

# Our Own Place

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### Feasibility Study for a Gathering Place in Wangaratta

April 2017



DIRRAWARRA GATHERING PLACE  
ABORIGINAL COMMUNITY CENTRE

future design works would attempt to imbue a sense of cultural significance within its built structure, yet ultimately attempt to visually merge the boundaries between built and natural environments, between connectivity of indigenous culture, people, the land, and community (JWP Architects, 2017)

Prepared for the  
**Dirrawarra Indigenous Network**  
by **Clare O'Kelly**  
Project Auspice: **Central Hume Primary Care Partnership**

### **Acknowledgement**

*We acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the lands this project relates to,  
their Elders past and present.*

*We also acknowledge Elders and community members who have come to make Wangaratta  
and the Central Hume their home from Aboriginal lands and communities across Australia.*

We wish to thank the Victorian Department of Health and Human Services (Hume Region) for funding the Dirrawarra Indigenous Network for this Feasibility Study.

**Disclaimer:** A warning to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people that there are images of deceased people in this document.





*Dirrawarra Indigenous  
Network Events,  
Celebrating, Sharing and  
Strengthening Culture  
and Community*

## Terminology

### Aboriginal

The term Aboriginal in this report refers to both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People. Indigenous and Koorie is used when it is part of the title of a program, report or quotation.

### Cultural safety

Cultural safety has been described as an environment that is safe for people: where there is no assault, challenge or denial of their identity, of who they are and what they need. It is about shared respect, shared meaning, shared knowledge and experience of learning, living and working together with dignity and truly listening

Cultural safety is about providing quality health care that fits within the familiar cultural values and norms of the person accessing the service that may differ from your own and/or the dominant culture.  
*(Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation Inc. – What is Cultural Safety?)*

### Cultural competence

Cultural competence is more than cultural awareness – it is the set of behaviours, attributes and policies that come together to enable a system, agency, or professionals to work effectively in cross-cultural situations.

*(Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2015, Cultural competency in the delivery of health services for Indigenous people)*

### Gathering Place

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander gathering places have been described as community hubs that promote the importance of culture in supporting positive health and wellbeing for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Victorians.

Definitions of 'gathering' in an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander context include activities such as sharing food, performing ceremony, exchanging knowledge and creating supportive networks to ensure continuity of culture and traditional practices that create culturally safe places...

Gathering places are safe, welcoming and inclusive spaces that provide social connection and create opportunities for personal and community empowerment.

*(Myers 1986; Pawu-Kurlpurlurnu 2008 – Extract from Health and wellbeing outcomes of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander gathering place model in Victoria: A place for inclusion, connection and empowerment, 2017 Final report Indigenous Health Equity Unit University of Melbourne and Gathering Place Reference Group For the Department of Health and Human Services)*



*Dirrawarra Indigenous  
Network Events,  
Celebrating, Sharing  
and Strengthening  
Culture and  
Community*

## Executive Summary

In November 2016, Wangaratta's Local Aboriginal Network (LAN) known as the Dirrawarra Indigenous Network (DIN), engaged consultants All-iN Productions Pty Ltd to produce a feasibility study for a Gathering Place in Wangaratta.

The project brief was informed by the Dirrawarra Indigenous Network Community Plan 2011-2016 and is aligned to Koolin Balit<sup>1</sup> directions for Aboriginal health, and the Victorian Local Aboriginal Networks Five Year Plan (2016-2020).<sup>2</sup>

Specifically, the feasibility study provides the DIN with a roadmap for moving forward in establishing a viable and sustainable Gathering Place in Wangaratta (*full Report available*).

The project was managed by a Project Steering Group (PSG) comprised of DIN members; Albury Wodonga Aboriginal Health Service; Rural City of Wangaratta; the Departments of Health and Human Services, Education and Training; and other stakeholder representatives, under the auspice of the Central Hume Primary Care Partnership (CHPCP). Eight meetings were held over twelve months, and a consultant was contracted.

The DIN Community Plan 2011-2016 recommended the establishment of a Gathering Place in Wangaratta to provide an accessible, culturally safe and appropriate base from which outreach health services, meetings, functions, and gatherings could occur.

It should be stressed that community members view a Gathering Place as meeting not only primary health needs, but areas that impact the physical, spiritual, cultural, social and emotional well-being of an individual, family and community.

The Consultant presented three governance scenarios at a workshop with the DIN in February 2017 – (i) Auspice (ii) Lead partner (iii) Independent (Gathering Place Incorporated organisation). The DIN's preferred model was a balance of Scenario 2 & 3 – **partnership while building capacity for a community controlled entity and space**.

Feasibility study consultations and research concluded that a Gathering Place for Wangaratta is **needed, viable, and sustainable**. A partnership governance model is advisable, with an initial auspice period for capacity building, while an appropriate space is accessed and adjusted, or built for purpose.

Consultations also refined the vision for use, specific functions and outcomes for the Gathering Place. Existing strengths, weaknesses, threats and opportunities were identified to inform recommendations going forward.

### **Strengths and Existing Resources**

Strengths are associated with strong relationships already in place between Aboriginal community-controlled and mainstream service providers in the Central Hume catchment (Alpine, Benalla, Mansfield, Wangaratta local government areas).

DIN members and service providers also agree about the needs, interests and potential outcomes for establishing a Gathering Place, alongside the requirement for good governance and sustainable operations going forward.

DIN members express a strong pride in Aboriginal identity and culture, and a determination to foster pride in cultural identity with youth, to better connect and support community members' links to services, and to educate service providers, and the broader community about Aboriginal people.

<sup>1</sup> Koolin Balit is the Victorian Government's strategic directions for Aboriginal health over the next 10 years. It commits the health system to improve the length and quality of life of Aboriginal people in Victoria by 2022.

<sup>2</sup> Victorian Local Aboriginal Networks Five Year Plan 2016-2020, Aboriginal Victoria. LANs bring local Aboriginal people together to set priorities, develop community plans, improve social cohesion and to empower Aboriginal Victorians to participate in civic and community life <http://www.vic.gov.au/aboriginalvictoria/community-engagement/local-aboriginal-networks.html>

There is a strong and shared aspiration to establish a dedicated space that celebrates and strengthens culture, while providing a practical one-stop-shop for community members and service providers to meet, in the interests of the better health, education and wellbeing of Aboriginal people.

### **Weaknesses and Threats**

---

Threats are largely associated with insufficient **local** human resources for planning, leadership, governance and operations of a Gathering Place going forward.

There is an immediate need for core investment into planning and development, including a designated Co-ordinator role, and succession for future local leaders.

Planning and succession needs to focus on operations for a Gathering Place that reflect a holistic view of individual, family and community health from birth through to aged care, including social determinants of health, social and emotional well-being.

A recent review of 13 Gathering Places in Victoria completed for the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) by Melbourne University highlights the positive impact Gathering Places can play in the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples who participate in their programs and attend their venues. The review also notes the importance of investment in core base-line and operational funding to programs that enable a strong community-controlled 'safe place' from which community members and partners can operate.

Currently there is a strong reliance and focus on the DIN to drive a Gathering Place forward. Without a dedicated investment into a Co-ordinator role and capacity building effort, this initiative is unlikely to realise results for community members in a satisfactory timeframe.

### **Opportunities**

---

Opportunities exist to provide a **clearly identified Aboriginal space** in Wangaratta.

This space could address current service gaps linked to vulnerable community members, including youth, out-of-home care children and foster families, young parents, Elders, and people with disability.

A culturally grounded **one-stop-shop** Gathering Place for community members would support increased levels of social and emotional health and well-being, while providing practical links between community members and all services.

If a Gathering Place was established, primary functions would be to:

- ✪ assist vulnerable & other community members with stronger links to existing services
- ✪ increase information sharing with service providers and community members
- ✪ educate service providers about cultural safety in service provision.

This is the strongest role and opportunity for a Wangaratta based Gathering Place for the Central Hume catchment. These functions were well supported in consultations, and in a review of policy and program directions at all levels of government.



*Koolin Balit Aboriginal  
Community Support  
Worker for Central Hume  
and partners*

## **Is a Gathering Place in Wangaratta needed, viable and sustainable?**

### **Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations**

While there are two Aboriginal community controlled organisations (ACCO and ACCHO) based in Albury/Wodonga, they agree servicing Wangaratta and more broadly Central Hume based Aboriginal people is challenging. Both agree that collaboration between them, the Dirrawarra Indigenous Network, and relevant other stakeholders and service providers is preferable and likely to be more effective in increasing engagement with services.

There are gaps in service delivery to Aboriginal people in the Central Hume catchment, particularly those identified in consultations as 'vulnerable' i.e. "*falling through the cracks*".

The Murray Primary Health Network recently provided Commonwealth Government funding to improve Aboriginal Health outcomes (chronic health conditions and improved access to mainstream primary care services) to a Consortium that includes these two organisations.

### **Collaboration across sectors**

Collaboration with these and other locally based service providers, not only in health, but education, employment, sports and recreation, aged care, justice, youth, and disability is recommended as critical to the work of a Gathering Place in Wangaratta.

The importance of a holistic approach to service provision for Aboriginal families is increasingly relevant to ensure the best outcomes for Aboriginal children and young people evidenced by a 68.5% growth of school enrolments from 2010 to 2016 across Central Hume

Reference: <https://www.data.vic.gov.au/data/dataset/government-school-atsi-enrolments-by-lga-august-2010-2013> Data Vic website.

The community health service in Wangaratta – Gateway Health, saw 138 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients in 2016 – 2017.

Collaboration across sectors includes outreach to connected Central Hume town centres and communities in the Benalla, Mansfield and Alpine local government areas, where there is both need and opportunity for Gathering Place community engagement activities.

### **A hub to link communities**

Central to increased engagement and addressing disadvantage for Aboriginal people is a well-governed, respected, clearly identified Aboriginal led 'Gathering Place - hub' as a connecting base for Wangaratta and linked communities. There is a high level of distress amongst community members in relation to feeling **culturally isolated** and **under-valued**.



*Our young people*

### **Strengthening culture and identity**

While there has been significant progress through activities such as Wangaratta Council raising the flags, Welcomes to Country, and a highly successful Aboriginal Youth Awards event, there is an overwhelming feeling of not having a place to connect that celebrates, affirms and strengthens culture and identity, particularly with young people.

This has had significant negative impact on the wellbeing of Elders, families, and youth where improved physical, social and emotional health and well-being are connected to cultural strengthening - noted in consultations, and well evidenced in the literature.

A Gathering Place could address these gaps effectively while raising the level of collaboration, knowledge, cultural safety and cultural competence in the broader service community. A report commissioned by the Victorian Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) on Victoria's Gathering Places in relation to Koolin Balit priorities provides further evidence of the efficacy of Gathering Places in increasing the levels of social and emotional well-being, and reducing social and cultural isolation amongst community members.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Health and wellbeing outcomes of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander gathering place model in Victoria: A place for inclusion, connection and empowerment Final report, Melbourne University 2017

## Gathering Place – primary purpose

The primary purpose of effective Gathering Places is to provide a safe, culturally affirming place and activities through which community members of all ages (taking a life cycle approach) can:

- Connect and strengthen cultural identity
- Empower individuals, families and communities in decision-making across a range of health, education, well-being and general life areas
- Raise levels of cultural safety and cultural competence in service provision including through education of service providers, and advocacy with clients
- Drive holistic approaches to health and wellbeing with services i.e. assist in understanding Aboriginal definitions and needs in relation to health and wellbeing
- Streamline connections and pathways to other services, in a co-ordinated, case management style approach i.e. Gathering Places can assist in reducing duplication, *'service users fatigue and absence'*, particularly for the aged and individuals with multi-faceted needs
- Provide alternative approaches to engagement with vulnerable community members, such as youth, people with disability, the aged, and those experiencing mental health challenges
- Deliver stand-alone programs, or in partnership with shared values ACCOs, mainstream providers, and volunteers for example L to P for Aboriginal drivers, Landcare, Food Security/Food Bank based at a Gathering Place.



A visual model of *Our Own Place* – the DIN Gathering Place in Wangaratta

### Place based approach

A one-stop-shop Gathering Place could not only assist to *identify those in need*, but also with how services, relationships, social and cultural activities can be provided in a culturally safe, streamlined manner. This type of activity is best driven by local people with local connections using a **place-based approach for planning and follow-through**. This is how a Gathering Place team could influence systemic change through relationship building, data gathering, monitoring and advocacy with community members, and between services.



*Proud and Deadly Awards in Wangaratta*

### Case Study – Vulnerable Community Members’ Service Fatigue and Absence

‘Aunty Lee’ needs her eyes and hearing checked regularly, she has diabetes, and must have regular visits to her GP. She needs her medication monitored as she struggles with how much she takes and when.

She wants to return to her Country for a visit before she is physically unable to do so. She wants to partake in cultural activities with other Elders, but nothing happens in community to facilitate that.

She struggles with increasing aggressive behaviour from her grandson who is in her care at 15 years of age. She wants to keep him at home, but she needs rest and help. She worries about her daughter, grandson’s mother, who is doing okay but is struggling with other small children. She is fearful of asking for help as it may lead to her grandson being removed from her care.

This is an example of the complex and multi-faceted needs that often present for Aboriginal community members. They require culturally sensitive, safe, well-coordinated, streamlined, and timely responses. They usually require an ‘anchor person’ who is trusted by the community member to assist coordination of services.



*Partnerships – community and service providers*

## Recommendations

The following recommendations have been designed to support a viable and sustainable Gathering Place establishment for Wangaratta through a **staged approach** to capacity building for community leaders, business planning and investment.

### Recommendation One

It is recommended that the Dirrawarra Indigenous Network (DIN) adopt the Gathering Place Feasibility Study Report. Particularly, as a guide to *feasible* and *community endorsed activities* for a Gathering Place in Wangaratta.

### Recommendation Two

It is recommended that the DIN, with its current auspice for this project, the Central Hume Primary Care Partnership (currently 17 organisations), continue to work as partners to implement Feasibility Study recommendations through a project referred to as:

**Transition to Governance – Capacity Building for a Gathering Place in Wangaratta.**

### Recommendation Three

It is recommended that the Victorian Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) is approached as the lead or champion department, to contribute *with relevant others* such as the Department of Justice, Department of Education and Training and the Rural City of Wangaratta. This would include a request for a **one-off grant** to the Department of Health and Human Services and relevant other investors for **two years of funding** to establish the Gathering Place through a **Transition to Governance - Capacity Building Project**, including developing a Business Plan.

The proposal would be for the first two years of funding (with the option of an additional year) for Gathering Place positions and on-costs for an interim operational space with specific requirements (*included in the full Report*) for capacity building and business planning.

### Recommendation Four

It is recommended that a **Gathering Place Alliance and Partnerships Protocol** is established and implemented using a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) framework to guide collaboration, including where shared investment is possible. The aim being to establish and run a *viable, sustainable and successful* Gathering Place in Wangaratta that reflects community aspirations in the DIN Community Plan and Feasibility Report advice.

### Recommendation Five

It is recommended that the Dirrawarra Indigenous Network (DIN) seeks support from Aboriginal Victoria – Department of Premier and Cabinet to establish governance training for DIN and other community members with an interest in establishing a Gathering Place for Wangaratta as a **not-for-profit organisation**, and potentially over time as a charity (*able to attract donations*).

### Recommendation Six

It is recommended that the primary function of a Gathering Place in Wangaratta is to provide a connection base from which community members, agencies and relevant others can:

- make stronger linkages and connections with community members to Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCO) and mainstream services (*better co-ordination*)
- improve the **inclusion and cultural safety** of Aboriginal people within all services and the general life of the community, eg. use of local government sports & recreation facilities and programs
- strengthen the identity and well-being of Aboriginal community members, particularly vulnerable members
- assist in the cultural safety education, cultural protocol and cultural auditing work with key service providers.