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**DHARRIWAA
ELDERS GROUP**

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Speaker's Annual Report to Dharriwaa Elders Group ("DEG") members for 1 July 2023 – 30 June 2024.

Prepared by General Manager Wendy Spencer.

Members News

In January 2024 the Elders Council lost long term Elders Councillor Violet Morgan. In March 2024 the Elders Council lost its long-term Speaker Clem Dodd. Both Elders are fondly remembered and honoured for their contributions to the organisation.

From 1 July 2023 – December 2023 the following Elders Councillors presided: Speaker: Clem Dodd, Secretary: Virginia Robinson, Treasurer: Rick Townsend, Elders Councillor: Violet Morgan. They were joined by Elders Councillor Elizabeth Peters from 2 August 2023 – 29 September 2023.

During the period DEG's Elders Council had 10 meetings.

The AGM of the Company was postponed from 19 December 2023 and 8 March 2024 due to Covid 19 and Sorry Business until it was held 26 April 2024. During that time Full Members were approached and asked to consider joining the Elders Council.

At the 26 April 2024 AGM the following were elected: Secretary: Virginia Robinson, Treasurer: Ricky Townsend. Elders Councillors: Elizabeth Peters.

A selection of Full Members were approached and then formally invited to fill Elders Council casual vacancies and Sandra Suey Thorne and Elizabeth Williams joined the Elders Council in the meeting of 31 May 2024. At the same meeting Sandra Suey-Thorne was elected Speaker.

The DEG contributed food vouchers for 22 x Walgett funerals during the period and mourned the loss of these people, loved of the community.

Representation

Narran Lakes Co-Management Committee. The Dharriwaa Elders Group had no delegate to this committee during the period.

NSW Aboriginal Cultural Heritage and Arts Association "ACHAA". Clem Dodd represented DEG as a director of ACHAA attending meetings by video from Walgett. Clem attended the ACHAA gathering at Boomali in Sydney in November 2023 with Rick Townsend, Wendy Spencer, Barry Simpson and Zoe Sands. After Clem's passing, Rick Townsend was elected to represent DEG on the ACHAA Board, and attended the ACHAA gathering in May 2024 at Murrook Aboriginal Cultural Centre with Barry Simpson and Zoe Sands.

Lightning Ridge Area Opal Reserve Manager. Wendy Spencer is the gazetted ex-officio representative of the DEG for this committee. The other members of this committee represent opal mining, opal tourism, opal retail, the Lightning Ridge LALC and Lightning Ridge heritage interests and

concerns. During the period management activities were conducted to reduce risk and enable the public to enjoy the reserve. The need for surveys of the Reserve's environmental and ACH assets in order to better manage them is often raised by DEG, as is the long-term aim for the Reserve to provide access to Country for Aboriginal communities of Walgett and Lightning Ridge. During this reporting period DEG made a proposal for the management of Gugurraan Lake so that its high environmental and Aboriginal Cultural Values can be restored.

General Manager's Report

The Objects of Dharriwaa Elders Group continued to be implemented. Increased investment into Yuwaya Ngarrali allowed DEG's staff and activities to expand this year in order to better respond to our community's needs. DEG is continuing to learn how to operate in self-determined ways and holistically - showing government agencies how to support Aboriginal Community-Controlled Organisations like DEG.

DEG is proud that its employment of local Aboriginal people continued to grow in the period. This growth was accompanied by more administrative work, alongside human resources and staffing challenges. In particular, we work to fill executive support and management capability gaps and to obtain staff housing that we have designed with our Yuwaya Ngarrali partners.

DEG continues to support its members to manage local Indigenous Cultural Intellectual Property – a responsibility championed by Founding Members and cultural custodians now passed. DEG networks with similar Aboriginal cultural organisations in its NSW peak body family ACHAA to grow in this undervalued domain. ACHAA is a member of the Coalition of Aboriginal Peak Organisations of NSW and works with other ACCOs to Close the Gap.

The Department of Health's CHSP program supported the provision of Elders Social Support and associated Transport activities. The DEG is actively advocating that its model of holistic social support for the aged is recognised and resourced appropriately. The National Indigenous Australians Agency extended the successful Walgett River Ranger Program until 30 June 2026.

DEG's work this year also included advocating for more supportive and responsive government agency roles and approaches, particularly in response to the high number of Walgett's children and young people interacting with police and the criminal justice system, food and water security crises, housing shortages and water management. The voice of DEG grew its influence, one of the outcomes we choose to measure by our Yuwaya Ngarrali (YN) evaluation processes – see Evaluation and Learning Report 2020 – 2023: <https://dharriwaaeldersgroup.org.au/images/downloads/Yuwaya%20Ngarrali%202020-2023%20learning%20and%20evaluation%20report%20June24.pdf>.

Notable research projects DEG proposed and undertook with YN partners include understanding government procurement of Walgett services, analysing publicly available data re Walgett, designing appropriate supportive housing for Elders, children and young people and for emergencies, and collaborating with Walgett AMS and Aboriginal Legal Service NSW/ACT to establish a new wellbeing service for children and young people. Our YN Food and Water for Life Program with Walgett Aboriginal Medical Service implemented supermarket food choices promotions and supported a growing Walgett Gardeners Network. During the period it designed a Community Freezer program to distribute frozen free meals.

During the period DEG made a number of policy contributions – links listed below. Our Yuwaya Ngarrali research received a mention in the prestigious 1/8/23 Nature journal editorial: <https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-023-02442-7> !

We share highlights of our work during 1 July 2023 – 30 June 2024 in the following pages of this report.



Above: Bingo is a popular Elders' activity started during the period. Other activities included fishing, On Country excursions, hospital visits, regional centre shopping trips, arts & crafts, movies and State Library of NSW ancestor-tracing workshops. During the period we began a review of our service user needs.

Elders' support



Left: In February 2024 Andrea Kelly, the Interim First Nations Aged Care Commissioner visited.

Right: This year DEG bought a second Elders mobility scooter that was loaned to Virginia Robinson in September 2023.





Minister Stephen Kamper announced funds to renovate the Walgett Aquatic Centre in June 2024. DEG was invited to hear the announcement in recognition by Council of DEG's advocacy to NSW and federal ministers regarding the need for a pool in Walgett. *Left and right: Many photos documenting this occasion were taken by all.*



Elders' civic participation



Left: DEG joined WAMS' ceremony in July 2023 for the launch of the Freedom Rides Park. Right: in June 2024 volunteer landscape architect Steve Davies from Communities First Development inspected the work of contractors with DEG's Virginia Robinson and Barry Simpson at the DEG's Memorial Garden project in the Walgett Cemetery. Steve has supported our project for more than 10 years.





Yuwaya Ngarra-li “vision”

Yuwaya Ngarra-li (YN) is a community-led partnership between the Dharriwaa Elders Group (DEG) and the University of NSW.

Associate Professor Ruth McCausland, is the Academic Lead of Yuwaya Ngarra-li. The core Yuwaya Ngarra-li (“YN”) team is based in Walgett and UNSW Sydney.

The purpose of Yuwaya Ngarra-li is for the Dharriwaa Elders Group and UNSW to work in partnership to improve the wellbeing, social, built and physical environment and life pathways of Aboriginal people in Walgett through collaborating with government, philanthropy and community organisations on evidence-based initiatives, research and capacity building, and to evaluate this model of CommUNITY-Led Development as a way of working with other Aboriginal communities.

The DEG has identified the following long-term aims for Yuwaya Ngarra-li in Walgett:

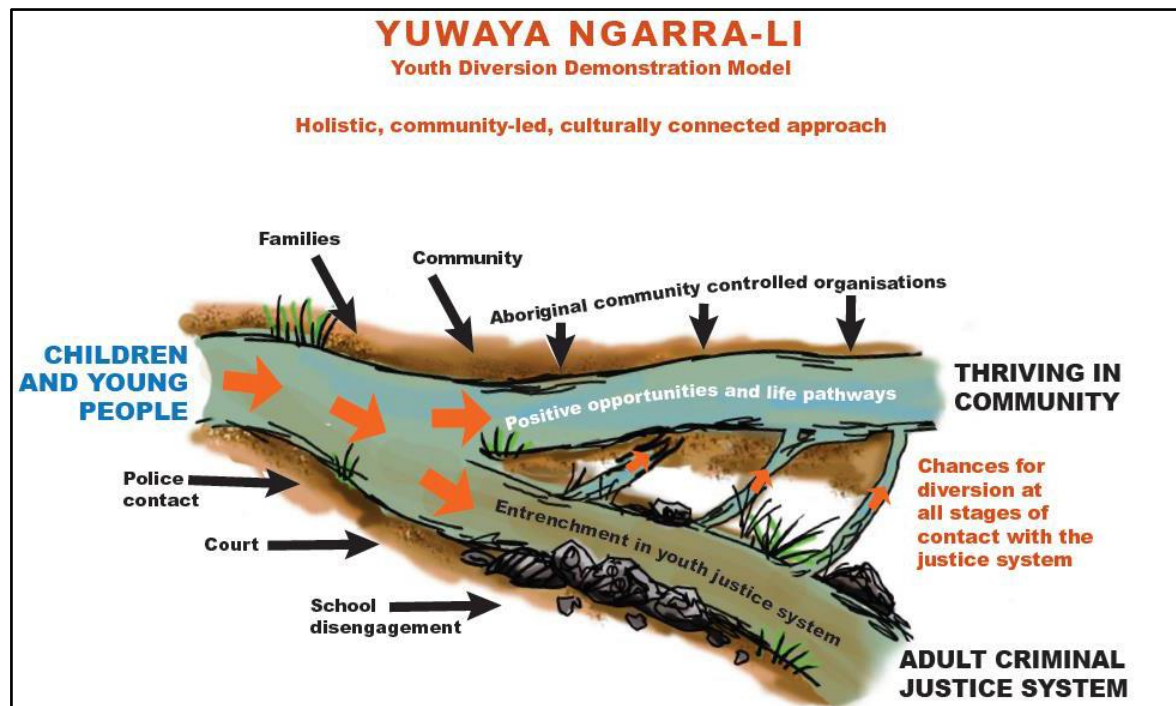
1. Greater Aboriginal community control and capacity
2. Increased numbers of Aboriginal young people in education, training & employment
3. Reduced numbers of Aboriginal people in contact with the criminal justice system
4. Improved social determinants of health and wellbeing amongst Aboriginal people
5. Improved sustainability of energy, water, land and natural resource management
6. Redirection of government funding towards strengths-based, holistic, community-led and sustainable initiatives

The partnership is developing and testing a new model of ‘CommUNITY-Led Development’ which is a place-based approach to breaking the cycle of systemic disadvantage, centring the needs and priorities of Aboriginal people through the leadership of a respected local community-controlled organisation and drawing on the expertise, influence and resources of UNSW.

Our work with the Yuwaya Ngarra- li partnership during the period was grouped over these areas:

Aboriginal Community Leadership and Control, Youth Justice, Water and Country, Research and Evaluation, Dealing with Fines, Housing.





With our Yuwaya Ngarra-li partners we published in February 2024 a paper that explains our learnings from developing and operating the Bulaarr Bagay Warruwi Burranbaligu (Two River Pathway to Change youth service) 2018 – 2013. [Yuwaya Ngarra-li Briefing Paper: Lessons from the Two River Pathway to Change Diversion Model 2018–2023](https://www.unsw.edu.au/content/dam/pdfs/research/2023-10-yssy-burton-clark/2024-02-yn_tworiversbriefingpaper.pdf) (https://www.unsw.edu.au/content/dam/pdfs/research/2023-10-yssy-burton-clark/2024-02-yn_tworiversbriefingpaper.pdf).

The Youth Wellbeing Service that we are building for Walgett in Collaboration with the Walgett Aboriginal Medical Service Ltd (“WAMS”) and Aboriginal Legal Service (NSW/ACT) Limited (“ALS”) is based in [Aboriginal SEWB models](#), which are holistic and position people within their broader social, historical and political context. Children and young people in Walgett are inseparable from, and embedded within, family, Community, Country and Culture, and the Two River Pathway model three-interlinked strategies recognises this.

The Two River Pathway to Change model is a locally-led model informed by the evidence including that by UNSW researchers involved in the Yuwaya Ngarra-li partnership.

Youth Justice

Below: Ash Jacky from the ALS presented DEG’s Speaker Clem Dodd with special artwork re the Collaboration. September 2024.

Since 2018, the DEG through its Yuwaya Ngarra-li partnership with UNSW has developed the [Youth Diversion Demonstration Model Bulaarr Bagay Warruwi Burranba-li-gu](#) (Gamilaraay) (‘Two River Pathway to Change’) model, which has three interlinked strategies:

1. Influence practices and services and improve accountability of responsible agencies to support better outcomes for Aboriginal children and young people (“CYP”)
2. Support engagement and leadership by ACCOs, parents/carers to support better outcomes for Aboriginal CYP
3. Work intensively with Aboriginal CYP in Walgett to increase their rates of belonging, safety and wellbeing and reduce or prevent ongoing contact with the criminal justice system.

To better operate this model we evaluated DEG’s work in this field and reached out to Walgett Aboriginal Medical Service Limited and the Aboriginal Legal Service NSW/ACT Limited to establish the Walgett Wellbeing Collaboration and to start work on designing and implementing a Wellbeing service for children and young people.



Policy and advocacy



Above: DEG's Community Responses lead Vanessa Hickey preparing vouchers from our online Food and Water Appeal for distribution to Walgett households in December 2023.

The direct relief Dharriwaa Elders Group provides for community members experiencing hardship is made possible from our on-line fundraising appeals, and an annual grant of \$10,000 from the Paul Ramsay Foundation. DEG knows that our community's hardships usually have systemic causes, and so our collection of evidence and advocacy efforts are important for influencing and changing government priorities. While direct relief to individuals is important, systemic change is required for long-term building of community and individual wellbeing.

During the period, DEG and Yuwaya Ngarrali partners made the following policy statements and submissions:

- Submission to [NSW Legislative Assembly Committee on Law and Safety Inquiry into Community Safety in Regional and Rural Communities](#), 28 June 2024.
- [Submission to Review of NSW Crown Land Management Act 2016](#), 2 April 2024.
- [Community-led diversion of Indigenous young people from the justice system: The role of government administrative data](#). Rebecca Reeve, Ruth McCausland, Peta MacGillivray (Kalkutungu), Virginia Robinson (Gamilaraay), International Journal of Law, Crime and Justice, Volume 76, 2024, 100650, ISSN 1756-0616
- [Yuwaya Ngarrali Briefing Paper: Lessons from the Two River Pathway to Change Diversion Model 2018 - 2023](#). February 2024.
- [Yuwaya Ngarrali Briefing Paper: Data Linkage](#). February 2024.
- [Productivity Commission Inquiry into the National Water Initiative](#). Submission from Dharriwaa Elders Group Walgett 16 February 2024.
- Our work with Yuwaya Ngarrali partners and Walgett Aboriginal Medical Service was presented for COP28 by Health Policy Watch ["From Australia to Bangladesh and Beyond: Mobilizing Local Communities Is Key to Breaking Down Climate and Health Silos"](#) December 2023.
- [Yuwaya Ngarrali Briefing Paper: Dealing with Fines](#) September 2023.
- Inquiry into the Water Amendment (Restoring our Rivers) 2023 by the Senate Standing Committee on Environment and Communications. [Submission from Dharriwaa Elders Group Walgett 13 October 2023](#)
- Submission: [Youth Justice and Child Wellbeing Reform Across Australia](#) - to Commissioner, 2023.
- Productivity Commission Review of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap Draft Report. [Submission from Dharriwaa Elders Group Walgett 6 October 2023](#)
- Natural Resources Commission review of the Gwydir Regulated River Water Sharing Plan. [Submission from Dharriwaa Elders Group Walgett 25 September 2023](#)
- [Statement from Dharriwaa Elders Group Walgett for the Sydney Rally to Stop the Narrabri Coal Seam Gas Project](#) 14 September 2023.
- [Australian Government Productivity Commission Murray-Darling Basin Plan: Implementation Review 2023](#). Submission by Dharriwaa Elders Group 11 August 2023.
- Our work to measure food and water security in Walgett [was mentioned in the editorial of the prestigious Nature journal 1 August 2023!](#)
- [Dharriwaa Elders Group letter to Walgett Shire Council](#) tabled and read at Council meeting 31 July 2023 re Walgett Pool closure.
- [Dharriwaa Elders Group and Walgett Aboriginal Medical Service Statement regarding high levels of homelessness in Walgett 13 July 2023](#).



Left: In January 2024, Stephen Ross Alcohol and other Drugs Counsellor and Sarah Ellison – Mental Health Counsellor, began work at WAMS. They are important supporters of the Dealing with Fines program and are seen here with DEG's Zoe Sands.

During the period we built Dharriwaa Elders Group's Dealing with Fines program, with the help of Yuwaya Ngarrali coach Peta MacGillivray.

Vital partners were the Aboriginal Legal Service NSW/ACT who collaborated with Dharriwaa Elders Group to provide a fines legal service which DEG team supported clients to benefit from. This achieved many fines write-offs. Legal Aid NSW also assisted DEG with its interactions with Revenue NSW by providing DEG staff with training and other supports in the maintenance of DEG's Work Development Order status. DEG's close relationship with WAMS also benefits this program because participation in an AOD or mental health care plan is a good way to reduce fine debt. The Yuwaya Ngarrali Briefing Paper: Dealing with Fines, September 2023, describes our program.

<https://dharriwaaeldersgroup.org.au/images/downloads/YNFinesBriefingPaperSept23.pdf>.

Dealing with Fines



Throughout the period, our Yuwaya Ngarrali collaborator, architect Samantha Rich, worked on different projects for DEG, and visited regularly (seen at left in February 2024). In particular she developed the plans for a cluster of Elders units for a funding submission made to Dept Health and Ageing in January 2024. Unfortunately our submission was not successful, however DEG is determined to eventually build the housing designed from Samantha's workshops with Elders. Other work during the period included supporting students to develop a brief for the Walgett High School to enhance their Wellbeing Room, scoping properties for DEG's Youth Wellbeing Service, and planning and making a submission for 2 x DEG staff houses. For more information see the Yuwaya Ngarrali Briefing Paper on Walgett's Housing Need

https://dharriwaaeldersgroup.org.au/images/downloads/YN_Housing_Briefing_Paper.pdf.

Housing



Above: NSWALC conducted a workshop re the Voice in July 2023. Roy Ah See, Geoff



Above: Historian Michael Bennett continued our Walgett ACCO history project during the period.

DEG aims to eventually see services well-designed to meet the needs of the Walgett Aboriginal community delivered well by place-based Aboriginal Community-Controlled Organisations. To bring this aspiration to reality we work to support our organisations' capabilities. We did this during the period by developing training resources, bringing in management, planning, coaching and psycho-social supports, and by working with sister organisations in ACHAA to build the resources and capabilities of the sector. We also work to improve the ways governments procure services and work with us – including by looking at how govts invest in Walgett and proving new service models that actually work.

Building our Aboriginal Community-Controlled sector



Left: While in Sydney DEG inspected modular homes on display November 2023. Samantha Rich organized the visit so that DEG could consider transporting homes in to Walgett for future opportunities.

Right: DEG attended the Boomali ACHAA Gathering in November 2023, and the 2023 Imagine Awards in which ACHAA gives two awards for Aboriginal Curator and Lifetime Achievement Award.





Left: Alicia Dunning, a new Yuwaya Ngarra-li colleague from The George Institute for Global Health working with us on the Food and Water for Life project, first visited Walgett in August 2023. Alicia has a background as a dietician, and brings great skills and knowledge that can improve food and water security and quality in Walgett. Pictured below is Alicia with Food and Water for Life Project Officer Trish Tonkin. Right: With Alicia online, we made a presentation re our drinking water work to a meeting of the Australian Water Association in October



Yuwaya Ngarrali supports



During the period DEG went through a big process of growth, loss and renewal. We lost long term directors Clem Dodd and Violet Morgan, and new Officebearers Sandra Suey-Thorne and Secretary Elizabeth Williams joined the Elders Council. Our UNSW Yuwaya Ngarrali staff were a great support during this period, as ever. Left: In June 2024, UNSW Yuwaya Ngarra-li colleague Peta MacGillivray visited Walgett and spent time with new Elders Council members Sandra Suey-Thorne and Elizabeth Williams and DEG staff Loretta Weatherall and Vanessa Hickey, as part of an extensive briefing and on-boarding of DEG's new leadership. Below centre: May Miller-Dawkins facilitates our team in Sydney and Walgett, UNSW and DEG with our weekly team co-ordination. She is seen here with UNSW-Yuwaya Ngarrali Lead Ruth McCausland. Below right: Yuwaya Ngarrali developed a new pilot program with NSW Customer Service – Michael Mara and colleagues. Stay tuned.






Above left: DEG's Ty Hickey with WAMS' Devanshi Gala setting up a Meal of the Month in the Walgett IGA. Above centre: DEG's Rick Townsend officially launched DEG's gali in December 2023 – Walgett's first reverse osmosis chilled drinking water. WAMS, council, police, Mission Australia and the Walgett Newsagency joined us.

DEG and WAMS are working together with Yuwaya Ngarrali partners in the George Institute for Global Health to initiate community programs that will improve Walgett's food and water security. Backed by research led by DEG and WAMS, we worked this year to bring acceptable quality drinking water to Walgett, locally-produced foods in community

Food & Water 4 Life - WAMS and DEG

gardens and better access to healthier food choices. The Healthy Supermarket program undertook an survey of the Walgett IGA supermarket to determine which items had higher nutritional content so we could promote them as "Healthy Choices". IGA manager Paresh Patel is always supportive and has been doing what it takes to improve his company's offerings of affordable food. Right: IGA's Paresh Patel with WAMS' Melissa Nathan Annie Deane and Devanshi Gala discussing the findings of the supermarket audit.

Food & Water 4 Life
Meal of the Month


Fish Casserole
Serves 6 people

INGREDIENTS

- 500g firm fish fillets, cut into large pieces
- 2 x tablespoons olive oil
- 2 tablespoons curry powder
- 4 garlic cloves, crushed
- 1 x leek, finely chopped
- 1 x onion, finely chopped
- 1 x carrot, finely chopped
- 2 x 400g cans crushed tomatoes
- 1 x 400g can cannellini
- 1 medium carrot, diced
- 1 cup frozen peas
- 1 x chicken stock cube, crumbled
- 1 x lemon
- Salt and Pepper to taste

METHOD

- Add olive oil to a large saucepan and place over medium heat. Add onion, leek and carrot and cook stirring for 5 minutes. Add garlic and curry powder and cook for 1 min.
- Add tomatoes, stock cubes, cannellini beans, and water to the vegetable mixture in the pan. Bring to a boil, then reduce heat to medium-low and simmer for 10 minutes or until the mixture thickens slightly.
- Add the fish and peas to the pan and simmer for 5 minutes until the fish is cooked through.
- Season with salt, pepper and a squeeze of lemon juice.
- Serve and enjoy!





Left: Everyone knows that a key way to improve river health is to remove weirs that block flows. Water NSW is planning to raise the Gunidgera Weir on the Ngamaay River at Wee Waa, to push more water to cotton irrigators down the Pian and Gunidgera Creeks. We visited the site in June 2024. DEG has written to NSW Water Minister about this matter, and the REF is being rewritten .

Water learning and advocacy



Above: This is how we develop a position together, and learn about issues that affect us in Walgett. Here we are discussing and learning about the latest water policy in September 2023 with Bill Johnson - DEG's Water Co-ordinator.



Left: Bill Johnson, water lawyer Nadja Zimmerman, DEG's Rick Townsend and Brenda McBride, June 2024. Right: Bloomberg News researched their story "The Big Take" with DEG in October 2023.
<https://www.bloomberg.com/graphics/2023-australia-water-trade-drought/>





Left: Another water learning and policy development workshop in February 2024. Feb 24. Right: DEG was visited by the MDBA and DCEW December 2023. Left: Ranger team was shown the seed collection activity of the Mildura River Ranger team.



Caring for Country



Left: DEG visited the Nari Nari Elders River Ranger team in Hay in March '24. Right: DEG visited the First Peoples of the Millewa Mallee AC River Ranger team in Mildura also in March '24. It was useful to learn of the activities of the other River Ranger projects, who both benefit from their organisations owning Country – a benefit DEG is working to realize.



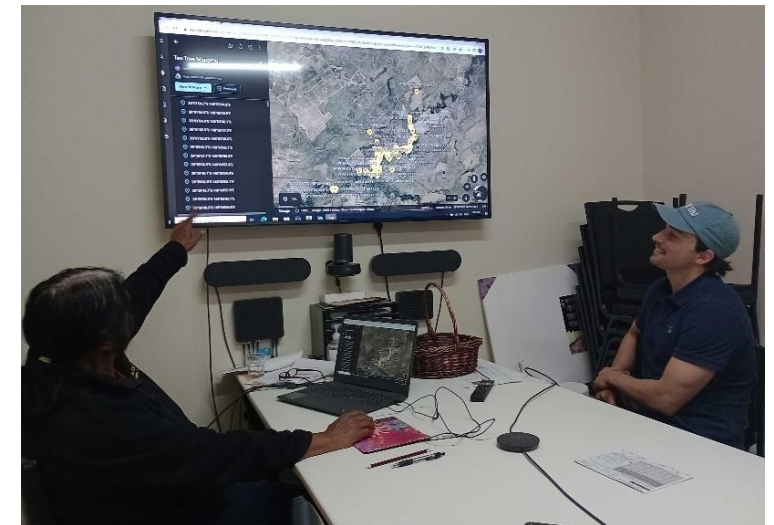


In November 23 Yuwaya Ngarrali collaborator – groundwater expert Assoc. Professor Martin Anderson continued training the team in their water quality monitoring work. During the period the team began publishing their regular water quality reports – providing information never available before – both for the community and water managers.

Right: In August 2023 the ranger team with Uncle Clem Dodd met with the NSW Heritage Aboriginal Heritage Assessments team to further DEG projects to remove weirs in the Narran River and progress Aboriginal Place gazettals.



Cultural values maintenance – the River Ranger Project



Above left: DEG Rangers were contracted to plan native seedlings in DEG's Walgett Cemetery Memorial garden in June 2024. They are seen here with Stephen Dennis from DEG's Dealing with Fines team. Above centre: NSW DPE's Eren Turak gave the Ranger team access to an app he developed. Above right: NSW DPIE's Environmental Water Manager Matthew Miles commissioned the Ranger team to map tea tree on the Baawan River – which allowed them to purchase a dinghy.



Left: DEG convened a meeting in December 2023 to discuss how threats to river health can be mitigated over summer, with NSW fisheries and NSW environmental Water managers. Right: DEG alerted agencies and the general public on our socials, to blue green algae in the Walgett rivers in September 2023.



Cultural values maintenance – working for healthy rivers and access to rivers



In November 2023 DEG convened a celebration to mark the historic re-opening of the roads leading to the Baawan at the Walgett weir, which we finally achieved with the help of Water NSW. See full story: <https://dharriwaaeldersgroup.org.au/index.php/yuwayangarrali/caring-for-country/celebration>



Above: An important process in our Yuwaya Ngarrali work is when our UNSW partners come back to DEG with findings and we work together to determine our next steps. This is a photo of one meeting – with our YN team members on the screen and in person (Samantha Rich and Alicia Dunning in this case in July 2023).

The 2020-2023 Yuwaya Ngarrali Evaluation and Learning Report was published in June 2024. (<https://www.unsw.edu.au/content/dam/pdfs/research/2024-02-yn/2024-06-yuwaya-ngarra-li-evaluation-report-2020-2023.pdf>).

The report summarises the outcomes and lessons from the community-led partnership, including the Two River Pathway to Change model's focus on reducing Aboriginal children and young people's contact with the criminal justice system. The evaluation identified 101 outcomes the TRP contributed, including a significant decrease to 7.8% of Walgett Aboriginal CYP appearing in the local Children's Court, and direct assistance to 144 Aboriginal community members around criminal justice-related matters, including intensive support of 17 young people.

Evaluating and understanding our work



Left: DEG's Loretta Weatherall and Zoe Sands attended the Reintegration Puzzle Conference in Sydney in June 2023 with UNSW Yuwaya Ngarrali colleagues (L-R) Samantha Rich, Ashley Shepherd, Ruth McCausland, Rebecca Reeve and Peta MacGillivray. The conference focuses on best practice support for reintegrating people back into the community after release from custody, and our team heard many great presentations that can inform our work in Walgett. Attending gatherings with other organisations who do similar work is an important way for us to measure the approaches and outcomes of our work.



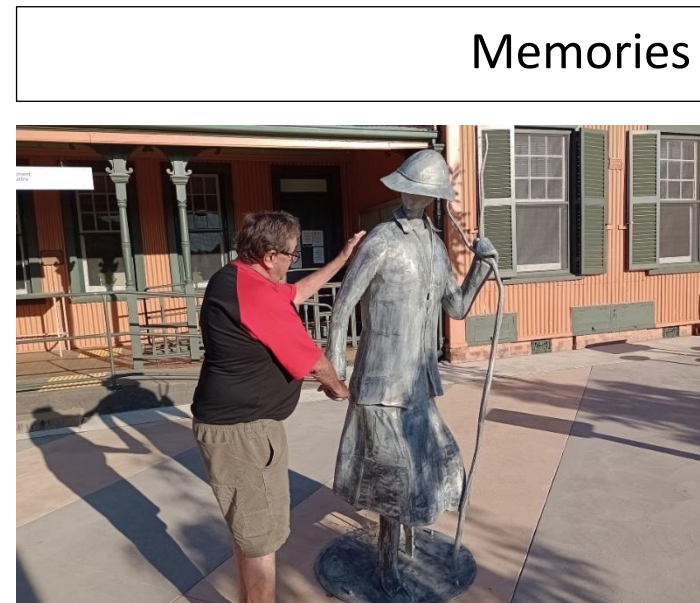
Above: DEG and UNSW Yuwaya Ngarrali partnership staff attended the Change Fest in Mildura in March 2024. We learnt of the work of other place-based organisations which allowed us to realise where our work sits in relation to these efforts – and we discovered it sits very well! While there we took an opportunity to reflect on our learnings during the conference and progress plans for the different streams of our work – with our valued process support May Miller Dawkins. We were invited to share with the delegates this reflection and planning process, and made two other presentations about our work to conference sessions.



Left: the Ranger team visited the Nari Nari and Millewa Mallee FPAC River Ranger Groups in March 2024. Left: before a meeting in Hay beside the Murrumbidgee. Right: The ranger team Ernie Sands, Aaron Murray, Zoe Sands, Latia Sands-Dennis, Auntie Brenda McBride with DEG's Bow Simpson and Elders Councillor Ricky Townsend at a Murray River weir.



Below left: Lewis Beale and Elders Transport Officer Bow Simpson often check out the rivers during breaks in the daily Elders Transport routines. They are seen here at the Baawan Weir. Below middle and right: Elders Transport Officer Bow Simpson is much loved for the laughs he gives us and so we share here his interactions with sculptures that were just waiting for him – in front of the Hay town hall in March 2024.



Memories



Left: during the period Bow and Dane Simpson competed in the Ch.10 celebrity Edition of the Amazing Race, nominating DEG as their charity.

Right: DEG's NAIDOC week offering was an ancestors' workshop with Michael Bennett in July 2023.



Memories



Left: In November 2023 directors and staff met with UNSW and funding partners in Sydney. It is always good to meet face to face.

Right: Historian Michael Bennett is working with us on our history of Walgett ACCOs and their proud legacy and service delivery approaches. We gifted him a Walgett dhing.gaa (meats) DEG uniform.



Dharriwaa Elders Group sustainability and supporters

Dharriwaa Elders Group (an Aboriginal Walgett community cultural organization of 25 years standing) expanded its staff and capabilities during the period. Staff during parts or all of this financial year were Vanessa Hickey, Peter Wright, Wendy Spencer, Clem Dodd, Virginia Robinson, Rick Townsend, Brenda McBride, Lily Johnson, Kim Sullivan, Bow Simpson, Zoe Sands, Jack Mayes, Stephen Dennis, Patricia Tonkin, Craig Vaughan, Ernest Sands, Latia Sands-Dennis, Aaron Murray, Loretta Weatherall, Tyrin Hickey, Babu Nagarkoti, Amanda Hunt and Norma Kennedy. Valued service suppliers included Environmental Defenders Office, Slattery and Johnson, Danett and Associates, Walumarra Studio, Nook Studios, Tech Exe.

The wellbeing of members and safety of staff remains our highest priority. The Employee Assistance Program provided by Dr Elizabeth McEntyre has been essential. The provision of a safe meeting place with harmony amongst Elders and their visitors has become an increasing challenge in our troubled community.

DEG directors are determined to develop DEG's fundraising and social enterprises for Walgett's wellbeing and economic and social development. To further this aim, DEG continued to build relationships with the philanthropic sector in order to test and model the ways governments can Close the Gap by procuring services and capability of the Aboriginal Community Controlled Sector.

During the period DEG became more experienced in assessing the value of engaging with government and other agencies, and deepened relationships with stakeholders like Mission Australia, NSW Dept Communities and Justice, NSW Fisheries, NSW Heritage and NSW Water.

The Dharriwaa Elders Group was supported financially or in kind by:

- a. Leading and providing services to the Yuwaya Ngarrali project – DEG's partnership with University of NSW, supported by the Paul Ramsay Foundation
- b. The Commonwealth Government through the CHSP program of the Dept. of Health for Social Support and related Transport
- c. The Commonwealth Government through National Indigenous Australians Agency Indigenous Advancement Strategy (River Rangers)
- d. NSW Dept. Planning and Environment Tea Tree mapping project
- e. Gilbert + Tobin Lawyers, Environmental Defenders Office, Steven Davies and Community First Development, Beca Group, Mullane Foundation
- f. The many donors to the Food and Water Appeal, the Organisational Support Appeal, the Covid-19 related Work and Relief Appeal and general donations.

Staff undertook formal training in First Aid, Safe Food Handling, Cert 3 Conservation and Ecosystem Management, Aboriginal Sites Identification during the period.

