

West news

Connecting and partnering
with Aboriginal communities

Issue 10 – Summer 2022



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Deputy Secretary's message

Dear readers, greetings from Dja Dja Wurrung Country.

Department of Families, Fairness and Housing has been focused on flood recovery and relief efforts following recent flood events across the state and we are incredibly grateful to our sector and local partners for their support.

We recently underwent significant changes following the conclusion of the Evolve Project. On 8 August 2022, a new division, the Aboriginal Self-Determination and Outcomes Branch was established to elevate the significance of Aboriginal leadership and incorporate Aboriginal voice and partnerships in all that we do. A very

warm welcome to Raylene Harradine who commenced as Deputy Secretary of the new division in October.

As part of the Evolve changes, Aboriginal Engagement Units from across the department transitioned to the new division. I would like to thank members of the West Aboriginal Engagement Unit, Lindi Dietzel, Syd Fry, Julian Harvey, Sandy Hodge, Julie Jose, Jodie Rantall and Rhiannon Smith, led by Shane Cumming, for their stewardship over the past few years. They drove Aboriginal governance and provided an important link between the division and the Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations, supporting them through

the COVID pandemic. The West has gained invaluable knowledge from the unit and we look forward to continuing to work closely with the unit in the new division. The structural changes also saw our Dhelk Dja Coordinators and IFV Coordinators transfer to Family Safety Victoria and we thank them for their important role in supporting vital work to address Aboriginal family violence in the West. We are all eager to realise the impact of the new division in our work.

On 23 June 2022, Aboriginal community members, Secretaries and senior representatives from the Department of Families Fairness and Housing, Department of Justice and Community Safety, Department of Health and the Department of Education and Training came together for a West Metro Aboriginal Community Forum. The forum was an opportunity to hear about the service system experiences of community members and a number of commitments were made by the department's Secretaries' following the forum. As an outcome of the forum, the West is committed to supporting the Wungurilwil Gagapduir Agreement through the following initiatives:

- Strengthening practice leadership for the West Metro catchment, focussed on capacity building for leaders and practitioners working with Aboriginal children



across DFFH, VACCA and community service organisations.

- Considering how we support our carers with carer payments and the commencement of the West component of the Carer Help Desk in October 2022. We are ensuring this new service is culturally safe and appropriate.
- Supporting community consultation and local self-organisation processes for the creation of a gathering space in West Metro and to improve access to culturally specific services.

Finally, I would also like to acknowledge Pam Williams, Executive Director, Barwon Area who left us at the end of September. As the Executive Director, Barwon Area, Pam helped to drive outcomes while working closely with Wathaurong over the past six years. Her wisdom, guidance, empathy, professionalism, integrity and championing of clients and agencies across Barwon communities will be sorely missed.

I hope you enjoy this edition of *West news* and I look forward to providing you with further updates.

Paul Smith
Deputy Secretary,
West Division

Front page: A digeridoo workshop, competition and performances were just some of the popular activities held during BADAC's annual Open Day, held during NAIDOC Week.

Welcome to *West news*

The Department of Families, Fairness and Housing respectfully acknowledges the Traditional Owners of Country throughout Victoria and pays its respects to the ongoing living cultures of Aboriginal peoples.

In this edition of *West news*, we take a deep dive into the Evolve Project, which aims to deliver on the government's commitment to self-determination by elevating Aboriginal leadership, voice and partnerships.

Wathaurong Aboriginal Co-operative shares its exciting plans for a new Healing Spirit Youth Hub, which will be a one-stop shop for young community members to socialise and access supports, services and programs.

We'll see some of the ways community marked

NAIDOC week and touch base with the Aboriginal Cultural Support and Awareness advisors about the impact their new roles are already having in the Child Protection space.

There is also some great news for community members who are looking for work or considering a career change, with the creation of a free careers counselling service with a specific culturally safe stream for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

We trust you enjoy this edition of the *West news*.

Youth to benefit from \$1.6m grant

Wathaurong youth will have a safe and dedicated drop-in space to access programs and services, or just have a yarn, thanks to a \$1.6 million Victorian Government grant. The grant will be used to turn a property owned by Wathaurong Aboriginal Co-operative into a youth hub.

Wathaurong Aboriginal Co-operative CEO Simon Flagg says the project is the result of feedback from young people that they needed a dedicated space to access a range of supports and connect and engage with each other on a day-to-day basis, to yarn, participate in cultural activities, strengthen their life skills, and receive support and guidance.

'A key aspect of the hub is that the youth helped develop what they want the space to be, how it will look and even the design of it. They wanted a one-stop shop for them, so

they'll have a GP as well as social and emotional supports and services,' Simon says.

'We've also embedded cultural elements – men and women's circles – as well as areas where everyone can come together to yarn as a group. It'll be where we do all our youth activities so they can strengthen their identities in their place, where they lead and control how it works and the values of the space.'

Wathaurong will move its breakfast club, afterschool activities and homework club to the new space and provide additional, engaging activities targeted at the 15-to-25-year-old age group.

Wathaurong is one of 11 Aboriginal businesses to share in \$11m from Round 6 of the Aboriginal Community Infrastructure Program, with the Victorian Health Building Authority contributing an additional \$647,000 to the refurbishment project.

The Healing Spirit Youth Hub, as it will be known, will be located at Foster Street, Norlane, and it is hoped it will be ready for a grand opening during NAIDOC Week in 2023.



An artist's impression of the new hub

Shane Cumming message

Kaya (Noongar greeting) everyone,

I hope everyone is safe and well given the extreme flooding that has been inundating the state. Whilst the West Division has been spared much of the impact, I'm proud to say members of the West's Aboriginal Engagement Unit have been quick to assist our mob in the areas hardest hit, helping to provide a culturally safe and appropriate emergency response.

Our team members have been touching base with

individual public housing tenants to make sure they are safe and offering any needed support such as food, transport and interim accommodation as well as helping them apply for Personal Hardship Assistant Payments if appropriate. More than 5,000 applications have already been made.

Our team has also provided support to ACCOs on the ground who are working hard to help community, including Rumbalara, and I'm pleased to say our mob

have fed back they are really happy to hear from our guys and to have that proactive contact in this time of need.

I'd like to thank Adam Reilly and Tim Kanoa for their outstanding work and leadership in acting in the role of Deputy Secretary these past few months and welcome our new Deputy Secretary, Raylene Harradine PSM, who took over the reins on October 24. I'm looking forward to the unit benefitting from Raylene's extensive skills and experience, which



includes nine years as CEO of Bendigo and District Aboriginal Co-operative and membership of the First People's Assembly of Victoria.

**Shane Cumming
Acting Director,
Aboriginal Engagement,
West Division, Partnership
and Practice Branch**

NAIDOC 2022 – Get Up, Stand Up, Show Up



Aboriginal communities across Australia held events to mark National NAIDOC Week, which celebrates and recognises the history, culture and achievements of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Bringing community together in Ballarat

Ballarat and District Aboriginal Cooperative (BADAC) hosted more than 2,000 local Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal community members at the showgrounds for its annual Open Day during NAIDOC Week, with fun activities including music competitions, dance workshops, cultural activities and a kid's Fun Zone.

BADAC Social Media Officer Erin Kanoa says there were around 40 stalls ranging from arts and craft to representatives from organisations including the Western Bulldogs Football Club, Victoria Police, the Department of Environment, Land and Water and Planning (DELWP), Child and Family Services, Federation University, and BADAC's key partners.

'It gave people an opportunity to talk one-on-one,' Erin says.

Indigenous Hip Hop

Project performed and facilitated workshops for everyone to bust their own hip hop moves.

The local ukulele group put on a show and a young fella was proud to win the digeridoo competition after taking part in a didj music session earlier in the day.

A kids' fun zone, complete with jumping castle, photo booths and live snakes, was well attended.

Lunch was provided, with some native tucker and baked spuds on the menu.

The Open Day followed a flag raising ceremony at BADAC and Ballarat Council earlier in the week. The local Baarlinjan Dancers performed before BADAC's annual cemetery walk to pay respects to Mullawallah, followed by a smoking ceremony.

Elders were also treated to a lunch later in the week, with a home-cooked roast meal and a delicious, NAIDOC-themed cake.

Turn to Page 8 for more NAIDOC news.



The Fun Zone was a hit with all ages

Evolving structure elevates

Aboriginal Victorians will have a stronger voice on matters that impact them thanks to a significant restructure within the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing that includes the creation of a new Aboriginal Self-Determination and Outcomes division.

The new division elevates Aboriginal leadership within the department and will make it easier for internal and external stakeholders to work collaboratively with community to deliver programs and services through a self-determination lens. The new division will be led by an Aboriginal Deputy Secretary.

The changes follow an extensive internal and external consultation process, known as Evolve, that engaged with the department's key stakeholders, including Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations throughout Victoria. Evolve had multiple aims: to elevate Aboriginal leadership and practice expertise; ensure a dedicated workforce focus; elevate practice leadership; clarify roles and responsibilities and reduce duplication; better understand performance; and be fiscally sustainable.

West Division Deputy Secretary Paul Smith says he has no doubt the combined impact of the changes will be significant. It elevates the seniority of Aboriginal voices through the creation of new Aboriginal-identified Deputy Secretary,

Executive Director and Director positions, as well as opening up new roles and career pathways with more Aboriginal-identified roles within the department.

Additionally, Ruby Warber, the Chief Practitioner, Aboriginal Children and Families, will now sit within the new division and report directly to the ASDO Deputy Secretary, promoting opportunities for collaboration and increasing the influence of this important work.

'The Chief Practitioner will work across the department and externally with our sector partners to provide expert advice, champion and support the best of practice. This will help shape our program and policy development,' Paul says.

The new division will work across the Victorian Public Service and community to drive accountability for improved outcomes for Victoria's Aboriginal people and ensure the delivery of services and programs to Aboriginal communities is underpinned by self-determination and cultural safety.

'For community, it will mean a clearer route for consultation with the department and a greater reassurance that the government's commitment to self-determination and cultural safety is embedded within its structure and processes,' Paul says.

Under the restructure, West Division's Aboriginal Engagement Unit (AEU), which publishes *West news*, will transition to the Partnership and Practice Branch within

Aboriginal voice within government

the new Aboriginal Self-Determination and Outcomes Division.

'I would like to thank members of the Aboriginal Engagement Unit: Lindi Dietzel, Syd Fry, Julian Harvey, Sandy Hodge, Julie Jose, Jodie Rantall and Rhiannon Smith,' Paul says.

Led by Shane Cumming, the unit has driven Aboriginal governance and provided an important link between West division and Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations. It provided vital support to ACCOs through the COVID pandemic and has been successful in increasing cultural safety and awareness within the Child Protection and Housing programs.

'The West has gained invaluable knowledge from you all and I wish you all

the best in this. We look forward to continuing to work closely with you all on these key areas of focus,' Paul says.

Responsibility for Dhelk Dja will also transfer from West Division to the Aboriginal Strategy area of Family Safety Victoria, and Paul thanked the West's Dhelk Dja Coordinator, Jacqui Watkins, and IFV Coordinator, Tania Dalton, for their vital work to address Aboriginal family violence.

'The new changes acknowledge the practice expertise of our workforce and will help to strengthen the role of operations in policy development and implementation. There will also be a greater focus on reform and workforce management to support and increase our workforce capacity,' Paul says.



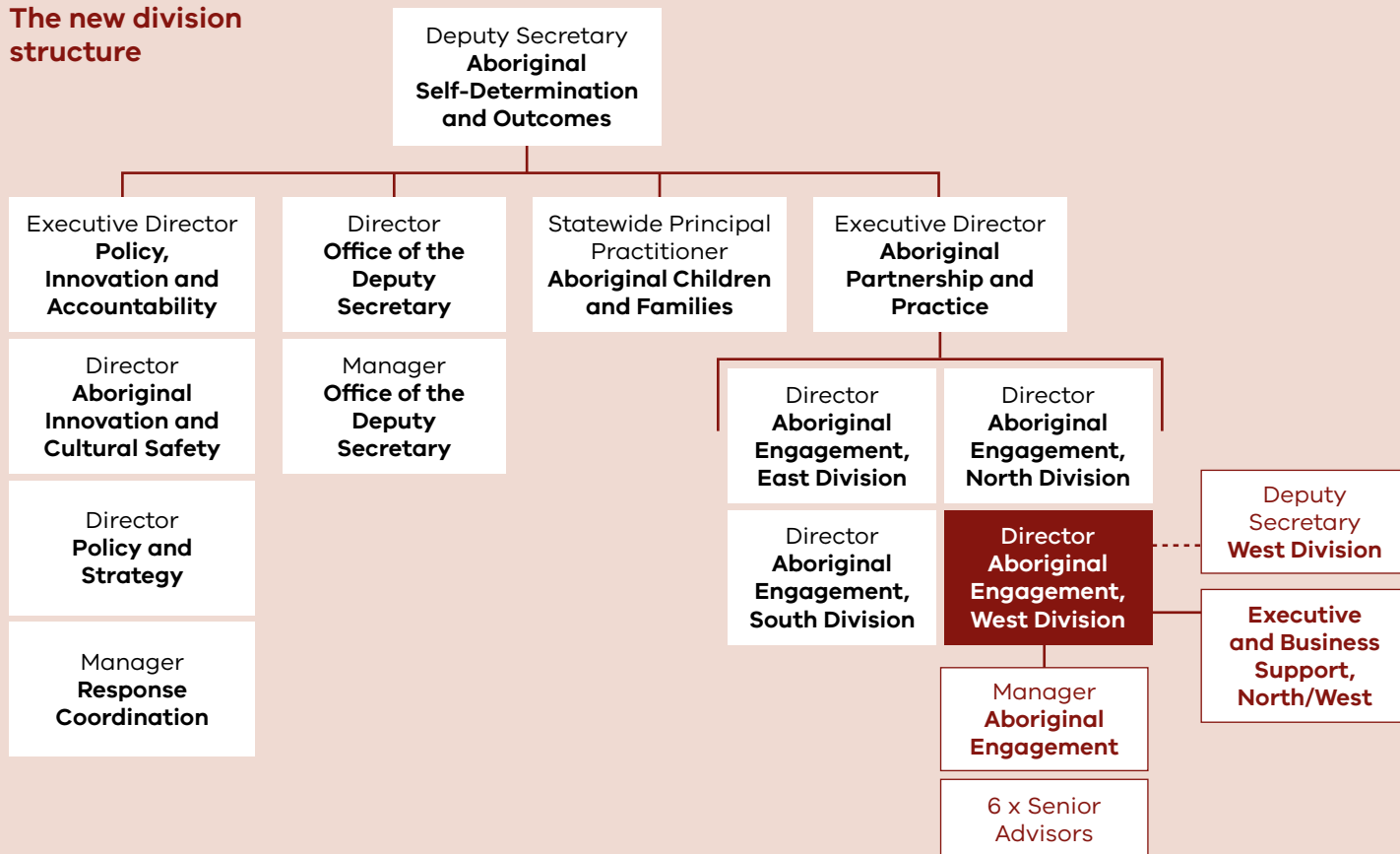
Introducing the new ASDO Deputy Secretary

A proud Wotjabulluk, Latji Latji and Dja Dja woman Raylene Harradine PSM has been appointed as the inaugural Deputy Secretary of Aboriginal Self-Determination and Outcomes (ASDO) division.

Raylene has more than 20 years' experience in management positions within Aboriginal communities, including as CEO of the BDAC, and has worked at the Department of Justice and Regulation and Health and Education Sectors.

Raylene is passionate about culturally inclusive practices, equity for all and achieving the best possible outcomes for Aboriginal children and young people.

The new division structure



Cultural safety roles already having an impact

Engaging families that have previously spurned contact with Child Protection workers and assisting young Aboriginal children to be released from custody to go back to country with cultural supports are just some of the positive outcomes that are being achieved by West Division's new Aboriginal Cultural Support and Awareness Advisors.

The advisor roles, which were an initiative of West Division to increase the cultural awareness of Child Protection workers and increase engagement with Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations, have been rolled out throughout Victoria since the start of this year.

In the last edition of *West news*, we featured three of West Division's new workers; Auntie Elsie, who is the Barwon Area Advisor as well as a mentor to the other advisors; Donna Cameron – Western Melbourne Area Advisor; and Anthony Lovett – Central Highlands Area Advisor.

In this edition, we caught up with advisors for the Southwest and Western Melbourne Areas, Samara Hanley* and Jo Malkiewicz.

* Since this interview/story was written, Samara has taken up a secondment to the role of Acting Manager, Office of the Deputy Secretary, Aboriginal Self-Determination and Outcomes Division.

Samara Hanley Southwest Area Advisor

Samara is a proud Lurijtja woman who grew up in the small Northern Territory community of Papunya, speaking three Aboriginal languages. Samara had been working at the family violence service Orange Door in regional Victoria before making the move to the department earlier this year.

'My skill sets are working with children and young people. I have worked with Child Protection previously in South Australia and looked after the Eyre Peninsula region,' Samara says.

Samara has also been a Northern Territory Police officer, working in the Child Abuse Task Force and alongside Australian Federal Police members during the rollout of the Intervention.

It was the opportunity to amplify the voices of children within Child Protection that peaked Samara's interest in the Cultural Safety role.

'I've always been really passionate about making sure that our children are connected to their lore, language and culture, and making sure that our children are safe and heard,' Samara says.

She is also focused on dismantling racism within the department. 'It's a one-step-at-a-time approach and I feel that I'm the right person within this region to be able to help drive that.'

'I'm very excited about taking this on.' – Samara Hanley



Jo Malkiewicz Western Melbourne Area

Jo is a proud Wiradjuri woman from New South Wales who has been living and working on Wurundjeri country for the past 25 years.



Originally a nurse, Jo had been working at Justice before taking on the Cultural Advisor role with the department.

'Most recently, I managed Naalamba Ganbu and Nerrlinggu Yilam, which is the Aboriginal Cultural and Integrity Unit within Justice. So, we were responsible for all the programs and support of our Aboriginal prisoners, men and women, at every prison across the state.'

Jo was also involved in the development of a Women's Healing Unit, to be created within the women's prison, the Dame Phyllis Frost Centre.

Currently a kinship carer for two boys, Jo always knew she wanted to work in Child Protection.

'I think that we need to do a lot better. I think that relationship between Child Protection and community has been severely damaged over time.'

'I think it's just building that connection. We all want reunification. We don't want to see any of our families or any of our children in Out of Home Care or away from their families. I think it's just providing that culturally safe space for our families to work in and making sure what they need to do is understood, so that they're part of that journey and they're not left out.'

Helping Child Protection workers gain a greater understanding of how the Aboriginal family and kinship system works is another priority for Jo.

'Mum, dad, a dog, a cat, and a picket fence — that's just not reality for us.'
– Jo Malkiewicz

Career cheerleaders to inspire job seekers post COVID

With unemployment rates in Victoria at a historic low, and the COVID pandemic prompting many people to rethink their lives, Kristy Lillyst expects to be busy.

Kristy is an Aboriginal Career Counsellor with the Jobs Victoria Career Counsellors Service (JVCCS), a free service set up last year by the Victorian Government to provide personalised career guidance to Victorians who are looking for work, are underemployed, are unsure of their options, or are looking for a career change. In addition to the mainstream service, there is a specific culturally safe service for Aboriginal people.

Sessions can be accessed online, via phone and Aboriginal community members can request face-to-face and group sessions on Country.

'It's about thinking about how do I start making decisions so that I can find something that I'm actually interested in, that I can add value to, and it will add value to my life,' Kristy says.

'With what's been happening over the last couple of years, people have had a chance to stop and reflect and think about whether their job suits them or is right for them. And I think, in general, they are conversations that we haven't really had much experience with within community.

'I think it's more important than ever to be able to give our kids and our families options to actually build their own aspirations, to

stop thinking about what the wider community thinks of them and to stop thinking about what their teachers thought of them, or the systems have thought of them, and to actually celebrate the things that they are good at, and to find ways that they can use those things in a way that will make their work lives more fulfilling and thus make their lives more fulfilling,' Kristy says.

With self-determination now a real focus, the Aboriginal community needs to build skills across a range of occupations.

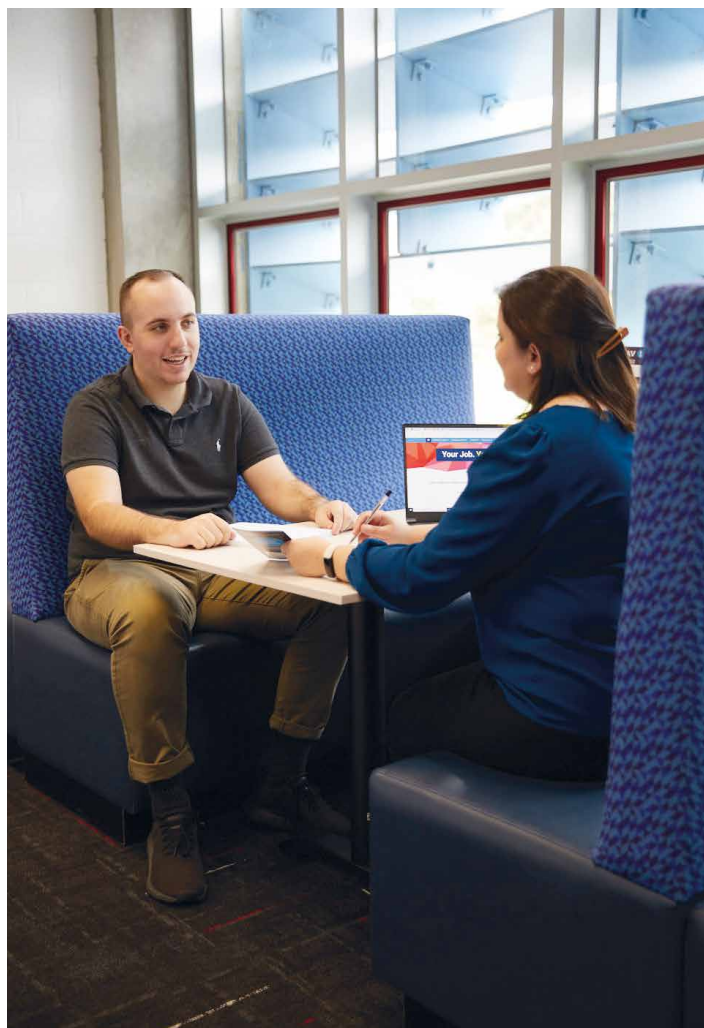
Kristy says whilst it's important to have Aboriginal people among the ranks of senior managers, lawyers and doctors, and their success should be celebrated, there is a great need to increase representation across all occupations.

'We need accountants. We need optometrists.'

Career counselling can help people consider occupations they previously thought were out of reach, or perhaps weren't even aware existed.

'It's about giving people the tools and the support to be able to make good decisions for themselves. Enabling people to build their own capacity to understand who they are, what they want, how they can get it and how to plan to get there.'

Making sure JVCCS was culturally safe was built into the development of the service to ensure strong



take up by Aboriginal people. Ironically, there is a shortage of Aboriginal careers counsellors, and Kristy is being kept busy as one of only two at the 40-strong JVCCS service. But whilst additional Aboriginal staff would be welcome, Kristy is not fazed by the challenge.

The free and culturally safe service provides personalised career advice

'My mother always said, "Good work isn't always easy, but it's always good". If we're run off our feet, that means that we are kicking goals for community and that's what we are here for.'

Career counsellors can help you:

- Find jobs that suit your interests and abilities.
- Identify your strengths and skills.
- Look for pathways into the job you want.
- Review your job applications, resume and cover letters.
- Link you to resources that can help you achieve your goals.
- Empower you to take the lead in your career journey.

Call 1800 967 909 to access up to six free sessions with an Aboriginal Career Counsellor.

NAIDOC 2022 – Get Up, Stand Up, Show Up



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Celebrating champions

Wathaurong Aboriginal Co-operative celebrated its Champions of Change at a Flag Raising and Community Day during NAIDOC Week.

Wathaurong presented six Community NAIDOC awards, which celebrate those who have driven and led change to promote strong community, strong culture, strong country.

The joint winners of the Nedok Yoongga (Elder/ Respected Person) awards

were Uncle Alfie Oram and Aunty Naomi Surtees. Uncle Alfie is known as ‘a man who gets things done’; always helping out at events and organising activities for the men’s group. Aunty Naomi is a big supporter and advocate for community, particularly with her work for the Orange Door.

The Ngarra Ngitj (Community Person) award went to Renee Howell for her amazing work as the female Aboriginal Liaison at Barwon Health. Renee shows her deep connection

Pictured from left to right: Jordyn Flagg, Piper Knox, Renee Howell, Mikali Harrison, Uncle Alf Oram, Aunty Naomi Surtees

and community spirit by always going above and beyond to support patients and their families.

Mikali Harrison was presented with the Koolay Goopma (Young Male Achiever) Award for always going above and beyond in his role in the community, as an individual, and as an employee of Wathaurong.

The Moordeemoondeek Goopma (Young Female Achiever) Award was presented to joint winners Jordyn Flagg and Piper Knox. Jordyn was nominated for her leadership within the Wathaurong community as a mentor to Aboriginal girls and a force of strength for other young women. Piper was nominated for being an incredible role model. Piper is studying Aboriginal Health at university and is a senior member and mentor to youngsters in Dhungala Children’s Choir. Piper was also a representative in Youth Parliament for the Bill on First Nations education in schools.

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