.

The back of the jersey sees the inclusion of a new totem, a black swan or ‘Mulgo’, which represents the Mulgoa clan.

Also on the bottom back four reaching hands embody belong-

ing and respect to the club and land on which we unite.

The Panthers will wear the 2023 Indigenous Jersey in the Round 12 showdown against the Broncos at Suncorp Stadium.

Visit www.penrithpanthers.com.au for more information.



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Oneeva Tuuhetoka
Nepean Community & Neighbourhood Centre

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Incredible opportunity to share our vision

Real Futures Women's Business Second Chance Education Programme was established in March of 2020. The vision for this Hub was to create meaningful and lasting opportunities that would transform the lives of our First Nation Sisters across Australia that have been marginalised and excluded socially and economically. This is achieved through providing tailored educational and vocational training workshops. In addition, the program also offers social, emotional and wellbeing support in a culturally safe environment.

Women's Business delivers services to over 650 women

through its culturally safe women only hubs located in Greater Sydney, Rooty Hill, the Hunter region (Newcastle), the Mid North Coast (Coffs Harbour, Kempsey), as well as in WA (Geraldton, Carnarvon, Denham, Exmouth). These locations were chosen specifically for their emerging industries and regional development, creating opportunities for First Nations Women to be supported into work.

Women's Business recently attended New York for the 67th Commission on Status of Women. We were invited to contribute to the event "Rewiring the network: Digital education and skills for girls' and women's empowerment",

organised by ITALY, UNESCO, UNICEF, The Group of Friends for Education and Lifelong Learning, in collaboration with UN Women. We also took part in a panel which shared on Pursuing Second Chances: "inclusive e-learning for women who need it the most". We got to share how Women's Business have been able to help shape, cultivate and influence another way of learning through the digital e-learning platform. What this has done for our women in community has most definitely been a wonderful journey to watch. We as a team are excited to brainstorm new content and look forward to sharing this with our Aspirants.



Team photo in New York. Nakoa Pitt - Reach Out Officer - Proud Yuggera Bul and Meriem Le Woman, Christianna Cartwright - CEO - Proud Dharug Woman, Oneeva Tuuhetoka - Women's Business Program Manager - Proud Worimi Woman and Melissa Fernando - General Manager - Proud Kamiaroi Woman.



History + Education
with Muru Mittigar

www.murumittigar.com.au

What is Dharug language? Its history is intriguing and its place very important

The Aboriginal language of what is now called modern day Sydney is Dharug dhalang (Dharug language). Dharug language is what Aboriginal communities call a sleeping language.

However, languages are never lost, they are only waiting for people to speak them again, to awaken them. All Aboriginal languages in Australia are under threat, however the majority are being revitalised just like Dharug.

In 2021 Dharug Ngurra Aboriginal Corporation successfully attained an Indigenous Languages and Arts (ILA) grant in collaboration with the Darug Custodian Aboriginal Corporation. The grant was to help the organisations provide Dharug language lessons for the community. The organisations wanted to look at the historical sources of Dharug language and learn as much as they could about Dharug language.

Many people have written about Dharug people and Dharug language over the past 230 years, however Australian linguistic research has changed dramatically over the last decades. Aboriginal teachers and linguists are now leading the research on their own languages. This project reflects that. It is a grass roots initiative led by Dharug people to research and teach our own language.

The Dharug community have always kept their language. Many Dharug people have

been sharing language and have passed down language through their own families. We proudly stand on the shoulder of giants and are building on the knowledge of the many Dharug people have taught Dharug language in the past including Aunty Edna Watson and her family, Uncle Richard Green and Aunty Jacinta Tobin.

Brad Moore is also contributing to our knowledge base with ongoing research into previously documented language sources.

The lessons created were made to bring Dharug people and their allies together to learn what was being researched. And most importantly so they could begin using language with their families. We wanted more communicative language. Language that we could begin to use to communicate in for everyday things like calling you family to dinner. For that we needed a grammar. Through looking at the primary sources of our language we have been able to reconstruct some of our grammar structures.

The language project, led by Corina Norman and Jasmine Seymour has now taught over 700 people, most of whom identified as Dharug and some of those are Dharug people who live off Country. Through a mixture of COVID zoom lessons

and face to face sessions we have been able to reach many.

We are now seeing our language being taught in some primary and high schools, and this year it has been introduced into TAFE. Our vision is that one it will be delivered as Bachelor of Dharug language and culture at a Western Sydney university.

Language awareness promotes people and place. For us, the Dharug people, language is both a powerful recognition of the past and hope for our future.

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AEC begins its work ahead of The Voice referendum: What voters need to know

The Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) is this week increasing its communication with the nation's 17.3 million enrolled voters following the introduction of the Constitution Alteration (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice) 2023 Bill into federal parliament in late March.

Throughout the coming months, AEC communication will strive to inform voters about the Australian Constitution and the role of a federal referendum.

Digital advertising, media outreach and the distribution of curated products through community groups and other stakeholders will all point back to the dedicated referendum sub-site now live at aec.gov.au/referendum.

Australians have not voted in a federal referendum in almost a quarter of a century with more than 6.4 million enrolled voters not of voting age when the previous referendum was held in 1999. It is not the AEC's role to explain the topic of a referendum but it is important for the body conducting the vote to explain to voters how that process works.

A range of educative resources, including AEC TV videos, animations, graphics and fact sheets, will be progressively distributed to help Australian voters understand the role of a referendum. The social media accounts of the AEC will continue to be an active proactive and reactive presence – pushing out messages regarding the history and role of federal referendums.

"We're taking all the necessary first steps to kick off an education phase for the Australian public in order for all to understand how referendums work and the AEC's role," said AEC Commissioner, Tom Rogers.

"The Constitution plays an active, daily role in the lives of Australians but it's not on everyone's coffee table at home, so it's appropriate that ahead of a referendum we explain what it is and the upcoming process that seeks to change a part of it.

"More than 6.4 million enrolled voters have never voted in a referendum before. Some may not even know that it is compulsory to vote in a referendum and you will need to vote in-person, similar to a federal election."

"The topic of the referendum is for others to debate but when it comes to the process, we'll be running it and we're here to help inform Australian voters and answer any questions they might have.

"Knowing what the Constitution is and what the role of a referendum is will clearly be vital in providing a solid foundation for how people consider their opportunity to vote in the back half of 2023.

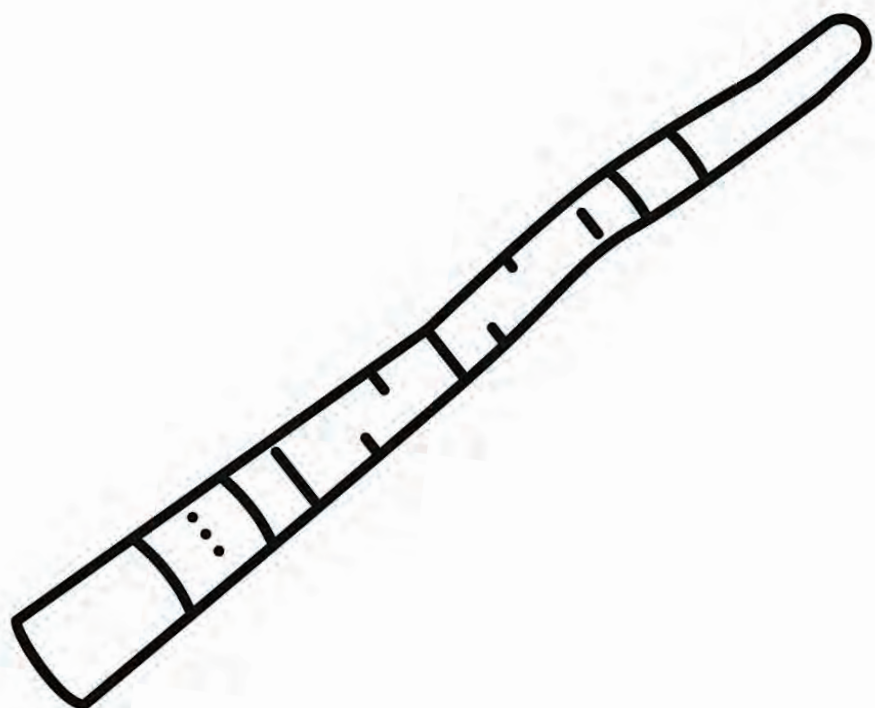
"Our aim is for Australians to feel comfortable voting in a referendum and know how the process works."



W Western Weekender Colouring Competition!

Post your entries to **The Western Weekender** Colouring Competition, Suite 42-44 Abel Street, Jamisontown 2750

SCHOOL HOLIDAY COLOURING COMP



Use your own creative flair to colour in this didgeridoo for your chance to **win a family pass to Hoyts Penrith.**

If your design is judged the best, you'll be declared our winner!

Post your entries to **Western Weekender** Colouring Competition, Suite 42-44 Abel Street, Jamisontown 2750.

Name:

Age:

Email:

Ph:

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Bronwyn Nuttall
Nepean Community & Neighbourhood Centre

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Supporting Koori Kids at school: Programs available to support our region's children

Nepean Community & Neighbourhood Services (NCNS) and the team at Kooly have a number of programs to support Aboriginal kids' success at school.

This starts with Aboriginal Supported Playgroups – at Cranebrook and St Marys – every week. Aboriginal Playgroup is a great way for Aboriginal kids to connect in play, fun developmental challenges, and culture – all the time having fun with sensory play and time for parents to connect in a friendly space.

This term, we will implement a Music program at Kooly Friday playgroup – this has been a great way for kids to express themselves, share new experiences, and the evidence for enhanced development through music is very positive.

Every term we run an Early Childhood Developmental Outreach day – on May 31, your (0-5-year-olds) child can see the Bounce Mobile dentist, have a Blue Book check with the nurse, have a HAPPEE hearing check, have eyes and vision checked,

and more. Families are supported through this process, and this means together we can get kids off to the best possible start.

Something new at Kooly, is the new Homework Help afternoons for Aboriginal kids.

On Tuesday afternoons in school terms, any school-aged Aboriginal student with homework to do can come to the Youth Hub at Kooly, have a snack and work with the support of our Aboriginal Youth Workers on their assignments and projects.

The Hub has computers and

printers and free Wi-Fi, so it's all set up for homework help. This is a great new project that has arisen out of what we are seeing in the community.

In Term 3, all Aboriginal kids starting school in 2024 (and who haven't attended formal early childhood education) will be able to enrol in our School Readiness program which runs over 10 weeks and helps prepare kids for this important transition.

For information on all these programs, please check the NCNS Facebook page or website.

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Western Weekender Colouring Competition!

Post your entries to **The Western Weekender** Colouring Competition, Suite 42-44 Abel Street, Jamisontown 2750

SCHOOL HOLIDAY COLOURING COMP



Use your own creative flair to colour in this boomerang for your chance to win a family pass to Hoyts Penrith.

If your design is judged the best, you'll be declared our winner!

Post your entries to **Western Weekender** Colouring Competition, Suite 42-44 Abel Street, Jamisontown 2750.

Name:

Age:

Email:

Ph:

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THE DHARUG CONNECTION

A special weekly focus on local Indigenous affairs and services



Rodney Matthews

Program Manager for Closing the Gap (ITC) Program

www.nepeancommunity.org.au

Jason's story – closing the gap in life expectancy

The “Closing the Gap” ITC program works with Aboriginal people across the region suffering chronic diseases such as cancer, heart, renal, respiratory diseases and diabetes. The team links patients to essential medical support to improve health outcomes – extending life and quality of life. This happens through case management, cultural support and transport to walk with clients on their health journey. This team is slowly changing the unacceptable life expectancy gap between First Nations Australians and mainstream Australia in the Nepean area.

We thank Jason for agreeing to

share his incredible story.

Jason suffered a massive heart attack in 2015. He was referred to ITC program for health support. Jason was allocated a Care Coordinator (a Registered Nurse or Aboriginal Health Practitioner) to manage his complex medical needs. An Aboriginal Outreach worker also worked with Jason to provide transport, cultural support and help understand and prioritise his many appointments.

Through this process Jason was diagnosed with multiple chronic diseases including asthma, sleep apnea, obesity, congestive cardiac failure, atrial fibrillation, and Type 2 diabetes.

Jason's heart stopped many times throughout our time working with him. Resulting in multiple resuscitations and hospitalisations. He spent many years unable to leave his bed.

The team referred Jason to specialists at St Vincent's Hospital. He initially had a defibrillator implant followed by a LVAD (mechanical heart). Jason began the long journey of working on his medical conditions in the hope of getting onto the heart transplant list.

This took great strength from Jason, as it required the achievement of many milestones of meeting health improvement over many years. He was now fit

enough, and on 10th of February 2023 Jason received his new heart and is currently in St Vincent's Hospital making a miraculous recovery.

Jason is the father of two girls and we are all elated that the transplant surgery was a success and that Jason now has the opportunity to spend many active years with his family.

We acknowledge the huge team of dedicated medical staff across many teams who also supported Jason on his journey.

Closing the Gap (ITC) can be contacted for referral on 4706 0299. This program covers Hawkesbury, Penrith, Blue Mountains and Lithgow.

Jacinta Price aims to be a voice for the community

Leader of The Nationals David Littleproud has congratulated Senator Jacinta Nampijinpa Price on her appointment as Shadow Minister for Indigenous Australians.

Mr Littleproud said Senator Price was a champion of Indigenous causes and a fierce advocate for improving the lives of Indigenous communities and families, particularly women and children.

“I welcome [the] announcement and I know Senator Price will make an enormous contribution in her important new role,” Mr Littleproud said.

“Senator Price has the courage, conviction and lived experience to shine a lens on the challenges

Indigenous communities are facing. Senator Price's promotion shows the great depth and talent in the 21-strong Nationals party room and the strength of diversity in our Shadow Ministry representation.

“The Nationals are proud to now have almost 60 per cent female representation in our seven Shadow Cabinet positions and 50 per cent across our broader 12 Shadow Ministry roles.

“We are bringing common sense to Canberra with the diversity of lived experience from our party room's deep understanding of the regional, rural and remote communities we represent.”



How you can be part of the Dharug Connection page and submit your stories and articles

The Western Weekender is proud to be producing this weekly page aimed at local Indigenous issues and affairs.

Produced in partnership with the Walkley Foundation, ‘The Dharug Connection’ aims to inform the local Indigenous community about various programs, initiatives and news, as well as inform the non-Indigenous community about history and various issues.

Weekender Editor Troy Dodds encouraged Indigenous organisations or those with a story to tell to get in touch.

“We’re welcoming article submissions for this page, and hoping that a range of local organisations will take part,” he said.

“Local newspapers are all about information and education and this must extend to our Indigenous communities and history as well.

“We’d encourage organisations to send through stories about specific programs and opportunities available to Indigenous locals, but also stories about achievements and other great news that should be told.”

People can get in touch by emailing news@westernweekender.com.au, calling 4722 2998 or sending a message on social media.

“Whether you’re interested in writing a weekly column, or sending a one-off story, we’re really interested in hearing from you,” Dodds said.

“There are a huge range of services, programs and opportunities out there for Indigenous locals, sometimes it's just about connecting the right people with each other. We are hoping to do that with this page, and aiming

for it to become a regular part of the Weekender moving forward, even after the initial concept is scheduled to come to an end.

“We look forward to receiving your submissions.”

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THE DHARUG CONNECTION

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Joy Impiombato
Nepean Community & Neighbourhood Services

www.nepeancommunity.org.au

Reconciliation Week is an opportunity to start an important conversation with others

From May into early July we commemorate and celebrate some key dates and events, important for Aboriginal people, and for all Australians. Over the next few weeks this column will take a closer look at these events – and let you know where you can get involved in them!

First up is Reconciliation Week – which is May 27 to June 3 every year. These dates are chosen as they commemorate two significant milestones in the reconciliation journey – the successful 1967 referendum, and the High Court

Mabo decision respectively. Reconciliation Week is a time for all Australians to learn about our shared histories, cultures, and achievements, and to explore how each of us can contribute to achieving reconciliation in Australia.

This year's theme is "Be a Voice for Generations" – it calls on all of us to keep up the momentum for change. The theme encourages all Australians to be a voice for reconciliation in tangible ways in our everyday lives – where we live, work and socialise. Reconciliation Australia says: "For the

work of generations past, and the benefit of generations future, act today for a more just, equitable and reconciled country for all."

Reconciliation must live in the hearts, minds and actions of all Australians as we move forward, strengthening respectful relationships between the wider Australian community, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Reconciliation Week is an especially important time for non-Aboriginal Australians to lead the way.

Sometimes we don't speak

up, for fear of saying something wrong.

Reconciliation Week is our chance to start conversations. If we are respectful and speak from the heart – there is nothing to fear. Reconciliation Australia has lots of ideas on how to be involved at <https://nrw.reconciliation.org.au/actions-to-be-a-voice-for-reconciliation-2023> and we will highlight some local events in upcoming columns.

We will also reflect on another May date – Sorry Day – and why that is important to commemorate.

Health advice in the community: How local service is helping deliver important help

Nepean Blue Mountains Local Health District's Mootang Tarimi mobile outreach services are a popular way for the Aboriginal community to come and yarn with health professionals in an accessible, comfortable, and culturally safe environment.

Mootang Tarimi is supporting Aboriginal communities access services by taking the health care out of the hospital and into the community to provide health screening, education and wellbeing care.

Extensive community consultation helps Nepean Blue Mountains Local Health District's Aboriginal Health team to tailor clinics.

Throughout the Penrith area, the outreach model delivers cardiac, diabetes, mental health and men's and women's health clinics.

"Because the needs at each location are different, we adapt how we run the days based on where we go," said Donna Jory, Aboriginal Health Worker.

"Depending on the age group and audience, we might talk to women about mammograms, sexual health or we might focus on newborn care."

As this coming flu season approaches, the Mootang Tarimi service will be offering an immunisation service during the



month of May. With strong partnerships across the region with local Aboriginal organisations, each visit by Mootang Tarimi continues to help build trust and establish relationships with local clinicians.

"We know it can be hard for members of our community to build connections, especially with people from government organisations. We often have

morning tea or lunch with activities organised during Mootang Tarimi visits so that a relationship can be established before offering personalised health advice and support," Jory said.

"We also meet with clinicians before they're scheduled for an outreach clinic to ensure their understanding of culturally responsive care and how to engage."

Registered nurse, Rae Campbell, said all members of our Aboriginal community are welcome to drop in, have a yarn, and find out how the health professionals might be able to support them.

"Being able to meet with community in community has been a highlight for me. I hope Mootang Tarimi is helping remove barriers for people to access the help they need from NSW Health," she said.

If you are Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander and want free health advice, drop-in to one of the Mootang Tarimi outreach visits.

Check the Nepean Blue Mountains Aboriginal Health Facebook page for upcoming visits: www.facebook.com/NBMAH.

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Nepean Community & Neighbourhood Services

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May 26 is a day to reflect and recognise the past, while stepping towards vital healing

Since 1998, one year after the landmark *Bringing them Home* report, May 26 remembers and acknowledges the mistreatment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who were forcibly removed from their families and communities.

National Sorry Day is a day to acknowledge the strength of Stolen Generations Survivors

and reflect on how we can all play a part in the healing process for our people and nation. The impact touches almost every Aboriginal family.

It's easy to think that this was a policy from another era. But importantly, children were still being removed under the guise of these policies, until well into the 1970's. There are many people

living in our own community who were directly impacted.

In 2000 hundreds of thousands of us crossed the Harbour Bridge to bring attention to the issue. It took until 2008 when Kevin Rudd as Prime Minister made the official Apology to the Stolen Generations. This was an emotional and important milestone.

On May 26 – if you are unable

to attend a ceremony – take a moment to reflect on the experiences of those that were removed, and their incredible resilience. Many people light a candle to mark the day.

Recognising our shared history is not dwelling in the past, but an important part of recognition, and a vital step towards healing and reconciliation.

Aboriginal art inspires gift wrapping used for Mother's Day initiative at Westfield

With Mother's Day right around the corner, Westfield Penrith is providing local shoppers with the perfect opportunity to upgrade your gift, with the help of Our Community Cares' wrappers, and local modern contemporary Aboriginal artist, Kyrilee Shields.

The gift-wrapping initiative will this year go towards fundraising for a local boy from James Erskine Public School who, in January this year, found out that his Acute Lymphoblastic Leukaemia had returned, and is currently facing another bout of chemotherapy and a bone marrow transplant.

"I don't think people realise that it's just total upheaval. There's just a total refocus on everything," Our Community Cares' Kris Gauci said.

"If we can do a little bit to help,

that's really good. We're happy to do that."

After designing the wrapping paper for last year's initiative, Shields couldn't be happier to see her artwork return for such a worthy cause.

"It's an honour to have my artwork feature on the wrapping

paper again this year," Shields said.

"The funds raised go to such a wonderful cause and I'm grateful that my artwork can contribute to the incentive."

The artwork is titled 'Wiyanga', the Dharug word for 'Mother', and is a piece Shields said she's

particularly proud of, especially in the context of the collaboration.

"This collaboration really resonated with me, being a mother myself, and gave me the opportunity to honour all the matriarchs who help shape and guide us," she said.

"It's so wonderful that Aboriginal art is being embraced and celebrated and to have my art showcased on this platform has been such a positive experience."

The Our Community Cares team will be wrapping gifts at Westfield Penrith from Thursday, May 11 to Saturday, May 13, just in time for Mother's Day.

"The ladies do such good gift wrapping, it's really lovely just to do something a little bit extra for mum," Gauci said.

– Cassidy Pearce



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NRL launches annual Indigenous Round

The National Rugby League this week launched NRL Indigenous Round 2023, highlighting the importance of 'Moving Forward Together' towards reconciliation.

NRL Indigenous Round elevates and celebrates First Nations history and culture through the game and encourages greater understanding across the rugby league community.

This year, listening to and learning from the game's Indigenous communities takes on added significance ahead of the referendum on the First Nations Voice to Parliament. To help fans learn more about Indigenous land and history, and get the facts about the Voice, the NRL is providing a range of resources, information and stories via nrl.com/indigenous.

Bringing the round to life across the weekend (May 18-21), all venues will use their traditional custodian land names, matches will be preceded by welcome ceremonies and Indigenous cultural performances, and teams will take the field in specially designed jerseys inspired by local Indigenous art and storytelling.

Australian Rugby League Commission Chairman, Peter V'landys AM (pictured), said: "NRL Indigenous Round is a truly special week in our calendar. Our First Nations communities have incredibly deep bonds with rugby league and are part of our fabric at all levels of the game, from grassroots participants and fans to the Indigenous stars who light up the NRL and NRLW.

"It is through listening to and learning from



Indigenous voices in our game that we can continue to move forward as the greatest game for all.

"Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture is ingrained in rugby league. The

game's bonds with Indigenous communities run deep and have always helped drive learning and change.

"This week, we celebrate those bonds and call on everyone in the game to listen, learn and use their voices, so we can lift up Indigenous voices."

NRL CEO Andrew Abdo said that Indigenous Round carries special importance on the NRL calendar.

"As the only national sporting organisation with an Elevate RAP, we have a leadership role to play in educating and storytelling about the Indigenous communities and cultures who give so much to rugby league," he said.

"Indigenous Round is a time to celebrate culture and community so that our whole game feels empowered to move forward together."

The NRL has supported the Uluru Statement From the Heart in full since 2017, and last week announced its position on the Indigenous Voice to Parliament.

NRL Indigenous Round is delivered by DoorDash, which supports its commitment to Indigenous Australians via the DoorDash Scholarship Program. The program was created in 2021 to assist Indigenous students across the NRL School to Work Program with financial needs, to help them move forward in completing their HSC and pursue further education or employment.

Since 2021, Doordash has helped 142 students through the program and in 2023, it is pledging another \$30,000 to help more future leaders achieve their goals and aspirations.

Elevating the voices of women and girls

Women's Business 2nd Chance Hub has provided this submission:

The Australian Human Rights Commission and the National Indigenous Australia Agency (NIAA) partnered on a national conversation to elevate the voices of Aboriginal Torres Strait Islander Women and Girls.

Following this, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner, June Oscar AO, Led the Wiyi Yani U Thangani Summit set up to capture what Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls consider to be their strength, challenges, and aspirations for

change. The theme of the summit was WE ARE THE CHANGE.

Christianna Cartwright (CEO), Melissa Fernando (General Manager - Indigenous Programs), Oneeva Tu'uhetoka (WB2C Program Manager) and Tracey Tonga (Engagement Officer) had the privilege to share their stories and the Women's Business 2nd Chance impacts under the Economic Justice and Empowerment session. Day 3 of the Summit focused on innovation and transformative change. Innovation is inherent to First Nations cultures and knowledges. This day was about how we consider First Nations people



to be the first innovators, adapting and responding to changing conditions over tens of thousands of years

This day reminded all summit participants that innovation is an active process that can fuse ancestral knowledge with contemporary methods. The discussions explored many sides of innovation, and that to innovate is to confront some of the most entrenched problems of our times to make serious and lasting

change happen.

A quote from our presentation: "Each of our amazing women have incredible stories that are made up of strength, pain, resilience and triumph, and it's through each of our stories we get to learn, grow and heal together so we can continue to thrive, prosper and move forward in life. This my sisters is a part of the foundational values in which Women's Business 2nd Chance has to offer".



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By Narelle Smith

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Listening to Country provides a way forward for families

Budyari darrabarra (good day).

Have you ever noticed the stand of Casuarina trees (gumin) at Jamison Park in Penrith, alongside York Road?

Many years ago, on a winter afternoon at the park with my mudyin (family), as we approached the Casuarinas, they were clacking, whistling, and muttering in the strong breeze. A chill came over me and I gasped "there are the spirits of Elder Women inside those trees".

I subsequently discovered that there is a Dreaming story

from both the Dharawal nation (south-west Sydney) and the Dharug nation (western Sydney) about the Casuarina trees. The Dharawal story tells of how the spirits of the older women came to inhabit the Casuarina trees (1). The Dharug story tells of how the Casuarina needles protect the children from snakes, and the children can roll the seed pods from the Casuarinas around in their hands to take their worries away (2).

Casuarina trees grow in families and are very resilient. They grow upright and tall, and each

tree is unique. On a recent walk with a friend along the Nepean River, I saw how the young Casuarinas were still standing and thriving after being completely submerged and battered by the floods over the past few years. Although Casuarinas are known as the 'she-oak', some trees have male and female flowers, or there can be separate male and female trees.

Casuarina Aboriginal Family Project was named after the trees that have a story that entwines people (yura) and Country (ngurra). 'Project' because life is

always a work in progress, we are always learning and growing.

The Casuarina Project provides Family Support to Aboriginal families in the Penrith area. Referrals can be made through the NCNS website.

Naabawunya (see you!).

(1) Aunty Frances Bodkin <https://dharawalstories.files.wordpress.com/2015/05/dahl-wah890kb.pdf>

(2) Erin Wilkins <https://www.sl.nsw.gov.au/stories/dyarubbin/chapter-1-yellow-mundee/3>.

How league inspired Clarke Scott to help

For Clarke Scott, rugby league was always in his blood, starting and ending his career as a Warragamba Wombat. But, it's through this that he became a leader for Aboriginal people, both in his sport, and in his work.

In 1973, the Wiradjuri man was one of just 20 players hand-selected for the first ever all-Aboriginal rugby league team.

The five-eighth was picked by a selection panel that included league legends such as Eric Simms and Johnny Raper to go on the Aboriginal All Stars tour to New Zealand, which saw them win seven of the nine games they played over 10 days.

For Scott, the hospitality he experienced in New



Clarke Scott.

Zealand is something he said he'll never forget, both during his playing

days, and at the recent reunion at this year's NRL All Stars match in February.

"At the hotel, people were asking for photos, we were celebrities, I couldn't believe it. There were hangis every night, we were welcomed into Maori player's houses and families. Then going back 50 years later, the respect was still there, they cared about us," Scott said.

Scott returned from the tour inspired to pay the leadership and mentorship he received forward,

by entering a career at Nepean Blue Mountains Local Health District.

30 years ago, Scott became the first person employed by the District in an Aboriginal identified position as an Aboriginal Liaison Officer, breaking down barriers between clinicians and the community, and running Aboriginal Boys Cultural Mentoring Camps out of Lawson Community Health Centre.

Scott went on to serve two consecutive five-year terms as a valued member

of the Nepean Blue Mountains Local Health District Board, letting his passion for championing for health equity for the Aboriginal community drive his career.

Now, as Aboriginal Health Programs Manager, Drug & Alcohol Services, he's continuing to do just that, despite some of the challenges the job has provided.

"The stories behind the issues are devastating, helping to address those issues is the challenge for me. But, I know it's part of the job where I can make a difference," Scott said.

Over the years, Scott has seen firsthand how the industry has transformed, with the addition of a Director for Aboriginal Health making an immense difference in their ability to create change at the hospital.

"Having someone at a higher level to support staff and make decisions is so important," Scott said.

"Things have changed in health over many years and now that we have a larger Aboriginal workforce, they will and can assist the community to guide them through the system too."

— Cassidy Pearce



The 1973 Indigenous All Stars team at Mascot airport ahead of their historic trip to New Zealand.

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Joy Impiombato
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Reconciliation Week is just the start

On Tuesday, May 30 the community turned out to mark Reconciliation Week 2023. This year's theme "Be a Voice For Generations" is impactful to all who attended. We come together – both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people – to share our stories, to be fully present, to listen and learn from one another. So we can create a world for our children that is free from racism and inequality.

Jie Pittman set the tone, creating a ceremonial circle, welcome and smoking ceremony. The sound of the didg, those most ancient vibrations resonated through the space, unconsciously drawing us in, and re-energising us. Jie spoke of his own ancestral heritage – the Aboriginal side (Jie belongs to the Dharug, Wiradjuri, Yuin, Kooma and Ngemba nations), while also recognising his English, Irish and German bloodlines. Through example, he is reminding us to recognise and reconnect. Then the painting of ochre on our faces, symbolising our vision in this week marking Reconciliation, our desire to see each other clearly.

The children made damper, we shared a delicious lunch, and spent time around the table, and

then around the fire pit, sharing our stories and building connection.

Honouring Reconciliation should not be restricted to the seven days of Reconciliation Week. Instead we can all take purposeful actions daily. Getting to know more about the stories and local Aboriginal history, its people. Watch some of the amazing films and TV shows. The historical documentary series 'The First Australians' is a great place to start.



Mural honours respected local Elder

Chifley College Dunheved Campus has unveiled a new mural depicting local Indigenous elder, Uncle Wes Marne.

The mural was painted as the first part in a collaborative project

Boyd recalls being approached by the school with the idea of painting Uncle Wes after doing some work for them a few years ago.

Knowing that the correct permissions had to be given, the

Boyd said he couldn't be happier with how it turned out.

"It was great to finally link up with Zac and put our styles together," he said.

"It turned out how I envisioned it, and has been really well received."

For Boyd, the piece had a more personal connection, having met Uncle Wes back when he was teaching in Whalan.

"It was very special to pay respect to Uncle Wes – he's lived on Dharug land for over 40 years, and he turned 101 just a couple of days before we finished the piece," he said.

"He's had a massive impact on not just connecting the Aboriginal community to their culture, but also teaching non-Indigenous people like myself."

Jennifer Ribeiro, Principal of Chifley College Dunheved Campus, said that the mural was done to show the school community's deep respect for Uncle Wes' contributions.

"Uncle Wes is a local Elder who has shared his wisdom with staff, students and community of Chifley College Dunheved Campus for many years," she said.

"Our school has had the privilege of regularly calling on Uncle Wes during NAIDOC celebrations, Sorry Day and NRW events. He has been a pioneer for Aboriginal Studies and revitalisation of the Dharug language at the school."

"Our students have benefited from the many stories told by this master storyteller and now have the opportunity to learn from his published poems through studying the *Through Old Eyes* anthology."

With collaboration on the work also done between the school's Aboriginal Education Officer, Kerry Burns, Uncle Wes and his family, Ribeiro said she's incredibly proud that the mural has found its home at Chifley College Dunheved Campus.

– Cassidy Pearce



between artists Shannon Boyd, and Zachary Bennett-Brook of Saltwater Dreamtime.

work was nine-months in the making.

But, after it was completed,

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Bronwyn Nuttall
Nepean Community & Neighbourhood Centre

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Expressing themselves through dance

Getting involved in a cultural after-school activity is one of the best ways our young people can learn, connect, and grow their cultural identity and pride.

At Kooly, we have been running Dance and Didg classes every week. Thanks to the engaging teaching style of our Cultural Facilitator, and founder of Nulungu Dreaming, Jessy McKinless, the Aboriginal dance group has grown to such a huge size (nearly 60 kids last week),

that we are now running Dance over two separate days to meet the growing demand.

Young fellas can learn Didg on Mondays. And now dance with Jessy (supported by NCNS Community Worker Carolyn) - is available for girls and boys, all ages, on Tuesdays and Wednesdays.

Just getting together with other Aboriginal kids learning culture - and having a healthy afternoon tea thanks to Carolyn is great. Even better is having

the opportunity to perform in public. Every year, we receive dozens of requests to perform at big community events (like the Eel Festival in Parramatta), as well as for local groups like the Emu Lions, retirement villages, preschools, and other community gatherings.

Jessy is a Kabi Kabi and Jinibara man, who has been allowed to share the culture he grew up with, including the dance and song - from his warm, saltwater land - with us here on Dharug

lands.

For their performances, the children paint up, and wear their dance costumes with pride. This is a powerful way that we can connect to our ancient culture in today's modern world, giving our kids that cultural connection that will strengthen them for their whole life.

Transport is available for children to attend groups, just call Kooly on 4706 0280 to book in. Otherwise, just turn up on the day.



Push to increase cancer screening

National Reconciliation Week is a time for all Australians to learn about our shared histories, cultures and achievements and to explore how everyone can contribute to a more just, equitable and reconciled country.

"Cancer Council NSW is committed to reconciliation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples," said Natalia Arnas from Cancer Council NSW - Western Sydney.

"This year's theme is Be a Voice for Generations and our voice is to support and improve the health outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities across NSW by creating culturally safe and responsive programs and services."

Cancer Council NSW is committed to supporting improved cancer screening participation rates in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in order to reduce the inequalities

in cancer outcomes.

Uncle Colin Locke opened the Penrith Relay for Life on Saturday, May 27 with a Welcome to Country and would like to encourage all people to do the Bowel Screening test kit when it comes in the mail. Uncle Colin was able to get in early and have polyps removed before it turned into cancer when he received a positive result recently.



Bowel cancer is the third most commonly diagnosed cancer in Australia but 90 per cent of bowel cancers can be successfully treated if detected early, which is why it's vital we improve screening rates.

Arnas said that low screening rates is likely to be a reason bowel cancer survival is lower for Indigenous Australians than for non-Indigenous Australians.

"Screening rates are lower in First Nations communities due to multiple barriers to access. There has, however, been some progress, with a pathway co-designed and co-delivered with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander groups. We need to do more of what works, to reduce disparities in bowel cancer survival," she said.

"We're here to support everyone to reduce their cancer risk and get the information and support they need. If you've got a bowel cancer screening kit sitting in the drawer, don't delay. Take the test because it could save your life."

Cancer Council NSW is excited to announce the launch of their new Aboriginal Portal, the home of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tailored information about cancer, staying healthy, getting support, and stories that are being shared by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders who have been affected by cancer.

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Yarning Circle an important addition

Four years in the making, Kingswood High School's Yarning Circle is getting closer and closer to completion – with the help of a few very special helpers.

For Principal Adam Forbes, the idea of building a yarning circle in the school came about with the intention of creating a safe space for their students to connect to country. But, to do this, he wasn't taking any shortcuts.

"The Yarning Circle had been in planning for a number of years as we wanted to ensure

that all stakeholders, including members of our local Aboriginal community, actively contributed to the site suitability and design," he said.

"After consultation with local elders and Jason from Dalmarri, our Aboriginal Education Officers Jayden Young and Jirah Liddiard established a group of students to provide input to what the final design and build would encapsulate."

From here, the construction of the space has very much come down to the students, Forbes said,

allowing them to have a sense of ownership and connection.

"The planning of the yarning circle has been collaborative process with significant input from the students who provided insight on the surrounding themes of the yarning circle, including the colours of the totems which were representative of the students' various mobs," he said.

"The construction phase was completed by Jason Douglas from Dalmarri and the students and staff finalised the project with

mulching, lighting and perimeter seating."

A few weeks ago, the students had a few extra hands on deck, with Tyrone Peachey and Glen Liddiard from the Penrith Panthers coming along to help complete the Yarning Circle before their official opening during NAIDOC Week.

"It was great to have two highly respected ambassadors attend the school and assist in finalising the project," he said.

"The students thoroughly enjoyed the positive interaction and opportunity to talk culture whilst expressing what the yarning circle means to them and our school community."

Once the space is open, Forbes is excited to see it transform into a place where students and the greater Aboriginal community alike can be proud of their culture.

"[It's all about] creating a safe cultural space for our students where they can connect to country, as well as an outdoor learning space to share stories and have a yarn about the importance of culture," he said.

"Our very successful cultural engagement initiatives, including the NASCA mentoring program, would be able to utilise the space to develop learning opportunities to promote cultural connections for students."

– Cassidy Pearce



Council confirms NAIDOC Week events

Penrith City Council has announced a special program of community events will be taking place in honour of NAIDOC Week.

There will be a number of community activities and events across the City from July 2 to 9.

They will also embrace the NAIDOC 2023 theme – For Our Elders.

NAIDOC Week is an opportunity to celebrate the significance of our Aboriginal heritage and the important contribution Penrith's Aboriginal population make in our community and across our vibrant city.

Council's NAIDOC community event will return to Jamison Park from 10am to 3pm on Friday, July 7.

Indigenous and non-Indigenous locals are encouraged to attend this fun and inclusive event which will feature performances from First Nations artists, workshops, stalls, a free BBQ and more.

Penrith Mayor Tricia Hitchen encourages everyone to come

along to the events and activities, which are being held locally, to learn and pay homage to the oldest, continuing culture on the planet.

"NAIDOC Week is an excellent opportunity for our community to celebrate the history, culture and achievements of our local

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people," she said.

"While COVID-19 and bad weather impacted our flagship NAIDOC event in recent years, we can't wait to welcome everyone to Jamison Park this year to participate in a range of activities that celebrate and support our

First Nations communities."

Council's program will embrace this year's NAIDOC theme, a homage to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders and their ongoing contributions to communities across the country.

For more information, visit Penrith City Council's website.



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Thousands attend annual NAIDOC Cup

A beautiful and sunny day greeted around 2000 kids from 30 local schools attending the 2023 NAIDOC Cup on Tuesday.

Held at Hunter Fields in Emu Plains and run by Nepean Community & Neighbourhood Services, the annual event has been a popular and meaningful fixture on the Penrith community calendar for more than a decade.

Not only were the kids in attendance treated to an incredible insight into their rich and unique culture, but they also got to participate in a range of activities including Netball and OzTag.

"I think it's one of the only days where Aboriginal kids can come together, enjoy the day and be connected to their culture," Nepean Community & Neighbourhood Services General Manager, Joy Impiombato said.

Dozens of OzTag and Netball teams battled it out for their school, while the younger kids got stuck into traditional Indigenous games, workshops, dance, and arts and crafts.

"We also have 200 high school students that come every year to help out," Impiombato said.

"A lot of them have grown up attending NAIDOC Cup and they continue to come because they love the day and they want to stay connected to culture."

— Nathan Taylor



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NAIDOC Week at Cranebrook High

On Monday this week, Cranebrook High School celebrated the start of NAIDOC Week with a whole-of-school assembly that showcased Aboriginal performances, dance, song and story and a smoking ceremony from Nulungu Dreaming.

Four students from Cranebrook High spoke with warmth about the theme of this year's NAIDOC week - For Our Elders. They recognised the role the Elders have played in caring, nurturing, and supporting the young ones - on a family level, as well as the role they have played as strong advocates, activists and spokespeople for the issues that have faced their communities.

Uncle Les then led the Welcome, and then Jessy explained the stories about each of the dances and songs performed (in language). What was most important was the relationship between Aboriginal cultural life, and natural lore. The caring for country that was central to traditional life.

Craig Dunne, Principal at Cranebrook High said: "It was a truly inspiring event that showcased the rich culture and heritage of our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. NAIDOC at Cranebrook High School is an important week in the school calendar and

out students are truly committed to learning about the history and traditions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

"The assembly marks the start of a week of activities at Cranebrook High School. Guest speakers, cultural performances, traditional art and craft workshops, students verse teacher games, BBQs and book readings will be held all week."

Additionally, the school's Aboriginal Education Team wanted to provide students with an authentic cultural experience that was both educational, interactive and engaging. Students were united in their engagement and respect for the performance.

Highlights of the event included the participation of Aboriginal students performing the



'Turtle Dance' with the Nulungu Dreaming performers, a wonderful opportunity for students to demonstrate their cultural pride, and for the wider student body to participate.



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Driving a message with inspiring truck

Western Suburbs Concrete has unveiled a new artwork on the turret of one of their concrete trucks, inspired by the land it drives across.

The truck is driven by Gavyn Millan, whose tattoos kickstarted the movement, which was then championed by Kevin Dowling.

"Kev noticed that I've got some Aboriginal tattoos, and he started asking a few questions about that, and then asked, 'How would you like a design like that on the truck?'" he said.

The idea was then brought to Managing Director, Peter Vicary, who Millan said couldn't have been more supportive of the idea.

"Peter Vicary was all for it, I can't thank him enough for how supportive he's been of it," he said.

"It was really good of him to raise cultural awareness in the area."

Next, the trio had to find an artist, and ended up approaching Trevor Eastwood from Dalmarrri.

Born and raised in western Sydney, Eastwood said he loves painting the land that he's on, collabo-

rating with Millan, Dowling and Vicary to create something meaningful to everyone.

"The artwork is calling our elders," he said.

"You know when you see the sunset, and you see the silhouette of the trees in the background, and then a twinkling in the sky? I always think that's our ancestors watching over us, telling stories and guiding us."

"Then, at the bottom, it's the Dharug, western Sydney landscape that we've walked on for thousands of years, with the rivers and different parts of our land."

Though the original is still in his St Marys gallery, Eastwood said it was a

special feeling seeing the artwork on the truck after it was finally installed earlier this month.

"The artwork itself becomes a little bit like your baby, so it's a bit of a proud moment when you see it blown up in such a big size, going all around western Sydney," he said.

"I'm very proud to have the artwork up there."

For Eastwood, it's all about awareness.

"It keeps the conversation going, and is all part of the healing journey of people learning about country," he said.

Millan said this has already been the case,

hoping that more and more people ask questions as he continues to drive the truck all over western Sydney.

"I've had people call me, and people at job sites taking photos of the truck," he said.

- Cassidy Pearce



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Joy Impiombato
Nepean Community & Neighbourhood Services

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See you at the NCNS Cultural Tent!

Excitement is building about Friday, July 7's big NAIDOC celebration at Jamison Park. Between COVID and bad weather, it's been a few years since this important community event has run. NCNS have been involved in NAIDOC

Jamo since the beginning, back when it was a small, community footy and netball and BBQ day. It's now a huge event, reflecting the changing community in Penrith and the willingness of so many more people to be involved.

NCNS has been running a Cultural Tent for many years, showcasing cultural practice and leaders from this country as well as other nations. This year we hope to see you in the Cultural Tent - there's something for everyone.

10.30am Welcome to Country from Krystal Mervin

10.45am Firestick workshop with Uncle Les

11.30am Darug stories and culture with Auntie Erin

12.30pm Dance and Didg with Jessy from Nulungu Dreaming

In between workshops we will be showing short films by First

Nations filmmakers.

Additionally, we will have a table outside where anyone can join an Aboriginal Beading Workshop with Auntie Tracey.

It's always cosy and warm in the Cultural Tent, so come on in.

There is of course a packed program on the main stage including a fascinating panel

discussion from some of our local elders highlighting the theme of NAIDOC this year - For Our Elders. Not sure about you, but we will be ready to join in with the community line dancing too.

It will be great to gather together again - NAIDOC Jamo is always a great place to catch up with mob. See you there.



Learning circle opens at new airport

A traditional Aboriginal learning circle has been opened by Western Sydney International Airport (WSI) and their contractor AeroWest. It has been constructed by the company's own First Nations employees, and with all materials donated by the local western Sydney business, Hytec Concrete.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students from western Sydney schools were welcomed onto the airport construction site with a tour, and helped in the opening of the circle. Students were engaged in a learning experience about their heritage and culture, as well as about the future of the airport itself; such as its future jobs and ambitions.

Katy Hannouch, General Manager - Community Engagement and Social Impact at WSI has been working with the team at AeroWest to launch the 'First Nations Taking Off' program.

"Overall, the program is committed to fostering connections between First Nations young people and First Nations employees across the project, as well as provide the support and guidance needed to succeed

in their chosen career paths," Hannouch said.

Participating Plumpton High School student, Ethan Hawke added: "It was a great experience to see the opportunities that are there for me and where I would like to go in the future. The workers were very informative and easy to talk to. They cared enough to listen about what I want to do and where I would like to go in the

future, as well as telling me the jobs they have available regarding electrical engineering, which is what I would like to do."

Hannouch is working on building strong engagement with local First Nations people and businesses, with already acknowledged success. As of current, the airport project has more than 100 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

working on the team, and First Nations businesses account for over 10 per cent of contracts across the total project.

Hannouch concluded: "Western Sydney International Airport is driving the creation of new jobs across the region which will provide significant future employment opportunities for people living in western Sydney and for First Nations people".



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NAIDOC celebrations a huge success

After three years of delays due to COVID and rain, the main event for NAIDOC Week returned to Penrith last Friday.

Jamison Park was transformed for the event, with dozens of stalls, visits from local support organisations, and emergency services representatives, and commenced at 10am with Quiet Time; an opportunity for those more comfortable in less hectic and noisy environments to explore what the event had to offer before the speakers were turned up and

together and walk forward and respect country," she said.

Embracing the NAIDOC 2023 theme; 'For Our Elders', Penrith Mayor Tricia Hitchen shared her gratitude for their presence in the community in her opening speech.

"The elders preserve the cultural knowledge, they pass on their own wisdom and courage, and they help lead the way in tackling broader community issues like health and education," she said.

"We're fortunate to have so many Aboriginal and Torres



learn and participate in interactive stalls.

To keep the winter chill away, booths also offered free coffee and pancakes, and a BBQ for lunch.

A collection of health tents could be found at the border of the event, offering free health checks by experts to anyone interested.

The main NAIDOC celebration was a beautiful

connection between members of the community to make homage to Aboriginal and Torres Strait elders and individuals and all they bring to the community.

"NAIDOC is a week-long celebration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture, and importantly, the acknowledgement of the stories and the learning from the world's oldest continuing living culture. In doing so, it helps deepen our community's understanding and appreciation of our nation's culture, history, and achievements," Hitchen said.

— Hayley Rochester



SCAN TO SEE MORE FROM THE EVENT



the main event began.

11am marked the commencement of the festivities, with an Acknowledgement to Country conducted by Auntie Julie Jones Webb, a speech from the Mayor, and a collection of beautiful displays of traditional dance and didgeridoo performances.

This was an event thriving with spirit and life as the community came together to celebrate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture, heritage, and history.

Auntie Julie Webb paid respect to elders and country.

"Gathering together like this strengthens our spirit, and strengthens our dreaming and that is the goal for us to come

Straight Islander people call Penrith home. We share their culture and their practices, not just for today but all through the year".

With over 70 stalls and services present to support Penrith's First Nations communities, there was something for everyone to enjoy and learn.

The community was offered the opportunity to check out the display of Aboriginal artefacts, try their hand at weaving, create art, and participate in story workshops.

Everyone was encouraged to



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Brand new opportunity for job seekers



Generation Australia and Kimberwalli have united in an innovative partnership, designed to develop opportunities for First Nations people in western Sydney.

As part of a commitment to dismantle the boundaries which often exist around education and employment, the partnership will see the two organisations actively recruit First Nations people and provide a physical location for Generation Australia to deliver a hybrid training program normally offered online.

Their education-to-employment program prepares graduates for a rewarding tech career, developing skills in web development and Cloud computing.

It also includes First Nations mentorship and job placement support, and an additional program in the care industry will be released later this year.

Kimberwalli's Director in the Department of Education, Aboriginal Outcomes and Partnerships Directorate Kelly Stanford is a proud Aboriginal woman, and descendent of Stolen Generation Survivors, with connections to the Yuin Nation on the south coast.

She has significant experience in working in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and placing them at the centre of decision-making, enabling them to make informed decisions to support their social, cultural and economic wellbeing.

"The ability to use digital technologies has become both an essential life skill, and capability for job seekers and employees, regardless of their age, job function or industry. By delivering this important skills development opportunity at a culturally safe community space, with genuine pathways to employment and wrap-around mentoring support,

this partnership provides an amazing opportunity to contribute to closing the gap in education, employment outcomes, and digital inclusion in western Sydney," she said.

Generation Australia's CEO Malcolm Kinns is passionate about Generation Australia's mission to reveal motivated work-

ers who remain unseen because traditional hiring processes overlook the skills and commitment they have to offer. He said the organisation is committed to strengthening educational pathways and enhancing sustainable employment outcomes for First Nations Australians.

"Kimberwalli is a beacon of hope for our First Nations community in western Sydney. It

is a privilege for us to partner with them and offer opportunities to the people in this area, while also providing our employer partners with the diverse talent that they need," Kinns said.

An intense recruitment campaign is now underway, and First Nations people are encouraged to apply for a place within the programs. To find out more, visit australia.generation.org.

- Makayla Muscat



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Solving problems as a community

Last week the NSW Council of Social Services CEO Joanna Quilty presented the recently released 'Mapping Disadvantage in NSW' research at Nepean Community & Neighbourhood Services.

The focus was on the key themes from the data and the implications for western Sydney as well as what's going on in these communities.

Joanna said, "it was great to connect with services who are at the coal face of this cost-of-living crisis, trying to plug the many gaps and really going above and beyond."

I spoke at the forum about the significant increase in the Aboriginal population that the Penrith area has seen (nearly 40 per cent increase from 2016 to 2021 - ABS data).

We know that Aboriginal families are the most disadvantaged group in Australia.

The recent cost-of-living has only increased pressure on individuals and families that are already dealing with the

pressure from being carers for children and elders. Housing shortages and rent increases have forced a new group of people into homelessness - as we are seeing more and more older Aboriginal women now struggling to find affordable accommodation. Like all other services, NCNS is seeing a significant increase in the community to meet basic needs - food, shelter, healthcare.

The forum brought many services together who have a shared concern for mob in Penrith/Nepean. We acknowledge that these are big problems, but when communities get together, we can come up with local solutions for our own people. Many committed to forming a working group to both advocate on the needs in Penrith; and to work on local solutions to

the current cost-of-living crisis - we know that local Aboriginal community members know what's best for their families and communities, so this is a great way to start.

Thanks to Western Sydney Community Forum and NCOSS for bringing this forum to Penrith. If you want to be a part of a working group - please contact joy@nepeancommunity.org.au.



Local school's NAIDOC celebrations

Orchard Hills Primary School has held their NAIDOC Week celebration this week, aiming to educate their students through a more hands-on method.

On Wednesday, July 26, the school invited Connie Dawson and the team from Koomurri Aboriginal Incursions to hold several activities for the students.

According to teacher and event organiser Liz Gabriel, the organisation has been involved in their

NAIDOC Week celebrations for a number of years.

"It's just a really wonderful way for them to embrace the culture and learn more about it," she said.

"There's only so much that we can teach them in the classroom, so they get this hands-on, really authentic experience, which was amazing, and we all enjoy it and learn from it as well."

As part of the 'Outback Experience', students and teachers were able

to learn through a variety of activities, including song and dance, face painting, storytelling and boomerang throwing, as well as more theory-based sessions around history, weaponry and bush survival.

With the day split up into Kindergarten to Year 2, and Years 3 to 6, Gabriel said that the students were able to make the most of the day.

"It's a very special time, and it's a real celebration, so whether

they're Indigenous or not they still get to celebrate and enjoy it along with everyone else," she said.

"It's really important that they learn about it, and they just love it, because it's all the music, and the hands-on artefacts, the storytelling, the face painting, the boomerang throwing. They get really enthusiastic about their learning, and then they want to continue learning more about it."

- Cassidy Pearce



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National Aboriginal Children's Day

National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children's Day is our national day dedicated to celebrating our children. Children's Day is celebrated across the country each year on Friday, August 4.

Children's Day is a time Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and communities and all Australians, celebrate the strengths and culture of our children.

It is an opportunity for us to show our support as well as learn about the crucial impact that culture, family and community play in the life of every Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child.

Why it's important for us to focus on children's well-being, safety and development.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are 2.5 times more likely to be developmentally vulnerable early in life than non-Indigenous children, and only half as likely to access early childcare services, according to the *Family Matters Report 2019*.

Pre-school enrolments (four-year-olds) are relatively high for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, however attendance rates are low in each state and territory. This includes in our own Penrith area.

Children who are developmentally vulnerable are less likely to do well at school and are more likely to leave school early and have poorer life outcomes.

Join us at Koolyongarra Aboriginal Family Centre on Friday, August 4 for NATSI Children's Day special event - that will have a strong focus on cultural activities for the little ones. As well as opportunities for parent/carers to get together and have some time out.

You can also find out about the free Developmental Outreach days we have each term, that will help your kids get off to the best possible start.

The event is free, transport is available. Call Zoe on 0409 986 121 to arrange your transport - otherwise just come along to Kooly today.



FRNSW unveil special Yarning Circle

Fire and Rescue NSW (FRNSW) is further encouraging respectful and honest conversations and the sharing of Traditional Knowledge by opening a Yarning Circle at its training centre at Orchard Hills.

Officially unveiled off the back of NAIDOC Week last month, the new outdoor space at the Emergency Services Academy (ESA) is a tangible step towards Reconciliation between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and non-Indigenous people.

It is lined with a dozen sandstone blocks for seating, and native Australian plants which create a lively and inviting atmosphere.

Other key features of the Yarning Circle include Aboriginal story poles, which contain contemporary takes on cultural designs, in FRNSW colours, and decorative privacy screens with Aboriginal artwork designs as well.

These have been lovingly created and donated by a company owned by two Penrith-

based FRNSW firefighters, Jason Douglas (a proud Murri man) and Trevor Eastwood (a proud Ngamba man).

This significant and sacred space will have many uses including hosting meetings, events and recruit classes, as well as generally providing a culturally safe place for staff to access as needed.

FRNSW Acting Commissioner, Megan Stiffler, said the Yarning

Circle will help improve cultural awareness among firefighters and the agency's administration and trades staff.

"From our recruits to our longest serving firefighters, this new space will enable us to all gain a greater understanding of our First Nations people and allow us all to better connect with those around us," she said.

FRNSW Deputy Commissioner - Field Operations, Jeremy

Fewtrell, said: "By developing a deeper understanding of traditional cultures and better reflecting the diverse people we serve, our firefighters will feel more equipped to do their jobs and our communities will ultimately be safer."

The Yarning Circle is an embodiment and symbol of the connection and togetherness which Reconciliation seeks to fulfill and deliver, according to FRNSW Senior Aboriginal Organisational Change and Development Advisor, Rhiannon Dotti.

"People will come together in this sacred space to learn about, share in and experience Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture, which ultimately benefits all communities," she said.

"It's fitting the Yarning Circle has been developed at the training academy given the facility empowers current firefighters to support others and sets expectations for future generations about the kind of workplace we want to enjoy."



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Joy Impiombato
Nepean Community & Neighbourhood Services

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Keeping mob healthy at Kooly

On the first Wednesday of every month, a partnership between NCNS Kooly team and the Nepean Local Health District (NBNLHD) Aboriginal Health Unit, brings specialist allied and medical health professionals – out to the community. In the past two months alone, we've been able to screen over 40 people, and provide what was needed for free! No waiting rooms, no transport hassles, no cost, and a culturally friendly space.

In August, Hearing Australia came out and screened 12 community members for their hearing. If mob need extra assistance, as some did – then additional follow up is arranged at no cost.

In July, the Brien Holden Foundation came out, and conducted 30 eye tests. 30 community

members were screened, with 15 identified as needing glasses. These are made to fit for each person, at no cost!

This is a great partnership between the NBNLHD's Mootang Tarimi outreach health bus and the Kooly team. It's playing a small part in the big picture of Closing the Gap in health outcomes between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians.

Of course, when we look after our health, we are also looking after our families. And vision and hearing checks for kids can make a huge difference to how they are going at school.

NCNS provides free transport to these outreach health days, as well as some tasty morning tea – so it couldn't be easier to look after yourself, and your family.

Our next Health Outreach day is 10am – 12 noon on Wednesday,

September 6. You can just turn up at Kooly on the day, or call Carolyn to arrange transport.

The friendly staff include an Aboriginal Health Worker, Registered Nurse, and Aboriginal

Community Worker – so you'll be given the very best care by mob looking after mob.

To book transport, call Carolyn on 0437 083 839 or Kooly on 4706 0280. See you there!



Government puts focus on hearing

The Albanese Government is improving the hearing health of First Nations children through the delivery of the Hearing Assessment Program – Early Ears (HAPEE), established in 2019 to reduce ear disease and prevent hearing loss in young First Nations children.

This is part of the Government's \$100 million investment over four years (from 2022-23) in a range of programs to improve the ear and hearing health outcomes for First Nations children.

Hearing Australia runs the HAPEE Program, which is avail-

able to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children who are not yet attending full time school.

In 2022-23, the program provided over 14,000 First Nations children with free clinical assessments of their ear and hearing health. Around 49 per cent were found to have undiagnosed ear disease and 26 per cent had undiagnosed hearing loss, with many requiring referral to medical practitioners and specialists for follow up care.

Minister for the National Disability Insurance Scheme

and Minister for Government Services, Bill Shorten, said the HAPEE program is making a real difference in the early identification of ear disease and hearing loss in young First Nations children.

"More than 60 per cent of children seen for a follow-up appointment now have better ear health and hearing, and this is just wonderful because not only is access to sound important for early language development, it is integral to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's connection to culture, family, commu-

nity, and history," Shorten said.

"These results would not be possible without the strong support of local community-controlled health services."

A recent evaluation of the HAPEE program found parents and health workers agree that HAPEE is helping to identify problems early and has helped them understand more about ear health. More than 90 per cent of parents and carers indicated high levels of trust and rapport with HAPEE audiologists and an important success factor was the consistency of audiologist.

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Rodney Matthews
Program Manager for Closing the Gap (ITC) Program

Nepean Neighbourhood & Community Services - www.nepeancommunity.org.au

Stepping On for Mob – staying on our feet for a long and enjoyable life

The NCNS Closing the Gap program is hosting the Stepping On program over seven Thursdays this August and September at the Closing the Gap team office at Werrington.

The program is free, and is for Aboriginal people over 45 years, who have some mobility issues that put them at risk of a fall. Transport is provided at no cost, and the sessions are run by qualified Health professionals from Nepean Blue Mountains Local Health District, with NCNS

cultural support workers – male and female – also joining the group to make sure you feel safe and supported.

We all know that falls can have a terrible impact on lifestyle and life expectancy. We have all seen the impact that a fall can have on our loved ones, including the loss of independence, and complications of disease that can often result following a fall.

The Stepping On program has been shown to reduce the incidence of falls in the community

by 30 per cent. And by running it at our Closing the Gap office, we can provide the cultural support to go with a quality health prevention program.

The program will help you learn how to reduce your risk of falling and how to maintain your independence.

Stepping On includes gentle group exercise to improve your balance and educational talks from experts. BUT it doesn't matter if you haven't exercised in a while... anyone can do the

gentle activities.

Topics covered include home hazards, community safety, managing your medications and more.

No prior knowledge or exercise experience is required!

Only a few spots are left and registrations are required.

Please call your Closing the Gap support worker or Rodney on 0447 766 861 to check your eligibility and book your place in this culturally friendly and supportive group.

Student is reaching for the stars

PhD candidate and proud Palawa man, Edward (Ted) Vanderfeen will be heading to the United States for a once-in-a-lifetime internship with NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory after being selected for Monash University's National Indigenous Space Academy (NISA), supported by the Australian Space Agency.

Representing Western Sydney University's International Centre for Neuromorphic Systems and the School of Engineering, Design and Built Environment, he will be partnered with a scientist or engineer mentor at NASA's JPL in California for a 10-week internship to complete projects outlined by NASA mentors while also contributing to current NASA JPL space missions.

"Engineering is in my blood. My dad was an automation engineer when I was growing up and he would bring his work home. I would always get curious as to how things worked, I pulled them apart and destroyed all the stuff he bought home – much to his dismay – but looking back, I don't think I'd want to do anything else," he said.

Applying for the NISA program after completing his Bachelor of Engineering degree with 1st Class Honours with the University's School of Engineering, Design and Built Environment, Vanderfeen said the NISA program opportunity has come at the right time.

"It was very serendipitous timing, it felt like the opportunity that I had spent my entire degree here at Western Sydney University preparing for. It's a dream come true to get to spend 10 weeks at NASA JPL," he said.



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Joy Impiombato
Nepean Community & Neighbourhood Services

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NCNS says YES at the referendum

The NCNS Board and Management Team are saying Yes to the Voice. Our Board and Management Team is made up of both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal community members from the Penrith/western Sydney area, and we are united in our support for the Voice. We don't want to tell anyone how to vote, but our hope is that everyone has access to the information they need to be comfortable and confident in the decision they make.

We acknowledge that there are

many opinions on the referendum question, and we also respect every person's right to their own view on the matter. We also know that while NCNS as an organisation supports the Voice, our staff members will have a range of views.

The NCNS Board encourages our community to educate themselves about the Referendum, by going to Reconciliation Australia's website on the Voice to Parliament, and Yes23.

We know that no democratic system is perfect, but something

is better than nothing. We work with the community and see the impacts of generational disadvantage that have resulted from colonisation. Listening to communities is how we get solutions that work. Listening to communities and making realistic recommendations on matters relevant to Aboriginal people is what the Voice will provide. And Recognising Aboriginal people as the First Peoples of Australia will be a powerful statement, that will set us up for making Australia united, stronger and fairer for

everyone – both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal.

The Voice is a vehicle to deliver real improvements for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in:

- Life expectancy
- Infant mortality and health
- Education and employment

There are so many ways that we can make a difference. Get educated and make your vote count. Reach out to us at info@nepeancommunity.org.au to find out more about what the Voice could mean for our community.

AEC launches new campaign

The Australian Electoral Commission has launched the main phase of referendum education advertising, reminding voters Your Answer Matters in the lead up to the 2023 referendum.

The campaign, which will be shown on a range of channels, aims to assist and educate Australians to get vote ready for the referendum – providing information resources, translated and accessible material.

Australian Electoral Commissioner Tom Rogers said the campaign is deliberately starting before the referendum voting date is announced.

"It's been 24 years since we last had a referendum," Rogers said.

"Approximately 6.4 million enrolled Australians weren't of voting age when we had our most recent referendum in 1999 – for a lot of people



the role of a referendum won't be familiar.

"This campaign ramps up the public education

we've been doing all year, educating Australians

about the importance of referendums and how to

cast a formal vote."

The campaign will also encourage people to update their enrolment

details or enrol to vote at the referendum.

This follows a recent announcement of record growth in general, Indigenous and youth enrolment rates.

"This isn't the time to rest on our laurels," Rogers said.

"We've seen record growth over the past six months but we're conscious there's still more to do – and it's also important that newly-enrolled Australians turn out to vote at the referendum as well."

The Your Answer Matters campaign explains why referendums are held, how to correctly complete the ballot paper and encourages people to check the source of information about the voting process.

Advertising will be shown on television, online video, radio, cinema, press, digital display, and social media.

Submit your story to this page!

The Dharug Connection is a weekly page in the *Weekender* dedicated to information and education about the local Indigenous community.

We encourage content submissions for this page from the community, whether it be from

businesses with a story to tell, or organisations promoting their services available to the Indigenous community.

"We were really proud to receive funding from the Walkley Foundation to help make The Dharug Connection a reality

earlier this year," said *Western Weekender* Managing Editor, Troy Dodds.

"We have presented a great variety of content since launching the concept, which has been informative for not just the Indigenous community itself

but for the wider community in learning about Indigenous culture and issues."

To submit a content piece to The Dharug Connection, please email news@westernweekender.com.au or call our newsroom on 4722 2998.

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Bronwyn Nuttall
Nepean Community & Neighbourhood Centre

www.nepeancommunity.org.au

Cranebrook High students cultural visit

Last week, 25 students from Cranebrook High School's Wiruwi Group visited Katoomba for a cultural outing. Wiruwi is the Dharawal word for "girl". The Wiruwi Group is a weekly activity for Aboriginal students at Cranebrook High

group were lucky to come across an amazing bower, created by the Satin Bower Bird. Being August (or Wiritjiribin – the Aboriginal cold and windy season), it is the mating season of the Bower bird, so his bower was filled with shiny objects and blue things to reflect



School. Each week the class takes a look at a different aspect of Aboriginal culture. In Term 3 this has included lessons on the Aboriginal Seasons, Aboriginal culture and science, Totems and Skins, Caring for Country, and the Three Sisters.

Last week the group went up to Katoomba to continue their learning about the Three Sisters, and met with Indigenous Ranger, Uncle Lester. He took them on a guided walk through the bush, pointing out the plants that are used in bush tucker and bush medicine.

They also learnt about how Aboriginal people traditionally related to the local fauna. The

his glorious colours. The girls heard from Uncle Lester about the stories of both the Bower bird and the Lyre Bird and the way both birds are represented in dance, song and dreaming stories.

Uncle Lester showed a huge range of traditional artefacts, and NCNS Aboriginal Youth Worker Leonie had the opportunity to show how the tools would have been used and worn by the female ancestors.

The Wiruwi program at Cranebrook High is one of many examples of how culture is being passed down to the young ones, as mob from different nations walk together on Dharug country.

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NCNS says 'Yes' as referendum nears

On October 14, we are going to the polls for an important reason. To support the Voice, so that Aboriginal Australians and Australians can take the next step together to create the future direction for this united, diverse, and amazing country we share.

The reason I am committed to the Yes vote is that thousands of Aboriginal people have been working on this for over 14

years. The consultation process enjoyed bipartisan support until only very recently. It's a shame that politics has entered the discussion and taken away from what so many have worked towards.

The Voice is about Aboriginal people having a say about the matters that effect their lives - health, housing, education. It will bring the voices of local communities to the forefront

in solving local community problems. Most importantly, constitutional recognition though symbolic is an important next step in righting the wrongs of past years.

When I speak to Aboriginal community members, they are often worried about a future should the No vote succeed. Aboriginal Australians suffer the highest rates of disadvantage of any group in this country. This

is our opportunity to make that right and make this country fair, which is a principle we all find so Australian and important.

Let's not be diverted by the fear campaigns associated with the No vote, look at the Uluru statement yourselves and vote with your heart for a future that is inclusive of all Australians. Here in Penrith, we have a big Aboriginal population, let's support them at this important time!

Extraordinary new murals honour elders

A mural at Chifley College Dunheved Campus has been completed, with the addition of a section including Indigenous elders Uncle Greg Simms, and Aunty Edna Watson.

The mural, painted as part of a collaboration between local artist Shannon Boyd and Zachary Bennett-Brook of Saltwater



Dreamtime, stands in the same courtyard of Chifley College Dunheved Campus as

their last mural of Uncle Wes, completed in May.

After the first part of the mural was completed earlier this year, Boyd told the *Weekender* he couldn't be happier with how it turned out, recalling being approached by the school to do the

large project after doing some work for them a few years prior.

"It was great to finally link up with Zac and put our styles together," he said.

"It turned out how I envisioned it, and has been really well received."

Continuing to work with the school's Aboriginal

Education Officer Kerry Burns, Principal Jennifer Ribeiro, and others to ensure all the proper respect, permissions and designs were approved and appropriate, the second part of the mural was completed earlier this month, just in time for NAIDOC week celebrations and an assembly paying tribute and respects to the Dharug Elders, which occurred at the school earlier this week.

According to Boyd, the idea of the design was to have Uncle Greg Simms and Aunty Edna Watson mirroring Uncle Wes, with the orange and sepia palette inspired by the Yellow Sun and Red Earth, as well as incorporating the orange branding of the Chifley campuses.

- Cassidy Pearce

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