



Case study:

Wulgunggo Ngalu



The Wulgunggo Ngalu Learning Place (Wulgunggo Ngalu) is a joint initiative of the Aboriginal community and the Victorian Government under the Victorian Aboriginal Justice Agreement. It opened in 2008 in Yarram, Gippsland.

Wulgunggo Ngalu is a residential learning place, accommodating up to 18 men. The program offers voluntary attendance; however, people may be directed to attend by the courts. Shaun Braybrook ACM, General Manager of Wulgunggo Ngalu, said:

[Wulgunggo Ngalu] is a place that helps Aboriginal men understand what it means to be an Aboriginal today. Through the use of culture we support the men to address their offending behaviours and the effect these behaviours have on them, their families and our communities.

Aboriginal Elders provide leadership and communicate traditional cultural values, in keeping with the name 'Wulgunggo Ngalu', from the local Aboriginal language, Gunai/Kurnai. 'Wulgunggo' means 'which way' and 'Ngalu' means 'together'.

Mr Braybrook said Wulgunggo Ngalu places issues of culture and identity at the centre of its operations and promotes cultural connection at multiple levels,



He noted that Aboriginal values and physical protocols are reflected in Wulgunggo Ngalu's environment; for example, its bush location, firepit, dance circle, multiple shared living spaces and accommodation for Elders and visitors. The physical building was designed by an Aboriginal architect to reflect the blue wren, a totem of the local Aboriginal community.

Mr Braybrook explained that all core staff at Wulgunggo Ngalu are Aboriginal men who act as strong role models and '[w]eave into the fabric of [Wulgunggo Ngalu] Koori ways of communicating and doing business'.

The program provides an opportunity to engage in a range of activities, such as education, community work and learning new skills, many of which are directed at increasing cultural knowledge and strengthening identity. These include the Aboriginal Cultural Immersion Program, Koori Art and Design (an on-site TAFE program) and ceremony activities. Mr Braybrook said Wulgunggo Ngalu also includes cultural elements in its other programs wherever possible, such as in its family violence programs.

The vocational and recreational activities at Wulgunggo Ngalu also provide residents with opportunities to interact positively with the local community, such as by performing dance ceremonies at local events.

Uncle Warren Marks, a member of the Stolen Generations and participant of the program, said the program was a turning point in his life.

It was a start of a new journey ... If you let them teach you and listen to what they say ... you realise who you are, where you come from and what you stand for. You know how you got here but how you can fix yourself up and make your family proud.

You come here just as a black fella, I left here as a black fella who had become an elder, somebody who had learnt about his culture as well.

Another participant in the program said.

[Wulgunggo Ngalu] is a special place to finally be able to heal from the life I was so caught up in which was so toxic, the life I thought I would never get out of, the ultimate success I needed in order to grow and change my life forever.

A qualitative evaluation of the program was completed in 2013, and one of its many



foundations for any process of change'.

The program was awarded a prestigious International Corrections and Prisons Association (ICPA) award in October 2010.

Source: Shaun Braybrook ACM, *Correspondence to the RCVMHS, 2020*; [Corrections Victoria, Community Programs](#), [accessed 30 November 2020]; *Wulgunggo Ngalu Learning Place, Final Evaluation Report*, May 2013; [Vimeo, Warren Marks WNLP2019 V2](#), [accessed 18 December 2020].



The Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System has now concluded. If you have any questions about the Commission's work or its website, please contact the Department of Health by emailing MentalHealth@dhhs.vic.gov.au

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