



Connecting 2770

Working to build connections to community
and culture in Western Sydney

Summary Report
June 2024



Acknowledgments

We acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the land on which our project was shaped and delivered, the land of the Darug People, and pay respects to their Elders past and present. We extend respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples who assisted in the program development and delivery within the community.

Thank you to the following individuals and organisations for their contributions to Connecting 2770:

- **Willmot Primary School** – supported especially by Carley Bugeja, Ms Taylor
- **Aunty Sandra Hickey**, Aboriginal Education Officer at Willmot Public School.
- **Brenden Moore Royal Botanic Gardens**
- **Chifley Shalvey High School Campus** – Miss Sweeny
- **Blakfit** – Josh Toole
- **Aboriginal Community Members who generously passed on their traditional teachings** – Aunty Sandra, David Whitton, Peter Dahlstrom, Lillian Whitton, Aunty Kayleen, Angela Collins and Jamie Thaidy.
- **Baptist Care** – Jaymie-Lea Thaidy and Matt. T
- **Djirabitty** – Steve Trist
- **Dalmarri** – Jason runs an Aboriginal cultural art business. Jason donated his time and supplies to create the Art Mural piece with the children
- **Currawong Kitchen** – the team provided catering for events and programs.

Warning to Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Peoples:

This report may contain images, details, or names of an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person who has died.

Connecting 2770 was coordinated by Jesuit Social Services Western Sydney project staff:

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Evaluation and summary reports were prepared by:

Dr Rachael Green from the Learning and Practice Development Unit, Jesuit Social Services.





About Connecting 2770

This report summarises key activities undertaken as a part of an initiative called **Connecting 2770** undertaken by Jesuit Social Services in collaboration with community partners on the traditional land of the Darug people in north west Sydney, New South Wales. The report also provides indicators of short-term impact gained through evaluation of the initiative across 2023. A full evaluation report detailing findings is available upon request.

Connecting 2770 was a series of cultural activities and events held across 2023, aiming to build meaningful and empowering connections to country, culture, and community across the postcode 2770.

The 2770 postcode is a priority area for community service providers due to the high proportion of socioeconomically disadvantaged residents and the co-occurrence of issues affecting their health, wellbeing, and ability to flourish. The area has a strong Aboriginal community, and there are also a range of cultural groups who are more highly represented in the area than in New South Wales more broadly.

One of the key drivers of **Connecting 2770** was to build community cohesion and the capacity of Willmot residents to advocate for and drive change, as well as to remove the barriers that exist so that families and other community members can participate in society and take up opportunities.

What did the initiative involve?

Connecting 2770 involved implementation of a cultural program engaging over 600 participants of mixed ages across 2023. The program included:

- Art workshops engaging children and adults, including a men's group.
- Aboriginal dance programs engaging children and young adults.
- Dreamtime story workshops for children.
- Bush tucker community garden engaging adults.
- School choir group and school/community performances with/by children.
- Ecology workshops for adults.

The cultural program culminated in a one-day festival titled "Willmot Many Friends" held on 4 November 2023 attended by over 260 people during which several activities from the initiative were showcased and celebrated.

The initiative was funded by Resilience NSW (New South Wales Government) under the "COVID-19 Community Connection and Wellbeing Program – Pathway 2" funding stream.

We acknowledge a number of organisations and individuals throughout this summary report who contributed their time and resources towards **Connecting 2770** and extend our thanks to all others who are not mentioned here.

All **Connecting 2770** activities, including the evaluation were overseen by a Steering Committee of community members, some of whom participated in an impact yarn to give their feedback on the initiative including areas of individual and community level impact.

Select findings and comments given by participants are highlighted in this summary report alongside a description of key activities comprising the cultural program, which are presented next.

A summary of impact across the five areas outlined above is shown at the end of this report.

Evaluation of Connecting 2770

Evaluation of the **Connecting 2770** was undertaken by Jesuit Social Services' Learning and Practice Development Unit, in close collaboration with Jesuit Social Services' Western Sydney program staff and with the guidance of a project Steering Committee comprising Aboriginal community members.

The evaluation had two aims:

- A. to measure satisfaction and gain feedback on experiences of cultural program participants and festival attendees that can help inform future planning; and,
- B. to gain insight into the impact of the initiative on participants':
 - i. connection to others;
 - ii. opportunity to connect with, learn about and share Aboriginal culture;
 - iii. connection to, and sense of belonging in, the local community;
 - iv. self-confidence;
 - v. sense of pride.

The evaluation used mixed methods, including:

- 126 surveys conducted with 86 participants of the cultural program and 40 festival attendees
- Impact yarns conducted with 11 participants (3 school choir participants, 5 Aboriginal dance group participants, and 3 Steering Committee members).



Art workshops

Several art workshops streams were held across 2023, engaging a total of 228 participants. The art workshops explored cultural themes with groups of children, women and men. Workshops included:

- Women's Mural Workshops (15 sessions)
- Children's Mural Workshop (single session)
- Men's Art Workshops (15 sessions)
- Children's Rainbow Serpent mosaic workshops (10 sessions)

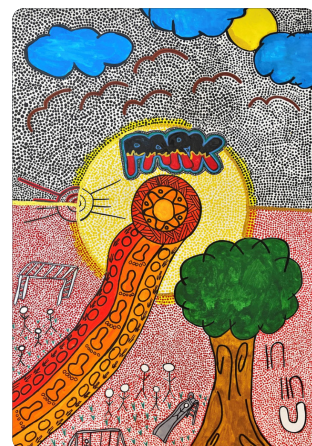
96%

of Aboriginal and or Torres Strait Islander participants across all art workshops (24 of 25) reported that they felt more connected to their culture as a result of their experience.

Women's Mural Workshops

Women worked on four murals across a series of 15 sessions. These murals are now displayed at the Willmot Community Hub (the Hub). The murals, pictured below, depict the four central areas within the community: the park, the shops, the school, and the Hub. Each panel has a meeting circle with a trail leading either to the right or the left and, when placed together, they depict the Hub at the centre - representing community, connection, trust, family, friends, safety, and belonging.

The Women's art group was supported by Jesuit Social Services and Jaime Thai dy.



Children's Mural



The children participating in this workshop produced a mural representing the Darug lands, the land on which we live and work, with all walking paths leading to the Hub as the central meeting place. This central meeting place is in the circle with the flows of the Parramatta River and the arcs representing the Blue Mountains at the edge of Darug lands. The mural is now displayed at the Hub.

The children's art group was proudly supported by Jesuit Social Services and DALMARRI.

Children's Rainbow Serpent mosaic workshops

A footpath mosaic depicting the Rainbow Serpent was created in 10 weekly sessions by the children of Willmot Public School, in partnership with Jesuit Social Services and Aunty Sandra Hickey, the Aboriginal Education Officer at the school.

Approximately 90 children years 2 to 6 participated in breaking the tiles, laying out the design on pavers, fastening them with adhesive, grouting, sealing, and cementing the pavers to form a footpath as the entry to the yarning circle of the school.

An event was held to celebrate the opening of the permanent mosaic installation. This included a smoking ceremony conducted by senior elder Uncle Wes, a performance by the children's dance group (see pg.8) and a morning tea for staff, parents and carers.



“The welcoming and support of every member of the group.”

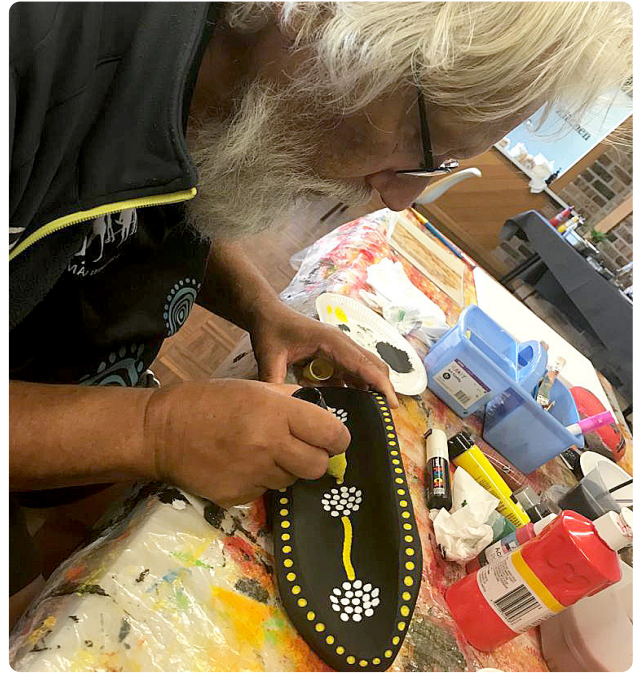
(Participant feedback when asked what they liked most about the experience)

Men's Art Workshop

The Indigenous art workshop was held with 9–12 men across 15 weekly sessions. Participants gave very positive feedback about the impact of the men's group, emphasising improved confidence, the opportunity to learn from elders, and friendships they formed with other participants. There was exceptional engagement, connection, and support for the program. The group continues to be run by community members in 2024 and has expanded in size.



The art workshops were facilitated by Jesuit Social Services in partnership with Elders Uncle David Whitton and Uncle Peter Dahlstrom.



100%

of survey respondents from the men's art program (7 of 7) reported that they had an improved sense of connection to their local community and improved connection to others as a result of their experience.

“More confident within my cultural art skills, **confidence in my identity** as an Aboriginal man.”

(Participant feedback)

Aboriginal dance programs

Aboriginal dance programs were held with primary school aged children from Willmot Public School and high school students from Chifley Shalvey High School.

The children and young people learned traditional Aboriginal dance, language, totem dances, traditional dress, and cultural ceremonies such as the circle cleansing, and the ochre ceremony. Participants then showcased their dances in several performances, including the opening ceremony of the rainbow serpent footpath and the 2023 Willmot NAIDOC celebration.

Children's dance program

78 primary and secondary school students participated in the workshops which were facilitated by Blakfit – Josh Toole and supported by Aunty Sandra Hickey, the Aboriginal Education Officer from Willmot Public School, in collaboration with Jesuit Social Services.



“It was a great opportunity to show pride in indigenous culture — that it’s not dead, **it’s very much alive.**”
(Steering Committee member)

Young adults dance program

This program provided an opportunity for high school students from Chifley Shalvey High School to participate in dance workshops and decorate their dance costumes by making artefacts such as necklaces and headpieces out of quandong seeds, emu feathers, hair pieces and leather cords.

The young people learned traditional Aboriginal dance, language, totem dances, traditional dress and cultural ceremonies such as the circle cleansing and ochre ceremonies.

This program was supported by Miss Sweeny, Lillian Whitton from Chifley Shalvey High School in collaboration with Jesuit Social Services.

91.6%

of survey participants from the young adults dance program (11 of 12) reported that they felt more connected to their culture.

“I feel like I understand more of my culture.”

(Participant feedback)

“I feel happier to be in the community.”

(Participant feedback)





Dreamtime story workshops

Aboriginal Elders engaged children in a series of workshops where they gave oral teachings about artefacts, told stories using language, and children participated in an art session and play linking to the Rainbow Serpent story.

A total of 74 children were engaged across three workshops. Additionally, a children's story time tent was held at the **Willmot Many Friends** festival.

Workshop 1



This workshop was conducted by Senior Elder Uncle Wes in Auntie Sandra's classroom with 54 participants, 43 of whom identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander.

Workshop 2



Storytime conducted during the after-school program with Elder Auntie Kayleen who is a Murri woman born in Cairns Queensland.

100%

of survey participants from the dreamtime story workshops (9 of 9) reported that they learned something new about Aboriginal culture.

Workshop 3

With the support of Senior Elder Uncle Wes, students first created a rainbow serpent on muslin fabric using dot painting along the length of the serpent.

Every child from Willmot Public School had an opportunity to contribute and 54 children engaged in the activity, 43 of whom identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander.



“I learnt more about my culture.”

(Participant feedback)



Students from Auntie Sandra’s classroom then performed in a Rainbow Serpent Play at the Willmot Public School hall, with the dot painted rainbow serpent and other art including trees used as props.



Bush Tucker Community Garden Project

This project engaged 73 adult participants across four workshops held through 2023. The workshops each spanned six hours and covered the following topics:

- Planting learning plant name and uses.
- Bush tucker knowledge and beginning of signage for plants.
- Propagation and bush tucker.
- Bush Tucker and final planting day.

The project culminated in bush tucker tours held during the **Willmot Many Friends** festival. The tours engaged 180 participants. In addition, a tent was held at the festival with traditional food including crocodile skewers, native jam, cream and dampers.

The bush tucker garden was created in partnership with Brenden Moore from the Royal Botanic Gardens.

Tours were led by Elder Aunty Kayleen.

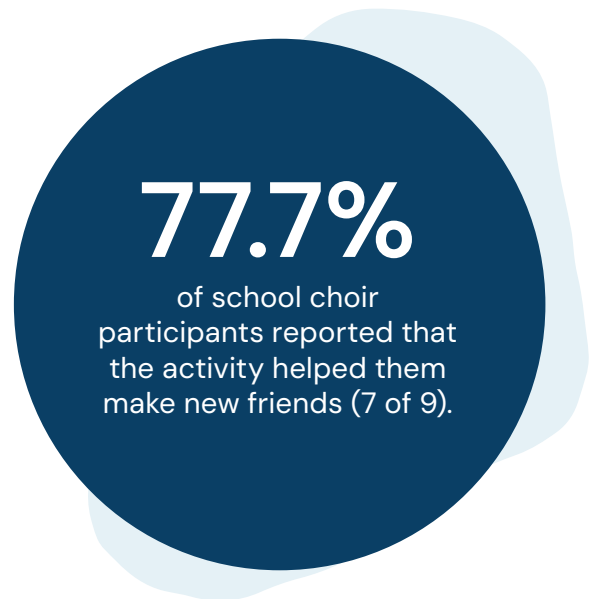




School choir group and performances

A group of 15 Willmot Public School students from years 2 to 6 were engaged in school choir rehearsals across 24 sessions. The choir performed on seven occasions in the community, including at the **Willmot Many Friends** festival in November 2023.

The school choir was facilitated by Willmot Public School Staff Ms Taylor and supported by Carley Bugeja, Aunty Sandra, and Elder Uncle Wes. The song performed was "Let the World Know" with lyrics including, "Let the world know, We are still here, Let the world know our culture survived, Let the world know we are still strong."




"I saw new people from school in the group."

(Participant feedback)

"We've become best friends."

(Participant feedback)



Ecology workshops

In 2023, three ecology workshops focused on how to care for the country were held, engaging over 100 adults, including participants at the **Willmot Many Friends** festival.

The workshop themes were:

- First Nations focus
- We're young and green
- Combination workshop at the festival

The workshops were facilitated by Josh Toole from BlackFit and Steve Trist from Djirabitty.

**“Enjoyed it; a lot of new stuff
I didn’t know.”**
(Participant feedback)

87.5%

of participants from the ecology workshops (7 of 8) reported that the workshop gave them the opportunity to meet new people.



Willmot Many Friends festival, November 2024

The **Connecting 2770** cultural program culminated in a one-day festival titled **Willmot Many Friends**, held on 4 November 2023. The festival was attended by over 260 people during which several activities from the initiative were showcased and celebrated.

100%

of survey respondents from the 2770 postcode reported increased pride in their community after attending the Willmot Many Friends festival.

The festival event featured the following events and activities:

- Art exhibition
- Video and photo exhibition
- Talent quest
- Choir performances (cultural program school choir)
- Reptile show and photo opportunity
- Dance performances
- Ecological workshop (cultural program, mixed session)
- Bush tucker talk and tour (cultural program)
- Cultural food tasting
- Cultural dancing (cultural program, Aboriginal dance workshops)
- Community Café
- Festival lunch




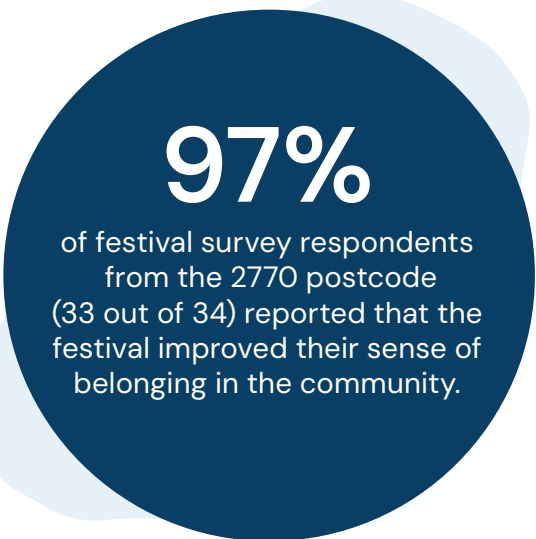


Community celebration: a day of music, dance, art, and food.



While the focus of many workshops was on Aboriginal culture, the Tongan and Tokelauan groups are an important part of the community and joined our **Willmot Many Friends** festival 2023 to demonstrate elements of their culture, including a kava ceremony.


“It was an amazing day. We need more events like this in the future for our community.”
 (Participant feedback)



Satisfaction levels with the festival were extremely high. Many comments indicated that they appreciated the cultural experiences and the cultural aspect of the food provided. They also appreciated that the festival was welcoming to families, inclusive of cultural groups, and many requested that it be held again.

All festival survey respondents (40 out of 40) rated the day as the highest possible, indicating they enjoyed it ‘very much’.

A total of 40 festival attendees completed a five-minute feedback survey at the exit gates.

Survey respondents represented a mix of ages, with the majority being female. Over half (51.2%) of respondents identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, and 78.3 per cent of festival attendees who completed the survey lived in the 2770 postcode.

- Some of the feedback comments include:**
- “The singing group was amazing, along with the dances, the food, and the community coming together. Hopefully, we have more events in the future!”
 - “All the dances, artwork, food, and connecting with the community.”
 - “The performers, the community coming together, cultural food, and families uniting through artwork.”
 - “I loved the performances and the good food.”
 - “LOVED EVERY BIT ABOUT IT.”

Summary of evaluation findings across impact areas

Below is a summary of evaluation findings across five impact areas, combining survey ratings collected from 86 cultural program participants (across each of the 6 activity areas described above) and from 40 festival participants. It also highlights key qualitative findings collected from surveys and impact yarns.

Impact area 1: Opportunity to connect with, learn about and share Aboriginal culture

There is strong evidence that the **Connecting 2770** initiative provided participants with the opportunity to connect with, learn about and share Aboriginal culture.

- 98.5 per cent of cultural program participants who identified as Aboriginal (65 of 66), **reported learning something new about their culture.**
- 94 per cent of Aboriginal and/Torres Strait Islander adults reported that they **felt more connected to their culture** as a result of their involvement in the activity (nb children were not asked this question).
- All non-Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander cultural program adult participants (9 of 9) reported an improved **appreciation of Aboriginal culture** as a result of their participation in the activity.
- Many participants commented that they had the **opportunity to learn from elders/'uncles'**, which also gave these senior community members the opportunity to share their culture.

Impact area 2: Connection to others

There is evidence that the **Connecting 2770** initiative promoted improved connections to others among participants, with the majority of those who engaged with the cultural program reporting that they had the opportunity to meet new people or make new friends.

- 85 per cent of cultural program survey respondents (73 of 86) reported that they had the chance to **make new friends/meet new people** through their participation in the activity.

Impact area 3: Connection to, and sense of belonging in, the local community

There is evidence that the **Connecting 2770** initiative promoted improved connection to, and sense of belonging in, the local community among cultural program participants and attendees of the of the **Willmot Many Friends** festival.

- 98 per cent of adult cultural program participants (42 of 43) reported that participating in the activity had a positive impact on their **sense of connection to and belonging in their local community.**
- 97 per cent of festival survey respondents who were residents of the 2770 postcode (33 of 34) reported that the festival has **improved their feeling of belonging in the community.**

Impact area 4: Improved sense of pride in the local community

Cultural program participants and festival attendees reported having an improved sense of pride in the local community through their involvement with the **Connecting 2770** initiative. This was evidenced at a number of levels including through their involvement in showing their work/performing and positive promotion of their culture.

- 95 per cent of adult cultural program respondents (41 of 43) reported an **improvement in their sense of pride** in their community
- All festival attendees who were residents of the 2770 postcode reported **increased pride in their community** following attendance at the festival, with 82 per cent (32 of 40) reporting that they felt 'a lot more' pride.

Impact area 5: Participants' self confidence

There is evidence that the **Connecting 2770** initiative promoted improved self-confidence among participants of the cultural program, especially those who had the opportunity to perform and showcase their work in front of their community, and also among those who were involved in organising the **Willmot Many Friends** festival.

- 93 per cent of adult participants reported that participation in the activity has had a **positive impact on their self-confidence**.
- The impact yarn groups with cultural program participants discussed the experience of performing publicly with feedback indicating that the experience was confidence building and how this made them **feel confident in other areas of their life**.
- Steering Committee members spoke about how the experience of being a part of the committee was confidence and **skill building, improving their communication skills** and building experience of being a part of a committee.

Conclusion

Jesuit Social Services and our Western Sydney team, take great pride in the achievements of the **Connecting 2770** initiative and the positive feedback received from community members and participants in evaluation feedback surveys and impact yarns.

Support from Resilience NSW (New South Wales Government) was gratefully received for **Connecting 2770**. However, successful implementation of this project was achieved through leveraging of additional in kind community resources. This has fostered and strengthened networks of relationships and improved capacity in the local community.

The participation of a large number of community members in this initiative – over 600 cultural program participants including over 260 festival attendees – indicates strong community interest in community cohesion-building culturally focused initiatives in this disadvantaged area.

The findings of this evaluation are extremely promising. Satisfaction levels among both cultural program participants and festival attendees were very high, with many requesting that cultural programs and a festival event be held again in the future. The findings strongly suggest that the program had a positive impact in all target areas, including improved community cohesion, sense of belonging, connection to culture, and enhanced self-confidence and community pride. Due to the positive support and engagement they received, a small number of the activities described in this report, continue to be run on an ongoing basis including: Aboriginal dance programs within Willmot Public School and Chifley College Shalvey Campus (primary and high schools); and, the Men's Indigenous Art program, which has expanded in group size and postcode reach. In addition, the bush tucker garden is maintained by community members and continues to thrive.

However, the evaluation has primarily indicated short-term impacts, emphasising the need for sustained long-term engagement to achieve lasting change. Jesuit Social Services remains committed to investing in the 2770 postcode to enhance community cohesion and empower communities to advocate for and drive positive change for a strong future.

