

West news

Connecting and partnering
with Aboriginal communities

Issue 3 – Autumn 2018



*A view of Gariwerd/
Grampians National
Park and Halls Gap
from Boroka Lookout.*

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Welcome to West news

The Department of Health and Human Services respectfully acknowledges the Traditional Owners of Country throughout Victoria and pays its respect to the ongoing living cultures of Aboriginal peoples.

Self-determination is a key theme of this edition of the *West news*. Ensuring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders have a say in their own future is a fundamental principle and one that is at the heart of the Victorian Government's *Korin Korin Balit-Djak: Aboriginal health, wellbeing and safety strategic plan*.

Self-determination is also vital to ensure the success of the Close the Gap Refresh, which is currently underway. In this edition we learn of Victoria's input into the process.

And we see self-determination in action, with impactful community-led projects, such as The Well Women and Their Children's Health Program, in Portland, and *Caracaramigen*, the Colac Aboriginal Gathering Place.

Adam Reilly, one of the most senior Aboriginal public servants in Victoria, talks about his journey and we pay our respects to Uncle Banjo Clarke, whose legacy has been formally acknowledged by the Department of Health and Human Services.

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

Deputy Secretary's message

Welcome to the Autumn Edition of *West news* – a newsletter committed to keeping you up-to-date on what is happening within the Aboriginal-focussed space across the Department of Health and Human Services' West Division, both internally and within the funded sector.

One of the department's key commitments is to ensure that Aboriginal people are represented at every level, and that staff feel supported, safe and valued.

I am extremely pleased to report that West Division has achieved great success in

increasing our Aboriginal staffing numbers over the past five years, and has drawn heavily on the experiences of our staff to shape our approach to developing culturally-safe employment practices.

As at January 2018, 53 employees in West Division identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, compared with only 15 in December 2013.

In 2013, the most senior role occupied by an Aboriginal staff member in West Division was a VPSG5 position, so it's very heartening that, in 2018, we have: an Aboriginal Executive



Officer; two Aboriginal Divisional Executives; two Aboriginal staff at VPSG6 level; and, seven VPSG5 Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander staff. You can read about our most senior Aboriginal staff member, Adam Reilly, in this edition of *West news*.

I am proud of our success in encouraging Aboriginal people to not only apply for positions across West Division, but to shine in those roles, and I am fully committed to continuing to build on this great momentum to achieve a two per cent Aboriginal workforce by 2021.

One of the department's key commitments is to ensure that Aboriginal people are represented at every level, and that staff feel supported, safe and valued.

To find out about our current job opportunities, and the strategies and supports in place around Aboriginal Employment, I recommend jumping onto the 'DHHS Aboriginal Employment Unit' Facebook page or the Aboriginal Employment page on the department's website at dhhs.vic.gov.au/aboriginal-employment

Paul Smith
Deputy Secretary,
West Division

Empowering community

Aboriginal communities have had a long struggle for their right to control their own lives to ensure they survive and thrive, and the Victorian Government has committed to embedding self-determination as a core guiding principle as it works with Aboriginal communities to realise their individual visions and hopes.

'Self-determining, healthy and safe Aboriginal people and communities' is the foundation of the *Korin Korin Balit-Djak: Aboriginal health, wellbeing and safety strategic plan 2017-2027*.

Self-determination is more than a guiding principle; it is a paradigm shift that sees Aboriginal people take ownership, carriage and responsibility for designing, delivering and evaluating policy and services on their own terms to overcome disadvantage and create their own, positive, future.

Specifically, this means that rather than Aboriginal people merely being 'engaged' or 'consulted' as 'advisors' or 'co-designers' of services and policies, they are authorised and empowered to own, direct and make strategic decisions about:

- the values and motivations of a policy or program
- strategic intent
- policy or program design
- funding and allocation of resources
- implementation and operations
- evaluation measures and definitions of success.

Importantly, while the concept of self-determination is universal, there is no single approach to achieving it – each Victorian Aboriginal community is unique and will have its own definition and requirements for ensuring its people are empowered to have a say in their future.

Five minutes with Adam Reilly

Adam Reilly, a proud Aboriginal man from the Marrawarri people (Northern NSW) has recently taken on the role of Area Director for the Wimmera South West Area. Adam oversees a cohesive network of five offices within the department's largest catchment area, which covers about 20 per cent of Victoria and includes several regional cities, as well as more isolated communities.

Adam brings a wealth of experience to the role. He was the Assistant Director of the department's Barwon Area and has worked across various states and territories at both state and commonwealth levels within the Education and Health and Human Services sectors.

How did you come to work for the department?

I saw a job online that I liked which was based in Geelong. With a preference to regional and remote work, I applied and was interviewed and offered the role.

Who or what has been the biggest influence in your career?

I have worked in a lot of different parts of government all around Australia. The biggest influence for me was working out bush in remote Aboriginal Communities. This work made it clear to me that the most vulnerable members of our communities are often the ones without a voice.

This places even more pressure on us to make sure we get things right, which includes addressing power imbalances and being genuine about self-determination.

What has been the highlight of your career to date?

I would say being the Manager of a remote

Continued page 4



Marcus Clarke message

Things have been moving apace since my last message in the Summer Edition of West news, which focussed on the interconnected governance mechanisms of the Aboriginal governance and accountability framework announced alongside the department's new headline Korin Korin Balit-Djak: Aboriginal health, wellbeing and safety strategic plan 2017-2027.

West Division has held its first meeting of the newly-formed Divisional Aboriginal Governance Committee (DAGC), setting up the meeting structure through collective agreement on the:

1. process of appointing the Aboriginal co-chair
2. tenure of the Aboriginal co-chair
3. frequency of meetings
4. quorum requirements
5. conflict of interest processes
6. standing agenda items.

These critical elements were written into a Terms of Reference that will serve as a central document to guide the group's working arrangements.

I am pleased to report

that Michael Bell has been collectively appointed to the role of Aboriginal Co-Chair. Michael is a highly-respected and capable Aboriginal leader who is committed to improving the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal people.

The next steps are to formalise the Area Aboriginal Governance Committee structures across:

- Wimmera South West, which takes in the 10 local government areas of Corangamite, Moyne, Warrnambool, Glenelg, Southern Grampians, Northern Grampians, Horsham, West Wimmera, Hindmarsh and Yarriambiack
- Central Highlands, which takes in the six local government areas of Ararat, Ballarat, Golden Plains, Hepburn, Moorabool and Pyrenees
- Barwon, which takes in the four local government areas of Greater Geelong, Colac-Otway, Queenscliffe and Surf Coast
- Brimbank Melton, which takes in the local government areas of Brimbank and Melton



- Western Melbourne, which takes in the five local government areas of Melbourne, Moonee Valley, Maribyrnong, Hobsons Bay and Wyndham.

Once the structures are finalised, we will begin the process of engaging with Aboriginal communities in each area.

It really is exciting times ahead with communities being empowered to develop action plans to address their local challenges and work towards achieving their identified aspirations.

As always, your comments and feedback are welcome and necessary to ensure this newsletter continues to serve its audience well. Feel free to drop us a line (see back page) if you have any article suggestions for upcoming editions.

Marcus Clarke
Manager, Aboriginal Engagement Unit,
West Division

'Strong Spirit' sets the scene for true healing

The fundamental principle of self-determination and a holistic approach to healing is at the heart of the Victorian Government's plan to achieve better social and emotional wellbeing outcomes for Aboriginal people.

Launched in October 2017, *Balit Murrup: Aboriginal social and emotional wellbeing framework 2017-2027* adheres closely to the Aboriginal social and emotional model of wellbeing, which is centred around resilience, building strengths and connecting to country and culture as key protective factors.

According to the Healing Foundation, a national organisation that addresses the ongoing trauma of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people: 'Healing works best when solutions are culturally strong, developed and driven at the local level, and led by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.'

Balit Murrup is closely aligned with Victoria's 10 year mental health plan, and is a companion document to *Korin Korin Balit-Djak: Aboriginal health, wellbeing and safety strategic plan 2017-2027*.

The *Balit Murrup* framework, which means 'Strong Spirit' in the Woi-wurrung language, contains four domains:

1. improving access to culturally responsive services
2. supporting resilience, healing and trauma recovery
3. building a strong, skilled and supported workforce
4. integrated and

seamless service delivery.

The Victorian Government has invested heavily in a range of strategies that support the above four domains, including \$22 million towards an expanded Aboriginal mental health and drug and alcohol workforce; \$7.7 million for demonstration projects to provide culturally-responsive mental health care, treatment, counselling and care coordination; \$1.8 million to extend the Aboriginal youth mentoring program; and, \$27 million over four years to deliver the *Victorian suicide prevention framework* to support 12 local communities, with an important focus on seeking the input of Aboriginal community members to shape culturally-appropriate and safe approaches to suicide prevention.

Written into the framework is a commitment that key Aboriginal leaders and experts, plus a range of other stakeholders across the health and human services sectors, will be responsible for monitoring, measuring and evaluating the framework's outcomes.



'There's an innate capacity in us to heal. It's all about establishing safety, security and trust, and having the opportunity to work with someone you trust and get support from. As long as we remain committed to our healing, be really true and honest with ourselves, and reach out for support, the healing does come. But often we need help, that's the thing, and there's no shame in reaching out and asking for help.'

- Graham Gee, senior psychologist at the Victorian Aboriginal Health Service

Five minutes with Adam Reilly

From page 3

Centrelink office with all Aboriginal staff. We had such strong links to the community in Halls Creek and all the way down the Tanami Track to the NT border.

What motivates you?

I think much of life is about luck and timing. I started life as a 'welfare baby', just like many of our own clients here at DHHS. I believe it's due to timing and luck that I didn't end up in residential care or having contact with youth justice. I am very mindful of this and I feel a strong obligation to ensure that any service response that I can influence provides a positive and meaningful pathway for Aboriginal kids.

What advice do you wish you'd had when you were a young man?

Don't buy flash motor cars. Do save and buy houses!

What would people be surprised to learn about you?

Not too many people know that I have multiple sclerosis (MS). It's a nasty disease that impacts different people in different ways. I'm very blessed to have a great medical care team who

have kept the symptoms under control for me and afford me the freedom to work and live a normal active life. The take away message for me having MS is not to take anything for granted. Enjoy every day and make the most of what we have.

The advice I would give to Koori kids who are entering adulthood is that it doesn't matter what your level of education or achievement is to date, it's about what you do now. You can earn your own money and you can support your family, just have confidence in yourself and accept help when it's offered.

What advice would you give young Indigenous people who see you as a role model?

I get pretty annoyed at the pressure kids in general are under these days; especially when it comes to achieving at school and then the expectation of going to Uni. I was not academic at school but have always had an appetite for learning. For me it means we all learn in different ways and university isn't for everyone.

Department honors Banjo Clarke's legacy

Henry 'Banjo' Clarke was respected by the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities alike for his wisdom and leadership, and now his legacy has been officially acknowledged and honoured by the Department of Health and Human Services' West Division.

In February this year, in a ceremony described as 'extremely moving' by the division's Deputy Secretary Paul Smith, the department named a conference room in its Warrnambool office after Banjo.

A proud Gunditjmara man, Banjo was awarded the World War II Civilian Service Medal for his services during the war years and was inducted

Tommy, Brett, Caleb and Marcus Clarke.



into the Victorian Aboriginal Honor Roll in 2012.

He was a key figure in the Framlingham community's peaceful decade-long campaign for land rights over their forest, which achieved success in 1987 when the Federal Government handed back 1,130 acres to the Gunditjmara people.

His honor roll citation reads, in part: 'Uncle Henry "Banjo" Clarke was a man who cast a spell on all who met him. Renowned

for his compassion and wise words, he promoted respect and forgiveness between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people long before the term 'reconciliation' was coined. 'Although he experienced the worst of people at times, Banjo only ever saw the good. He believed that love and compassion could change the world; for that he will always be remembered as truly special.'

Mr Smith says, 'Banjo Clarke was a community

leader of great wisdom, presence, respect and knowledge who over his long life made an incalculable difference to the lives of all he touched, across the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities, and across our country.

'By honoring him in naming our conference room after him, we know that his wisdom will guide us and inspire us, through the important consultations, discussions and decisions which take place in this key departmental facility.'

Several of Mr Clarke's descendants were among those who attended the ceremony, including grandson Marcus Clarke (Manager of the department's Aboriginal Engagement Unit, West Division), who gave a speech on behalf of the Clarke family.

Brett Clarke performed a generous welcome to Gunditjmara country and smoking ceremony and Banjo's daughter Fiona and granddaughter Patricia donated a portrait they had painted of Banjo, which now takes pride of place in the conference room.

Banjo's daughter and artist, Aunty Fiona.



Gathering Place a culturally-safe hub

Hundreds turned out to celebrate the long-awaited opening of the Colac Aboriginal Gathering Place, Caracaramigen, in November last year, and the culturally-safe space is already delivering on their hopes for improved advocacy, culturally-safe delivery of services, and an increase in local awareness of Aboriginal issues.

The centre has been providing the community with a range of much needed services and support, from family violence identification training for mainstream workers to access to showers for those facing homelessness, and delivering and setting up donated cots for young families.

Project worker Ebony Hickey says before Caracaramigen's opening, the Aboriginal community in Colac lacked an Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation or culturally-safe space to meet.

'The lack of advocacy and cultural safety in health, community, family education and a range of other services has led to a



Strong Brother, Strong Sister Team Cormach Evans and Keedan Graham with Chantel Johnson.

series of issues historically; these issues are now slowly being addressed with increased support, cultural awareness and partnerships created by the Local Aboriginal Action Group and the Colac Aboriginal Gathering Place,' Ebony says.

Caracaramigen has had a tremendous impact in the short time since its opening, including successfully advocating for three government-funded positions in local kindergartens; delivering 11 food and toiletry support bags; providing four people with Justice Support and information; providing 16 hours of community work for community members through the Department of Justice; supporting three families experiencing family violence; and, writing 19 letters of support.

The centre has also hosted the Koorie Engagement Support Officers (Department of Education and Training), formal meetings, Aboriginal Health worker visits, and supported families to gain supervised access with their children

Facepainting fun.



within child protection.

'We have provided parenting support and education on safe sleeping techniques and distributed bags of children's clothes donated by "Geelong Mums",' Ebony says.

The Gathering Place was an initiative of Colac's Aboriginal Action Group and Wathaurong Aboriginal Co-operative, who worked on the project for several years before securing the required funding from the Department of Health and Human Services to open the service at 4 Miller Street, Colac.

'Throughout this time, the resilience of the Colac Aboriginal Community has been second to none and the informal ways of support they have shown to navigate the lack of

relevant services shows a level of self-determination that is the core of the Gathering Place project moving forward,' Ebony says.

'The local community feel that the future is now strong and that Aboriginal people and families are being assisted in ways that best support them in a holistic and culturally-appropriate manner, including by mainstream service providers in the Colac Otway local government area.

'Work continues to build, strengthen and maintain the Gathering Place for the future generations of the Colac/Otway region. We appreciate the support so far and hope it can be a way forward for our mob,' Ebony says.

Coming up at Caracaramigen

- the Colac Koorie Community Justice Forum
- win tickets to Mission Songs for Reconciliation Week
- huge NAIDOC week celebrations (fibre optic arts, possum skin cloak and basket weaving projects and flag raising at the Colac Otway Shire – Colac's very first NAIDOC event)

See facebook.com/colacaboriginalgatheringplace/ for details

Closing the Gap

This year marked 10 years since the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) committed to a framework aimed at Closing the Gap between the health and life expectancy of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities.

With only one of the framework's seven targets to reduce indigenous disadvantage being on track, (Year 12 attainment rates) the Commonwealth Government has announced a 'Refresh' of the framework.

In Victoria, Aboriginal people gathered to talk about their views on the needs and aspirations of their communities to inform not just the national Close the Gap Refresh, but the Victorian Aboriginal Affairs Framework.

Six Victorian Aboriginal representatives, and the Victorian Premier, then took part in a two-day Special Gathering in Canberra with prominent Indigenous leaders from around the country to talk about the Refresh's priorities for the next decade.

High on Victoria's list was for the Commonwealth to embrace the *Uluru Statement from the Heart* and its call to establish a First Nations Voice to Parliament, which would have the right to be consulted on legislation and policies that relate to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

After being presented with a statement from the Special Gathering, COAG agreed to conduct community

consultations throughout the country before setting new targets for the Closing the Gap framework by 31 October 2018.

Event highlights inequity

The challenges facing ongoing efforts to Close the Gap were high on the agenda of a Barwon Health morning tea attended by members of the Department of Health and Human Services' Aboriginal Engagement Unit in March.

The morning tea was to mark the annual National Close the Gap Day (NCTGD), which highlights the ongoing inequity of healthcare and health



Barwon Health NCTGD event.

outcomes in Australia for Aboriginal people, who can expect to live 10 years less than non-Aboriginal Australians. NCTGD is usually held on the third Thursday in March.

Wadawurrung woman Corrina Eccles performed a Welcome to Country and the event was MC'd by Barwon

Health Social Worker and Aboriginal woman, Mandy Collie. Keynote speaker, Geelong MP, Christine Couzens discussed the challenges facing efforts to Close the Gap and the importance of continuing to strive towards achieving that goal.

Towards reconciliation: Sorry Day helps healing

May 26 marks the day when Australia remembers and commemorates the mistreatment of Aboriginal People, including through government policies such as those that resulted in the Stolen Generations.

On May 26, 1997, the *Bringing Them Home* report by the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families was tabled in Federal Parliament.

The report recommended that Prime Minister apologise to the Stolen Generations. The then-PM, John Howard, refused on the basis he, 'did not subscribe to the black armband view of history'.

Public anger at this lack of acknowledgement by the government for its past actions led to the first 'Sorry Day', held the following year to raise awareness among politicians, policy makers, and the wider public about the forcible

removal policies and their ongoing impact on the Aboriginal children who were taken, their families and their communities.

Sorry Day is an outlet for Australians to express regret for the historical mistreatment of Aboriginal people.

The date May 26 is now

cemented as one of great significance to the Stolen Generations and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, as well as many non-Indigenous Australians, who continue to mark it with ceremonies, marches, speeches and presentations around the country.

Evolution of Sorry Day

January 26, 1938 – Aboriginal Australians held a 'Day of Mourning' to protest 150 years of callous treatment and the seizure of land. The date was selected to coincide with the Australia Day celebrations held by the European population on the same day. The protest has continued to be an annual tradition and is now widely commemorated as 'Survival Day'.

May 26, 1998 – The first Sorry Day was held one year after the *Bringing them Home* report was first tabled in parliament.

May 25, 2005 – the National Sorry Day Committee renamed Sorry Day as the *National Day of Healing for all Australians* to better engage with the wider Australian community.

Speaking on the National Day of Healing launch, Senator Aden Ridgeway said: 'The day will focus on the healing needed throughout Australian society if we are to achieve reconciliation.'



Program improves the lives of women and children.

Engaging service keeps women and kids connected

Gunditjmara Elders' concerns about the wellbeing of women and children in their community has led to the development of a program that is keeping women engaged and connected with vital services.

The Well Women and Their Children's Health (WWATCH) Program, run by the Portland-based Dhauwurd-Wurrung Elderly & Community Health Service (DWECHS), aims to 'Close the Gap' in health services by improving the physical, mental, social, emotional and spiritual wellbeing of mothers and their children. The program provides a culturally-safe and confidential support

service to Aboriginal women and their children. Non-Aboriginal women with Aboriginal children are also assisted.

The program provides advocacy, referrals to appropriate Aboriginal and mainstream services, assistance with housing applications, and supports women in their contacts with the justice system and the Department of Health and Human Services, and with kindergarten and primary school issues.

Workers also assist women, when needed, with transport to external appointments. A Women's Group is held every Wednesday.

Feedback from participants

has been positive:

'The program has been going for three years, I've been coming pretty much the whole time. I have six kids ... it's great to have some time just for myself.'

'The workers have walked beside me through appointments with services and things I found stressful and hard to understand – but they never took over – just supported me.'

Staff say the program is playing a vital role in improving the quality of participants' lives:

'If the women drop off the radar ... we will go around and knock on the door to encourage them to come. (It) usually works!'

'One of the great things about the program is we can keep the client engaged and connect them with our services and our community. It could save someone's life.'

Women can refer themselves to the program by contacting DWECHS directly, and other service providers are also able to make referrals. The intake process includes the client working with a support worker to clarify their goals and the services and support they need to achieve them.

Contact WWATCH on (03) 5521 7535, or freecall 1300 802 664, or visit dwech.com.au

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