Dirrawarra Indigenous Network

Community Plan
2017 – 2022
Message from Uncle Freddie Dowling

Firstly, I want to thank all of Dirrawarra Indigenous Network participants who have given their support to help make Dirrawarra what it is meant to be … unity and togetherness … coupled with understanding, it is a presence which is lacking in today’s society.

This is why it is so important to have ‘a place of our own’ so that we can build on our strengths to achieve a hub where Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal people can come together and share their common love and caring for each other’s culture and awareness.

Some people say that “the past is the past” and rightly so, however we must never forget our past Elders and community members and their aspirations and achievements … it is their memories which are our driving force.

Pangerang House in Wangaratta is a model of community success but the rooms are too small to accommodate the future number of people which is ever-growing due to public awareness of the need for such a sharing place where people who have the common goal of just wanting to be themselves and in a relaxing environment … Dirrawarra.

In recent years there has been a growing number of real supporters for what we are trying to achieve… a place of our own…a gathering place in Wangaratta where people can meet and bring their community together, a place where all the things like Closing the Gap, Harmony Day, Sorry Day, National Reconciliation Week etc can all be brought together and celebrated under the one roof by people with a common goal.

‘A place of our own’ is a necessity for Dirrawarra to thrive and grow, and give a sense of belonging to the participants, Wangaratta and the whole community to be proud of in their city, and an incentive to be even bigger and better.

Freddie Dowling
Bpangerang Elder
Acknowledgements and Disclaimers

**Country.** The Dirrawarra Indigenous Network acknowledges the Bpangerang People as the Traditional Owners of the land on which it operates and pays respect to their Ancestors and to Elders, past and present.

**Inclusiveness.** Use of the word ‘Aboriginal’ throughout this document refers to people of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander decent.

**Warning to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People.** This document may contain the names and images of people who have passed away.

**Document Review.** This Community Plan is a dynamic document that will be reviewed and refreshed every 2 years. Version 1 of this document was first created in 2017. It may contain terminology from this period including previous names of State Government Departments or agencies. Every effort will be made to update the terminology when the document is reviewed.

**Front Cover Artwork.**
This artwork was created by Safina Stewart, a long term participant of LANs in the Eastern suburbs of Melbourne. Safina is of Aboriginal (Wuthithi country) and Torres Strait Islander (Mabuiag Island) descent and her artwork has been adopted as the state-wide branding of all 39 LANs in Victoria. The gum leaves are a symbol of 'Welcome' and they remind us that we have been entrusted with the responsibility to care for all creation. The fluid waterways represent the creeks, streams and rivers that support all life, while the abundant lush environment is captured in the green hues. The pathways of footprints honour those who walk with heart attitudes of respect, caring and sharing. The green tones highlight the desire of our Indigenous community to aspire to greater wholeness, vitality and health. The campfire scene represents the Elders and community members of the Local Aboriginal Networks who gather to represent and strengthen our Indigenous community.
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**Introduction**

Local Aboriginal Networks (LANs) – formerly known as Local Indigenous Networks were established in Victoria from 2008 by Aboriginal Victoria to enable and support local Aboriginal communities to set local priorities and problem solve to develop local solutions; improve social cohesion and strengthen relationships and to empower Aboriginal people to participate in civic and community life.

LANs are volunteer based, non-incorporated community action groups made up of local Aboriginal people who come together regularly to address local issues that are important to them through the implementation of a Community Plan. LANs do not represent, nor do they undertake Traditional Owner (TO) business, which includes management and protection of Aboriginal cultural heritage.

There are 39 LANs operating within Victoria and in addition to addressing local issues, they also form part of state government’s Aboriginal community engagement mechanism as set out in the *Victorian Aboriginal Affairs Framework 2013-2018*. Through these initiatives LANs are directly contributing to ‘Closing the Gap’ and ‘Self Determination’ initiatives.

The Wangaratta community established a LAN in 2008, which is known locally as the **Dirrawarra Indigenous Network (DIN)**. Soon after being established, the DIN identified local priorities. “A place of our own” was identified as the highest priority by the DIN. This plan also sets additional priorities over the next 5 years.

![Artist's Impression of the DIN's Gathering Place](image-url)
Our Region

Home to 28,324 people, Wangaratta is located 235 km north east of Melbourne. Wangaratta gets its name from the Bpangerang language – Wanga (long neck) Ratta (cormorant).

The Rural City of Wangaratta encompasses the Alpine Valleys of the King and lower Ovens Rivers. The Ovens and King rivers are culturally significant to the local Bpangerang people who called the rivers ‘Torryong’ (The Ovens River) and ‘Poodumbia’ (The King River).

Although Dirrawarra is based in Wangaratta, we welcome participation of any Aboriginal person from other surrounding Local Government Areas including Indigo, Alpine, Mansfield, Benalla and Moira.

Other Local Aboriginal Networks. In the Hume Region are four other LANs that are working to address their own priorities and like us, they are looking for opportunities to come together and share experiences which may help us to achieve our goals. These other Networks include:

- Wodonga Aboriginal Network
- Gadhaba Local Indigenous Network (based in Mansfield Shire)
- Seymour Local Aboriginal Network (based in Mitchell Shire), and
- Shepparton Local Aboriginal Network
**Our Challenges**

There are no Aboriginal specific organisations or services in Wangaratta to meet the growing needs of the community. The closest Aboriginal services are located in Wodonga (75 km) or Shepparton (98 km).

There is general agreement within the Aboriginal community that the population data issued by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) significantly underestimates the Aboriginal population living in Wangaratta. The 2016 data reports an Aboriginal population of 385, whereas anecdotal evidence suggests a much higher population at least double the official estimate. Allocation of funds based on population data to support local programs or projects risks under resourcing due to this anomaly.

Aboriginal leaders, Elders and workers in our community are in high demand and often represent at community events and on numerous Committees, Working Groups and Forums in addition to performing their primary roles and also meeting family and other commitments. These competing interests impact considerably on the capacity of volunteers to remain engaged and to actively lead community projects and activities. To ensure a sustainable future we must engage with our young people.
Our Vision

Our vision of “united, we are proud and strong” is underpinned by our Core Values, Focus Areas and our Strategic Objectives.

These are the building blocks of our ‘Our Own Place’.
Our Core Values

Underpinning our vision of “united, we are proud and strong” are the core values that hold us together and keep us going:

- Unity
- Pride
- Strength
- Respect

Unity – Dirrawarra is a Bpangerang word that means ‘together’ or ‘united’ and this is the traditional Aboriginal name we have adopted because it reflects the way we operate, and how we strive to unite our community through partnerships.

Pride – We will show our pride in our culture by showcasing it at every opportunity and sharing it with the whole community and our partner agencies. We are proud of who we are and what we have achieved.

Strength – We recognise that our strength as a network and as a community comes from within ourselves and from each other. We will support each other and this will give us the strength we need.

Respect – We will always show respect when dealing with each other, our partners and the public. We will always respect cultural protocols and we will strive to gain the respect of everyone that Dirrawarra comes into contact with.
Our Focus Areas

These focus areas will allow us to prioritise our network activities to ensure we stay on track to achieving our objectives and they are all interconnected with ‘Our Own Place’ at the centre:

- A Place Of Our Own
- Continue To Build Our Profile
- Community & Regional Services Coordination
- Educate, Promote & Share Our Local Heritage & Culture
Our Strategic Objectives

We will use these objectives to measure our success - everything we do will be aligned to one or more of these Strategic Objectives:

- Undertake a Project with partner agencies to work on the establishment of a Gathering Place in Wangaratta by 2020.

- Plan and conduct high profile cultural events and activities every year in Wangaratta involving our young people and the broader community.
Collaborate with our partner agencies to support the sharing and promotion of our culture and the coordination of regional services.

2014 Victorian State Government announcement of funding for the Bullawah Cultural Trail
A joint project between Rural City of Wangaratta and the Dirrawarra Indigenous Network
Our Key Partners

The DIN operates as a non-incorporated ‘community volunteer network’ with the support of several key organisations including:

- Gateway Health as primary auspice,
- Central Hume Primary Care Partnership as project auspice, and
- Rural City of Wangaratta as a major partner

**Primary Auspice – Gateway Health.** As the DIN is non-incorporated it needed to identify a willing partner organisation to manage all financial transactions of the Network, including maintaining a bank account for income and expenses. This auspice arrangement has been in place since 2010 and is formalised with an Memorandum of Understanding (MOU).

**Project Auspice – Central Hume Primary Care Partnership.** The DIN’s highest priority is the establishment of a Gathering Place in Wangaratta. This project requires collaboration with multiple agencies and a key agency to auspice the project – Central Hume Primary Care Partnership was identified as the best positioned agency to fulfil this requirement.

**Major Partner – Rural City of Wangaratta.** The support of Local Government, particularly during the implementation phases of projects and initiatives to address priorities identified in this Community Plan is vital to the success of those projects and initiatives. Considerable effort has been applied to developing the relationship between Rural City of Wangaratta and the Dirrawarra Indigenous Network, resulting in successful high profile joint projects, e.g. Bullawah Cultural Trail.
Working Well Together

The DIN recognises the many other partners we have established relationships with and the Aboriginal participants that make up this Network. As a community group, we have established a Terms of Reference that sets out the rules under which we have agreed to operate, meet and do business with each other and our partners.

We have also made an agreement - ‘working well together’. Guided by our core values of Unity, Pride, Strength and Respect, we will always strive to achieve this by remembering our traditional name and what it means:

Dirrawarra = Together or United