

## Good News Story

### Report on the Cultural Trip to Melbourne and exhibition

**Date:** 16<sup>th</sup> March – 25<sup>th</sup> March, 2013

**Place:** Burrinja - Building Community through Arts  
Arts | Performance | Education | Community  
cnr Glenfern Road and Matson Drive, Upwey, VIC 3158

Recently Arlpwe Art Centre workers, including artists, were privileged to be part of a “Keeping Culture Strong” cultural exchange, discovered that Melbourne is indeed a complex cultural kaleidoscope with diverse cultural influences. There are 60 different nationalities in the Yarra Ranges Shire.

We stayed at Olinda which is a popular tourist town in the bushy and scenic Dandenong Ranges, situated between Mount Dandenong and the villages of Sassafra and Kallista. The diverse rainforest landscape where we stayed was in stark contrast to spinifex landscape of Ali Curung.

Our trip began officially in Melbourne where the group met up with our host Cr Noel Cliff who helped coordinate the cultural exchange between our two communities.



At Burrinja, JD Mittmann, the Visual Arts Manager, coordinated the schools visiting the cultural centre for our educational presentations. We showed slides, demonstrated artefacts and their use, showed original ochres and bean-seed necklaces, our group also fielded questions from the school children and adult visitors alike

A painting workshop was also conducted by our three ladies.

Early starts every day saw us travelling down from the pleasant, cool landscape of the Yarra Ranges, travelling on winding roads, to the community of Upwey, where we were greeted by the



friendly Burrinja staff and where we gave our presentations.

With the school visits, 2 a day, the schools Principals and teachers expressed their warm appreciation to us, as did the students who took away so many wonderful impressions of Indigenous Australia.

In fact, their friendliness during our visit was second to none, with all members of the school community who attended our presentations, willing and open to learning and keen to know and ask questions of life in a remote Indigenous community. Our staff and artists were very impressive and presented positive images of Indigenous Australians who were willing to share their unique culture.

Our cultural exchange program also included partaking in a 'citizenship' ceremony. Our host, Cr Noel Cliff, had organised for us to be part of this event which took place at Burrinja Cultural Centre on the evening of Thursday 21<sup>st</sup> March 2013.

It was a nervous time for our mob but by the end of the ceremony the 'new citizens' and our mob were sharing stories over a delicious supper provided by the Yarra Ranges Shire. The willingness



to learn and share with each other, we were all smitten by their friendly smiles for our cameras! Lasting impressions will be:

- The pride shown by our team in being part of this ceremony in sharing a friendship gift from Arlpwe to the new Australian Yarra Ranges citizens.

- The pride of our team 'sharing' their culture to the students who were eager to know about life in an Indigenous remote community in the NT
- The development of their own dot paintings and the pride our ladies showed about their paintings and the 'sharing' of their stories in these paintings. The young school students were enthralled.
- Watching the men talk and discuss the use of the artefacts, boomerangs and, spears and stone knives, woomeras, was exceptional and one could only admire these individuals who grew in stature from this cultural exchange. They were challenged and rose to the occasion, surpassing even our own expectations of excellence.



Our Cultural Exchange team proudly acknowledged their Indigenous heritage when introducing themselves and made many new acquaintances and saw many contrasts from a remote community to a highly urbanised modern Australia.

Indeed it had been a once in a lifetime experience, one that certainly would benefit the development of our staff and artists alike, building confidence and self-esteem. Such exchanges



can influence the manner in which we, as an Art Centre and Art Gallery address our relationships with non Indigenous and other Indigenous people and particularly school students. Further developing Indigenous Studies programs that focus on reconciliation and respect, in our schools and communities across the Australian social spectrum.



Our departure from Melbourne was a reluctant one, for we all knew that, not only had we been welcomed and appreciated as educators, we had also experienced true Yarra Ranges hospitality, its sincerity and generosity to remain with us always.

