



# Yiramalay/Wesley Studio School

Many Cultures, One Community

[www.yiramalay.net](http://www.yiramalay.net)

Edition 83 | December 2021

## This extraordinary school

It is my pleasure to write this piece for the final Yiramalay newsletter for 2021.

Once again, I have not managed to travel to Yiramalay this year. I did get as close as Perth but was then caught in a lockdown due to COVID-19 and I caught the next flight back to Melbourne. That was in March. Since then, of course, it has largely been impossible to travel between Victoria and Western Australia.

I have kept in close contact with Matt Watson over this period and have heard of all the various activities, challenges and wonders of Yiramalay. The wet weather challenges. The successes of the U19

Kimberley Colts football championship and the Interschool Athletics Carnival for the Kimberley. The contributions made to Wangki Yupurnanupurra and the Bunuba Rangers Program.

My sincere congratulations are extended to our 2021 graduates Jason Baird, Hiki-Lee Kinley, and Rohan Watts. These young people have achieved something extraordinary in the face of a pandemic. They have my admiration and respect. Let's hope 2022 can bring a closer connection between Melbourne and Yiramalay and that I can, once again, visit this extraordinary school.

**Nick Evans, Principal Wesley College**



Images of the Studio School in the Kimberley in 2021

## Principal's Reflection

Reflecting on my first year in the Kimberley, I am humbled to think about the amazing experiences, interactions and learning I have been exposed to. Starting the year with a classic wet season characterised by flooding creeks and plains, muddy and at times, impassable roads, I was able to see how the whole place comes to life. Then the arrival of new students. Young people from Wangkatjungka, Gapuwiyak, Fitzroy Crossing, Roebourne and Derby. Beautiful, trusting, eager young people ready to take on the challenge of living and learning at Yiramalay. For some, it was a significant challenge and for others it has been the perfect fit.

I have been very fortunate to spend time this year in Fitzroy Crossing and surrounding communities with Kaylene Marr, Stanley Shaw and other Indigenous colleagues, getting to know families and elders. My experience living and working in the Northern Territory has taught me that to make a real impact in a community, you need to develop strong and authentic relationships with the families and leaders of the community you serve. This is about being available, listening and listening some more. These first twelve months have been the beginning of that.

As I think about the coming years, I am excited to think about the development of a School Council at Yiramalay which will represent the voice of this community in the development of our school and

its priorities. I'm excited to commit to regular interaction with the community and the local schools, as we combine our efforts and resources towards supporting the youth of our communities to be the best they can. Most importantly, how we work together to counter the negative and distressing representations of young people from this area and begin to tell a new story. A story of growth and leadership, of pride and of happiness. In order to achieve this, we must ensure we are providing caring and engaging educational experiences for our students and supporting families to trust us and encourage their children to participate in the Yiramalay Program and other community led initiatives.

As I look back on 2021, I am extremely grateful. Grateful for the ongoing support of the Wesley College community and Principal, Nick Evans, Friends of Yiramalay with their unfaltering advocacy and support, the families of the students who attend our school and the staff who dedicate themselves to this program. I am overwhelmingly grateful to the students, who through their experiences, honesty, resilience and vulnerability, teach us important lessons about what it means to work and commit to the vision of this program. Wishing everyone a safe and happy Christmas and New Year.

**Matt Watson, Principal Yiramalay/Wesley Studio School**

We acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as Australia's first people and pay our respects to their elders both past and present as owners of this land where we stand.

## Class of 2021 graduation reflections

I started at Yiramalay in 2019 with Induction 37 and I remember the different places we went to and the waterholes that we went swimming in, they were amazing. I was part of the Gibb Challenge which was fun and visiting Purnululu National Park was another highlight for me. The best thing that happened while I was at Yiramalay was being selected to play football with Claremont next year.

At Yiramalay I learnt many life skills that will help me in the future. I would like to tell other students starting out at Yiramalay, to listen, it will help them learn what they will need when they leave school. I am looking forward to moving to Perth with my family to play football next year. I would like to thank Matt, Brent and all the staff for getting me through to the end.

### **Rohan Watts (OW2021)**

Rohan has come a long way while at Yiramalay, personal development is the biggest change in him, he is respectful to others and his environment and engages with others confidently. 2021 was a turn around year for Rohan, he matured and decided that he wanted to engage in his education at school. We are looking forward to our family moving to Perth so that he can pursue a career playing football. One of the best things about the school is that it also teaches life skills to support students personal development and that is something that I see in Rohan everyday. Thank you to the staff, especially the mentors for supporting Rohan during his time at Yiramalay, he found it was a safe space where he could share his thoughts, be heard and it would be OK.

### **Yasmin Watts, Parent**



Images from the Yiramalay Graduation Dinner in Broome

On country excursions were the best things about Induction 39, I really liked being in the bush and swimming in waterholes, it is what made me want to come to Yiramalay. I loved going to Melbourne to study it was so different to where I come from, I loved the Learning in Residence and the great activities that we did and friends I made there. My biggest challenge in Melbourne was keeping up with my study, making sure I didn't miss classes and get behind. I enjoyed my work experience with the Aboriginal Health Services in Derby, it has made me much more confident especially speaking to people. I am considering health work or the arts as a career in the future. I would tell students starting at Yiramalay to be confident, there is no point in feeling *shame* because it can lead to missing out on so much.

Thank you to my family and everyone in Melbourne and at Yiramalay who supported me.

### **Hiki-Lee Kinley (OW2021)**

One of the big changes for Hiki-Lee since coming to Yiramalay is that she has become more responsible and reliable. I hope that next year she finds a career that she loves and enjoys and one that will make her happy. She is considering a placement at KAMS and hopes to do a Cert II in Health Work and may consider doing nursing after that. Hiki-Lee has learnt about western and Indigenous culture while at the school, it is the two way learning that is taught at Yiramalay that made me send her to the school. Being immersed in Indigenous culture was denied to me as a young person and having western education acknowledging Hiki-Lee's Indigenous culture and bringing it together for her, makes the school stand out from others. It was challenging for Hiki-Lee when her family experienced health issues and the loss of a close family member. It impacted our family greatly especially Hiki-Lee because she was away from home at the time and returned to Broome as part of the healing process. The school was very supportive through this difficult time.

Thank you, Matt Watson, and all the teachers for your patience and support. I would especially like to thank the mentors for being there to support students, you all do an outstanding job.

### **Sharnie Dean, Parent**

I started at Yiramalay after I completed Induction 40 in 2019. I really enjoyed the induction especially sharing my culture with Wesley students and catching up with Induction 40 students in Melbourne, sharing memories of our time together. Highlights of my time here include playing footy with the Wesley students and building relationships with students in Learning in Residence. The biggest challenge for me was being away from home, being away from my people and my culture. Speaking confidently to others and building relationships and friendships are the most important things I have learnt while at Yiramalay.

For new students coming to Melbourne, I would advise them to get out of their comfort zone. Going to Melbourne you will not be comfortable all the time. Branch out and make friends, build relationships, take everything in, you're only there for three years. Put your head down and study hard and appreciate the opportunities that come your way. I have not been able to attend the Graduation Dinner in Broome as I am in Queensland training with the Gold Coast Suns Academy and intend to pursue a career in football.

Everything that was done for me has not gone unnoticed by me, so I want to thank my parents and family for their support, they are the best. I am appreciative and grateful to Matt, Sean, and Kym and all the staff and teachers at the Studio School, LiR and Wesley College who have supported me over the three years that I shared with them - my second family.

### **Jason Baird (OW2021)**



Images from the Yiramalay Graduation Dinner in Broome

## Class of 2021 graduation reflections continued

The pathway that Jason took at Yiramalay was at first a roller-coaster ride which has given him a sense of self belief and achievement now that the journey is complete. He is proud, excited and overwhelmed to have completed Year 12. I hope Jason will be confident and a bold, strong leader and take charge in any field or pathway that he undertakes in life. Jason loved being around his colleagues while in Melbourne, he was outspoken and outgoing, with a 'I can do this' attitude, he was in a different world when he is with his peers and I am filled with pride for him. Jason also connected with his culture while he was at the Studio School, speaking Yolngu Matha and sharing his culture, it made him confident and proud of who he was.



Jason Baird playing football in Melbourne.

COVID-19 was very challenging for me and Jason, he was doubting himself and I had to support him through it, no matter what. The Studio School is a place where relationships and connections with students and their families are allowed to grow. Students know they are heard and that people around them understand who they are and where they are in their educational journey and their journey as young people.

## Alison Wunungmurra, Parent Industry Learning Week

One of the highlights of our final term of 2021 was our Industry Learning Week. Students were provided with real life, hands-on experiences and opportunities to further define their interests and uncover passions in a wide range of industries.

All students in SYPP and SYLF programs participated, spending time working with many fantastic local Fitzroy Crossing and Derby organisations. Jirrwiliny and Juan dived into life with the Derby Garnduwa team and took advantage of many opportunities for further growth, including attaining their Learner's licences! Hiki-Lee shone brilliantly working alongside the team at Derby Aboriginal Health Service and was offered a job with further training as a career pathway for 2022. Kelwin has since signed a casual contract with the Derby Youth Centre and will be working in a youth services role during his holidays. Bart and Ellias spent time learning alongside Cooksey and his team, as they counted 48 crocodiles in a local water hole. Kyle was inspired during his time at the Fitzroy Crossing Hospital and is now intending on undertaking further training in Aboriginal Primary Health Care while completing Year 12 next year.



Images from Industry Learning Week in the Kimberley

It was clear the learning involved in and around these experiences built students' confidence, resilience and stamina, all the necessary attributes of future change makers! Students gained skills and the understanding needed with the important transition to further training and education and or employment, which they will all make in the coming years, some sooner than later! We are all very proud of the open and courageous manner in which each and every one of the students embraced this opportunity.



Images from Industry Learning Week in the Kimberley

A huge thank you to both the staff teams and to the local organisations that supported us with our Industry Learning program this year. We are very fortunate to have such incredible support from our local communities.

## Eliza Barlow, Deputy Principal

## A great experience for everyone

What a year 2021 has been for extra curricular and weekend activities for students at the Studio School. We saw our students win most of our events at the annual Kimberly Cup in Broome, as with other numerous games of basketball and footy competitions in the Kimberley, where our local talent shone.

Most of our camps have been On Country around the Kimberley, from Manning Gorge on Kupungarri traditional land in the west to Home Valley Station on Balangarra traditional land and the Bungle Bungle Range in Purnululu National Park in the east. A lot of our after-school sporting activities including football, basketball, and the students' favourite, volleyball, were we focused on personal development and physical fitness outcomes. Other activities, such as painting with a community Elder, are linked to building cultural knowledge. A first here at Yirmalay, was the popular colour fun run, where all the students and staff raced around the school while being covered in coloured flour, culminating in a very fun but messy party at the end.

Our school motto is "One Community, Many Cultures" and thanks to our wonderful chefs, we had a cultural dinner party, learning about different foods and customs from all around the world, each term. We had students smashing Mexican piñatas and rolling Japanese sushi. Its been an absolute blast working here at Yirmalay and this newsletter is far too short to report on all the fun and activities. I'm looking forward to what 2022 will bring us all.

### Rhett McGill, Program Activities Coordinator



Students enjoying extra curricular and weekend activities

### Yirmalay students in Melbourne

At the end of Term 3, it had been hard for our Melbourne students. Jason, Banjo, Tonheya and Abby as they all wanted to go home for the September holidays, but to do that they would have to endure another two-week quarantine. They decided it was worth it, took a deep breath and organised an adult who would be their quarantine chaperone.

During the holidays, Melbourne COVID-19 case numbers had grown, meaning they would likely face another quarantine to get home at the end of Term 4. Under the circumstances, they all opted to remain in WA and attend their remote classes from there. This was not without its sacrifices – the Vic/WA time difference had meant the first period started at 5:30am! Although it's been challenging to maintain momentum and motivation, they all dug deep and persevered wonderfully by logging on to classes and working on study tasks. When face-to-face classes resumed in Melbourne, the online lessons finished, but they doubled their efforts and began an intensive online self-study phase.

These wonderfully talented students have shown amazing tenacity, drive and positivity during this extraordinarily demanding time. While their end-of-year exam outcomes are as yet unknown, they have matured and developed as diligent and hard-working individuals – qualities they will benefit from in spades.



Yirmalay students learning during the pandemic

### Kym Adams, Induction Coordinator and Teacher

#### Thank you to donors, supporters and volunteers

With your support, we have continued to transform lives and communities and create positive change through education. The program continues to open the minds and hearts of communities across Australia, bringing greater understanding, acceptance and respect for Australia's first people.

As the year draws to an end we would like to express our gratitude to all our donors, supporters and volunteers and acknowledge their generous contribution.

We were fortunate again this year to have significant support from the Friends of Yirmalay and Wesley Pride, the St Kilda Road campus parents' association, both have contributed funds to support our students and alumni through another difficult year overshadowed by the pandemic.



Friends of Yirmalay and Wesley Pride supporters with Melbourne students in Term 2

### A Skutta Christmas and New Year from the Yirmalay Mob!

#### Important Dates 2021

Tue 25 Jan  
Wed 26 – Fri 28 Jan

All staff on-site  
Staff professional learning and start up

Sat 29 – Sun 30 Jan  
Mon 31 Jan

Student travel  
Term 1 classes begin

The Yirmalay/Wesley Studio School is committed to keeping children safe.  
Trained teachers deliver the Keeping Safe: Child Protection Curriculum to all students.