

PROJECT REPORT

2012 Aboriginal Artists in Blue Mountains Schools

Overview

Three hundred and sixty Blue Mountains children in ten schools participated in the reconciliation project **2012 Aboriginal Artists in Blue Mountains Schools**, which assisted their participation in the *NSW Reconciliation Council Schools Reconciliation Challenge*. The project facilitated school workshops by 6 Aboriginal artists, who shared stories and their work to inspire the students to create works on this year's reconciliation theme "Our Place". Students gained insight into Aboriginal history, culture, and connection to place, and learned new ways to express themselves.

Participating Aboriginal artists included Dianne Ussher, Elly Chatfield, Graham King, Janelle Randall-Court, Jo Clancy and Leanne Tobin. They were accompanied by members of Blue Mountains People for Reconciliation, who also assisted with funding the project. The project was again guided by Darug & Gundungurra Elder Aunty Carol Cooper, and auspiced by MOCS. The children's artworks were exhibited at the 'OUR PLACE Exhibition' at Lawson Public School Hall on Saturday, 31st March 2012.

"I felt my emotions flow through me like water"

(Lawson Public School boy)

"I learned not to use my mind to paint but to let the painting be what it wanted to be"

(Lawson Public School girl)

The Blue Mountains Aboriginal Culture & Resource Centre joined the organising team and was the major sponsor for 2012. TAFE Community Services students Heather Smith, Emma Williams, Joycelyn Pickering and Patricia Fitzgerald and teacher, Kay Bazley, worked tirelessly to assist the project. The project welcomed Springwood High School and Kindlehill School, as Blackheath PS and Warrimoo PS withdrew this year. Other participating schools were Mt Victoria, Springwood, Lawson, Hazelbrook, Katoomba and Katoomba Nth Primary Schools, Korowal School and Katoomba High Schools.

NSW Reconciliation Council - Schools Reconciliation Challenge

Over 1000 artworks were submitted for the NSW challenge this year from schools across the state. Twelve winning and 23 highly commended works were shown at the Australian Museum in Sydney in an exhibition which ran until well into August. Five works from four Blue Mountains schools and were among the 23 highly commended works. Three of the schools and four of these works were from the 2012 AABMS project. T

Those students whose works were highly commended include

Korowal School	Ruben Harvey
	Brent Gosling
Springwood High School	Murrandah Hampton
Mt Victoria PS	Tierae Guerin

Contact was made with Winmalee High School. whose student Lachlan Craig was also among the highly commended. The school submitted works independently and is keen to collaborate with the Blue Mountains project and exhibition next year.

Celebration at Echo Point

On 1st June 2012 Aunty Carol Cooper convened an event at Echo Point to celebrate the achievement of the project, the schools and children. The highly commended students, their family members, school teachers and principals, as well as affiliated organizations were invited. Darug custodian, Chris Tobin conducted a smoking ceremony, and the Koomurri Aboriginal Centre at Echo Point hosted morning tea and an culture and interpretation performance for guests.



Winmalee High School was unable to participate due to other commitments; Aunty Carol Cooper and Lyn Bevington, MOCS Manager, attended the school assembly, and on behalf of the NSWRC Schools Reconciliation Challenge presented the Highly Commended certificate, affirming the schools new relationship with the Blue Mountains project.

BMP4R volunteers, students, MOCS and ACRC staff were ably supported by Aunty Carol Cooper, all motivated by the projects aims

- To encourage BM schools to have their students create art work to enter NSW Reconciliation Council Schools Challenge Competition
- To strengthen existing links and build new links between BM People for Reconciliation (BMP4R) group and local schools
- To strengthen existing links and build new links between local Aboriginal elders and artists and schools
- To build momentum around the reconciliation message in schools and in the local community.

Funding

The project operates on a very tight budget comprising fees for artists, hall hire and sundries. The 2012 project was funded by a combination of contributions including

- 2012 Major Sponsor - Blue Mountains Aboriginal Culture & Resource Centre (\$2000 - a one-off grant)
- Voluntary Schools Contribution of \$100 (received from eight schools)
- BMP4R contribution of \$400.00

Highlights and Outcomes

All participating schools reported that the project was positive for children and staff, promoting an increased understanding of Aboriginal culture, of place, and symbolism in art. All reported that the Aboriginal Artist Workshops were engaging and enjoyable, and many reported significant impact for students, teachers, families and, in some cases, the school. Reports of the experience as 'incredibly effective that will stay with those involved' were not atypical.

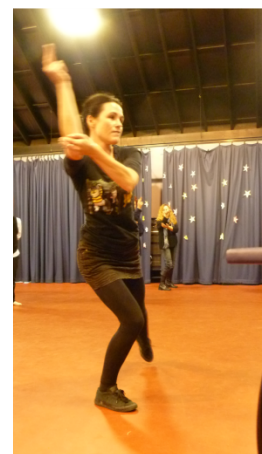
Teachers reported that the workshops and project enabled the school to explore with children and staff their understanding of concepts such as of reconciliation, Aboriginal culture, respect, multiculturalism, sense of belonging. An increased number of reports were received of interactions between children (particularly Aboriginal children) and their families about their artwork. Aboriginal children were reported to benefit greatly from the experience.

All TAFE students and volunteers welcomed the chance to deepen their understanding of Aboriginal perspectives and culture, to meet Aboriginal people and share in the teamwork that made the complex project possible.



Feedback from the exhibition was overwhelmingly positive, and many were happy that it brought together Aboriginal community members and school communities. The overall number at the opening event was lower than in 2011 but it appeared that many more Aboriginal families and community members were a part of the event. Many families arrived after the opening ceremony (following other commitments) and had photos taken in

front of the children's artworks.



The response of schools to the ease of organization was mixed, with a few reporting that involvement was seamless and easy, others (especially those involving staff turnover, plus one involving a large number of children) reported insufficient time for effective liaison between team and teacher, affecting the workshop experience and the creation of artworks.

The attempt to facilitate interaction between artists was not entirely successful due to issues of availability and insufficient direction from the coordinator. Variation in the approach of artists is a strength of the project. In the schools setting, with time pressure for the production of artwork, closer liaison between artist and teacher was welcomed where this occurred. The introduction of Jo Clancy's performance based workshop was resoundingly successful.

