



GUNAWIRRA

Prevention through Early Intervention



2021 ANNUAL REPORT

Gunawirra, as a community led organisation, recognises and respects all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples of Australia. We respect their elders both past and present and we acknowledge the rightful place that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have in our communities and in Australia's future. Gunawirra acknowledges that these ancient people are the traditional owners and custodians of their own Country and its water and we value and respect their cultural knowledge, values, customs and culture. Gunawirra also recognises and respects that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples still have a strong connection to their Country, their heritage and culture.

Cover photo by Omar Boulad.

Images throughout this report are from our native garden. The garden provides culture, connections, safety and healing, which in turn captures Gunawirra's programs, strengths and aims.

This report, the *2021 Annual Report of Gunawirra*, appears on the Gunawirra website www.gunawirra.org.au

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Mother and daughter planting a tree in our native garden.

ACHIEVEMENTS



3 of our staff and board members were recognised for their service to the community.



More Therapists were sent where needed **on Country**.



1.3k+ views on our YouTube cultural videos.



Healing circle completed as part of our garden's cultural upgrade.



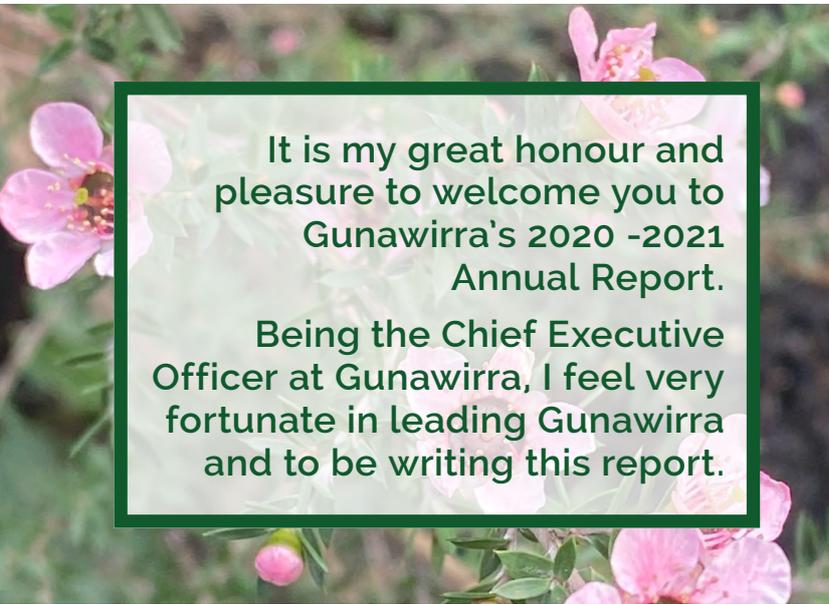
WINNER of the Best Technology Achievement by an Indigenous Australian in the Australian Not-for-Profit Technology Awards.

Gunawirra acknowledges the original artwork of artist Melissa Barton, a Boorooberongal Dharug woman. Her artwork 'People on Country' captures our work and those people, children and communities we support across Sydney and greater NSW.

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CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER'S REPORT



It is my great honour and pleasure to welcome you to Gunawirra's 2020 -2021 Annual Report.

Being the Chief Executive Officer at Gunawirra, I feel very fortunate in leading Gunawirra and to be writing this report.



Gunawirra is regarded as one big family, and like our own families we're there to help, care and support each other. I would like to thank the Gunawirra family for their support and for strengthening Gunawirra's programs throughout the year. I gratefully acknowledge and recognise everyone's tireless commitment, determination and enthusiasm in providing care, treatment and support for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families, carers and preschool communities we support. This year has seen our lives change, possibly forever. I have seen everyone at Gunawirra at times selfishly putting this organisation first, before their own families during the pandemic and the lockdown periods. These acts of empathy and care is what Gunawirra is renowned for, and the board and I thank everyone sincerely.

I wish to thank the Gunawirra Board, led by our dedicated chairwoman, Miriam Cavanagh. Your leadership, guidance and support has been outstanding and has made my role less challenging. I want to recognise the many hours that Miriam and the board have given Gunawirra, myself and the Gunawirra staff. Thank you to our clinical staff and contractors, led by our community award winning Clinical Manager Katrina Ikonomou. Throughout the year they remained committed and passionate within their work, while facing many challenges along the way. Your work ethics and enthusiasm in caring and supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people has strengthened Gunawirra's place in the many preschools we work in. I also wish to thank sincerely the Administration staff at Gunawirra, led by Sonia White. Their tireless efforts in managing our operations and maintaining processors has been instrumental in maintaining Gunawirra's professional efficiency and standards. I also

would like to thank our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural facilitators. Gunawirra regards culture as the heart of our organisation and it's your passion and willingness to share your cultural knowledge that provides strong connections and healing for the many mothers, children and families we support. I also must thank our other incredible staff and volunteers. The Gunawirra staff and volunteers who work behind the scenes are extraordinary people who give so much of their time and energy to Gunawirra, and if it wasn't for them our doors would not be open.

This year Gunawirra achieved tremendous results and faced many challenges while providing treatment, care and support for many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Our programs continue to provide unequalled quality of treatment, support and care. In 2020 – 2021, Gunawirra has connected with more individuals comprised of families, children, carers, and teachers from across a range of our programs throughout Sydney and NSW. We look forward to building on our new program "Clinic on Country" which will see much needed professional support traveling into those preschool communities across NSW.

The 2020 – 2021 Gunawirra annual report truly captures and reflects the incredible work undertaken by Gunawirra while we work in line with our strategic direction, values and vision. With all these affairs in place I look forward to be inspired by the courage and determination of those we care for and support. I also look forward to hearing inspiring stories of achievements and triumphs while we face challenges in pursuit of a positive future.

Graham Toomey
Chief Executive Officer/ Executive Director

OUR PHILOSOPHY AND VALUES

OUR VISION

Gunawirra's vision, as a community led organisation, is respecting and valuing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and their cultures, and improving the lives of disadvantaged and vulnerable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, children, families and their communities.

PURPOSE

Our purpose is to promote the best possible development for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children aged 0-5 and to empower the parents of these children to intervene in their own lives, breaking the cycle of suffering caused by loss of culture, family, community and country.

PHILOSOPHY AND VALUES

We:

- Hold a deep respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and are committed to redress the harm of past wrongs.
- Incorporate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures into our programs which allows healing and a better quality of life.
- Have a strong theoretical base in psychoanalytic thinking and attachment theory, which builds an early capacity for healthy emotional, cognitive and physical development of children.
- Have a commitment to research, evaluation and the measurement of outcomes.

STRATEGIC DIRECTION

Gunawirra's strategic direction is grounded in the following principles:

- Provide Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people a connection and a belonging to their heritage, Country and culture.
- Support emotional nurturing during pregnancy and early childhood which is critical in preparation for a stable, emotionally connected, resilient and productive adult life.
- Helping Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents and carers deal with their own trauma is critical for them to develop better parenting skills and to negotiate their lives.
- Designing and implementing professional, unique, innovative and transformational programs — small models of excellence that are fully evaluated to allow Gunawirra's work to be replicated in widening circles of effectiveness.
- Helping Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander professionals and preschool teachers deal with the trauma in their own lives enhances their personal and professional effectiveness with children in their care.
- Increasing understanding of transgenerational trauma and the effects of present-day trauma on young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children is vital.
- Working at the interface of healing trauma and developing a capacity to learn is central to all Gunawirra's work.

OUR AMBASSADOR

Gunawirra would like to acknowledge and thank Professor The Honourable Dame Marie Bashir AD CVO for her years of support and patronage. As Professor Bashir winds down her professional duties we wish her all the best with a relaxing and well deserved retirement.

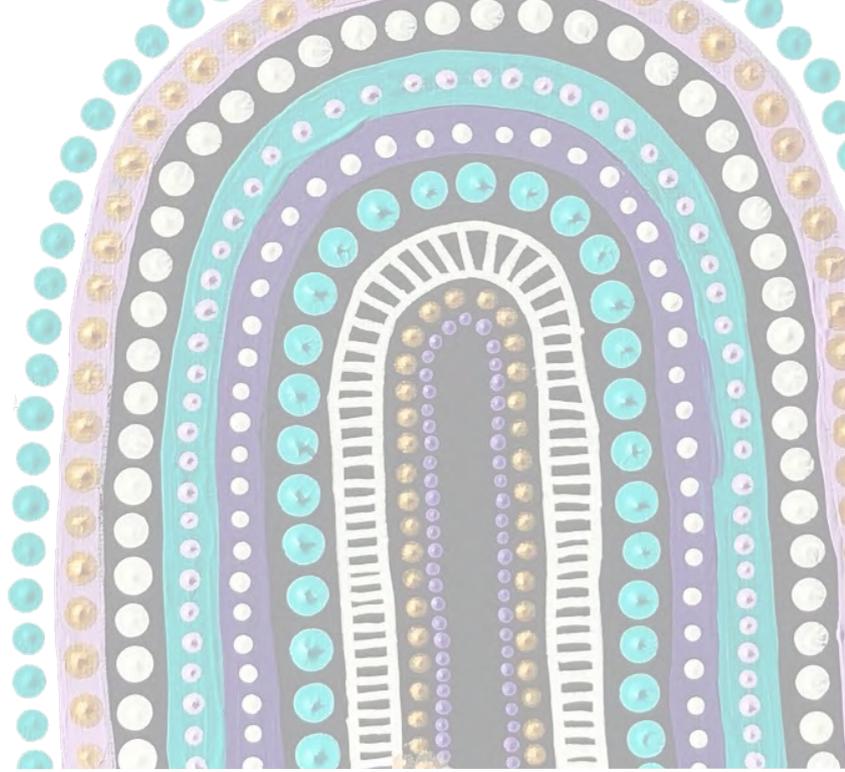


Photo provided by Ursula

We are excited to announce our new ambassador, **Ursula Yovich**. Ursula is a proud Burarra and Serbian woman who has become one of Australia's most celebrated performers and has impressed audiences around the world.

Ursula has had an extensive career in TV, Film and Stage, appearing in the TV series *Mystery Road*, *The Gods of Wheat Street*, *Redfern Now* and *Rake*, and has been in film such as *Jindabyne*, *Australia* and *Top End Wedding*.

Ursula decided to retire from stage acting to focus on music, writing, her family and giving back to the community. This has led her to becoming an ambassador for Gunawirra. Welcome to the family Ursula.



L to R: Ursula Yovich, Miriam Cavanagh, Katrina Ikonomou & Graham Toomey



BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Current board members



Miriam Cavanagh

Chairwoman

Miriam is of both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent, her Mother's family are both Aboriginal - Yirrganydji Cairns/ KuuKu Ya'a Lockhart River and Torres Strait Islander - Meriam Mir (Darnley / Murray) Eastern Islands, and Kala Lagaw (Mabuiag) Western Islands. Her Father's family group are Wonnarua Hunter Valley NSW.

She works as a Cultural Broker in both the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education and health areas, ensuring peoples education and health is at the core and embedded into different policies.



Graham Toomey

CEO/ Executive Director

Graham belongs to the Wurrumunga clan of the Wiradjuri nation. Graham also belongs to the Wongaibon nation. Graham works at Gunawirra as the CEO and each day he is committed to improving lifestyles for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and their communities.



Audrey Walker

Director

Audrey is a proud Gumbaynggirr woman from the mid north coast of NSW.

She works within the justice space in the Kulin Nations (Melbourne) and is passionate about reducing the rates of incarceration in our communities and breaking the cycle of trans-generational trauma.



Lenny Stanley

Director

Lenny is a proud Aboriginal man from the Wiradjuri Nation of Central Western NSW.

Lenny is a Workplace Trainer and Assessor in the heavy machinery industry.

Lenny's aims to empower young mothers and their children to be proud of their cultural identity.



Shannon Hunter

Company Secretary

Shannon has more than 15 years' experience working in education. She has a particular interest in advocacy, mentoring, positive leadership, mental health and childhood wellbeing.

She has a Diploma in Early Childhood Education and Advanced Diploma of Community Sector Management. Shannon is currently the Managing Director of a large NFP OOSH Service.



CHAIR'S REPORT

It has been my pleasure to be Chairwoman of the Board of Directors for Gunawirra during what has been an unforgettable 12 months navigating through the World Health Pandemic Covid-19 as we have worked throughout NSW.

The Pandemic has been an extremely taxing time for our Board of Directors, CEO, and all our staff and volunteers, who have worked tirelessly to keep our communities safe during these times.

A really special thank you to all our Staff, who have continued to work throughout the Pandemic and come up with new and innovative ideas in order to work and communicate with their Clients.

Our CEO Graham Toomey, has provided the guidance and strength to lead our organisation through Covid-19. He continues to work with our partners and funding bodies to maintain our strong relationships and strives to improve the positive outcomes for Gunawirra through his leadership.

Gunawirra's much needed programs did become affected but we initiated support via remote plus online learning like zoom meetings and other means.



We are very proud to have done so and know that this has been achieved because of the commitment, dedication and support received from our community and funding support in some way big or small.

To those people, we say a really big thank you and we look forward to continuing our relationship.

Gunawirra is now getting much stronger, and letting us know what has been a long and hard proud journey. With the strong commitment, passion and professionalism of our staff and volunteers who work tirelessly to provide great care facilities and support throughout the programs for our clients and children, we cannot thank them enough for their ongoing support.

I would also like to personally thank my fellow Board Members for continuing to demonstrate commitment, leadership and the continual quality improvement for Gunawirra. I also wish to thank the CEO and senior management, for their tireless efforts and for taking Gunawirra forward in a positive way.

2021 has been a testing time for all, and I look forward to working with our Directors and Staff to continue providing professional and culturally appropriate sharing of knowledge to Gunawirra and all our Communities.

Au Esoau, Koeyma Esso
(Thank you everyone)

Miriam Cavanagh
Chairwoman



2021 has been a testing time for all, and I look forward to working with our Directors and Staff to continue providing professional and culturally appropriate sharing of knowledge to Gunawirra and all our Communities.

CLINICAL REPORT

2021 has been a year full of challenges and change for everyone at Gunawirra. Due to Covid-19, we had to adapt to the 'new normal' of living online. Services that we regularly offer to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families had to come to a halt, resulting in many new support strategies being created.

Firstly, our Young Aboriginal Mothers Program has come a long way since the beginning of the year, with so many new changes being implemented into the program. A program that was once mainly a psychotherapeutic attitude has now shifted towards having a more holistic approach. Psychotherapy, speech therapy, nutrition, art, culture and social work have all been implemented into the program's weekly structure thanks to our amazing team of professionals. All these services are offered as individual sessions, separate to the weekly group setting as well.

However, during the peak of the Pandemic, we were not able to function on an in-person basis, so the team formed an online resource group for all of the women who have attended Gunawirra. Here the mothers could access nutrition, speech and cultural resources while being in lockdown at home. This group also allowed the women to connect with each other in a different way and share their personal experiences with one another online. Gunawirra also provided care packs to both the women and children in the YAMP program on a regular basis throughout the lockdown period. The team was determined to ensure they had all the practical resources they needed, as well as some fun activities to do too. Additionally, celebrations have definitely not been missed during this year. We have held many Covid-safe events such as a welcome back party to acknowledge the reunion of mothers group after lockdown, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children's day, Halloween, and more! The team has also provided gifts and a cake to every mother and child on their birthday. All these supports have now been implemented into permanent YAMP practice at Gunawirra as they have opened effective new channels that support our families.

Gunawirra also provides clinical support programs in five preschools and one primary school throughout NSW. During the Pandemic, these too were forced to go online. Therapy sessions via remote were immediately established, while social media pages and videos offered extra support. These initiatives proved that Gunawirra remained committed to its work and it's been incredible to see our team, put the children, families, and teachers before themselves and their families during this challenging time. A weekly online teacher support session with a highly experienced Art Psychotherapist was established, which is going to offer important support for teachers and for their own well-being.

Many of these online initiatives will also remain permanently at Gunawirra, as we've seen extraordinary outcomes in keeping our much-valued work available.

Lastly, Gunawirra has been able to increase their focus on spreading cultural knowledge and awareness to both our people and the wider community this year. Cultural outings for our YAMP program, staff and volunteers have been fantastic for all involved. Knowledge about native plants and their uses have been carried on creating Gunawirra's new native garden. This garden has become fundamental to our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. Each child has been assigned their own plants that they tend to each week and watch them grow. Gunawirra has also been hosting webinars each month that discuss Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ways of knowing, being, and doing to the public. Gunawirra also provides time during these webinars for people to ask the tricky and uncomfortable questions that people may have been worried about asking in the past. The webinars have been recorded and have become a great cultural resource for anyone wanting to learn more.

Overall, it is important to know that many of Gunawirra's clinical team consist of recently employed people, who are new to Gunawirra. Each of these individuals come with their own unique ideas to help make our work better and more useful to those receiving our services. However, it truly is the passion and respect that this team has for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history, culture and the people that make Gunawirra so special. I am proud to be a part of this amazing team of people and excited to witness the positive changes that we help create throughout our journey together.

Katrina Ikonou
Clinical Manager



Katrina receiving Young Citizen of the Year 2021 at the Inner West Citizen Awards



OUR EARLY INTERVENTION PROGRAMS

Young Aboriginal Mothers Program (YAMP)

Pregnancy and early motherhood can be a time of vulnerability and uncertainty for most women. All mothers need and deserve a great deal of care, assistance and support during this time so that their physical and emotional health, and that of their babies, is protected and fostered. Early trauma and loss in the mother's life can have a direct impact on her capacity to bond with her baby and to meet the challenges and demands of caring for babies and young children. Gunawirra's Young Aboriginal Mothers Program is here to support women throughout these life changing times.

What We Do

The Young Aboriginal Mothers Program currently runs two groups for women who have Aboriginal children aged 0 to 5 years. The groups meet weekly at Gunawirra in Rozelle and are offered with a variety of resources. In practical terms, Gunawirra provides transport to and from the centre, morning tea, a warm lunch and food parcels from Oz Harvest. Depending on the interests and needs of the group members, we provide various activities such as: cooking with kids, art, craft, art therapy and more!

Recently Gunawirra has shifted from a psychotherapeutic approach to a holistic model, placing culture at the heart of the program. We have witnessed how culture has significantly helped with healing for our mums and bubs. The YAMP team is made up of both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal facilitators. These facilitators work side by side to provide the families with a variety of assistance including, social work support, nutrition and speech therapy. Gunawirra has also gained an Aunty this year who dedicates time each month to bring her extensive cultural knowledge to the program. Here she creates a safe place for the women to ask questions, and learn more about their heritage without any fear.

Placing culture at the heart of the program has been the key factor that has resulted in the improvement of our women and children's well-being.

Culture

We understand that our health and wellbeing as a First Nations people is intimately attached to the health of our country, our surrounding environments, and our families and communities.

In our work with mothers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children we honour our ancestors, we work to ensure the health and wellbeing of women and their Aboriginal families.

We acknowledge women's roles in raising strong Aboriginal children and families. We value their continuous leadership and contribution to our communities. We recognise their specific roles carrying and sharing our stories and knowledge, maintaining cultural practices. We support their aspirations.

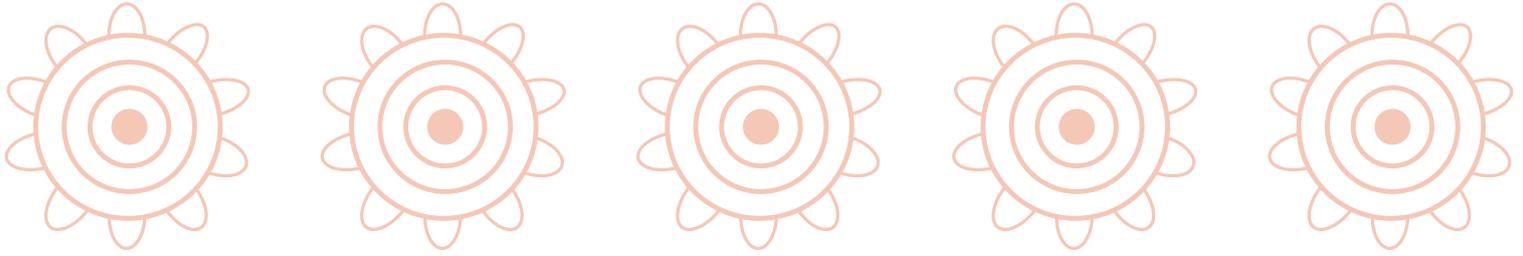


Weaving with Aunty Jo

At Gunawirra we believe that connecting with our culture benefits our physical and emotional wellbeing. Our Women's Business Program focuses on making ancient wisdom, tools, and culture relevant to our families in the 21st century. It is designed to reconnect Mothers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children with a sense of belonging, enhancing their knowledge and understanding of cultural practices. In this way culture is a living expression that helps our mothers to feel confident as women, secure in the value of their own knowledge and worth.

"My focus is always on a contemplative understanding of cultural practice where we are always exploring the why of what we are doing. This is important to build an understanding on the interconnectedness of all of life's systems." - Aunty Jo Selfe





Nutrition

The nutrition program at Gunawirra has been developed to be responsive to the health and nutritional needs as expressed by the Mums and their kids. The aim is to encourage the development of healthier habits and behaviours around food so that the children will grow and thrive and chronic health burden risk is reduced within the community.

Our intention is to work together within the Gunawirra community supporting each other in continuing to develop skills around cooking and presenting food. Cooking sharing and eating meals together has been a great way to embed the joy of home cooking, connecting and demonstrating healthy eating habits, with the kids eating with the Mums and staff members.



Mother's Group preparing lunch as part of a nutritional session

As the COVID challenges developed in 2021 we were prevented meeting in person but we have continued individual nutrition and health support for the families and also conducting cooking demonstration webinars and videos for them within the online community. Discussing the health benefits of various preparation techniques for different foods and the nutrients they offer embedded within the cooking instructions for the recipes on the videos.

Another important skill we have been focussing on this year is sharing tips on ways to eat well on a budget and on creating meals with a healthy balance of nutrients.

We have also been experimenting with various native ingredients to integrate cultural knowledge around these indigenous foods. We have been developing recipes using these potentially nutritious foods so that a recipe book can be created, to share with our Gunawirra community.

Speech Therapy

At Gunawirra we believe that a secure attachment between mother and child forms the foundation for a child's language learning. We acknowledge the impact of trauma on the developing brain and support adults to increase their responsiveness to children's attempts to communicate. We have developed a range of programs to support our mothers, children and the wider community in understanding how to support children on their communication journey.

These include:

- Providing individual and group speech therapy.
- Creating language and culture rich environments.
- Coaching adults to develop their skills in supporting children.
- Creating a speech therapy that can be replicated in the outreach preschools gunawirra supports.

The aim of the speech therapy programs are to:

- Provide children with the communication skills they need for meaningful participate across the day.
- Provide mothers with strategies to support children's communication development.
- Facilitate positive interactions between children that allows children to develop their social skills.
- Provide preschool staff with strategies to support communication development.



Jarjum in a relaxed speech therapy session





Art Therapy

Children we see for Art Therapy have experienced or are experiencing difficult and challenging lives due to family breakdown; domestic violence, parental substance use, abuse and neglect, and this particular time of Covid-19 has exacerbated these difficulties. As a consequence, the children display a range of behaviours including anger and rage, fight/flight states, destructibility, emotional turmoil and distress that reflects the trauma, chaos and instability of their young lives. This in turn affects their ability and capacity to learn, socialise, have relationships and be part of a community.

The opportunity to engage with art materials in the context of a therapeutic relationship offers children a place to share difficult sensations, thoughts, and feelings. Sometimes words are not necessary, and healing takes place through the art process within the context of the art therapy relationship.



Jarjum painting in an art therapy session

The child is given space to communicate in their own way. The art therapist facilitates the use of art materials that encourage children to best express themselves and their needs, and children often find what fits for them.

Aims include expressing thoughts and feelings that are otherwise difficult to verbalise; promoting emotional well-being and health; encouraging speech development and learning; increased confidence and self-esteem; and development of positive ways to respond to life's challenges.

Children are therefore more settled in class and are able to stay in the classroom for longer periods and transitioned between activities more easily. There was a greater capacity for listening and participating in class activities, fewer outbursts of rage, improved reading and writing skills, and improved social skills.

The Pregnancy Project

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mothers and their babies face increased risks during pregnancy and birth compared to non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and babies. In addition to these health risks, many of the women we see also face isolation, lack of support, emotional difficulties due to early trauma and loss, and disadvantage in many areas of their lives. These factors impact directly on the woman's confidence in her mothering capacities, her emotional connection to her baby and the future relationship of the mother-baby couple. The Pregnancy Program is designed to provide therapy and support at this crucial time so that the mothers and their babies are able to form safer and more stable and secure foundations for life.

The program works in conjunction with the Women and Babies Aboriginal Midwifery Unit at Royal Prince Alfred Hospital, ensuring that the women with the highest needs are referred to the program. Yet over the past year, the current pandemic has greatly affected Gunawirra's ability to facilitate this program. Necessary lockdown restrictions have been put in place at all hospitals to avoid the spread of covid-19. As a result of these restrictions, Gunawirra has been unable to go onsite and work directly with pregnant women. To continue supporting these women, Gunawirra's social worker has starting providing weekly home visits as a substitute for the pregnancy program. So far this service delivery method has proven to be effective, and so Gunawirra will continue to implement regular home visits as a part of the ongoing program.

YAMP Outcomes

There has been progress with the Mums forming deeper connections with their kids and culture. We have also noticed the difference in mindfulness regarding taking care of their health and well-being. Overall having a Cultural component has really managed to help strengthen bonds with Gunawirra and all the families who attend the program.



BUILDING NEW PARTNERSHIPS

Gunawirra and Australian Catholic University

Gunawirra's research project in partnership with Australian Catholic University will assess the mid to long term impact of our Young Aboriginal Mothers Program (YAMP) for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mothers and their children.

This partnership and engagement is characterised by high levels of cultural safety, whereby engagement is culturally appropriate and respectful. This research and quality assurance project has been mutually agreed upon by both partners to ensure all ethical standards are respected. The evaluation seeks to understand the medium-term impact the programme has had for those mothers and their children who have been part of the YAMP program. The project will also make recommendations for the program's future operation and expansion while also reconnecting to mothers and children that have been part of the program.

Gunawirra and The University of Newcastle

The Guyati, Garraka wa Witing Speech Pathology Project is a ground-breaking program to address the critical shortage of speech pathology services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in the Dalaigur and Scribbly Gum Dalai Preschools in Kempsey.

In partnership with Newcastle University, and supported by the Vonwiller Foundation, this much needed pilot program will see final year Speech Pathology students help to close the gap and address early speech and language difficulties for children at Dalaigur and Scribbly Gum Dalai Preschools in Kempsey. This program will fill the high need for culturally appropriate speech pathology services for pre-school children and address the severe shortage of qualified professionals to fill the demand.



Dalaigur and Scribbly Gum Dalai Preschools leaders, Newcastle representatives from the Speech pathology department, local community leaders and Gunawirra representatives gathered for opening ceremony to pilot program

CLINIC ON COUNTRY

For over six years, Gunawirra has provided vital services through fly-in-fly-out (FIFO) therapists to rural NSW schools where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their families are unable to access professional resources. These therapists have expertise in intergenerational trauma and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture.

From feedback, Gunawirra learned the services were vital and effective. However as there was insufficient time for the therapists to reach all of the children, the irregular sessions were simply not enough to make an impact. Out of this need came the new program - **Clinic on Country**.

The official launch of Clinic on Country was unfortunately postponed in early July due to COVID-19. However despite the adversity this program currently faces, we have already moved forward with appointing therapists to the Kempsey region, and will send them to Country when safe to do so.

Our program design is structured for a team of professionals to collectively visit two preschools who have the highest proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families: Dalaigur and Scribbly Gum, both near South Kempsey.

The **Clinic on Country** team will consist of a Speech Therapist, Occupational Therapist, Art Therapist and Social Worker. By basing the team in one location at Kempsey, the duration of services increases while the economic costs decrease.



Together, we can sow these Gunawirra seeds and bring **Clinic on Country** to fruition.

DONATE NOW



Uncle John and children of Dalaigur Preschool

Evidence-Based Therapies

Around 40% of Aboriginal children begin school with communication difficulties¹. The need for speech pathology is compounded among Aboriginal children due to 'increased rates of early childhood trauma' as well as 'high rates of middle ear disease'².

The first three years of 'new stimulations ... will shape a child's cognitive, social and physical growth'³ and determines developmental delays. Occupational Therapy (OT) delivers proven benefits to 'motor, cognitive, sensory processing, communication and play skills'.

A University of Sydney study⁴ on OT with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in remote NSW found that 22.1% of these children were 'developmentally vulnerable on language and cognitive skills', compared with 5.9% of non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

The integrated early intervention of the **Clinic on Country** will redress diagnoses, speech impairments, coordination and school readiness. The holistic approach will involve the parents and educators, implementing changes needed to ensure positive growth and development in all aspects of the child's life.

The project will pilot a partnership with University of Newcastle and other research collaborators to train local therapists in the longer term. The outcomes and evaluation will inform a new model that can be scaled and replicated in other indigenous preschools across regional NSW.

1. Closing the Gap report, 2019
2. Gould 2014
3. American OT Association
4. Corey Block, 2015



JOURNEY TO LEARNING & CULTURAL WORK

Gunawirra knows that culture is the heart of our organisation and its comforting to know that it's having the positive outcomes that we knew it would have for our mums, bubs and preschool communities. Over the last twelve months Gunawirra has involved more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural facilitators and staff into our programs. Our Young Aboriginal Mothers Program (YAMP), has developed a 'Woman's Business' module as part of the program which has had enormous benefits for the mums. Watching our facilitators share their cultural knowledge and activities like weaving, storytelling, dance, song and visiting sacred Aboriginal sites across Sydney, has been incredible. Culture is healing and provides comfort and happiness. Seeing our mums and bubs shine while connecting to their culture and identity has been moving. Watching them planting additional native plants to our garden and then watching them nurturing and protecting their plants is inspiring. I look forward to the future with our mums and bubs program and how culture will further strengthen them and provide happiness and healing.

The Journey to learning cultural program has had to largely rely on cultural videos and webinars to connect children, teachers and families to the culture. While I made some visits to preschools, the health restrictions have not allowed many visits to take place. Gunawirra did send out our cultural colour in booklet and pencils for the preschool children and have continued to produce cultural videos as the means of connection and education for children to the Aboriginal culture. Our cultural videos received an award in the Australian Not-for-Profit Technology Awards. This is a fantastic reward for all of us here at Gunawirra and it's comforting to know that our work is being recognised out in communities.

Importantly, Gunawirra has incorporated more cultural training and initiatives for our staff, contractors, students and volunteers. Gunawirra prides itself on ensuring everyone has a connection and an understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and their peoples. Our workplace continues to provide a safe and a culturally appropriate work space providing knowledge and security for those who are part of our programs.

Gunawirra is looking forward with providing more culture for our mums, bubs, preschool children, teachers and their communities in the coming year, hopefully well away from the challenges that the pandemic has thrown at us. Listening to children laugh and watching them having fun with their culture is so compelling and inspirational and it's this that inspires us all to do more.

Graham Toomey
CEO/ Executive Director



Graham preparing a smoking ceremony for the YAMP group, connecting to culture and traditions.



THE FIVE BIG IDEAS PROGRAM FOR PRESCHOOLS

Gunawirra works closely with preschools across remote and regional areas of NSW. The Five Big Ideas Program is a grass-roots program, designed in consultation with preschool educators, to impart practical strategies and living skills to preschool children and their families.

Aims

- Better equip preschool teachers to address the particular emotional, health and cultural needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.
- Improve understanding of good nutrition for children and families.
- Provide good nutrition.
- Increase awareness of and pride in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures.
- Improve emotional health.
- Support preschools to provide safe, healthy and caring environments.

Preschool teachers across the country access the free activities booklet to support the program covering.



Children receiving *Five Big Ideas* carepacks kindly donated by Sydney schools and organisations in the community.



BASIC HYGIENE

Respecting your body, healthy ears, blowing noses, cleaning teeth. All children are provided with a Carepack that contains toothpaste, toothbrush, soap, washer, antiseptic cream, Band-Aids and underwear.



NUTRITION

Teaching good eating habits and reducing the amount of fast food. Practical and financial help with vegetable gardens, bush tucker and Cooking and nutrition videos and recipes are shared.



HANDLING PROBLEMS AT HOME

Assists teachers to support children who may be in distress and having difficulties at home. Activities aimed at naming, expressing and soothing emotions, circle of healing, mutual respect and caring, connecting to culture. (Please see the sections on Art Therapy and Professional Development for Teachers for more detail).



IDENTITY

Self-respect, my totem, my mob. Gunawirra's Cultural Advisor plays a significant role in bringing culture to the children, teachers, families and community. Activities include making a family tree with parents, telling stories from the Dreamtime, performing ceremonies and using the items in the Aboriginal Learning Kit for Children (the 'Culture Box').



MY ENVIRONMENT, MY LAND, MYSELF

Based on the important Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander principle that if we look after the land, it will look after us. Activities that increase children's understanding of the natural environment, their place within it and how to care for it.



GUNAWIRRA SUPPORTED PRESCHOOLS



- | | | |
|---|--|--|
| 1. Boggabilla Preschool | 10. Jarjum Preschool | 19. Poet's Corner Preschool |
| 2. Boori Preschool
(at Aboriginal Medical Service) | 11. Kooloora Preschool
(part of Toukley Primary School) | 20. Quirindi Preschool |
| 3. Bowraville Preschool | 12. Kootingal Preschool | 21. Scribbly Gum Dalai Preschool |
| 4. Coraki Preschool | 13. Little Yuin Tilba | 22. Tingha Preschool |
| 5. Dalaigur Preschool | 14. Lyrebird Preschool | 23. Wee Waa Preschool |
| 6. Evans Head Preschool | 15. Minimbah Preschool | 24. Werris Creek & District
Preschool |
| 7. Gainmara-Birrilee Preschool
Association | 16. Minimbah Primary School | 25. Woodburn-Evans Head
Preschool |
| 8. Goonellabah Preschool | 17. Moama Public School
Preschool | |
| 9. Gyndarna Preschool | 18. Peak Hill Preschool | |





Jarjum in a tree in our Native Garden at Gunawirra

HEALING ON COUNTRY

In line with the 2021 NAIDOC theme - Heal Country!, Gunawirra have been lucky enough to take our families out on Country to learn about cultural heritage, identity and personal healing.

Drew Roberts, Arakwal/ Bundjalung man, and the team at Shared Knowledge led us around the natural meeting place of the Eora nations in the current Centennial Parklands, Sydney.

Our Mums and the Jarjums learnt about Bushfoods and Bush Medicine on Country, washing hands with leaves and playing tunes with grass.



As part of Reconciliation Week, we collaborated with Inner West Council to hold a series of Grass Tree walking tours through the Gulgadya Ward of Eora.

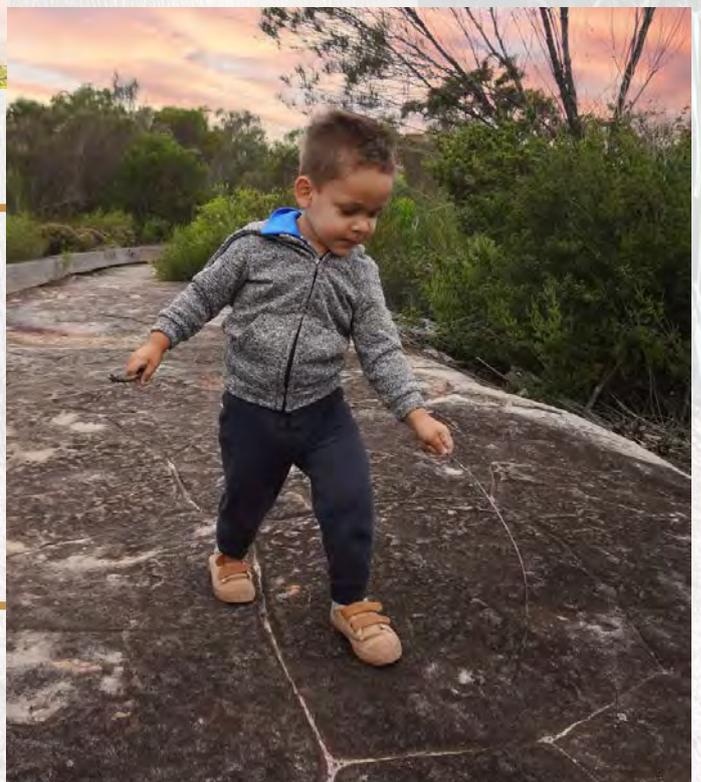
Elders and knowledge holders - Matthew Doyle a descendant of the Muruwari People from Northwest NSW and Terry Lennis a proud D'harawal man, led our Mums along the Hawthorne Canal.

After being engaged and connected with the landscape through an Aboriginal perspective, the families participated in some cultural dancing at Callan Park.

On Kuring-gai Country Drew Roberts led the Mums and bubs around the beautiful ancient rock engravings throughout the bush. He explained the stories of each image and the significance of the location, the plants and the animals to the original peoples of this land.

He further emphasised the importance of preserving these engravings and how we all have a responsibility to continue taking care of our beautiful country.

Thanks to Connect Inner West for providing our transportation for the day.



PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR TEACHERS

Gunawirra provides professional development for preschool educators working with Aboriginal children and families through seminars and webinars. These sessions focus on how to understand trauma, its impact on the children and the teachers who care for them, the importance of culture in healing and the need for self-care for professionals.

Preschool educators are in a unique position to assist and support traumatised children given the strong attachment relationships the children form with them and the trust of families that they enjoy. However, they require a great deal of professional support to do this.

Our research shows that preschool teachers in country NSW face enormous challenges in their work. They report high levels of stress, burn-out and vicarious trauma and these are related to the prevalence and severity of the distress and trauma suffered by many of the children in their care and the communities around them. They face issues of isolation, with very few professional supports or resources.

The aims of the seminars and webinars are to:

- Increase understanding of worker burn-out and vicarious trauma.
- Better equip teachers with strategies to deal with their own distress.
- Increase understanding of trauma in early childhood and its impacts.



Children watching one of Gunawirra's cultural videos in the classroom.

Professional Support for Teachers

Gunawirra provides much needed teacher support via remote platforms with our professional Art Psychotherapist, separate to the teacher development program. This additional support is added as a means to further help and support teachers Gunawirra works with throughout NSW.

Gunawirra's highly experienced professional Therapist provides a safe and friendly space where teachers can receive professional therapy support, while also supporting each other. Sharing and talking as a group is a positive way they can work through those difficult challenges they face every day. Our therapist also provides private sessions for teachers who feel they need that extra care and support in a one-on-one session. Gunawirra knows this will assist teachers in feeling more content while teaching, which will ensure the children receive the best educational outcomes possible.

Gunawirra importantly also provides educational videos that share insights and knowledge on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and peoples. These award winning videos have allowed teachers to learn valuable cultural knowledge and share with children in the classroom. Sharing culture provides healing but also allows cultural knowledge to live and endure.



Educators and children in a North Kempsey preschool.



“GUNAWIRRA HAS ALWAYS BEEN THERE FOR OUR CHILDREN, FAMILIES AND COMMUNITY WHENEVER WE NEEDED THEM. OUR COMMUNITY IS BETTER OFF FROM THE CARE AND SUPPORT GUNAWIRRA HAS PROVIDED US”

Aunty Debbie Swanson – Director of Dalaigur & Scribbly Gum Dalai

1. CARING FOR THE CARERS

This focuses on the ways in which exposure to trauma in others, particularly children, can impact us professionally and personally. The groups are taken through guided exercises designed to support them during times of high stress.

2. UNDERSTANDING TRAUMA

This module covers:

- A theoretical framework for understanding trauma in young children.
- Intergenerational and communal trauma.
- The impacts on the child’s learning and play, memory and brain function, emotional development and attachment relationships.

3. ART THERAPY TECHNIQUES

This session is experiential and involves therapist-led art therapy activity for group members.

- It provides insight into the art therapy process.
- Gives teachers an activity to support their own healing.
- The activity can be adapted for use with the children in the classroom.

4. HOW TO RECOGNISE TRAUMA IN YOUNG CHILDREN

- Explores the overt and subtle signs of trauma, with discussion of case examples.
- Presentation and discussion of a long-term art therapy treatment of a preschool child.

5. ABORIGINAL IDENTITY AND WORKING WITH TRAUMA

- Understanding of intergenerational trauma through the narrative of one family’s experience.
- The importance of culture and identity for healing.
- How work in the preschool can be culturally respectful and relevant.
- The Journey to Learning Program.



POLICY, EVALUATION AND RESEARCH

Throughout 2021, Gunawirra has established a strong, holistic framework. This has informed policy, research, and evaluation. Our work has prioritized the collection and use of qualitative data, as both an outcome of this holistic approach, and as an outcome of the restrictions enforced amidst the Covid-19 Pandemic. Due to travel restrictions, we have had to adapt research and evaluation methods. By enhancing the adaptive capacity of our enquiries and analyses, we recognised the importance of extending research and evaluation methods beyond face-to-face interactions. This realisation has informed the way we now conduct research and evaluations at our on-site and rural locations.

ON-SITE PROJECTS

Face-to-face interactions were not limited at our Rozelle facility. This allowed for in-person data collection, research, and policy amendment for the following projects:

YAMP Evaluation

- Between February and June, past reports, evaluations, and surveys on YAMP, produced throughout 2012-2020 were analysed. This gave insight into its outcomes, positive and negative elements, areas overdue for improvement, and service user expectations. It also identified the positive effect of shifting from a psychoanalytic approach to a holistic foundation within the program.
- An evaluation was then conducted in May, focused on the experiences of long-standing members. Two surveys were developed. One was anonymous, based on data from the evaluation. One was personalised, based on individual responses in a 2020 survey. The evaluation confirmed the effectiveness of the holistic approach, with the mothers and children all improving the measures they gave in 2020. The evaluation also identified areas in need of improvement, and paved new ways to secure positive long-term outcomes for group members.

Policy Creation and Amendments

- A Covid-19 Policy was developed in March, based on government recommendations.
- A Vaccination Policy for staff and service users was also developed in March, based on specific legislative material to ensure the wellbeing of all children and adults at Gunawirra.
- In April, an updated Child Protection Policy was sent to the board of directors. As a response to the 'future task' section of the 2020 policy, evaluation, and research report, the updated policy expanded upon the nature of child protection, also making specific reference to relevant legislation.

RURAL PROJECTS

Gunawirra's Early Intervention Programme was evaluated in June this year. Due to travel restrictions, the evaluation occurred remotely.

Art Therapy

- The art therapists at Kempsey and Armidale provided reports including; explanations of the activities and subtle lesson teaching, group numbers and commentaries provided by the therapists, teachers, and children.
- Engagement in group and individual sessions increased at both locations. The program was highly valued, especially at Kempsey, when the community experience severe flooding and the children came together at the sessions to process the event. Both therapists noted increasing sense of pride among the children, and clear improvement of fine motor skills.

Teacher Support

- A clinical therapist provided a report on the impact of the support program, accounting for sessions from January to June. Attendance was regular at the weekly meetings, which occurred online, after school hours. The program was highly significant, with teachers using the sessions to share experiences, work through trauma, and prevent burnout.

Journey to Learning and Cultural Facilitation

- Information was provided by the cultural facilitator in June on cultural visits. The child-friendly method of cultural education was explained. The children responded well to the use of Totem animal colouring books, cultural boxes that enable tangible exploration of significant items such as boomerangs, and storytelling. In the second half of 2021, webinars and videos were provided in place of visits. Schools accessed these weekly, and on important dates such as NAIDOC week and Reconciliation Day. The teachers reported that the children enthusiastically engaged with these resources and have increased their understanding of Aboriginal culture, identity, and pride.



SUPPORTING AND DEVELOPING OUR STAFF

Recognition

The 2020/ 2021 year has been a fantastic year for community recognition of some of our staff. We are all extremely proud of the work the entire Gunawirra staff do everyday, and we couldn't be more excited that the community has honoured the following people for their achievements.

Graham Toomey - The Best Technology Achievement by an Indigenous Australian in the Australian Not-for-Profit Technology Awards.

Katrina Ikonomou - Young Citizen of the Year 2021, Inner West Council.

Gunawirra YAMP program - Amy Large Volunteer Award, Inner West Council.

Miriam Cavanagh - Excellence in Indigenous Medical Education from the LIME Network (Leaders in Indigenous Medical Education of Australia and New Zealand).



Gunawirra staff with Melissa Barton's artwork 'People on Country'

Our People

Graham Toomey - CEO/ Executive Director

Sonia White - Administration Manager

Katrina Ikonomou - Dharug Clinical Manager

Julie Cowmeadow - Speech Pathologist

Brendan Kerin - Cultural Advisor Marrawarra/Barkindji

Drew Roberts - Cultural Advisor Arakwal/Bundjalung

Eve White - Cultural Advisor Wiradjuri

Susan Kath - Nutritionist

Emma Gentle - Art Therapist

Liz Fairfax - Art Therapist

Loren Weber - Art Therapist

Dominique Flynn - Art Therapist

Lorain Levy - Volunteer Cook

Mary Robson - Occupational Therapist

Danielle Lass - Psychotherapist

Annette Coulter - Art Psychotherapist

Ingo Lambrecht - Psychoanalyst

Melanie Houlahan - Graphic Designer

Charlotte Owen - Marketing Manager

Greg Sutcliffe - IT Manager



OUR VOLUNTEERS & 5 BIG IDEAS DONORS

As a team at Gunawirra, we wish to acknowledge the contributions that our wonderful volunteers and students make, which multiply the impact of our work. Without the many volunteers and students it would not be possible for the organisation to achieve all that we do to grow and thrive.

A vast number of volunteers at schools in several suburbs of Sydney donate the hundreds of Care Packs, books and toys that are distributed through *The 5 Big Ideas Program* to the preschools we work in.

This year due to Covid-19 restrictions, it was necessary to change the volunteer program and scale back the number of people coming on site. Rather than the usual model of large groups, we had small groups on a weekly basis packaging up Care Packs together with other goods into boxes for delivery. The Care Packs include soaps, shampoo, toothbrushes and toothpaste, face washers and underwear. We were fortunate enough with donations to include activity packs, hand sanitisers and dental packs for the families as well as extra supplies for the preschools.

Our volunteers and students also helped enormously with our huge Christmas toy and book drive. Hundreds of toys and books were packed and distributed across NSW to the preschools we support and this would not be achieved without their hard work and efforts.

The Mothers Groups would not be able to operate as effectively without committed volunteers generously giving their time to shop, prepare meals and provide housekeeping to support the groups, and without student interns assisting the clinical staff leading the groups.

We are grateful for every contribution a volunteer makes and, though sad when they move on, are delighted that many secure paid employment after their time as a volunteer with us.

Gunawirra is fortunate to have many volunteers who contribute to various activities throughout the year. This enables us to achieve far more than we otherwise would, and to use grants and fundraising dollars for our primary purpose: to break the transgenerational effects of trauma on young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, mothers, families and communities.



Items ready to go into the care packs for the rural preschools.



Graham and volunteer organising care packs for shipping.



OUR FUNDERS AND SUPPORTERS

GRANTS AND FUNDING



PARTNERSHIPS AND SUPPORTERS



INDIVIDUAL DONORS AND SUPPORTERS

Agnes Josephine Bell and Judith Mary Taplin for supporting our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander scholarship fund with assistance from Anthony Protich.

Maria & Henry Manning

Ash Holmes Art

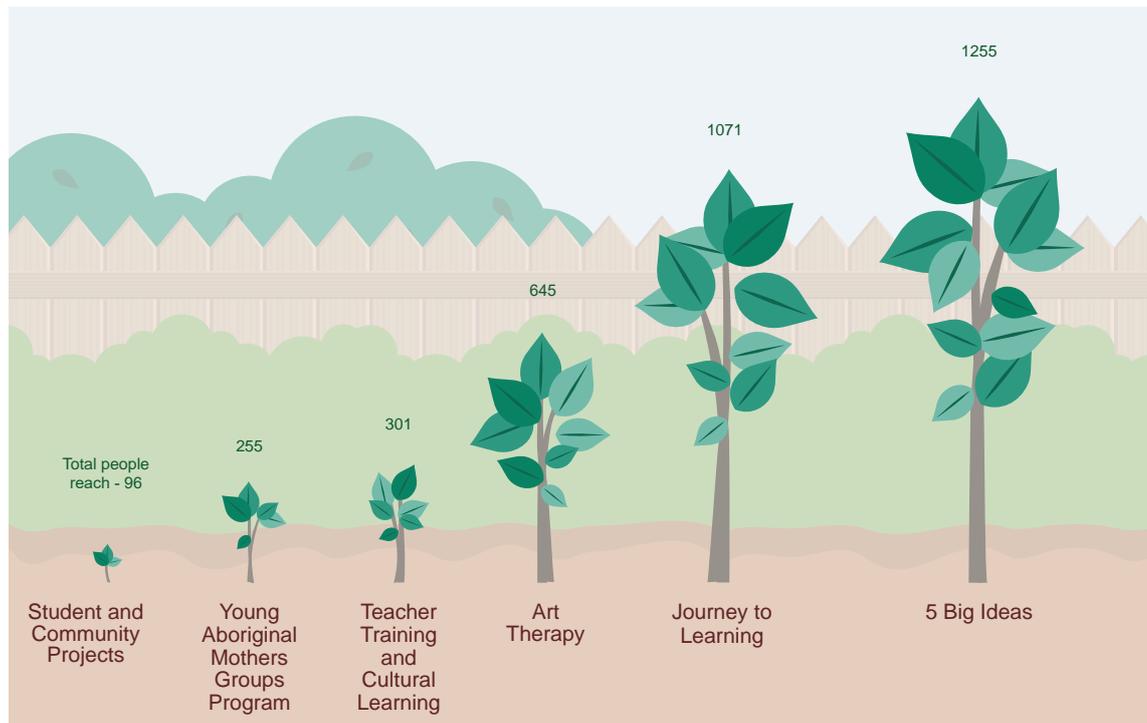
It is not possible for us to list the hundreds of amazing donors who supported us online from July 2020 to June 2021.

A huge THANKYOU to everyone!!

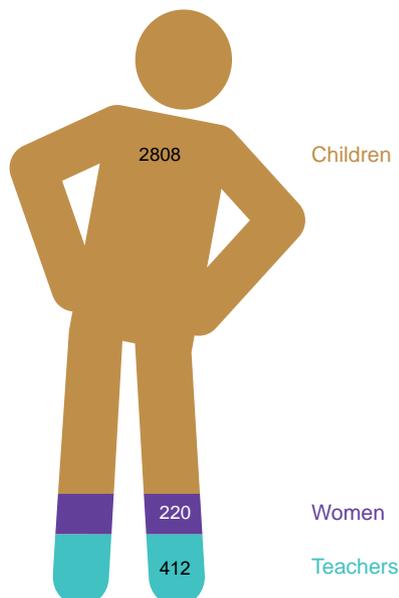


STATISTICS

Gunawirra service delivery by program 2020-2021



Gunawirra service delivery by client group 2020-2021



Gunawirra program delivery hours 2020-2021



OUR YEAR ONLINE

Earlier this year we launched a collection of cultural videos, aimed at reaching Aboriginal families during the pandemic, sharing knowledge with our preschool children, and enlightening the wider community. Topics included Dreamtime stories, Aboriginal tools, and native plants.

After winning the *Best Technology Achievement by an Indigenous Australian in the Australian Not-for-Profit Technology Awards*, we are continuing the knowledge sharing and hosting new series' of cultural webinars covering topics such as kinship and identity, and traditional native food uses.



4272

total views of our cultural education videos

Over **100** attendees watched our webinars live, tuning in from all over Australasia



5 star rating by all attendees

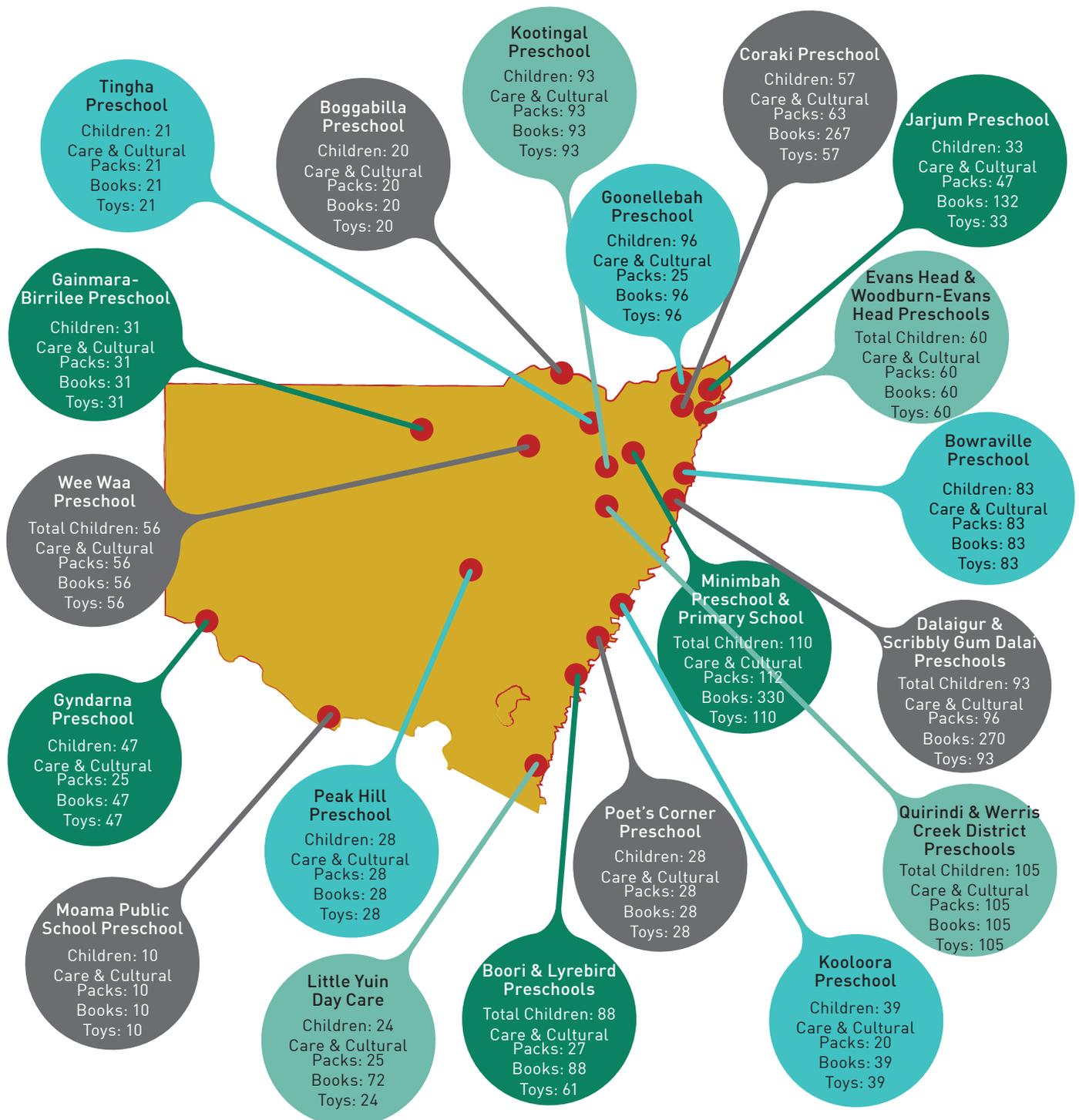


CARE PACK, BOOK AND TOY DISTRIBUTION

Care Packs are used as part of The 5 Big Ideas Program Hygiene Module, and teachers can give them to children any time when teaching about good hygiene and first aid suitable for their young age. Things like washing their hands, cleaning their teeth and putting Band-Aids on cuts. The aim of the

Care Packs is to help children understand they can also take care of themselves. They are made up by generous volunteer in Sydney, many of them schoolchildren, and then boxed at Gunawirra for distribution.

2020 - 2021 Care Packs, Books and Toys distributed



DONATING

All donations are welcome. Donations of \$2 or more are tax-deductible*

Your donation will help transform the lives of young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mothers and children.

Ways of donating

Online

Through our website: gunawirra.org.au/donate/

GiveNow direct portal: givenow.com.au/gunawirra

Simply Giving: gunawirra.simplygiving.com.au



Direct transfer

Account name: Gunawirra Business Transaction Account

BSB number: 06 2156

Account number: 10180211

*Gunawirra is registered with the Australian Securities & Investments Commission as a Company Limited by Guarantee. We are a Public Benevolent Institution (PBI) registered with the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission (ACNC). As an Australian Taxation Office-endorsed Deductible Gift Recipient (DGR), Gunawirra is entitled to receive tax-deductible gifts. ABN 75 133 509 583



