



# THE WEST AUSTRALIAN INDIGENOUS STORYBOOK



CELEBRATING & SHARING  
GOOD NEWS STORIES



The Perth & Peel Edition





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**Cover Photo - Photo Credit Sunni Wilson** The Western Australian Christmas Tree (*Nyctia floribunda*) or Moodja is one of the largest hemi parasitic plants in the world. When it flowers the hot weather is on its way and people should be making their way to the coast following the six Seasons Cycle. The Noongar people made use of the species during the season Kambarang, around October to early December, obtaining bark to make shields. The gum that exudes from the wound can be collected later, it is sweet and eaten raw.



In the 2012 Perth/Peel edition of the West Australian Indigenous Storybook, we were delighted to publish a story on the Australian Indigenous HealthInfoNet. The storyteller was Professor Neil Thomson, who described the journey of developing and growing this service. He told us that HealthInfoNet's role was to promote collaboration and provide and disseminate a wide range of free information and knowledge via the web and that some days there are over 4000 visitors. It is with deep regret we advise that Professor Neil Thomson passed away peacefully on the 24th January 2016, surrounded by his loving family. Neil was a passionate, brilliant and generous man whose long and distinguished career was dedicated to promoting and improving the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Neil held tertiary training in medicine, mathematics, anthropology and public health. In 1997, Neil became the founding Director of HealthInfoNet, which is now a nationally respected service.

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# INTRODUCTION

You are about to read the seventh Western Australian Indigenous Storybook – and many say seven is a lucky number. There are seven days of the week, seven colours of the rainbow, seven notes on a musical scale, seven seas and seven continents. And although I could not find any reference to the number seven in Australian Indigenous culture, seven is considered lucky in the traditional Chinese culture, where it represents the combination of Yin, Yang and Five Elements (Metal, Wood, Water, Fire and Earth). This combination is considered as “harmony” in the ideology of Confucianism.

Harmony - now here is a concept that we can relate to Australian Indigenous culture. Throughout all of our WA Indigenous Storybooks, we have showcased many stories that demonstrate how Australian Aboriginal people live in harmony with nature and how harmony and spirituality are so closely aligned. This edition is no different. We feature a number of stories that talk about harmony and connections to land and culture – like the Bindi Bindi Dreaming, the Madjitol Moorna Choir and The Yonga Boys. However, being a metropolitan focused edition, this Storybook also emphasises the harmonies and connections between people and services, and highlights the importance of keeping culture strong in the City. Every story in this edition is a celebration and the Public Health Advocacy Institute of Western Australia, along with our primary funder Healthway, are very proud of each and every storyteller – not only in this edition but in all editions of our positively focused and highly valued WA Indigenous Storybook.

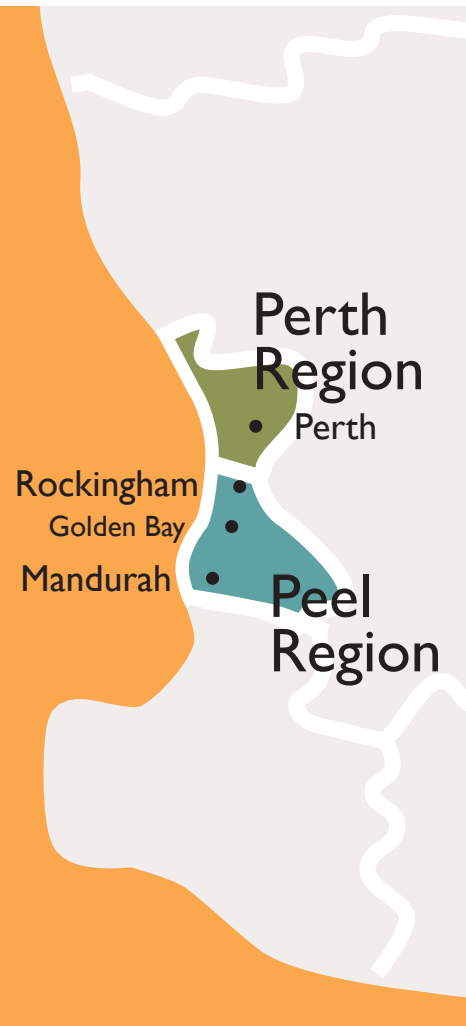


Personally, I don't think we will ever run out of positive stories to showcase in these books. Yet I still see a need for these types of resources. Let me tell you a story. I was reading a novel recently and I came across this paragraph: "Hamish stared at the back of the man's neck. He'd never been this close to an Aboriginal person. In fact, he'd never even talked to an Aboriginal person before. But Hamish had seen enough on television to draw his own conclusions – you didn't have to be an anthropologist to figure it out. Aboriginal communities were troubled places, full of dysfunctional families; doped-up teens and lazy parents. People who said they wanted to work but never did. People who claimed they needed housing but didn't respect it when the government gave it to them. People who made excuses for themselves, who let bad things happen to their children in the name of culture. People who took handouts, but no responsibility."<sup>1</sup> I paused. It was embarrassing to read. As a white Australian, I was offended. I could only imagine how an Australian Aboriginal person might feel if they read this. Yet it cemented the reasons why PHAIWA continues to so strongly advocate for the dissemination of positive stories that are so valuable, appreciated and readily available from our WA Aboriginal communities and people. I would like to think that Australia is a modern nation of enormous diversity – and one that starts to embrace and cherish our Aboriginal heritage and culture. This Storybook attempts to do this...we hope you enjoy reading the stories.

<sup>1</sup> Higgins F (2014) *Wife on the Run*. Allen & Unwin, Sydney.

## ABOUT THE PERTH & PEEL REGIONS

- In the 2011 Census there were 27,102 Indigenous persons usually resident in the Greater Perth Region which includes up to Yanchep (north), down to the Yalgorup National Park (south), Armadale and Pinjarra. This represents 1.6% of the total population
- Perth is the capital and largest city of the Australian state of Western Australia. It is the fourth most populous city in Australia, with an estimated population of 1.74 million living in the Perth metropolitan area
- The Peel Region is 5650km<sup>2</sup>. It includes the towns on Boddington, Dwellingup, Mandurah, Pinjarra, Jarrahdale and Waroona
- The Peel Region has a diverse economy based on mining and construction, although manufacturing, retail, tourism, agriculture, forestry and fishing also make valuable contributions



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<http://www.thewheatbelt.com.au/>

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# YARNING IT UP: DON'T SMOKE IT UP

## ORGANISATION NAME:

South Metropolitan Population Health Unit

## CONTACT PERSON:

Deanna Eades or Robert Morrison

## EMAIL AND WEBSITE:

[www.southmetropolitan.health.wa.gov.au](http://www.southmetropolitan.health.wa.gov.au)

## PROGRAM / PROJECT PARTNERS:

Derbarl Yerrigan Health Service

## KEY STAFF / PEOPLE INVOLVED:

Robert Morrison and Deanna Eades

## KEY WORDS:

Yarning it Up - Don't Smoke It Up

Quitting tobacco is a journey; it was a journey of discovery, now it's a journey of recovery

It took time to be a smoker – so it takes time to be a non-smoker



## Once upon a time...

around four and a half years ago, I came on board at South Metropolitan Population Health Unit to work on a project to tackle smoking that had previously been running for six months prior to my appointment. The project was funded for four years under the national Close the Gap funding. We named the project Yarning It Up because that's one of the things Aboriginal people like to do; yarn, talk and discuss. When I started I attached a specific logo and a slogan to the project so that people became familiar with it quite quickly.

I knew that several of the health agencies' currently tackling smoking cessation presented their information in a manner which made the participant feel guilty about their smoking habit and we wanted to use a different approach. So, we developed a new

## About the storytellers...

Robert Morrison is the Health Promotion Project Officer at the South Metropolitan Health Service.

Deanna Eades is the Senior Project Officer at the South Metropolitan Health Service.

## About Yarning it Up-Don't Smoke it Up...

Yarning it Up-Don't Smoke it Up is a smoking cessation program specifically designed for metropolitan Aboriginal adults. The teams' aim is to reduce smoking by yarning with community, training staff, promoting smoke free homes and referral to holistic smoking cessation services. The program uses interactive smoking cessation messages and shares up-to-date information using a non-judgemental approach.

model that was more culturally appropriate than current educational models available in the health sector:

The way we present information and our entire approach is positive. We have tailored the message to be about a journey of discovery and recovery that the smoker undertakes. The slogan is: "Quitting tobacco is a journey. It was a journey of discovery, now it is a journey of recovery." Our vision was to introduce a new way of thinking, which becomes a new way of dealing with quitting tobacco. The other slogan we use throughout our resources is: "It took time to be a smoker so it takes time to be a non-smoker."

The logo we developed represents the individual's journey and it contains many layers of understanding. It tells the individual several things. One is that mind, body and spirit must be equal to each other in order to be well. The double spiral in the middle of the logo represents the individual journey, one track (black and orange) represents the spiral of despair and the other track (lined road) is the road of recovery. The outer circle of the logo has four parts incorporated in its journey. Not ready (Yarning it Up), Thinking (first set of footprints), Doing (Don't smoke it Up), Sticking to it (Second set of footprints).



*Robert Morrison and Deanna Eades*



*Robert delivering a workshop*

## And then one day...

once we developed the model, we needed resources to accompany it to form the basis of our educational workshops. We produced several clinical booklets which relate directly to the different stages of the model; Two booklets for each section of the model. During the workshops, the participant is given the corresponding booklet as to where they are at on their journey.

Our main focus is to educate using the model as a reference point. Our target group is Aboriginal people 18 years and older and we deliver our workshops all over the south metropolitan area. We don't actively seek engagements; rather we are contacted by different organisations and invited to speak at different events. We present at Aboriginal events, cultural days, NAIDOC week, and any other forums happening locally throughout the South Metro area. Our workshop sessions involve explaining the tobacco model and we present our information in the way Aboriginal people have communicated for thousands of years, which is to sit down and yarn, which we find is the most effective style of approach.

For the five years I've been a part of the project, I've not come across any negative feedback and a key component to that is our non-judgmental approach. We don't tell people to quit smoking. We feel we are past the point of telling people that tobacco kills them. Everyone knows it kills and they don't need to be told something they already know. Instead we present them with the information and then it's up to them to decide how to process it and to make a choice as to whether they will embrace the journey

to quitting tobacco. We have found that people really respond to this style of information sharing.

The information that we do gather from people is shared freely, not reluctantly. We also allow the session to be led by the people in the room. When sharing our messages we do so in a manner in which the messages are embraced by people and not resisted. We haven't changed method in which we share information in five years. We have noticed over time that people are grasping the information quicker than when we first started presenting. We also run information stalls at different events such as multicultural week, World No Tobacco Day and Harmony Day to share our message.

## And because of that...

as there are only two project officers working on this program, Deanna and I, we are able to cover the whole South Metro area. Although we target



*"It is my hope and vision that this model will become the baseline for people, clinicians and organisations who are working with people to quit tobacco, Australia wide."*



people 18 and over; we know that this is not the only group affected by tobacco smoke. However, it is our hope that by educating adults, it will have a flow on effect to young people and teenagers who may be susceptible to taking up smoking. Also, we hope that our sessions will provide a clear understanding of the effect of second hand smoke on children and others who may passively breathe in the smoke. We evaluate every session and stall that we run. Pre and post evaluation forms are completed by our participants so we can ascertain if our methods are effective. Our project has also been evaluated and can be obtained through the South Metropolitan Population Health Unit. The evaluation process keeps us focused and driven given that none of our workshops are the same and neither are our sessions. The same information is given out but the flow in which it begins and ends is always different.

Our educational sessions run for a minimum of one hour. We cover the model thoroughly. This includes understanding the logo, triggers and barriers to smoking, a personal recovery plan and educational information in regards to tobacco. We also provide a list of other support services. Once our participants are finished, they leave equipped with the knowledge that is needed on self-awareness versus the knowledge to survive in a social environment. On average we run one session per week but last month for instance we held around three sessions per week.

A lot of people come to the office and update us on their progress. We also try to revisit previous places we have been once every three months.

## And since that day...

although we don't have the resources to follow up on people months and years later, we have produced and released a book which provides a snapshot of people's personal journeys with tobacco. There are 35 people stories. The people who feature in this book are current smokers, ex-smokers, non-smokers, a whole range who share their views on smoking and their journey into tobacco and out of tobacco. It features young and old. Some people are still current smokers but they have all said they wish they hadn't taken it up.

We've also released two reports; the first one was in partnership with another program, titled Exploring Healthy Lifestyle messages for Aboriginal people in Perth Metropolitan Area. It provides guidelines and information for organisations that are developing



*Robert with participants*

healthy lifestyle messages to Aboriginal people in Perth and provides an understanding on how Aboriginal people perceive healthy lifestyle messages.

I enjoy this job very much. Everything I do, I try to achieve more quality and quantity in less time. As we have been doing it for five years, all our current work has become evidence based.

We have never had anything but positive feedback, in my view I believe the project is successful because the model really works.

We recently presented a paper at the 3rd Annual Diabetes WA Forum and the Oceania Tobacco Conference where we shared the Journey to quit model. Every step of the model and the journey the participant embarks on was explained. It is my hope and vision that this model will become the baseline for people, clinicians and organisations who are working with people to quit tobacco, Australia wide.

## The Model...

The model begins at the first stage 'Yarning it Up' and journeys through stages that assist with the goal of quitting tobacco. The "Don't Smoke It Up" was the key phrase to remember when confronted by whichever trigger or barrier presents itself. The single pair of footprints on each side represent a solo journey to quit. It shows a cycle of continuous learning.





# JOSIE JANZ-DAWSON: A PERSONAL JOURNEY



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KEY WORDS:  
Netball, mentoring, connection, culture,  
resilience, independence



## About Josephine Janz-Dawson...

Josephine Janz-Dawson plays professional netball for West Coast Fever. She was born on Thursday Island in the Torres Strait and spent most of her childhood living in the Kimberley town of Derby. It was in Derby where she developed her love of netball through playing in local teams. She moved to Perth after receiving a scholarship to attend Presbyterian Ladies College and a position playing in the WA under 17's netball team. During her netball career, Josephine also trained at the Australian Institute of Sport in Canberra. As well as playing for West Coast Fever, Josephine currently works at the Wirrpanda Foundation as the Program Manager of the Deadly Sista Girlz program.

a lot of the community were made up of Aboriginal people, with most people coming from Mowanjumb, the outskirts stations or the Dampier Peninsula. Racism was rare.

I played a lot of sport and I loved school. I started playing netball when I was eight and we didn't have a junior team then so we used to train a lot. A lot of the time it was just a whole bunch of Aboriginal kids getting together to hang out and play sport. Our coach Jane Edwards was an Aboriginal woman so it was a very inclusive environment.

My dad was quite strict, especially regarding education. Our parents had high expectations about what they wanted us to achieve. If there were sporting carnivals or trips to regional areas, school work always came first before we could go. My dad never referred to us as Indigenous kids. He never once said, "You are black kids and I'm a white man." I never saw the black and the white; to me it was just mum and dad. It wasn't until I got older that there were a lot of questions from younger people asking if my dad was my real dad. During my childhood it seemed white people had relationships with white people and black with black and society deemed it controversial if there was a cross over.

My parents got divorced when I was eight but they both remained in Derby. I have an older brother and a younger sister. My brother lived with mum and my sister and I lived with dad. We made the decision

## Once upon a time...

I was born in 1988 on Thursday Island, which is in the Torres Strait. The Torres Strait Islands are situated between mainland Australia and Papua New Guinea. My mum is Torres Strait Islander and part Papua New Guinean and my dad is white. He grew up in Australia and is of German descent. We moved from Queensland to the Northern Territory when I was a toddler and my younger sister was born in Katherine, NT. At that time we were living at a community in the central desert of Australia called Lajamanu. When I was four, we moved to Derby as my dad got a job working for the Aboriginal Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC). We remained in Derby for many years. My dad was a Senior Field Officer and did a lot of work in Aboriginal communities. I had a great life in Derby. I went to school from pre-primary to year nine at Derby District High School. In Derby

to live with dad, which upset mum at the time but we knew it was the right thing to do. I felt my mum wasn't strict enough with us as she is a very relaxed and carefree person. Although my dad was strict, my sister and I knew he would provide a more structured home environment. Once my parents got divorced we were exposed to the idea of a black world and a white world. In the white world there were things like routine, saving money and not a lot of flexibility. With mum, life was much more carefree, more of a "living on the edge" type of lifestyle.

The positive aspect was I felt I could pick and choose what I enjoyed about both. Mum's world was very connected to family and culture and dad's was more focused on individual needs and doing what's best to get ahead in life. Growing up with these two perspectives, I have empathy for Aboriginal people trying to assimilate both worlds and being forced into a structured environment in which they may not feel comfortable.

### And then one day...

when I was 13, a couple of netball selectors came to Derby and selected three of us to go to Perth for trials. I played as a goal shooter at that stage but when we went to trials they identified me as a natural defender so they moved me into that position which I didn't really like. They also thought I was older

because of my height, given that I'm tall. They flew me down to the state school girls' trials, it was my first time in Perth and I didn't know anybody. My heart was racing when I arrived and I was so anxious about the training environment. I was just thinking, "Don't stuff up, and don't ask questions." The whole two days were just a blur and I remember clearly wanting to go to the bathroom and cry all the time. After all of that, I didn't get in. They didn't communicate as to why and I just wanted to leave and never go back again. I thought it was the worst experience of my life.

As I had been the only girl chosen to be sent to the state trials from North-West regional WA, I felt a lot of pressure to be a certain player. That pressure definitely affected my netball playing in a negative way. I had built up this psychology that when I was on court everyone was watching me and talking about me because I was the kid who was good at netball.

The following year I went to the under 17's state trials in Perth again. Although I had bad memories from the year before and hadn't made the state under 15's, there was a coach who really believed in me and wanted me to give it another shot. She was of the view that this time, I'd definitely be selected. I was 15 at the time and I really wasn't sure. My dad encouraged me to go; he was all about getting us to extend our comfort zones. His philosophy was, "Let's throw you in the deep end and hope you can swim."



*Cable Beach Primary School (Wirrpanda Foundation)*



*Parkwood Primary School Intensive  
English Centre (Australia Post One  
Netball program)*

When I came to Perth, they introduced me to another Indigenous player named Kirby who was undoubtedly the best player. I immediately loved her and thought, "If this Aboriginal girl is the best player and everyone wanted to be like her, I could relate to her." At the end of the day, your netball needs to do the talking. She was shy, shame, as I was, but she made me feel welcome and encouraged me to warm up with her. I saw how everyone loved her and how they all wanted to be in her group. I thought don't be shame, just play.

At the end of the trial, when I was in Year 10, I received a scholarship to go to Presbyterian Ladies College (PLC). I was very focussed on doing well in high school and on my netball. PLC provided lots of excellent opportunities for me. I was appointed the Reconciliation Captain for the school in Year 12 and attended regular Future Footprints Program activities. Future Footprints is an additional support structure for Indigenous students from regional and remote areas of WA attending residential schools in Perth.

By the end of my first week of school at PLC I received a letter saying that I was in the state team. I didn't really know what was going to happen. I didn't really understand what playing at the National Championships was, whereas the majority of the team already knew the netball pathway to playing for Australia. All I really knew about was representing Derby and the North-West. I had no expectations

about what we were going to achieve; I didn't know which teams were the hardest to play against or who was scouted as being the next big thing. I didn't have any pre-conceived ideas about my limitations.

Sometimes I rocked up late to training and I couldn't provide a clear answer as to why I was late. My only experience with netball training sessions was from my time in Derby. Those sessions had a very relaxed starting time with some people arriving half an hour later, so the idea of structure and strict time commitments was a relatively new concept for me. I used to walk in casually and people would already be doing drills. They would say, "Didn't you know training started at 4.30pm?" I would say, "Yes but its 4.30pm now." They would answer, "If you're five minutes early, you're already late." They also used to say, "You've got to earn my respect." However, in my culture if you're an adult and an Elder you've immediately got respect and it's not until it's lost that it's otherwise. So the way I saw it, there were 12 players and four coaches who I already respected even though I didn't know their stories. I think some people are so text-book in their approach to learning and teaching that they have forgotten how to connect and how to use their thinking ability.

It took some time for me to adjust to a different way of thinking and stop feeling shame. Going through this experience, I realised I didn't want others to go through it, so if a new girl came into the state netball team I would be the first one to approach her and make her feel at home and comfortable in her new environment. I'd invite her to warm up with me and encourage her to ask questions.

## And because of that...

after I completed my TEE, I got a scholarship with the Australian Institute of Sport (AIS) in Canberra. I went there for two years and enrolled in a Bachelor of Science at the Australian National University (ANU) at the same time. I found out pretty quickly that

*"I try to inspire  
young girls to take on the  
challenges that come their way and  
cultivate a growth mindset to keep  
learning and developing."*





committing to both was going to be tricky. Because of my university commitments, I was missing a lot of netball training. As I was on a netball scholarship I was told that if my course work was clashing with my training I had to give it up. So I did. I was easily moulded back in those days. I enjoyed my time at the AIS. It was strict but it was much more flexible than my dad would ever allow, so in my mind, I had quite a bit of freedom. I turned 18 in Canberra and those two years were a big personal growth period. I learned about independence and resilience, two very strong themes for me.

After I finished my scholarship I went home to Derby, keen to take a year off and enjoy the Kimberley lifestyle. However, I was home for about a week when the West Coast Fever coach called to invite me to be one of the first contracted players. I told her I needed a week to decide because I was so homesick. I had also put on 10 kilos in a year after being in Canberra and I felt overweight and unfit and I wasn't really enjoying my netball. The idea of pursuing and leading a successful life didn't even cross my mind at that stage. I thought I could just work at Woolworths for a while and enjoy being at home. I spoke to my dad and he said I couldn't pass up this opportunity. So as fast as I was home, I was back in Perth, living with Sue Gaudion, who was the head coach of West Coast Fever, while I set myself up. Sue was the original coach who had come to Derby and encouraged me to go to trials, so I trusted her a lot. There was a Perth girl who was playing for Australia at the time, and there were billboards of her up at Challenge Stadium. Sue would say to me, "You see that photo? That could be you." I didn't believe her. Although I played netball because I loved it, I never had the fire and competitiveness that all the other girls did.

I trialed at the Australian 21/U camp and afterwards the Australian Diamonds coach told me I needed to lose five kilos and I walked away thinking, 'whatever'. My attitude was; if it was meant to happen, it would happen. I never believed in working really hard to get fit. They told me during every season, and I disregarded their advice. The idea of nutrition and losing weight was a foreign concept; I didn't even know where to begin. I didn't grow up eating really healthy food. People would tell me to fix things but never showed me the pathway to achieving it. We had support staff available but I was too embarrassed to talk to them as I felt they would judge me. The idea of being fit was a real barrier for me. I would justify not making teams because I wasn't fit enough. In hindsight this was actually a protective measure



*Parkwood Primary School Intensive English Centre (Australia Post One Netball program)*



*"It is my hope to be involved in positions that create real change for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, whether it's through netball or the work I do in the community with the Wirrpanda Foundation."*

because I had an excuse as to why I didn't make it. I never really tried or played my best at the trials. I was worried that if I was the fittest girl in the group and I still didn't make it then that meant I just wasn't good enough. In time, I realised I needed to get fit to play my best netball in order to work out if I had reached my limit, and there was nothing more I could give. I put myself out there and tried this approach for a year. I decided to get fit and eat healthy. It paid off. I lost weight and was playing better netball. I think losing the weight showed the coaches that I really wanted it. Around this time I had some disappointments, such as not being named in the Australian 21/U squad. However, this just spurred me on and motivated me to come back and be a better player. I also found a more competitive edge with

the other defenders. I had always helped everyone else, but it wasn't always reciprocated as everyone is there for themselves so I needed to change my mentality. It's something I still work on today, having that individual fire. Not long after this happened, the captain for the Australian 21's team injured herself, and they wanted me to go to Jamaica as a fill in. So I went and it was a great feeling. Although I was just an invitee, I had more pride in being an invitee than being automatically selected as a squad member and experienced what it felt like to want to be there and be competitive.

### And since that day...

I've now been playing for West Coast Fever for the last seven years, since I was 20. My position is goal defence/goal keeper. The coach who told me that I needed to lose five kg's also said to me that you never play your best netball until you're about 25. I found it was true for me. You stop worrying about looking fit and running around on the court, and you start to use your brain more. The smarts are what make you a good player. My goals at the start of the year are things such as being in the starting seven; to be the best defence West Coast Fever has; to be the only option the coaches look at. We have a new assistant coach and when she looked at the list of my goals she asked me what my team goals were. I explained that it will make sense later; I need to achieve these personal goals because my first priority for this team was always to build the best team around me. I never thought if I played my best netball I'd be well respected, it was always about wanting to help everyone else - I wanted them to be better than me. I think that has come from my upbringing-it is in my blood; we think about the collective rather than the individual. To that end, I am really enjoying my work with the Wirrpanda Foundation where I now work during the week. I fit my netball training in every morning between 8am and 10am and represent my team during the season. I am also required to travel for interstate games so life is busy. However, the Wirrpanda Foundation is a flexible working environment and they support me so I can fit it all in.

I'm the program manager of The Deadly Sista Girlz Program which is a program that aims to build proud Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander girls that thrive in the Third Space. It is delivered by strong Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander role models and mentors who offer a stable environment in which they can discuss current and personal issues they may be

facing. Each girl has the opportunity to be personally mentored throughout the program and also make positive social interactions with their fellow sista girlz in a fun and caring environment.

The concept of our Deadly Sista Girlz program is based around connecting with the girls; sharing identity and where they're from, what they feel their Aboriginality is (whether it's expressed through art, dance or another medium), exploring their family history and anything that enables them to be creative. There's a real strength in knowing who you are and where you come from, it's really important for Aboriginal people to express their identity and find power in that. We talk to a lot of kids in the city who might not know a lot about their familial ties or their history. In contrast, we can head out to regional areas and most young people can name their language group and where their Country is - so connecting those dots is really important and a big focus of the program.

It is my hope to be involved in roles that create real change for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, whether it's through netball or the work I do in the community with the Wirrpanda Foundation. I try to inspire young girls to take on the challenges that come their way and cultivate a growth mindset to keep learning and developing. We all have a story to share and you never know, what you say and share with others may encourage them to be a better person or even turn their whole life around.



*Josie in Pre-Primary, Derby*

# LANGFORD ABORIGINAL ASSOCIATION

## ORGANISATION NAME:

Langford Aboriginal Association (LAA)

## CONTACT PERSON:

Angela Ryder

## EMAIL AND WEBSITE:

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admin@laalangford.com.au

## KEY STAFF / PEOPLE INVOLVED:

Angela Ryder, Jill Abdullah

## KEY WORDS:

Heart of our Community

## About the storyteller...

Angela Ryder is the Chairperson of the Langford Aboriginal Association and the manager of Aboriginal Programs with Relationships Australia. She is a Nyoongar woman who is originally from Katanning but has lived and worked in Perth for 26 years. She works to ensure equitable access to services for all Aboriginal people.

## About Langford Aboriginal Association Inc...

Langford Aboriginal Association is a not for profit community organisation which delivers programs to benefit the local Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal community.



*LAA Health Program*

## Once upon a time...

back in the late 1990's, I became involved in an organisation called Boogurlarri Community House, which has since been named the William Langford Community House. During my time on their committee, which was mainly comprised of non-Aboriginal people, management decided it would be beneficial to access Aboriginal funding. The Aboriginal community members also believed there weren't enough services in the area (within the City of Gosnells) for Aboriginal people so it was suggested that we form an Aboriginal Association so that we could assist the mainstream organisation to access Aboriginal funding. Although Boogurlarri had an Aboriginal name, the services weren't specifically for Aboriginal people. Given this, it made sense to



form Langford Aboriginal Association (LAA) for the many Aboriginal community members in the area, and in 2000 we subsequently became incorporated. Becoming incorporated put us in a position to apply for independent funding.

I was appointed the inaugural Chairperson. After the first year I stepped down, however, I resumed my tenure in 2002, and have remained in the position since. We formed LAA with an aim to provide services and programs for Aboriginal people. Our initial grant was for \$3000, and I remember how excited and proud we felt when we secured this funding. We have since recorded our journey through photos and we captured the first of our gatherings together where we made candles, had a pampering session and a big social event with lots of Aboriginal people coming together; it was really wonderful and it was the first step in the LAA journey.

## And then one day...

the Boogurlarri management committee decided that LAA needed to find its own space to operate from, and we were asked to find a premises in a short period of time. It was a shock at the time but in hindsight, it was definitely for the best. We started looking for a new location to run the organisation and found the fantastic space we are in now. Back then, it was a Noongar Kindergarten but only a small



2014 -2015 LANGFORD ABORIGINAL ASSOCIATION COMMITTEE



ANGELA RYDER, RAELEE COOK, TANIA DUDGEON, MERINDA HANSEN, TANYA EDWARDS, MARGY DIA,  
DAWN BESSARAB, ANNE OXENHAM, ADRIAN RYDER, GERALDINE MARTIN & CATHY BYNDER

*LAA Management Committee Members*

area of it was utilised and the rest of it was empty. I spoke to the Principal at Brookman Primary School (as the Noongar Kindy came under the school) who showed me around and my first thought was, "Wow, there is so much potential here." As it is a City of Gosnells' building, leased through the City, the school obtained approval to sublease it to us. Initially we shared this space with the Kindy. However, back then in mid-2005, there was literally only one person in the office, the Manager, so sharing wasn't an issue. We've been here ever since, and we haven't looked back - the Kindy no longer uses the premises so it's all ours!

Our organisation is primarily driven by funding through successful grants, and over time we have built ourselves up to be stronger and more sustainable. We have never been a big organisation, nor did we grow fast, however due to slow growth over the past decade, we are now in a strong position. Our staff levels have fluctuated during this period, depending

on funding. At one stage we had 13 staff members but currently there are four, and a volunteer gardener. We have a manager (Jill Abdullah), an admin project support person, a language teacher and a finance employee. All staff are part time. Two years ago Lotterywest provided funding to completely refurbish the building which is why it is now so functional and looks great. We now have a commercial kitchen, a community and a bush tucker garden and an open fire pit.

### And because of that...

we run several programs, many of which are in partnership with other organisations. They are all free and open to all ages. The programs are: Noongar Language, Art and Yarning, Grief and Loss, Moorditj Yoka (Women's) Group, Best Start Program and My Time Parent's Group. We also provide onsite outreach services such as Djinda Services (Relationships Australia WA). Our programs are



*LAA community breakfast*

extensive and well attended. The Art and Yarning program runs every Tuesday and is managed by Cathy Bynder who is a Management Committee member and a valued volunteer. Although this program isn't funded anymore, it still operates successfully due to the passion and commitment of several community members. The supplies are provided by the people who attend but the emphasis for this group is to have a safe, culturally appropriate space to come together.

The Noongar Language program which is held once a week in the evening is very well attended. We offer the workshop to both beginners and more advanced participants. It is taught by Merinda Hansen who also teaches English as a Second Language (ESL). She has now taught this class for a number of years. Merinda is also a Management Committee member.

Our Best Start Program is a parenting program in collaboration with the Department of Local Government and Communities. The aim of this program is to develop the skills of parents to get their kids ready for Kindy or Primary School. LAA has now been running this program for the past ten years.

On Wednesdays we hold our Grief and Loss Program in partnership with Relationships Australia, which I am currently facilitating. The sessions run for two and half hours once a fortnight and have been running for the past four years. Although all of our programs are important, this one in particular brings about some remarkable changes in people. One of the women who attends regularly recently said to us, "I was nearly at the end of my tether, but coming here really saved me." Several of the women who attend the Grief and Loss sessions recently participated in a DVD which was produced by four Curtin University

media students. The DVD focused on the themes of grief and loss. It was such an incredible indicator of how far these women have come, from not being able to talk to anyone, to being able to share their experiences on a DVD to help other community members. The DVD is due to be released shortly and is such a positive outcome which has stemmed from one of our programs. The partnership between LAA, Relationships Australia WA and Curtin University has contributed significantly to community.

The LAA programs have excellent attendance because it's a place that feels like home for people, and participants are comfortable in this space. Everything we do is delivered on site which is a conscious decision because we wanted a space in the community which people could access easily. For example, one of our outreach programs is Djinda Services. I am employed by Relationships Australia and manage Djinda Services which is the Perth Aboriginal Family Violence Prevention Legal Service. We run the outreach service one day a week from LAA. This service, along with many of LAA's other outreach programs, ensures that we are able to assist Aboriginal community members that we wouldn't normally be able to.

## And since that day...

we had a huge celebration for our tenth anniversary. In 2010, Cassandra Ryder, our previous manager who was with us for nearly eight years and who loved event managing, organised a fantastic party and we had a great night with lots of people.

One of our success stories is our Women's Group, which was our initial project and started on the back of the first \$3000 grant. It's been running ever since. A core group of women attend and it is an opportunity which the women relish, as it provides the chance to be creative, be together and learn from one another. Participants make candles, have pampering sessions, and participate in sewing as well as yarning and have a catch up.

For those who have never used a sewing machine before, learning that skill has been fantastic - it builds up the women's self-esteem. This term we have been focusing more on cultural endeavours. The group has two folds; it helps the women to overcome isolation and fight off the battles of depression, and it provides new skills and the opportunity to network socially. Many of the women comment that they'd wish they had found the group earlier.



*LAA's Inaugural Flag Raising Ceremony*



*Landscaping the gardens at LAA*

I often wonder about many of the people who access our services, and where they would be today if we weren't here. Several of the founding members, myself included, are still around but a couple of our Elders have passed on and others may not be here much longer. In this cycle of life, we have also seen many people who have been associated with LAA, mainly our Elders, die along the way from different illnesses, predominantly diabetes. When you become part of an Aboriginal organisation, you are exposed to deaths that are affecting the wider community as well so that's an added dimension. If LAA wasn't here, I don't think we'd know each other as well as we do, we really do feel like one big family, which is how it used to be. I come from Katanning and everybody knew everyone, but when you come to Perth, it's an isolated place for many people. On a personal note, I don't know where I'd be if I didn't have the Women's Group every Saturday and the great people that I have met along the way. I would have never have known them and I just can't imagine that.

We have many plans for LAA's future both immediate and long term, but we are dependent on external funding. We are moving in the direction of a cultural centre, which will incorporate both Noongar language and culture. We'd like to develop our bush tucker garden a bit more and have schools access it and learn about bush tucker, and be involved in storytelling. Now that we have a commercial kitchen, we are also looking at the idea of having a café here at LAA. We would start it once a month on a Sunday arvo and people could come and have a coffee and sit under the trees in the garden. One of our long term strategic goals is to secure ongoing sustainable funding which we are currently working towards.

Many of the youth who have accessed our programs over the years have gone onto secure employment in many different fields. One is now a health worker, one is a chef, and one is a bank employee and there are several more who have gained employment in various occupations. It's amazing to look back through the years and recognise that we didn't realise how successful we would be until further down the track. It is just fantastic to see the growth of LAA since its inception. We have many stories to share from the past decade and we are looking forward to making and sharing many more memories.

I, on the other hand have to start my next journey without being a 'driver' of LAA. I am stepping down as Chairperson from LAA. I am confident that LAA will survive, prosper and go from strength to strength. It has been built on a solid foundation and many Moorditj community members will continue to be part of this fantastic organisation far into the future.



*"The LAA programs have excellent attendance because it's a place that feels like home for people, and participants are comfortable in this space."*



# RROSIAC (REDUCING THE RISK OF SIDS IN ABORIGINAL COMMUNITIES)

ORGANISATION NAME:  
SIDS and Kids (WA)

CONTACT PERSON:  
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<http://www.sidsandkidswa.org/safer-sleep/reducing-the-risk-of-sudi-in-aboriginal-communities.aspx>

PROGRAM / PROJECT PARTNERS:  
Reducing the Risk of SIDS in Aboriginal Communities

KEY STAFF / PEOPLE INVOLVED:  
Sherrilee Mead, Monnia Volp-Wise

KEY WORDS:  
Maternal health, babies, women, families, SIDS, infant mortality, safe sleeping

## About the storyteller...

Sherrilee Mead is a Yamatji woman who was born in Mullewa in the Murchison Region. She began in her role as the RROSIAC Program Officer to deliver the RROSIAC program throughout WA in January 2015 with Sids and Kids WA. Sherrilee has a background in Early Education.

## About the RROSIAC Program...

SIDS and Kids Western Australia's Reducing the Risk of SUDI (Sudden Unexpected Death in Infancy) in Aboriginal Communities (RROSIAC) program seeks to reduce the unacceptably high risk of Aboriginal infants dying of SIDS and sleep accidents. The program has been successfully operating throughout WA since 2005.



*Upskilling Aboriginal Health Workers at Bidjgadanga Community*

## Once upon a time...

In 2005, SIDS and Kids Western Australia began a project called the RROSIAC program in order to tackle the continuing and unacceptably high incidences of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) in Aboriginal children. RROSIAC stands for Reducing the Risk Of SIDS In Aboriginal Communities. It started from the results of the Western Australian

Maternal and Child data collection which showed that while the all-cause mortality rate had almost halved in Western Australia over the 15 year period 1992 to 2006, for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal infants, the mortality rate among babies born to Aboriginal women was still more than four times that of babies born to non-Aboriginal women. The data also revealed that the rate of infant mortality attributed to SIDS was eight times greater in Aboriginal infants than non-Aboriginal infants. RROSIAC has been designed specifically for the Western Australian Aboriginal community.

The program has now been running for the past 10 years and it is fully funded by the Commonwealth, Department of Health via the Office of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health (OATSIH). RROSIAC has just recently been refunded for another two years and we deliver state-wide throughout WA. RROSIAC's target groups are Aboriginal families, Aboriginal women during and after their pregnancy, Aboriginal health workers, Aboriginal Early Years services and others who work with Aboriginal families. The program delivers culturally appropriate information on ways to reduce sudden infant death including SIDS and fatal sleep accidents. We use regional health infant mortality statistics to inform and assist us with reaching high risk population areas. The



*“The most important step in our future would be to have more Aboriginal health workers engaged in our training program so they can support our people in the maternal health space. If we can implement these plans, it will go a long way to ensuring the survival of our newborn babies and essentially, our people and our culture.”*

RROSIAC program obtains their statistics from both national and state based reports.

Babies spend a lot of their time sleeping. Some sleeping arrangements are not safe. They can increase the risk of Sudden Unexpected Death in infancy (SUDI) including SIDS and fatal sleeping accidents. The term SIDS is used for the death of a baby when, despite a thorough investigation, no known cause was found to explain the death. Some babies do not respond properly when faced with a life threatening event during sleep. SIDS can occur if a baby has a problem arousing (waking) from sleep. Babies need to be able to stir during sleep, just enough to gasp, cough, swallow or move. SIDS remains the most common category of deaths between one month and one year of age. Although the cause of SIDS is unknown, studies have been successful in identifying underlying risk factors. Risk factors that place a baby at a higher risk of SIDS and a fatal sleeping accident are:

- Sleeping baby on the tummy or side position
- Sleeping baby on soft surfaces, e.g. soft mattress, pillow
- Loose, soft and fluffy bedding
- Sleeping baby with face or head covered
- Overwrapping/over heating
- Exposing baby to tobacco smoke before or after birth
- Sleeping baby on a sofa/chair
- Sleeping baby in an unsafe cot or portable cot
- Sleeping baby alone in an adult bed



*Staff training at Hedland Health Campus*

These risk factors can act as stressors where a baby may not be able to cope and respond appropriately. If parents and care providers remove these risk factors from a baby's sleeping environment the risk of SIDS and a fatal sleeping accident is reduced.

## And then one day...

I came on board as the Aboriginal Program Officer for the RROSIAC program to deliver safe sleeping messages to Aboriginal families. We established networks with Indigenous and non-Indigenous organisations and agencies that provide services to Aboriginal families. We conduct staff training for health professionals, health workers, child care educators, and parent support workers. Aboriginal community engagement and cultural protocols and practices are incorporated into the training.

On a day-to-day basis, we engage with Aboriginal communities in metropolitan Perth. We offer one on one information sessions or group sessions such as mums and bubs groups. Sometimes we may visit the families in their home environment. If we visit them in their home environment, it makes things a lot easier as we are able to provide demonstrations, have a look where the baby sleeps and do some role modelling.

Our philosophy is to take a harm minimisation approach. When we discuss SIDS with Aboriginal families we also talk about sleeping accidents that



*Delivering the Yummy to Be Mummy program, working alongside the Boodjarri Yorgas Program*

can be fatal. The aim is to provide education, teach families about risk factors and put measures in place to help prevent sudden infant death from occurring using a culturally appropriate approach.

As we have identified co-sleeping as a SIDS and fatal sleeping accident risk factor, we promote room sharing with the cot or mattress next to the parent's bed. However we don't have a fixed rule for each parent as everyone's circumstances are different. Families might live in a caravan with three kids and no room for a cot, so we need to ascertain what is the safer option for that family's circumstance.

We acknowledge that for some families co-sleeping may be their only option. If the baby can't sleep in a cot or a porta cot, then we need to find something else to minimise the risk. We always ensure we don't make the parents feel bad about their choices; rather we try to raise awareness and offer solutions that encourage safety for their babies in their sleeping environment.

We don't know the cause of SIDS. We can't tell which babies are vulnerable to SIDS and which aren't. So when we are on the road delivering the program, we say every baby is vulnerable and deliver the same messages to all families.

## And because of that...

the RROSIAC program is important because we are making a difference in reducing the incidence of infant mortality. If our babies aren't making it to the age of one and our life expectancy compared to the non-Indigenous population is 10.5 years lower, then what is going to happen to our people, our culture? It is vital that we prevent infant death from occurring and do what we can to see these babies pass their first birthday. Although we can't completely eradicate SIDS, if we can prevent a large percentage of deaths then we are doing our job. One of our primary aims is to get the community to have some ownership of this program by training the trainer. We would like to see more Aboriginal health workers educated in this program so they can deliver the messages to people in remote communities.

In March this year we ran a two day training course in the Pilbara. It was attended by Aboriginal health workers, child health nurses and midwives. There is no public transport in the Pilbara so if people don't own cars to travel in to town, they rely on the Aboriginal health workers and/or child health nurses to visit. These health workers are exactly who we are targeting. They are the kind of professionals who need to be trained so they can take the safe sleeping messages out to the communities.

## And since that day...

10 years on, the rate for SIDS in Aboriginal babies has been reduced by 50 per cent. It is now four times higher instead of eight. From these statistics, we can ascertain that the RROSIAC program is working which fills us with great hope that we can reduce this figure further. It is exciting to be involved in a program that is having such a positive impact.

We are also starting up the 'Yummy to be Mummy' program, which focusses on maternal health, healthy eating and self-care. The 'Yummy to be Mummy' program is run over six weeks and includes an art component and belly casting which is always a big drawcard! We also focus on budgeting, good nutrition and positive lifestyle choices.





I would like to see several things take place going forward with RROSIAC. It would be fantastic to employ an Aboriginal counsellor to deliver the grief and loss component of our program – “Healing Communities”. This would enable us to deliver a more holistic service because we could provide education and counselling, not just education.

It would be great to establish ‘Yummy to be Mummy’ and provide the program more consistently and extensively to pregnant mums across the state. The most important step in our future would be to have more Aboriginal health workers engaged in our training program so they can support our people in the maternal health space. If we can implement these plans, it will go a long way to ensuring the survival of our newborn babies and essentially, our people and our culture.



*RROSIAC inauguration focus groups in the Kimberley*

# MOORDITJ KEILA

## ORGANISATION NAME:

Moorditj Keila Basketball Club

## CONTACT PERSON:

Garry Gower

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## PROGRAM / PROJECT PARTNERS:

Southcare Inc.

## KEY STAFF / PEOPLE INVOLVED:

Dena Gower, Garry Gower

## KEY WORDS:

Basketball, family, community, leadership, sport

## About the storytellers...

Garry and Dena Gower are the founders and mentors of The Moorditj Keila Basketball Club.

## About Moorditj Keila...

Moorditj Keila collaborates with the City of South Perth and aims to share Noongar culture with the community. The organisation delivers consultations and presentations at events and community support programs. These support programs include Elders group, the breakfast program, community camps, women's group, and playgroup.

## Once upon a time...



back in 2002, there was rising concern in the community that the local Indigenous kids did not have enough to do to keep them occupied. As a consequence, the kids from low socio-economic backgrounds were becoming wayward which came to the attention of the City of South Perth Council. The Council approached Southcare Inc. as the two organisations already had an established relationship with their Community Development Partnership, to propose devising a program for Indigenous youth.

Southcare also works in close partnership with the South Perth Aboriginal Community Group Moorditj Keila to create health, cultural, artistic and skills-building events and activities for the community development of local Aboriginal people, so the two organisations are intrinsically linked. This partnership collectively decided to start a basketball club. We discovered that the Victoria Park Leisure Centre ran sports competitions so we assembled a basketball team and registered. We started with an under 12's team and the first players to join were all from the same extended family. Word spread quickly and more kids kept turning up so we knew we were onto a good thing. Garry and I coached the team and we trained once a week. A lot of the players came from very tough backgrounds but playing basketball provided a focus and brought them a sense of joy, you could see it on their faces. Many had never trained or played a real game before but they went for it and absolutely loved it. We didn't start the program with a view to train or play professionally; it was just about getting the kids involved in something



*Moorditj Keila Basketball Club*

positive so they were engaged and feeling good. What stood out immediately was their level of talent. Many of them were extraordinary players. We used to call a lot of them 'bush basketballers' because they had no training but possessed natural skills.

Funding was scarce in the first five years of running the basketball program so Garry and I provided financial support to keep it going. However, Southcare have continued to be a fantastic support. Without the use of their bus to pick up the kids for training, we would not have been able to transport them. Back then the team was mainly made up of boys and Garry and I would collect them on Saturday mornings for the games. We'd generally pick up around eight kids and the rest would make their own way there. We would spend all morning competing



*“What stood out immediately was their level of talent. Many of them were extraordinary players. We used to call a lot of them ‘bush basketballers’ because they had no training but possessed natural skills.”*

and I would say to the boys, “You know how to do this, get out there and play your game.” Then I would stand there watching in awe as they won their games, and marvelled at their raw talent.

### And then one day...

we decided to take the team to a basketball competition in Cockburn. All the other teams in the competition had been playing for years. When we started playing the other coaches were asking, “Where did this mob come from?” because the team were outstanding. After this more kids kept turning up to play and as we could only have nine kids in a team we realised we needed to start another couple of teams. Numbers were never an issue. Once we had several teams, we entered all the competitions that were running and continued to have an excellent success rate; the wins definitely outweighed the losses! A lot of non-Indigenous people would sit on the sidelines and watch our teams play because of their skills and they still do now. Over time, many of the families started contributing financially to help pay for the costs of running the teams, which was great and took the burden off Garry and I a bit.

The trait that we really love about this club is the passion the players have for the game. All of the kids love to play basketball, it’s a game where they can be physical, get their aggression out, display their talent and their skills, and be themselves in a positive, social environment. It also makes the kids feel acknowledged that someone cares enough to invest their time and energy. I believe because of the underprivileged backgrounds that some of these kids come from, they are tougher and it makes them play harder. It’s also a social learning environment for the kids and helps them to find their place in the world by learning to communicate, relate, and build relationships. The discipline and structure that playing in a team provides is also invaluable in helping develop their sense of selves.

### And because of that...

our club has now been together for 13 years. We employ a coach and a coordinator who facilitates playing schedules and takes care of administration. Volunteers drive the Southcare bus for some of our players and family members needing transport. Over the last 13 years we’ve managed to secure funding, which has helped the club enormously. We are now partnered with the City of South Perth, Southcare, Lifestream, The Christian Church and more recently, Global Missions, who provide financial resources. These resources support us to purchase uniforms and basketballs, employ the coach and the coordinator. The Moorditj Keila Basketball Club has expanded to five teams and altogether there are about 53 kids, along with parents and extended family. We have two under 10 teams, one under 12’s team, one under 14’s team and one under 16’s team. However, numbers continue to grow and it’s becoming increasingly challenging to cater for them. If we had more people to train and coach extra teams, then the sky would be the limit, but our resources are limited.

Early this year I registered seven of our basketballers for the 2015 Friendly Games, and unintentionally spoke to the games founder Andrew Vlahov. Though they had a full quota of participants, he made room for our kids to join the overseas contingent at the Games Village, Leeuwin Barracks. He said to me, “You know I used to play a bit of basketball” to which I responded, “Great.” When I spoke to my work colleagues they couldn’t believe that I didn’t know



*Andrew Vlahov with Courtenay Michael*





*Moorditj Keila basketball windup*

of our girls is playing in the state team, which is a fantastic outcome. We have many long term goals for the future. The Perth Basketball Association offers a direct pathway for our players beginning with a reconciliation action plan and we would like to utilise that opportunity as much as possible. Being an active participant in the Redbacks Indigenous Program is also high on our agenda. We would also like to send several of our players to the upcoming Friendly Games in Asia next year. A collective future hope for our players and community is underpinned by the scriptural verse chosen by the group; "For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." [Jeremiah 29:11].

who Andrew Vlahov was. However, he had told me he likes to fly under the radar. Andrew and his staff provided fantastic support throughout the eight day event and I cannot speak highly enough of them. Several months after the Games, I asked Andrew to come to a training session so that he could teach the kids some skills and share his knowledge of the game. So, he did and it was such a great, inspiring experience. They learned a lot from him and really came out of their shells. They blossomed that day; it really did a lot for their confidence. It's lovely to see the changes in the kids when they start to bloom and grow.

**And since that day...**

Moorditj Keila in partnership with Southcare continues to grow. Extended family is such an integral aspect of Aboriginal culture, which also extends to our basketball club. We embrace all the kids' families and we see ourselves as one big family. However, there is more to this club than just basketball. As Garry works with several of the families in his role at Southcare, he is familiar with many of them, and some of the issues they are experiencing come up at the basketball sessions. We take a holistic approach to supporting the families and basketball is just one aspect of Moorditj Keila.

Although we started the club so that the kids had an opportunity to play basketball, it goes deeper than that. We want to provide opportunities for them going forward and over the years, we have had great results. Many of them are doing really well, some of our girls are playing for the Redbacks and one



*The plaque we presented to Andrew Vlahov in appreciation*

*"Extended family is such an integral aspect of Aboriginal culture, which also extends to our basketball club. We embrace all the kids' families and we see ourselves as one big family."*



# MOORDITJ YARNING

## ORGANISATION NAME:

Moorditj Yarning

## CONTACT PERSON:

Roy Tester

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<http://www.relationshipswa.org.au/>

## PROGRAM / PROJECT PARTNERS:

Relationships Australia

## KEY STAFF / PEOPLE INVOLVED:

Annette Dickie, Dave Hilton, Kim Carpenter, Deb Singh, Shannon Kearing

## KEY WORDS:

“Yarning about things worrying you is often healing”

## About the storytellers...

Roy Tester is the Program Manager for Moorditj Yarning. Deb Singh, Annette Dickie, Kim Carpenter and Shannon Kearing are Community Workers and Dave Hilton works as a Psychologist for Moorditj Yarning.

## About Moorditj Yarning...

Moorditj Yarning provides an opportunity and a setting for Indigenous people to discuss personal concerns. The program is run by Relationships Australia and works with Indigenous people in the Langford/Gosnells and Joondalup/Clarkson areas. The program involves councillors meeting one on one and in informal group meetings to yarn about worries as a form of healing. Counsellors have experience working with alcohol and other drug issues, other health concerns, family and relationship issues, grief, loss and domestic violence.

## Once upon a time...

around 10 years ago, Relationship's Australia's (RA) CEO Terri Reilly, was interested in exploring the idea of providing services to specifically meet Aboriginal people's needs, as RA did not offer any Aboriginal services. This coincided with Terri being approached by a lady named Jan Woodland looking for employment. Jan's area of interest was in alcohol and drugs and she was keen to work with Aboriginal people and see sustained change in this area. On the back of this concept, Moorditj Yarning was born. Moorditj Yarning is an Aboriginal specific service of Relationships Australia that offers advocacy, workshops, men's and women's groups, family and one on one counselling. The service is available for individuals and families of all ages. Sadly, Jan is no longer with us but she left an important legacy in Moorditj Yarning. We recently held an art exhibition which was dedicated to her.

*“It is always incredibly rewarding to make progress with people and establish trust and a dialogue around healing.”*



In 2005, RA developed the RA Indigenous Network (RAIN), which is a national network of employees that actively engages in the development of culturally relevant and innovative service provision and practices. RAIN offers a model for other agencies seeking to enhance the understanding and inclusion of Aboriginal people in their services and programs. Moorditj Yarning provides several outreach programs, predominately at Neerabup Primary School, Clarkson Primary school and Balga High School. There are currently three community workers who work with children in the school environment, and its purpose is twofold; providing the opportunity to work with the children and also giving staff a direct connection to their families.

Our approach is to support families and parents through engagement with their children, and encourage their participation in the school so they feel part of that community. In addition, if our staff are working with a child who is upset or distressed due to external factors, they can make contact with the family and facilitate a connection. From there, a link can be provided to one of our counselling branches or other services they might find useful. Our overall endeavour is to make the service fit the person rather than make the person fit into the service.



*“We would like to connect some of the Elders to the younger people, not just to hear the stories but also as a way of addressing some of psychological and emotional impacts of history.”*

## And then one day...

we now have six staff in our team and our three female staff, Annette, Deb and Kim spend one day a week in each school. The focus for the first half of 2015 has been on an artwork program with the children in all three schools, getting their pieces ready for the exhibition we recently held during NAIDOC week. The schools displayed all the finished artwork so their parents could come and view the works, along with the other students. It was an exciting achievement for the children to see their work displayed and sold both at the schools and the exhibition. It is a big advantage that two primary school principals are really committed to the programs we are delivering and they provide a lot of support to the staff. This upcoming term we are working with the schools to build a Six Seasons bush garden at both primary school locations. Balga High School is also involved and has started constructing their garden and they'll work on the Six Seasons project for the rest of the year. Our staff also run a healthy eating program which is funded by Healthway. The program is run in conjunction with other activities such as Aboriginal language classes.

At the moment there is a bit of a shift happening. We will be trying a new approach for a term by moving the program into the mainstream classes. The school decided on the change to ensure the ethos of the program is on inclusiveness instead of difference. We don't think leaving the classroom for a 'special' lesson encourages inclusiveness. We are focused on delivering the program, while simultaneously providing the opportunity for non-Aboriginal kids to participate.

Deb stated that: “We also run a soccer program, and we have ensured that the kids are provided with the same high quality equipment as everyone else. Initially,

the mentality was, we can buy some cheap gear and one of our staff members picked up on that and said, “No, these kids deserve the same gear as all the other kids.” We are trying to build self-esteem and facilitate the belief that they are just as worthy as the other kids who run out onto the field.” Annette said: “One of the other current projects engages the teenage girls group in a fashion recycling initiative. The girls source clothing and create Aboriginal designs for the clothes. They are also doing shoe painting which is an ‘in thing’ at the moment! This project will culminate in a fashion show and an evening of pampering with portrait photographs taken. Part of this process is about engaging the girls’ mothers so it becomes a mother/daughter experience and the girls are really excited about this upcoming event.”

## And because of that...

an important aspect of all our programs is school retention. We want to ensure the kids are keen to come to school and by providing services that are prepared specifically for them, this encourages school attendance. It also gives the kids the opportunity to experience something different related to their culture within the school environment.

One of the young boys was identified by one of our workers as having very low self-esteem so the staff member took him under her wing and did some painting with him and he produced a really amazing piece of artwork. At the recent art exhibition, it was the first piece to sell and this changed his demeanour completely. He was paid for his art which was a bonus, but the fact that someone loved his work enough to want to hang it on their wall meant the world to him. It's often hard to articulate the change that happens but that's the sort of thing we observe. Being aware of these kinds of stories is important and articulating them for the broader organisation and our funders is vital to continuing to do what we do.

This program is important for many reasons but ultimately we just want to make a difference for the kids and their families. Our staff, Deb, Annette and Kim who work with the kids really see the value in giving them alternative experiences and opportunities that may be a bit different to what they are used to. Some kids are in environments that can be challenging. If they are supported within the school system to build their sense of self-worth and have an understanding that there are things they can aspire to, and aspire to be, then we are changing the outcome of their future in the most positive way.





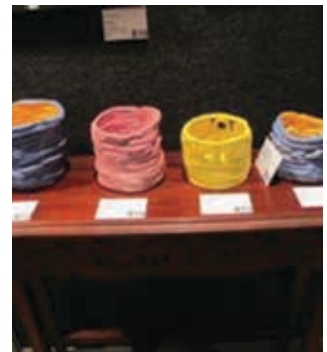
*Community Worker  
Deb Sing, The Moorditj  
Yarning Art Exhibition*



*People's Choice  
Award, painting called  
'Reconciliation' being  
explained by artist  
Narelle Ryder*



*Community Worker  
Annette Dickie and  
Aboriginal Education  
Officer Shauna Narrier*



*Pottery completed by  
school children for the  
Art Exhibition*

Our two male staff members Shannon and Dave work very closely together to provide support to families. Dave is a psychologist and works with men and women and their families to provide a counselling service. For example, if there has been a death in the family, they will either know the person or a member of the family, and will be able to provide support as needed, whether emotional or practical or both. Shannon works more at the community level and is very connected with people and families. We've spent the first half of this year engaging with adult men, some through the art work and the exhibition.

Shannon has recently shifted his focus to the younger guys in the 18 to 25 year old group and is currently running a contemporary rites of passage program which is based around cultural education. He provides some historical background around Aboriginal culture and the young men participate in cultural activities such as going out bush for a day, making a fire and boomerangs with the goal of reconnecting to Country.

They are a great group of young men who are really motivated so we are trying to tap into that. They recently asked Shannon how they could help other people in the community which lead to volunteering their time to clean up the yards of tenants who are unable to do this type of activity themselves. They identify the person or family, make contact and organise the clean-up. As this is a new initiative, we are having some discussions with Bunnings around providing equipment so we can keep the momentum going and harness the enthusiasm they have to help others in the community.

## And since that day...

we are currently in a building phase of the overall program. Essentially we are a counselling service wanting to reach people through our service. What is becoming more and more apparent is people's need for understanding about identity, history and the impact of inter-generational trauma. Our ultimate goal for the future is establishing an environment which addresses some of these issues for people so it doesn't necessarily have the same effect on their children. We would like to connect some of the Elders to the younger people, not just to hear the stories but also as a way of addressing some of the psychological and emotional impacts of history. Over time stories have been told and but the impact of those stories has not been addressed. The narrative may be: "I was taken away and that's why I drink..." but that doesn't address the impact, which is emotional.

We want to give people the option to address historical trauma and the resulting issues. Some people are not up for it but by presenting the option we are providing the opportunity. If we support people at the right moment we have more of a chance to assist them. There are often so many other things happening in their lives which makes it hard to focus on their own specific needs. We need to grab that tiny window of opportunity to help people when they have verbalised what is bothering them. It may only address one issue but often that will be the thing that sticks with them. It is an ongoing process but it is always incredibly rewarding to make progress with people and establish trust and a dialogue around healing.

# MADJITIL MOORNA CHOIR

## ORGANISATION NAME:

Madjitil Moorna

## CONTACT PERSON:

Jo Randell

## EMAIL AND WEBSITE:

[www.madjitilmoorna.org.au](http://www.madjitilmoorna.org.au)  
[contactus@madjitilmoorna.org.au](mailto:contactus@madjitilmoorna.org.au)

## KEY STAFF / PEOPLE INVOLVED:

Jo Randell, Aunty Karl Mourach, Candice Lorrae, Kobi Morrison, George Walley, Della Rae Morrison. Musicians, singers and administration staff

## KEY WORDS:

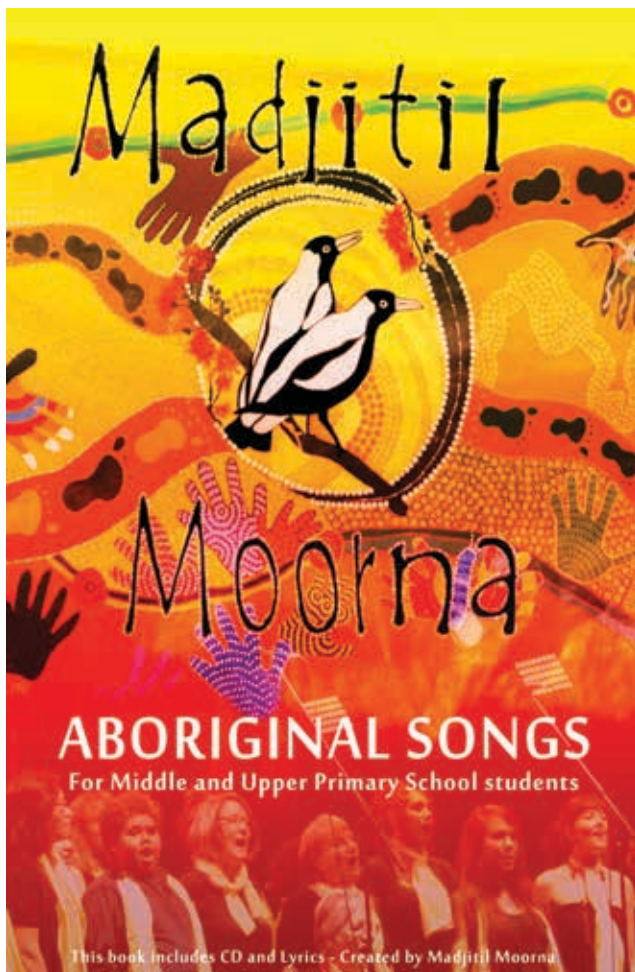
Music, singing, language, history, culture, collaboration, reconciliation, healing, wellbeing, inclusive, building trust, building community

## About the storytellers...

Jo Randell is the Coordinator of Madjitil Moorna Choir. Aunty Karl Mourach is the Cultural Mentor at Madjitil Moorna.

## About Madjitil Moorna Choir...

Madjitil Moorna is an independent community choir led by award-winning Noongar musicians. The choir sings traditional and contemporary Aboriginal music. Founded in 2006, originally as a community arts project, the choir now performs at various events and rehearses regularly. The choir also encourages diversity within the group and invites all ages, backgrounds and voices to join. The choir aims to encourage people of diverse backgrounds to explore Aboriginal culture together through singing in a safe environment. The choir also aims to benefit both the singers and the community as a whole.



*The Madjitil Moorna Aboriginal Songs  
Songbook and CD*

## Once upon a time...

ten years ago, a group of volunteers were brainstorming project ideas to be developed as part of the Zig Zag Community Arts Festival in Kalamunda. We had previously organised arts projects across the community, with a performance at the annual Festival and Street Parade. Someone suggested that we involve the Aboriginal community and the idea of a choir came up. We loved this concept and ran with the idea. We thought it would be powerful and unique to have people singing Aboriginal songs at the Festival, led by Aboriginal performers and that the symbolism of this would be profound.

We immediately contacted Della Ray Morrison. Della, in 2003/4, in collaboration with Jessie Lloyd, had taught an 800 strong massed choir a welcome song called 'Kaya' by Charmaine Bennell, for a performance at the opening of the 2004 Perth Festival. Della and Jessie agreed to lead our 13 week choir project and Zig Zag Festival performance. We rallied to get the Aboriginal community involved and managed to get a few families and friends on board early on. Both Della and Jessie insisted on having non-Aboriginal people also involved in the choir and we began to see



*Performing at the Zig Zag Festival*

ourselves as a bridge, building relationships and trust between all members of the community.

We named the choir Madjtil Moorna which means 'magical sounds of movement in the bush' in Noongar language. We began by rehearsing at night from 6.30pm until 8.30pm to include working people and children. People grew to love the songs and the rehearsals. They provided an opportunity to come together and share experiences with people from the other side of the big divide between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians.

### And then one day...

after three months of practice, we had our very first choir performance at the Zig Zag festival. 32 people of all ages and backgrounds performed. The public was really wowed by our performance and we had three separate invitations to sing at other events across the metro area, which was very exciting for us. So after a break, we rehearsed again and performed at a private gig and two other festivals in early 2007. The choir had such a positive response from the community and we continued to receive more invitations to perform. It all came together pretty quickly and we realised that the choir could have a viable, long-term future. 2007 saw us performing at many different events including openings, festivals, launches, corporate events and NAIDOC and reconciliation events. It was a wonderful start for the Madjtil Moorna choir and we gained a lot confidence through this show of support. People were really enjoying it and we absolutely loved singing our hearts out - often in Aboriginal languages.

### And because of that...

we were invited to sing Kerry Fletcher's 'Sorry Song' at the televised Parliamentary Apology to Stolen Generations on 13 February, 2008. This was an extremely moving occasion with thousands of people in the Perth audience at 7.30am. Madjtil Moorna swelled to 46 singers for this remarkable event. Another extraordinary experience came in 2009. Doreen Green, an Elder and former teacher of Halls Creek school, saw our choir perform at the Chocolate Martini live series. Doreen then invited us to Halls Creek to perform. We had a moordtj team of people raising funds to get us there. 29 choir Madjtil Moorna people made it to this remote Kimberley town on that first trip. At the end of a week of rehearsals and activities, we hosted a free community concert together for the town of Halls Creek. Local musicians and bands filled out the program and dozens of kids who had learnt our songs during the week joined us on the stage to belt them out! We had approximately 600 people at the concert to support their kids. The town had never seen anything like it before. (We counted the number of people present by the number of sausages at the BBQ!).

Mat de Koning, a young film-maker joined us to document the trip and produced a video called 'Harmony at Halls Creek' which tells the story of that amazing experience. After a second trip to Halls Creek the following year, the community organised their own Nguyuru Waaringarrem Music Festival. Madjtil Moorna has made five trips to Halls Creek and a song written by George Walley and Halls Creek kids is firmly fixed in our schools song set. Everyone loves the Halls Creek Rodeo Song. See the music video at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7oZKblGQWal>

Early in 2015 we performed at a fantastic event with one of our key Aboriginal musicians, George Walley,



*"It's very important to keep culture alive through language and it's empowering for Aboriginal people to sing in language."*





*Halls Creek Concert, 2009*

in Mandurah. The event commemorated the 100th year anniversary of the death of a very significant Noongar Elder in the Mandurah region - Yaburgurt (George) Winjan. Yaburgurt survived the Pinjarra massacre when he was 10 years old but lost his mother and brother. George Walley is a descendant of Yaburgurt and with a dedicated reference group, was instrumental in organising the event. Madjitil Moorna taught several Noongar songs to Mandurah-based choir, the Koolbardi Singers and they joined with us in the special service honouring Yaburgurt's memory.

**And since that day...**

we still come together on Monday nights to rehearse and over the last three years we've performed over 30 times each year – all over the Perth metro area and across the state. We sing joyous, sometimes sad, but always interesting songs, often in language. Most of our songs are stories of Aboriginal culture and



*“There is no better way to achieve deeper understanding, respect and reconciliation than through creative expression in the form of language, singing and performance.”*

history from all over Australia. We feel especially privileged to sing in Noongar – the language of the land we live on.

Over the years we have had several Aboriginal music directors who have contributed greatly to the choir including Della Rae Morrison, Jessie Lloyd, Josie Boyle and George Walley. We are currently led by Candice Lorrae who is a wonderful performer who has brought some of her own soulful songs to the choir. Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander songwriters who are willing to share their songs with us are sometimes asked to be guest musicians including Aunty Josie Boyle, Gina Williams, David Milroy, Karla Hart, Honey Webb, Kobi Morrison, Fred Penny and Sam Dinah. They usually come to choir rehearsals for at least two or three weeks to teach us their songs. The understanding is that the songs are then free for us to sing and share. This exchange is very beautiful, generous and shows a huge amount of goodwill.

One of the important aspects of the choir is the



*Parliamentary Apology to Stolen Generations on 13 February, 2008*



*Yaburgurt commemoration*

learning of language. A lot of Aboriginal people have lost their languages and learning language through singing is an excellent way to learn because of the repetition during practise. It's very important to keep culture alive through language and it's empowering for Aboriginal people to sing in language.

We will reach a milestone in 2016 - our 10th anniversary! To honour this, we are currently working on a very special project – the Noongar Songs in Schools Project. In October 2015 the Kalamunda Zig Zag Festival included a spectacular Noongar-infused finale where 230 excited children sang Noongar songs with Madjitil Moorna. Young up-and-coming Noongar performers went into schools to teach the students songs from our repertoire. After weeks of practice at school, nine school choirs joined a massed choir, singing with Madjitil Moorna at dusk in the Festival Finale. This project is ongoing. We invite schools interested in learning Noongar songs to make contact and arrange a time for a workshop for the school choir, for a particular class or even for the whole school. The Madjitil Moorna Aboriginal Songs Songbook and CD will help the process!

The importance of the choir for non-Aboriginal people is that many of our singers were born in Australia but don't necessarily have a connection to Aboriginal people or an understanding of the ongoing culture. We live on Noongar Country here in Perth and if we don't know anything about

Noongar culture and its thousands of years of history, then we are living in ignorance of our rich heritage. That connection is vitally important because it paves the way for deeper understanding, respect and reconciliation. There is no better way to achieve this than through creative expression in the form of language, singing and performance. Singers and audience members feel connected.

One dream for the future is to involve young people in establishing new community choirs. We would like to pass on our experience and if people are interested, provide guidance and advice to emerging choir groups. To date, we have succeeded in helping to establish community choirs in Halls Creek and Mandurah. Our long term aim is to keep spreading language, continue to develop new ideas and most importantly, hold onto the good people we already have, both singers and musicians. We would also love to be a part of the Perth International Arts Festival so we need to keep working hard and continue to improve our skill set in order to take Madjitil Moorna to the next level. The future looks bright and we are excited about expanding and seeing just how far we can spread our wings.





*Madjiti! Moorna rehearsal, 2014*



We usually have around 25 people attend every Monday night. There are no auditions so anyone is welcome to come and be a part of the choir and it's up to people to decide which group they feel most comfortable in - whether it is singing the high, medium or low parts. It is very relaxed and people can move into different groups as they wish. We understand people have all sorts of commitments and we very consciously ensure the choir is welcoming and flexible. All ages, all voices, all backgrounds welcome.

Visit our website:  
[www.madjitilmoorna.org.au](http://www.madjitilmoorna.org.au)  
 for more information or to  
 make contact. We'd love to  
 hear from you!

## Marwit, Noonook Ngany Koort (Karla's Lullaby)

Marwit, noonook, ngany koort  
 Marwit, noonook, ngany koort  
 Marwit, noonook, ngany koort  
 Ngany djinda, ngany moort, ngany koort

Marwit, noonook, ngany koort  
 Marwit, noonook, ngany koort  
 Marwit, noonook, ngany koort  
 Ngany djinda, ngany moort, ngany koort

Baby, you are my heart  
 Baby, you are my heart  
 Baby, you are my heart  
 My star, my blood, my heart

(softly)  
 Marwit, noonak ngany koort  
 Marwit, noonak ngany koort  
 Marwit, noonak ngany koort  
 Ngany djinda, ngany moort, ngany koort  
 Ngany djinda, ngany moort, ngany koort





# BETTER BEGINNINGS

## ORGANISATION NAME:

King Edward Memorial Hospital, Women and Newborn Health Service

## CONTACT PERSON:

Janinne Gliddon

## EMAIL AND WEBSITE:

Janinne.Gliddon@health.wa.gov.au

## PROGRAM / PROJECT PARTNERS:

Women and Infant Research Foundation, BHP Billiton Nickel West, Aboriginal Health Council of WA, Women and Newborn Health Service

## KEY STAFF / PEOPLE INVOLVED:

Anne Rae (retired), Leanne Pilkington, Aboriginal Community Women Consultative Group, Sharma Hamilton, Rekisha Eades

## KEY WORDS:

Aboriginal, women, maternal health, newborns, support, community

## About King Edward Memorial Hospital's Women and Newborn Health Service ...

KEMH is Western Australia's only tertiary maternity and gynaecological hospital and treated its first patients in 1916. Today more than 6000 births take place at the hospital every year and it is WA's only major referral centre for high-risk pregnancies. KEMH also has a state-of-the-art Special Care Nursery, designed to care for premature and sick infants.



*Moort Mandja Mia*

## About the storyteller...

I am a 48 year old Badimia/Yamatji and Balladong/Nyoongar woman and mother to a wonderful 23 year old son. I am proud of both of my cultures. I come from a small town in the Wheatbelt area of Badimia country called Perenjori, however I have lived in Perth since I was 12 years old. In saying that though, my heart and home will always be with Country.

I have been in the public service agencies for about 27 years. Most of my working career has been in the housing sector (Aboriginal Housing) and in 2008, I made a move across to health.

I began my career in health working as an Aboriginal Health Promotion Officer with the WA Cervical Cancer Prevention Program for two years. I then moved to the Aboriginal Maternity Services Support Unit (COAG funded) which was also under the umbrella of Women and Newborn Health Services as Manager and Aboriginal Senior Health Promotion Officer.

In October 2012 I moved back into my permanent position of Aboriginal Senior Health Promotion Officer within King Edward Memorial Hospital for Women and Newborn. I am currently in this role and loving it. During this time I gained my degree from the University of Sydney in 2013, a Grad Dip in Indigenous Health Promotion, which I am extremely proud of.

For the last six months I have been involved in a four year project with Murdoch University called "Birthing on Noongar Boodjar" as the Chairperson, Aboriginal Consultative Group and Cultural Leadership and Brokerage Coordinator.

I love working with our mob and I am extremely blessed to be in a position where I can help and support our women who come to the hospital. It is my hope that I can make changes in the access to services within the metropolitan area for Aboriginal women across the state.



*Wadjuck Elder Marie Taylor conducting the smoking ceremony*

## Once upon a time...

in mid-2006, as part of the health reform in Western Australia, King Edward Memorial Hospital (KEMH) joined with other women's based health services to form the new Women and Newborn Health Service (WNHS), part of the larger North Metropolitan Area Health Service.

My journey in health started back in 2008 when I commenced working at the WA Cervical Cancer Prevention Program (WACCPP) in a health promotion role. During this time, the Acting Executive Director, Graeme Boardley came to a staff meeting at WACCPP and informed us that WNHS were starting up an Aboriginal maternity services support unit on site at King Edward Memorial Hospital, which I thought was a fantastic opportunity. In 2010 whilst working with WACCPP, I was fortunate to secure the position as the Aboriginal Senior Health Promotion Officer with the Aboriginal Maternity Services Support Unit (AMSSU) in health promotion on a six month secondment, four days a week. As this was a brand new position, I was able to come in and identify the priorities for the unit for the Aboriginal women who attend the hospital from all over the state. The women often have to stay from one week up to three months or more due to a range of health problems, either affecting themselves or their unborn baby. Some of these issues include; gestational diabetes, heart problems, high blood

pressure or kidney problems, drug and alcohol issues and sometimes post natal depression as well. Alternatively, they may have to deliver their baby early or may have to be monitored over a period of time. If a woman is having twins or multiple births they may be admitted, often a month before they are due, so we can assist them in reaching full term.

As the women don't like leaving their families and other children or being away from Country and their cultural commitments, we try to make the hospital their home away from home. Many of them have never been on a plane, left their communities or even travelled to Perth before. For many, English is not their first language, so it can be challenging, isolating and lonely at times. To that end, we do as much as we can to ensure the women feel comfortable and safe during their stay. As we are a woman's hospital and birthing site, we think it is more appropriate to have a female Elder perform the Welcome to Country ceremony when there are special cultural events at the hospital, when we are launching a particular resource for Aboriginal women or when we have other events.

## And then one day...

when I first started in this position, I was a part of a consultation process that had been started by Anne Rae, Director Allied Health who has since retired



*Janinne Gliddon & Sharma Hamilton,  
Underpass Health Messages  
Artwork Launch*

and Leanne Pilkington, Aboriginal Program Officer, BreastScreen WA, who are both under the Women and Newborn Health Service umbrella as well. They initially met with several Aboriginal women within the Perth community in regards to where to locate a culturally appropriate space on the hospital grounds for the Aboriginal women to use. The idea was to create an area that was family oriented; somewhere the women could take their families when they visited, instead of crowding the wards. In 2012, Anne, Leanne and I invited female Aboriginal community members in the metro area to lead the consultation process to nut out a vision for this project, because we needed their support and input to go ahead with the design. Three meetings were held with around 21 women to discuss the design of the space. BHP had kindly donated funding for this specific project and we settled on a perfect location at the side of the hospital (Hensman Rd) on a quiet street.

On the advice of the consulting group we knew the women would feel good about taking their kids there. It was private but accessible and felt right as it is surrounded by trees and is separate from the rest of the hospital. A lot of the women come from remote communities and small towns so it's nice for them to have somewhere they can relax away from the hustle and bustle of the hospital. Consultation also took place by sending a tender out for Aboriginal artists to be a part of the design of the space. Two wonderful and very talented Aboriginal women, Elsie Woods



*“As far as I’m aware,  
there is no specific Aboriginal Health  
Promotion Officer in a hospital Australia wide  
so we feel we are pretty unique and it’s  
important to tell our story.”*

a Noongar woman from Albany, and Jilalga Murray-Ranuia Karrimara from Port Hedland were chosen to design the artwork in conjunction with a very well-known artist Jenny Dawson. They then transformed those designs onto ceramics which were placed on a bench and four stools within the garden.

Work began on the space which was known as the Family Gathering Place and when it was finished we decided that it was more appropriate to give the space an Aboriginal name. I consulted with several Aboriginal Wadjuk language consultants who provided several different translations to name the garden space. The name that was selected was “Moort Mandja Mia” which means family gathering place. We then held a launch with Wadjuk Elder, Marie Taylor who welcomed everyone to Country. We held a smoking ceremony as we thought it was really important to get rid of the old spirits and energy and welcome the new. We also had a morning tea as a part of the launch which was really well received and attended by about 60 people including the Aboriginal agencies connected to the hospital and our female community consultants, who were very happy with the outcome. A children’s dance group also performed and entertained the guests.

The local community paper covered the launch and we were interviewed on local radio. I wanted to make sure the message was not about bringing the community into the hospital but about taking the hospital and other services within the Women and Newborn Health Service back out to the community, so people knew we existed and what services we offered. We are very proud of the cultural space on the hospital grounds. Although it’s a space with Aboriginal artwork, made by the Aboriginal community, anybody is welcome to use it; staff, non-aboriginal people; it’s just a lovely, tranquil area to relax.





*WNHS Staff & Artists at Moort Mandja Mia Launch*

## And because of that...

the next project we undertook was in partnership with The Aboriginal Health Council of WA (ACHWA) and one of their Tobacco Action Workers, Sharma Hamilton, to provide educational information on smoking prevention whilst pregnant. This took place in our art room, Ngalla Mia, which means (Our Place). Sharma engaged the women in activities while yarning about the dangers of smoking, to make it a more conducive environment for learning. Ngalla Mia has been open for over 10 years and is a room that the women can access to meet up and have a yarn or do some painting or art therapy. It gives them something positive and fun to focus on.

Around this time, many of the women who stayed in Agnes Walsh Lodge and on the wards were telling us that they didn't like using the walkway that leads from the hospital and Agnes Walsh House to their boarding house and across to the hospital for appointments or meals. They felt it was intimidating and as it was cold, dark and isolated, especially in winter after 4pm and they were not keen to walk along it. We knew we needed to upgrade the walkway and brighten it up in a positive way, to make it more welcoming.

We engaged Aboriginal Health Promotion Officers and Community Liaison Officers from the different agencies that worked with WNHS, such as BreastScreenWA, WA Cervical Cancer Prevention

Program, the Aboriginal Maternity Services Support Unit and the Sexual Assault Resources Centre to provide a combination of preventive health messages pertaining to their programs. Sharma from ACHWA advised that AHCWA had funding for the project to be completed so she progressed with some artwork and message ideas and sent them around for comment. All the agencies involved sent back their logos and messages specific to their programs, which was a great example of agencies working in partnership. There are now pieces of bright, colourful, eye catching artwork with health messages on safe sleeping, breast screening, pap smears, cervical screening, and mental health messages for the women to read while they walk along the walkway.

It's been so well received with the women loving the artwork and saying the change to the walkway walls helps them to find their way when walking around the hospital. We have had so much positive feedback from nurses and allied health workers who tell us it's a brilliant concept which indicates that it's working. We also launched this project and invited all the agencies involved including Sids and Kids, Derbarl Yerrigan Health Services and all our partners. We had around 35 people attend that launch which we started at Moort Mandja Mia in the gardens and ended up at Ngalla Mia, after walking down the walkway and admiring all the fantastic, bright health messages adorning the walls.

We also have a memorial garden on the hospital grounds for families who lose their babies during birth or in the hours or days following. If the family don't want to take their babies' ashes home, a service can be held in the gardens and the ashes can be scattered. I am on the grief and loss committee, which



*"We are immensely proud of the services available for women to access. Our focus is doing everything we can to ensure the women are happy, comfortable and feel supported in their 'home' away from home."*

was set up for the women who lose their babies, and one of the most important things is to ensure we get the processes around death and grieving right. Depending on where the women come from, they may have a different process for dealing with death and grief and we try to be sensitive to those needs. Birthing babies is usually a happy time but sometimes it can be sad and we have to ensure that the procedures around both these events is dealt with in the most culturally appropriate way.

### And since that day...

over the years I have realised that we don't have enough Aboriginal staff, resources or education around cultural requirements so I have brought in more cultural representations. I have focussed on educating the medical staff, the nurses in special care, and the midwives about the women's cultural protocols and differences. It's important that all staff working with the women have an understanding of their different family structures, their lifestyles, the difficulties they face and the challenge of being away from their families and communities. For example, if the woman is not looking at you when she is speaking to you, she is not being rude, she is just shy. I ask the staff to have a yarn with the women, as they'll find out more information rather than asking "tick the box" questions. Aboriginal people are not all the same, just like non-Aboriginal people are all different, so you can't put us in a box.

One of the other things we have implemented recently is a program to document the women's journey through photos. The idea was to build up an archive of photos for two purposes. Firstly, to have stock photos of mums and bubs to use in brochures, newsletters, websites and banners, and secondly, to have high quality photos to pass on to the families. It's a special gift to give, as those first days with a newborn provide precious memories. The hospital has a medical photographer on site and more often than not, the women are happy to be involved and if not, they are always happy for us to take photos of their babies. We now have a good collection of photos of families with sometimes up to five generations of one family, which makes for a beautiful photo!

We have lots of plans in place for the future. We would like more Aboriginal staff at KEMH to support our services and support the Aboriginal women who are admitted to the hospital. We have also reviewed the "Bush Tucker Menu" on offer to the women who

are on the wards for more than a few days. The menu is now called the "Health Tucker Menu" which provides more traditional foods so the women have more to choose from. If a patient is here for an extended period of time and if for example, kangaroo is part of their staple diet, then it's important to be able to offer it so they feel more at home. We'd also like to finish off the other phase of the garden area which includes implementing the information on the Nyoongar six seasons and hopefully building a pergola.

We are immensely proud of the services available for women to access. Our focus is doing everything we can to ensure the women are happy, comfortable and feel supported in their 'home' away from home. As far as I'm aware, there is no specific Aboriginal Health Promotion Officer in a hospital throughout Australia so we feel we are pretty unique and it's important to tell our story.



*KEMH Underpass  
Health Messages Artwork*



# WELCOME TO COUNTRY

## ORGANISATION NAME:

Weeriana Street Media

## CONTACT PERSON:

Tyson Mowarin

## EMAIL AND WEBSITE:

tyson@wsmedia.com.au

## PROGRAM / PROJECT PARTNERS:

Woodside

## KEY STAFF / PEOPLE INVOLVED:

Tyson Mowarin, Robyn Marais, Cavell Schipp

## KEY WORDS:

Country, Welcome to Country, history, culture, knowledge, education, digital media

## About the storyteller...

Tyson Mowarin is the Creative Director of Weeriana Street Media in Roebourne and the innovator behind The Welcome to Country Smartphone App.

## About Weeriana Street Media...

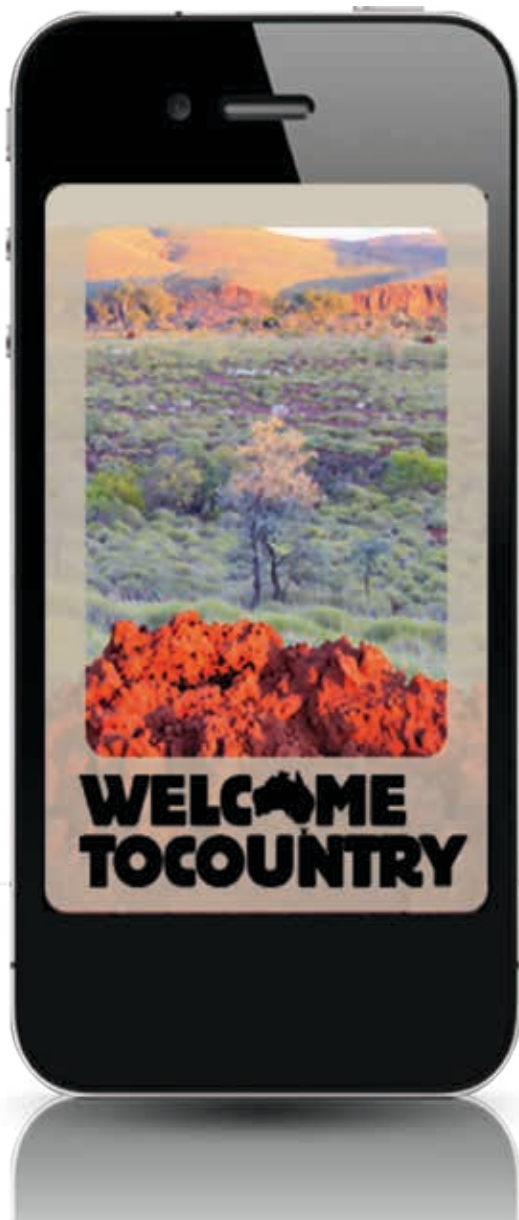
Weeriana Street Media is a proud Australian Indigenous media company based in Roebourne in the Pilbara region of Western Australia.

## About the Welcome to Country iPhone application (now referred to as App.)...

Welcoming people to Country is a tradition that Indigenous people do for visitors to their country. It's a simple concept; if you happen to travel to Ngarluma country in the Pilbara and you have the App. on your smartphone, it will alert you that you have just arrived on Ngarluma Country and notify you that a traditional Welcome to Country video (from Elders or knowledge carriers in the area that you are in) is available to watch. The video provides the viewer with information about cultural knowledge, language lessons, keeping safe, local protocols, tribal boundaries, skin names, local flora and fauna education and more.

You will also have access to our website [www.iCampfire.tv](http://www.iCampfire.tv) through the App., which was established as a way to share Indigenous culture with people. So, if you upload something from the website and you tag it with the word Ngarluma then the smartphone App. will automatically link the two.

The Welcome to Country smartphone App. is the first of its kind in Australia. We describe it as "a virtual experience of Australian Aboriginal culture, history and heritage blended with today's cutting edge technology". The idea was founded by our traditional practices that are still used today. I always liked how Indigenous people welcome one another to Country and acknowledge the visitor is in an area they are not familiar with. These days that tradition is practised at events right across Australia, whether an award ceremony or a local club function or a concert. More frequently non-Indigenous Australians





are acknowledging the Traditional Owners of the area they are in. I thought the Welcome to Country App. would be a good way to share a significant aspect of our tradition. The App. was launched through iTunes in March 2013 and is free for everyone to download onto their smartphones.

We have been working hard over the last couple of years to get the App. widely recognised and utilised. We are very happy with how well the App. has been received. The feedback has been extremely positive. People from all around Australia have been contacting us and wanting to know how they can make a video to contribute from their own Country or region. We have made welcome videos for the majority of the capital cities and regional towns that have major airports. As Qantas has a list of all the airports they use around Australia on their website, we have ensured there is a welcome video for all the places people fly into. This ensures that passengers/travellers can have that experience of being welcomed because when you land or travel through different regions the inbuilt GPS in your phone will recognise that you have crossed into another tribal boundary and it will automatically provide a welcome from that specific area. It's basically a way to be welcomed into someone else's Country.

I am currently working on securing sponsorship or a partnership to expand its presence Australia wide, particularly with organisations such as Telstra or Virgin, or Qantas. If Qantas come on board as a major sponsor/partner we'd love to call it the Qantas Welcome to Country App. Ultimately, I would like to see the Welcome to Country videos playing on screens in the airport as people enter. Audio is another option and that could also be broadcast in the aircraft upon landing.



*"To date over 500 people have downloaded the App. Australia wide which is fantastic. However, we want that to be in the thousands! We have recently purchased advertising on Facebook which will provide further publicity. The sky is the limit for this App."*

## What is a 'Welcome to Country'?

"A Welcome to Country is where an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander custodian or Elder from the local area or region welcomes people to their land. This may be done through speech, song, dance or ceremony and has been part of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander protocol for thousands of years. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander protocols or customs in relation to Welcome to Country are diverse and will vary from region to region."

<http://www.welcometocountry.mobi/>

The Welcome To Country App. is available to download on Apple iTunes.

For more information go to:  
<http://www.welcometocountry.mobi/>

To date over 500 people have downloaded the App. Australia wide which is fantastic. However, we want that to be in the thousands! We have recently purchased advertising on Facebook which will provide further publicity. The sky is the limit for this App.



*Tyson Mowarin*

# YORGAS YARNING

## ORGANISATION NAME:

Yorgas Yarning

## CONTACT PERSON:

Christine Ross, Carol Michie, Jenni Curtis

## EMAIL AND WEBSITE:

[http://www.noongarradio.com/nr\\_programs/yorgas-yarning/](http://www.noongarradio.com/nr_programs/yorgas-yarning/)

## KEY STAFF / PEOPLE INVOLVED:

Christine Ross, Carol Brewster-Michie, Jenni Curtis, Lesley Radloff, Tracey Cullen, Dawn Bessarab, Josie Maxted, Stacy Maxted, Louise De Busch, Angela Ryder, Kathy Pickett

## KEY WORDS:

Radio, media, community, collaboration, language, reconciliation

“Our news, our way” “Radio for women by women”

## About the storytellers...

Yorgas Yarning is made up of a team of contributors/presenters. They are: Christine Ross, Carol Brewster-Michie, Jenni Curtis, Lesley Radloff, Tracey Cullen, Dawn Bessarab, Josie Maxted, Stacy Maxted, Louise De Busch, Angela Ryder and Kathy Pickett.

## About Yorgas Yarning...

Yorgas Yarning is a radio program on Noongar Radio highlighting news and information for women in Perth and the surrounding areas. It focuses on a number of different topics such as health, education, child-rearing practices, employment and career paths. Yorgas Yarning is not color specific and it caters to all women. The program has dedicated teams of female presenters as well as regular guests.



programs to its schedule each year. In 2011, Noongar Radio's Station Manager Wayne Bynder realised that there was a gaping hole in programming – what was needed was an issues discussion based, informative program specifically for women, presented by women.

## Once upon a time...

Noongar Radio started broadcasting in 2009 during NAIDOC Week after the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) allocated a broadcasting licence for 100.9 MHz to Peedac Pty Ltd as Perth's only Aboriginal radio station. It was set up to serve the Noongar community of Perth, WA and provide positive and empowering Indigenous programming to the broader population. Over the last seven years, Noongar radio has developed substantially, and continues to add new broadcast

Wayne put the call out and a group of women showed interest and met up to discuss the concept. From that meeting, Yorgas Yarning was born. The first Yorgas Yarning show was broadcast in October 2011 and has been running successfully ever since. All the presenters are volunteers and were thrown in the deep end during the initial stages of the program going to air. Several of the original presenters had professional radio or media training but the majority had never broadcast before. However, the interest and enthusiasm for the program was strong and everyone jumped in and in the process, had fun creating, which is the fastest way to learn!



*Tracey Cullen, Lesley Radloff, Christine Ross, Dawn Bessarab, Carol Brewster-Michie and Louise De Busch*



*Jim Morrison, Wayne Bynder, Carol Brewster-Michie and Louise De Busch being interviewed on the Unna You Fullus Breakfast Show*

Yorgas Yarning is presented weekly on Tuesdays and then repeated on Saturdays. The program runs for an hour from 6pm until 7pm at night on Tuesday evening and then is then replayed on a Saturday morning from 8am until 9am on frequency 100.9 FM. The beauty of our program, like all Noongar Radio programs is that it is streamed on the internet so people can listen in all over the world, and they do! It's also important that it is repeated on Saturday mornings, as the 6pm time slot can be a tricky time for the listening audience.

The program is broadcast each week however the three teams prepare and deliver on a three weekly rotation and as the position is voluntary, and everyone has jobs and families, this arrangement works well.



*"We are really proud of our program. We know that it provides integral information to the community and engages and connects people. Our shows are good, juicy shows packed with informative content that people can relate to."*

## And then one day...

Yorgas Yarning was designed to be informative for women and their families in the community and focus on a number of different topics. The program provides information on health, child-rearing practices, education, employment and career paths. We discuss current affairs and issues relating to Indigenous people and community news. Yorgas Yarning is not colour specific and we ensure that it caters to all women and all people.

We aim to promote Australian Indigenous culture, traditions and language through Yorgas Yarning which is an integral aspect of the program and one of Noongar Radio's primary objectives. We promote events that are coming up and encourage people to let us know about community stories and programs or issues that are affecting them. If there is a current and pressing issue on the day our program airs, we will lead with that. We invite guests to come in and speak about a topic; whether it's about their workplace or a program they are promoting. For example, we recently had several girls from the Dream Time Project speak prior to their trip to New York to walk the runway in a fashion show. Langford Aboriginal Association also recently came in to promote the valuable, relevant community programs their organisation is running. We feature regular guests as well.

The production process for Christine, Lesley and Tracey's team starts on the Friday before the show when we start to consider content and conduct





*“We enjoy showcasing women who are doing amazing things in the Perth area and contributing to the community in positive ways but don’t get the chance to have their voices heard otherwise. It’s great to be able to offer a forum for people to share their journeys.”*

research. We email each other, confirm that everyone is available on the Tuesday, and then start listing topics and brainstorming ideas. On the Sunday evening, Christine checks the Koori Mail for leads on issues and stories to discuss, particularly with what has happened over the weekend, and starts putting the program together. We always check social media as it’s a good barometer of what is happening with people and issues they are concerned about. We also nominate the songs for the playlist. Christine will generally compile the running sheet which gets sent out to everyone on the Monday before the show.

The program runs for an hour but at the end we always say it goes way too quickly and we need almost an hour and half to get through. All three of us are on air at the same time as it is a yarning program. The friendly discussion suggests we all fight for the

microphone and on occasion, that’s true! Sometimes one of us will be out at a community event like Survival Day or events that run during NAIDOC week and we conduct live interviews. We also do outside broadcasts from time to time if we want to broadcast from a big event. We use social media quite a bit to promote our show and upcoming guests. We also run competitions to keep people engaged and invite listeners to text in so they can be involved in the program.

### **And because of that...**

we are really proud of our program. We know that it provides integral information to the community and engages and connects people. Our shows are good, juicy shows packed with informative content that people can relate to. We also understand the sense of empowerment many of our guests feel when they come on the show-feel the fear about speaking on live radio-and do it anyway! We relate, as in the early days we were in the same position ourselves. Sometimes it takes months to get people to agree to come and speak on live radio. For a lot of people it is far out of their comfort zones but once they do, it is always an overwhelmingly positive experience for them. They are relaxed and feel safe in the studio because women are talking with women. That has a way of breaking down any barriers. For instance, we had a lady called Nerolie come in for an interview. It took us forever and a day to convince her but when she finally did, she couldn’t believe the sense of accomplishment she felt. Stories like this are one of the many reasons we love what we do.



*Christine Ross, Tracey Cullen, Lesley Radloff, Dawn Bessarab, Josie Maxted and Carol Brewster-Michie*



*Carol Brewster-Michie, Stacy Maxted,  
Jenni Curtis*

We enjoy showcasing women who are doing amazing things in the Perth area and contributing to the community in positive ways but don't get the chance to have their voices heard otherwise. It's great to be able to offer a forum for people to share their journeys. We love the fact that we get to do a lot of yarning on the show.

We receive feedback on aspects of the show that need changing or improving and we take this on board. We feel it's important to improve so we can provide a better experience for listeners. Although we don't claim to be a completely professional outfit, all three groups have come such a long way from where we first started. That is beauty of the Saturday repeat show; it gives us the opportunity to listen back to ourselves to hear how we come across on air, even if there is a slight cringe factor involved! We can pick up what's worked and what hasn't and consider this the next time we broadcast. It's an excellent learning experience.

### **And since that day...**

there is definitely a demand for our program in the radio sphere. The feedback we receive is always positive and a lot of our mob listen on Saturday mornings when they are driving their kids to sport. We know we are making a difference for many women and families who tune in because of the nature of our content. We are also showing other women out there it can be done. You don't have to have a background in radio or media. You just need some motivation, the desire and a bit of time. We think that one of the reasons our program is successful is because we genuinely love what we do. We often say we never laugh as much as when we get together and that sense of sisterhood and camaraderie comes through on radio. A lot goes on off air as you are sitting in the studio. Often it is the only time we get to see each other as everyone is



*Christine Ross, Wayne Bynder  
and Dawn Bessarab*

busy and on that 3rd Tuesday of every month, we get to hang out and have fun. We just proudly celebrated our fourth Birthday with a special morning tea.

As volunteers we all probably have our moments where we feel that it's too much effort to continue but then you walk out of the studio and feel really proud or you listen back on a Saturday morning and it reinforces just how worthwhile Yorgas Yarning is. One of our presenters Jenni runs workshops with some of the women at Boronia Pre-release Centre for Women. Jenni says that when she starts talking all the women immediately recognise her voice from Yorgas Yarning and tell her they love the program. So we have a regular listening audience there and we are reaching women who need connection and engagement with the outside world. That kind of feedback keeps the desire strong to not only continue presenting the program, but consistently striving to ensure it is engaging, funny, informative and relevant.



**\* Although this story was told by Christine, Carol and Jenni, there are many other dedicated people who give their time to ensure Yorgas Yarning is a success. Please see the information box at the top of the page for a full list of presenters/contributors. This is their story too.**

# BINDI BINDI DREAMING

## ORGANISATION NAME:

Bindi Bindi Dreaming

## CONTACT PERSON:

Marissa Verma

## EMAIL AND WEBSITE:

<http://www.bindibindidreaming.com.au/>

## PROGRAM / PROJECT PARTNERS:

City of Melville (MOU), Djidi Djidi Aboriginal Women's Corporation, WAITOC

## KEY STAFF / PEOPLE INVOLVED:

Penny Musgrove

## KEY WORDS:

Explore Noongar Boodja, Keeping Culture Alive

## About the storyteller...

Marissa Verma grew up around the Fremantle area and is very passionate about her culture. She loves meeting new people who have an interest in learning about Aboriginal culture. Marissa's cultural knowledge has been learnt by spending time with her Elders who want to continue to share their culture. She loves the natural environment and understands that she has a responsibility to take care of Country and continue to share knowledge to ensure that culture remains strong. She also feels that it is important to share cultural knowledge with young Aboriginal people and encourage them to be proud of themselves and their culture.



*Bidi Katitjinny trail located at Piney Lakes*

## About Bindi Bindi Dreaming...

Bindi Bindi Dreaming is an Aboriginal family owned and operated business. The sorts of skills that exist within the enterprise are didgeridoo and dance, cultural tour guiding, catering with bush flavours and knowledge of Noongar Country and its people. Local guide Marissa Verma will share her lifetime experiences about Noongar culture with you. This knowledge has been shared with her by Elders of Noongar Country and they are happy for her to now share it with you.



## Once upon a time...

around ten years ago, I was working for Conservation and Land Management (CALM) which is now known as Department of Parks and Wildlife (DPAW). It was here that I first started delivering cultural tours and designing Aboriginal education programs with my colleagues. In this role we were responsible for developing a cultural education program which taught people about Noongar history and culture. This

program was developed when it became apparent there was a big gap in understanding about Aboriginal history, culture and connection to Country. We delivered the education programs to schools, TAFE's, Universities, Polytechnics, and members of the general public who wanted to learn about Noongar history and culture. We would either deliver the program in a national park or on a significant site such as the Swan River. There was a lot of interest in our programs and we found ourselves inundated with appointments and often working seven days! Our boss at the time was very supportive in encouraging us to set up our own business and run some of the tours on the weekends to cater for demand. So that's what I did, and my passion for Aboriginal cultural education was well and truly ignited.





*Marissa Oerma at Piney Lakes*

About three years ago, I started to think seriously about setting up my own business but procrastination is my best friend, so that idea took three years to materialise into something solid. I had people saying to me that I had something important to offer but I didn't trust that notion at first. It was the push from my mum and husband, who were incredibly supportive and told me that now was the time to have a go. So, it was just a process of getting to a point where I realised I could go out on my own as a solo business owner and share my passion with people.

### And then one day...

last year, I launched a fulltime business venture called Bindi Bindi Dreaming. Bindi Bindi Dreaming now offers guided tours on significant Noongar cultural sites in and around the Perth region. I predominately deliver information around the Noongar connection to Country and the six seasons. As I'd previously completed some business training and had some runs on the board over the last 10 years, I knew how I wanted to structure my business. I've spent the last three years implementing my business

plan and putting structures in place to the point where I felt comfortable enough to leave my full time job. Although it's been a risk, I knew if I didn't do it, I'd never know. One of the advantages of my transition from employee to business owner was my background at The City of Melville. As I had developed the education program alongside the Sustainability Officer over the course of my employment, the plan was always to have an Aboriginal person deliver the programs, so this business really was a natural career trajectory. I had also established a lot of contacts through the delivery of the education programs, particularly in the local schools. As a result of this, I haven't had to do much marketing.

I have a website and a Facebook page for the business and I attend Aboriginal events and festivals to hand out flyers. Word of mouth also ensures my bookings are steady. My business is going really well and my working week is always full. I run many of my tours at Piney Lakes Reserve. Piney Lakes is a significant site for the traditional custodians of the area and a significant place for the Aboriginal women of the Whadjuk tribe. The tours we offer are varied; they range from bush tucker tours, women's cultural workshops, a school program and cultural learning journeys. During these tours, I discuss the men's and the women's role in traditional culture and the bush foods and medicines that are located on the trail.

I deliver cultural tours on the Bidi Katitjiny Aboriginal Women's Trail through The City of Melville at Piney Lakes. The Bidi Katitjiny Aboriginal Women's Trail reflects the special relationship Noongar people, especially women, still have with this land today



*"I don't see my business as a job-this is my life that I am sharing with you, and it becomes your life too and that's how you become a family because you are sharing important cultural information-it's broader than just being a business."*



*Walyalup Cultural Centre in Fremantle*

and aims to promote their unique identity and history. The Noongar six seasons each represent a different period of activity which are dependent on the weather and the cycles of nature (<http://www.melvillecity.com.au/environment-and-waste/piney-lakes/piney-lakes-reserve/bidi-katitjiny-aboriginal-womens-trail>).

The reserve has several panels within walking distance with relevant information written on them so in essence it can be a self-guided tour; however, most people actually prefer an Aboriginal guide to interact with and learn firsthand knowledge from. I enjoy this aspect of my work very much and encourage people to ask me questions so I can provide the correct information. If I am unsure, I'll go and ask someone in the community, and follow up with an email or phone call back to the client.

Although I do run many of my tours at Piney Lakes, as I am a mobile guide, a big part of what I do is on the road. This includes visiting schools, child care centres and delivering cultural learning journey workshops all over the metro area. The content I deliver often differs depending on what experience the client is seeking. For example, a women's group may request a workshop to specifically discuss women's business.

### And because of that...

my sessions usually run for one and half hours, which is enough time just to scratch the surface of Noongar

history and culture. As a spinoff of that, we run other programs through The City of Melville or through the Piney Lakes Education Centre, so people can build up their levels of learning.

It was important to establish and design a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with The City in relation to this trail. The Environmental Officer takes care of the marketing and booking of the tours and then contacts me to deliver the cultural sessions at the request of the school or organisation visiting the trail. We have a great working relationship. More recently, my business has developed in new and innovative ways. I not only deliver tours but now use my environmental background experience to balance natural resource management with cultural information. I work with "friends of groups" and environmental groups seeking knowledge on our perspective and how we can continue to care for the land and waters.

My business has also started to expand in other unexpected ways. For example, I am running a bush food evening in Fremantle for Oxfam. Oxfam sell traditional herbs and spices which are sourced locally, so my information session will be based on how people can incorporate herbs and spices into their cooking. I will share bush food and bush knowledge and hopefully people will come and learn and buy some of the products. These opportunities just keep popping up, which is exciting for me. I'm continually thinking about how my programs can be more creative and innovative.

### And since that day...

I feel like this business venture was my calling in life. Although I am a Noongar woman, when I was



*"Personally, I view this trail at Piney Lakes as a reconciliation trail as well as an education trail. It is about creating awareness and passing on information that will hopefully open people's eyes to new ways of seeing things."*

growing up I didn't have a lot to do with my own culture. It has really been a process of accessing knowledge through my Elders which wouldn't have happened if it wasn't for some key players who have mentored me, and taken me out on Country. Our culture has been disconnected, disengaged and fragmented and there are many younger people who are seeking to find out about their own cultural identity. Many of these kids are being proactive by going out on Country and speaking with their Elders to gain this knowledge.

As part of this disconnection, my role is to continue to share the culture, not just for Aboriginal people but for everyone. The Elders have told me it's not just mine to know, the knowledge belongs to everyone. I view the trail at Piney Lakes as a reconciliation trail as well as an education trail. It is about creating awareness and passing on information that will hopefully open people's eyes to new ways of seeing things.

People who do the tours really love the experience, they respond so positively. Since I've started this business, I've found that a lot of people are actually seeking something greater than themselves. Often what they find is there is a missing element in their lives and they discover it is actually a disconnection to Country. People will often say to me, "You guys (Aboriginal people) just get it, you can look at a plant and you know how to use it." That is often the type of information people are seeking.

They are local Australian people but they have a disconnection around their own knowledge to do with the environment that sustains them. Once that clicks, during the tour, you can see the onion layers just fall off them and they lap up the information. They walk away and I might get an email or phone call saying, "Wow I actually know what I need to do in this life with myself, with my family." Hearing this feedback is incredibly rewarding; to know that you can help someone see through our eyes and connect through our ways is very powerful.

I have many plans for Bindi Bindi Dreaming's future. I am focussed on continuing to ensure through this business, I can reach more people and create awareness and understanding about our people and culture. I want to share the many positive and interesting elements of Aboriginal culture with the whole world and do it in a culturally sensitive way. If two people can walk away from my tours with a different mindset, I've done my job.



*Bidi Katitjinny trail located at Piney Lakes*



*Marissa Oerma*

**For more information or to book a tour visit:**

<http://www.bindibindidreaming.com.au/>



# OCHRE WORKPLACE SOLUTIONS

ORGANISATION NAME:  
Ochre Workplace Solutions

CONTACT PERSON:  
Joanne Pellew

EMAIL AND WEBSITE:  
<http://www.ochreworkforcesolutions.com.au/>

KEY WORDS:  
Training, employment, business, pre-employment, advocacy, self-esteem, empowerment, opportunity, positive contribution



*Joanne Pellew*

## About the storyteller...

Joanne Pellew is a proud Noongar woman and the founder of Ochre Personnel, the first business in Australia to specialise in the recruitment of Indigenous people to Australia's mining industry.

## About Ochre...

Ochre Workforce Solutions is full service recruitment and Labour Hire company which specialises in Indigenous employment. Ochre is also certified as a Registered Training Organisation which allows it to offer a range of nationally accredited training. Ochre is a 100% Indigenous owned business which is certified by Supply Nation.



## Once upon a time...

I've been involved in businesses since I was 21 years old. My first business was based in Broome and every business that followed always revolved around Aboriginal people and culture. I only recognised this in hindsight but I always seemed to gravitate towards this space. In 2006, while I was working for a mining company, I was also running an Indigenous swimwear line business from home called Kooey which was starting to take off and get some good traction in the media. In 2008, we held an International launch which made breaking news by channel 10's Narelda Jacobs and was touted as the first Aboriginal Swimwear Label to be launched in Australia. Indigenous model Samantha Harris modelled at the launch, and Jessica Mauboy also performed - before she was unaffordable!

Kooey became the swimwear sponsor for the finals of the Miss Universe contest and it was amazing to think that I had started the label from very humble beginnings in Broome, WA. Although my involvement in this business didn't work out in the long term, I was extremely proud of its success.



*“The sky is the limit for Ochre, it has unlimited potential. The wider community has to recognise that Aboriginal people can do anything they set their minds to and I hope I’ve paved the way for other Indigenous people to believe in themselves and take the risk if they are passionate about pursuing a dream.”*

During the period that I was building Kooey, my ex-husband was working for a mining company. One day their receptionist didn’t come in and they were desperate for someone to man the phones, so one of the HR ladies asked me to come in on a temp basis as a favour while they looked for someone else. After a few days, the Human Resources Manager asked me if I knew of any Indigenous people who may be interested in applying for work as they couldn’t find anyone, either through advertising or consultants. I said I did, and I called several people whom I knew were experienced and currently looking for work. The three people I called, I was able to assist through the recruitment process. Although I had only been temping as a receptionist for a few days, I was able to observe the recruitment process and learn very quickly from the HR team what was required.

As I was helping these people through the process, I went into a lot of the finer details and provided information that recruiters don’t generally provide. I knew it was important when dealing with Aboriginal people to break things down so there was no confusion as to what was expected by using terms and language they understood. This made them more comfortable in communicating with me as well. This resulted in those three people securing jobs with the mining company, who then told family and friends about their new employment.

All of a sudden, people started coming in and asking to see me. I came back from my lunch break one

day and the HR manager asked to see me. He said, “What the hell is going on?” I thought I was in trouble. But he just said, “Where have all these Aboriginal people come from? We are inundated, this has never happened before. We’ve spent all this money on consultants, advertising, policies and nothing has worked. How has it been that you have been able to get all these people to come in?” And I said one word to him: communication. If you can’t communicate with Aboriginal people properly, you will get absolutely nowhere.

### And then one day...

on the back of that conversation with the HR Manager, I was offered a job in the HR Department, as the Aboriginal Engagement and Coordination Officer. This role was invaluable and would lay down the foundations for my own future recruitment business, Ochre. Within the first six months, I engaged with 286 Indigenous people who were ready and available to work for the company. In this role, I discovered there are a lot of gatekeepers in the Indigenous engagement space who are there to provide an employment opportunity for Indigenous people, but in most cases that doesn’t translate to people actually securing employment, which was very frustrating to see.

The mining company would win contracts and tenders but none of the Indigenous guys that I had engaged with were being picked up. It became apparent to me that Indigenous people were not being employed because many of the recruiters were using Labour Hire companies and getting their staff to recruit people. I didn’t think this was fair, I thought if you are paying recruiters shouldn’t they be recruiting instead of paying labour hire companies? At this point bells went off in my head and I realised if these companies weren’t going to use the people that they had actually won the contacts for then I should start my own Aboriginal Labour Hire Company to provide the opportunities myself.

At the time I had never dealt with a Labour Hire Company, I wasn’t familiar with how they operated, what their margins were or how they brought in revenue. However, while I was in this role, I had the opportunity to go to the board meetings and lap up information, including just how important Indigenous employment was within the mining industry. I learnt a lot about the industry during that period and I knew I had a golden opportunity to create positive change for our people and I had to use it.



## And because of that...

I was in this role for 18 months. During this time I was feeling overwhelmed with my commitments, a fulltime job, raising kids and managing both my son's football career and my daughter's needs and progressing my swimwear label. It left no time for anything else. During the next phase I won a scholarship to undertake a double degree at Murdoch University studying Entrepreneurship and HR Management. I only completed a couple of the units as I didn't feel like Uni was the right fit for me, I was more of a 'jump in and do it kind of person'.

So I then wrote a 75-page business plan for the recruitment company I wanted to start. It included everything I aimed to do, each step of the way. In April 2010, I drew the original logo on my computer with my Mum and Aunty chatting at the kitchen table and watching what I was doing over my shoulder. This was the beginning of the Ochre journey.

I then contacted an accountant to set the business up. He looked at my business plan and asked me about financial modelling but I wasn't interested in

going down that path, I knew this was an excellent opportunity. The accountant said to me, "You are going into a very capital heavy business, but you don't have any capital." I didn't know what he meant by the word capital, but I pretended that I did, luckily I didn't though, because at that point I probably would have said, "Okay well I can't do this, it's just too hard."

So, after the accountant set the business up, I was on my way. Ochre Personnel started small and I had to do everything myself- bookkeeping, payroll, marketing-as I couldn't afford to outsource back then. It was a big learning curve but it provided an excellent insight into every single aspect of my business. I started at home on my kitchen table on a computer one of my friends was kind enough to buy for me, and when people started knocking on my front door to give me their CV's I knew it was time to move to an office. My business plan turned out to be invaluable and I started to win contracts and Ochre has grown exponentially from that point.

In the beginning, I didn't really know what I was doing, I was learning on the go and I distinctly remember at one point, my Dad said to me, "You've winged it for this long, now it's time to put someone else in there who really knows what they are doing," which was kind of like a backhanded compliment! At that point I employed a couple of recruiters from my former workplace who came on board and helped me to grow.

There are two business models for the recruiting process. If a mining company wants a permanent employee, we recruit an Indigenous person who has the skills and attributes the employers require.



*Pre-employment Heights Training*



They then pay us a placement fee, and that person becomes their direct employee. However, if they just require a labour hire workforce, then they request X amount of candidates for a variety of positions that might run for six months or however long, without employing them permanently. This way, they don't accrue leave and other benefits, so we take that onus off them by giving them casual work staff. Ochre then gets paid an hourly rate based on the hours the staff do. We recruit for all industries; tourism, retail, mining, and hospitality to name a few, which is how we have been able to grow. There are a lot of companies and industries that have Indigenous obligations through Reconciliation Action Plans and Indigenous Land Use agreements-but Ochre crosses all industries.

In the first 18 months, I turned over three million dollars. This was due to having the right formula and sheer hard work. I also put it down to capitalising on a gap in a specific market and knowing how to relate to Aboriginal people. At the peak of Ochre Personnel, I had 12 employees. However, the mining boom slowed and the entire industry contracted and I had to contract with it. Ochre currently has a smaller staffing level however, we outsource staffing on an as needs basis such as admin, payroll, consultants, IT etc. I learned early on the more people on your payroll, the more taxes you have to pay. Now Ochre contracts people as required, to grow and expand, at the rate of the business.

## And since that day...

the growth plan for this company is to have an Ochre office in every state in Australia. We are gearing up to launch the new Ochre Jobs website in January 2016 and I'd like to get as many unemployed Indigenous people registered as possible. Ochre Jobs will be the first to market as an Indigenous version of SEEK, which is a natural extension of what we already do. Corporate Australia and Government organisations will post jobs specifically for Indigenous people and as Ochre already has an audience, those jobs will go directly to that audience. Potential candidates will list which job alerts they want so as soon as they are posted-they will be notified.

I have a large database of clients (companies) I have worked with over the years, plus a database of over 5000 people registered with Ochre for training and employment opportunities. This database represents that Ochre is a living, breathing example that thousands of Indigenous people don't want to be living in a welfare cycle; they want to work. By signing

up to Ochre it demonstrates to me that people want to change their lives and contribute to society in a meaningful way. I think that Ochre Jobs will be hugely successful and I know it will be the number one Indigenous job site in Australia.

I always knew that my company would succeed. There were many times over the first years that people told me to give up when times were tough but I refused to listen. I always knew the potential the business had and I didn't waver from that vision. True to word, I am now winning contracts at the Federal Government level and with high profile, large corporate companies. Ochre was the first Aboriginal Recruitment Company in Australia and also the only combined Labour Hire and Registered Training Organisation-so I'm an end-to-end business, the only one of its type in the private sector. Currently, there are no other Indigenous companies with the same model as Ochre. I am also the only Indigenous female in WA that owns her own RTO private license and I am very proud of that. Ochre has also, never received any Government funding. The business was created from scratch with nothing but an idea and it is completely self-sufficient in a commercial sense.

To take people who have limited skills, no driver's license, low self-confidence and bleak prospects on a journey to employment and happy, productive lives is incredibly rewarding for me. Ochre is taking people out of the welfare cycle and assisting them to become positive, contributing members of society. I have been asked to share my story but I feel like I am still in the middle of it! I don't have the secret yet. But, I do think the key to Ochre's success is that I am a grass roots person and have an innate understanding of people, the issues they face and how to help them overcome those barriers that may hold them back.

As an Aboriginal person growing up with abject poverty and experiencing adversity, I can relate to a human being sitting across the table from me who has probably had a similar experience. My skills come from understanding my people. A lot of other people simply don't possess that level of understanding when it comes to Aboriginal people. The sky is the limit for Ochre, it has infinite potential. The wider community has to recognise that Aboriginal people can do anything they set their minds to and I hope I've paved the way for other Indigenous people to believe in themselves and take the risk if they are passionate about pursuing a dream.



## Pre-employment Programs

We also run pre-employment programs. The first one, which still means the most to me, was in partnership with Abi Group who approached me with a contract offer to fill 20 entry level roles across their sites. They specifically wanted to employ younger Aboriginal people.

So we consulted our database and started off with a pool of 120 people who were screened through our recruitment process. We then narrowed the number down to 30 people. Abi Group selected their final 20 who were given a letter of commitment promising employment if they successfully completed four weeks of training. Their positions were as trainees starting on around \$100,000 a year. All 20 people made it through the training process.

These people were long-term unemployed and living on around \$15,000 a year. It was mind blowing to watch this process and to capture it all on camera. You can view the vision on Ochre's website:

<http://www.ochreworkforcesolutions.com.au/>

## Registered Training Organisation

In 2012, two years after I'd started Ochre, I was getting inundated with applications from Aboriginal people seeking employment in the mining industry who didn't have the background or the expertise, tickets, or training. However, there were a lot of entry-level opportunities so I decided to, quite naively, become a Registered Training Organisation.

Although the process was challenging as I knew nothing about training and had to re-invest \$350,000, thereby taking a huge risk, I managed to pass all the necessary criteria. This process was very challenging and physically draining due to the amount of pressure I put on myself to ensure it happened. Being an RTO has given me a lot more scope to help Aboriginal people, as I am now able to both train and recruit.

## Blogs

There is a blog section on our website, which now has a readership of over 6000 people. The blogs discuss real life issues and tell the story of an Aboriginal woman in the Aboriginal community sharing information with the Government, industry leaders and business people on what steps are needed to get Aboriginal people moving in a positive direction. If industry wants to employ Aboriginal people then they need to have an understanding of the generational issues, which impact on many of the social problems. The blogs provide an opportunity for people to start that conversation in a diplomatic, non-blaming balanced way and hopefully begin to implement the changes needed for our people to move forward.

## iTraining Program

Ochre has just been approved for a Government initiative which allows us to provide training and computers to Indigenous people who want to learn basic computer skills. These people can then set their computers up at home and purchase them through their Centrelink payments. This is a national initiative and we are currently entering an agreement with Harvey Norman to provide the computers across Australia. We are really excited about this initiative.



# KURONGKURL KATITJIN

## ORGANISATION NAME:

Kurongkurl Katitjin, Centre for Indigenous Australian Education and Research, Edith Cowan University

## CONTACT PERSON:

Jason Barrow

## EMAIL AND WEBSITE:

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<http://www.ecu.edu.au/schools/kurongkurl-katitjin/overview>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EgNbjsxHzWg&feature=youtu.be>

## PROGRAM / PROJECT PARTNERS:

Edith Cowan University

## KEY STAFF / PEOPLE INVOLVED:

Jason Barrow

## KEY WORDS:

Kurongkurl Katitjin, Ngoolark, Wandjoo, Rock Solid Foundations, ITAS

## About the storyteller...

Jason Barrow is the Cultural Awareness Officer and the ITAS Coordinator (Tuesday & Thursday) for the Kurongkurl Katitjin Centre for Indigenous Australian Education and Research at Edith Cowan University.

## About the Kurongkurl Katitjin Centre...

Kurongkurl Katitjin, Edith Cowan University's Centre for Indigenous Australian Education and Research, plays a vital role in assisting the University to meet its commitment to Indigenous peoples. We support University-wide activities and programs, as well as activities specific to Indigenous Australian people and their cultures.

## Once upon a time...

the Kurongkurl Katitjin Centre, Edith Cowan University's Centre for Indigenous Australian Education and Research, was officially opened on the 30th June, 2005 at the Mount Lawley campus. Kurongkurl Katitjin is a Nyoongar phrase meaning 'coming together to learn' in the Nyoongar language. The building was designed in consultation with the Nyoongar community and Elders to incorporate elements from Aboriginal culture and the Australian landscape. The Centre is a big, funky coloured building, which, during the design phase, used the large monoliths or stones found throughout the southwest and Uluru as its design impetus.

The building is a big, powerful stand out feature on campus and the colours used represent the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags and are also found in the Australian landscape. The Centre has multiple entry points and the six seasons inspired landscaping is visible from within. As part of the building and landscape design, five mosaic artworks were created to represent the north, south, east and west regions of the state. Four of the five mosaic tiles are linked by story paths to the fifth one, which is located at the centre of the building and is called "Our Place." (<https://www.ecu.edu.au/schools/kurongkurl-katitjin/about>). Kurongkurl Katitjin's aim is to support university-wide activities and programs and to play a vital role in assisting the University to



*The Kurongkurl Katitjin Building*





*“Our primary goal is to witness our students graduate and to that end, we offer as much guidance and support as possible.”*

meet its commitment to Indigenous peoples. Some of these include: Rock Solid Foundations - our Indigenous Alumni monument, the Nala Karla student lounge rooms, various Indigenous artworks, the six Season gardens surrounding the centre, and the Kurongkurl Katitjin Centre. (<https://www.ecu.edu.au/schools/kurongkurl-katitjin/about>).

## And then one day...

one of the programs that Kurongkurl Katitjin facilitates is the Indigenous Tutorial Assistance Scheme Tertiary Tuition (ITAS) for our Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students. The ITAS scheme is funded under the Indigenous Advancement Strategy from the Commonwealth Government. The aim of ITAS is to improve the educational outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in tertiary courses to the same levels as those for non-Aboriginal Australians. ITAS is also available on a case by case basis for post graduate students. Although people are generally comfortable in their abilities at

that level, sometimes and for a myriad of different reasons, people may still need help.

Our tutors are fantastic; they all offer the flexibility to work around our student's timeframes. If the student happens to need tutoring after hours, on a Sunday morning, or on a public holiday, then so be it. It's all about enabling. If we come up against a brick wall, we will come up, go over it and work through it until we find a solution. The tutors either engage in a one on one mode with the student (which most opt for) or in the odd case, a mini group.

The university provides excellent support in seeking to deliver this, as it's our philosophy that the students come first. Our primary goal is to witness our students graduate and to that end, we offer as much guidance and support as possible. We often see our Aboriginal students isolated and on their own, particularly our fair skinned Aboriginal students who often question where they fit in. Many will voice that feeling to us. I've had students recently who have approached me to express feelings of isolation and stress in week 10 of a 14 week semester. However, we reach out with warm arms and provide encouragement and support.

We generally have about 200 Indigenous students who are enrolled at ECU out of about 20,000 altogether, which is quite underrepresented. However, this year, we have seen a big jump to 300



*Kurongkurl Katitjin*



*Birak season seating and performance area*



*Rock solid foundations*



*“Kurungkurl Katitjin is a Nyoongar phrase meaning ‘coming together to learn’ in the Nyoongar language.”*

enrolled students which is fantastic. We attribute some of this uptake to the power of our alumni who are an excellent example of what can be achieved and the opportunities available. It's not just those students who have graduated; education affords support for those around the individual as well, both above generations, sideways generations and most importantly, generations to come.

## And because of that...

2011 was a pretty special year for Edith Cowan University. It was our 20th year of being formally recognised as a University, it was the 90th year of Edith Cowan herself being elected into Parliament and it was 60th year of our first Aboriginal graduate. We not only wanted to celebrate and acknowledge our first Aboriginal graduate but all those who came thereafter. So, we researched the databases up until the end of 2010 and came up with 501 names and started discussions around how we would display and honour these students. We knew we didn't want an embossed oak honour board in an ivory tower that people get to view just once. It needed to be accessible, tangible and visible for people to be able to see and touch. We had six decades to represent and we also had to consider students who would graduate in the future so I suggested having

the seven pillars of wisdom; a stone per decade. The other idea was to have the pillars placed in a corresponding pattern to the Yokala or the Seven Sisters star constellation which is visible overhead in the November night sky at about 9pm in the evening. The Seven Sisters is known by groups of people right around the world and the universal stories are remarkably similar regardless of language or cultural background. So as the Yokala constellation sits in the sky, the stones are also placed accordingly.

Each of the stones, which are Nyoongar granite, have a special story behind them. They were sourced from Gwambygine near York, and we worked with the Elders from that region to ensure we were following the correct protocols. Each of the stones has a raw natural face, a drilled and fractured face; a cut face and a highly polished plinth. I liken these rock faces to the journey of the individual. When you first come to university, you are a bit raw-in your natural state-and then you get drilled, fractured and honed over time, until you are a highly polished unit on your way out.

And so the Rock Solid Foundations were born. They took eight weeks from conception to unveiling. The colours of the stones are in synchronicity with our graduation regalia policy. Sky blue is for education, red is for health sciences and turquoise is for performing arts (WAAPA). The darker blue is for the arts degrees, green is for the hard sciences, purple is for law, the yellow is for business and commerce and the dark gold ones are for engineering. One of the most inspiring stories to come from this project is the tale of one of our students who came to me as





*Tall trees of the south*



*Turtles from the west*

we were in the final stages of finishing it. She was in deep distress and ready to walk away from her degree. So I brought her outside to show her what we were doing with the stones. I said to her, "When you graduate, your name will be on that stone." She started crying and hugging me and I asked her to come and check it out in a few days when it was completely finished, so she brought her kids back and they all had a discussion. What came out of that discussion was the idea that all three family members' names could be on these stones together in the future. And that was the clincher; she completed her upcoming exam, received a distinction in that corresponding unit and walked across the stage in September 2015 as a graduate nurse.

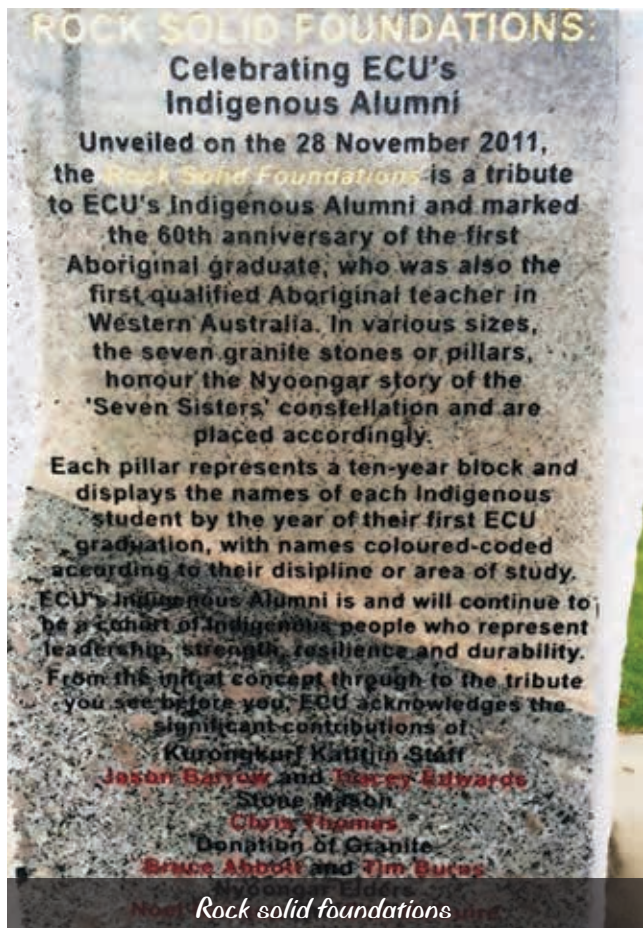
I often share that story with potential students, particularly the Follow the Dream kids who come through. Today, two of her children are enrolled at university. This is just a remarkable story and one of the many reasons why Kurongkurl Katitjin and all of its initiatives is a vital Centre and resource for our Indigenous students.

## And since that day...

although we have achieved an exponential amount in the last decade, there is always more to do and we have many plans to develop our services at each of our three campuses in the future. I came up with the idea to provide interpretive opportunities for all of our students and staff to learn more about the

campus space they are studying and working at, and the Country they find themselves on. As a Nyoongar man, when I travel, I don't expect to see my Country replicated so I feel that I should recognise, learn about and pay homage to the Country that I am visiting, and share my own cultural knowledge, respectfully, wherever I am.

At our Joondalup campus we have a Wandjoo/Welcome cultural reflection space which is a bilingual entry statement at one of the main entry points onto the campus. Additionally, a newly opened building incorporating several cultural elements from the Joondalup area, called Ngoolark (Ngoolark is a Nyoongar name for the Carnaby's White Tail Black Cockatoo) can also be found. Ngoolark has recently been shortlisted as a finalist in the World Architectural Awards. The impetus behind these cultural reflective spaces comes off the back of the success of our Rock Solid Foundations at Mount Lawley, and the Kurongkurl Katitjin building itself. I am aiming to get six cultural reflective spaces at Joondalup campus online; the first two are here and another will be completed over the summer holidays with the rest to come in the future.



*Rock solid foundations*



# THE YONGA BOYS

## ORGANISATION NAME:

The Yonga Boys

## CONTACT PERSON:

Lindsay Calyun

## EMAIL AND WEBSITE:

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## PROGRAM / PROJECT PARTNERS:

The Town of Kwinana

## KEY STAFF / PEOPLE INVOLVED:

Lindsay Calyun, Marianne McKay

## KEY WORDS:

Dance, custom, culture, performance, education, history

## About the storyteller...

Elder Lindsay Calyun is the founder of the Yonga Boys. Marianne McKay co-ordinates resources such as costumes and headbands for the group. Lindsay provides the julips and the white ochre for the dancers.

## About the Yonga Boys...

In the early 1990's, Perth Indigenous Elder Lindsay Calyun decided to organise an Indigenous dance group to ensure local young people were in touch with their culture. Since then, the Yonga Boys have performed at various local and state-run events across Perth.



## Once upon a time...

In 2008, The Town of Kwinana were organising an upcoming NAIDOC ceremony event and were looking for an Aboriginal dance group to perform as part of the ceremony. They contacted Elder Lindsay Calyun who organised a group of young local boys to perform. The event was a huge success and the group of 20 boys absolutely loved performing. As a result of this, their desire to continue performing was sparked. A group of parents and community members including Lindsay Calyun and Marianne McKay contacted Kwinana Industries Council, BHP and ALCOA to request financial support to set up a professional dance group. All three companies sent representatives to come and meet with us to discuss our options. We decided to apply to ALCOA for funding for \$30,000, which Reg Henry from RUAH Community Services wrote and submitted on our behalf. We received the

funding, which was fantastic and enabled us to facilitate a series of six month cultural dance workshops. We then employed Derek Nannup, Timmy Kelly and Adrian Ugle to help run the workshops. David Hart (Ngoombajurra) also worked with the group for the six month period.

## And then one day...

these cultural workshops were extremely beneficial for the group and on the back of this, The Yonga Boys were born! Yonga means kangaroo in Noongar. The boys perform a kangaroo and an emu dance during their shows so it's a very fitting name for the group. This group was a long held vision by Lindsay who was keen to ensure the local children had a good sense of culture and belonging. All the boys are from the Kwinana area and many are from the same family. They range in ages from 3 to 15 years. Initially, when we first started, Lindsay would pick them all up and drive them to practice. They practised consistently until they became a tight, professional group and started to get booked regularly. It was a very organic process as people would hear about us through word of mouth and community networking, and approach us to perform at local events and schools. We are now contacted by different organisations if there are upcoming events such as the Wardarnji Indigenous Festival where we have performed for the past three years. The Wardarnji Festival is a Noongar tradition and contemporary cultural celebration based in the heart of Fremantle at the Arts Centre. We also get a lot of jobs booked through The Kwinana Shire such as The Sunset Festival. The Yonga Boys now have about



eight different dances in their repertoire and they always end their show with the celebration dance. The dance performance runs for 25 minutes in total. The Yonga Boys have now been performing for the past seven years. As the boys grow up, younger ones come in to take their place in the group. Lindsay facilitates the group and takes care of the logistics and Marianne co-ordinates resources such as the costumes and headbands which are made by the women in the extended family. Lindsay provides the jilpis and the white ochre for the dancers.

## And because of that...

the demand for our performances just keep growing. We have performed at many large gatherings including state-run initiatives and local events. We have also been performing at all the schools in the Wambro area including Rockingham, Queens Park Primary School, Kelmscott and Gilmore College. The group is always well received. The differing ages of the boys contributes to their appeal. The older boys are talented dancers and excellent mentors to the younger ones which is evident when they are dancing. Although we haven't registered a business, our boys get paid for their performances. We don't really consider the money to be important, we just want to see them dance and share our culture to keep our traditional dance alive. That's the purpose of what we do, and what matters. The boys really love dancing; they can't wait for the next performance. The three year old often asks Lindsay, "When are we doing Noongar dancing again Pop?" They feel proud to share their culture.

One thing that stands out is their lack of fear. When they first started performing, they were a little bit fearful, but once they did the first couple of shows, they were just in their element. Benji, the oldest boy in the group, is the leader and a mentor to the younger kids, who all learn from him. We don't really need to practice anymore as the boys know what their positions are and they know exactly what they are doing, even the three year old who picked it up straight away. He'll go right through his childhood as a Noongar dancer/performer now, which is such a great way to spend parts of his childhood-being creative and contributing to the arts. We are pretty keen to bring in a didgeridoo player to teach the boys how to play to add another element to the performance. We find it challenging to get good didgeridoo players to perform with us as it is a highly specific skill. If several of our boys can learn how to play then we will be able to offer the full experience ourselves and not have to bring in people from outside.

*"My ancestors are from the Murray River and one of my ancestors was a warrior. When the genocide of Aboriginal people occurred and they were dispossessed from their land during the Pinjarra massacre, his tribe all performed corroboree, so it's part of my heritage and instinct and it's important to carry on that tradition and continue to share the culture of traditional dance."*

*Lindsay Calyun*

## And since that day...

in 2014, the boys spent six weeks working with Simon Stewart, a choreographer and dancer from Ochre Contemporary Dance Company, to create a special performance for Karlak Karlil, an event hosted by the City of Kwinana and Friends of the Spectacles to celebrate NAIDOC Week. This was an invaluable experience for the boys, who were able to, with Simon's guidance, expand on their traditional dance technique to include contemporary Indigenous dance. This experience was so enjoyable for the boys. Having the opportunity to interact with Simon, who is such a positive role model, inspired several of the boys to consider the possibility of pursuing a career in the arts. Karlak Karlil – Home Is Where The Fire Is, was held on Sunday 6 July at the Spectacles Wetlands, Kwinana. The performance was a hit and a proud moment for the boys after working hard for six weeks rehearsing.

We are very happy with how The Yonga Boys are travelling at the moment. We go day by day and don't really think about the future, we live in the moment and we are happy that way. We love performing in the schools so the school students can learn about Aboriginal culture. School students are our future leaders and we think it's very important that they are educated about our ancient culture. The more they understand, the more they will respect us and our history and the closer we can move towards establishing reconciliation. That's the message we aim to convey through our dance performances and that's why we love to dance. It's a non-confrontational way to teach people about who we are and why our culture is important. We want to keep our culture strong and carry on what our Elders taught us. If we can share our culture through our performances with people everywhere to help keep it alive for another 40 thousand years, then it's a pretty joyful way to do it.

*Have you  
got a great  
story?*

*Would you like  
to contribute to the  
next Indigenous  
Storybook?*

*If so, contact PHAIWA on;  
(08) 9266 2344 or  
email: [phaiwa@curtin.edu.au](mailto:phaiwa@curtin.edu.au)*

*For more information  
on the Storybook, including  
framework and guidelines visit  
the Indigenous Storybook  
webpage at:*

*<http://www.phaiwa.org.au/index.php/other-projects-mainmenu-146/308-indigenous-storybook>*

*Stories from all over  
Western Australia are welcome  
and encouraged.*





THE WEST AUSTRALIAN

NEWS