



# **HANDS UP MALLEE**

## **YARNING GROUP**

### **2023 REFLECTIONS REPORT**



We acknowledge the Latji Latji as the Traditional Owners and Custodians of the Country on which we are. We also acknowledge their near neighbours the Barkindji.

We pay our respects to the Elders past, present, and emerging and to the ancient connection they hold with their Country.

We acknowledge there are also other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who live, work in and contribute to the cultural heritage of the Mildura region.

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# Background

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The Yarning Group was created to bring together people from the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community and hold space for authentic conversation and engagement with Hands Up Mallee (HUM) through yarning. The development of the Yarning Group was informed by the commitment to deepen relationships with Aboriginal community as outlined in the 2022 HUM Action and Support Plan.

After connecting/engaging/collaborating with the Aboriginal community, the Yarning Group was formalised as a function within HUM. Working with the Aboriginal community's wisdom, knowledge and connection to community, the partnership has enabled authentic conversation and yarning, guidance, and better informed decision making for the HUM initiative.

## About the Yarning Group

The Yarning Group is made up of local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members, including Elders and young people. The group has strong links to the HUM Collaborative Governance group and the HUM Backbone.

The group provides a space for Aboriginal community to:

- engage in authentic conversation
- build and strengthen relationships in community
- provide cultural guidance
- share and lead decision making

The Yarning Group is coordinated by HUM's Aboriginal Social Impact Lead. The HUM Executive Officer and other Backbone team members support the group as needed.

## Establishing the Yarning Group

The work to establish and grow the Yarning Group has occurred through a phased approach.

### **Phase 1 - 2022**

The first phase of Yarning Group involved informal yarns hosted by the HUM Backbone to listen to community about what matters to them. The informal yarns ensured that there was a clear understanding of what was important to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members, and this helped to inform how the Yarning Group could be brought together and how it could work.

## **Phase 2 - 2023**

A core group continued to come together in a more formal arrangement for the Yarning Group in 2023. In March 2023, there was sufficient interest to commence monthly meetings. Between April and June the group designed how they wanted meetings to run and conducted a membership drive to ensure that youth voices were at the table. During this phase the HUM Backbone developed appropriate processes and structures to support the members of the group. Monthly meetings continued until December 2023.

## **Phase 3 - 2024**

This phase will involve further development of the Yarning Group and a further refined strategic role as a key part of the HUM initiative.

## **About this Reflection Report**

The purpose of this report is to capture and summarise the early reflections and learnings from the first two phases of the Yarning Group.

The reflections and learning were captured through a facilitated yarning and journey mapping activity held by the HUM Aboriginal Social Impact lead and Evaluation Lead in December 2023.

The purpose of the reflection and journey mapping activity was to:

- Reflect on the journey since the start to see the growth and impact it is creating for members and beyond
- Acknowledge and celebrate what has been achieved so far
- Check-in that the original purposes of the Voice Yarning Group are still holding true and whether anything needs changing for 2024.
- Learn how HUM can continue to provide support for the Voice Yarning Group

As the Yarning Group moves into the next phase of development and growth, a Measurement, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) plan will be developed to guide future and ongoing evaluation.

# Reflections

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The following reflections were captured in response to key prompt questions as part of a facilitated reflection conversation as well as a journey mapping activity. The reflections are from the members of the Yarning Group.

## How did I feel at the beginning?

*'I was very nervous at the start because I know that the mob is very honest and open, so I felt like I needed to be doing things properly.'*

*'I felt very excited, over-whelmed and nervous to be part of a yarning circle and speak my thoughts for the community. Loved being treated like one of the family through the HUM team and community'.*

*'Felt I was the best one – all about sharing culture'.*

*'I felt nervous at the start and things had to be done properly'*

*'I felt curious as to what HUM is and what could possibly be accomplished'*

## How do I feel now?

*'I am feeling more confident as I now know there is support from the Voice Yarning Group'*

*'I feel good now because we are all sharing our ideas'*

*'Now I am finding it good at the meetings'*

*'Now we can see what it's about and have more information. We have a better idea of who we are, who do we involve and what is our purpose'*

## What have I been thinking?

*'At the start I thought it was good to come along and share ideas and yarn'*

*'At the start I was trying to get my head around what to put on the agenda and work out what the group was about and what to talk about'*

*'I am proud of what the group has achieved in unity. Also proud of the connections and team-work that have been formed'*

*'I think I am very connected with my people and the HUM Team'*

*'I am confident to continue the work with the HUM yarnning circle'*

*'I am thinking what indicators will help us gauge our success. I am wondering are we talking to the right people? Setting the right agenda to suit the conversation and people. I am thinking about necessary funding and achieving success for project funding'*

## **What was difficult or challenging?**

*'Figuring out the schedules for meetings'*

*'Racism is a big issue and we are sick of it. We haven't changed it yet and need to keep it as a topic'*

*'The issue around Aboriginal funding (being hit on by non-Aboriginal people)'*

*'Some services feeling touchy when challenged about youth issues'*

## **What helped or enabled the work?**

*'Ada has a support team behind her, but she still has a lot of work'*

*'Open communication to everyone'*

*'Two way conversation'*

*'Everyone gets a say'*

*'Respecting people's different views without judgement'*

*'Despite the issues we have fun and a laugh. This helps us to keep going'*

## **What were the good things that happened, that we achieved?**

*'We pulled a lot of people into the youth meetings'*

*'Getting the traders, government and Police together to get youth action started'*

*'The Mall is quieter now. Changing the ways the traders are thinking about working with youth in the Mall'*

*'Girls talking to the pub owners about the youth discos. Going back again when they started them up again'*

*'Sharing culture- On Country Learning where there was more than one voice telling some of the history'*

*'Sharing the cultural load with the Yarning Group and not just being the only one on the HUM Team to carry that.'*

*I was uncertain at the start, but now we have a big list of things to talk to government about, and to elevate the Yarning Group request for change'*

### **What were some of the things we learnt along the journey so far?**

*'We are all working to the same goal, even though we have different opinions'*

*'It was good learning about each other's opinion, hearing other voices, the voices of youth'*

*'Learning from each other because there are still some things we don't know. Guiding each other'*

*'We have achieved more than we thought in our short time so far'*

### **What do we want to move forward?**

*'Like to see Child Protection to leave our kids alone'*

*See more of our kids supported by volunteers'*

*'What indicators should we have to help us see if we are being successful?'*

# Next steps

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To support the Yarning Group as it moves into the next phase (2024 and beyond), a simple Measurement, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) plan will be developed with the Yarning Group. The MEL plan will include a Theory of Change outline the goals and intended outcomes for the Yarning Group over a period of time, key evaluation questions, appropriate tools for data collection and a timeline for evaluation.