

Today in Walgett, in north west NSW, the Yuwaya Ngarra-li partnership team<sup>1</sup> launched an Action Plan for Children and Young People [<http://www.dharriwaaeldersgroup.org.au/images/downloads/Walgett-Action-Plan-for-Children-and-Young-People-June18.pdf>] that responds to community concerns and aspirations for urgent action for change.

Joining Yuwaya Ngarrali at the Launch today were representatives from Walgett’s Aboriginal Community Controlled organisations Dharriwaa Elders Group (“DEG”), Walgett Aboriginal Medical Service, Walgett Aboriginal Education Consultative Group and Walgett Local Aboriginal Land Council together with staff from Walgett Shire Council, NSW Police, Walgett Community College, Aboriginal Legal Service, Mission Australia, parents and children.

Yuwaya Ngarrali’s UNSW Project Manager Peta MacGillivray convened the gathering in Walgett’s Gray Park. DEG’s leadership – Secretary Virginia Robinson and Speaker Clem Dodd made a strong introductory statement that left no doubt about the Elders’ strong commitment to change the futures of Walgett’s children and young people.

The Dharriwaa Elders Group’s vision is that Aboriginal children and young people in Walgett can learn, work, be safe, supported and thrive within a robust sense of belonging to their families, community, culture and country. The Action Plan seeks agreement from community and commitment from all service providers in Walgett to work together towards this vision.

Peta explained that the Action Plan grew out of a Youth Justice Forum [<http://www.dharriwaaeldersgroup.org.au/images/downloads/Walgett-Youth-Justice-Forum-Report-June18.pdf>] held in Walgett in March 2018 hosted by the Yuwaya Ngarra-li partnership.<sup>2</sup> The forum brought together community members (young people, families, Elders) and critical services, organisations and Walgett stakeholders (Walgett Aboriginal Medical Service, police, legal and justice agencies, Walgett high school) to discuss the needs of Aboriginal young people at risk of entering or who are already in the justice system, to consider relevant data and research, and to focus on positive, evidence-based solutions.

There were many ideas raised at the Walgett Youth Justice Forum about what local, evidence-based strategies could work to address the problems identified, and to support children and young people in Walgett to thrive in their community [<http://www.dharriwaaeldersgroup.org.au/images/downloads/Walgett-Youth-Justice-Forum-Report-June18.pdf>].

Yuwaya Ngarra-li’s Peta MacGillivray and Vanessa Hickey then explained how the ideas from the Forum were developed into an Action Plan for Children and Young People with draft goals and strategies. The Yuwaya Ngarra-li project team – Wendy Spencer and Vanessa Hickey from the Dharriwaa Elders Group, and Peta MacGillivray and Ruth McCausland from UNSW – worked with Aboriginal children and young people and other key stakeholders and agency representatives to refine the goals and strategies.

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<sup>1</sup> The partnership [<http://www.dharriwaaeldersgroup.org.au/index.php/yuwayangarrali>] between the Dharriwaa Elders Group [<http://www.dharriwaaeldersgroup.org.au/>] and UNSW [<https://www.unsw.edu.au/>].

<sup>2</sup> As above

The goals of the Action Plan launched today are:

- Aboriginal organisations, government agencies, service providers, UNSW and other partners have made clear and funded commitments as part of a long-term plan agreed with the community to improve education, health, housing and employment outcomes for Aboriginal children and young people in Walgett.
- Young people in Walgett report higher rates of belonging, safety, support, confidence and wellbeing.
- Less than 10% of Aboriginal children and young people aged 10-17 from Walgett are appearing in the Children’s Court (excluding appearances related to diversion).
- Visible progress in the engagement of children and young people in study and work including through improvements in school attendance and outcomes, and new work opportunities for Aboriginal young people.

The core strategies to achieve these goals are:

- Build relationships of respect and develop effective coordination and collaboration between relevant people and organisations within Walgett to enable us to achieve the goals of this Action Plan.
- Significantly improve Aboriginal children and young people’s education, training and employment participation and outcomes, including through increased access to relevant services and opportunities.
- Create effective options for diversion of children and young people from the criminal justice system.
- Reflect on our practices and processes, build evidence around our shared knowledge and outcomes, and plan the work that will be required to consolidate and improve on our impact.

The CEO of Walgett Aboriginal Medical Service (“WAMS”), Christine Corby OAM completed the presentation by explaining how WAMS has been integrally involved in the development of the Action Plan and will join Yuwaya Ngarra-li and Walgett service providers to commit to it.

‘Yuwaya Ngarra-li’, which means ‘Vision’ in the Yuwaalaraay/Gamilaraay languages, is a unique community-led partnership between the Dharriwaa Elders Group and UNSW Sydney to work towards the DEG’s positive vision for change in Walgett, by growing and building on community strengths and assets.

Those interested in the launch and progress of the Action Plan can find out more at:

@Dharriwaa\_UNSW

<http://www.dharriwaaeldersgroup.org.au/index.php/yuwayangarrali>

Project Manager Wendy Spencer Dharriwaa Elders Group Walgett [wendy@yuwayangarrali.org.au](mailto:wendy@yuwayangarrali.org.au)

Project Manager Peta MacGillivray UNSW Sydney [peta@yuwayangarrali.org.au](mailto:peta@yuwayangarrali.org.au)

General enquiries: [yaama@yuwayangarrali.org.au](mailto:yaama@yuwayangarrali.org.au)