

PHAIWA launches the 9th edition of the WA Indigenous Storybook

Sunni Wilson

Since its very first edition and subsequent launch in Broome in 2011, the WA Indigenous Storybook series continues to successfully fulfil its initial objective, to provide a platform for Aboriginal people to share their stories and to showcase the myriad of positive programs and projects taking place throughout Western Australia.

Storytelling has been part of Aboriginal culture for thousands of years and it remains a vital way to ensure that Aboriginal heritage is passed onto the younger generations today. The telling of the more contemporary stories within the WA Indigenous Storybooks, supports this principle by sharing the positive things that are occurring in many Aboriginal communities in Western Australia.

It has always been challenging to easily locate positive literature relating to Aboriginal people. In fact, a media analysis conducted by the Public Health Advocacy Institute of WA (PHAIWA) in 2012, found that 74 per cent of articles on Aboriginal people in the mainstream media were negative. This analysis clearly indicated that there needed to be a more balanced view of Australian Aboriginal health to policy makers and the focus needed to be on positive models of change and commitment in Aboriginal communities. To help drive this change, PHAIWA decided that a compilation of stories to highlight, share and celebrate positive stories about Aboriginal people and communities was necessary. Subsequently the WA Indigenous Storybook was created; a strengths based and culturally appropriate resource which provides Aboriginal people with a voice, provides a permanent record of projects and history, and contributes to social and emotional wellbeing.

This innovative initiative by PHAIWA has now seen the completion of nine editions, with the latest edition launched in April 2018. All editions focus on a geographic region of WA and the stories are diverse in content. The storybooks implement a holistic approach on the premise that health encompasses not only physical, but spiritual, cultural, social and emotional health as well. In particular for Aboriginal people, a tangible relationship to Country and a connection to culture is vital to their health and wellbeing outcomes. For this reason, stories are drawn from both the health sector and from sectors outside of health, and many focus on projects and programs that aim to strengthen and maintain Aboriginal culture.

Numerous stories across the nine editions focus on role models and Elders, and people who run successful ventures in their communities. Other stories include programs that focus on the environment, housing, education, employment, transport, cultural tourism, animal management, sport and recreation, language and personal journeys. The stories speak of hope and resilience, successful partnerships and community champions. The one aspect the stories all have in common is the celebration of Aboriginal achievement.



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Dr Melissa Stoneham and Hon.
Ben Wyatt MLA

PHAIWA launches the 9th edition of the WA Indigenous Storybook cont.



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It was fitting then, that we were invited to hold the launch of our latest edition—the Pilbara edition, as part of the Karijini Experience which is held annually at Karijini National Park in the Pilbara region to celebrate Aboriginal achievement. The launch took place under a large marquee which was set up on the Karijini airstrip. It was an inviting space in a very special location with colourful cushions and chairs, and stalls including a one run by locals for guests to try out local medicinal bush products.

The Pilbara edition containing 14 stories was officially launched by the Hon. Ben Wyatt MLA and attended by over half of our storytellers, all who had all travelled to be there. Several storytellers had the opportunity to speak about their projects and future plans and liaise with politicians and stakeholders. Ben Wyatt spoke about how governments spend a lot of policy time on the challenges facing Aboriginal people and a limited amount of time on documenting and promoting positive outcomes. He believes that governments can only really succeed in those gaps around health in particular, by engaging in successful partnerships with Aboriginal people and ensuring Aboriginal people are key players in determining their own health and wellbeing outcomes.

It was a wonderful turnout and the feedback from storytellers and guests alike was overwhelmingly positive. The launch of the ninth edition really is testament to how well Aboriginal people and communities have embraced this project.

We are proud to be able to facilitate the storytelling process for the many inspiring projects across all our editions. To read the nine editions and to find out more, please visit PHAIWA's [website](#).



The Storytellers: (L-R, front) Troy Hill, Kevin Allanson, Gina Turangi, Melissa Stoneham, Amelia Scheele, Anne Hayes, Lesley Murray (L-R, back) Nathane Graham, Glenys Hayes, Dallas Hayes, Rob Donovan