



# Yiramalay/Wesley Studio School

Many Cultures, One Community

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

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## What a term!

Term one started in typical wet season style. Plenty of rain and beautiful green country. The mighty Fitzroy River burst its banks and the road into school resembling a muddy creek bed at times. Once again, and hopefully for the last time, we were impacted by border restrictions which held up the beginning of term for some staff. As frustrating as this was, staff and students took it in their stride as we got the 2022 school year underway.

Three new teachers joined our teaching team this year. Gavin Marks, Kerrie Williamson and Anthea Shedley. They joined with a great sense of excitement and curiosity to learn about the land, the culture and the people of the Fitzroy Valley. It has been a pleasure to watch them grow, learn, and develop new relationships with the students, families and staff. All three staff have their Certificate IV TAE qualification and have taken to delivering the Senior Years Learning Framework and associated Certificate II with energy and creativity. The result of this work has seen an improvement in the engagement and participation of students.

*Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have a shorter life expectancy compared to non-Indigenous Australians. The TIS (Tackling Indigenous Smoking) program aims to improve that life expectancy by reducing tobacco use. Tobacco smoking is the most preventable cause of ill health and early death among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. It is responsible for 23% of the gap in health burden (the total impact of disease, injury and death to Australians) between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.<sup>1</sup>*

Nicotine addiction in young people in the Kimberley is a monumental public health issue. This year, at Yiramalay/Wesley Studio School, we decided to meet the challenge head-on, but not by ourselves. In a team effort we engaged with students, families, and the Tackling Indigenous Smoking team to increase awareness of the harmful effects of smoking and support students who may struggle with this addiction. As a result of the planning, persistence, and ongoing support associated with this approach, we have seen improvements in student health and well-being, increased participation in all areas of the program and improved classroom attendance and participation. Well done team!

It has been a real pleasure to be working alongside Bunuba man and my friend, Stanley Shaw, in his new role as Community Engagement Officer. Stan is the first Aboriginal person to work in this role since the school began and has taken to it with enthusiasm and confidence. Stan brings his knowledge of language and culture to the role and his family connections and relationships across the whole of WA are phenomenal. I'm looking forward to working with Stan and watching him develop this role as he engages with the families and key stakeholders across the Kimberley.



Snapshots from Term 1 in Melbourne and Yiramalay

I must acknowledge the outstanding support from the Friends of Yiramalay once again this year. Romy, Georgie and friends have been unfaltering in their support of the students at Yiramalay raising funds to provide new gym equipment, a new games table, laptop computers for alumni and running the always successful movie night in Melbourne. With the love and kindness we receive from this group, our work is made easier. On behalf of the staff and students of Yiramalay/Wesley Studio School, a heartfelt and sincere THANK YOU for your ongoing support.

I would like to acknowledge Year 12 student, Tonheya McCormack, who has been living and studying in Melbourne this year. Tonheya has gone from strength to strength with her education, thriving in the Learning in Residence environment at Wesley's Glen Waverley Campus. Recently Tonheya spoke at the Friends of Yiramalay fund-raiser movie night and showed great confidence attending the Year 12 formal. We are all very proud of Tonheya's efforts this year ably supported by Kym Adams, Dawn Anderson, and the team at LiR.

Finally, I thank the amazing staff team of Yiramalay/Wesley Studio School. We are largely in the Kimberley now but still have a footprint in Melbourne. This, like any other school term, has been one of complexity, excitement, and challenge. The team has worked hard and collaboratively through the challenges of COVID and the wet season. They have maintained a focus on student safety, quality teaching and high expectations relationships. Thank you for a great effort this term.

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

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.health.gov.au/initiatives-and-programs/tackling-indigenous-smoking#why-it-is-important>

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.

## Going back to Yiramalay was like going back home

At the start of 2022, I was selected to be the Yiramalay/Wesley Studio School Community Engagement Officer. My name is Stanley Shaw Marr, I am Bunuba (Father's side) and Kija (Mother's side). I am proud to say my hometown is Fitzroy Crossing in WA. I have two older brothers and one younger sister, who also live there as does most of my extended family.

I can remember hearing about the Studio School in 2010 from family members, "you know you should probably come out to the school and have a look; I've known you all my life, you would be a good role model for young people at the school." I would ask questions only to be told that I would have to come out there and experience it for myself.

The Executive Director would bump into me at the IGA in Fitzroy Crossing and humbug me about working at the school and in 2014 I thought, why not? I'll give it a go, and that is how I started working at the school. In 2015 I moved to Melbourne and mentored the Indigenous boys in houses in Glen Waverley.

The Learning in Residence (LiR) opened at the beginning of 2017, and I joined the team as a Residential Mentor. Being part of the LiR team was a huge learning experience for me and I appreciate having the chance to work there.

I was seconded to Yiramalay in the Kimberley in Term 3 last year, the Community Engagement Officer role became available at the end of the year, and I applied and was selected, it was perfect timing. The role involves building trusting relationships with families within communities that our students come from, going into communities, engaging and endorsing the school, listening to the needs of families, and interviewing prospective students and their families to see if we are a good fit for their student. Being a local works to my advantage, I know the community and elders around the Valley and have family and friends across the Kimberley including Derby, Bidadanga, Karratha, One Arm Point, Halls Creek and Roebourne. Working as a mentor over many years, I am also well known to students and their families in the NT communities where our students come from.

It's been great so far, we participated in the Fitzroy Expo this term, I told everyone to come down through social media. When I got into town everyone asked questions about how to enrol to get into Yiramalay/Wesley Studio School. The biggest challenges of the role are just getting students set up with Abstudy, families find it challenging to get this done and that's where I support them. We are engaging with more families across the Kimberley now and several organisations including Bunuba Dawangarri Aboriginal Corporation RNTBC and Marra Worra Worra Aboriginal Corporation are actively supporting and promoting the school. Although COVID-19 has created some travel restrictions, it has not affected my role significantly, I know that it will get better in the coming months.

This job has been great and I am really enjoying it here. Going back to Yiramalay was like going back home. I don't even worry about going into town most weekends, I prefer to just chill here at Yiramalay.

### Stanley Shaw Marr, Community Engagement Officer



Yiramalay students at the Fitzroy Expo



Building a healthier lifestyle choice awareness at Yiramalay with community support

### Healthier lifestyle choices

This year at Yiramalay we have been focusing on building awareness to make healthier lifestyle choices including our non-smoking policy. We are very lucky to have not only the support from the Healthy Lifestyles Health Promotion Officer at Nindilingarri Cultural Health Services, but we have also had a visit from the Tackling Indigenous Smoking (TIS) team from Broome.

During their visit, they worked with both staff and students to educate us on the harmful effects of smoking, and we completed a 1-hour SOLIDfit session. The TIS team also worked with staff to help us to develop intervention strategies and have a better understanding of the Nicotine replacement therapies that are available. The TIS also set up student Quit plans and as a community we continue to work one on one with students to break the cycle of smoking.

### Kym Oakley, Residential Student Wellbeing Coordinator



## Yiramalay staff snapshots

My arrival at Yiramalay has been an exciting new chapter in my journey in teaching and has enlarged my heart and passion for indigenous education. Throughout my career, I have spent time in remote and city communities in Borneo, Phnom Penh and recently on Elcho Island on Yolngu country in the NT.

Teaching HPE and a certificate course at Yiramalay has been a whirlwind of adventure and challenge this term. My first impression was the uniqueness of the school where 'many cultures in one community' come together to learn. One highlight was watching our students run the Yiramalay Café and Restaurant as part of their hospitality industry experience. While COVID-19 has challenged all of us this term, it was incredible to see the unity and teamwork shown to persist in difficulty. This was a great learning experience for all of us in overcoming challenges in life.

### **Kerrie Williamson, Teacher**

My name is Anthea, and I am very excited to be one of the new teachers at Yiramalay! I am teaching SYPP English and Humanities, and SYLF Personal Development. I've really enjoyed getting to know all the students and hearing their stories about their lives and experiences. I've also loved going out on country to learn from the Elders and students about their cultures, and to share fun times fishing and swimming in the beautiful water holes. While the heat has been challenging, I've loved seeing the country so green and lush!

### **Anthea Shedley, Teacher**

After visiting Yiramalay over the past two years, I enjoyed my time here so much that I decided to make this my home (of course having my partner Colin here also helped with the decision). I was lucky enough to be offered the role of Office Manager which is very different from my usual duties. I was with South Metropolitan TAFE for 28 years mainly dealing with apprenticeships. Even though I have only been in this current role for the past two weeks, I am enjoying my newfound responsibilities. The staff and students have been very welcoming and made my transition as smooth as can be under the present circumstances.

### **Lynn Addison, Office Manager**

#### **Yiramalay continues to have a lasting impact on my life**

It is almost 12 years since I first attended Yiramalay/Wesley Studio School (Yiramalay) as part of Induction Group 1 as a Wesley College Year 10 student and almost nine years since I went back to work as a Residential Mentor. So, while there are hundreds of students and staff members who have been to Yiramalay more recently than me and therefore could provide a clearer and more detailed reflection of their experience, what I can write about is the lasting impact that Yiramalay has had and continues to have on my life. But before doing this there are some key memories from my time at Yiramalay and Learning In Residence (LIR) which I wanted to share.

Two notable memories from my time as a student, which remain clear today, are being welcomed onto Bunuba Country when we first arrived and forming friendships with students from around the Kimberley region.

Some of the most special memories I have from being a residential mentor include going into Fitzroy Crossing to watch some of the Yiramalay students play footy, attending ceremonies, driving to Wangkatjunga Community to meet families, and visiting significant sites around Yiramalay. And finally, some of my memories from my role as a LIR mentor at Glen Waverley include watching so many students graduate, being part of the excitement before several Year 12 formals and watching friendships form between students who have come to LiR from around the country and the world.



Images of Lizzie during her Yiramalay journey



Beyond memories, Yiramalay continues to have a lasting impact on my life and still informs and shapes many of the decisions and career choices I make. Since first attending Yiramalay, I have spent eight years working for both Yiramalay and LIR. And currently, I am completing a PhD on the wellbeing and aspirations of First Nations Peoples and working at Deakin University as a tutor at the National Indigenous Knowledges Education Research Innovation Institute and work as part of the subject Cross Cultural and Indigenous Psychology. Following the completion of my PhD, I plan on working in a policy role that contributes to the decolonisation of the mental health system in Australia. All of these experiences have been informed by my first experience with Yiramalay back in 2010.

And while every student who attended Yiramalay will have a different story to tell, I doubt that there would be many of us whose lives have not been enriched by our experiences at Yiramalay.

### **Elizabeth (Lizzie) Doery, (OW2012)**



Lynn, Colin and Anthea at the Yiramalay Café and Restaurant



Kerrie with Yiramalay staff at the Welcome to Country ceremony at the start of Term 1

## Student reflections

Induction 49 started on February 14 with six students from different communities including Derby, Fitzroy Crossing, One Arm Point and Roebourne. We went to KALACC and met Scott, who told us some interesting stuff, we also met two Elders. We went to an expo in Fitzroy Crossing where we talked to people about the school and fundraised for the Gibb Challenge with cupcakes and muffins.

My favourite part was going to the river where Ralphie and Sandra told us stories about the past and skin groups from around Fitzroy. The hardest part of the Induction was getting used to everyone and working with my classmates. I've joined the SYPP class but there haven't been as many students due to COVID, and it's also been a bit tough for me being away from home.

I will get through it. I'm happy with myself and how much stuff I've done since I've been here. I'm loving it here in Yiramalay so far.

### **Arianne Dolby, Year 10**

This term at Yiramalay has been happening. At the start of the term we went swimming at Brooking Springs, and we went to the gallery at the Mankaja Art Centre in Fitzroy Crossing where we each did a painting. I painted my totem the Wandjina and a snake, everyone loved it when they saw my paintings.

In class we learnt how to be the best we can be. I made a poster that says, 'All the days that you wake up you have got one job and that's to get better every single day', I put a photo of a past NBA player on it, his name is Derek Rose.

Sometimes I get tired at school, but I still work right through the term and I fight my tiredness. I come to school to learn and get an education and one day get a job. I want to work in the bush on the Gibb River Road on my grandfather's country.

### **Hughie Burgu, Year 12**

I wasn't here at the start of the term. I arrived in week five. I was honestly excited to be at school after having a long holiday. Being back at home for the holidays, it was great to be with friends and families, but I missed being in class, learning new things and just hanging with friends, all the teachers, and mentors. As soon as I got back to Yiramalay. I was keen to be in class, but sadly after one day of school, I found out I was COVID positive.

I had to isolate for seven days which wasn't too bad for me. I was tired, frustrated and annoyed about getting moved around and having to go into town for three whole days, just sitting in the hospital for hours, I was really upset with it. But I chose to believe everything happens for a reason, I'm glad I got through it and got out of isolation. I made the most of my freedom and went to all my classes on time. I also enjoyed going for an afternoon cruise down to 6 Mile, it was peaceful swimming around and yarning up with Gavin, Marilyn, HB and Kelwin, it was nice and quiet being down there.

### **Niniesha Norman, Year 12**

In week three I came back to Yiramalay and got straight back into class and did most of my work. Rhett did some after-school and evening activities, which was fun. We even went to the old homestead. I haven't been back there since 2019 so it was good going back there. We had a good day swimming and cooking up a feed. We packed up and headed back to the cars, and as we were about to leave Rhett got one of the cars bogged and Kerrie got the car out. It was fun that day.

One of the hardest things this term was going into isolation. It was so hard being away from my friends, sitting down and staring at four walls every day. But it was good having some time to myself. I had a lot of ups and downs going through it, but I managed to get through it all.

Being in quarantine was stressful and fun. Although I had a lot of time to myself, I got to ring up my family every day, had visitors come to see me and teachers gave me classwork to do while I was in isolation. They gave us movies to watch and games to play. Tavia took me and Shanine to the gate for a walk to get outside of the dorms it was a fun experience doing quarantine.

I'm happy it's all over!

### **Jirrwirliny Jefferies, Year 12**



Images of Arianne and Induction 49 students



Hughie Burgu, learning on country



Niniesha and Jirrwirliny with friends on country

## Important Dates 2022

Tue 26 Apr  
Tue 26 Apr

Yiramalay Term 2 Starts  
All Kimberley staff on-site

Wed 27 Apr  
Sun 1 May

Students travel to Yiramalay  
Induction 50 commences

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