

Solid Ground

LIGHTS, ART AND SPOTLIGHT!

Empowering the everyday lives of the women of **The Baabayn Mums & Bubs Group** to grow into their potential and to contribute to an Aboriginal-led movement for better outcomes for First Nations women and children is one of the key goals of this **Mercy Works** partnership project.

And this year is already providing spectacular results!

In May, nine of the mums of Baabayn were invited to showcase their artworks in an immersive display of art projections as the centrepiece of Crown Sydney's inaugural Vivid Sydney activation, *The Gallery*.

The spectacular lighting projections created a 160m walk through experience along the landmark Wulugul Walk at Barangaroo, bringing to life the works of the talented Baabayn mums and other First Nations students from Blacktown and Redfern. This was part of the Solid Ground program for Western Sydney's emerging artists.

Not only did the artworks transform Crown Sydney into a stunning visual gallery of light projections, but the mums were also invited to a VIP cocktail party at The Crown Hotel where they and their families were treated

Artworks from Baabayn Mums and Bubs Group transform the Wulugul Walk at Crown Sydney during Vivid Sydney

to a media event celebrating the success and stories behind the art and the artists.

"All of the mums were excited to visit Sydney City and view their artwork and to share their pride and happiness on social media," says Amanda Peachey, a program support worker at Baabayn.

"We have seen an increase in confidence from the artists themselves, showing enthusiasm to continue to paint and share their experiences and a few of the artists have since been approached for commission pieces and have grown their business portfolios."

"The Wednesday program has opened up many business opportunities which increased financial independence for the mums involved. The mums have since held a fete stall of artworks, jewellery, clothing and pieces created by themselves at a Baabayn NAIDOC event with more markets to come."

Mercy Works is proud to support the "bubs" component of the group which engages Aboriginal children in cultural, educational, health-promoting and healing activities in weekly three-hour sessions. This includes storytelling, learning culture, native gardening projects, motor skills activities and preschool literacy and learning sessions.



Meanwhile, their mums participate in programs like Real Futures Job Training 'Bring Your Bills Day' with Legal Aid and The Western Sydney Local Health District's Public Health Unit for a breast cancer 'Bedazzled Bras' initiative. Other aspects have included dealing with Government departments like Birth Deaths and Marriages and the Learning Driver Mentor Program. It's designed to empower, promote healthy lifestyles, and enhance life skills.

To read more and meet one of our Baabayn art stars scan the QR code here



Welcome to a very special First Nation Report for our September Bilum. **Mercy Works** continues to partner with

Indigenous projects as we respond to the invitation from our First Nations people in the Uluru Statement from the Heart "to walk with us in a movement of the Australian people for a better future". **Mercy Works** welcomes this Statement and supports an Indigenous voice to parliament, enshrined in the Australian Constitution.

In this edition 'Solid Ground emerging artists program' shares the story of nine of our Baabayn mums who were chosen to exhibit their art works in the Sydney's iconic Vivid

Lights festival. These women have discovered their artistic talents in the Wednesday sessions while their bubs are cared for by Child Care Worker Janaya. They have grown in confidence, gained business opportunities, and formed friendships.

'It Takes a Village' is the good news one of the students at the Cape York Girl Academy in Cairns. Naydia shares how important finding the school was for her education, her mental health and the future of her 14-month-old daughter, Thea.

Slow and steady progress has been made in our 'Prospering after Prison' pilot project in Port Augusta South Australia – which

highlights the lack of follow through care for Indigenous women who are released at the end of a jail sentence into the community.

A big THANK YOU to those who so generously donated to our Chicken & Egg Nutrition July Tax Appeal in Timor-Leste! We are thrilled to reach our target of \$13,000 which will go to support the women and children of Maucatar who are facing extreme hunger and malnutrition.

Sally Bradley RSM
Executive Director



It Takes a Village

TODAY'S CHILD, TOMORROW'S FUTURE

Naydia Dooley, a Year 11 student who lives and learns with her 14-month-old daughter, Thea, at Cape York Girl Academy (CYGA) in Cairns, admits she wasn't always a model student.

The 18-year-old Wik Mungkan and Wadjigu girl from Pormpuraaw and Woorabinda, says there has been a profound shift in the way she views the world these days compared to her younger years.

"I am Thea's mum. I love her endlessly; she is my motivation to keep going through life. Being a mother has changed me a lot. Before this, I was running amok. Thinking about what my future looked like back then, it wouldn't be good."

"I used to fight all the time and get into trouble. I never had the responsibility of having to look after someone else before. Now, all my focus is on her and what she needs. It's kept me away from all that other trouble. It's a full-time job being a mum, they need you!"

Now emerging as a young leader in her community, Naydia was recently invited to speak at the Early Years Conference in Cairns, where she made the presentation: 'A Village Raises a Child; Providing opportunities for young women to continue their secondary education while being a mum at school.'

She spoke of her experiences at the first-of-its-kind boarding school for teenage Indigenous mums and their babies along with other young women who are at risk of disengaging with their education.

As a young mother wanting to go forward in life, she says the CYGA was the perfect place to study and actively raise her daughter. It has been "challenging but rewarding".

"Cape York Girl Academy gives chances to students unlike other schools. The school is non-judgemental about your past and that gives me the confidence and sense of belonging, when other schools don't, to complete my education to the best of my ability."

"Thea loves it here. At first, she wasn't too sure because there are so many girls and people around. Then she started to get used to people and now she'll go to everyone, she's a very social girl. The girls love having Thea around. They fight over who's going to hold her. When I need a break, they'll take her straight away. I don't feel worried because I know she's safe with them and she knows them very well."

Naydia has transformed from a restless 17-year-old into an ambitious and loving 18-year-old mum in her time there.

"I love being here, away from everything. The environment is calm, and everyone is friendly, and the school is so supportive. If Thea has kept me up and I haven't had a good sleep, they let me rest. They encourage you to get into class. I like being in class because the teachers make it fun. I can come up to the day care whenever I want to see Thea if I'm worried about her."

"I like all my classes and I love learning."

Top images: [Top] Naydia Dooley with her bub, Thea, [bottom] live and learn together at Cape York Girl Academy

To read about the ground-breaking new technology for a Multi-Sensory Calming De-escalation Room which Mercy Works is funding scan the QR code:



PROSPERING AFTER PRISON

One of the key principles at Mercy Works is to walk with vulnerable people, to empower them to take responsibility for their lives and become their own agents of change. Sometimes change can be slow and we accept that.

We are proud of our **Prospering After Prison** Pilot project, based in Port Augusta. In partnership with Centacare Catholic it has been running for two years, providing throughcare (or holistic care) for Aboriginal women leaving prison to prosper in their community.

In the past year, 21 Aboriginal women were assisted in the development of personal resilience, financial resilience, living skills, cultural healing and community connection under the guiding and dedicated care of three Sisters of Saint Anne of Chennai: Sisters Delma Rani, Elizabeth Royan and Sheela Thomas.

They accompanied women to their court hearings when they were released on parole, connected them with legal aid on their behalf, transported them to locations to access service and referrals for emergency housing, food and clothing as well as visited inmates in prison. They also delivered food packages in the APY lands during Covid-19 and basic amenities packs upon their release.

The project has worked tirelessly to empower and strengthen the families and communities of these vulnerable women, many of whom are dealing with alcohol and drug addiction, homelessness, prior traumas, poverty and domestic violence.

We are happy to report their hard work, monitoring and evaluation is potentially going to be incorporated to advocate for on-going funding for a range of providers including State and Commonwealth Government. Both Sr Delma and Sr Sheela have been appointed by the prison to be volunteer chaplains.

"We hope the information and documentation we have acquired will encourage us in engaging the support of other stakeholders in this project," says Sr Sheela.

(L-R) Sr Elizabeth Royan, Sr Sheela Thomas & Sr Delma Rani are known as "Kanga" (sister) to many women in Port Augusta

To read more about the **Prospering After Prison** Pilot project, scan the QR code:



MercyWorks

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IN AUSTRALIA & PAPUA NEW GUINEA

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