

Mercy Works proudly supports the "Yes" vote in the upcoming Referendum



Mercy Works has a long history of advocating in support of Indigenous voices.

In the last year, we have partnered with five Indigenous projects. We facilitated the *Yartangka Tirkanthi* (Learning on Country) camps in Adelaide, where youth were able to reconnect with their country and ancestors. Last year I visited the Cape York Girl Academy and saw the completed Multi-Sensory Calm Room, an outcome of our partnership. This peaceful space is greatly valued by the young Indigenous women.

Currently we partner with Nunga Babies Watch in Adelaide – where Aunty Pat Waria-Read continues to advocate with the Department of Child Protection for prioritising placement of Aboriginal children with kin. She also continues to mentor two women Aboriginal volunteers through our Salt and Pepper project.

We are strengthening our Baabayn project this year by 'Keeping a Good Thing Going'. I have recently witnessed our Baabayn 'empowered educator' Janaya Hickson present to students at Our Lady of Mercy College, Parramatta. Since I first met Janaya in 2019 I have seen her grow in self-confidence to proudly use her own voice.

We are excited to announce our two newest Indigenous partnerships – *Yaanyji Ngalan* (Walking Together) at St Mary's Primary School in Bowraville and *Nellei Jerring* (Join and Unite) – a Koori Youth Leadership program partnering with Western Bulldogs Community Foundation in Victoria. We look forward to bringing you updates on these.

Mercy Works stands with our First Nations people as they "call for the establishment of a First Nations Voice enshrined in the Constitution" (Uluru Statement of the Heart 2017). We believe this Statement is generous and inclusive as it invites us all to walk together in peace. It is a gift to the Australian people, an opportunity to heal country, people and nation. Let us all keep well-informed as we approach the upcoming Referendum. Together we can build a just and merciful world fully recognising the dignity and the human rights of all people.

Sally Bradley RSM
Executive Director

Home & Heartland

For thousands of years Raukkan, 80 kilometres southeast of Adelaide, was an important meeting place for the Ngarrindjeri people. It is the home and heartland of Ngarrindjeri country, a place with a deep and scarred history.

It was here, in the 1800's, a starving explorer Charles Sturt was fed by Aboriginal clans and the Point McLeay Mission was established. From here some of the first Aboriginal men to enlist in World War 1 came, and, here, a generation of Aboriginal children were stolen.

Raukkan also appears on our Australian fifty dollar note, with Ngarrindjeri man David Unaipon, Australia's first published Aboriginal author, born at Point McLeay Mission.

So it is more than fitting that this year's Kura Yerlo 'Yartangka Tirkanthi' camp, supported by **Mercy Works**, saw 10 boys and girls visit the sacred area for an overnight camp to reconnect to country. They made a fire, toasted marshmallows and were welcomed by Uncle Bobo.

"I can't explain how happy this makes me feel, or even the feeling of bringing our own mobs together to connect. It gives me so much joy knowing one day they will come back and say, 'I remember this fella once did this tour!'" said Uncle Bobo.

Kura Yerlo hopes to give young people access to cultural and language opportunities away from metropolitan Adelaide.



Happy camping at Point Pearce

"We hope to build a sense of pride in identity, belonging and resilience and that the trips will be a vehicle for healing," says Claire Fleckner from Kura Yerlo.

"Reconnecting with local elders will create an opportunity for the ongoing survival of Indigenous culture and pride in heritage. This process honours the potential of our young people to one day become new Elders, passing on their knowledge of language and culture and ensuring the survival of traditional skills."

Jayla, 13, enjoyed engaging with her Aboriginal heritage. She has since developed a renewed interest in her culture and developed an interest in basket weaving from Aunty Betty Sumner.

Aunty Betty creates elaborate mats. *"The closest thing to my ancestors is my weaving, especially when I go to stand on my mat. I feel what my ancestors felt. I weave my identity within it. When you first start it it's like the umbilical cord. Like the umbilical cord of life."*

By reconnecting with local elders, hearing their stories, learning their skills, Jayla says she hopes to spend more time on country as well as participate in a "girl's group" facilitated by an Elder at the school.

◀ Basket weaving with Aunty Betty

◀ L: Jayla attended the camp to reconnect with her Indigenous heritage

Best Foot Forward

Nothing makes Esther* happier than making clothes for others.

The 32-year-old asylum seeker from Papua New Guinea is a participant in **Mercy Works** partnership with the Romero Centre - *Gateways To Employment for People Seeking Asylum* - in Brisbane, which has so far helped 20 women and 17 men gain employment since last July.

There are many challenges facing people seeking asylum in Australia, including financial - which often leads to homelessness and destitution. Lack of employment also impacts on welfare, mental and physical health and children. Isolated, uncertain and frightened, it's a complicated system to navigate.

For women like Esther, finding a job can be particularly difficult. Many come from a cultural background where paid employment for women is not widely available. And many, particularly those from PNG, are fleeing domestic violence and have sole child caring responsibilities - an additional barrier. Others have lived in detention for a prolonged period and 70% of participants have flashbacks from trauma they have experienced.

Which is why we are so proud to help women like Esther safely enter the workforce.

After approaching The Romero Centre for support last October, she was able to apply for a protection visa and was granted a bridging visa with work rights.

It was during this three-month process Esther engaged in several workshops under the **Mercy Works** partnership program including a workshop with Mater Hospital for Workplace Health and Covid 19 Protocols; a workshop with MCW Lawyers for Safety and Employment Rights and Obligations; Group ESL and individual tutorials and a cultural mentoring workshop as well as an excursion with her peers. She also attended a workplace group visit in a café and undertook a trial shift.

But it was not the right fit.

So, with **Mercy Works** support, she decided to focus on what she loves to do: Sewing!

Esther began applying for tailoring jobs, as she had some experience in that field. "Sewing clothes is my natural gift," she says. "Nothing makes me happier than making clothes for others."

Once her work rights arrived, she applied for five tailoring jobs and was invited to two job interviews, ultimately receiving a job offer as a commercial tailor.

"With her skills, passion and help of Romero Centre staff, she started her dream job not even three weeks from the day she was granted work permission to work in Australia!" says Misha Emingerova, a case worker at Romero.

With a regular income, Esther will now be able to continue her settlement in Australia and support her family back home financially.

"She is now onto her next step - obtaining a Queensland drivers licence!" says Misha proudly.

This empowering project is seeing fantastic results. It supports asylum seekers from over 40 cultural groups, with a particular focus on women, to gain work experience and employment and to address the barriers they face from a lack of English language skills, resources and networks. Pathways to employment are strengthened by linking participants to real-world employers within our Mercy Partners and business association networks.

*Name has been changed to protect identity

Dress for Success - Refugees get support getting ready for a job interview. ➤



ALL TIME HIGH AT HILLTOP!



Climbing high!



Talk and Tabouli...



Big smiles



The big trip



Yum! Baked goodies

Our Hilltop Road Adult Literacy Class reached an all-time high in May as they embarked on their first excursion.

The adult literacy learners are from the Hilltop Road Community Centre in Sydney, run by Catherine Gregory, The Community Liaison Officer at Hilltop Road Public School, where **Mercy Connect** provides volunteers to support students from refugee and asylum seeker background.

The Adult Literacy Classes empower their parents to learn English so they can help their children in their school and adapt to their new life in Australia.

"Well, I can truly say, Monday's excursion was the highlight of my 17 years here at Hilltop Road!" says Catherine.

"Sherry (a Mercy Connect volunteer) opened her house to the Mums, and they didn't want to leave!"

For most of our adult literacy learners, it was the first time they had been invited to an Aussie's house or a house outside their own family.

The smiles and chatter over lunch say it all!



MercyWorks

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IN AUSTRALIA & PAPUA NEW GUINEA

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