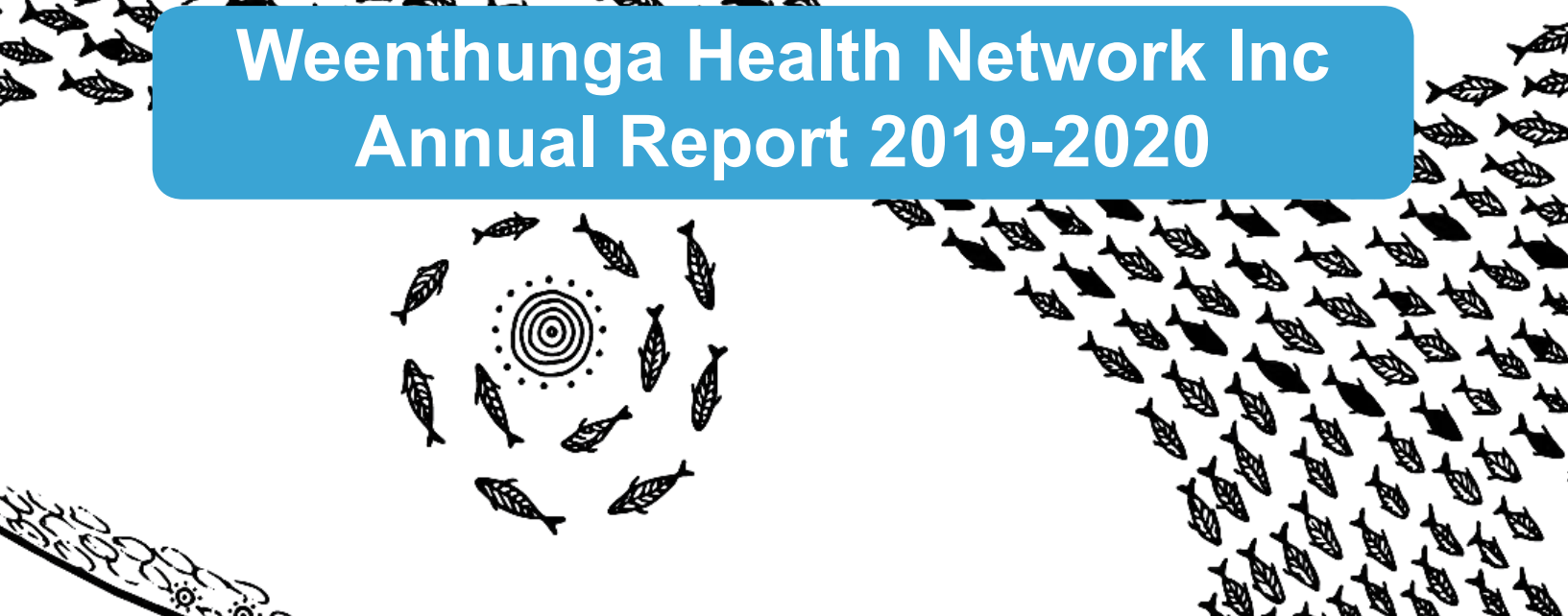
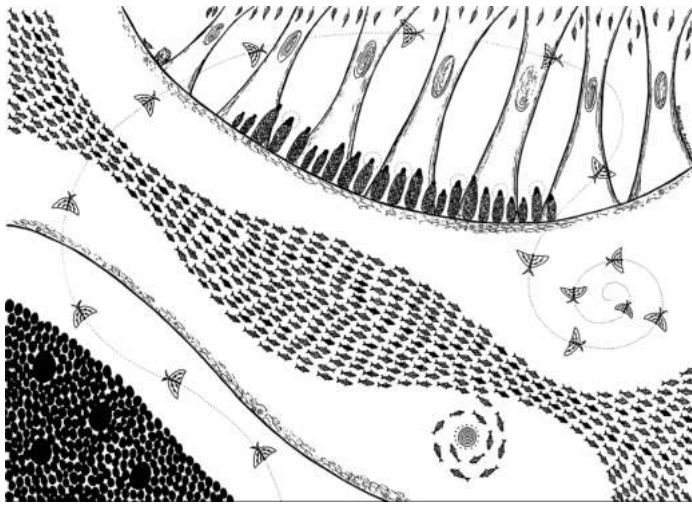


**Weenthunga Health Network Inc  
Annual Report 2019-2020**



## Front Cover Artwork



**Balance** by Shawana Andrews 2020 ©

This image represents balance across time, place and people. It shows the timeless anchor of mother earth with the 4 principles of relationship, respect, reciprocity and responsibility embedded within. The fish show a river of movement of community through time, from past to future, demonstrating connectedness and leadership. They also show diversity across communities that builds strength from its networks and two-way learning and working. The spiraling fish moving from the collective display strength and bravery in their leadership, leading through education and the support of generations.

The ancestors in possum skin cloaks stand together strong beneath the ancient trees and Elders, showing the way. The moths, humble creatures who show great adaptability and resilience, represent women as they move across Country and water, linking time and place through knowledge and understanding. They show great aptitude as they emerge from the earth, move through the community, learning from their ancestors and Elders. They create a path that others can follow and finally come together, drawing on old and new knowledge in their shared vision of First Nations health.

## Weenthunga Logo

**Connecting through Conversation** by Shawana Andrews 2010 ©

The flames represent the campfire, a focal point for sharing knowledge and listening. The circles represent communities, which have an abundance of knowledge to share.

## Weenthunga Health Network Inc.

**ABN** 95 615 678 762

17-23 Sackville Street  
Collingwood VIC 3066

**Facebook** [facebook.com/weenthunga](https://www.facebook.com/weenthunga)

**Website** [www.weenthunga.com.au](http://www.weenthunga.com.au)

Weenthunga Health Network Inc has ATO Income Tax Exemption and DGR status.



## President's Report

This has been an exciting and challenging year for Weenthunga Health Network, and I'm proud of the way our team has navigated the challenges and opportunities to work in different ways presented by the pandemic.

I was honoured to join the Weenthunga Committee at the 2019 AGM and be appointed President. I'd like to acknowledge the contributions of outgoing President Brenda McDermott, and retiring Committee Members Jacqui Watkins and Melissa Deacon-Crouch. Weenthunga was pleased to welcome Kevan Horder back to the Committee in 2019 and into the role of Vice President, along with new Committee Members Glenn Milliken, Treasurer, and Genevieve Napper, who joined continuing Members Kerrie Thomsen, Carol Mioduchowski and Meg Irwin.

We were very saddened by the passing of Genevieve in June 2020. Genevieve was a warm, generous and valued Member of our Committee, and Weenthunga pays tribute to Genevieve's outstanding contribution to public health optometry and particularly the space of First Nations eye health.

On behalf of the Committee I'd like to thank Weenthunga's team of part-time staff, which grew to 10 over the year, for their commitment to Weenthunga's 4R's of relationship, respect, reciprocity and responsibility, and to each other. I commend their achievements in continuing to develop and implement programs that are contributing to First Nations health and wellbeing, while adapting to the challenges of COVID-19. I also acknowledge Weenthunga's leadership team of Aunty Steff Armstrong, Sam Paxton and Erin McKinnon for their approach to nurturing wellbeing within our team, and the support they've provided to both Committee and staff throughout the year.

Along with many Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations, Weenthunga has demonstrated the strength and effectiveness of First Nations leadership, knowledge and practice in the health and wellbeing space. We are proud to be part of the network of 32 ACCHOs represented by VACCHO who have kept their communities safe and connected during COVID-19, and lead the way in effective public health response.

We acknowledge the National Indigenous Health Associations, IAHA, CATSINaM, AIDA and NATSIHWA for their leadership, advocacy and support of the Aboriginal health workforce, and value our connections with these organisations.

Finally and most importantly, we acknowledge and thank you - our Members – many among whom have worked on the frontlines of this pandemic keeping our communities safe, putting yourselves at personal risk, sacrificing time and connection with your loved ones, and responding to the demands of a pandemic response through stress and exhaustion. We are so grateful for your service and sacrifice, and we wish you and your families a restful break and a joy-filled year ahead. We look forward to continuing to work together to over-throw systemic racism and improve experiences, care and outcomes for First Nations people in Victoria.



**Mikaela Egan - Muthi Muthi and Gunditjmara**  
President

## Weenthunga Committee of Management



**Mikaela Egan** - *President*

Founder of The Wellbeing  
Connexion and Aboriginal  
Nutrition Promotion Officer at  
VACCHO

**First Nations:** Muthi Muthi and  
Gundiṯjṯimara



**Kevan Horder** - *Vice President*

Manager of Chronic Care  
Unit at Rumbalara Aboriginal  
Cooperative

**First Nations:** Kooma and  
Guamu



**Glenn Milliken** - *Treasurer*

Physiotherapist at St Vincent's  
Hospital Melbourne and Project  
Management Officer at Telstra

**First Nations:** Kamilaroi



**Kerrie Thomsen**

Occupational Therapist and  
Art Therapist at Hallmark  
Occupational Therapy

**First Nations:** Butchulla  
(Badjṯala) and Gubbi Gubbi



**Colleen Kelly**

Nurse and Lecturer in the  
Gukwonderuk Unit at Monash  
University

**First Nations:** Wilunyu and  
Yamaji



**Carol Mioduchowski**

Podiatrist at North Area Health  
and Manager at Barwon  
Health Community Health and  
Rehabilitation Services

**Australian**



**Meg Irwin**

Speech Pathologist at Bendigo  
Health

**Australian**



**Genevieve Napper**

Optometrist

**Australian**



Following last year's AGM, Kevan Horder rejoined the Committee of Management along with new Committee Members Mikaela Egan, Glenn Milliken and Genevieve Napper. They joined continuing Members Kerrie Thomsen, Colleen Kelly, Carol Mioduchowski and Meg Irwin. The Office Bearers were elected: Mikaela Egan, President; Kevan Horder, Vice President; and Glenn Milliken, Treasurer. We thank outgoing Committee Members: Brenda McDermott, former President (resigned 12/11/2019); Jacqui Watkins (resigned 28/11/2019); Melissa Deacon-Crouch (resigned 28/11/2019); and David Menzies (resigned 28/11/2019) for their contributions during their time on the Committee.

## Gratitude for the life and legacy of Genevieve Napper

Genevieve was among Weenthunga's first Associate Members, joining the organisation in 2011. A celebrated Optometrist, educator and advocate, Genevieve's work in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander eye health, including working with twenty ACCHOs across Victoria, demonstrated genuine allyship, and her legacy has contributed to improved eye health experiences, care and outcomes for First Nations people. Genevieve's commitment to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander eye health was evident through her voluntary involvement in a number of committees and working groups, including long-term involvement in the Optometry Australia Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Committee and five regional Aboriginal eye health stakeholder groups around Victoria. We were so pleased to welcome Genevieve to Weenthunga's Committee of Management upon her election at the 2019 AGM. Prior to joining the Committee, Genevieve was an active Weenthunga Member, contributing to Womxn's Talk Health Days to promote eye health career pathways to First Nations young womxn pursuing health careers. In her own words Genevieve was committed to partnerships "to enhance First Nations leadership and self-determination in health care." She is remembered by her many friends and colleagues for her determination, her supportive encouragement of students and peers, and for her kindness, grace and dignity. Weenthunga will continue to honour Genevieve's legacy through nurturing the growth of the First Nations eye health workforce and contributing to cultural safety within the eye health professions. We send our deepest sympathies to Genevieve's family and loved ones.

## Governance and Operational Model

Weenthunga is Aboriginal-led and values collaboration between First Nations people and other Australians. The Committee of Management comprises a majority of First Nations people and the position of President can only be held by a First Nations person. Only Full Members of Weenthunga, First Nations people, are able to vote. This model underpins Weenthunga's operations, as we acknowledge the value and power of First Nations people and other Australians working together.

## Weenthunga's Members

Weenthunga's Membership has grown steadily to 504 Members. We have welcomed 81 new Members in the last year. Our Membership comprises 150 Full Members - First Nations people, 322 Associate Members - other Australians, and 32 Students. All our Members are working in health/health education and/or studying health courses.

Weenthunga's Members work in diverse health roles, including: Aboriginal Hospital Liaison Officers; Audiology; Chiropractic; Counseling; Dentistry; Dietetics; Exercise Physiology; Health Education; Health Promotion; Medicine; Mental Health; Midwifery; Nursing; Nutrition; Occupational Therapy; Optometry; Osteopathy; Pharmacy; Physiotherapy; Podiatry; Public Health; Psychiatry; Psychology; Social Work and Speech Pathology. Our Members work in a variety of sectors including Aboriginal Health Services, public and private hospitals, community health centers and universities.

## Weenthunga's Aims and Objectives

Weenthunga Health Network aims to contribute to the health and wellbeing of First Nations people in Victoria through:

- Backing First Nations young womxn into health careers, thereby increasing the Aboriginal health workforce
- Advocating for anti-racism and decolonising within the health and education sectors
- Embedding and valuing First Nations' knowledge and practice, and
- Ensuring better understanding and practice of health professionals to improve experiences, care and outcomes for First Nations people and communities.

## Weenthunga Staff



Aunty Steff Armstrong



Lin Oke



Sam Paxton



Erin McKinnon



Sarah Stoller



Kylie Clarke



Kylie Fox



Ashley Paxton



Danielle Amiet



Arkeria Armstrong



Josie Garner



Sue Bray

Weenthunga's part-time staff work flexibly and make the most of our small hours of employment. The Weenthunga staffing team (average FTEs shown) in 2019-2020 comprised:

- Aunty Steff Armstrong, Gamilaraay, Weenthunga Aunty and Bendigo NGM Program Leader (since Feb, 0.6)
- Lin Oke, Executive Advisor (until Nov) and Executive Assistant to Aunty Steff Armstrong (volunteer)
- Sam Paxton, Waywurru, Durrong Ngulu, Melbourne NGM Program Leader (0.6)
- Erin McKinnon, Durrong Ngulu (0.6)
- Sarah Stoller, Operations Manager (0.2)
- Kylie Clarke, Gunditjmara, Wotjobaluk and Ngarrindjeri, Geelong NGM Program Leader (0.4)
- Kylie Fox, Geelong NGM Program Collaborator (0.4)
- Ashley Paxton, Waywurru, VAHENonline Leader (since Nov, 0.2)
- Danielle Amiet, VAHENonline Collaborator (since Jan, 0.2)
- Arkeria Armstrong, Gamilaraay, Alumni Connection (since April, 0.2)
- Josie Garner, Jaara and Yorta Yorta, Bendigo NGM Program Leader (resigned Feb, 0.4)
- Sue Bray, Bendigo Program Collaborator, (resigned March, 0.4).



## Weenthunga's Leadership

Weenthunga's vision is shaped by our Aboriginal-led Committee of Management. Weenthunga Committee and staff are supported by a leadership team of three: Durrong Ngulu Sam Paxton and Erin McKinnon and an Aboriginal Aunty, Aunty Steff Armstrong. All of our voices are informed by family, community and our own lived experience. We are each sharing our own messages, advocating for change in our own way. At the end of the day, our messages are connected by the same purpose, Weenthunga's vision.

## Aunty's Report

2020 has been a year of challenges yet the establishment of Weenthunga's formal Aunty role has allowed me to embark on a new and exciting path. In 2019 I took a leap of courage and undertook a manager/teacher of Aboriginal education position with Broome High School (WA). I reflect that I wanted to feel grounded in spirit and culture and be a leader. Having a brief nine months to continue to learn to listen to young voices and see their strengths and abilities be nurtured was an honour.

Then for family reasons I returned to Victoria in early 2020 and the position of Weenthunga Aunty seemed to fit so nicely. Whilst the Weenthunga Aunty role was new, it was envisaged it would bring leadership, honesty and wisdom, and grounding in culture, for the organisation. It would be a role that was tied to the value that Weenthunga places on Aunties in the Aboriginal community and wider community.

My return felt right in the space of this new position as I wanted to bring what I had recently learnt - that of the courage of our youth and the strength within their voices to be heard. In the first six months I reflected on the number of young womxn and their families that have come into my life over the last eight years within the Nyarrn-gakgo mangkie Program. Again, I am reminded that despite many obstacles these young womxn follow and achieve their dreams.

The Aunty role works across all our programs, to ensure Aunties inform our work. We have listened to and been guided by Aunties voices strategically, operationally, at events and when yarning with young womxn, staff, Members and Committee.

In my voice I reflect and openly say "I am Steff Armstrong, from a large extended family, a Gamilaraay woman living on Dja Dja Wurrung Country, and proud to be Weenthunga's inaugural Aunty. I am NOT an Elder, I am a mother, sister, wife and Baggi (nana). But my increasing community role is Aunt. I now see in this role I will be like the evergreen banyan tree (Morten Bay fig) - strong and determined, reaching out to support and nourish from the inside".



**Aunty Steff Armstrong - Gamilaraay**  
Aunty

## Durrong Ngulu's Report

Where does anyone start a report in 2020? This year, I've lost count of the number of times I've heard the phrase "unprecedented pandemic". In yarning with and listening to First Nations people locally and globally, for many of us, this pandemic was not unprecedented. Our Ancestors and Elders have been cautioning society for a long time about factors which contributed to the COVID-19 pandemic and when it hit, our First Nations leaders and communities were ready.

Our bloodlines hold memories of resilience and our cultural values, knowledge and protocol positioned us in the best way possible to keep each other safe and well. The response and adaptability we've witnessed from Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) has been incredible. I'm so proud of our Weenthunga family, for we too have shown adaptability, inspiring people and organisations along the way.

Weenthunga's priorities during the pandemic were thoughtfully and efficiently established. Our priorities were to keep our Weenthunga family safe and well; for our staff to contribute to keeping our communities safe and well through our programs; to advocate for and nurture the wellbeing of the health workforce and in particular, the First Nations health workforce, and; to mobilise collaborators, allies and accomplices. As I write these, I reflect: this was already the way Weenthunga did business – we just added a pandemic, and the unique challenges and considerations of a pandemic, into the mix.

Not a day passes that I don't feel a sense of gratitude in being connected to Weenthunga. For too long, we as blackfullas have been forced to leave our culture at the door when we enter spaces; a continued means of and attempt at assimilation. It's been a joy to work alongside Aunty Steff and my Weenthunga sistas to rejuvenate cultural practice within our organisation, to share this outwards and to resist and challenge any product or process that does not align to our ways of being, knowing and doing. It's been a joy to work alongside Durrong Ngulu, Erin, and Weenthunga collaborators, who have and are putting in the work of unlearning and relearning, decolonising their hearts and minds along the way. It's been a joy to share space with our incredible Committee of Management, who bring profound strength and guidance to Weenthunga. And of course, it's been a joy to connect with Members and supporters, to deepen our relationships, to hear stories and to move together towards our shared visions.

In the year ahead, I'm looking forward to witnessing the continued 'global awakening' unfold and seeing more people's critical consciousness lenses ignited. One of my hopes is that more settler-Australians and organisations will consider the role that Country plays in holistic wellbeing. We cannot talk about health and health education without talking about Country, and all that is an interconnected part of Country; our skies, waterways, plants, animals and kin. Our reciprocal relationship with Country means that we need to keep Country well, as Country keeps us well. If we don't put things in place now, it's only a matter of time before we'll be living through the next "unprecedented" event. Anti-racism, decolonising and embedding and valuing First Nations knowledge and practice – all of which are part of Weenthunga's work – are crucial elements within this conversation.



**Sam Paxton - Waywurru**  
Durrong Ngulu





## Durrong Ngulu's Report

We are very pleased to share with you our Annual Report 2019-2020, which tells the story of our work pre-pandemic doing what Weenthunga does well – bringing people together to create meaningful experiences, opportunities and connections – and our work during COVID-19, responding to the challenges and opportunities with creativity and courage – and always valuing the 4R's – relationship, respect, reciprocity and responsibility.

This year, conversations we've had within Weenthunga Health Network have connected with conversations across the country and around the world, as a spotlight on racism and injustice has finally seen more people seeking out and listening to First Nations voices. As a settler-Australian I am privileged to work alongside proud Waywurru woman Sam Paxton, Gamilaraay woman Aunty Steff Armstrong and my First Nations colleagues, and have been deeply grateful for the opportunity this year to listen, learn, reflect and share, through courageous conversations on power, privilege and decolonising within our organisation and with others we work with.

I can't list all the many things I'm grateful for but some of the highlights of the year for me include: the powerful imagery and story of Shawana's artwork Balance, which provided a sense of calm and grounding to connect with during a challenging year; the love and wisdom shared by Weenthunga's Aunty, Aunty Steff Armstrong; our protocols of Acknowledging Country, grounding and holding space for each person to share at the beginning of each of our meetings; the words of Ambelin Kwaymullina, who's book Living on Stolen Land we gave to each of our staff and Committee Members to reflect on individually and collectively; working with Sam to develop and deliver Cultural Safety and Critical Consciousness Workshops, sharing our learnings and reflections and having courageous conversations with others in the health space; the knowledge and practice of First Nations healers and health practitioners who's work we've engaged with and promoted; and Weenthunga's Committee of Management, who provided support and guidance even while some Members worked on the frontline of the pandemic response.

And I continue to be deeply grateful to be part of the Weenthunga team, to learn, grow and develop as part of the leadership team with Sam and Aunty Steff, and to nurture and be nurtured by our wonderful team. Being part of this group of First Nations and settler-Australian women has really got me through this year. We have worked together from our homes, over computers and phones, while raising our children and caring for our families, welcoming pets and family members into many of our meetings and conversations. Weenthunga cares deeply about the wellbeing of our team, and have had regular check-ins, provided care packs, encouraged staff to weave or colour during our online meetings and to take an hour of paid self-care and learning time each fortnight. I've been so impressed by the creativity and focus of my colleagues during such a challenging time, generating ideas and turning them into reality. This demonstrates to me the story that has been undeniably revealed through this pandemic, of the power and impact of First Nations health leadership, knowledge and practice.



**Erin McKinnon**  
Durrong Ngulu



**16 July:** Inaugural Womxn's Sports Science and Allied Health Day held as part of Geelong Nyarrn-gakgo mangkie program, with young womxn interested in these careers going behind the scenes to meet health professionals and athletes at Basketball Geelong Supercats and Geelong Football Club AFLW.



**26 November:** Melbourne Nyarrn-gakgo mangkie program hosts careers afternoon at Reservoir High School, with three Aboriginal womxn sharing their health career journeys.



**6-8 December:** Yarning Up Strong Camp held with 20 First Nations young womxn. A weekend of yarning, healing and happiness, with special guests Wurundjeri Elder Aunty Di Kerr, Boonwurrung Elder N'arweet Carolyn Briggs, Gamilaraay woman Aunty Steff Armstrong (who FaceTimed in from Broome) and staunch Gunditjmara woman Sissy Austin.

**23-25 September:** Weenthunga delivers two presentations at IAHA National Conference in Darwin. Sam and Kylie present alongside Nyarrn-gakgo mangkie Program Alumni Charmaine, Aramana and Morgan. Lin and Kerrie present on VAHENonline.



**28 November:** AGM and Member Meet Up held. 21 Members gathered at the Koorie Heritage Trust and enjoyed Pawa Catering, heard the stories of the Djirri Djirri dancers and listened to a panel discussion on *'First Nations visions for the future of health and how to get there'* featuring Mikaela Egan, Dean Duncan, Georgia Radford and Kevan Horder.





**2 June:** 125 people joined the 'Engaging with identity and culture; are we ready for the conversation?' Zoom Webinar during National Reconciliation Week hosted by Bendigo Reconciliation Committee with City of Greater Bendigo, St John of God Hospital and Weenthunga Health Network. Aunty Steff Armstrong and Sam Paxton shared their stories, knowledge and perspective and Phil Bretherton spoke about St John of God Hospital's collaboration with Weenthunga.



**12 June:** Weenthunga's National Reconciliation Week Virtual Film Series commences with a screening and discussion of the film *Gurrumul*. Twelve staff and Committee came together to share their reflections, which resonated strongly with Weenthunga's 4R's and two-way working.

**11 March:** The World Health Organisation declares the COVID-19 outbreak as a global pandemic. Weenthunga responds by releasing our *How to be an ally to First Nations mob during the COVID-19 pandemic* series, which has a Facebook reach alone of over 12,000. We adapt our programs and services to online spaces. We advocate for and support the wellbeing of the health workforce, particularly First Nations health professionals.



**5 June:** Weenthunga and St John of God collaboration is recognised with a 2020 HART Award for 'Acknowledgment of work driving systemic change'.



**15 June:** Bardi woman Stephanie Markey joined Weenthunga for a four-week Aurora Internship, part of her final year of a Bachelor of Biomedical Science. Stephanie developed a cultural safety page for VAHENonline, connected with our Nyarrn-gakgo mangkie teams and participated in several Weenthunga events.



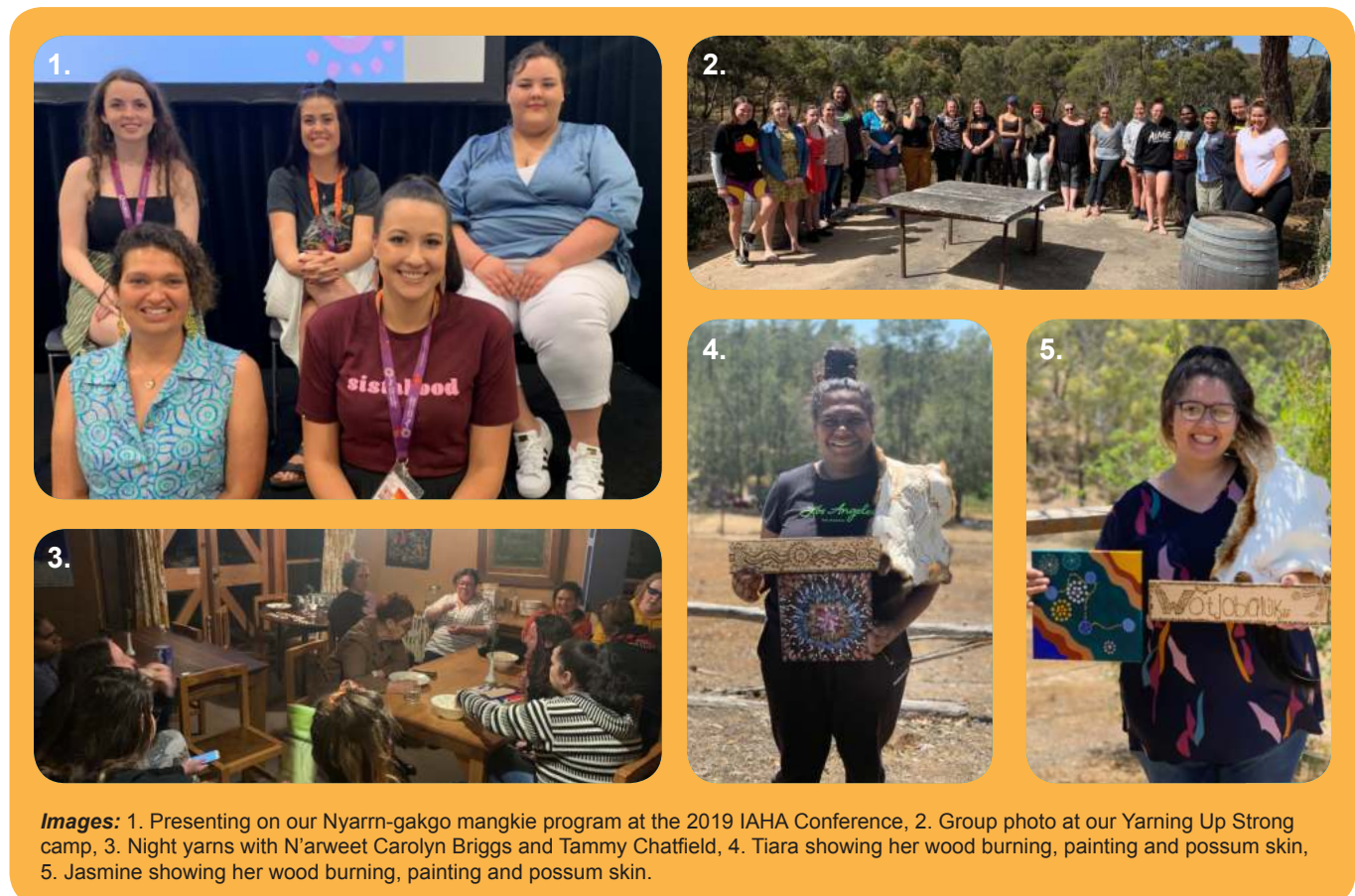
## 2019-2020 Event Highlights

### IAHA Conference

From 22 to 26 September 2019, Weenthunga supported a delegation of representatives to attend the 2019 Indigenous Allied Health Australia (IAHA) National Conference. The delegation comprised Kerrie Thomsen (then Treasurer), Sam Paxton (Durrong Ngulu and Program Leader - Melbourne), Kylie Clarke (Program Leader - Geelong), Charmaine Gray (Bendigo Alumni), Morgan Carter (Bendigo Alumni) and Armana Parsons (Bendigo Alumni). Our Bendigo Alumni were financially supported to attend through the generosity of Committee Member Meg Irwin, who funds our Meg Irwin Bursary. Brenda McDermott (then President), Lin Oke (then Executive Advisor) and Skye Anderson (Bendigo Alumni) also attended the conference with the support of IAHA.

At the conference, Weenthunga presented on two topics: Nyarrn-gakgo mangkie and VAHENonline. During the conference, we connected with sistas and brothers from all around, expanded our professional network, had powerful reflections, learned new skills and information and had heaps of fun along the way.

One of many highlights for us occurred on the day prior to the conference commencing. First Nations delegates had the opportunity to participate in Women's and Men's Yarning Circles. The majority of Weenthunga's representatives attended the Women's Yarning Circle, where we were Welcomed to Country through Ceremony and then had the privilege of sharing yarns with Aunties Dr Miriam Rose Ungunmerr (AO) and Miliwanga Wurrben. Weenthunga would like to respectfully acknowledge and thank Larrakia Elders and community for hosting us on their Country. We'd also like to commend IAHA for organising an outstanding conference and congratulate them on their 10th Anniversary!



## Yarning Up Strong Camp

From 6 December to 8 December 2019, we hosted a Yarning Up Strong camp for First Nations young womxn embarking on health career journeys. We gathered for a weekend of yarning, healing and happiness on Taungurung Country at Commonground Cooperative. We were joined by amazing guests, including Wurundjeri Elder Aunty Di Kerr, Boon Wurrung Elder N'arweet Carolyn Briggs, Tammy Chatfield, Sissy Austin and Aunty Steff Armstrong (via video call from Broome). We had nights around the fire, we painted, we sung, we swam, we burned on wood and possum skins, we laughed (a lot), we shared stories, we spoke of Weenthunga's 4R's: Relationships, Reciprocity, Respect and Responsibility and how they relate to ourselves, each other, community and Country. All those who attended felt so fortunate to have had this time with Elders and each other, creating memories to last a lifetime. We acknowledge the financial support of the Fellowship of Indigenous Leadership that made this vision a reality.

## Engaging with Identity and Culture; Are we Ready for the Conversation?

Adapting to the impacts of isolation and the pandemic, Weenthunga was involved in our first Zoom Webinar on 2 June during National Reconciliation Week. The Webinar was titled: *Engaging with identity and culture; are we ready for the conversation?* It explored how health and community services respect and support the identity and culture of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people who are accessing their services. The event was a collaboration between Weenthunga Health Network, St John of God Hospital Bendigo, City of Greater Bendigo, Bendigo Reconciliation Committee and Communities for Children. Aunty Steff Armstrong and Sam Paxton shared their stories, knowledge and perspective and Phil Bretherton spoke about St John of God Hospital's collaboration with Weenthunga and their learnings along the journey. There were 125 people watching online, mostly working in health and community services, and the feedback on the event was very positive and created much reflection. The session was recorded and can be viewed here: <https://youtu.be/cemfFca0qdQ>

## National Reconciliation Week Virtual Film Series

Weenthunga hosted a virtual film series for National Reconciliation Week to keep us connected and support learning and reflection amidst lock-down and the pandemic. The films we selected related to themes of two-way, decolonising and Weenthunga's 4R's – they were *Gurumul*, *In My Blood It Runs* and *The Australian Dream*. We provided questions to guide reflections, sent out movie packs with popcorn, chocolate and tea sourced from First Nations businesses, and reimbursed for a takeaway dinner for one of the film nights. We had 12 people participate in the first event, 13 people for the second and 16 people for the final event. Participants included Weenthunga staff members and intern, Committee Members and young womxn and their mums involved in our Nyarrn-gakgo mangkie programs. The virtual film series contributed to strengthening relationships, wellbeing and learning within our organisation, which are values we strive to embed. Meeting via zoom at the end of the week, in a relaxed and nurturing environment, sharing food, watching films and discussing together, was something that added to the collective wellbeing of our team and organisation. We spent time at the beginning of each film night checking in how people were, which during this challenging time of COVID-19 provided mutual support and acknowledgment of the challenges each of us were facing. The discussions we shared about the films we watched allowed each of us to listen deeply, reflect and learn, and developed our individual and shared understandings of two-way, decolonising and racism and other related issues. We thank Reconciliation Victoria for their grant that supported us to host these events.

## 2019-2020 Programs and Services

Weenthunga's programs and services have grown over the past year with additional funding and a strategic focus on backing First Nations young womxn into health careers and addressing racism in health and health education. This focus has come from listening to the voices of young womxn in the Nyarrn-gakgo mangkie program, and building on the learnings and success of that work, which started eight years ago on Dja Dja Wurrung Country under the guidance of Aunty Steff Armstrong, and has been established on Wurundjeri Country in north-east Melbourne and Wadawurrung Country in Geelong over the last two years, nurtured and developed with the leadership of Sam Paxton and Kylie Clarke.

The vision of VAHENonline – to contribute to improved content and teaching in tertiary health courses – has now become a reality, under the leadership of Ashley Paxton who joined Weenthunga in 2019, and enabled by philanthropic funding. This project responded to recommendations of the Victorian Aboriginal Health Education Summit, co-hosted by Weenthunga and VACCHO in 2017. VAHENonline also responds to the voices of our Nyarrn-gakgo mangkie Alumni who are studying or have recently completed tertiary health courses at Victorian universities. The Alumni have shared with Weenthunga the racism and lack of cultural safety they have experienced while at university and their perspectives on what is needed to address this.

The establishment of Aunty's Voice – and the engagement of Aunty Steff Armstrong as the inaugural Weenthunga Aunty – shows the continued development of our approach, recognising the importance of listening to Aunties voices to inform our work, and valuing the role of Aunties in nurturing wellbeing.

Our work in the space of cultural safety and critical consciousness is again informed by the voices of our Alumni who are working in health, and by the lived experiences of our First Nations staff, Committee Members, and Members involved in our Local Support Networks (LSNs); as both health professionals and health services users. There is so much unlearning and relearning, reflection and action required by health professionals and organisations to create culturally safe health services and workplaces that do not cause harm to First Nations people. We have approached this work from Weenthunga's 4R's, building on our existing relationships, and always considering respect, reciprocity and responsibility in the way we approach this work.

### Nyarrn-gakgo mangkie Program

*We come together in a safe environment to hear and understand other womxn's\* stories. We are supported by community and Ancestors to listen to our own voice; to reflect. We move forward on our journey into a health career with new information, confidence, cultural knowledge and strength in our identity.*

We adapted to the challenges of COVID-19 in 2020, delivering the program remotely and responding to the needs of young womxn learning from home and facing increased stress and anxiety. We have worked to provide additional wellbeing and cultural support to the young womxn engaged with the program this year, to address the impacts of isolation and the pandemic. This support has contributed to young womxn's health, wellbeing and cultural identity, which in turn has supported their continued engagement in education and/or employment.

\*Nyarrn-gakgo mangkie is a space for female identifying, trans-women, gender-fluid and non-binary mob. We use the term 'First Nations young womxn' and are here for all sistas; not just cis-ters. We recognise that Aboriginal genders existed prior to the illegal occupation of these lands and colonial white genders are an assimilation mechanism.



## Nyarrn-gakgo mangkie Bendigo

In 2019-2020 our Nyarrn-gakgo mangkie Program in Bendigo engaged with young womxn from seven schools across Bendigo, Castlemaine, and Echuca. Nine of these young womxn finished Year 12, three commenced studies in health fields and three pursued other pathways. Two students obtained traineeships prior to the end of Year 12, and both of these have led to ongoing employment. 17 students continued their high school studies into the next year level. Our Womxn's Talk Health Day planned for 20 March 2020 was canceled due to COVID-19, and instead we took the information to the students - delivering careers information and wellbeing packs to 25 participants. The packs included canvas and paints, and we facilitated a virtual collaborative painting activity, pivoting our program to remote delivery due to the lock-down which included engaging participants via phone, video-chat and a closed Facebook group. A bursary was provided to a young womxn facing financial hardship. We recorded short videos with three Alumni with messages of encouragement and solidarity that were shared with 25 program participants. We continued our connections with mums and families which has helped build strong bonds of friendship, support, and trust between families, and facilitated greater family support and encouragement for the students to continue in the program and at school and university.



**Images:** 1. Bendigo Program Leader and Weenthunga Aunty, Aunty Steff Armstrong, with Nyarrn-gakgo mangkie Alumni Member Maryanne, who now works as a Nurse at Bendigo Health, 2. Tempany showing her painting at our Yarning Up Strong camp, 3. Jasmine painting at our Yarning Up Strong camp.

Teachers and tertiary educators have valued the role and contribution of Weenthunga in supporting student engagement and wellbeing throughout this year. LSN Members attended a planning meeting in November 2019 to provide input into 2020 Health Day planning and our overall Program. The LSN has provided the following outcomes to participants this year:

- An Alumni successfully gained a Graduate Nurse position with Bendigo Health in 2020
- An Alumni commenced in the Aboriginal Health Liaison Role at the Hospital
- A new graduate Occupational Therapist was supported into culturally safe employment with an Aboriginal health organisation
- Scholarships were provided by SJoG Hospital to Year 11 and 12 program participants.

In 2020 we established a Nursing/Midwifery Network, with representatives from the University, TAFE, Hospital and High School, as well as Alumni who are currently undertaking or have recently completed nursing/midwifery degrees. We have connected current Year 12s pursuing nursing/midwifery with this network.

We would like to thank the Ian Potter Foundation and RE Ross Trust for their funding support of this program, St John of God Hospital Bendigo, Bendigo and District Aboriginal Cooperative, La Trobe University and Bendigo Senior Secondary College for their support, and Meg Irwin for her generosity in funding the Meg Irwin Bursary.

## Nyarrn-gakgo mangkie Geelong

In 2019-2020 our Nyarrn-gakgo mangkie Program in Geelong gave emphasis to developing relationships with young womxn, their families, the local community and our LSN. We backed 34 family members including 27 mums, four Aunties, five grandmothers and three siblings. We experienced our first transitional year, in which we welcomed nine new young womxn to the Program (24 young womxn in total), four moved into non health-related spaces and all five in Year 12 became VCE and VCAL graduates, forming our first Alumni. Four out of those five young womxn continue to explore their health career options along with the 10 young womxn who remained in the program.

Unfortunately, two of our major annual events had to be canceled due to COVID-19; our Welcome Dinner and Scholarships Award Night (March) and our Womxn's Talk Health Day (April). Instead, we created a COVID-safe means of meaningful engagement by visiting each young womxn and their families at their homes. This was a great opportunity for deeper yarns to develop and strengthen relationships and to meet mums new to the program. We gifted the young womxn a wellbeing and info pack with cultural and social and emotional wellbeing items, as well as health and education materials.

Nine health organisations and 27 education institutions including Geelong Secondary Schools and further/higher education engaged in our program. Together with St John of God Geelong Hospital, we developed several initiatives reflecting our 4R's including an interactive whole-group experience for our Womxn's Talk Health Day, a Work Experience Program for six young womxn and our very first Nyarrn-gakgo mangkie Education Scholarships (three out of four awarded in 2020, totalling \$4,000).

Over the last 12 months the Geelong Program has created connections that back the exploration of our young womxns' health pathways and together with our LSN have provided the following opportunities:

- Work experience for two young womxn based at Wathaurong Health Service and Bellarine Community Health
- Connected five young womxn and families with health/education professionals from their specific area of interest, providing opportunities for personal connections and mutual exchange
- Weenthunga's Meg Irwin Bursary was provided to one of young womxn so she could attend her Year 12 Graduation Ceremony and Celebratory Dinner
- Connected six young womxn with Monash University's on-line 2020 Hands-On Health Program.

We would like to thank our financial supporters Geelong Community Foundation, Give Where You Live Foundation and St John of God Geelong Hospital for giving us the means to continue the Nyarrn-gakgo mangkie journey.



**Images:** 1. Sonya and Taleena at their Year 12 graduation evening, 2. Ngara receiving her wellbeing and info pack during COVID-safe home visits, 3. Bri and Penny connecting for a yarn about pharmacy careers at Wathaurong Health Services.





## Nyarrn-gakgo mangkie Melbourne

In 2019-2020 our Nyarrn-gakgo mangkie Program in Melbourne engaged with twenty young womxn from three schools across North-East Melbourne.



**Images:** 1. Listening to Natarsha sharing at the Reservoir High School careers afternoon, 2. Tamara showing her wood burning and painting at the Yarning Up Strong camp, 3. Wellbeing packs put together for Nyarrn-gakgo mangkie Melbourne young womxn and teachers.

In November 2019, we hosted a health careers afternoon at Reservoir High School. After enjoying a Pawa Catering feed, we gathered for yarns and listened to the health career journeys of three Aboriginal womxn; Merindah Brown, Human Resources Officer at the Victorian Aboriginal Health Service (VAHS), Worrin Williams, Straight Talk Coordinator at Oxfam and Natarsha Bamblett, former VAFLW player and Wayapa Wurruk practitioner.

During our Yarning Up Strong camp, we were joined by five Aboriginal young womxn from our LSN, who were able to share space and stories with Nyarrn-gakgo mangkie young womxn who attended.

Unfortunately, our 2020 Womxn's Talk Health Day in April was canceled due to COVID-19. In recognising and responding to the impacts of COVID-19, we offered virtual activities, including young womxn's yarning and weaving circles. We also provided wellness packs, which included Tjanpi Desert Weavers weaving kits, Imangka-Irningka bush medicine, *Girls Can Fly* by Sally Morgan and Ambelin Kwaymullina, Sistahood sticker by Gammin Threads, Chern'ee Sutton Originals chocolate bar, facemasks from DHHS and information and merchandise from our friends at Ngarara Willim - RMIT University and IAHA. Whilst working from home, we were also grateful for the opportunity to deepen our connections with our LSN, which includes VAHS, VACCHO, the Mercy Hospital, the Royal Women's Hospital, Deadly Sista Girlz and Ngarara Willim - RMIT University.

We were thrilled to welcome Bardi womxn Stephanie Markey to our team in June 2020 for a four-week internship with the Aurora Foundation. Upon completion of her internship, Stephanie shared: "One of the best things about interning for Weenthunga was the culturally empowering environment it provided. They did this by ensuring that First Nations women, whether they are studying or working in health sectors, that they are equipped with support, guidance, empowerment and encouraged to continue practicing their culture wherever and whenever possible. I cannot think of a better environment to be in than that strengthen my personal, cultural and academic growth".

We would like to thank VACCHO and the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet for their support of this program through the Pathways to Education and Training project.

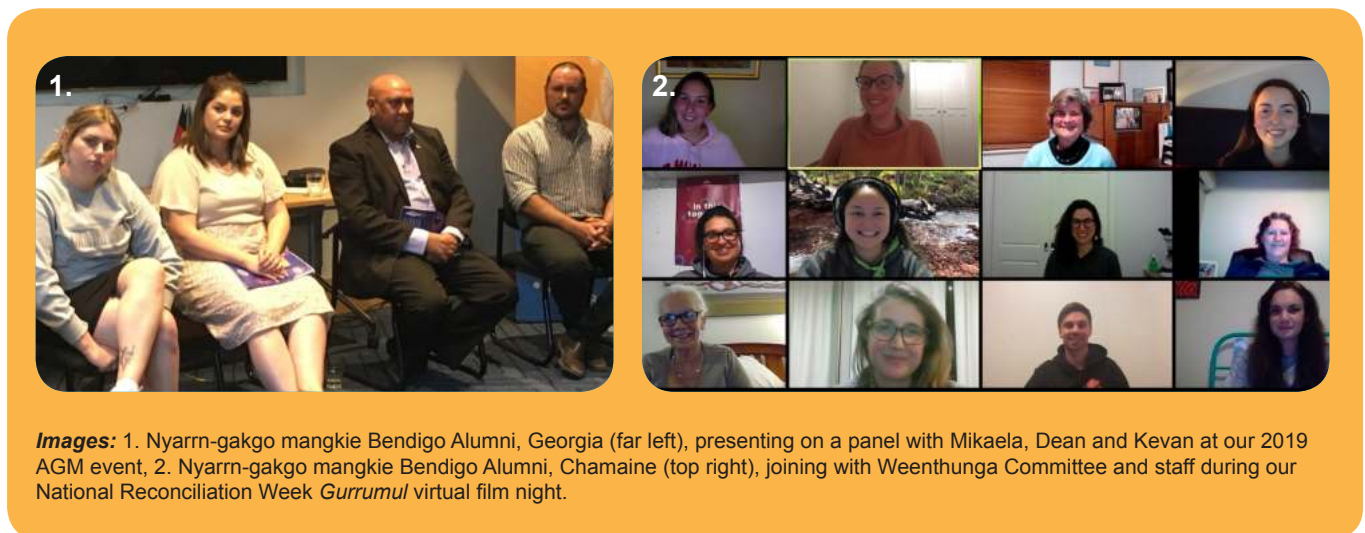
## Nyarrn-gakgo mangkie Alumni

Our Bendigo program began eight years ago, so has an Alumni network of many young womxn studying health course and working as health professionals in their chosen fields. The Alumni have consistently demonstrated a desire to 'give back' to Weenthunga and they regularly attend our events. The Bendigo LSN includes ten Alumni who are studying health courses or working in health careers who continue to contribute to the development of the program, and provide encouragement and advice to current participants.

The Program Leader and Collaborator in Bendigo supported the Alumni by:

- Sending careers information and weaving kits to ten Alumni
- Hosting three virtual conversation nights with Alumni with five participants in each event. These conversations provided an opportunity for Alumni to debrief and share challenges they are facing, share perspectives on the impacts of the pandemic and be provided with support and advice from the Program Leader and each other on dealing with racism they face at work or university
- In September 2019 three Bendigo Alumni co-presented at the IAHA National Conference in Darwin, alongside Program Leaders Sam Paxton and Kylie Clarke. Charmaine (Occupational Therapy), Aramana (Social Work) and Morgan (Public Health) shared their journey with the program, their aspirations, and the changes they want to see in their communities.

In November 2019, Bendigo Alumni Georgia (Nursing) nominated for Weenthunga's Committee. In her statement, Georgia shared of her "ultimate goal to care for and be the voice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in communities and within metropolitan health care institutions, I know there are systemic challenges and hurdles which prevent First Nations people accessing health".



Geelong now also has an Alumni group who have enrolled in a range of courses in 2020 including Certificate II Community Services, Certificate III Individual Support, Bachelor of Biomedical Science and Certificate IV Child, Youth and Family Intervention.

As our Alumni venture into the next phase of their career, we are seeing Weenthunga's value of reciprocity shine brightly, with our Alumni mentoring and inspiring the next generation of young womxn pursuing health careers.

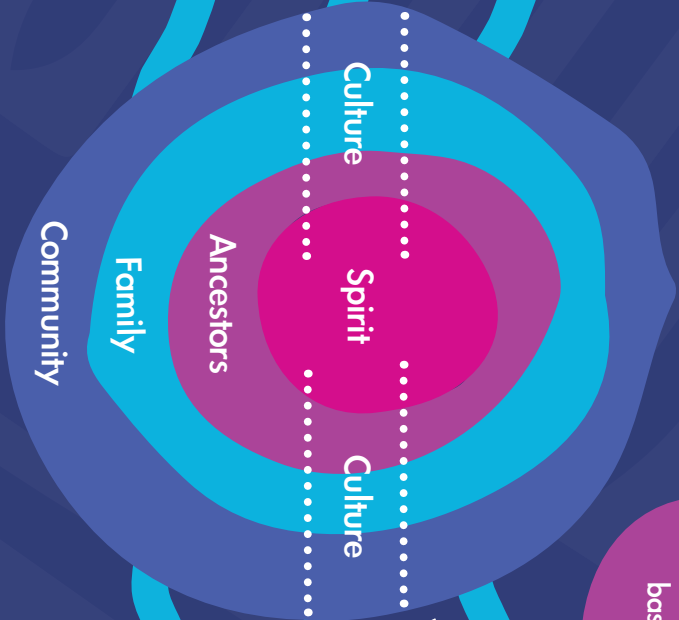


Giving back to ACCOs and community

Past

Present

Future



Strengths based

Culturally centred

Led by Aboriginal women

Tailored to individual interest and aspirations

**NYARRN-GAKKO WANGKIE**  
**Local Support Network**

Increased representation of mob in health workforce  
 Embedding and valuing Aboriginal knowledge and practice  
 Decolonising health services  
 Economic development

Health sector

Collaboration

Education sector

Relationships Respect Reciprocity Responsibility

Trust  
 Stories  
 Sharing  
 Connections

Opportunities  
 Access  
 Emersion  
 Understandings

Skills  
 Confidence  
 Growth  
 Vision

What do you ...  
 see? hear? feel?



## Aunty's Voice

Yaama>Hello. I was delighted to take on the role of Weenthunga's Aunty in 2020, it has been a role that I have steadily grown into over many years. For me it came at a time of enormous change and it reminded me to think of others. It is a role where you are ready to give and share. It is a space for patience and to breathe deeply taking the time to create a space where culture is always visible. There are also the times to "growl" with love and care to make sure protocols and our ways are heard and followed. The onus is on the listener therefore when you are "growled" you are required to learn to sit with the discomfort and look to your heart and hear what your inner voice is saying. It is a gift, to allow for self-reflection, not to take a position of defense.

My role started with listening and reading from a range of sources. The Aunty role is part of Weenthunga's leadership team of three; Durrong Ngulu Sam Paxton and Erin McKinnon and myself. Our leadership team met often to continue a process to decolonise and step into our own paths. At a time when many changes were happening with COVID-19 I found I was reaching out to stay connected with First Nation womxn at state, national and international levels. It provided us a time to 'yarn up'. Laugh, cry and share how we were feeling and our stories in culturally safe spaces. There were opportunities to hear so many voices through webinars, zoom meetings, and social media. Some may have felt overwhelmed but for me I felt invigorated, it provided me strength and resolve to know we have the solutions and need to continue to have the courage to speak up. We learned how to 'back-up' one another, in our way, for this support looks like 'creating space for other voices to be heard, that of our young and our Elders', not someone taking our voices and speaking for us.

Though there were many meetings, we always looked to take time to plan before meetings and to debrief after. The processes of how we run meetings and how we engage with others has developed as a leadership team of three. The principles of the 4R's which I wrote a few years ago for Weenthunga are now known and are used to guide our decisions. I have written of a 5th R and we are now considering that of Resistance in honor of a year of change and a strength in the words 'Always Was, Always Will Be'. I wish to thank Sam and Erin for their patience, to Lin my unpaid PA and friend and to my wonderful family who back me with these three words, as a Gamilaraay grandmother my mantra is "I believe in lore, laughter and legacy."

We would like to thank the Donald Fraser Family Fund for their funding support of the Aunty role.

## Cultural Safety and Critical Consciousness Workshops

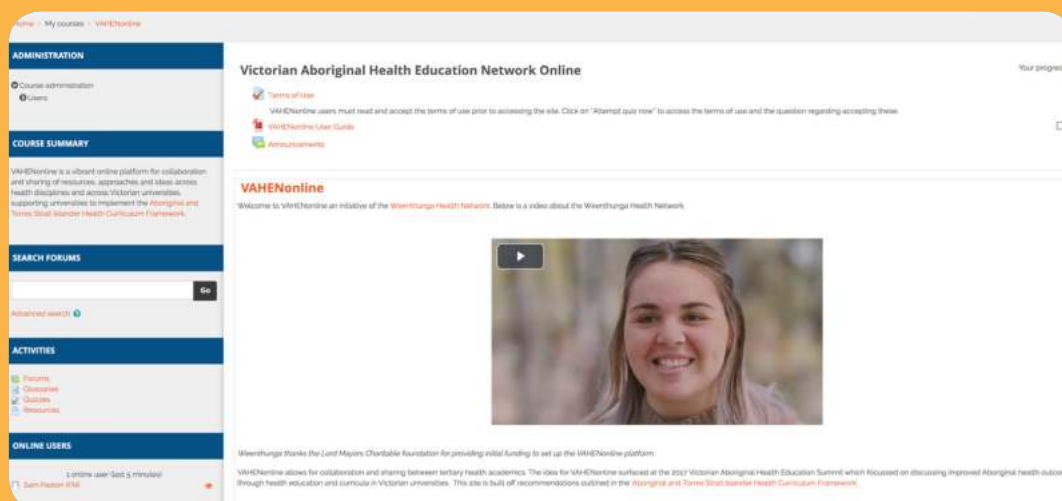
This year we were able to pursue our intention to work in the space of addressing racism in health and health education. We developed a fee-for-service model for this work, and delivered our first fee-for-service workshops in November 2019. We call our approach Cultural Safety and Critical Consciousness, and it covers topics of power, privilege, racism, decolonising and working two-way. The content and delivery is designed to provide opportunities for reflection and learning that build the critical foundation for developing understandings of our past, present and possible futures. In late 2019 we were invited to deliver a workshop with a staff team at St John of God Hospital Bendigo, building on the long-term relationship and collaboration between our organisations. The workshop has contributed to improved cultural safety and identification of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people accessing their services. We were invited to present on Cultural Safety and Critical Consciousness to a class of post-graduate tertiary health students in early 2020, also building on an existing relationship. This was a positive learning experience, both for the students and for us, and we looked forward to delivering further workshops, however the pandemic necessitated a change in approach from our preferred face-to-face delivery. In collaboration with St John of God Hospital Bendigo and other Bendigo-based organisations we co-hosted a Zoom Webinar, *Identity and culture: are we ready for the conversation?* during National Reconciliation week, exploring how health and community services respect and support the identity and



culture of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people who are accessing their services. We were so pleased that 125 people participated in the event, feedback was positive and it led to an opportunity to provide organisational and professional learning with a mainstream health organisation whose CEO watched the webinar. The necessity to adapt to online delivery due to the ongoing lock-down and COVID-19 restrictions has meant we are now able to deliver training virtually as well as in person, which is leading to greater opportunities for Weenthunga in the coming year.

## VAHENonline

Ashley Paxton, a proud Waywuru woman, joined Weenthunga as VAHENonline Lead in November 2019, and Danielle Amiet joined the team as Ashley's Collaborator in January 2020. In 2020 VAHENonline transitioned onto Learning Management System (LMS) 'Moodle' to align more to the LMS platforms typically used within the tertiary education space. The rebuild allowed for increased functionality and ways for innovative collaboration with users. VAHENonline has been populated with many new resources across all sections of the portal. In addition, new subject topics have been created to expand the offerings of VAHENonline; including an online book club and an eWorkbook on 'How to be an Ally'. Content pages have been built that offer University academics an overview of topics and resources they may benefit from incorporating into their teaching or for their own learning. Teaching pages include: racism and implicit bias, strengths based approaches to health, white privilege and white fragility and sovereignty and self determination.



*Image:* VAHENonline homepage.

Currently, 70 people are registered on the new VAHENonline site. The registered users come from eight different Victorian universities. Additionally, executives from various health councils have registered for use. Of the users, 27% have identified as First Nations people.

VAHENonline are always welcoming new users to the site. If you work in the health space with First Nations peoples or are a health academic, we would love to have your knowledge shared in the space. To join in on the discussions taking place on VAHENonline please complete the short registration survey at [www.surveymonkey.com/r/2MVRSZ7](http://www.surveymonkey.com/r/2MVRSZ7).

We would like to thank The Lord Mayors Charitable Foundation, B B & A Miller Fund and the Alf & Meg Steel Fund for their funding support of the VAHENonline project. We would also like to thank all new and existing VAHENonline users for coming along on this learning journey with us.

## Treasurers Report

In 2019-2020 Weenthunga's income and expenditure increased, with successful grant applications and the growth of our team to implement our programs. Weenthunga is grateful to the following organisations for their support of our work in 2019-2020:

- Victorian Department of Health and Human Services for their support of our work
- Lord Mayor's Charitable Foundation, B B & A Miller and Alf and Meg Steele Fund for their support of the VAHENonline project
- VACCHO and the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet for their support of the Nyarrngakgo mangkie program on Wurundjeri Country
- Ian Potter Foundation and the RE Ross Trust for their continued support of the Nyarrngakgo mangkie program on Dja Dja Wurrung Country
- Give Where You Live Foundation and the Geelong Community Foundation for their support of the Nyarrngakgo mangkie program on Wadawurrung Country.

Weenthunga would like to express our gratitude to our Members and supporters who have given donations to support Weenthunga. Your assistance is vital in supporting us to achieve our vision. Special thanks to:

- Hannah Lai and her mum for their donation in memory of Hannah's grandmother
- The Bruce Parncutt Family
- The Donald Fraser Family Fund for generously backing Weenthunga's Aunty role
- The Handbury Family Foundation for their generous donation
- St Michael's Grammar School for their fundraising efforts in support of our work.

We also greatly appreciate the support of the Fellowship for Indigenous Leadership which enabled our Yarning Up Strong Camp.

Finally we acknowledge the continued generous support of Meg Irwin for the Meg Irwin Bursary which supports young womxn studying tertiary health courses.

With no secure core funding, we have worked to accurately reflect costs of implementing programs in our grant applications including provisions for overhead and management supervision expenses, which is shown in the increased Administration figure. This figure also includes ICT expenses required by our staff who all work from home.

Weenthunga had retained earnings of \$214,868 for 2019-2020. We have increased our fee-for-service income this year and will continue to develop our approach to fund-raising and income generation to enable Weenthunga to grow and thrive into the future.

I'd like to thank Chris Dragisic for managing our finances and financial reporting, Trevor Donegan for providing pro-bono auditing services and Weenthunga's Durrong Ngulu for their oversight of finances and the operations of Weenthunga.



**Glenn Milliken - Kamilaroi**  
Treasurer

*Note: a full copy of the audited financial statements are available on request from Members.*



## Finance Report

	June 2020 \$	June 2019 \$
<b>Income</b>	533,312	453,990
<b>Expenditure</b>		
Administration	95,271	26,252
Disbursements	14,367	2,000
Promotional expenses	8,656	6,575
Project activities	34,666	21,239
Staff expenses	363,809	349,159
<b>Total expenditure</b>	<b>516,771</b>	<b>405,208</b>
<b>Surplus</b>	<b>16,541</b>	<b>48,679</b>
<b>Retained earnings</b>	<b>214,868</b>	<b>198,327</b>

## 2019-2020 Financial Supporters



