

West news

Connecting and partnering
with Aboriginal communities

Issue 1 – Spring 2017



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Welcome to *West news*

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

Welcome to the first edition of *West news*, a seasonal publication to showcase the connections and partnerships of the West Division of the Department of Health and Human Services and the local Aboriginal communities.

In this newsletter we feature the work we do with the Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations, the Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations and all our partner organisations which provide care and support for families, those with disabilities, and the youngest members of

the community here in the west of Victoria.

From Yarriambiack in Wimmera South West Area to Colac Otway and the Surf Coast in Barwon Area, to Brimbank and Melton, and Wyndham in Western Melbourne Area, to Ballarat and Ararat in the Central Highlands Area, the West Division funds and delivers services to support healthy, safe and strong communities by addressing the needs of Victorians across the continuum of health and human services.

We hope you enjoy *West news* – please read on.

Introducing the Aboriginal Engagement Unit

The West Division Aboriginal Engagement Unit formally commenced operation in September 2016 as part of the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) West Division Health branch.

Its work has an internal focus within the department and an external focus to build the department's engagement capacity in support of Aboriginal health and wellbeing initiatives.

The unit works with Aboriginal organisations and communities as well as universal services to support Aboriginal self-determination, cultural safety and service delivery. The team presently comprises five staff, with three positions to be recruited soon.

The team is led by Marcus Clarke, a Gunditjmara man

based in Warrnambool, and includes Lindi Dietzel, a Yorta Yorta woman based in Geelong, Julie Jose, a Gunditjmara Waddawurrung woman also based in Geelong, Julian Harvey based in Ballarat who looks after Aboriginal health projects for the Grampians area, and Dianne Szkirka, a Marrithiyel woman whose mob is from Woodycupaldiya and Peppimenarti in the Northern Territory.

Dianne has always lived in Victoria, shares Ukrainian heritage and looks after Aboriginal health projects for the West metro area, based in Footscray.

Drawing on their collective experiences the team leads the West Division's contribution to a whole-of-Department Cultural Safety Framework.

It has also been re-evaluating our Aboriginal Outcomes Committee for the West.

It assists in the implementation of the Department's various statewide initiatives, including:

- Aboriginal Employment Strategy 2016–2021;
- Moondani Aboriginal inclusion action plan 2015–2018;
- Aboriginal Children's Forum;
- Taskforce 1000;
- Victorian Aboriginal Affairs Framework (VAAF).

The team aims to raise the profile of Aboriginal health and wellbeing issues throughout the wider community, including with mainstream service providers.

Deputy Secretary's message

Genuinely mutual and productive relationships are based on sensitive engagement and transparent communication.

The Department of Health and Human Services is committed to a continuous journey of learning, sharing and respect as we work with Aboriginal stakeholders. Since commencing in this role, I personally have learned so much from our Aboriginal staff, particularly those in the Aboriginal Engagement Unit. I thank them for driving this fantastic newsletter initiative – a fresh and exciting way

to demonstrate the important work being done, and to share inspiring stories from across West Division.

Story telling has always been part of Aboriginal tradition. Stories are used to teach, to hand down knowledge, and to impart information. As I travel around our Division, I hear wonderful stories about initiatives that are making a real difference in improving the quality of life for Aboriginal people, their families and communities.

This newsletter will enable readers to share these stories, and to feel as proud as I do of the work being done in West Division. Each

article demonstrates the breadth, diversity, strong cultural presence and connection of the Aboriginal communities in the West Division, and emphasises the innovation, commitment and versatility of the workforce delivering the services and programs.

I am delighted to present the inaugural edition of *West news*. Read on!

Paul Smith
Deputy Secretary,
West Division



Budja Budja Aboriginal Cooperative

With breathtaking views, Budja Budja Aboriginal Cooperative is nestled in the Gariwerd (the Grampians) at Halls Gap.

Established in 1999 as a gathering place by Tim Chatfield, a Framlingham boy, 'Budja Budja Cooperative is amongst the smallest Aboriginal community controlled health organisations in Victoria,' Mr Chatfield said.

Budja Budja Cooperative is an initiative of the local Koori community, and services Ararat, Stawell, Halls Gap and Gariwerd, St Arnaud, and the towns and all areas in-between.

Operating a four-day-a-week GP bulk billing clinic, Budja Budja provides services to the local community – encompassing the 3,200 Aboriginal people in the broader region, as well as the non-Aboriginal community, plus visitors to the Gariwerd – which draws around 1 million tourists from interstate and overseas each year.

'We know the community,' Mr Chatfield said.

'We've got the Swan Hill to Stawell migration, families returning home, families moving to be close to relatives in Stawell and the tourists.'

Tourists now account for 10 per cent of annual patient consultations.

With more than 5,750 individual patients since 2016, and a further 5,000 non-Indigenous patients annually, the services range from scripts, to the presentation of critical patients requiring stabilisation prior to transfer to a hospital



Budja Budja Aboriginal Cooperative.

at Stawell or Ararat.

While Budja Budja is future focused they are also firmly grounded in Halls Gap, offering

culturally appropriate and culturally aimed services with a fine quality of care to the roving population.

Mr Chatfield said, 'We

consider the social and emotional wellbeing of the community and offer the personal touch... we go above and beyond.'

Marcus Clarke message

It is exciting to be involved with the Department of Health and Human Services at a time of much consultation and engagement with the Aboriginal Community.

There is a genuine commitment to putting the voice of the Aboriginal community at front and centre of the decision making conversation.

There has been an enormous amount happening both internally within the department, and within the funded sector in the Aboriginal space.

Victoria is leading the way on many fronts, particularly on understanding and working towards self-determination, as well as working towards a treaty with Victorian Aboriginal communities.

We are on the cusp of ground-breaking system reform that will shift the dial on the status quo and shake up the old way of doing business – with the recently launched departmental headline strategy *Korin Korin Balit-Djak* and companion strategies *Aboriginal Governance and Accountability Framework* and *Balit Murrup: Aboriginal social and emotional wellbeing framework*.

Many conversations with Aboriginal communities have already occurred to inform our strategies and the department looks forward to continuing the conversations in the new environment.

I hope you enjoy reading the great content that has been put together for our first newsletter.



I know you will be as inspired as I am by the great work that is happening internally within DHHS, as well as within the Aboriginal organisations and communities and universal services.

As always, your comments and feedback are welcome and necessary to ensure this newsletter serves the audience in the best way possible.

So we would love to hear any suggestions for upcoming editions.

Marcus Clarke
Manager, Aboriginal Engagement Unit, West Division

A little girl returns to Country – a healing journey

The 2017 Victorian Protecting Children Awards recognise excellence in 10 categories.

Among the 40 finalists, top honours for West Division went to a senior child protection practitioner for her work in helping to reunite a little Aboriginal child – Bella* – with her family and Community.

Bella is 18-months-old and from a remote island in the Northern Territory, where the Traditional Owners have native title of the sea. Many Aboriginal people acknowledge this island as the birthplace of the Rainbow Serpent.

During her mother's pregnancy, it was identified that Bella had a life-threatening heart condition and would need emergency surgery soon after birth.

So Bella's parents flew to Melbourne for her birth and returned to the Northern Territory, planning to return a few days later. But Bella's mother did not return.

During her mother's pregnancy, it was identified that Bella had a life-threatening heart condition and would need emergency surgery soon after birth.

As they were unable to contact her parents, child protection workers made an application to the Melbourne Children's

Court to allow Bella to have her surgery. Bella suffered cardiac arrests during surgery and was resuscitated and fitted with a heart stent.

As Bella's heart grows she will need replacement stents, which will require major heart surgery every two years for the rest of her life. After being discharged from hospital, Bella was placed with non-Aboriginal foster carers Kate and John.

Kate is a trained nurse and was able to meet Bella's special medical needs – including tube

(AFLDM) meeting was held in the Northern Territory to explore kinship care options.

Soon after, Bella travelled to Darwin with child protection staff, representatives from the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency and the AFLDM convenor, so she could meet her mother, grandmother, aunt and sister for the first time.

Bella's return has been guided by consultations with the family, Community Elders and Bella's aunt who is a Traditional Owner.

Two months later, Bella again

'The excitement of the trip home and opportunity for this healing journey shone through in Bella's infectious laugh and smile which made the community fall in love with her at first sight,' her case manager said.

Bella waved and shouted 'hi' to the wild horses and jabiru that grazed on the flood plains.

Bella and her family then went to the local school to see her sisters aged six and eight who ran from their classrooms screaming with excitement when they heard of Bella's arrival.

Many happy tears fell that day.

Bella then spent time with family, eating freshly caught barramundi and bush tucker, and was spoken to in language for the first time.

Bella lapped up the attention and from afar it looked like she had never been anywhere else but home.

Bella continues to travel back to her community with child protection while future plans are progressed.

The expectation is that Bella will return to community and grow up supported by her extended family, parents and siblings, and be supported to learn and develop the skills of her ancestors.

* Not her real name.



View from the plane.

feeding until she was one.

To connect Bella to her culture Kate and John sought pieces of art from Bella's Country, and introduced her to Aboriginal events.

Her case was presented to a care panel which emphasised the importance of Bella being connected and eventually returned to her community.

Earlier this year, Bella's cardiologist said she was fit and healthy to travel. An Aboriginal Family Lead Decision Making

travelled to

Darwin and then out to her community for the first time.

She was met at the landing strip by a lady who called herself Aunty and greeted Bella with a heartfelt 'welcome home'.

Bella waved and shouted 'hi' to the wild horses and jabiru that grazed on the flood plains.

Her family and community were waiting expectantly. And it was an emotional moment as Bella stretched out her arms and was embraced by her grandmother.

What a difference a flag makes – Towards Cultural Security across the Wimmera

Cultural sensitivity recognises that there are differences among cultures. And cultural sensitivity places value on this diversity.

So begins the Yanng Ngalung Maligundidj cultural training delivered by Joanne Clarke for the Wimmera Primary Care Partnership.

Part of the work of the West Division Aboriginal Engagement Unit is to support community-initiated projects through Koolin Balit.

One of these is the *Towards Cultural Security* project run by the Wimmera Primary Care Partnership.

The Wimmera region is represented by the Barengi Gadjin Land Council and takes in five tribal clan groups – the Wotjobaluk, Jaadwa, Jadawadjali, Wergaia and Jupagulk.

In 2010, the CEOs of 20 member agencies of the Wimmera Primary Care Partnership identified a need to improve the cultural safety and responsiveness of the services they provide for their local Aboriginal community across the Wimmera catchment, and so the *Towards Cultural Security* project was born.

To get started 700 staff across these agencies completed a cultural audit.

The data generated

was used to create a comprehensive report for each organisation outlining the current level of safety of each organisations' services and an action plan to improve these services.

Seven years on and the project has generated many measurable results and some that simply can't be measured.

• Turn to Page 7

Joanne Clarke and Felicity Johns with some of the portable flags.



Aunty Elsie Coates wins the 2017 Wathaurong NAIDOC Elder of the Year Award

The Wathaurong Aboriginal Cooperative held a smoking ceremony to mark the start of NAIDOC week celebrations and this was followed by a Family Culture Day and BBQ.

Commencing with a didgeridoo performance and a flag raising ceremony, the speeches reflected on the year and the 2017 NAIDOC theme: *Our language matters.*

Built on strong foundations, Wathaurong Aboriginal Cooperative provides Aboriginal families living, or in transit in Wathaurong's traditional boundaries, with assistance and access to a range of culturally-appropriate health, housing, education, employment and cultural services.

Improving community wellbeing, and building the capacity of the community to control its own affairs and achieve self-determination,

Wathaurong's Family Culture Day celebrated its achievements which culminated in its 2017 NAIDOC Awards.

The 2017 Wathaurong NAIDOC Elder of the Year Award went to Aunty Elsie Coates, a cultural support worker from the Barwon area of the Department of Health and Human Services.

A proud Yorta Yorta woman, Aunty Elsie is employed in the West Division of the department to assist child protection case managers with their cultural plans for children in care.

'I want to see our children move forward, to see our children going home, and if they can't go home, I want to see them in the best possible placement,' Aunty Elsie said.

Aunty Elsie has been in the workforce for more than 50 years, advocating for families and children, and has seen a lot of change in that time.



Aunty Elsie Coates

'Good change takes time because everyone has to get the message. It's got to stick,' Aunty Elsie said.

The Wathaurong award recognised her hard work and long-term commitment to improving family services for the Aboriginal community.

'I am very proud to be nominated in our community. It's a very prestigious award,' Aunty Elsie said.

Sports club grants will help kick goals for Aboriginal youth

Applications for sporting club grants open from November 27, 2017.

Only 38 per cent of Aboriginal men and 23 per cent of Aboriginal women participate in sport and physical activity, and the sporting club grants will address cost barriers to participation for Aboriginal youth.

The sporting club grants program will help clubs purchase sports uniforms and equipment, assist with travel to competition or training, or help with the skills development of coaches and officials.

Grants are available for up to:

- \$1,000 for uniforms and equipment;
- \$2,000 for coaches and officials skills development;
- \$750 for travel to competition or training.

Applications close January 24, 2018.

To receive further information please contact email: info@sport.vic.gov.au

Apply online using My Grants: <http://sport.vic.gov.au/grants-and-funding/our-grants/sporting-clubs-grants-program>



Artist impression of the new health hub by Morton Dunn Architects.

Going for growth – a new health hub for Ballarat

In the past 10 years, the Aboriginal population in the greater Ballarat area has doubled.

And so the Ballarat and District Aboriginal Cooperative (BADAC) has received funding under the Victorian government's Regional

Health Infrastructure Fund to develop a new district health hub.

Situated beside the existing BADAC building, the new health hub will increase BADAC's floor space by 1,500 square metres, so it can expand services to treat Aboriginal patients from across the Western District.

'These are exciting times in the community and BADAC is pleased to be able to develop something culturally appropriate to meet the growing needs of the community,' said Karen Heap the CEO of BADAC.

With Aboriginal art and glassworks, the new building will be modern, light and airy – a place patients can feel at home.

Currently providing more than 19 different services to the local Aboriginal community, BADAC is a leader in Aboriginal health research and provides culturally-sensitive holistic care.

It is also a major employer in the region.

With growth projected to continue, the new development will also allow the clinic to open

outside of normal business hours.

The new health hub will feature:

- A new welcome reception area;
- A new Cultural meeting space;
- Additional rooms for consultation and general practice;
- Additional office space and storage for BADAC staff;
- A new connection between the existing premises and the new building;
- Fresh landscaping;
- A new fit-out for the clinic;
- And a refurbishment of the existing building.

Construction is expected to be completed in a year and with an increase in the Aboriginal people moving to the area will be a real positive for everyone.

'With the planning permits approved we are keen to get started... we need to grow and develop things for the community, so they have access to the holistic service delivery that is culturally appropriate,' Ms Heap said.



2017-18 Sporting Club Grants Program

The Sporting Club Grants Program assists in the purchase of sports uniforms and equipment needed to improve the capacity and accessibility of Victorian clubs and community sport and recreation organisations and increase the skills of their coaches, officials and managers.

A key priority is increasing the participation of Aboriginal people in sport and recreation. Aboriginal community controlled organisations are eligible to apply or auspice applications for Category 4: Aboriginal Participation.

Grants are available for up to:

- \$1000 for uniforms and equipment
- \$2000 for coaches and officials skills development
- \$750 for travel to competition or training

Funding round	Applications open	Applications close
2017-18 Round 2	27 November 2017	24 January 2018

Apply online using My Grants

To apply go to <http://sport.vic.gov.au/grants-and-funding/our-grants/sporting-clubs-grants-program>

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Health and Human Services

On yer bike: *Deadly Dan* and *Deadly Bikes* deliver dietary ditties

Two projects proving a big hit with young people in the Wimmera are the *Deadly Bikes* project and visits by *Deadly Dan*.

Funded through Koolin Balit, *Deadly Bikes* and *Deadly Dan* are part of the *Wirrin-ditch-murrundalk* (Children Living Healthy) program.

Through these programs, Goolum Goolum Aboriginal Co-operative (GGAC) has seen an increase in the number of Aboriginal people pledging to quit smoking in the home around children; an increase in the number of child health checks performed; and an increase in overall awareness of the impact of unhealthy lifestyle choices.

Modelled on GGAC's *Deadly Ute* project which ran in 2011 and 2012, *Deadly Bikes* turns donated bikes into vehicles for change.

'We teach the kids skills – including how to interact with each other and with the adults who run the project,' Johnny Gorton from GGAC said.

Using bike maintenance as a tool, leaders teach the young people healthy habits.

Both boys and girls from the local community participate in *Deadly Bikes* which runs one day a week, and seeks to teach more than the cogs and chains of bike maintenance.

'They learn to develop pride,' Mr Gorton said.

'You can't make something sitting on your hands.'

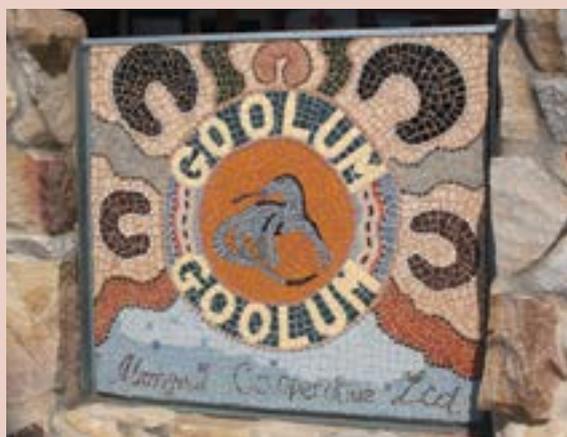
Created by 35 Aboriginal children in GGAC's Koori Kids After School

(KOOKAS) program, the *Deadly Dan* visits the *Wimmera* comic book is the story of *Deadly Dan* protecting the local Aboriginal children from the harms of smoking, sugary drinks, junk food and inactivity.

Established in 1979, and becoming incorporated in 1983, GGAC is dedicated to fostering cultural pride within the community and ensuring that service delivery respects Aboriginal culture, history and experience.

Proportionally Horsham area has the highest number of young Aboriginal people in Victoria, so GGAC focus on the youngest members of the Wimmera community so they can get the best possible start in life.

Amazing grass trees and mosaics from the front of GGAC.



What a difference a flag makes – Towards Cultural Security across the Wimmera

• From Page 5

To help make mainstream services more responsive to the local community, local traditional owner Joanne Clarke, a proud Wotjobaluk woman, was hired to develop and deliver a training package with a non-Aboriginal project officer, Felicity Johns.

Ms Clarke said that with more than 300

participants there has been significant change in breaking down the barriers and reducing the fear of the system.

'We walk alongside each other in the journey,' Ms Clarke said.

Phase 2 of the project is the creation of locally-produced Aboriginal artwork, and flag stands made at Mens' Shed for flags in health services and

community health centres across the Wimmera.

'A better cultural response from the agency closes the gap,' Ms Clarke said.

This work also forms part of a broader approach to cultural safety being led by the Aboriginal Engagement Unit in partnership with the Aboriginal Health and Wellbeing Unit of the department.

Aboriginal Family Led Decision Making

Aboriginal families are being empowered to have a say in care plans for their at-risk children through a program that provides a safe, culturally-appropriate space to talk through issues and workshop solutions.

Convenors from DHHS and the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA) run the Aboriginal Family Led Decision Making program as a partnership. Family members, and support services involved with the child, including child protection workers, sit down together to talk about the risk issues around the child and to develop the child's care plan.

DHHS convenor Kate Harrington said the voluntary program is offered to families once it has substantiated that an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander child has been harmed or is at risk of harm. The families of children who are subject to a Children's Court order are also referred to the program.

Paul Ferris, VACCA's

program manager says AFLDM provides families, especially those who have had involvement with the child protection system, with a safe space at the table.

'We say to mum and dad, it's your meeting around your kids – who do you want to be there?' Mr Ferris said.

'It could be any family member.

'If it's around school we can get a teacher or school rep to attend, if there are medical concerns we can get a paediatrician.

'If it's about supporting a placement or finding a placement option who would they want?'

The conference is structured to emphasise the need to be respectful of each person in the room, to set out the non-negotiable bottom lines for the care plan and the type of outcome the conference is aiming to achieve.

Common desired outcomes are support to ensure school attendance, family violence or drug and alcohol counselling, or to move towards family reunification

or kinship care.

'We always include how the child is being supported in their connection to Aboriginal culture and the Aboriginal community,' Ms Harrington said.

'Sometimes we use "family time", which is when convenors and other professionals leave the room to give parents and extended family the time to talk to each other and, when we come back, they say, 'This is the plan, this is what we can do.'

'If there's agreement around the table, I endorse it.'

Older men have told Mr Ferris that they wished the program had existed when their children were younger.

One participant, who was very negative at the beginning of the process, gave Mr Ferris a hug after it delivered a good outcome for his grandchild.

'I went to shake his hand at the end and he gave me a hug.

'I was quite touched by that.' Mr Ferris said the key to the program's success was the collaboration of all parties.

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This publication may contain images of deceased Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Where the term 'Aboriginal' is used it refers to both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Indigenous is retained when it is part of the title of a report, program or quotation.

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Contributions may be forwarded to: Marcus Clarke, Manager Aboriginal Engagement Unit, West Division email: marcus.clarke@dhhs.vic.gov.au

Cover image: Bunjil's cave.

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