

HIGHWAYS AND BYWAYS

HEALING THE LAND, HEALING OURSELVES, TOGETHER



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and Byways**

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NEWSLETTER



Our longer-term programs are supported by Mary Mackillop Today and the Foundation for Rural and Regional Renewal. We thank them for their support.



FROM THE EXECUTIVE OFFICER

JANE COLLOPY

Highways and Byways is so grateful to all of you for your continuing support! In this edition, we are very happy to announce the successful grant applicants to our 2024 Small Grants Program, *Valuing Community Connections in an Ancient Land*. In all, we are supporting 33 small communities across regional and remote Australia to take action where it's most needed.

We are also very excited about the *Yarck to Yea Walk/Run/Ride* on Saturday 27th July. If you haven't come along in the past, please consider making the trip – it will be a special year for this much loved event, as we mark 80 years of the Missionary Sisters of Service!

Free2b Girls

We continue to be inspired by the work Tani Langoulant and her team are doing in North East Tasmania with the three *Free2b Girls* programs: Free2b Girls (group support), Free2b Time (1:1 support and activities) and Free2 Fly for 18-25 year old women. As we learn more about effective models for supporting young people in our society more generally, the message is finally getting through that we can't just treat everyone equally (ie. the same), we need to treat everyone equitably. This means looking at the person in front of us and asking them what they need to be able to access the same opportunities as everyone else. This doesn't always mean excessive resources are required, but that the right questions need to be asked of the right people (those in front of us) so that resources can be provided that are effective! As a social ecologist, Tani understands the importance of this approach, which is why Free2b Girls is so successful.

This also reflects the approach that the Missionary Sisters of Service took over many years of visiting women, children and men across remote and regional Australia. Lorraine Groves mss actually worked in the same area that Free2b Girls now does. The day after ANZAC day, Tani took some of the Free2b Girls to Hobart for the day to visit Lorraine (see image left, top). Tani wrote later that their visit was a microcosm of the "adaptive, responsive, organic, care-based framework that Highways and Byways provides Free2b girls to work within." She specifically described the feeling of sitting in Lorraine's dining room with the girls; "there is no judgement - just a stream of openness and homely welcome."

Of when this photo was taken, Tani's describes, "I feel a wholeness in that moment... the capturing of a moment in time of generations of women in one single space.... there's wholeness in that... like a circle that's joining up."

Seeds of Connection

Megan Brown brought almost 40 women together for a *Healing and Belonging through Culture* weekend at the Yumba, near Mitchell in late May. The women were in awe of how they felt being at home on Country, and they reveled in the opportunity to connect with each other. Some also knew the Gungarri Elders who came, and were so grateful for the opportunity to connect with them again.

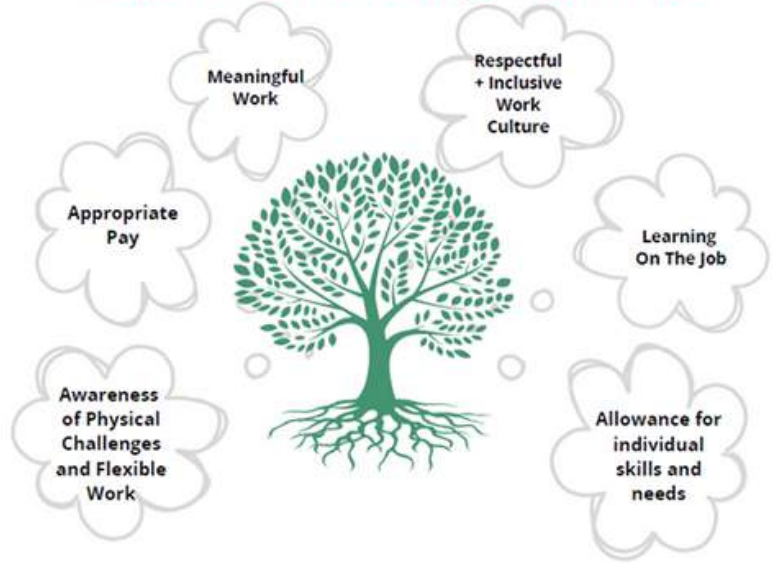
As Megan often reminds us, healing for Indigenous women happens when they gather and share their stories with each other. Doing so on Country really helps them to ground themselves, and become open to connecting with what is in the present moment; Country, the women they are gathered with and the experiences facilitated by Megan and the Gungarri Elders.

The weekend began with a traditional Smoking Ceremony. This was followed by a range of workshops. Smoking sticks were made to take home (see image front page, lower), and beads were threaded together. The Elders were able to also offer modern healing practices they have made their own, including creative journalling, expressive art, creative scrapbooking, Qi Gong, Access Bars and Reiki. This opportunity for Indigenous women to bring their skills back home to Country is really important in deepening their sense of identity in relationship to their Indigenous community.

Restoring Nature and Communities

Todd Dudley's team are working through the cold days of winter to regenerate the Skyline Tier. The North Eastern Bioregional project has been set up in such a way that it supports all parts of the ecology (see image right). The benefits of the program to members of Todd's team were articulated in the University of Tasmania's specific research report in 2022. They include improved physical and mental health, increased self esteem and pride, reduced alcohol intake, improved friendships, social engagement, hope and positivity.

Features of NE Bioregional Model



GREEN THUMBS IN ACTION: GROWING & COOKING TOGETHER

GOONDIWINDI, QLD (BIGAMBUL COUNTRY)

Karra Suhr's students are growing food in the first half of the year that they will use to cook up a storm in the second half of the year. Her approach to teaching agricultural science is practical and one she hopes will equip her students to better understand the environment and learn important life skills.

Karra is a teacher at St Mary's School Goondiwindi, a small Queensland town on the NSW border. Her Year 9 and 10 students, with support from Highways and Byways, have created a small garden (see image right) that can now be used and cared for by all the school's 50 secondary students.

The students assembled two large, raised vegetable beds and then researched what plants they should grow to eat and what plants would enhance the environment. In recent weeks they have harvested herbs, capsicum, spinach, strawberries and are staking their tomatoes, which keep producing fruit. They have also planted flowers, such as lavender, marigolds and salvias, to help maintain the health of the nearby native and other bees.

"Next term I will be teaching Years 7 to 10 students cooking so we are looking now at what we want to plant and then eat. The students are hoping their spring/summer gardens will have plenty of basil and pumpkins," Karra said.

"It's about more than the gardening because the kids have researched what will grow best in this environment and what plants are needed to keep the bees healthy. As part of the agriculture science unit they are also producing a brochure about bees and their importance in our food production."

Karra said a highlight of the vegetable garden is the teamwork that went into the early setup. Students had to assemble the 2.7 metre long veggie beds and work together to maintain the gardens. Most lunchtimes students inspect the garden and report back to Karra if there's a problem, a pest or a budding vegetable.

Students are excited at the prospect of cooking what they grow. And any scraps, will of course, go to the school's chooks

and their manure used to fertilise the garden. It's a circular affair at St Mary's!



READING THE LANDSCAPE INVERELL, NSW (KAMILAROI COUNTRY)

Byron Norman has a big job. He's a coordinator with the Gwymac Landcare team working with farmers around the Inverell area of the New England Tablelands of NSW, encouraging them to consider tending their land differently. It can be challenging as farmers have many issues, including environmental conditions, to manage each day. But there's a lot of good things going on and a field day, supported by Highways and Byways, has led to many farmers trying new methods to improve their soil.

"It can be a bit overwhelming for farmers to sift through all the material that is offered, and they don't have a lot of spare time. So, the field day was the chance to get people together, talk about alternative methods and to hear from people who are now using alternative methods to chemicals and seeing great results," Byron said. "A big focus was asking farmers to look at the landscape of the farm and use biological solutions to problems, rather than chemical solutions which can affect the nutritional value of the food produced."

The day was to celebrate Macintyre Development Unit 2000, a group formed in 1974 by farmers in the district to look at different ways to manage the land. The group had a particular interest in sustainability and caring for the environment, as well as local food. It featured local ingredients in a camp oven lunch to build on the sustainable theme.

Presenters discussed Natural Capital Accounting and how this method of calculating the natural assets and biodiversity of a farm can benefit both the land and the farmers bottom line.

During a paddock walk on "Billabong," a property which won

the prestigious 2011 Black-Woods Shield for Natural Resource Management, the owner shared with others how a change in practice has bought back healthier soils to the farm and he explained strategies to achieve these outcomes.

The field day was not just an opportunity to share information and insights on soil management. Many farmers were also relieved to discover cost-effective measures to address soil issues. "We know the field day had an impact because some farmers came in afterwards wanting the biological preparations recommended," he said.



SEEDS FOR THE FUTURE JIMBOOMBA, QLD (BUNDJALUNG COUNTRY)



Beth Cook has future generations in mind when she wanders around parts of the Jimboomba Community Garden. Not just tomorrow's gardeners, but sustainable fruit and vegetable plants that will be producing food for future generations.

Beth and her team of volunteers, with support from Highways and Byways, have established a seed bank at the community garden in Jimboomba, a town in the Logan district of Queensland. Three large, raised garden beds were established to grow seasonal edible plants that are let go to seed. Seeds are then collected and given away to encourage others to grow their own food. The project kicked off with some information

sessions and initial seed swapping that encouraged lots of community participation and seed 'donations'. Hundreds of seeds, including spinach, beans, lettuce, chilli, pumpkin, chives, marigolds, cosmos and sunflowers, have already been saved from the seed saving program and distributed to people at workshops, festivals and other community gatherings.

The seed bank garden, currently lush with edible crops, is part of the wider community garden which has been situated on the Hills International College site for 11 years.

There's dill, coriander, peas, beans and butter beans growing despite the seasonal challenges facing many home gardeners in winter, such as frosts and low rainfall. Beth said volunteers are gearing up to start planting more winter vegetables and edibles including broccoli, parsley and lettuce. "We have also purchased gardening equipment and identification stamps to keep track of what we harvest and when the seeds need to be used," Beth said.

Importantly, the plants are given away with planting information and suggestions to ensure people are supported in their gardening endeavours. "One of the good things about the seed bank is it gives people an understanding of what grows well in this environment. We also want people to think about food supplies and long-term sustainability," Beth said.

"The seed saving project has opened my eyes to the possibilities of harvesting seeds from the neighbourhood in which you live. Not only are those seeds more adapted to your environment, but they also have more genetic diversity and therefore increased resistance to the diseases that are prevalent in monoculture farming."

MARSHES TELL A STORY

WARREN, NSW (WAYLIWAN COUNTRY)

Some areas of cultural significance around Warren, in north-west NSW, have been seen for the first time by local Indigenous people, thanks to Riversmart Australia and Highways and Byways. Two bus trips to the area included people from the Warren Wayliwan community and secondary students from the Warren Central School.

RiverSmart is a not-for-profit organisation that has the vision of 'Rivers for people, wildlife and sustainability'. For eight years RiverSmart volunteers, led by Kate Mildner, have been working along the Macquarie River into the Macquarie Marshes.

"This Wayliwan project was about offering local Indigenous people the chance to connect with culture and go to the marshes, which most had never been to before," Kate said.

While a walkway through the marshes is open to the public, the RiverSmart tour, led by guides from the Department of Environment and Heritage, took people into an area, normally closed due to its cultural importance and fears that artefacts might be removed or damaged.

"The Elders and younger people gained knowledge of their heritage and provided healing by their presence on Country. They were pleased to have the

opportunity to see an area normally out of reach," Kate said.

"The area contains cultural artefacts like flintstones and there are still obvious gathering spots and hearths. Some of the trees have scars and signs where the bark has been removed to be used for baby and food carriers."

The visit to the Macquarie Marshes, including some national park reserve land, coincided with high water flows – a far cry from the droughts and floods of recent years. Guides were able to share information about the ecology of the area as well as its cultural significance.

One participant, an Indigenous teenage boy from Warren Central School, loved being in the wetlands and marshes and said the tour inspired him to want to be a guide.

A Wayliwan Elder said it was fantastic to learn about different sacred Wayliwan sites and to learn "about the waterways, water management, bird, fish, frog species, flora and fauna of the Macquarie Marshes area."

Kate said the trips had also fostered positive relationships between many Wayliwan people, department staff and RiverSmart volunteers.



LEAVING A BEQUEST TO HIGHWAYS AND BYWAYS

A gift in your Will is a simple way in which you can support the legacy of the Missionary Sisters of Service through the work of Highways and Byways.

You can make a bequest in various ways including specifying an amount of money or a percentage of your assets to pass on to Highways and Byways. You can consult with your solicitor when preparing your Will, or Highways and Byways is happy to assist you.

Please contact our office if you need advice or are considering a bequest.

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Highways and Byways is a national charity established by the Missionary Sisters of Service to support people and communities experiencing disadvantage and inequality across Australia.

We do this through our annual small grants and longer-term programs. Our programs are designed to strengthen community relationships and networks, develop local leadership, and empower people to meet the challenges confronting them.

Highways and Byways is a registered charity with the Australian Charities and Not-For-Profits Commission.

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