

# Giiir Maaru

A QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER FROM GOMEROI CULTURE ACADEMY JULY 2019



## GUURRAMALDANHA *STANDING STRONG*



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

# On Country Learning

## LIGHTNING RIDGE, NARRAN LAKE AND MOREE



Students started Term 2 with a trip out west to connect to Country and meet three well-respected Aboriginal knowledge holders to gain a stronger understanding of the importance of sharing stories.

In Lightning Ridge, the students first met with Rhonda Ashby who spent time with students teaching them about 'Reading Country' and developing an understanding of the sacred kinship system. Rhonda took us to a special water hole at Angledool (a former Aboriginal Reserve which many of the student's families are connected to), where she shared stories and talked about the importance of Songlines.



Students were then introduced to Tom Barker. Well-respected for his skills and knowledge of woodcarving, Tom spent the morning showing students around the collection held in his family museum 'The Goondie'. The collection includes items both traditional and from early mission days, including grinding stones, scar trees, woven and wooden tools and old photos.

The girls then travelled out on Country with Rhonda, while the boys were shown through Tom's workshed, providing an insight into the process and skills required to create high quality wooden and stone tools.



After gathering again, the students were told stories of Garriya (the Rainbow Serpent) before travelling on to Narran Lake, a sacred river system created in the very beginning. Here Rhonda shared stories to highlight some of the important bush foods and medicines around the lake. Students were also taken to an ancient 'Shell Midden' site where thousands of years of Aboriginal practice can be seen through the shells layered deeply in the dirt. As we stood on the banks to pay respect to Garriya, the students commented how they could feel



something special – the connection made over many generations, unfolding before them through shared stories.

On the return journey, we stopped at Moree's Dhiyaan Centre which holds a nationally significant collection of family history. Here the students met Raquel Clarke who provided a tour of the Centre, its collections of photographs, stories and documents. Raquel then taught GCA students how to best collect and record stories, setting up the work that students will be focusing on throughout the term.



## GATHERINGS



The focus for Term 2 was on Dhiyaan (family), and this was explored from a number of perspectives during our On-Country excursion. Students were shown the Gomeri kinship structure and helped to understand its role in ensuring that everything and everyone is looked after. The students learned about different blood and skin groups, including the names for each position within the system (eg. your mother and mother's sister share a name because they share the same position).

Throughout the term students will collect their own family stories in order to create a family canvas which will be displayed at their graduation in December. Students began this process by recording as much family information as they could, and were given booklets to help guide family conversations, and assist in accessing external family archives. Students were excited to share stories about their family members with each other, and to discover new family stories through this process.

The importance of cultural practices including Welcoming people onto Country and acknowledging Country were explained, and students were taught Gamilaraay phrases to help acknowledge Country. Students have been starting each Gathering with an Acknowledgment of Country and some students have extended this practice into their school assemblies and community gatherings.



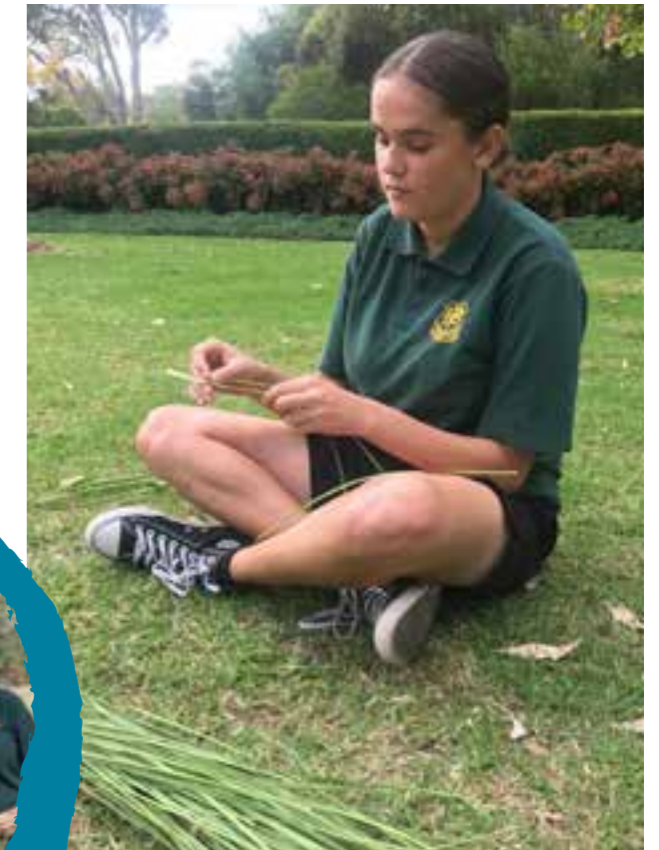
## MENTORING

All students have shown commitment to their Cultural Learning Plans (CLP) by deepening their understanding in their area of focus with the support of their Cultural Mentors.

Over Term 2, Joash and Lyle have spent time with Bareki and Barega Knox to understand the story of the Yidaki, and to practice the skills and techniques needed to confidently play in front of their family and friends. At the start of the Term, neither of the boys was comfortable playing the Yidaki and they did not know about its story. Over Term 2 we have seen significant progress in the boys who are now confident in creating sounds and have almost mastered circular breathing. Joash has nominated himself to perform at his school's NAIDOC Assembly next term.

Tamia has been spending time with Mentor Bronwyn Spearim to better understand the role that art plays in sharing stories, and how art and their shared symbols supported the sharing of knowledge between generations and between clan and nation groups.

All of GCA students have been making progress in their learning and aim to have something to be on display or performed at the end of the year.



## MYALL CREEK MASSACRE



In June, students and our 2018 Alumni attended the 181 year anniversary of the Myall Creek Massacre that took place on Gamilaroi Country between Bingara and Delungra.

The event allowed students the opportunity to better understand some of the horrific events that occurred across our region and see first-hand the efforts being made to recognise the impact of these events.



Our students were invited to share song and dance at the official ceremony where they talked about the strength and resilience that lives within our community. Students then participated in a Smoking Ceremony as they made their way along the path to the site of the massacre where they heard stories and speeches from local community and descendants from the event.

On return students spent time with many community members and elders, while Olivia Flett from our Alumni was joined by her sister and respected musician Buddy Knox to share songs that tell our story. Afterwards, the National Indigenous Music Awards Hall of Fame inductee Uncle Roger Knox invited our students to perform dance to a very special song that he shared with great emotion.

## ALUMNI



Our Alumni from 2018 have returned to provide direction for the GCA moving forward.

Last year's program participants were provided with an opportunity to participate in a Decision Jam Activity lead by Shaun Allan from Gomerai Education and Training where Alumni identified priorities for their ongoing involvement with GCA - support and motivation, and cultural growth. The input from our Alumni will ensure that the program has been shaped by the wants and needs of young people and that current participants are well supported into the future.

On a personal level, our Alumni have been taking steps in the right direction with three more students obtaining their learners permits, two starting school-based apprenticeships and one starting a career in cultural education.

They have also been active within the community and are showing leadership that is having a positive impact of others. They were involved in running a number of Gomerai dance workshops in lead up to this year's NAIDOC Week which saw over 100 young people attend and participate in the Tamworth NAIDOC Corrobboree led by the Gomerai Dance Company.



# THE GOMEROI CULTURE ACADEMY STORY

Gomeroid Culture has been passed down between 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 GCA harnesses the strength and knowledge that exists within our community to support our young people. The individually tailored program and mentorship will enable participants to learn more about their culture, strengthen and develop their own identity, and have a greater opportunity for success.

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 and be passionate about their future.

**Giirr Maaru**  
("gear-ed mar-roo")

**THIS IS A POSITIVE PHRASE THAT MEANS WELL DONE, GOOD STUFF OR GREAT JOB. THE NAME HAS BEEN CHOSEN TO REFLECT AND RECOGNISE THE WORK THAT IS BEING ACHIEVED BY GCA STUDENTS WITHIN THE STRUCTURED ACTIVITIES AND OTHER ACHIEVEMENTS IN THEIR LIVES.**



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Gomeroid Cultural Academy has been designed and is delivered by the Gomeroid 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 Gomeroid Dance Company and Yinarr Maramali are active members of the community and are passionate about inspiring our next generation of leaders. The Gomeroid Culture Academy is made possible by the ongoing and dedicated support of Joblink Plus.

### Gomeroid Culture Academy

PO Box 357, West Tamworth NSW 2340.

**M:** 0432 652 832

**E:** gomeroidancecompany@gmail.com

**f** /GomeroidCultureAcademy #GCA

