

Giiir Maaru

A YEAR IN REVIEW FROM THE GOMEROI CULTURE ACADEMY 2018 REVIEW



NGAMILUWIY 2018: YEAR IN REVIEW



GOMEROI
CULTURE ACADEMY

Working to support and inspire a generation of culturally strong leaders within our community.

Yaama yaaminday
Gamilroi walaay-baa-ga ngiyani
winung-ulla-waa yillumbul murri
maaru mala ngalay dhawan

Dhiriya yambuli
garriyan-gun-dhuul marridhuul
gaayangal Gamilroi.
ngamil-la nginda,
ngamil-la ngindaay
winanga-la nginda,
winanga-la ngindaay
winangalawa, winangalawa

Acknowledgement of Country

The Gomeri Culture Academy would like to acknowledge the Gomeri people as the custodians and care takers for this land since time immemorial. We recognise the rich culture, history, diversity and deep connection to the land and waters held by Gomeri people.

We pay our respects to our Elders both past and present that have cared and always will care for Gomeri Country. We acknowledge that without their strength, wisdom and desire to continue cultural practice and create a better world for generations to come, the Gomeri Culture Academy would not be possible.



The Yaraan and the two Muraay

In the beginning the very first people were shown how to find enough food and water to live without ever going hungry. At the time, they were not given permission to eat meat but after a long drought, plants failed to grow. On the verge of starvation, a decision was made to eat meat. One man refused to break the rules and walked away.

Everyone then ate a meal of meat, but once the feast was over, the others went in search of the man who walked away. They found he had passed away under **Yaraan** (red river gum). As they walked closer they watched as a dark spirit named '**Yowee**' appeared out of the tree, grabbed hold of the man and lifted him back inside the tree.

The people ran in terror as the tree began to shake the ground. Two **Muraay** (white cockatoos) flew out of their nest in the tree. The Yaraan then lifted out of the ground and flew past the heads of the people. The Yaraan continued to fly up into the night sky where it became known as 'Yarraandu', and it's still being chased by those two Muraay.

DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE



Yaama.

I am very proud to present to you the inaugural Gomeroy Culture Academy 2018 Year in Review.

The Gomeroy Culture Academy (GCA) is a unique program, designed and delivered by members of the local Aboriginal community for our own young people. Over our first year, we have been extremely proud to work with an excellent group of students who have shown determination, passion and ambition in learning and applying their knowledge of Gomeroy culture across a range of settings.

We set out on this path, believing that by investing as much time, effort and energy into each young person as we could, that they would achieve emotional, mental, physical and spiritual growth. They have exceeded our expectations. We have seen our first cohort of students grow into a tight group of friends, leaning on each other's strengths and encouraging each other to strive. Furthermore, we have been able to build a capable and passionate team of staff and continue to strengthen our partnerships with parents, school staff, community and program partners.

Our students have been given the opportunity to examine their core values and beliefs, strengths and passions and to use this understanding of self to inform their personal decisions and create a set of self-development goals. We

have seen the effects of this new self-awareness through its impact on their personal choices, school attendance, community involvement and ongoing commitment to learning. Feedback from parents has been overwhelming, with some saying that they have seen their child grow in ways they could only have dreamed of.

We are also proud to have been able to formalise the role of "Cultural Mentors" within our community, recognising the knowledge that is held across our regional Aboriginal communities, and through the GCA, providing a space for that knowledge to be shared appropriately.

More than anything, this first year has proven the value of our culturally-driven Gomeroy approach to youth leadership development. The success of the model has made us extremely confident that we will reach our goal of supporting the development of 50 strong young cultural leaders within our community over a 5 year horizon. We look forward to watching that future unfold.

Marc Sutherland

Director
Gomeroy Culture Academy

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GOMEROI CULTURE ACADEMY

OUR PURPOSE

To support and inspire a generation of culturally strong leaders within our community

OUR OBJECTIVES

To support our purpose, the Gomerai Culture Academy aims to ensure that the Academy:

- ← Implements a culturally-driven Gomerai self-development program that draws on the knowledge and strength of the community.
- ← Gives young people the skills, confidence and self-awareness needed to make decisions that will have a positive impact on their lives and the lives of people around them.
- ← Builds participants' personal and cultural identity by providing them with a formal cultural learning experience to help them better understand a variety of cultural skills, practices and techniques.
- ← Develops a network of like-minded young people within the community.

OUR 5-YEAR VISION

To have a network of more than 50 young people who are culturally minded, and are pursuing and excelling in a range of fields and occupations.



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ABOUT US



↑ Students at the lookout at Lightning Ridge, NSW

Who we are and what we do

Gomeroid Culture has been passed down through the generations for thousands of years. Story-telling, dance, and other cultural practices such as weaving have been integral to the development of cultural identity and values for young people.

The Gomeroid Cultural Academy (GCA) was launched in March 2018 and represents an exciting initiative that continues the Gomeroid peoples' timeless traditions of passing on cultural knowledge. Through our unique multifaceted program of gatherings, mentoring and On-Country learning, the GCA has worked intensively with a small group of Aboriginal young people to cultivate a sense of community, belonging and connection to the land. This process has developed a strengthened identity amongst our participants - the next generation of Gomeroid leaders.

Through its development phase, the GCA has been keenly aware of the wider cultural context in which we operate, and within this framework has worked determinedly to harness the strength and knowledge that already exists within our community to support our young people.

For each student participant, the GCA has create a tailored 12 month mentoring experience based on that individual's own areas of interest. Throughout the year students have chosen to explore interests in bush foods and natural resources, wood carving, dance, song, weaving, music, language and dance. The individualised programs have enabled participants to learn more about their culture, strengthen and develop their own identity and have a greater opportunity for success.

OUR PROGRAM

Over the first full year of the Academy's program, nine students have completed a 12-month program based on our innovative Gomeroi self-development model. The program has built each student's understanding of culture, identity and belonging. They each explored, over a variety of settings, how cultural knowledge and practice can transfer into leadership. The program has focused on each student as an individual, allowing them to pursue personal interests within a cultural mentoring relationship. Brought back into the group context, the learnings from each students' personal projects have been expanded to allow participants to consider how he or she can individually, and collectively, impact the world around them.

Weekly Group Gathering

Our weekly gatherings have provided a safe, fully-supervised space for students to gain a deeper understanding of personal and cultural values. Students have been supported to recognise their own values and to learn how to put them into practice. The gatherings have provided opportunities for participants to learn traditional cultural practices and to have meaningful conversations with local experts in the areas of weaving, wood carving, Gomeroi language, stories, songs and dance.

Weekly Mentoring Sessions

In addition to our weekly gatherings, the GCA has offered students weekly 1-on-1 mentoring sessions, by drawing on an extensive network of experienced Gomeroi cultural mentors. Personalised Cultural Learning Plans (CLP) were developed by each young person, identifying their interests and passions, as well as setting targets for them to reach throughout the year.

On-Country Learning

In order to share culture appropriately it is crucial that we have On-Country Learning experiences. Our Gomeroi culture has always been shared out on Country. Being on Country allows us to be surrounded by the traditional teaching tools of the natural environment and the cultural stories that connect us to place. Throughout the year students have visited a number of special places both locally and across NSW.

Learning On-Country has allowed students to develop a set of knowledge described by a sacred relationship between place and experience. Creating opportunities for students to establish these connections to Country under the guidance of local knowledge holders has been a special experience.

Performances and Demonstrations

Throughout their cultural learning journey students have learned traditional practices and processes that have strengthened their sense of self. An emphasis has been placed on using song and dance, weaving, woodcarving, bush food and medicine as a reflective form of 'participation based learning'. Furthermore, the GCA has provided students with a variety of opportunities to share their knowledge through performances, workshops and demonstrations.



OUR 2018 GRADUATES



MaKalyn Brown

MaKalyn has worked hard to achieve his goal of understanding the processes and techniques needed to make clapsticks and boomerangs out of natural woods. Over the past 12 months,

he has learned 10 new songs and dances and built his vocabulary to more than 200 Gomeroid words. A dedication to increasing his leadership capacity has seen MaKalyn facilitate dance workshops in a number of local primary schools and through the school holiday programs.

"We visited a lot of special places where I could feel the old people with me."



Dyontay Spearim

Dyontay has worked with his mentor to learn the processes and techniques involved in identifying materials, and creating artefacts such as clapsticks, boomerangs, and

didgeridoos out of natural woods. Creating his own set of mulga boomerangs, Dyontay shared this knowledge through his leadership role within his school dance group supporting other young people in their learning.

"I never realised that my strength and passion to support others could be used in my career moving forward."



J-Lee Nash

J-Lee has spent her year at the Gomeroid Culture Academy developing a better understanding of the natural environment, learning the names and uses of native plants,

including making natural remedies and medicines. She has used this understanding along with her skill and passion for weaving to create a series of woven objects using grasses and recycled contemporary materials.

"Learning our history helps us to connect more deeply to our culture and understand ourselves and how we belong. Sometime physical evidence through sacred sites can help blossom this connection to land, history and culture"



Olivia Flett

Olivia has investigated the role that both weaving and language play in her culture. Throughout the year, Olivia has become more familiar with the process and techniques of weaving and has

not only created her own baskets and kurrajong skirt but she has shared this practice with three generations of her own family.

"At the start of the year I didn't know much about my language, now I am confident to teach my younger siblings."



Kaleb Bergan

Kaleb has pursued his understanding of the role that song and dance play in culture and has connected with Elders and knowledge holders to explore the ways that knowledge

is passed on respectfully. With his mentor, Kaleb learned about the didgeridoo and spent time with different Didgeridoo players to make and learn to play his own didgeridoo.

“Our language and our stories need to be taught together.”



Ebony Naden

Ebony has been focused on gaining a better understanding of how art has been used to share stories and has visited many sacred sites throughout the year. She has undertaken personal

research and worked with her mentor to gain more experience in using traditional painting materials including ochre and creating her own artwork based on the stories that she has learned this year.

“We are the protectors, keepers and tellers of our stories.”



Jorja Irwin

Jorja joined the Gomeroid Culture Academy mid-year and set out to build her Gomeroid language vocabulary and to better understand the techniques and processes of weaving. She

created a series of interlocked weavings representing her own personal journey.

“Trust is the foundation of everything.”



Sheena Ruttley

Sheena has worked consistently throughout the year to better understand the steps, processes and knowledge needed to create a possum skin cloak. By working with her mentor to understand

the use of different patterns and symbols, Sheena has been able to share her own story by creating an artwork on a possum skin cloak.

“Being a part of the GCA has made me more confident to talk to people and share my thoughts.”



Maene Trindall

Maene used his Cultural Learning Plan to set a goal to learn 10 Gomeroid songs and dances, to better understand the process of woodcarving, create his own dancing boomerangs.

With a greater understanding of dance Maene performed in many dance events across the state, playing a lead role in supporting other young people to have the confidence to dance.

“Our language is special and holds our stories. That is what makes our culture strong.”

OUTCOMES

2018 saw the launch of the Gomeroi Culture Academy (GCA) with 10 student participants joining the program at the outset, drawn from across 3 Tamworth high schools.

School retention and employment

Over the year the students maintained their retention at school with 100% school completion. An overall school attendance rate of 85% was achieved, with GCA program and mentoring Attendance at 91% throughout the year.

One third of the GCA's students obtained their driver's license over the course of the year, representing 70% of students of an age 16 years and over. Among the students who were employed at the start of the program, 100% of students remained in employment, and at graduation 60% of students were in part time employment.

Confidence and well-being

Self-assessment surveys were undertaken at the start of the program and at a number of points throughout the year. Amongst the student participants, these surveys recorded:

- ← 30% growth in self-reported confidence,
- ← 40% increase in optimism,
- ← 30% increase in self efficacy,
- ← 30% increase in positive mindset, and,
- ← 25% increase in self-esteem.

All students graduated the GCA with a higher sense of self-worth and heightened positive attitude compared to when they commenced. Many of the students' statements around these increases reflected a belief that they are aware of their own capacity to make decisions that positively impact their own lives and those of the people around them.



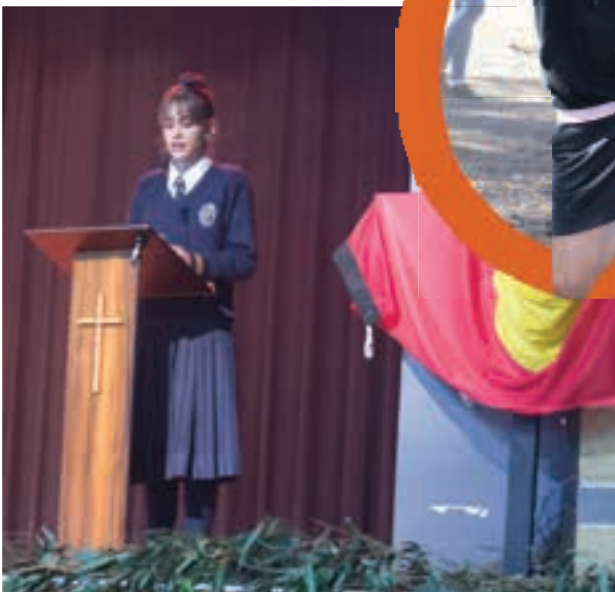
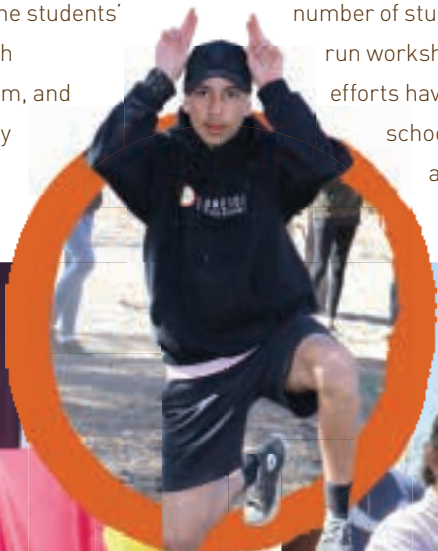


↑ Makalyn performing at the Anniversary of Myall Creek Massacre

Sharing of cultural knowledge

The students have extended what they have learned by sharing their new skills and knowledge with family and friends, and have also ventured further within their schools and across the community. The students' enthusiasm to share their culture, both spreads the benefit of the GCA program, and strengthens of our cultural community by the students passing on cultural knowledge in the Gomerioi tradition.

One of our students has shared weaving across four generations of her own family and gave woven gifts to family members for birthdays and Christmas last year. A number of students have taken on a more formal role to run workshops in weaving and dance, and the students' efforts have been appreciated and recognised by their schools with students receiving both academic and extracurricular awards at their school presentation ceremonies.



ON-COUNTRY LEARNING

Throughout the year students had regular On-Country learning experiences which were held locally and across the region. Through this aspect of the program, students spent time connecting to 10 different communities, and visiting over 25 sacred sites across Gomerai Country – travelling a distance of roughly 2,500km. The journey followed the storylines of many cultural figures, with students tracking their stories as they travelled Country.



2018 ON-COUNTRY LEARNING TRIPS

KEY TO MAP

- First Trip
- Second Trip
- Third Trip
- - - Day Trips
- Special Sites



SCALE 20km



← Makayln at the lookout at Light Ridge, NSW

ON-COUNTRY LEARNING

Under the guidance of local Elders and knowledge holders, students were helped to understand the importance of place and were given skills to connect with and interpret sacred sites and cultural landscapes. Students had lengthy discussions on how these sites and stories are still teaching us many things about our roles and responsibilities. During these experiences students commented many times that they could feel the energy of these sites, saying that they felt calm and at peace and connected to the story.

Students also visited significant sites from our recent history including the missions and reserves at Terry Hie Hie near Moree, 'Hollywood' at St George and on the river in Mungindi. Here students learned about the role that past government policies have played in our families' histories, and understood the strength, courage and resilience that was needed to keep our culture and our families alive.

Students were taught the importance of 'Calling out' and 'singing' Country and learnt phrases and songs to help support this connection. Students also participated in many

cultural ceremonies while On-Country including specific smoking ceremonies, dance performances, paint-ups and other place-based cultural practices as instructed by local Elders and knowledge holders.

Some sacred sites gave students the opportunity to understand the connection between our stories and modern science. At the Warrumbungles they heard stories of how the mountains were created by the eruption of giant body in the creation, and connected this to the Warrumbungles being the remains of an ancient volcano that erupted millions of years ago.

Our On-Country Learning would not have been possible without the support of many people in different communities. Thank you to everyone who has shared with us with a special mention to Raquel Clarke, Tom Barker, Uncle Peter Thompson, Buddy Robinson, Marty Gordon, Aunty Bernadette Duncan, Buddy Hippi, Steve Booby, Aunty Trish McPherson, Uncle Chris Lamb and Gordon Lister.





↑ Students with Steven Booby at Sawn Rock near Narrabri.



↑ Students looking west from the lookout at Lightning Ridge

GATHERINGS

Weekly Gatherings have allowed students to build up their understanding of belonging, family history and identity, language and cultural practices. With this foundation set, students had meaningful conversations around self-awareness and began to identify some of the values, strengths and motivations that are unique to them.

With this higher sense of self-awareness, students now have a stronger foundation on which to base their decision making and create opportunities for growth. Students have identified pathways of interest, and have already begun to move into employment, obtain their driver's licenses and make more informed decisions around school subject selections. Some examples of the topics explored throughout the weekly gatherings are outlined below, along with the outcomes that have been achieved.



Our weekly gatherings have provided students with the opportunity to be immersed in the Gomeroi kinship structure. The kinship structure across Gomeroi Country has been perfected over thousands of years, ensuring that healthy relationships are made and maintained with each other and the world around us.

Students were encouraged to sit down with parents, grandparents, Aunties and Uncles to hear their stories. Based on conversations with family members, students recreated their family trees, with some students able to record as far back as 1820. During this process, some of the students could retrace their individual totems and skin names, as well as reintroduce their family into their kinship structure, ensuring that their family will always know and be able to share their cultural identity with future generations.

Within Gatherings, students regularly hear a variety of 'Dreaming' stories from across Gomeroi Country and neighbouring language groups. After hearing the story of the Eagle, Crow and Magpie, students began to understand the importance of values, and decided to create their very own Shared Agreement. The student's Shared Agreement provides an outline of the behaviours and expectations placed on all GCA members, as well as a set of 7 core values: **Respect, Love, Humility, Trust, Honesty, Listening** and **Responsibility**.

During the Gatherings, students were given the opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of traditional languages and set themselves a goal of learning 100 words or more in Gamilaraay. After having some fun and learning a few songs in Gamilaraay, students worked together to create new songs. These songs were based around the experiences they have shared throughout the year and new dances are currently being developed to support the sharing of these songs.

After learning different words and phrases, students concentrated on learning sentences focused on individual items including animals, plants and actions. After discussions students wanted to find a way to make language and stories more accessible to community and other students. This was their motivation in creating their own language resource. The language resource connects sentences they have learnt with the stories that they have been taught throughout the year.



← Olivia and J-Lee at the Dhiyaan Aboriginal Centre in Moree.

MENTORING

Students have been linked with individual mentors, and have begun meeting weekly to create and work through their Cultural Learning Plans (CLPs). Each student's CLP includes 4 individual goals that they have set for themselves across the year, and the strategies to ensure that they reach their targets.

Some of these goals include learning the process and importance of many cultural practices, including weaving, wood carving, song and dance and bush medicines. All students have also committed to expanding their vocabulary of Gomerioi words and become more confident in speaking it to others.



Mentoring has been an important part in giving the time needed to students to develop the skills to complete their final pieces by the end of the year.

The girls have been spending time on a range of projects but have maintained a focus on weaving, acquiring the skills to weave many different objects including bags, baskets and skirts made from both recycled and natural materials. They have learned how to identify different weaving plants and grasses, how to source the right parts of the plant to use, and developed an understanding of the steps required to prepare the plant for weaving.

To complete their creations, students have also begun learning how to source and create different coloured dye from barks, learnt a variety of weaving techniques and gained confidence in using art to share stories on a variety of mediums. Mentoring sessions have also seen the creation of many artworks. The girls have begun work on large canvases and the sewing and design of a possum skin cloak.

The boys have been working with local wood carver Tom Flanders, focusing on goals around wood carving. Together they have spent time in the bush, learning to identify different plants and understand their seasonal cycles. A variety of pieces of timber were collected and students completed a didgeridoo, a carved bowl and a set of boomerangs.

Some of the students travelled out to Lightning Ridge to spend time with renowned wood carver Tom Barker. Tom guided students through the process of woodcarving and talked to them about the connection between traditional and contemporary tools.

Brad Flanders has also mentored the boys, supporting them to better understanding the role of song and dance in culture. They have learned new songs and dances from Brad and have become more confident in the dances they had already been taught.

Students whose CLP goals related to Gomeroi song and dance, were invited to take part in Dance Rites at the Sydney Opera House. The experience reinforced the power of dance as they performed with groups from all over the world and in front of thousands of people.



↑ J-Lee, Olivia and Sheena splitting grass for weaving in Tamworth.

STUDENT'S JOURNEY

Graduate - Maene Trindall

Maene is currently in Year 10 at Peel High School and is passionate about learning more about his culture.

As part of the GCA, Maene has chosen focuses on both songs and dance, including learning traditional wood carving techniques for dancing boomerangs. He has spent time with various mentors throughout the year to strengthen his understanding of these topics. Maene has also strengthened and grown his Gomerioi vocabulary throughout the year.

As part of his personal leadership journey, Maene stepped up into a senior role with the Peel High School Aboriginal dance group, which involves regularly teaching songs and

dances to his peers. Throughout the year, the dance group performed at a number of events within the school and across the community including National Reconciliation Week and NAIDOC Week celebrations. Maene was also one of the leaders for the Tamworth NAIDOC Corroboree which saw over 120 young people performing from across the community. Away from home, Maene performed at over 20 events across the state including corroborees at Tamworth, Pilliga and Wollombi, and as part of Dance Rites at the Sydney Opera House.



Cultural Learning Plan goals

1. To know all the steps and processes to making a pair of clapping boomerangs and clapsticks from scratch to the final product.

This involved:

- ← Identifying appropriate trees from which to source wood.
- ← Learning to use a variety of tools, and practicing various skills and techniques involved in wood carving.
- ← Learning how to source, cut, test, bark, sand, oil, wax, carve and paint the wood.

To achieve this goal, Maene spent time with wood carvers Tom Flanders and Tom Barker and created 2 pairs of boomerangs out of Bilaarr and Mulga woods

2. Building a knowledge and performance base of people from a range of community groups.

This involved:

- ← Running workshops with young people from other schools and community groups.
- ← Taking on a leadership role within the Peel High dance group.
- ← Running dance workshops during the school holidays.

3. Better understanding the role songs and dance play in maintaining cultural knowledge.

This involved:

- ← Learning 10 songs and dances.
- ← Perform these songs and dances at a range of cultural sharing spaces.
- ← Performing across 20+ performances.



Maene's Journey

A record of personal reflections were kept throughout the year to evaluate Maene's personal growth and development.

"We need to respect everything because our Elders are still here and they left a lot of important things for us to learn about and carry on."

"Culture teaches us to love, respect and care for everything around us."

"I am heaps more confident in speaking my language in public and I have learn songs that I thought I would never be able to understand."

"I enjoyed learning about my family tree and hearing stories of people in my family. I learnt about my family tree, my tribe and my totems."

"I feel like I see the world differently now, I mean when I am walking through the bush I am always seeing different types of wood for artefacts. Noticing different types of trees and bends in the wood that would make a nice boomerang."

STUDENT'S JOURNEY

Graduate - J-Lee Nash

J-Lee is in year 9 at McCarthy Catholic College, and is employed part-time at Donut King where she has worked for almost 12 months.

Prior to joining the GCA, J-Lee had developed an interest in and motivation to learn more about her culture through other cultural experiences such as Wii Gaay Residential School, the Catholic School Cultural Camp, the 'Coolamon Program' and Yinarr Maramali Weaving Workshops. Her natural passion for learning culture has meant that J-Lee is already finding ways to share her new knowledge and experiences with her friends and family.

Through the GCA's mentoring program, J-Lee set her sights on better understanding the world around her, and to learn the names and uses of native plants, including making natural remedies and medicines. She also focused on better developing her skill and passion for weaving, by becoming more familiar with the processes and techniques involved.

J-Lee has spent time with different knowledge holders of bush medicines across the region. Focusing most on Yarraan (red river rum), gadibundhu (quinine), yuuraa (eurah) and garruwi (sandalwood).

J-Lee also spent time with the women from Yinaar Maramali learning about weaving. J-Lee learnt different techniques and stitches to create different baskets, experimenting with a diverse range of materials including natural grasses and fibres as well as contemporary materials such as paper raffia. She has assisted in the delivery of Yinaar Maramali school holiday workshops and has also passed her knowledge of weaving onto her family members.

To develop her leadership capacity, J-Lee stepped outside her comfort zone to perform an Acknowledgement of Country both within the school and at the graduation ceremony. J-Lee also spoke at her school's NAIDOC Assembly, passionately retelling the stories of her Grandmother for the theme '*Because of her we can*'.



Cultural Learning Plan goals

1. Understand the role weaving plays in Gomeroi culture.

This has involved:

- ← Developing an understanding of the plants used for weaving and their properties.
- ← Developing an understanding of how to prepare native grasses for weaving.
- ← Knowing all the steps and processes to weaving baskets, with both natural and contemporary materials.
- ← Learn how to source, cut, split, soak, prepare and weave (coiling technique).
- ← Completing two high quality baskets (raffia and lomandra) for the GCA final presentation.

2. Gain an understanding of what medicine plants grow on Gomeroi Country.

This has involved:

- ← Spending time learning about medicine plants and how to identify them.
- ← Experimenting with plants and processes for extracting their medicinal properties.

3. Understand the role language plays in Gomeroi culture.

- ← Learn at least 100 words in Gamilaraay.
- ← Say an Acknowledgment of Country at a school function.



J-Lee's Journey

A record of personal reflections were kept throughout the year to evaluate J-Lee's personal growth and development.

"Before being a part of the GCA, I was unsure of the overall existence of our culture in modern times but now I am aware that our culture is evident through the work and beliefs of many people across our communities. Our history and the footprint of our ancestors are obvious. I have learnt that if we focus on the things enough, everything connects up and forms a map of our story and past."

"The Gomeroi Culture Academy have given me 12 months of indispensable cultural knowledge, helped me to understand and visualise the way our ancestors lived and behaved, flourish in different aspects of my school and social life, discover myself and expand my knowledge of my family's history. It has also given me hours of laughter, taught me patience and tolerance and most importantly has given me some amazing friendships, that I never thought possible."

GRADUATION CEREMONY AND ART EXHIBITION



The GCA's Graduation Ceremony was held on 10 December 2018 and was an emotional and exciting event to complete the year. With the support of their mentors', our first cohort of Gomeri Culture Academy students were all able to reach their goals and over 12 months, have developed an in-depth understanding of the different skills, techniques and processes across the areas of weaving, woodcarving, possum skin making, storytelling, song, dance and language.



The high standard of quality work produced by the students, prompted the development of a partnership with the Tamworth Regional Gallery, and the students work was incorporated into the Gallery's annual program. The Gomeri Culture Academy Exhibition was on display at the Tamworth Regional Gallery for two full months from 1 December until 1 February, coinciding with the touring exhibition of the Archibald Prize.

The artworks produced by the students reflected their learning journey throughout the year and shared stories of their experience, and these were also captured within the exhibition through the inclusion of interpretive panels.

The GCA's first Graduation Ceremony was therefore held in conjunction with the exhibition. This allowed students to showcase their hard work and commitment and this was celebrated with their family and friends.

At the event, students shared what they had learned throughout the year, speaking with passion about their experience and the deep connection that they have built with each other.

On display were student works including woven baskets and mats, dance skirts, paintings, boomerangs, a yidaki (didgeridoo) and a possum skin blanket. These sat alongside the Gomeroi Language Resource that students had created to showcase their knowledge of language and stories. The family research that students completed was converted into a large canvas for each student that highlighted some of their family connections and some of the stories they collected through the year. The canvases gained a lot of attention for parents and family members and were quickly collected at the close of the exhibition, to hang up on the walls at home.

The Graduation was also an opportunity to acknowledge and thank GCA's partners, and particularly Joblink Plus, for their support of the GCA.

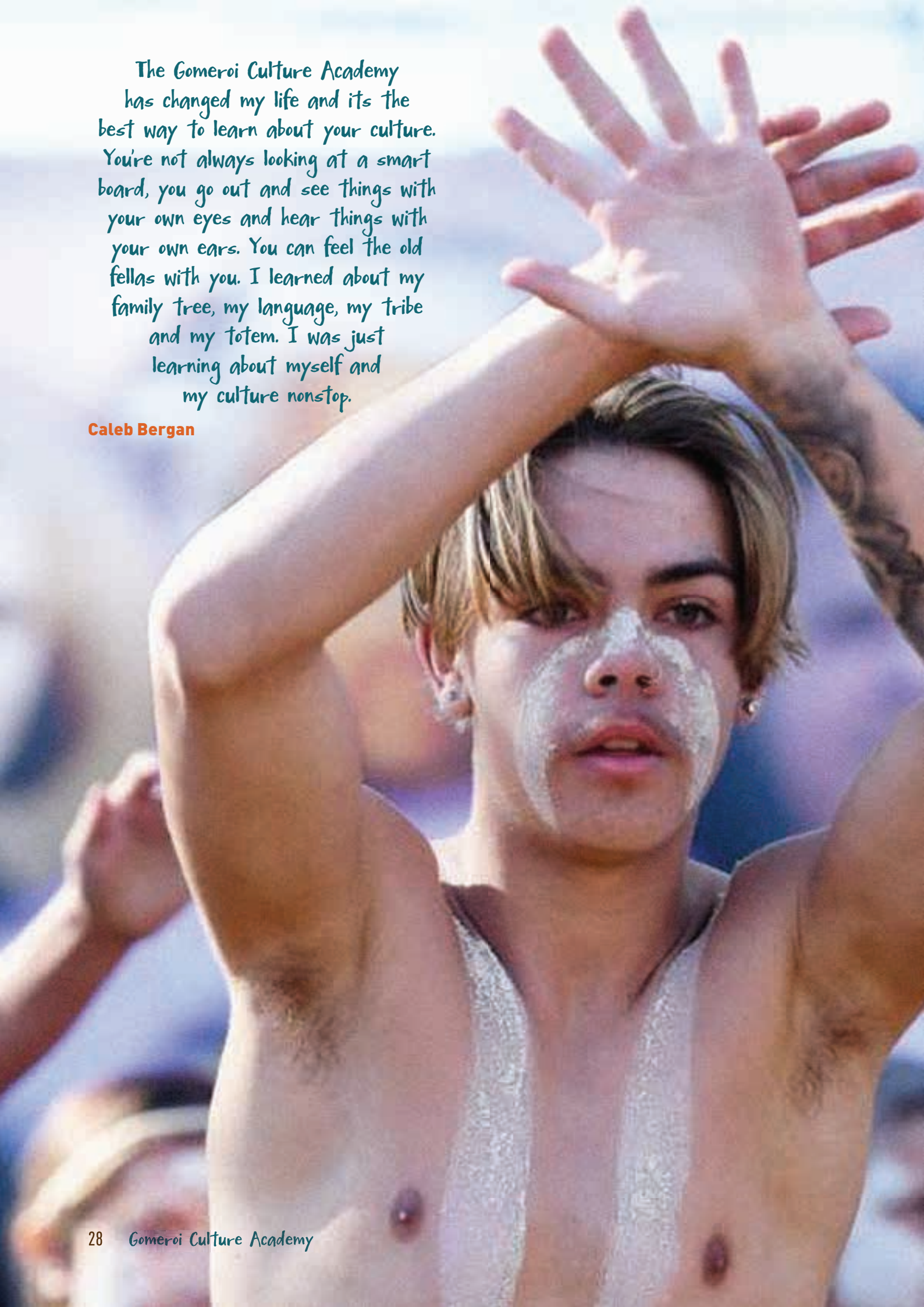
Woven dilly bags were given to each graduate as a gift. Each bag represented a different bird from Gomeroi Country. Students were told the importance of these birds and the connection that they have within our culture. The message to students was that these bags are never empty, they hold the story of this year and the student's journey moving forward.



↑ Students installing their works to go on exhibition at the Tamworth Regional Gallery.

The Gomeroid Culture Academy has changed my life and its the best way to learn about your culture. You're not always looking at a smart board, you go out and see things with your own eyes and hear things with your own ears. You can feel the old fellas with you. I learned about my family tree, my language, my tribe and my totem. I was just learning about myself and my culture nonstop.

Caleb Bergan



LOOKING AHEAD



Building on the back of a successful first year, the majority of changes planned for year 2 are related to the structure of the GCA program, and will be designed to allow for greater support of and impact on our young people.

An example of these planned changes is in the timing and programming of the weekly Gatherings. Our experience from our first year has been that limiting the workshop to only 2 hours per week with students was not enough. To maximise face-to-face time, Gatherings will now be scheduled for a full day, twice a term. This change will give us more time to build up delivery units and allow contact to flow. Schools have been consulted and are happy with this change as it also means less time out of class for students, and will allow them to maintain their routine in both class and sports time.

Our first year graduates will become our Alumni. We will be working to find ways for both Alumni and current students to come together, and create an expanded network of like-minded young people.

2019 will bring the opportunity to grow our number of Cultural Mentors, expanding the variety of cultural knowledge sharing.



A number of new products will also be launched including a one-day **GCA Immersion Workshop** which will be offered to local schools, targeted to students in year 7 and 8. These workshops are designed to give students a snapshot of the GCA experience.

PARTNERS

We can't finish this report without thanking our valued partners, who ensure that the GCA can make a significant difference in the lives of young people and the world around

them. The success of 2018 has been made possible by the generosity and support of like-minded people and organisations. Thank you for supporting our vision.



Yinarr Maramali

Yinarr Maramali are a Gomeri women's business that centres on the care taking of our weaving culture and supporting community wellbeing. Weaving our story through the creation of hand woven artworks and bringing our community together to connect and learn at our workshops, programs and events. We are 100% owned and operated by Gomeri women. Every artwork purchase supports our weavers and community programs.

Gomeri Dance Company

The Gomeri Dance Company is a 100% Aboriginal owned and operated not for profit organisation that consists of proud Gomeri people looking to celebrate the strength of our culture. Established in 2006 the Gomeri Dance Company aim is to increase the cultural knowledge and understand of all people to support better outcomes for Aboriginal peoples.



Joblink Plus

Joblink Plus is a not for profit community based organisation that provides employment services, support and training to communities across NSW. Joblink Plus prides themselves on their community focus, working together to bring collaborative solutions and innovation to regional and rural communities.

Joblink Plus is a foundation partner and have been the major financial contributor to the GCA. They have provided training rooms for our weekly gathering, and allowed access to their fleet of vehicles to assist students to participate in their mentoring and On-Country learning across the region. In addition, they have delivered job readiness training and workshops and worked to support GCA students to pursue training and employment pathways.



The Tamworth Local Aboriginal Education Consultative Group

The Aboriginal Education Consultative Group provides advice on all matters relevant to education and training with the mandate that this advice represents the Aboriginal community viewpoint. The AECG play an active role within the Tamworth community and we take pride in having their support and endorsement of at a local, regional and state level.

Schools

The GCA is not an alternative to school. Our commitment is to work closely in partnership with schools and assist them to support students to flourish.

We would like to make special mention of the support of the schools' AEOs - Billy Stanton, Kelli Allan and Jolene Faint - along with their respective school Principals. With their support, students were able to share experience and learning across the school, organise students to speak at formal events, lead cultural workshops and provide input to some of the cultural programming internally.

PARTNERING SCHOOLS

We would like to acknowledge the following schools for their ongoing commitment and support.

- ← Peel High School
- ← Tamworth High School
- ← McCarthy Catholic College



GOMEROI CULTURE ACADEMY

GOMEROI CULTURE AND COMMUNITY

The Gomeri Culture Academy harnesses the strength and cultural knowledge that exists within our community. Through the GCA, students have the opportunity to connect with respected cultural knowledge holders across the community and continue Gomeri cultural practices. Our unique program enables our young people to not only learn more about their culture, but to also strengthen and develop their own identity. This, in turn, builds confidence which supports students to have a greater opportunity for success throughout their lives.

Our Logo: artist Tom Flanders

The GCA logo symbol represents the presence of two worlds. Through a cultural lens, we can see the footprint of Dhinawan (Emu) travelling Country and through another lens we can see an arrow pointing in the opposite direction. This symbol teaches that we must be able to see the world from both perspectives.



CONTACT US

The Gomeri Cultural Academy has been designed and is delivered by the Gomeri Dance Company and Yinarr Maramali, who have been, both formally and informally, mentoring young people in the local community for over a decade. Both the Gomeri Dance Company and Yinarr Maramali are active members of the community and are passionate about inspiring our next generation of leaders. The Gomeri Culture Academy is made possible by the ongoing and dedicated support of Joblink Plus.

Gomeri Culture Academy

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