

West news

Connecting and partnering
with Aboriginal communities

Issue 4 – Winter/Spring 2018



*Twelve Apostles,
Kirrae Whurrong Country.*

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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.

In this edition of West news, we share some of the diverse ways our community celebrated NAIDOC in 2018.

We learn how a Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency-led collaboration with community and government is keeping Aboriginal children in Out of Home Care in touch with their culture through the creation of a deadly new resource.

We hear how an innovative project is improving the mental health of parents – and bringing families back together.

Aboriginal trainees who have been given an opportunity to expand their skills, explore their employment options and, potentially, begin a career in the department, talk about their experiences.

Finally, Jason Kanoa, CEO of Gunditjmara Aboriginal Cooperative, speaks of the rewards of returning to Country in a leadership role.

We trust you enjoy this edition of West news.

Deputy Secretary's message

I'd like to take this opportunity to tell you about the great work taking place both within the Department of Health and Human Services, and the broader sector.

After many months of consultation, changes to the organisational structure of West Division operations 'went live' on 25 June, 2018.

The critical changes across the divisional level of the operational boundary, and within the five distinct divisional areas of Barwon, Wimmera South West, Central Highlands, Brimbank Melton and Western Melbourne, will:

- provide greater focus on continuous quality improvement and safety for our clients
- increase capacity to respond at a local level with an integrated approach across health, human services and the broader service sector, including universal services
- Improve planning, performance, program and reform implementation and agency performance
- bring together functions that support the delivery of services and provide strategic oversight and management of key processes and performance
- improve opportunities for clients to provide feedback to the department and ensure responsive, resolution-focused processes
- strengthen the focus on population health and wellbeing and community capacity building efforts at a local or place-based (area) level

- manage service delivery support at an area level and strengthen the focus on quality and practice improvement
- focus Child Protection operations on delivering statutory services with increased executive leadership at the area level
- strengthen the department's capacity for responsive, risk-informed regulatory compliance, investigation and enforcement across specified regulatory schemes.

The game changing *Wungurilwil Gaggapduir: Aboriginal Children and Families Agreement and Strategic Action Plan* was officially launched on 26 April, 2018 at Parliament House.

Wungurilwil Gaggapduir means 'strong families' in Latji Latji Aboriginal language, which appropriately sets the tone and galvanizes the principle intent of the plan. Co-designed by Aboriginal services and key mainstream child service organisations, *Wungurilwil Gaggapduir* includes five central objectives aimed at helping to ensure young people are safe, resilient and can thrive in culturally-rich Aboriginal families and communities.

These are:

1. encourage Aboriginal children and families to be strong in culture and be proud of their unique identity
2. resource and support Aboriginal organisations to care for Aboriginal children, families and communities
3. commit to culturally competent and culturally safe services for staff,



children and families

4. capture, build and share Aboriginal knowledge, learning and evidence to inform practice
5. prioritise Aboriginal workforce capability.

There has also been a flurry of significant capital investment across West Division with several Aboriginal Controlled Community Organisations undergoing renovations or building new infrastructure.

This includes an exciting new build for the Wyndham Aboriginal Community Centre, extensions to Ballarat and District Aboriginal Cooperative (see page 3), a \$1m Aboriginal Victoria Community Infrastructure grant for Budja Budja Aboriginal Cooperative's capital works and upgrades, as well as a grant of \$41,000 for Worn Gundidj Aboriginal Cooperative for minor works and upgrades. We will keep you updated on the progress of these works in future editions.

Finally, the department has launched a new and improved public website. The visually appealing site offers visitors a greatly enhanced experience with a more easily navigable platform that makes it easier to learn about the services the department delivers. I recommend you check it out at dhhs.vic.gov.au

Paul Smith
Deputy Secretary,
West Division

Culturally safe medical centre nears completion

Ballarat's expanded state-of-the-art, culturally-appropriate and safe medical centre facilities are due to open before the end of the year.

The Ballarat and District Aboriginal Co-operative's (BADAC) two-storey medical centre, built with the support of the Department of Health and Human Services, will adjoin the existing BADAC building in the heart of Ballarat's CBD.

The centre will continue to provide the community with a wide variety of urgently needed services and programs, including some new initiatives. The expanded facilities will also allow for the co-location of programs delivered from other office locations, while still serving as a culturally-appropriate and safe space for the community to gather and socialise.

Prominent Aboriginal artworks and accents will be featured throughout the building and a large community area will have the capability to be opened on three sides for warm summer days or closed on all four sides on chilly winter days. Alongside the community area will be an outdoor meeting area, complete with built in seating, fire pit and barbeque.

BADAC CEO Karen Heap says staff and the community are taking a great deal of interest as the building takes shape and begins to become a key centre that will

service Ballarat for many years to come.

'I can't wait for the opening and I am looking forward to inviting the entire community, local, state wide and beyond, to check out the new facilities and the services that it will be able to provide,' Ms Heap says.

The expanded BADAC medical centre facilities are expected to be fully operational by late February, 2019.

BADAC CEO Karen Heap oversees the build.



Marcus Clarke message

Now that West Division's Aboriginal Engagement Unit is operating within the new Department of Health and Human Services organisational structure, it is an opportune time to provide you with an overview of what the unit does.

Our unit's work sits under the overarching vision and direction of *Korin Korin Balit-Djak: Aboriginal health, wellbeing and safety strategic plan 2017-2027*, and has both an internal focus within the department and an external focus to our stakeholders and community.

Internally, the unit's six-member team provides expertise and support to the business areas across West Division on such things as:

- Building an understanding of Aboriginal concepts and ways of operating to tackle entrenched disadvantage. This includes the philosophy of self-determination

and its practical application, and the philosophy of Aboriginal community control.

- Supporting, promoting and advising on best practice engagement approaches to improve our connection, accountability and cultural responsiveness to Aboriginal Organisations and the Aboriginal community.
- Facilitating a co-designed approach with the department's Aboriginal staff in the West to develop an enhanced Aboriginal Staff Network. The aim is to foster a strong and supportive environment for Aboriginal staff to share their experiences of working in the department, and provide them with professional development opportunities.

Externally, the unit works in partnership with local Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations, Aboriginal communities, and mainstream providers



to better respond to the needs and aspirations of the various communities within the division.

Overall, the breadth of work of the unit is quite varied, but the outcomes achieved are always grounded in making a difference in the communities that we serve.

The unit, which formally began in September 2016, now sits within the department's new West Division Population Health, Planning and Aboriginal Engagement Branch. The location and contact details of each team member can be found on the back page of this newsletter.

Marcus Clarke
Manager, Aboriginal Engagement Unit, West Division

NAIDOC Week Celebrations



Auntie Julie Jose with her Street Face.

Courage takes to the streets

Grannie Bessie Rawlings, who lived at Framlingham Mission, fought for the rights of Aboriginal people for more than 40 years from her kitchen table; writing to welfare, politicians and newspapers to stand up for her family and community.

Grannie Rawlings' story of immense courage and resilience in standing firm against threats against her family, and never giving up, was one of many highlighted by the City of Greater Geelong's Street Face arts project during NAIDOC Week.

To celebrate this year's NAIDOC theme, *Because of her, we can*, the council's Youth Development Unit collaborated with Strong Brother Strong Sister on the Street Face project to share stories and photos of Aboriginal women who have made a difference in our communities.

Auntie Julie Jose, who contributed the story of her great great grandmother Grannie Rawlings, was one of those to be featured by the project in the streets of Geelong.

Anti-violence game a slam dunk

A record crowd turned out to support this year's Hoops Against Violence clash, which uses basketball as a tool for the community to show it does not accept family violence.

In what's believed to be the biggest community basketball event ever for the Grampians Region, more than 200 children, parents and carers, from as far afield as Kaniva and Warrnambool, converged on the Ballarat Minerdome for two days of competition between teams made up of Aboriginal community members and Victoria Police.

Robyn Lauricella, from Goolum Goolum Aboriginal Cooperative, was one of the event organisers.

'My family has been involved from the very first event and we look forward to Hoops each year,' she says.



'We're already planning for Hoops 2019, which will be hosted by Horsham, and we'll be hoping to build on the success of the Ballarat Hoops event.'

With almost double the number of players than in 2017, more community, parents and police members were kept busy this year, including being called into action; collecting and cutting up fruit for the hungry players. The event also provided an opportunity to promote

services and activities from Berry Street, Goolum Goolum, anti-smoking messages and the popular Deadly Bikes project. Parents who had coached their children's teams during the year were able to take part in coaching classes, where they shared tips and learned new skills.

'It is just getting bigger and bigger every year, it was such a great turnout,' says Rhiannon Smith, Wimmera South West Area, Grampians Indigenous

Players in the Ballarat vs Horsham Community Challenge game.

Family Violence Regional Action Group coordinator.

A big thanks is due to the event organisers, Victorian Aboriginal Community Services Association, Goolum Goolum Aboriginal Cooperative, Australian Indigenous Mentoring Experience, Ballarat & District Aboriginal Cooperative and the local communities for pulling off a sensational slam dunk of an event.

ations 2018



(Rear) Troy Lovett, Maddie Barr, Taryn Bell, Jess Lovett-Murray, Tyleah Barr, Kayden Bell, Maddie Kanoa and DWECH CEO John Bell, (front) Rhani Reiri, Annabelle Barr and Saige Bell.

Because of her, they did

A group of Aboriginal dancers, aged between four to 14-years-old, took this year's NAIDOC theme to heart when they performed their first solo gig at the opening of the South West NAIDOC Ball, in Portland.

The eight girls are part of the larger mixed Koondoom Yarkeen dance group, but organiser Troy Lovett says the NAIDOC theme of 'Because of her, we can' persuaded them to go out on their own and perform a dance, and accompanying song, that they had created themselves.

'They were pretty daunted by the idea at the start, usually when they dance I do the singing for them, so they had to learn and practise doing it, but it was a big boost to their confidence. They were very professional,' Troy says.

'The crowd loved it, it was family and they had never seen them dancing on their own, so they were really surprised and impressed.

'The main dance they did was The Basket Weaving Story. Baskets were very important to our ancestors, they used them to catch eels and fish in the fish basket, so the girls' dance told the story of how the women would go out and collect the grass and come back and weave it together and then go out and set the markers and catch the eels.'

Whilst the girls enjoy hanging out together, the importance of what they are doing does not escape them, Troy says.

'They definitely understand the significance of passing down those stories and keeping the culture alive.'

Deadly stories

A desire to keep Aboriginal children in out-of-home (OoHC) care connected to their culture was the motivation behind the creation of a deadly website resource that is attracting thousands of visitors.

The need to ensure an ongoing meaningful connection with culture was identified by both Taskforce 1000, which analysed the experience of Aboriginal children in OoHC, and the Commission for Children and Young People 2016's Report *Always will be Koori children*.

Subsequently, as part of the Victorian Government's *Roadmap for Reform: strong families, safe children, every Aboriginal child in OoHC* now has a cultural plan.

'Deadly story was created as a resource to support non-Aboriginal carers of Aboriginal children, practitioners and Aboriginal children and young people as part of that process,' says Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency State-wide Coordinator Emma Bamblett.

Deadlystory.com includes an interactive map that allows users to learn about the customs, practices and stories of the people and land; an historical timeline that highlights significant people, stories and events from before invasion to the present day; and, interviews with role models and Elders who contribute to the



Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities.

It also has an events calendar; service directories; interactive activities; and, a collection of Aboriginal news sources.

Launched in November 2017, the engaging site had already attracted 62,479 page views by August this year.

'The feedback has been extraordinarily, overwhelmingly positive.

'Carers have said it is a fantastic resource.'

The Deadly Stories project has been created in partnership with SNAICC, The Koorie Heritage Trust, the Federation of Victorian Traditional Owners Corporation and Brightlabs, in conjunction with the Department of Health and Human Services.

Deadly feedback

'I am a non-Indigenous woman looking to learn as much as I can regarding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders in the context of social justice. This has been very helpful. Thank you.'

'I am seeking permission to use your tool offered on the site to assist in developing a cultural plan for our young people...'

'The page looks great and I will definitely be having a look at it with the kids.'

Keeping families together

An innovative project that works with Aboriginal parents whose mental illness puts their kids at risk of entering the child protection system has achieved 14 child reunifications and solid improvements to its clients' mental health.

The Ballarat and District Aboriginal Cooperative's (BADAC) *Keela Borron* project, which means 'speak children' in Wathaurong language, began taking referrals in July 2017. In the 12 months since, 34 families have exited the parental mental health program following reunification and closure from child protective services.

One of BADAC *Keela Borron's* priorities has been developing relationships and streamlining referral pathways with other service providers...

In addition, regular assessments of mental health outcomes have shown a significant drop in the depression, anxiety and stress levels experienced by clients. Chief Executive Officer of BADAC, Karen Heap says the program's success, 'highlights the strength of culturally appropriate, flexible and multidisciplinary models of care'.

BADAC *Keela Borron* is one of the initiatives stemming from the Department of Health and Human Services *Balit Murrup: Aboriginal Social and Emotional Wellbeing Framework*, which was

developed to reduce the health gap between Aboriginal Victorians and the general population in relation to suicide, mental illness and psychological distress.

The BADAC *Keela Borron* project has been funded for three years to design, develop, test and implement a culturally-appropriate model of care that is innovative and clinically responsive. The model is to address the needs of parents of Aboriginal children, where moderate to severe mental illness, combined with complex health, trauma and social issues, places their children at risk of entering the child protection system.

The project also supports family reunification, where the parent's mental illness has already resulted in child protective services involvement.

'Aboriginal children are 12 times more likely to be in care than non-Aboriginal children,' Ms Heap says.

'This over representation needs to be addressed. Using a trauma-informed view of the complexities faced by Aboriginal communities and building resilience and self determination is a key focus of this project.'

One of BADAC *Keela Borron's* priorities has been developing relationships and streamlining referral pathways with other service providers to prevent duplication of services and to ensure a co-ordinated service response.

Ballarat Health Service's Mental Health Service has



partnered with BADAC to provide specialist psychiatric assessment and consultation to the BADAC *Keela Borron* clinical team. By working alongside the area mental health service, the team has minimised barriers to specialist mental health care, ensuring clients can access specialist consultation, treatment and care planning in a timely and efficient way.

Ms Heap anticipates developing collaborative partnerships between Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations (ACCHOs) and mainstream mental health services will improve the social and emotional wellbeing of Aboriginal people, families and communities.

'With the recruitment of experienced mental health professionals to work alongside Aboriginal workers with cultural and community knowledge, the team have been able to identify gaps in services and supports that are contributing to the distress and frustrations parents experience when their children are in out of home care.'

The service model includes assessment of mental health and other health and social support

BADAC CEO Karen Heap (centre) with the BADAC *Keela Borron* Project Team.

needs, care coordination, advocacy and parental skill development.

The project has also established several group programs, including psycho-education and self-management, parenting skills, mindfulness and stress reduction, communication skills and life skills programs.

'By supporting parents to address their mental health needs and other life stressors, parents have been able to gain an insight into why their children have, or are at risk of being placed in care,' Ms Heap says.

A year in, the project's impact on families is clear.

'By measuring the levels of depression, anxiety and stress using the DASS21 self-assessment tool, we have been able to monitor improvements across these domains. So far, the results have been positive, showing an average improvement of 30 per cent,' Ms Heap says.

'Providing a supportive, culturally safe mental health program that is specifically designed to suit the needs of the local community is making a difference.'

YES to launch careers

A trainee program is giving Aboriginal youth the skills and experience they need to launch a career in government.

Gail Lister, from West Division's Workforce Services, says the Youth Employment Scheme (YES) targets young people who would likely struggle to break into employment. 'Youth unemployment is crazy high and its very, very hard for young people to gain employment, particularly in regional areas, so these types of programs really help,' Ms Lister says.

YES is a 12-month traineeship that couples on-the-job training with TAFE.

By the end of the year, the trainees have experience and a Certificate III or IV, which leads them into a two-year government cadetship.

'It's about getting people up to capacity so we can offer them a VPS (Victorian



Public Service) role at the end of it,' Ms Lister says.

'Some of them come from a background of third or fourth generation welfare dependency. By them securing long-term, ongoing employment it changes the situation for the entire family.'

Whilst YES is a mainstream program, West Division sees it as a great way to encourage more Aboriginal young people to gain experience in the Department of Health and Human Services. Currently,

YES trainees Cara Malone and Mickitja Rotumah-Onus.

the department has five Aboriginal YES trainees.

'We have well over 80 per cent stay. Of the ones who do leave, we tend to lose them to other areas of government because they have gained those skills in working for government.'

Ms Lister says she has the capacity to double the program's intake over the next 12 months. You can learn more about YES at jobs.vic.gov.au or call Ms Lister on 9275 7336.

Cara (*Yorta-Yorta/Wiradjuri*)

'I plan on completing a Bachelor of Social Work, but want to get more work experience first.'

Mickitja (*Gunditjmara/Iwaidja*)

'I've been able to improve my communication skills, time management skills and build on my confidence.'

Caitlin (*Narangga*)

'I have learnt a whole lot of new things while doing my traineeship with the department; mainly about recruitment.'

Ricky (*Yorta Yorta*)

'(It has given) me an opportunity to take my time and see what feels comfortable for me or potentially spark a passion for a particular field in the department.'

Samuel (*Bidjara*)

'I have met and been mentioned in a speech by the Secretary. I have also had the opportunity to meet many other amazing staff members that have become very close friends.'



Gail Lister (L) with YES trainee Caitin Smith.



YES trainee Ricky Davies.

Making his Country proud

When Jason Kanoa moved off Country to live in Melbourne at the age of 15, he always planned to return. But snaring a key leadership role, as the CEO of Gunditjmara Aboriginal Cooperative, has made the impact of his return to Country even more significant.

Jason's 21 years work experience in Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations, Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations, and in the Department of Health and Human Services, has given him firm ideas about how he wants to lead his community.

'I want to take a strength-based approach with all our services and responses,' he says. 'I think that's really important, so our community can move forward in today's world.'

'I think for too long we have had a reactive service response, so I'm really keen to implement an integrated proactive approach and get into early intervention and prevention.'

'I want to build strength and capacity in the

community to lead a fulfilling life under the banner of self-determination and culture.'

Jason has already used his extensive involvement with Aboriginal men's family violence programs to expand Gunditjmara's response to the issue.

'I'm very passionate about family violence,' Jason says.

'I understand the impacts it has on our community, particularly with kids. With a large proportion of the kids we see in out of home care, it is directly related to family violence. I've been a carer for a number of years and it's really put me in a place where I wanted to do more in that space and really try and make some change.'

'We already had a women's response to family violence at Gunditj, but I have actually started some men's responses because I think it's a problem that should be addressed by both keeping women and children safe, and challenging men on their part in family violence situations.'



Gunditjmara CEO Jason Kanoa

Under Jason's watch, Gunditjmara has also expanded its remit to include a Children and Families Division with a manager and kinship roles.

Another immediate priority is consulting with the community about Gunditjmara's plans to consolidate all its services in one building.

Whilst the role has been challenging at times, Jason says the past 16 months have been very rewarding.

'It's been great to get back home on Country with my family, my young ones (he has three children aged between six and 15 years old) and my partner, and in a leadership capacity.'

'The mob have been really receptive, the kids have just settled in like they have lived here all their lives, and the extra benefit of being around your family and community has really been comforting.'

'It was always a plan of mine to go home and let my kids experience what I experienced growing up; because there's nothing more powerful for Aboriginal people than growing up on Country.'

'It's something that we as Aboriginal people draw upon for strength and resilience to be able to go out on Country and feel the spirits and presence of our old people and appreciate the land is very powerful and awe-inspiring.'

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