

Linking Hands

NEWSLETTER

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Young Mob Leadership Program extends to Melbourne

In almost all areas of Indigenous affairs, leadership has been identified as a priority. Leadership projects and activities encourage personal growth, enhance self confidence and build self esteem in individuals, which in turn enhances mental health and well being and strengthen communities. Well designed leadership initiatives can also provide hope for Indigenous peoples to work towards fulfilling dreams and aspirations, particularly among Indigenous youth. (source: VicHealth)

- Building Indigenous Leadership Promoting the Emotional and Spiritual Wellbeing of Koori Communities through the Koori Communities Leadership Program

The Indigenous population of Australia is estimated to be 517,200, or 2.5% of the total Australian population. It is a relatively young population, with a median age of 21 years, compared with a median age of 37 years in the non-Indigenous population. Approximately two thirds of the Indigenous population is under 25 years of age, and one third of all Indigenous people live in urban areas such as Melbourne and Sydney.

The perception many Australians have of Indigenous people is often informed by images of Aboriginal people living in remote communities, such as those in the Northern Territory, Western Australia and Queensland. This stereotyping is often at the cost of Indigenous people who live in urban areas and who also suffer from discrimination and disadvantage. Urban Indigenous communities, along with rural and remote communities, are among the most disadvantaged in the country according to almost all socio-economic indicators.

The Indigenous community in the Yarra Valley region east of Melbourne has a high percentage of disengaged young people, many of whom are disconnected socially and culturally, displaying poor indicators in the areas of school retention and higher education entry. Considerable social problems such as drug and alcohol addiction, family breakdown and conflict are all significant contributors to many Koorie young people being identified as being in a high risk category.

On invitation from the community, World Vision is introducing the Young Mob Youth Leadership Project,

The Sydney Young Mob Project has seen participants develop their public speaking skills by presenting at major events, including the World Indigenous Peoples Conference on Education. Young Mob participants presented on the importance of leadership in the Aboriginal community.



which is currently being implemented in Sydney, to the Healesville community. The project began pilot implementation in December and is expected to be rolled out in additional communities in the coming years.

The Young Mob Youth Leadership Project aims to increase culturally appropriate leadership development opportunities for urban Aboriginal youth, which in the long term contributes towards building resilience, life skills and reinforcing cultural knowledge systems within urban Aboriginal communities.

Discussions with participants have indicated the Sydney Leadership project has produced some excellent results in relation to increasing confidence, self-esteem and personal-growth among participants. Project participants have developed skills in public speaking and were continually challenging themselves through engaging with not only the local community, but also broader society. Participants have used their public speaking skills to attend interviews, assist them in obtaining work placements, have presented at conferences and other community events and have performed Welcome to Country. Having a new positive outlook on life has also contributed to their family and social commitments, and general wellbeing.



Kaye proudly shows her artwork



Janella and son Dustin

Artist spotlight: Janella Akemarra Woodman

24-year-old artist Janella Akemarra Woodman grew up in Wutunugurra, close to Epenarra Cattle Station in the Northern Territory. Her paintings are inspired by the land. Janella says her two grandmothers have had a big influence on her development as an artist and the three of them often all paint together.

Janella has exhibited her work in Adelaide and Alice Springs. She is finding it harder to find the time to paint as she now has a young son but still enjoys her art and is currently planning her next painting, which she said may depict cattle being loaded onto a road train.

One of Janella's paintings was recently collected by the Flinders Art Museum in Adelaide, a great achievement for an emerging artist.

Epenarra art program continues to grow

In 2001, in response to a request by the Wutunugurra community (also known as Epenarra and Wetengerr) and the local Member of Parliament, World Vision Australia (WVA) began working with the remote community of Wutunugurra. This Community is situated south east of Tennant Creek in the Barkly Region of the Northern Territory. The purpose of WVA's initial partnership with Wutunugurra was to establish a way for the community to promote healthy lifestyles as well as contribute to the sustainable development of Wutunurrgurra.

The development of effective governance structures has been an integral part of World Vision's work in Wutunugurra from the start. It was decided that a program designed to strengthen governance structures may assist the community in strengthening their voice with government so that they might achieve a higher level of service delivery.

The Governance and Leadership Project (2006-2009) aimed to increase community control of resource allocation and service delivery decisions. World Vision Australia worked with the Community to reinvigorate the Wetengerr Aboriginal Corporation (WAC) and develop a culturally appropriate constitution. In 2007 a new constitution was developed and 'council' members were elected.

In 2009 World Vision Australia began working with the emerging artists of Wutunugurra based on requests from the community as well as discussions with key stakeholders. For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, participating in the growing Indigenous art market has many benefits: it helps to keep language and culture strong and provides opportunities in the mainstream economy for employment, skills development and financial independence.

The Epenarra Artists had a busy 2009. Three women are currently training to become art workers as part of the Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP). This involves working on all aspects of the art program, from cutting and stretching canvas to recording sales of paintings and developing certificates of authenticity on the computer.

Epenarra Artists have recently opened their own bank account and have registered themselves as a business. They have begun discussing ideas on what else they would like to produce. Recently they bought silk in order to begin dying using bush medicine. Production and painting of artifacts by the men is also planned, as is more training in use of colours.

Exposure to the art industry by way of visiting galleries, spending time with artists from more established art centres, seeing what happens to their art when it leaves the community for an exhibition and other professional development opportunities has had a major impact on many of the artists. Typically they are abuzz with enthusiasm when they return. The group have been lucky enough to have had 12 different artists of various ages travel to exhibitions this year.

Epenarra Artists have exhibited successfully in 2009 at the Bleeding Heart Gallery in Brisbane and World Vision's Birrung Gallery in Sydney. They have also exhibited two pieces of work at Desert Mob 2009, and participated in the Barkly Showcase at Tandanya Gallery in Adelaide, where one of the pieces was collected by the Flinders Art Museum.

Epenarra Artists have attended and sold art at four art market stalls in Tennant Creek as well as the Desert Mob marketplace. Art sales have gradually increased due to the improvement in the quality of art being produced and greater exposure in the market.

Epenarra Artists have grown in confidence when selling their work. The CDEP art workers have been involved in workshops that aim to increase their confidence in handling money and making sales. Despite their hesitation they are becoming more and more comfortable when working with customers both within the community and at market stalls.

World Vision will continue to work with the Epenarra Artists as the Indigenous Art Program develops and expands to work with additional Northern Territory communities.

Greg Mallyon, Manager of Birrung Gallery, Sydney, provided these comments relating to the art recently produced in Epenarra.

“The result of a high standard of artistic tuition combined with sensitive engagement of the community has resulted in paintings for which there is serious art market interest.

Over the past years sporadic workshops had been conducted at Epenarra in the women's centre with a variety of visiting artists. The standard of painting from my observations back in 2005 was that the quality of art materials was poor, the subject matter was mainly 'tourist style' (images of bush tucker and painting technique amateurish). The art produced in the community was not of a standard that would provide much interest in the wider art market. From a cultural perspective the artists did not appear to be painting images of meaningful content and engaging with art practice as a means of retelling important stories.

With the introduction of sustained arts tuition by visiting professional artists over the past 2 years a significant change has occurred. Through use of quality art materials and in teaching the use of these materials an immediate improvement was visible. In terms of the artistic integrity of the subject matter as well it was clear the art tutors concerned were engaging the artists by stimulating them intellectually. Beyond the commercial gallery world the acquisition of an Epenarra painting by a major museum also endorses the cultural integrity of the works produced during these workshops.”

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Positive start to Mapoon housing project

In early September World Vision launched the Mapoon Home Ownership Project in Cape York with a visit by the Deputy General Manager of Indigenous Business Australia, Kaely Woods, and CEO of World Vision, Tim Costello. The visit included a tour of the community, storytelling by Mapoon elders, visits to a number of households with prospective home owners, a community BBQ and a visit to Turtle Camp.

Over the next two years World Vision will facilitate the Mapoon Home Ownership Project. The Project will support prospective home owners, the local council, traditional owners and trustees of the land to navigate their way through the complex legal, regulatory and financial processes involved in home ownership on Indigenous lands. For many families living on communally-owned Indigenous land, the dream of owning their own home has long been out of reach. World Vision and its partners hope to help Mapoon people to one day soon feel the pride and joy of home ownership.

“Indigenous people in remote areas face huge barriers to buying homes, which are far more complex than we experience on freehold land in urban areas,” said World Vision’s CEO Tim Costello.

“We must support and encourage people who want to become home owners and Mapoon community have asked us to give them a hand. An important task will be finding a way to change the current way houses and land are being valued, which prohibits ownership.”

Recent policy moves towards home ownership in remote communities have captured the attention of media and the Australian public, but the benefits of home ownership have long been known to Mapoon people. During the mission time, newlywed couples where assisted to build their own homes, with money earned from working in the pastoral or fishing industries. Home ownership is today central to the aspirations of descendants of the original inhabitants of Mapoon mission, expressed in terms of self-sufficiency, pride, and heritage for future generations. Their vision now is for Mapoon families to own their homes like they did before, to live peacefully and to build their community together.

The national level of home ownership is 69% among all Australians and 34% among Indigenous Australians, but the option is currently limited to urban areas with freehold title. Home ownership has only recently become available to Indigenous people living on communal title, but it has long been a reality for Native Americans in the USA, where the home ownership levels on some reservations has risen to as high as 70%. “It is hard to understand why home ownership should be so readily available elsewhere in Australia and overseas, but not available to people living in remote communities like Mapoon. Whatever the legal and



The Ase family are one of the Mapoon families that hope to be able to purchase their own homes in the future.

bureaucratic obstacles, they should be overcome.” says Dr Mark Moran, Head of Australia programs at World Vision.

In the words of Tim Costello: “There is a strong link between housing and wellbeing. Home ownership is linked to education and getting and keeping a steady job. It underpins participation in the Australian economy. There’s a lot of talk about ways to end Indigenous disadvantage and here we have a community that is determined to make their lives better. We have seen the world over that the best results happen when communities take action themselves.”

Considerable media attention was drawn to the Mapoon project when Tim Costello visited the community in September 2009. Sandra Ase aspires to own her own home, and an extract of her interview with the Koori Mail is reproduced below. She currently lives with her family in a house that backs on to the beach:

“I sort of sit on top of a cliff so I can see over to the water; it’s like I have a big oyster reef in my backyard,” she said. “I want this home. I’m going to do whatever it takes to actually own my own home, so I’m prepared for the commitment.”

“The house that I’m living in now was my mother’s house, she moved into that house in 1994.”

“My mother was one of the ladies involved in the burning of Mapoon, she was working in the girls’ dormitory. She gets emotional even if I bring it up; some of the Elders here are still hurt by what happened!”

During the mission period at Mapoon, people were encouraged to build their own homes using money they had earned working away in the pastoral and fishing industry. In 1963, people were removed from the settlement and their houses were either burnt down or demolished by the Queensland police.

But Ms Ase said that, “despite all that Mapoon had been through, its people were still strong and proud.”

“My people never forgot about Mapoon, we all came back and built it up again and now we can own our own homes,” she said.

“For the Elders to actually come back after what they’ve been through and then still carry on the culture and