

20

A YEAR OF
GROWTH & RESILIENCE

25



IMPACT REPORT





Table of Contents

Our Winmarra Story	03	2025 Program Overview & Highlights	12
Message From Our Founders	05	Why This Model Works	18
Our Purpose	07	The Challenges We Addressed	21
The Cost of Inaction	08	2025 - 2030 Strategic Plan	27





Acknowledgement of Country

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The Winmarra Foundation acknowledges the Ngemba people as the traditional custodians of the land on which our Emerging Leaders Program operates in Brewarrina. We acknowledge the continuing connection to Country and waterways, and pay our respects to Elders past and present.

Through our work empowering young Aboriginal people, we are committed to creating a future built on respect, understanding, and shared responsibility.

Always was. Always will be. Aboriginal Land.



Our Winmarra Story

Origins: Born from Community Need

The Winmarra Foundation emerged from a simple but profound recognition: many capable Aboriginal youth in regional NSW communities are lacking positive role models, meaningful opportunities, and consistent support to navigate the transition to adulthood.

In communities carrying the weight of intergenerational trauma, geographic isolation, and limited economic opportunities, talented young people were falling through gaps – not because they lacked potential, but because the systems and support structures they needed simply didn't exist.

The Brewarrina Context

Brewarrina is a small Aboriginal community in northwest NSW, approximately 800 kms from Sydney. Like many regional Aboriginal communities, Brewarrina faces:

- **High levels of intergenerational trauma** from mission life and forced removal policies
- **Geographic isolation** from education and employment opportunities
- **Limited opportunities** for youth to connect with strong, positive male role models
- **Youth disengagement** from education and mainstream pathways
- **Exposure to negative behaviours** and cycles of disadvantage

As one community member told us: *"Our country does hold a very dark history... the problems that we face continue to stem from our dark history and what has happened to our men, what has happened to our women, and what has happened to our children, and we're still on a journey of healing."*

Our Winmarra Story (cont.)

A Different Approach

Unlike programs imposed by external organizations, Winmarra was developed in partnership with Brewarrina Shire Council and community members – Elders, parents, and young people themselves.

From the beginning, we committed to three non-negotiable principles:

1. **Community-led, not externally imposed** - Every decision, every activity, every goal is developed with community input and leadership.
2. **Culture at the core** - Strengthening cultural identity and connection to Country is the foundation of everything we do.
3. **Consistent, long-term engagement** - Not one-off interventions, but sustained relationships that extend beyond formal program completion.

What Makes Winmarra Different

We don't come in saying "we're going to fix you." We come in saying "**we see your strength, and we're here to walk alongside you.**"

As Auntie Doreen Waites, a respected Brewarrina member, explained: "That's what I actually love about this program, it's not a program that's just coming in here saying, I'm going to do this, I'm going to do that. It's actually a program that's coming in involving community people, involving us... involving mothers and getting our opinions."



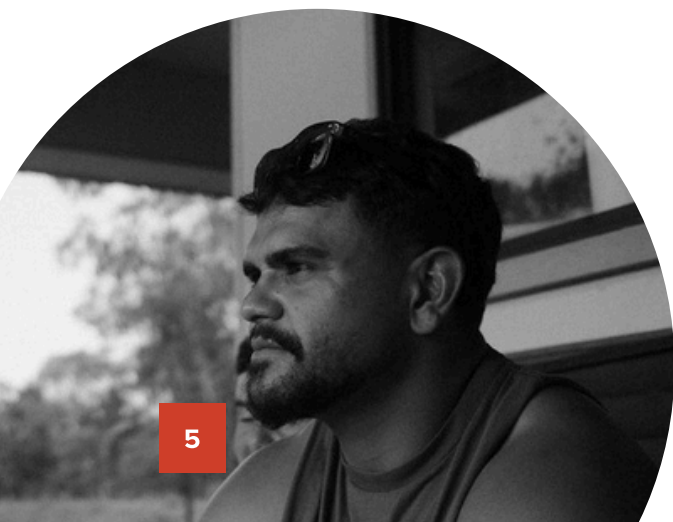
A Message From Our Founders

Reflecting on a Year of Transformation

2025 has been a year of profound validation for the Winmarra Foundation. When we first began planning the Emerging Leaders Program, our vision was simple yet ambitious — to create a space where young Aboriginal men in Brewarrina could discover their potential, connect deeply with their culture, and begin to build pathways toward meaningful, self-determined futures. What we witnessed throughout this journey exceeded even our highest hopes.

Throughout our careers in sports and community development, one truth has always stood out: young people don't fail because they lack ability, they falter when they lack belief. Belief in themselves. Belief that someone truly sees their potential. Belief that they belong to something greater than the circumstances they were born into.

The Emerging Leaders Program was built to nurture that belief — to show up consistently and authentically for our young men over 10 transformative months. And the results speak for themselves. Every participant reported an increase in confidence. We saw young men who once avoided the spotlight begin to step forward, take initiative, and pursue opportunities they had never considered before. Their families, teachers, and Elders noticed it too — nearly three-quarters of community members told us they could see the change, and not a single person said they saw “no change” at all. That tells us everything we need to know: every young man who entered this program grew.



A Message From Our Founders (cont.)

What has moved us most is the ripple effect across the broader community, with 80% of community members said they observed positive change beyond just our five participants. This tells us something powerful — that belief and connection are contagious. Younger siblings are being inspired. Families are engaging differently. Conversations in the community are shifting toward pride, hope, and possibility.

As one community member told us, *“It’s programs like this that enables my nephew to be the man that he was intended to be, you know, a real strong Ngemba Wayilwan man.”* That statement captures the heart of Winmarra.

Our goal has never been to change who our young people are — it’s to create the conditions for them to become who they were always meant to be.



Kirk Eyres’ story is one that stays with us. Kirk began this journey shy, withdrawn, and unsure of his place in the world. He rarely left home, avoided social situations, and carried the weight of generational challenges. But through the program, through consistent support, cultural grounding, and the collective belief of those around him — Kirk found his strength. Today, he works full-time at the Brewarrina Sewerage Treatment Plant. He’s earned his driver’s license. Most importantly, he’s found his voice. His mother told us, *“The program has helped him, real life. I think he’s coming out of his shell. He’s starting to talk, starting to express his feelings.”*

That’s what this work is about. It’s about showing what’s possible when we invest properly, not just in programs, but in people. When we honour culture, consistency, and care, transformation follows. The success of the Emerging Leaders Program is proof that when belief takes root, change becomes inevitable.

Latrell Mitchell & Sunny Brar

Founders, Winmarra Foundation

Our Purpose

Fostering the next generation of leaders, by enabling them through mentorship and community engagement.

Our Vision

Empowering Australian youth to deepen their connection to culture, country, and themselves through unique on country experiences.

Our Values

Cultural confidence.

Inclusivity.

Connection & belonging.

Empowerment.

The Cost of Inaction

Community members view the program as essential protective infrastructure, with **72% believing youth would be at greater risk if the program stopped**, and equally 72% stating young people would miss critical opportunities.

**Data reflects responses from community members in Brewarrina who were familiar with program participants and observed changes over the 10-month pilot period (n=60).*



The cost of inaction

The fact that 72% anticipate "more risk for youth" if the program stopped indicates the community views Winmarra as protective infrastructure - not just enrichment, but essential risk mitigation for young people in Brewarrina.

The 40% concerned about "less connection to culture" underscores the program's role in cultural preservation and transmission - a critical function in Aboriginal communities facing ongoing cultural disruption.

72%

of community members believe youth would face **"more risk"** and **"miss out"** on critical opportunities without the program

40%

were concerned about **"less connection to culture"**



Prevention Value

The Winmarra Emerging Leaders Program is proof that early, targeted intervention changes futures and saves systems millions.

By investing in intensive, culturally grounded support for Aboriginal youth at risk of disengagement, Winmarra builds confidence, purpose, and belonging while reducing the likelihood of future involvement in justice, welfare, and health systems.



Investment

Each participant receives mentoring, leadership development, cultural connection, and wraparound support over 10-months.

- Estimated cost per participant: **\$30,000**
- Annual investment for 30 youth across regional sites: \$900,000 total

This investment is not a cost — it is a prevention strategy that protects young people from entering far more expensive crisis systems later in life.

System Costs Prevented*

Category	Estimated Cost per Person	Potential Savings (30 Youth)	Key Sources
Youth Justice	\$100,000–\$1,000,000	\$3M+	Justice Reform Initiative, NSW Parliament
Education Disengagement	\$250,000–\$300,000	\$7.5–\$9M	Mitchell Institute
Mental Health	\$10,000–\$50,000	\$300k–\$1.5M	Treasury, AIHW
Welfare & Unemployment	\$200,000–\$300,000	\$4–\$6M	Mitchell Institute, AIHW

**The prevention value estimates in this report are based on publicly available Australian data. Youth justice figures use information from the Justice Reform Initiative and NSW Parliament. Education estimates come from the Mitchell Institute and the Australia Institute. Mental health costs draw on Treasury and AIHW data, and welfare estimates use findings from the Mitchell Institute and AIHW. These figures are indicative only and provide a conservative estimate of potential system cost savings.*

Prevention Value (cont.)

The Value of Prevention

Early intervention delivers the highest social and financial returns.

Detaining one young person can cost over \$1 million a year, while disengagement from education or work leads to lifelong welfare reliance and lost earnings.

By surrounding young people with mentors, cultural guidance, and opportunity, Winmarra breaks these cycles before they begin.

For less than \$1 million annually, the Winmarra Foundation helps prevent up to \$20 million in future system costs, and creates empowered young leaders who contribute to their families, communities, and the nation's future.

This doesn't account for:

- Positive contributions participants will make to economy and community
- Intergenerational impacts on their future families
- Community strengthening and cultural continuity
- Ripple effects on younger siblings and peers



2025 Program Overview & Highlights



The Emerging Leaders Program has achieved exceptional community engagement in just 10 months, with 85% of Brewarrina residents aware of the initiative and 85% personally knowing program participants.



**Data reflects responses from community members in Brewarrina who were familiar with program participants and observed changes over the 10-month pilot period (n=60).*

10 

Brewarrina young men participated

7 

completed the
10-month program



92%

of community observers saw **transformation**

86%

noticed community-
level impact

4/7

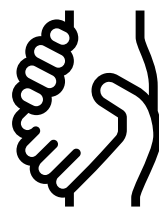
started employment and/or
finished school

100%

observed positive
personal growth

85%

rate funding as **VERY IMPORTANT**



22

community members saw
stronger Elder–youth connection

95%

would recommend the
program to other families

Emerging Leaders Program



The Winmarra Foundation's Emerging Leaders Program operates on a fundamental principle; **young Aboriginal people thrive when they are confident in their identity, connected to their culture, and consistently supported by caring adults who believe in their potential.**

The pilot program ran from January to October 2025, engaging young people aged 12-17 from Brewarrina in a structured program of activities, cultural experiences, and mentorship. Participants met regularly for workshops, attended cultural camps, engaged in community service, and maintained ongoing contact with program mentors.

Over 10 months, participants engaged in:

- **Cultural Connection:** Regular engagement with Elders, cultural camps on Country, and integration of traditional knowledge with contemporary leadership development
- **Consistent Mentorship:** Ongoing relationships with program mentors who provide guidance, encouragement, and accountability
- **Skill Development:** Practical workshops in communication, leadership, career planning, and life skills
- **Community Engagement:** Opportunities for participants to contribute to community events and develop civic leadership
- **Family Involvement:** Regular communication with families and integration of family support in participant development

The Transformation

The results were extraordinary

The program is generating observable community-level impact, with **86% of observers reporting positive changes** in the broader community, including youth engagement (78%), cultural pride (55%), and intergenerational connection (51%).



70%

of participants
**completed the full
10-month program**



100%

reported increased
confidence and
positive life changes



100%

of families confirmed
**observable behavioural
improvements**



100%

continued **education**
**and/or secured full-time
employment**

The Transformation (cont.)

The numbers only tell part of the story. Multiple participants are now pursuing further training and career pathways – from finishing Year 12, full-time employment to community coaching.



Darnell Heatherill

Darnell became the youngest RFS cadet in Brewarrina's history and is now coaching younger children in football, passing on what he learned.



Krik Eyres

Kirk secured full-time employment at the Brewarrina Shire Council, earning a steady income and building a career.



Jai-Kel Waites

Jai-Kel became the first person in his family to complete Year 12, and has started work at the Brewarrina Shire Council, breaking generational patterns.



Aston Simmons

Ashton has grown significantly in his self-confidence and has begun casual work at the South Brewarrina Butchery, while also pursuing his coaching journey.


Exceptional Community Recognition


What validates our work most powerfully is community recognition. In surveys completed by 60 community members in October 2025, **86.3% observed at least one positive community-level impact.**




 **85%**
were aware of the
Emerging Leaders
Program

 **92%**
of those who know
participants observed
positive changes

 **98%**
stated Brewarrina
needs programs
like this

 **95%**
would recommend the
program to other
families

 **85%**
rate continued
funding as "Very
Important"

The Evidence Base

We partnered with independent researchers to evaluate program impact through community surveys (n=60) measuring awareness, observed changes and qualitative interviews with participants, families, and Elders.

Why this model works

The Brewarrina community has provided near-unanimous endorsement of the program, with **98% stating the community needs programs like this**, 92% believing it gives young people hope, and **95% willing to recommend it to other families.**



The program's success stems from four key design principles

1 Community-Led and Culturally Grounded

Every element of the Winmarra program is grounded in strengthening cultural identity and connection. This isn't an add-on activity, it's the foundation upon which everything else is built. Unlike externally imposed programs, the Emerging Leaders initiative emerged from community's needs and is shaped by community voices. Elders are integral to program design and delivery, ensuring cultural authenticity.

"It's actually a program that's coming in and involving community people, involving us... involving mothers and getting our opinions."

Aunty Doreen Waites

Community Member

2 Relationship-First Approach

Program mentors invest in building genuine, trusting relationships with participants. This consistency creates safety for young people to take risks, try new things, and grow.

"When my son lost his cousin to an unfortunate car accident, the first people he called was Dougie boy and the boys in the Winmarra group. And I really, really found that quite uplifting. It was good because he had somebody else to talk to."

Raelene Eyre

Parent

"They're [Winmarra Mentors] not just program coordinators, they're like family to him now."

Christine Murphy

Parent



The program's success stems from four key design principles (cont.)

3

Strength-Based Focus

Confidence and culture are essential, but practical skills and opportunities turn potential into reality. Young people need tangible capabilities and pathways, not just inspiration. Rather than deficit-focused interventions, the program identifies and builds on young people's existing strengths, interests, and cultural identity.

“To have the boys come in and be excited to learn about content creation and storytelling is amazing. It’s expanded their thinking about what is achievable, and that they can make a career out of media”

Nick Hodgeskin
27Studio Director

“I've had the principal come up and tell me how Darnell was really good with the little kids at school... he makes time for them and stops to have a chat and make sure they're okay when they're playing.”

School Principal Feedback
via Christine Murphy

4

Holistic Development

The Winmarra Emerging Leaders Program is built on an evidence-based model that recognises transformation happens when multiple elements work together consistently over time. The program addresses multiple dimensions simultaneously, including confidence, cultural identity, practical skills, social relationships, and community connection.





The challenges we addressed

The program has **successfully bridged generations**, with over half of observers noting increased connections between Elders and youth, contributing to cultural knowledge transmission and community cohesion.

A History That Still Shapes Today

Understanding the challenges facing young Aboriginal people in places like Brewarrina requires acknowledging the ongoing impacts of colonisation, forced removal policies, and systemic disadvantage.

"Our country does hold a very dark history... the problems that we face continue to stem from our dark history and what has happened to our men, what has happened to our women, and what has happened to our children, and we're still on a journey of healing"

Aunty Doreen Waites

Community member and NASCA Employee

"I'm the third generation down from Mission life, so it's still very much intergenerational trauma."

This isn't ancient history – the impacts are lived daily in communities across Australia.



The Gaps Facing Young People

Young Aboriginal people in Brewarrina and similar communities face compounding challenges.

Limited Positive Male Role Models

"You Can't Be What You Can't See"

Young people need to see Aboriginal excellence in action - not just hear about it, but spend time with people who embody the possibilities they can achieve. When young Aboriginal people only see limited representations of what's possible and when those representations are often negative it constrains their aspirations. Exposure to Aboriginal excellence across diverse fields expands their sense of possibility and builds belief that success is achievable for people who look like them.

"With the boys, the teenage boys I'd raised in my home, they needed a man in their family, that bond with a male figure. And when I look out in the community, I see so many boys who don't have that. They're growing up without a strong male role model in their household." - Aunt Mary, Elder.

As Aunt Mary explains, many young men grow up without a male in their household. Strong male figures play an important role in shaping young men's sense of identity, confidence and belonging. For many boys, having a man in their life who can guide, listen and model healthy ways of being provides grounding and security. Where this support is missing in the home, community-based mentors become even more vital because they offer connection, accountability and cultural guidance that helps boys grow into strong, respectful young men.

Geographic Isolation from Opportunities

"A lot more opportunities with traveling, especially away from here, because [Brewarrina] barely has anything... it's good to travel, get away from here and get to do other stuff." - Kirk Eyre, Participant.

"This town is quite disadvantaged, not a lot going for it, and that's why they get on the wrong track, because it's boring. For him to be involved in that type of program gives [him] some purpose." - Jessica Simmons, Parent.

Physical distance from cities means limited exposure to diverse career pathways, educational opportunities, and experiences that build aspiration. Being far from major cities means young people often have fewer chances to see what different futures can look like. Exposure to mentors, workplaces, universities, creative industries and specialised training is harder to access, which limits not just skills development but imagination itself. When possibilities are not visible, they can feel out of reach, even when young people have the ability and drive to pursue them.

Intergenerational Trauma Affecting Development

"To control somebody, you need to make somebody lose their self-confidence, and that's what happened in our [Australia's] dark history. So if you can give that virtue and that value to these young people... we've already taken a step in the right direction." - Aunt Doreen Waites.

The deliberate destruction of Aboriginal culture and identity has created lasting impacts on self-confidence, identity, and community functioning that require intentional healing.

The Gaps Facing Young People (cont.)

Struggling with Self-Confidence and Identity

Many participants entered the program withdrawn, socially isolated, and lacking confidence.

"He never got out the house. He was more inside, playing video games. Darnell didn't go on excursions, didn't go anywhere. He was like a homebody." - Christine Murphy, parent.

"He's at that age now... he doesn't run with his mates anymore, and it's a good thing, and then they got involved with you, and that was even better." - Raelene Eyre, parent.

Without intervention, young people can become increasingly isolated and vulnerable to negative influences.

Limited Cultural Connection and Identity

"To know who you are in this world... You can break down many barriers. You can break generational cycles. You can stand up and be the future leaders of this country, if you know who you are, if you know where you've come from." - Aunty Doreen Waites.

Many young people have limited opportunities to connect deeply with their culture, learn from Elders, and develop the cultural identity that research shows is protective and empowering.

Exposure to Negative Behaviours and Cycles

"I've seen a lot of our kids, and especially the boys... fallen through the gap... without that mentor... and it's not their fault. It's society, it's what's out there in society... over the years... a lot of the drugs, a lot of the drugs and alcohol, especially the drugs... has gotten to our younger generation, and it's sad. It's really sad." - Aunty Mary, Elder.

"A lot of our kids learn from their mistakes, but if they don't make that mistake to get locked up, they'll never know that. And that's a cycle that I don't want Kirk in." - Raelene Eyre, parent.

Without positive alternatives, young people can be drawn into destructive patterns that feel like the only available outlet, including the misuse of alcohol and drugs. When boredom, grief, disconnection or a lack of opportunity go unaddressed, substance use can become a coping mechanism rather than a “choice.” Over time this increases the likelihood of conflict with police, and long-term barriers to employment, education and wellbeing. What is often labelled as “risk-taking” is really a response to unmet social, cultural and emotional needs, which is why culturally grounded, strengths-based alternatives are so important.

Limited Post-School Pathways and Support

"That's quite disappointing [limited after-school pathways]... especially from the community's point of view. There are kids finishing school and just sitting over there in their homes... not doing anything... isn't that part of their job [Other programs] to make sure he had a job to walk out into? What a waste finishing year 12 and just sitting over there in house." - Jessica Simmons on Other Programs.

Even when young people complete their education, the lack of follow-through support means they struggle to transition into employment or further training, and many find themselves without the guidance, networks or resources needed to take the next step.

Kirk Eyre

Youth Spotlight



Finding His Voice, Building His Future

When the Winmarra Emerging Leaders Program arrived in Brewarrina, Kirk Eyres was a quiet 16-year-old who kept to himself. Shy and uncertain, he carried the weight of family challenges and limited opportunities. Like many young men in remote towns, he faced the pull of negative cycles and the push of isolation. But Kirk made a different choice. He showed up.

At first, he barely spoke. The mentors didn't force it; they showed up week after week, checking in, listening, and creating a space where he could simply be himself. Cultural days on Country connected him back to identity and pride, helping him see that strength doesn't mean going it alone. "To know who you are in this world," Elder Aunty Doreen reminded the boys, "is how you break cycles." Slowly, Kirk began to believe that.

His first major breakthrough came when he finally faced his long held fear of getting his driver's licence. It wasn't about driving; it was about proving to himself that he could succeed. The day he passed, his mum beamed: "He refused to go for his licence... and he got it." That small victory shifted something deeper.


Through the months that followed, Kirk's world expanded. He travelled beyond Brewarrina, competed in state javelin for the third-year running, and began speaking up with confidence. When tragedy struck his family, Winmarra was there too — mentors calling, supporting, standing beside him. His mother still remembers: "It was good because he had somebody else to talk to... someone who didn't give up on him."

By the end of the 10-month program, Kirk had transformed. The once quiet boy was now employed full-time at the Brewarrina Sewerage Treatment Plant, earning his own income, contributing to his community, and talking about the future with purpose. He is still throwing javelin, still growing, and still inspiring others to believe they can do the same.

For Kirk, the Emerging Leaders Program wasn't just an opportunity, it was a turning point. With the right support, consistency, and cultural grounding, he discovered his voice, his confidence, and his place in the world. His story shows what is possible when belief replaces doubt and care replaces judgment.

As his mother put it simply: "There's more to life than being in that cycle [of domestic violence and community challenges]... he's matured now. He's like, oh, I know now that I can go and do this."

That is not just Kirk's transformation, that is community change, one young man at a time.



"I think they all [boys in program] have the skill sets... we just need to bring that out of them, just a little bit more... that way they themselves can be the leaders that we need in our community. They are our next generation of leaders."

Kirk's sister

Our roadmap to growing future leaders: Building pride, purpose and pathways.

2025 – 2030 Strategic Plan

Strategic Plan

At the Winmarra Foundation, we place culture, connection and leadership at the heart of everything we do. Our Emerging Leaders Program empowers young First Nations men and women to lead with confidence, cultural pride and purpose.

Our focus areas during this strategy period include

Culture & Connection	Deepen young people's connection to culture through Elders-led learning, on Country experiences, and local language revival.
Leadership & Growth	Strengthen self-belief, responsibility and community leadership through mentoring and experiential learning.
Education & Employment	Build pathways with schools, TAFEs, and universities to support transitions into higher education and meaningful work.
Sustainability	Establish long-term partnerships with government, universities and corporate supporters to ensure program growth and financial sustainability.
Impact & Evaluation	Develop a robust data framework to measure outcomes, track alumni success, and publish annual impact reports.

We are incredibly proud of:

- Delivering the first Emerging Leaders pilot in Brewarrina, with 100% of participants reporting increased confidence and all completing the program.
- Establishing partnerships with Charles Sturt University, local councils and community leaders to expand opportunities in agriculture and environmental sciences.
- Building a mentor network of alumni and community Elders to guide future participants.
- Creating meaningful cultural experiences, including on-Country learning, language sessions and connection to traditional practices.
- Inspiring new partners to join our journey in empowering rural and regional First Nations youth.

Our Next 12–24 Months:

As we move into the next phase, our focus is on growth, inclusion and deeper cultural impact. We will:

- Deliver a Young Women's Emerging Leaders Program in Brewarrina (10 participants).
- Establish the inaugural Young Men's Emerging Leaders Program in Taree (10 participants).
- Embed an ongoing alumni mentoring program that connects cohorts across regions.
- Formalise a strategic partnership with Charles Sturt University to strengthen education and career pathways in agriculture and environmental science.
- Welcome new partners and supporters to help us deliver life-changing opportunities for young people.

Strategic Plan (cont.)

Looking to the Future

Our long-term vision is clear: to build a generation of strong, proud and capable First Nations leaders who shape their own futures and strengthen their communities.

By 2030, Winmarra Foundation will:

- Develop Yetta as the Home of the Emerging Leaders Program, developing infrastructure for camps, cultural learning and leadership development.
- Scale to five regional locations across NSW and beyond, bringing opportunities to more than 100 participants each year.
- Establish a Cultural Mentorship Framework, connecting local Elders to every program site.
- Ensure gender equality with equal participation of young men and women.
- Achieve 80% alumni engagement in education, training or employment.
- Publish annual impact reports and develop data partnerships with universities to measure success and inform best practice.

The data provides compelling evidence that the Winmarra Emerging Leaders Program is achieving its intended impact and meeting a critical community need in Brewarrina. With near-universal positive change observation (92%), overwhelming community support (95-98% across measures), and visible community-level effects (86%), the program has demonstrated exceptional effectiveness in just 8 months.

The combination of individual participant transformation and community-wide impact creates a powerful case for sustained investment. The program isn't just changing individual lives - it's strengthening community cultural identity, building leadership capacity, reducing youth risk, and creating intergenerational connections that will benefit Brewarrina for years to come.

The question is no longer whether the program works, but how to ensure it continues and expands to maximise community benefit.

The Final Word

"Knowing who you are and where you're from, you can be anything and you can go anywhere."

- Aunty Doreen Waites

This is not just a program.
This is a movement.
This is healing.
This is the future.





WINMARRA
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