

Riverina Murray Regional Alliance
Events Report



RMRA logo artwork: A logo competition was undertaken in September/ October 2015 with the winner being an Albury resident, Tamara Murray. RMRA wish to acknowledge and thank Tamara Murray, a proud Yorta Yorta/Barkinji woman who has ties to Wiradjuri country for providing the cover artwork – the snake (gadi) symbolising the river that sustains our communities, and represents the strength and unity of our communities. Nine circles represent the nine original community members of RMRA – this membership continues to grow.

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Acknowledgement

Riverina Murray Regional Alliance (RMRA) acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the land of NSW and pays respect to Elders past, present and future. RMRA recognises and respects the cultural authority of Traditional Owner groups within the region and asserts that our work does not make recommendations that would impinge on the cultural influence or autonomy of local groups.

RMRA acknowledges the aspirations of Aboriginal peoples to participate more fully in the social, cultural, economic and political life of the region in a way that preserves and enhances Aboriginal culture, and identities of the region and increases control, self-sufficiency and sustainability of its member communities.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are advised that this document contains images of people who have died. The story of Riverina Murray Regional Alliance (RMRA) could not be told without recognising their achievements. In some Aboriginal communities, seeing the names and photographs of deceased peoples may cause sadness and distress, particularly to relatives of those people.

The Riverina Murray Regional Alliance acknowledges Country and Elders past, present and future. The RMRA footprint covers the traditional lands of the Wiradjuri, Wamba Wamba/ Wemba Wemba, Perrepa Perrepa, Yorta Yorta, and Muthi Muthi nations.



Community members participating in RMRA's men's and women's gatherings

Background

There are many social factors that impact on the physical, social, emotional and spiritual health of Aboriginal people in our communities. These include the changing social and economic roles and loss of identity; changing notions of roles in society and families; relationship breakdown; racism; mental health issues including depression, anxiety and suicide; unemployment, working patterns and hours, Aboriginal culture; as well as services which are lacking in responsiveness to our needs.

Riverina Murray Regional Alliance heard from our communities when we hosted the first Regional Healing forum in Griffith in November 2017. Community members in attendance stated they wanted opportunity to gather, to be together, to share, to learn and to grow our future generations with opportunities to learn culture, language and return to our way of being. The full Riverina Murray Regional Alliance NSW OCHRE Healing Report June 2018 is available from the RMRA office in Albury or by contacting RMRA's Project Officer on rmraprojectofficer@gmail.com.

The Riverina Murray region has an important and strong connection with Aboriginal culture, heritage and history. Aboriginal people's connection to the Riverina Murray region is both ancient and contemporary in nature.

We aim to meet the following outcomes for our communities:

- To raise the profile of Aboriginal community, locally and regionally across the Riverina Murray region and to increase connectedness.
- To raise awareness of Aboriginal health and wellbeing issues and increase services ability to work more effectively with our communities.
- To increase Aboriginal people's awareness of their own cultural identity.
- To promote Aboriginal awareness of wider lifestyle issues, including relationships, working life, emotional and spiritual, that can have an impact on Aboriginal communities.
- To acknowledge the contribution of Aboriginal peoples in their communities.
- To provide participants with the opportunity to engage in discussions and activities aimed at building their own leadership capabilities.
- To yarn about health support, social and emotional wellbeing, education, employment and leadership, culture, cultural identity and cultural awareness.
- To walk on Country, visit cultural sites, cultural walks focused on life skills, language sharing, mentorship and leadership.
- To increase connection, respect and participation within the Aboriginal communities across the Riverina Murray region.
- To develop skills and connectedness by facilitating participation and providing training and mentoring with strong leadership outcomes.

Main message

Participants who have attended these events indicated that they enjoyed the gatherings and took a lot of information away with them. The evidence is gathered by yarning, surveys and evaluations.

The gatherings created a real sense of belonging, connection to Country and strengthening connection with other Aboriginal men and women across the Riverina Murray region.

The main messages arising from the gatherings included:

- The events have been informative, entertaining and provided a networking forum for Aboriginal people from across the Riverina Murray region.
- Strengthening Aboriginal men's and women's health and wellbeing by engaging local and regional services providers.
- Aboriginal people actively monitoring their own health and engaging in activities to keep themselves feeling good through acknowledging the signs and responding to their health and to seek support.
- Increasing their awareness of their own cultural identity and connection to Country and languages.
- Better connectedness by having conversations between one another and being involved in yarn ups around cultural activities and listening to the speakers in a relaxed atmosphere.
- A desire for more opportunities to learn about health and wellbeing, leadership and role models and learning about our cultural and connection to Country.

We believe that these Riverina Murray events will stimulate a new level of interest in the area of men's and women's health and wellbeing. We encourage the development of more Aboriginal appropriate services.

We also hope that it will encourage increasing numbers of Aboriginal people's to value their health and wellbeing as an important first step in developing more effective ways of taking care of themselves so they can live longer and happier lives.

MEN'S YARN UP



CAMP HUDSON JUNE 2018

Men's Yarn Up Report

The 2018 event was camping up on an awesome little spot about 20 minutes outside Tumut on the Goobarragandra River at a place called Camp Hudson. Over 50 men from across the Riverina Murray region made connections to Country and each other.

The Riverina Men's Yarn Up stimulated a new level of interest in the area of men's health and wellbeing and encouraged the development of more male friendly services. This, in turn, will encourage increasing numbers of men and boys to value their health and wellbeing as an important first step in developing more effective ways of taking care of themselves so they can lead longer and happier lives.

Guest speakers included Shane Herrington from National Parks, Len Connolly from NSW Health, Tim Humphries from Family and Community Services, and Tony Fuller from NSW Aboriginal Affairs.

Being a part of Aboriginal men coming together at a Yarn Up is one of the best ways of recognising and celebrating the resourcefulness, determination, wisdom and courage of Aboriginal men.

It is an opportunity to celebrate the good things that Aboriginal men and boys bring to society as well as to shed light on the health and wellbeing issues they face.

The positives taken away from the boys who attended the Men's Yarn Up was listening to the Elders and older people who passed on their knowledge. The boys reconnected with traditional practices and knowledge through being involved in cultural walks and talks.

Local Police who attended enjoyed the day and actively participated in cultural activities such as the making of artefacts, hearing stories and going on cultural walks.

The Yarn Up allows our men to have the opportunity to engage, reconnect, share their journeys and open up about the challenges they face as men and issues more freely by being on Country in a culturally safe environment.



Men's Yarn Up representatives of Tumut handed the message stick (created as a symbol for future Men's Yarn Ups across the Riverina Murray region) to Griffith who will host the next event.

MIGAY ALLAWAH



YANCO NOVEMBER 2018

Migay Allawah Yanco Report

It is important that Aboriginal women have an opportunity to come together and to reconnect. A gathering is one of the best ways to bring women together to celebrate their achievements.

The Migay Allawah was held in the year of the NAIDOC theme “Because of her we can”. This provided opportunity to celebrate the resourcefulness, determination, wisdom and courage of Aboriginal women living in the Riverina Murray region.

However, there are many social factors that impact on the physical, social, emotional and spiritual health of Aboriginal women and girls. There is a need for support networks and self-care strategies for our Aboriginal women who are the backbone of their families and always caring for others. These days it is more significant that women hold each other up and support each other to be the best they can be.

The women who attended learnt new strategies and tools to use for themselves and to share amongst family and friends. Guest speakers provided information that allowed participants to explore the physical, emotional and spiritual side of health. These included meditation, Wayapa Wuurrk and what it means to connect to Country.

Participants attended a workshop hosted by Mel Brown of Spirit Dreaming around transgenerational trauma, impacts and how to assist our younger generations place more focus on themselves and their own self-care. Participants wrote their dreams and aspirations on a template provided by Mel. This was mailed back to participants in March 2019. Feedback provided verbally from women in attendance said it reminded them of what they had promised to themselves.

The women have requested that this event be held more often as the benefit of getting together regularly assisted their own social and emotional wellbeing as well as the emotional wellbeing of their families and communities.



Women connecting and networking at the first Migay Allawah

STRENGTHENING CONNECTIONS TO CULTURE



GOGELDERIE WEIR MAY 2019

Strengthening Connections to Culture Report

Riverina Murray Regional Alliance partnered with Wellways to hold this event over two days located at the Gogelderie Weir, 7 kms from Leeton. Aboriginal staff within Wellways led the conversation seeking the relevant partners, funding bodies & stakeholders to make this event a success. There were several other partners that seen the importance in this event and became valuable sponsors and partners.

The purpose of the event was to provide an opportunity for Aboriginal community members from across the Riverina Murray region, to come together, to catch up and exchange cultural knowledge.

The steering committee acknowledged that many different clans and tribes now reside within the Riverina Murray region and wanted to encourage everyone to come along.

Aboriginal owned businesses were utilised in all aspects of the event. Uncle Michael Lyons from Sandhills Artefacts in Narrandera provided bush tucker with a modern twist and Giilangyaldhaanygalang (100% Aboriginal owned Wiradjuri language business) provided GALING, 600ml bottled spring water.

Both days contained many cultural components including Welcome to Country, talks in Wiradjuri language, cultural activities and separate men's and women's business.

Beyond Blue provided in-kind support with Aboriginal identity Kyle Vander-Kuyp, former Australian Olympian. Everyone was very interested in his story and upbringing, as well as his search for his family and journey to build connection to his culture. Kyle interacted with all people that attended. Kyle stated that he really loved being out there with Aboriginal community members. He enjoyed the yarning and making connections to different families and mobs.

Tirkandi Inaburra students also performed several cultural dances. The boys loved the opportunity to learn and connect to their culture through their demonstrations. Many proud community members spoke with the boys and passed on their gratitude that these boys were learning their culture.

Facilitators from Deadly Thinking spoke of the need for support networks and not trying to do it all on your own. Each participant received information packs including the RMRA Regional Strategic Priority Plan 2018 -2021, RMRA Healing Report June 2018, Wellways information, and local Aboriginal Medical Service information.

At the end of the event each participant had an opportunity to plant a native tree in memory of this gathering.



Participants enjoying activities at the first Regional Strengthening Connections to Culture 2019 at Gogelderie Weir

MIGAY ALLAWAH



TUMUT JULY 2019

Migay Allawah Tumut Report

The second annual Migay Allawah took place in Tumut. Just over 100 women of all ages attended this amazing event. This years event had a more relaxed environment, which a lot of the women had said they liked about it.

The women who attended liked the way this event was run. Some women who had attended both women's gatherings said they liked the way this event felt more relaxed. The feeling of being outside, around a fire, near the creek with Aboriginal women and Elders was a feeling of tranquility.

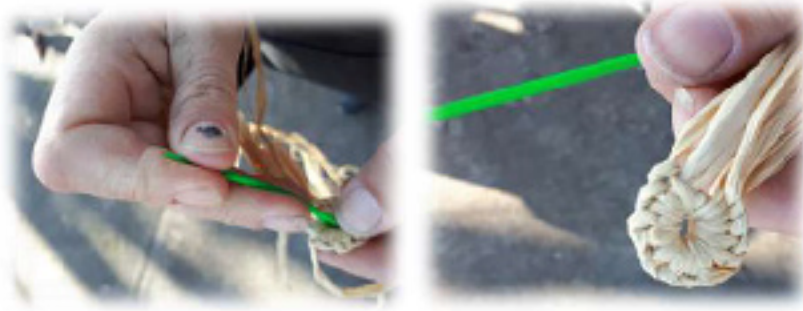
Service providers had set up stalls outside with information and activities. Ladies were free to attend an information session indoors. Throughout the day the women were able to contribute to the weaving of a shared basket.

They also had the opportunity to make jewellery or paint on canvas outside. Local Tumut women, Grace Bowman, donated a painting as a lucky door prize that was won by Heather Bramich of Deniliquin.

Passionate guest speakers spoke about Career Trackers and Internships. Participants heard about Disability Linkers, the NDIS, disability support, aged care packages along with educational opportunities at TAFE and Charles Sturt University. Fair Trading spoke of scams and how to protect yourself from them. Some comments received were that the sessions were highly interactive and lively which made the women feel involved.

Elders spoke of how grateful they were to catch up with other Elders they had not seen in some time. This demonstrates how Aboriginal women connect with each other and how valuable a continued opportunity to be together will be.

Looking to the future, the weaving which the women contributed to represents all the women's love for each other and the desire for the continuation of Migay Allawah yearly events in the Riverina Murray Regional Alliance footprint. There is a vision that this weaving turns into a basket over several gatherings which as a vessel holds the dreams, hopes and aspirations of our women in the Riverina Murray region.



The weaving the women started was handed to Deniliquin, who will host 2020 Migay Allawah event

Outcomes

Men's Yarn Up June 2018:

- Increased Aboriginal men's awareness of their own cultural identity
- Promoted men's awareness of wider lifestyle issues (including relationships, working life, emotional and spiritual issues) that can have an impact on Aboriginal men
- Continued to engage men to use various programs

Migay Allawah November 2018:

- Raised the profile of Aboriginal women, locally and regionally across the Riverina Murray region and increased their connectedness
- Provided self-care strategies to assist with social emotional wellbeing of Aboriginal women in the Riverina Murray area

Strengthening Connections to Culture May 2019:

- Ensured the inclusion of more of our local Elders and community members to participate
- Continued to support other Aboriginal owned businesses that could provide catering within the region
- Provided transport options

Migay Allawah July 2019:

- Reconnected isolated community members and Elders
- Used local community transport options
- Grew understanding of educational opportunities for Women



Migay Allawah Yanco 2018

Conclusion

Aboriginal culture, heritage and history connects Aboriginal people to the land and each other. This is also true for Aboriginal people and communities of the Riverina Murray region. The Riverina Murray region has an important and strong connection with Aboriginal culture, heritage and history. Aboriginal people's connection to the Riverina Murray region is both ancient and contemporary in nature. Over the last 2 years we have hosted various gatherings throughout the Riverina Murray region. Community members attending have had the opportunity to learn from each other while being on country.

The Riverina Murray Regional Alliance is committed to meeting the needs of the Aboriginal community and has done so through these gatherings. Not only have we met the needs of community, but also had the opportunity to hear more about what we could be doing into the future. As in the past, future challenges remain; loss of identity, what it means to be a role model, how to grow and nurture relationships, dealing with racism, strengthening mental health, growing job opportunities; and all of these concerns draw attention to the importance of services continuing to meet the needs of the community.



Strengthening Connections to Culture May 2019



Migay Allawah July 2019

Where to from here?

With the success of all individual events especially the Strengthening Connections to Culture event, our communities have echoed how hugely important it is to host annual cultural events for each area, Men's, Women, Youth and a regional gathering, with similar formats.

Our grass roots community members will continue to plan these events and RMRA, as an Aboriginal regional body, will continue to advocate and partner with our own Aboriginal community Controlled organisations and non-government organisations. We also understand how important it is to allow for professional media & radio exposure.

We will continue to lobby the NSW & Australian Government agencies such as Department of Planning and Industry, NSW Aboriginal Affairs and the National Indigenous Australians Agency for future ongoing funding.

We hope that you as the reader, see the benefit to supporting these events and that you may be able to contribute in financial support or in kind in some way.



Strengthening Connections to Culture May 2019

Next scheduled events

Migay Allawah Deniliquin – 2020/21

Youth cultural camp Yanco – 2020/21

Men's yarn up Griffith – 2020/21

(keep an eye on our Facebook page)

Thank you to all our Sponsors

RMRA thank all generous sponsors of these events.



Aboriginal
Affairs



Wagga Wagga
City Council



Family &
Community
Services



L&DLALC



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Riverina Murray Regional Alliance October 2019

