

School and community context: Integrated study – Murray Islands community

Cowra is a small rural town with a population of about 9 000 people in central western NSW. A little over 300 of these people are Aboriginal.

The Cowra community can boast a strong history involving Aboriginal people. At times this history shows the worst in a racist society, while at other, more recent, times there is much that the community can be proud of.

For Aboriginal people, Cowra holds the story of cultural resilience and survival; of a community which has struggled against the harshest conditions to persevere and grow.

Much of this history centres on the Erambie Aboriginal Mission, ‘the Mish’ or ‘the 10 acres’, which was established in the early 1890s and continues to hold residence overlooking the adjacent Lachlan River.

Over time the Wiradjuri families who lived in Cowra – often on the Mission – have relocated into town, bringing their community and culture together with the fabric of life which makes up the larger Cowra community. Their lives, cultures and organisations are prominent within the town. The Coes, the Williams and the Bamblents are a few of the surnames proudly associated with the Aboriginal people of Cowra, while Yalbillinga Preschool, Weigelli Drug and Alcohol Centre and the Gumbuya Aboriginal Offices are a few of the local Aboriginal organisations servicing the Aboriginal people of the Cowra district.



Together, these people, families and social organisations cooperate with the broader community to strengthen and build this resilient and proud Aboriginal community. A fine example of this was shown in 2008 when local high school students, as a reconciliation project, completed the construction of a 45 m long, three-dimensional tree goanna named ‘Injumara’ (a Wiradjuri word meaning ‘Respect’). The goanna is the local people’s totem and is built on school grounds in an area known as ‘Reconciliation Park’. It was created from the ideas of local Aboriginal people and constructed largely by past and present students of the school, many of whom are Aboriginal. These and many other students who helped create ‘Injumara’ make up the four Aboriginal Studies

classes at Cowra High School (there are four classes, one in each of Years 9–12). Aboriginal people and Aboriginal culture are prominent and strong in the school and community.

The ‘Injumara’ project received complete endorsement from the Aboriginal elders of the community, from DEST and from the local Cowra community, with several

individuals and organisations (both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal) providing significant financial and in-kind support for the project.

Like the Aboriginal flag which flies side-by-side with the Australian flag at the front of the local high school, 'Injumara' overlooks the school, its community and students. Together they proudly demonstrate a community working together to create awareness and recognition of pride in Aboriginal Australia.