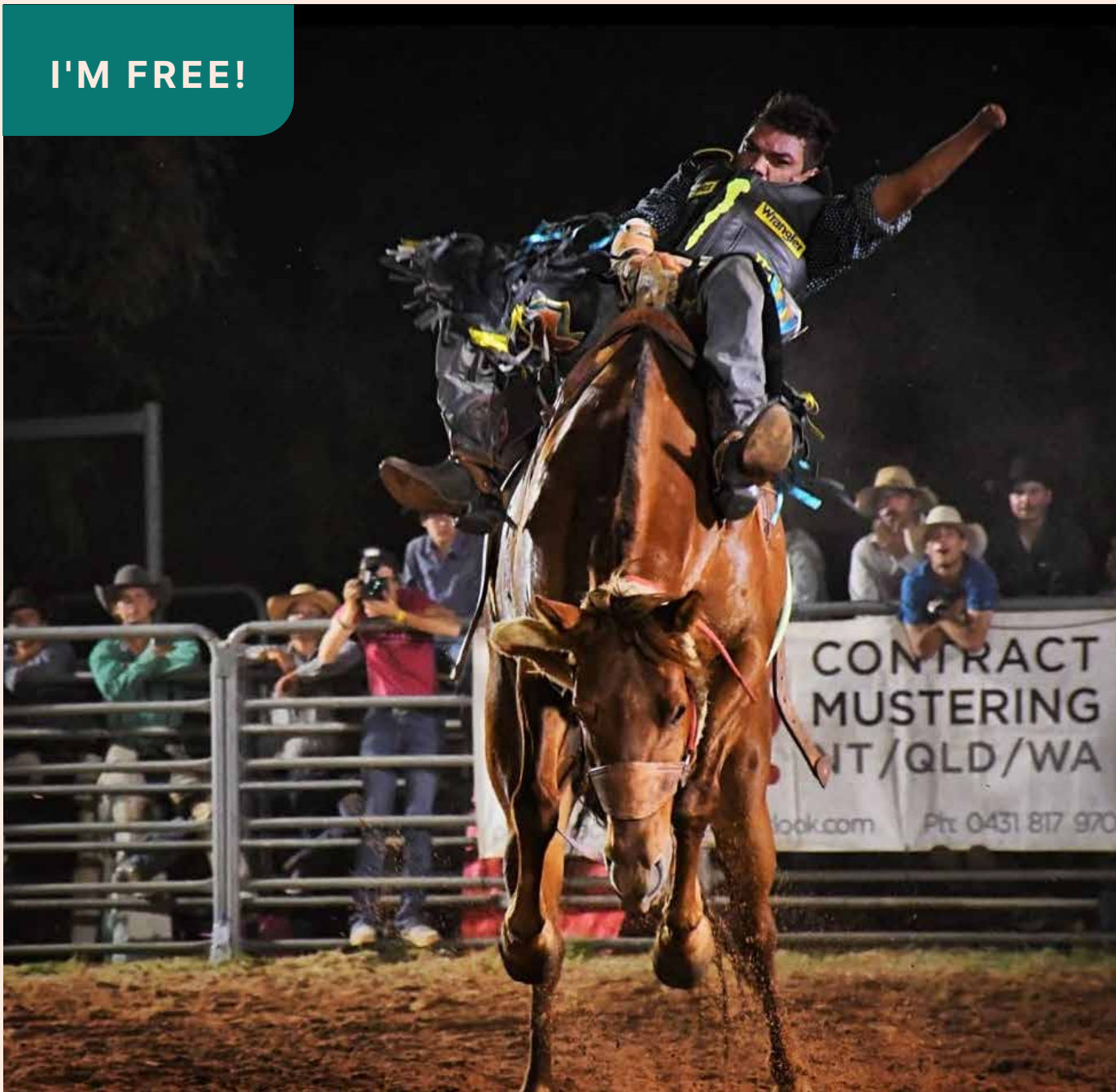


I'M FREE!



Cowboy Lance Bedford. Credit: Lance Bedford Facebook

Halls Creek Cowboy competes in Tamworth National Finals

When the gate swings open at the Australian Equine and Livestock Events Centre in Tamworth, the noise is deafening, but for Lance Bedford Jnr, the only thing that matters is the next eight seconds.

The Halls Creek local recently made the long trip from the East Kimberley to New South Wales to represent his hometown at the Australian Bushmen's Campdraft and Rodeo Association National Finals Rodeo, going head-to-head with the top 12 bareback riders in Australia.

Bedford Jnr entered the late-January 2026 finals ranked 11th in the country in the Open Bareback category. It's a position he earned through a rigorous season of travel and high-pressure rides across Western Australia and the Northern Territory, including a standout

win at the Ord Valley Muster and a strong showing at the Boddington Rodeo.

For Lance, the arena is a second home. He follows a deep family tradition of station work and horsemanship in the Kimberley, having watched his father, Lance Snr, compete before taking to the chutes himself.

Today, he is part of a new generation of Kimberley riders making their mark on the circuit, and often appears alongside his younger siblings.

The technical skill required for bareback riding is immense, but Bedford Jnr manages it with a unique physical challenge.

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Message from the Shire President

COMMUNITY YARNS

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Local recruitment drive for 2026 Census

NATIONAL NEWS

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Featured Artist: Troy Drill

ART AND CULTURE

PAGE 22



A new chapter for our oval and for Halls Creek

SPORT

PAGE 31

Halls Creek Emergency Contacts

Life-Threatening Emergency

000 – Police, Fire, Ambulance

State Emergency Service (SES)

132 500 – Floods, storm damage, fallen trees, leaks

Halls Creek Police Station

9168 9777 (Use 000 for emergencies)

Halls Creek Hospital

9168 9222

Fire and Rescue / DFES Kimberley

000 – Emergencies

9168 6000 – General enquiries

Main Roads WA

138 138 – Road conditions and closures

Shire of Halls Creek – After-Hours

9168 6007

Horizon Power

13 23 51 – Power outages

Water Corporation

13 13 75 – Water and sewer issues

Editor's Note

Welcome to March and another bumper edition of your favourite local read, Wat Na! News. We've had great feedback from friends across the Kimberley about February's edition. Nathan McIvor, CEO of Djarindjin, called it "awesome reading", while John Reudavey, CEO of Ardyaloon, said his copy was a "fantastic read!!".

I share this because it's easy for bad news to dominate the day, and we want to balance that here at Wat Na!. Yes, the Shire faces serious issues – long-term energy and water challenges, youth issues and food insecurity among them – but the story isn't fair without the good happening in our community too. And there's plenty of it!

As we've said before, this paper is what the community makes it, so a big shout-out to organisations who contributed content, ideas, pictures and feedback for March: Yura Yungi Medical Centre, Halls Creek District High School, KRACLN, Threads Together, Outback Stores, The Kimberley Hotel, WA Health, Nirrumbuk, Divina D'Anna and staff, and more.

Thank you for your support – and to you readers. Let's lift each other up; we're stronger together.

Community Grants and Support

The Shire of Halls Creek provides \$45,000 each year to support local events and community-led activities. See what's available below.

Facility Hire Waivers

Free or discounted hire of Shire facilities for community events. Pre-approved support includes NAIDOC Week and the Halls Creek Rodeo. Other events, including cultural activities and funerals, can apply.

Sponsorships

Funding for larger events that benefit the community. Pre-approved sponsorships include the Business Excellence Awards and East Kimberley Aboriginal Achievement Awards.

Small Community Grants (\$500–\$1,000)

Cash grants for local projects such as community celebrations, youth programs and small improvement projects. Grants also support national and commemorative events, including ANZAC Day, Armistice Day, Reconciliation Week and National Sorry Day. Funding is available on a rolling basis until funds are used.



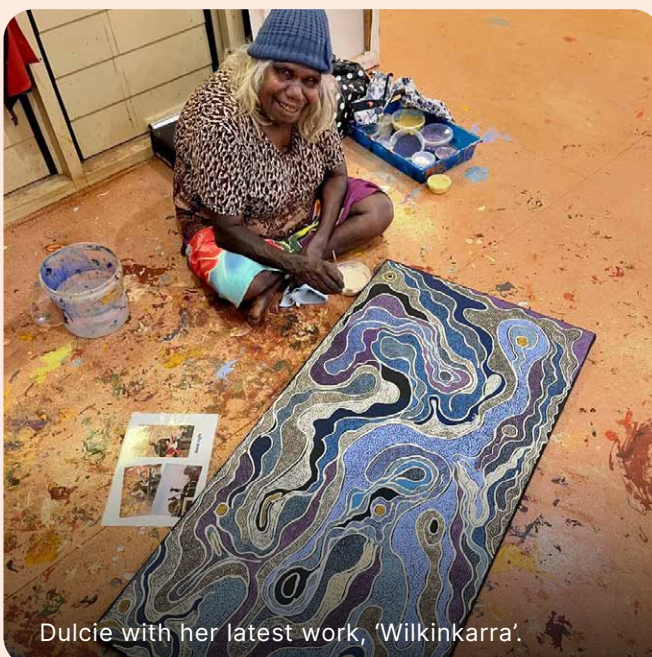
Wat Na! is created and published by the Shire of Halls Creek with help from local contributors. Thank you to everyone who shared their stories, ideas and photographs.



Captured in the Shire of Halls Creek



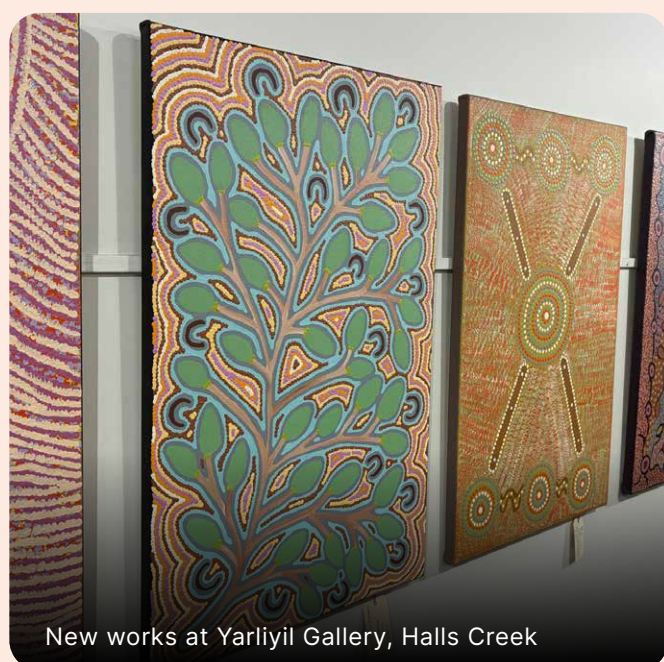
Community meeting at Jungarni-Jutiya.



Dulcie with her latest work, 'Wilkinkarra'.



Having fun outdoors between the rains



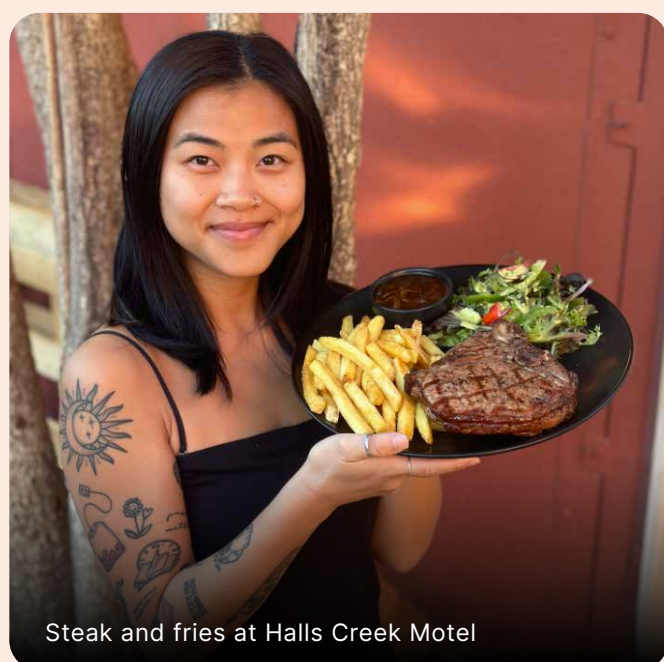
New works at Yarliyil Gallery, Halls Creek



Halls Creek Womens Hub



Trusty old car boot signs in Old Halls Creek



Steak and fries at Halls Creek Motel



Dark Warmun skies



A recent painting by Susan Peters Wangamirr Nampitjin in Halls Creek.

Share your adventures around the Shire of Halls Creek! Tag your posts with **#WatNaHallsCreek** on Instagram, or email your favourite shots to **watnanews@hcsire.wa.gov.au**

Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge the traditional owners of the lands on which the Shire operates and pay our respect to Elders, past, present and emerging; for they hold the memories, the traditions, the culture and hopes of First Nations peoples across the country and are instrumental in shaping our collective futures.



Brenda Garstone with actor Mark Coles Smith in Halls Creek. Credit: NITV



Brenda Garstone working at Yura Yungi. Credit: ABC



Brenda Garstone with former politician Linda Reynolds. Credit: ABC



Brenda Garstone with her Yura Yungi colleagues. Credit: Yura Yungi

Brenda Garstone: Stepping up for our Shire

When the Shire began talking with the community about its long-term vision, I heard something different. There was a sense of momentum — plans on the table, ideas taking shape, and a real focus on what Halls Creek could become. That was what made me step forward and nominate myself for council. It felt like the right time to be part of a different future for our Shire.

I've always been motivated by energy, growth, and sustainable development that helps our mob thrive. For me, those ideas are not abstract. They are about everyday life — flexible services, resilient, climate-adaptable infrastructure, and the same basic opportunities that people take for granted in larger towns and cities. Our remoteness affects all of that, from the price of food to

how we travel, where we live, and what jobs (or not) are available in our region.

Take something as simple as catching a flight. For many families in our Shire that means driving long distances to Kununurra or Broome just to reach a regional airport. It's a big trip, and there are real risks on the road. The cost is also very high. Over time, we've come to accept that as normal. But it shouldn't be. I'm interested in working with partners, including mining, to see if airlines can fly into Halls Creek on a regular basis. Sealing the Tanami is also a pivotal aspect of connecting our Shire to the outside world.

At the same time, development has to be sustainable, tailored to our circumstances, and address the realities our families face every day. Food security is one of the clearest examples of that.

More than half of our household's experience food insecurity, and many simply

cannot afford enough healthy food - ever. Fresh fruit and vegetables here can cost two to three times more than in capital cities, and malnourishment is not a burden experienced only by the Third World – it's here, in our homes and in our empty tummies.

When the healthiest food is the most expensive, it contributes to higher rates of chronic disease, kidney problems and heart conditions, and that affects the whole community. I am committed to lobbying state and federal government for cheaper prices of essentials, as I believe access to healthy, affordable food is a human right, not a luxury.

On the horizon, housing and water security issues are also critical for our Shire. During COVID, I worked with local partners on maintenance programs for some of the houses in Yardgee, and the condition of some homes was not acceptable.

Unfortunately, I suspect the situation has not improved in the years since.

Homes cannot be clean, cared for and fit-for-purpose without a secure water supply, and we know that our Shire's future water security is under threat. As President, I will be advocating with my fellow councilors for more investment into this issue by State and Federal governments, and exploring options that may seem bold, but are worth exploring.

All of these issues connect to the future of our young people and children, and how prosperous their lives will be. When I was campaigning, I spoke about creating the same opportunities for our youth that children have anywhere else in Australia. If young people feel pride in their community, and if they can see real pathways into

training, jobs and leadership, that changes the direction of families, communities and eventually, whole towns.

Part of my decision to take on this role was also about learning. As CEO of Yura Yungi Medical Centre, I am building an organisation from the ground up. Local government, however, operates under very structured legislation, compliance and governance systems, and I saw council as an opportunity to strengthen those skills and learn new ones.

My goal is not just to learn governance for myself, but to bring that knowledge back to Halls Creek and share it with our future leaders.

Good governance should build stronger community organisations, stronger leaders, and better outcomes for our people. The more those skills are shared across the Shire, the stronger we all become.

This role takes time, energy, and responsibility, but it is ultimately about service. It is about working with council, with government and community to improve the quality of life in our Shire, step by step, in practical ways.

Feel free to drop me a line with your thoughts - brenda.garstone@hcshire.wa.gov.au



**WORDS BY
BRENDA GARSTONE,**
President, Shire of Halls Creek

Get your **free** lung cancer screening in Halls Creek

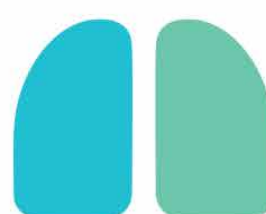
Monday 16 - Tuesday 17 March 2026

On the Heart of Australia truck

If you're aged between 50-70 years, talk to your GP or health worker about lung cancer screening



**HEART of
AUSTRALIA**



**NATIONAL
LUNG CANCER
SCREENING
PROGRAM**

Halls Creek Cowboy competes in Tamworth National Finals

CONTINUED FROM FRONT PAGE

Born with a limb difference that left him without his lower left arm and hand, he has had to master a sport that relies heavily on balance and a "free hand" for stability.

In bareback riding, the rider grips a leather handle known as a "rigging." Because Lance cannot use a second arm to counter the horse's movement, he relies on a modified rigging and exceptional core strength to stay centred.

In a 2021 interview Lance made it clear that his physical start in life was never going to be a barrier to his ambitions in the dirt.

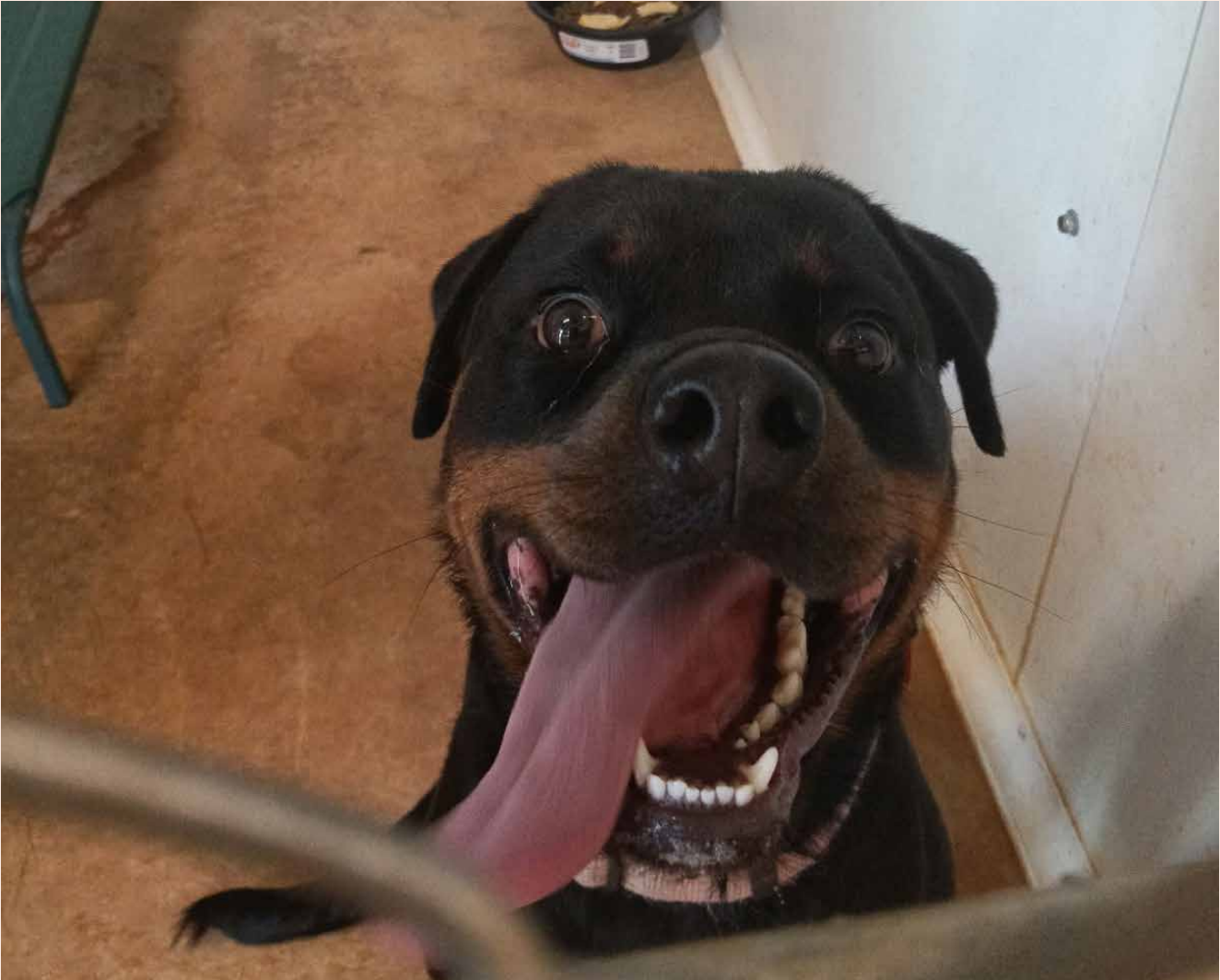
"I was born this way and it hasn't really affected what I can do," he told The Kimberley Echo. "I'll ride in rodeos for as long as I can. I don't get scared but I love the adrenaline I get from them, it gets you pumped up."

Competing at the 2026 National Finals is a major milestone, not just for Lance, but for the Halls Creek community. But even more exciting, is what he'll achieve next.

WORDS BY SHIRE STAFF



Lance Bedford enjoying himself in Tamworth. Credit: Lance Bedford Facebook



A local dog healthy and happy boarding at Halls Creek pound. Credit: Shire of Halls Creek

Local dog boarding available right here in Halls Creek

Halls Creek residents and Kimberley travelers are being encouraged to look closer to home when planning their next adventure, with the Shire's boarding facilities currently sitting under-capacity despite offering expert care for the district's dogs .

While many owners have traditionally looked to out-of-town kennels or made difficult travel arrangements, the Shire of Halls Creek is reminding the community that high-quality boarding is available right here in town.

The facility offers a significant advantage for animal welfare, allowing dogs to stay in a familiar climate without the stress of long-distance transport. By keeping pets local, owners can ensure their dogs remain in a secure, climate-appropriate environment while they travel through parts of the Kimberley that do not allow dogs.

The Shire's Senior Ranger Paul Robins has decades of experience in animal welfare and management, and is a veteran at handling dogs of all temperaments. The presence of an on-site expert ensures that every animal is monitored around the clock in a professional, secure setting.

"For older dogs or larger breeds, long hours in a hot car can be very uncomfortable and even taxing on their health if they have underlying issues," said Robins.

"Dogs especially are creatures of habit, and getting them familiar with our local boarding facilities could be a great way to develop a trusting long-term relationship that allows you a bit more freedom to explore."

The service is not restricted to locals; the Shire is also welcoming the pets of tourists and visitors passing through the Kimberley. This is particularly useful for travelers heading into "dog-free" tourist meccas like Purnululu National Park (The Bungle Bungles), where pets are strictly prohibited.

At a competitive rate of \$25 per day, the service is designed to be accessible for everyone, and Robins encourages anyone interested in the facility to give him a ring and come and take a look - bringing your dog, of course.

"Both myself and ranger Johnno are used to handling tricky dogs and aggressive dogs, we're not intimidated by their behaviour and know it is usually based in fear. Predictability can help calm these dogs a lot, and that's what we offer here."

For more information on boarding your pet locally, contact the Shire of Halls Creek or speak with the Ranger team directly on 0429 383 694.

WORDS BY SHIRE STAFF

The 8.8-year gap: Why March 19 is a 'Wake-Up Call' for Halls Creek

As Halls Creek enters the month of March, the community is preparing for National Close the Gap Day on the 19th — a day that highlights the stark divide between Indigenous and non-Indigenous life outcomes.

For residents of the East Kimberley, the "gap" is not just a policy term; it is a documented health crisis. National data released for 2026 shows that an Aboriginal male born today can expect to live just 71.9 years — nearly nine years less than a non-Indigenous male (80.6 years). For women, the gap persists at 8.1 years.

"Closing the Gap is about addressing structural barriers and inequities. For our children and young people, it is about being let down by systems that exclude them, harm them, or simply fail them." — National Commission for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Young People (2025 Statement)

While these national figures are sobering, the reality in remote areas like Halls Creek is even more acute. Life expectancy for First Nations people in remote and very remote areas is 5.3 years lower than for those living in major cities.

The Western Australian Burden of Disease Study reveals the Kimberley has a 1.9 times higher rate of fatal disease burden than Perth. Local health inequities are driven by specific, documented factors:

- **Chronic Disease:** The Kimberley has the highest cardiovascular and cancer burden in the state.
- **Potentially Preventable Hospitalisations:** Local rates for conditions like diabetes complications and congestive heart failure are the highest in Western Australia.
- **Incarceration and Health:** Aboriginal adults in WA are incarcerated at a rate 15 times higher than non-Indigenous Australians; a factor that directly impacts long-term mental and physical health.

The Drive for Reform

Every February the government hands down a progress and implementation report on the National Agreement on Closing the Gap.

Prime Minister Anthony Albanese used his annual Closing the Gap speech to condemn the alleged Invasion Day terror plot in January in which someone threw an explosive into a Perth crowd. He also renewed his government's commitment to reducing inequality.

He told First Nations people, "We see you. We stand with you," and denounced the attack as driven by "white supremacy ideology," saying Indigenous Australians had the right to gather safely and to "a full and equal place in our nation and our future."

Albanese acknowledged progress on closing the gap goals had been "slow" but rejected talk of failure, declaring: "I am not contemplating failure... We are determined to succeed."

He highlighted improvements in some states on youth detention and preschool enrolment, and announced new funding for remote jobs, health clinics, food security and maternal care, saying the government would accelerate efforts before the 2031 deadline.

On the ground, in the Shire of Halls Creek, this means moving toward community-controlled health services rather than top-down government programs.

"Closing the Gap is about addressing structural barriers," notes the National Commission for Aboriginal Children and Young People. Currently, only four of the 19 national targets are on track to be met. While early childhood education (95% enrolment target) is seeing progress, critical areas like suicide prevention, adult incarceration, and child removal are worsening nationally.

WORDS BY SHIRE STAFF



Gija Youth Program. Supplied: Warmun Community Inc.

Gija youth enjoy fishing day out

The Gija Youth Program recently hosted a successful community fishing day for Warmun residents.

The outdoor activity focused on engaging local young people and spending time on Country. Organisers from Warmun Community Inc. described the event as a positive day for all involved and confirmed plans are already underway to hold a follow-up fishing trip in the near future.

WORDS BY SHIRE STAFF



New gifts now in stock at the Visitor Centre. Credit: Shire of Halls Creek

Branded Halls Creek gifts land at the Visitor Centre!

A collection of branded Halls Creek merchandise has arrived at the Halls Creek Visitor’s Centre. The new stock - which includes stickers, hat pins and beer coasters - features a modern artistic interpretation of the famed China Wall, designed from historical images currently hanging in the Visitor’s Centre.

Manager Shirley Little said many customers - locals and tourists alike - often asked about beer stubbies and stickers to recall their time in Halls Creek, and she was happy the new stock was so fresh and memorable.

“I love how it looks - a very modern interpretation of an ancient wall. You will definitely get questions about where you got it”.

Other new stock to have arrived includes large appliances such as toasters, electric mixers, grill plates and melanin dinner ware (good for camping).

Shirley invited locals (old and new) to drop by and have a chat with her, as the wet season was traditionally a quiet time for tourists dropping by in the Wet Season.

“I’ve always got some good ideas for weekend trips - I’m happy to share my secret spots!”

WORDS BY SHIRE STAFF



\$5,000 Scholarships for Halls Creek women to start a trade

The Cook Labor Government has launched an incredible opportunity for women in the Shire of Halls Creek and the wider Kimberley: the Women in Trades Scholarships.

This initiative is a direct investment in local women who are ready to train, upskill, or launch a career in a high-demand trade. The scholarships are worth \$5,000 each and are designed to help overcome the real barriers women often face in getting into the industry.

This \$5,000 payment is flexible and can cover the cost of training, equipment, travel, or any other expenses that support young people through their studies.

“These scholarships encourage more women to enter traditionally male-dominated trades by breaking down stereotypes, removing

barriers, and creating real pathways into secure employment.

This support is especially important for women in regional and remote communities, where access to training and job opportunities can make a real difference.

By investing in targeted support for women in trades, we’re building a more inclusive, skilled and resilient workforce for the future.”

There are 100 places available across Western Australia in 2026, with a strong focus on regional access. Local training pathways, including courses through North Regional TAFE, are part of the program, meaning interested women can start their training near home.

WORDS BY SHIRE STAFF



Women in trades. Credit: North Regional TAFE

VR project brings Kangaroo Rock to life at Halls Creek school

Students at Halls Creek District High School are stepping into culture in a whole new way, using virtual reality to share and preserve local Aboriginal stories.

The project began after students took part in camps and daytrips on-Country, where Elders shared dreaming stories, history, bush medicine and bush tucker.

Deputy principal Michelle Buss said one story in particular stood out.

"From this, a particularly powerful story, called Kangaroo Rock Dreaming, emerged," she said.

"This yarn was told to the students on-Country by school Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Officers (AIEO) and Gija man Eric Ramsey as it was told to him by his Elders."

The experience sparked the idea of blending culture and technology, after staff saw how powerful both on-Country learning and hands-on VR could be for students.

To bring the story into the virtual world, students worked alongside Elders, visiting important places and taking photos on-Country. The images were then turned into 3D models using photogrammetry, allowing real places to be recreated in VR.

"Eric Ramsey recorded the story in language and English, and this guided how the virtual environment was built," Miss Buss said.

"Our technology partner supported the school by building things like the kangaroos' movements and gave them AI so the experience feels alive."

Students say the project has been both exciting and meaningful.

"When I was blessing the rock in VR, I felt calm but nervous at the same time because it was strange being there in a game," said Year 6 student Tyson Thomas.

"You got to get a stick or a rock and rub it on Kangaroo Rock so the Kangaroos will come. Our ancestors did this to get a feed long time ago," said Year 5 student Charlotte Butters.

This year, the school will launch a new digital technology program to teach students how to build and code their own VR experiences.

"Over the three-year program, they will learn how to capture places on-Country respectfully, how to turn real photos into 3D objects, and how to use simple coding to make things move or respond in the virtual

world," Miss Buss said.

Student Azza Johnson said he is already looking forward to what's next.

"I am excited about coding my favourite place, The Snake Dreaming we saw at Violet Valley," he said.

Principal Daniel Pollard said the project is about more than just technology.

"They become guardians of the stories, they become theirs to share with tomorrow's students," Mr Pollard said.

Miss Buss said the project was a strong example of two-way learning.

"It is an excellent example of two-way learning (Ngaparrtji Ngaparrtji) which we know is the best way to help our Indigenous students to take in knowledge and to feel valuable," she said.

"The tech also helps with preservation of this ancient and priceless knowledge.

"The final VR world is shaped by culture, created with students, and grounded in Country."

**WORDS BY SHIRE STAFF
WITH HALLS CREEK HIGH SCHOOL**



VR Program Halls Creek District High School. Supplied: Halls Creek District High School

Young cowboys in training at Burks Park

Eight participants have started their Aboriginal Pastoral Academy (APA) experience, kicking off in February with determination and excitement, Job Pathways reports. Following two weeks of training at Burks Park Station just outside Halls Creek, they will shift to Mistake Creek for four weeks of hands-on learning as they prepare for a career in the pastoral industry.

WORDS BY SHIRE STAFF



Burks Park Station, 2026 Aboriginal Pastoral Academy Pre Employment Program. Supplied.

\$745,000 in local ideas: Kimberley grants mark 10-year milestone

Community groups across the Kimberley are being encouraged to think big, with the 2026 Kimberley Community Grants Scheme opening soon as the program celebrates a decade of local impact.

Run by Water Corporation in partnership with the Lions Club of Broome, the scheme began in 2016 as a small West Kimberley initiative before expanding across the region in 2019 due to strong demand.

In ten years, the program has awarded more than \$745,000 to 132 grassroots organisations, backing projects designed and delivered by local communities themselves.

Grants of up to \$10,000 are available to not-for-profit groups, Aboriginal communities,

schools and education providers with projects that support wellbeing, strengthen connections or encourage care for the environment.

“What makes the scheme stand out is how it is funded,” says Sharon Broad, Water Corporation’s North West Regional Manager.

“The grants come from the sale of Rhodes Grass hay grown at the Broome North Water Resource Recovery Facility using recycled wastewater. The proceeds are then returned directly to Kimberley communities, creating a circular system that turns treated water into practical support for local ideas.”

Over the years, funding has helped deliver a wide range of projects, from solar power installations and facility upgrades to bush

food gardens and cultural events. Some of the more memorable initiatives include an equine therapy program in the Fitzroy Valley, a new community plant nursery in Broome, and a citrus garden bringing fresh produce to the remote community of Yakanarra.

Together, the projects reflect the creativity and resilience of communities across the region, with each grant supporting practical, locally driven solutions.

Applications for the 2026 Kimberley Community Grants Scheme open at 9am on Monday, March 9, and close at 4pm WST on Friday, April 17. Community organisations with an idea that could make a positive difference are encouraged to apply.

WORDS BY SHIRE STAFF

Kimberley Community Grants



Are you a not-for-profit organisation or school on a mission to help your community thrive?

We’re offering grants of up to \$10,000 to kick-start projects that support and empower people and communities in the Kimberley.

Applications open Monday 9 March and close Friday 17 April 2026. Learn more about the grants and how to apply at:

www.watercorporation.com.au/kcgrants





Interested in working as an Aboriginal health officer?

Do you want to make a real difference in the health of our Shire communities? The Shire of Halls Creek is looking for dedicated people to join our team in this vital, permanent full-time role.

The Role:

This is a hands-on position where you'll work directly with our mob in town and remote communities like Balgo and Warmun. You will lead health workshops, manage environmental health plans, and empower residents to make healthy choices regarding food safety, hygiene, and housing.

What You'll Need:

- A deep respect for Aboriginal culture and experience working in community.
- A passion for public health and helping our people thrive.
- A current 'C' class driver's licence and a willingness to camp out on country.
- A Certificate II in Aboriginal Environmental Health, or the drive to earn one while you work.

CONTACT THE SHIRE TO APPLY

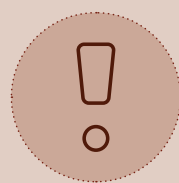


Does your garden need a Tidy-Up?

Keeping the grass short and having a tidy garden helps prevent snakes, mosquitoes and other pests.

Please ring the Shire for **FREE** access to a trailer and gardening tools (including mowers, brush cutters and line trimmers) to keep your patch tidy and pest-free.

Call 9168 6007 or pop in to the Shire front-desk.



Stop cockroaches before they start!

A clean house keeps cockroaches away, you make the difference!

Every day:

- Sweep the floors
- Wipe benches
- Wash the dishes
- Take rubbish to the outside bin
- Put cooking fat in the bin, not the sink

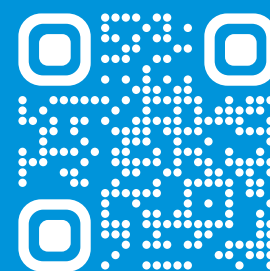
Tips from the Shire Environmental Health Crew



NOW HIRING - FEMALE SUPPORT WORKERS

Part Time • Fitzroy Crossing & Halls Creek

Certain roles require male or female support workers due to client needs. We encourage candidates to apply for positions suitable to their profile. Scan the QR code to email your cv to recruitment@farnorth.org.au



New Plumbing skills for Shire health crew

The Shire’s Environmental Health crew is stepping up to help Halls Creek residents, recently completing their Certificate II in Minor Plumbing Works.

The training means the team is now qualified to handle basic repairs around the home, providing "direct action" for residents who have been dealing with long-term maintenance issues. In some cases, crew members were able to fix taps that had been leaking for up to four months.

“These skills are really useful to have in our Shire, because visits by tradies can be few and far between." said Dean Graham, head of the Environmental Health Team.

What the crew can fix in Shire homes:

- Changing shower heads (sometimes we have free ones to give out to community - just ask)
- Replacing leaking tap washers
- Replacing entire taps
- Unblocking kitchen and bathroom sinks

The team said that while they can handle these minor repairs, larger tasks remain the responsibility of a professional plumber. This includes replacing toilet cisterns, servicing hot water systems, or performing copper pipe work.

All maintenance issues, including the more complicated jobs, are reported directly to the relevant state authorities by Shire staff using the official Healthy Homes template.

This new initiative ensures that simple leaks don't turn into major headaches for local families, and local homes get the attention they need - quickly.

WORDS BY SHIRE STAFF



Shire Rangers Paul and Jono with a local puppy. Credit: Shire of Halls Creek

Dog registrations overdue

It is time for Halls Creek residents to check their dog registrations. Making sure your dog is signed up with the Shire is an important part of being a good dog owner.

Registration is about more than just a piece of paper. It is the best way to keep your dog safe. If your dog ever gets lost, the registration tag helps the Shire find you quickly so your pet can come home.

It also helps the Shire look after all dogs in town and in our remote communities like Balgo, Billiluna, and Warmun. When we know how many dogs live here, we can better plan for animal health and safety programs.

Extra Benefits for Registered Dogs

Signing up your dog also gives you access to great free services and lower costs:

- **Free Vet Care:** You can get access to free desexing programs and free microchipping for your dog.
- **Lower Pound Fees:** If your dog ever gets picked up by the Ranger and ends up in the pound, the fees to get them out are much lower for registered dogs.

- **Low Costs to Help Families:** The Shire wants to make it easy for everyone to sign up. Prices are kept low to help all families.
- **Cheap for everyone:** Prices start at just \$10 for a year.
- **Discounts available:** If you are a pensioner or have a Health Care Card, you can get a big discount on the fee.

"Registering your dog is a simple way to protect your best friend," said Shire of Halls Creek senior ranger Paul Robins. "It helps us keep track of dogs across our huge backyard. Most importantly, it helps lost dogs get back to their families."

If you have a new dog, or if you have just moved to town, please come into the Shire office. It only takes a few minutes to sign up and keep your dog safe for the year.

Drop into the Shire frotn desk to fill out a simple form and pay your registration fee.

WORDS BY SHIRE STAFF

Warmun dining room updated by local artists

The dining room of the Warmun Roadhouse (operated by Outback Stores) has received a colourful make-over ahead of the busy dry season in which thousands of tourists and locals pass through and stop for food.

Artists from the Warmun Art Centre painted a variety of animals, local river, bush scenes and Purnululu National Park (The Bungle Bungles) to impress customers while they eat.

Staff at the Roadhouse said "it was wonderful to see the whole community get involved. A big highlight was seeing the school kids from both local schools painting the lower section."

WORDS COURTESY OF OUTBACK STORES.



The freshly-painted dining room at Warmun Roadhouse. Credit: Supplied, Outback Stores

Local groups urged to sign up for FREE repellent dispensers

Community groups in the Shire of Halls Creek are being encouraged to take advantage of a state health program that offers free mosquito repellent dispensers to help protect residents from bites.

The initiative, run by WA Health, allows eligible local organisations to apply for up to two wall-mounted repellent units at no cost. The program is designed to make protection easily available at busy outdoor spots where people gather, such as sporting ovals and community centres.

By installing these dispensers, local groups can help ensure that "covering up" becomes a standard part of heading outdoors in the Kimberley, WA Health said.

In Western Australia, mosquitoes can transmit Ross River virus, Barmah Forest virus and Kunjin virus, as well as the potentially fatal Murray Valley encephalitis and Japanese encephalitis viruses (JEV). The most effective way to prevent infection is to avoid being bitten by mosquitoes, experts say.

The dispenser units are easy to clean and maintain, and provide a large quantity of

repellent that is easily refillable.

Shire of Halls Creek Head of Environmental Health, Dean Graham, said it was vital for the community to take the lead on mosquito safety in such a high-risk region.

"We are urging everyone to be proactive in protecting themselves whenever they are in outdoor spaces." Mr. Graham said. "Having these dispensers available at our local hubs means there is no excuse not to 'fight the bite' every time you head out."

While the program is managed by the WA state government, it is a valuable resource for the Halls Creek district where mosquitoes are a constant hazard during and after the wet season. Local groups, including sporting clubs, NGOs, art centres and Aboriginal corporations are all invited to check their eligibility and place an order.

To find out if your group is eligible and to order your free dispensers, visit: health.wa.gov.au/Articles/N_R/Repellent-dispenser-community-initiative

WORDS BY SHIRE STAFF



Riddell's Dispensers in weather-proof dispensers. Credit: WA Department of Health



A grocery delivery by Outback Stores to a remote community finds itself in trouble. Credit: Outback Stores

Wet Season Realities for Grocery Deliveries

Outback Stores, who run multiple stores in the Shire of Halls Creek (including Balgo and Warmun), have delivered a sneak peak of some of the challenges behind wet season grocery deliveries.

“The wet season always brings its challenges, and this was no exception.” they wrote on social media.

“One of our delivery trucks became bogged while travelling to a remote community - a reminder of just how tough conditions can be at this time of year.”

The company said getting food and essential supplies into remote areas “isn’t always straightforward,” but “food security matters. That’s why we plan ahead, monitor conditions closely and do everything we can to ensure supplies keep moving, even when the road gets rough.”

“Flooded roads, soft ground and unpredictable weather can slow things down, but our teams and transport partners work hard to keep communities stocked and supported.”

The Shire of Halls Creek has been lobbying the Federal and State governments for more financial assistance to pay for food security measures, including subsidised basic supplies and industrial, climate-protected facilities to store large quantities of food and water for entire communities during the wet season when towns and the remotes can be cut off for weeks.

Last year The Guardian Australia reported on food insecurity issues in the Shire of Halls Creek, with locals telling the paper they “could not survive” amidst the high prices and lack of affordable access to fresh foods.

At the time, a spokesperson for the National Indigenous Australians Agency told the paper it was happy to continue further talks with the Shire.

They added that the 10-year remote Indigenous food security strategy “aims to make structural changes to the food system within remote communities nationally, including in the East Kimberley region.”

The strategy details inter-agency and government cooperation, with the goal of improving supply chains, ensuring access to traditional foods and boosting local knowledge of health and nutrition.

WORDS COURTESY OF OUTBACK STORES

Update on Jungarni Youth Night Space

Community members are being advised that work toward the Jungarni Youth Night Space is continuing, but some delays remain while approvals are finalised.

The planned night space will be located at 8 Flinders Street. While the building is ready for renovation, work cannot begin until all required approvals are in place. This process is outside the team’s direct control and has taken longer than expected. Once approvals are finalised, substantial renovation works will be needed before the space can open.

of youth night spaces in Wyndham and Fitzroy Crossing, which have provided safe, engaging environments and helped reduce antisocial behaviour while giving young people access to activities, mentoring, and support. Jungarni hopes the Halls Creek night space will have a similar impact.

The youth team says it understands the community’s frustration and is hopeful approvals will be completed in the coming weeks, allowing renovations to begin and the night space to open as soon as possible.

Community leaders point to the success

WORDS BY SHIRE STAFF



Fitzroy Valley Night Space has been a huge success. Supplied by Fitzroy Valley Night Space

ENTRIES NOW OPEN

CALLING ALL ARTISTS AND PHOTOGRAPHERS!



Entry forms close
Friday, 15 May 2026

Regional drop off between:
Monday 25 May-
Thursday 28 May 2026.

At: Shire of Halls Creek
Administration Office.

For more info:
(08) 9191 0999
www.kappawards.com.au
kimberleyartprize@sdwk.wa.gov.au



Kimberley
Art and
Photographic
Prize



Kids adventuring in Balgo. Credit: Wirrimanu Aboriginal Corporation

Youth Centre numbers boom in Balgo, with strong community and Elder support

Wirrimanu has seen encouraging growth and renewed energy through both the Youth Program and the Junior Rangers Program, writes Balgo youth worker Jordan Wasiak, with strong participation numbers and positive community feedback across recent months.

Wirrimanu Youth Program – A Safe and Active Hub After School

The Wirrimanu Youth Centre operates as a safe, structured and welcoming space for young people in the afternoons and evenings. Participation numbers have steadily increased, with many young people now attending consistently throughout the week. On any given day we might have 60-90 participants, largely due to the weather lately, on any fine day we will

have 80-90, the younger ones drawing, the older ones playing a basketball comp on the outdoor court. Each afternoon and evening, a convoy of families in their 4wd's pull up to drop off their children, and many young people even arrive and park their dirt bikes, eager to take part in activities including basketball, arts and crafts, music, structured group programs and recreational sport. The centre has become a positive meeting place where young people are getting along well, engaging respectfully, and enjoying structured recreation. Importantly, we provide meals each afternoon and evening, ensuring children have access to food while they participate in activities. The centre offers a safe space where young people can engage, connect and feel supported. This consistent engagement has had a positive flow-on effect, including improved school

attendance for a number of participants. Friday nights include Blue Light Disco events, supported by local Police, which continue to attract strong attendance and promote positive relationships between young people. We also host regular family movie nights, creating inclusive opportunities for families to attend together and strengthen community connection. The operation of the local swimming pool, managed full-time on site, has also been a major positive for the community. The pool provides another safe, structured activity space for young people, particularly during hot weather, and complements the broader youth engagement efforts. Go for a swim and head to Youth Centre for art or basketball or just for a good feed.



Wirrimanu Junior Rangers Program – Learning on Country

Separate to the Youth Program, the Junior Rangers Program provides structured on-Country learning opportunities focused on cultural knowledge, land care, leadership and responsibility.

Participation in Junior Rangers activities remains strong, with young people engaging in environmental projects, bush trips and skill-building sessions that promote cultural pride, teamwork, curiosity and practical development. The program has also received assistance from GeoScience Australia, providing geology resources and science equipment that enhance hands-on learning and deepen young people's understanding of the land they are caring for.

The program supports young people to strengthen their connection to Country while building confidence and respect for elders, community and the environment.

Community Collaboration and Support

These outcomes are made possible through the local support and funding assistance of the National Indigenous Australians Agency (NIAA), whose backing enables consistent delivery of both programs. The support from Virginia, our local engagement officer, has been so valuable.

Strong leadership and partnership within Wirrimanu Aboriginal Corporation has also been instrumental. Manne and Mick, Wirrimanu's CEO partnership duo, have provided ongoing guidance, strategic support and encouragement to ensure both programs continue to grow and deliver positive outcomes for young people.

The local store plays an important role by cooking and providing food for the Youth Centre. Police assist with Friday night Blue Light events. KAMS Balgo Medical Clinic, that it's a place of safety and welcome for any medical problem. supports the

programs and works collaboratively with staff and young people to promote health and wellbeing outcomes for young people. Families and elders attend movie nights and encourage participation, and the broader community has continued to pitch in and support the programs in meaningful ways.

The result has been a visible and positive shift in atmosphere — young people have a place to go, something to look forward to, and structured activities that keep them engaged in a safe and supportive environment.

The Youth Program and Junior Rangers Program will continue to work alongside families, elders and partner organisations to build on this positive momentum for Wirrimanu's young people.

WORDS BY JORDAN WASIAK
Youth Services | Wirrimanu Aboriginal Corporation



YURA YUNG

MEDICAL SERVICE ABORIGINAL CORPORATION

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(08) 9168 6266

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Thinking about quitting smoking/vaping?

Quitting helps your body start to repair itself from the damage caused by smoking/vaping, it also lowers your risk of developing cancer.

Quit support is available

Every quit journey is different, but you don't have to do it alone. Yarn with your doctor at Yura Yungi Medical Service about quitting and ask about what Nicotine Replacement Therapy is available to you, or call Quitline on 13 78 48

Make our community smoke and vape free!



Scan here for more information about smoking and cancer.



DID YOU KNOW?

THERE ARE 16 DIFFERENT TYPES OF CANCER CAUSED BY SMOKING.





Martin Luther King III visiting Australia. Credit: NITV, AAP

‘NEVER GIVE UP’ Civil rights royalty sends powerful message to Kimberley youth

Martin Luther King III, the eldest son of the legendary US civil rights leader, has used a high-profile visit to Australia to urge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people to maintain their long fight for justice following the 2023 Voice to Parliament defeat.

Speaking during a visit to the Sydney Opera House in February, Mr. King addressed the loss of momentum for the Voice, comparing the referendum's failure to the long road his father traveled during the American civil rights movement.

"There are many battles my dad, his team and my mother engaged in where it didn't happen until it happened," Mr. King told the crowd.

"I hope young people and the population would not give up just because it didn't happen on that vote a few years ago. You have to desire to bring it back again and again, because progress is not always immediate."

The legacy of the senior Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. serves as a historical blueprint for the power of persistence. Through non-violent protest and the 1963 March on Washington, he helped push the US government to pass the Civil Rights Act (1964) and Voting Rights Act (1965), ending decades of segregation and voter suppression under Jim Crow laws.

Mr. King's visit focused heavily on Indigenous economic participation. He highlighted the "stark" gap in leadership, noting only four Indigenous people currently sit on ASX200 company boards.

"It's sad it's taken this long, but it does not mean that progress can't happen," he said.

CareerTrackers CEO Adam Davids, who hosted the civil rights luminary, reinforced the connection between rights and the economy.

"Civil rights and racial equality

and access to the economy are absolutely intertwined."

Mr. Davids stated.

Despite the 2023 federal result, Mr. King pointed to state-level progress, such as Victoria's nation-first treaty agreement and South Australia's state-based Voice. He remained firm on the necessity of continuing the push through peaceful means.

"You shouldn't just disallow protesting, I don't think that's ever productive," Mr. King said. "But you've got to figure out: where is the balance? Where is it that people can protest peacefully?"

WORDS BY SHIRE STAFF

Local recruitment drive of 2026 Census

A major recruitment drive is underway across the Kimberley as the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) prepares for the national Census on Tuesday, 11 August 2026.

The ABS is currently seeking applications for Local Engagement Officers (LEOs). These temporary roles offer flexible hours and are designed for residents with strong community connections and experience working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, youth, and people experiencing homelessness or living with a disability.

The push for local staff follows significant challenges during the 2021 Census. That collection was hampered by the COVID-19 pandemic, which saw closed WA borders and strict travel restrictions limit the movement of Census staff.

These hurdles, combined with the loss of physical paper forms in some remote areas, led to concerns regarding undercounting and the accuracy of data for regional North West communities, local news outlets reported at the time.

To avoid a repeat of these issues, a Kimberley Operational Support Centre (OSC) has been established to drive community-led engagement and focus on local

recruitment, with offices opening across the Kimberley, including in Derby, Broome and Kununurra.

This includes an expanded, two-week window for data collection and a focus on "feet on the ground" in remote towns. As part of this regional focus, Halls Creek resident Michelle McKenzie has commenced in a new part-time role as the Community Engagement Manager for the Halls Creek district.

LEOs will play a critical role in building relationships with local groups and ensuring all residents are counted. Data collected during the Census is essential for planning local services and infrastructure, and it provides the foundational data required for the allocation of regional grants.

According to the ABS, collection of data in the Halls Creek district has been improving year on year, but major obstacles remain including geographical remoteness, trust and engagement from participants, language and cultural barriers, and complex logistics and operations.

"The 2021 Census reported increases in Indigenous Population, Indigenous Households and All Persons when compared with the 2016 Census," the ABS reported.

Building a reliable data set in the North

West has historically been an uphill battle for statisticians. For many people in remote First Nations communities a government official at the door doesn't always signal "assistance", it can signal "interference." - even fear.

With chronic shortages forcing many families into overcrowded housing conditions, some Shire residents told Wat Na! they fear that being honest about who is sleeping under their roof will lead to fines or evictions from state-funded community housing.

CEO of Shire of Halls Creek Sue Leonard said she looked forward to partnering with the Census team to make sure the local count went smoothly and accurately.

"Our funding opportunities, investments and future plans are often built on the back of this census data," Ms Leonard said.

"We'll be committed to making sure everyone in our Shire is counted, no matter where they live."

Applications for the LEO positions are now open. Residents are encouraged to visit census.abs.gov.au/jobs for more information and to apply.

WORDS BY SHIRE STAFF



3603
People



77.9%
Aboriginal and Torres Strait
Islander people



29
Median Age



1644
Private Dwellings



3.3
Average number of people
living in each house



24.4%
Unemployment



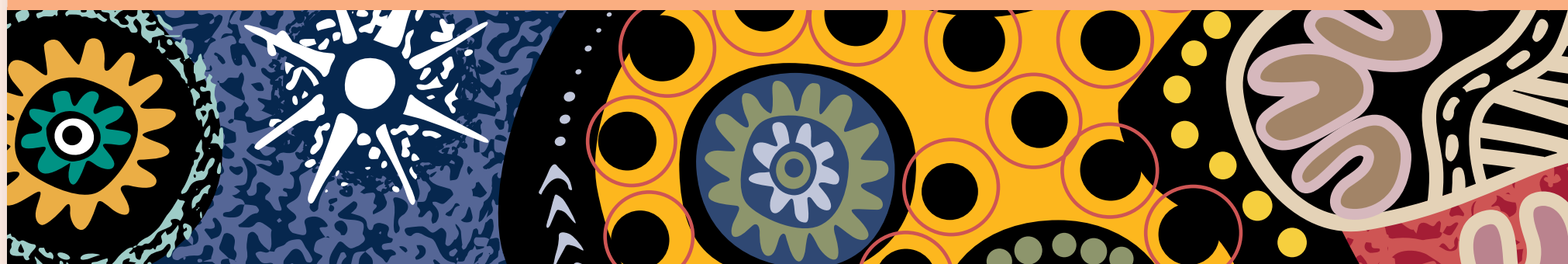
Jaru, Kukutja, Kriol, Gija, Gooniyandi
Main Aboriginal languages spoken

Data from the 2021 Census for the Shire of Halls Creek

Become a Mobile Field Representative



Census



- ✓ Travel to help Census teams in your region
- ✓ Distribute and collect Census forms
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Support communities to participate in the Census.

See all opportunities at census.abs.gov.au/jobs





Featured Artist



Halls Creek artist Eric Leria with one of his recent landscape paintings. Credit: Yarliyil Arts Centre

Troy Drill: Finding purpose through painting

Troy Drill is an emerging Gija artist from Warmun in the East Kimberley. His paintings are grounded in Country, family and the teachings of his elders. Born in Wyndham in 1981, he grew up surrounded by strong cultural influences, learning from grandparents, aunties and uncles who passed down stories, knowledge and responsibility for land.

As a young man, Troy spent time living around Purnululu with his grandfather Raymond Wallaby, who he calls the “Big Boss”. Those years on Country helped shape his identity and deepened his connection to Gija law, landscape and story.

Before turning to art, Troy was known as a talented sportsman, playing football and professional basketball across different states. A serious injury in his mid-twenties

changed that path, and years later he found a new direction through painting.

He only began painting in early 2024, encouraged by his mother, senior Gija Elder Shirley Drill, and his brother-in-law, artist Dwayne Jessell. What started as a way to stay busy and reconnect with Country quickly became a source of pride and purpose. Troy says painting makes him happy and helps bring back memories of time spent on the land with family.

Working through Warmun Art Centre, Troy uses traditional ochres sourced from Gija Country. Like many Warmun artists, his work reflects Ngarranggarni (Dreaming) stories and the distinctive landscapes of the East Kimberley.

His paintings often focus on specific

places and stories connected to Purnululu (Bungle Bungles), including the Kangaroo Fat Dreaming. In these works, the lines and shapes represent tracks, hills and markings in the land that carry knowledge for those who know how to read them.

While he works within the strong ochre painting traditions of Warmun, Troy is also developing his own style. Curators have noted his distinctive fine line work, created with grass or plant materials, which brings a new texture and movement to the classic flattened landscapes of Warmun art.

Through his art, Troy hopes people can feel a sense of home and learn more about the land and culture he represents.

WORDS AND IMAGES COURTESY OF WARMUN ARTS CENTRE

Kimberley Art Prize opens for 2026 entries

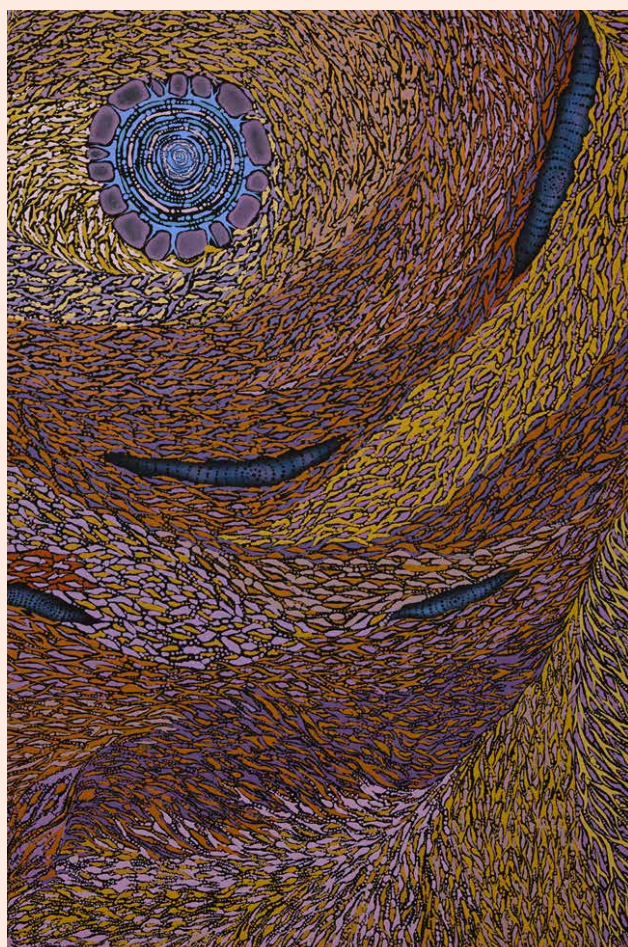
The famous Kimberley Art and Photographic Prize (KAPP) will open submissions from around the Kimberley on March 2 and close on the 15 May 2026.

(KAPP) is one of Western Australia’s longest-running regional art awards, first established in 1970 and now held annually in Derby. It attracts hundreds of entries across painting, photography and Aboriginal art categories.

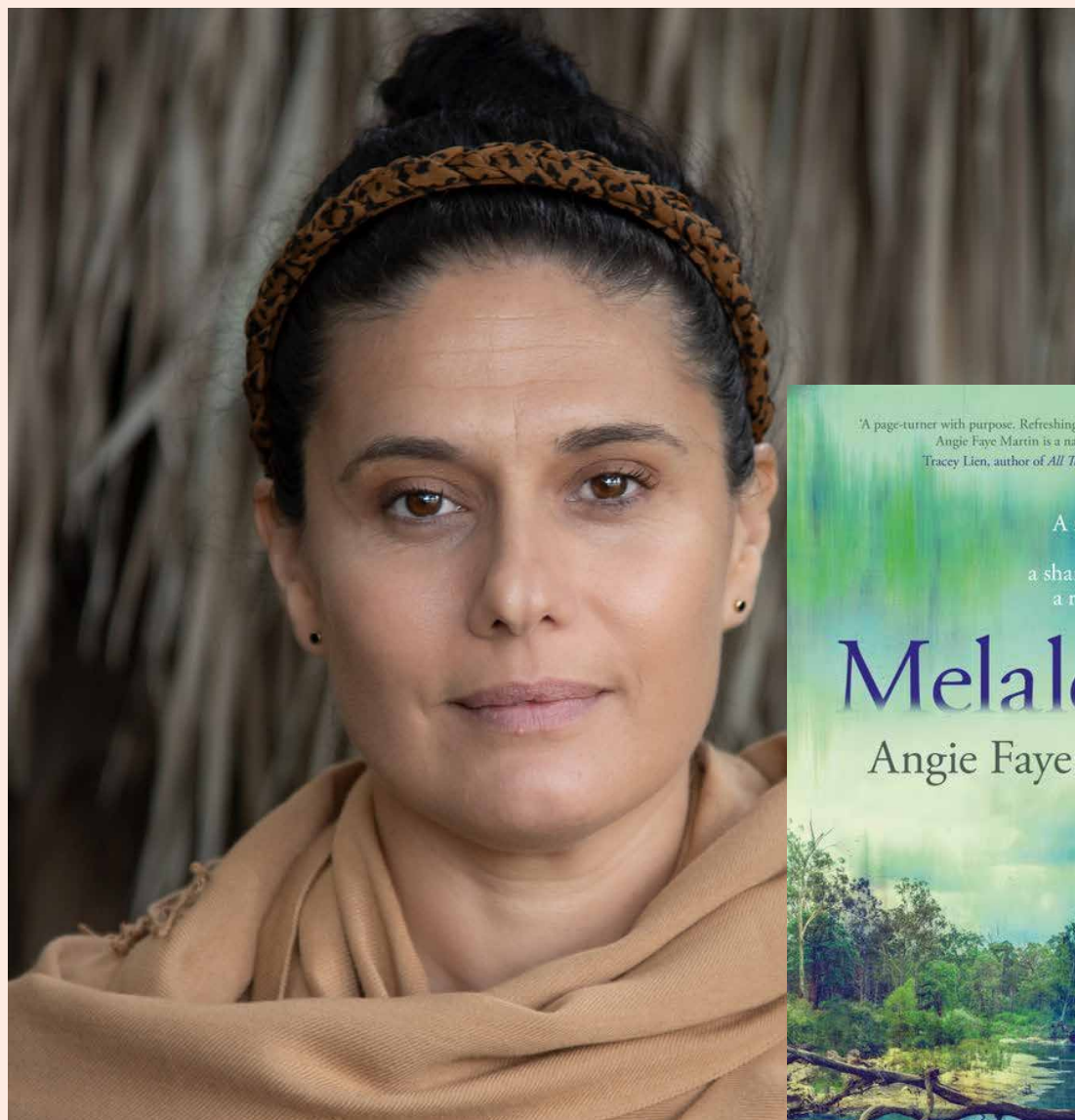
In 2023, Halls Creek artist Deirdre “Dilly” Butters took out the overall art prize with Desert Aurora, a painting inspired by dusk on her Country. Her win was widely celebrated, with the Walmajarri-Kija artist describing the work as a personal expression of her homeland’s colours and open plains.

Drop-off for submissions will be at the Shire front-desk.

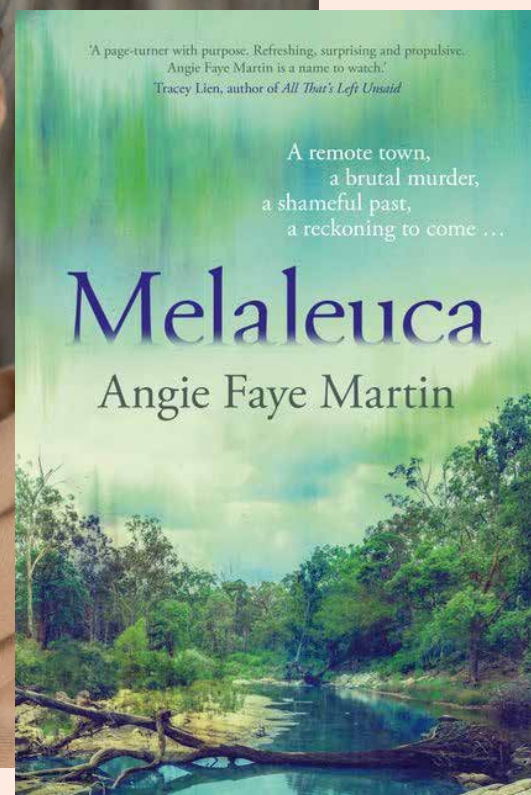
WORDS BY SHIRE STAFF



Halls Creek artist Dilly Butters. Source/ Supplied



Angie Faye Martin with novel 'Melaleuca'. Credit: Harper Collins



“A page-turner with purpose”: Indigenous crime novel unearths secrets in small-town life

Angie Faye Martin’s *Melaleuca* is a crime novel, but it carries the weight of lived history.

Set in a remote Queensland town, it follows Aboriginal policewoman Renee Taylor, who returns home only to find herself investigating a brutal murder tied to disappearances decades earlier. What unfolds is less a whodunit than a slow excavation of intergenerational trauma, racism and buried truths.

Martin writes from her own grounding in Country and community. She is of Kooma, Kamilaroi and European heritage, with a background in public health, anthropology and public policy.

Her fiction is shaped by that mix of cultural knowledge and social insight, and she is part of the First Nations Australia Writers Network.

Melaleuca is her debut novel, and it has already attracted strong recognition. An early draft won the inaugural Harper Collins First Nations Commercial Fiction Fellowship,

and the finished book was shortlisted for the 2026 Indie Book Awards for Debut Fiction. Critics have described it as “a beautifully written, absorbing crime novel” and “a stunning new voice” in Australian crime fiction.

For Indigenous readers, the novel’s power lies in its honesty. The story shows how the past sits just beneath the surface of everyday life in small towns.

Renee’s struggle—caught between professional duty and cultural belonging—will feel familiar to many readers who move between worlds.

Melaleuca isn’t always comfortable reading, but that’s part of its strength. It respects the complexity of Country, kinship and justice, and it refuses easy answers. Instead, it offers a tense, atmospheric story anchored in truths that many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander readers will recognise.

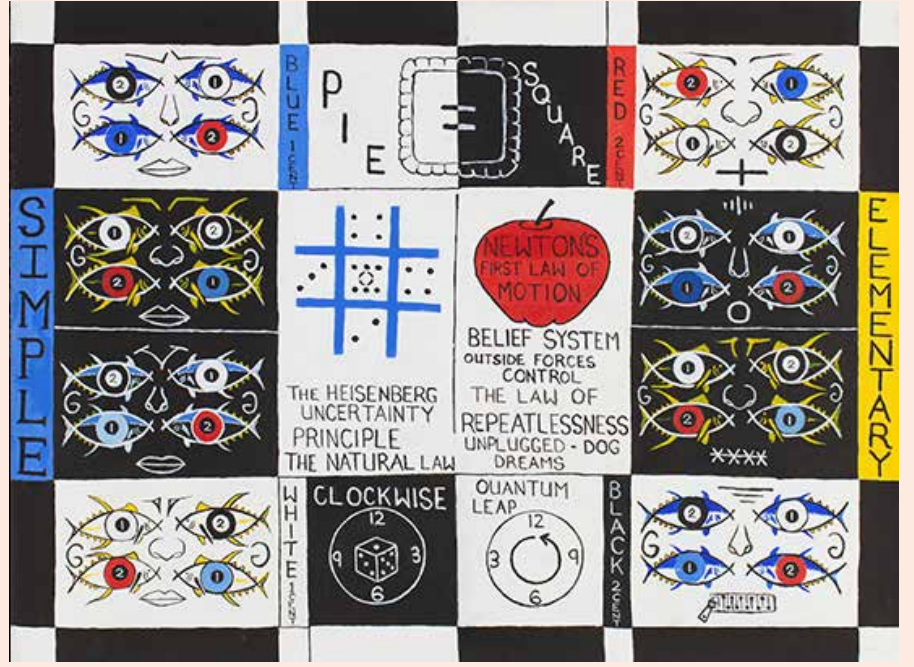
WORDS BY SHIRE STAFF



I am Sharyn Egan Memorial 2018-2020. Credit: AGWA, State Collection



I am Christopher Pease Nyoongar Dreaming, 1999. Credit: AGWA, State Collection



I am Constitution by Dallas Fletcher, 2018. Credit: AGWA, State Collection



I Am Milkwater by Kittey Ngyalgarri Malarvie. Credit: AGWA, State Collection

Finding treasures in the archives

A major new exhibition celebrating the strength and diversity of First Nations artists has opened at the Art Gallery of Western Australia (AGWA), putting the stories of the Kimberley and beyond onto the State's largest stage.

Titled "I AM," the exhibition showcases more than 60 works from across Australia. The collection features a mix of significant new acquisitions and rarely seen items from the State Art Collection, ranging from traditional ochre paintings and weaving to bold contemporary photography and sculpture.

The exhibition focuses on personal and shared stories, putting Aboriginal knowledge and perspectives front and centre. Carly Lane, AGWA's Curator of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art, said the gallery aims to be a space where artists can define themselves on their own terms.

"We write and create exhibitions that define and present us as we individually and collectively know ourselves," Ms Lane said.

Celebrating the East Kimberley residents visiting Perth will find familiar names and stories in the collection, with a strong representation of the East Kimberley.

The exhibition features seminal works from the pioneers of the Warmun Art Movement, including the late Rover Thomas and Queenie McKenzie.

Their work remains foundational to the gallery's collection, representing the unique Gija style of using natural earth ochres to map out Country, Dreamings, and historical events.

Rover Thomas is credited with changing the way Australians viewed Aboriginal art, moving it from "ethnographic" study to the world of fine art, while Queenie McKenzie's detailed landscapes continue to tell the story of the Gija people's resilience and connection to the hills and rivers of the East Kimberley.

The exhibition also bridges the gap between the masters and modern voices. Alongside the traditional works of Jimmy Pike and

Ngarralja Tommy May, the collection highlights contemporary artists like Broome-based photographic artist Michael Jalaru Torres.

His work explores the modern political and cultural identities of the Kimberley, showing that the "I AM" of First Nations identity is as much about the future as it is about the past.

"I AM" officially opens on 28 February 2026 and will be on display until late 2027. Entry to the gallery is free, offering a great opportunity for locals traveling south to see the massive impact our region's artists have had on the Australian art world.

WORDS BY SHIRE STAFF



Artist Rover Thomas. Credit: Japingka Art Gallery Bedford Station by Rover Rhomas. Credit: Japingka Art Gallery

Our artistic heroes .. Rover Thomas

Rover Thomas (c.1926–1998) was a senior Gija artist from the East Kimberley and one of the founding figures of the Warmun painting movement. Born in the Great Sandy Desert, he spent much of his early life working as a stockman across cattle stations before settling at Warmun (Turkey Creek) in the 1970s.

He first became widely known through the Kurirr-Kurirr ceremonial cycle, which

came to him in dreams after the death of a close relative. In these dreams, the spirit taught him songs and images describing its journey across the Kimberley. Rover led the ceremonies and directed the creation of painted boards that mapped the spirit's path across Country.

He began painting on canvas in the early 1980s, developing a bold, simplified style using natural ochres. His aerial views of Country were a major innovation, helping establish the distinctive Warmun school of painting.

Rover's works also recorded historical events, including frontier violence, as well as sacred landscapes. By 1990 he was representing Australia at the Venice Biennale, and today he is recognised as one of the most influential Aboriginal artists of the twentieth century.

When he once saw a painting by American artist Mark Rothko, he famously remarked, "That bugger paints like me!"

WORDS BY SHIRE STAFF

Our artistic heroes ... Queenie McKenzie

Queenie McKenzie (c.1915–1998), like her friend Rover Thomas, was a founding figure of the Warmun painting movement.

Born on Texas Downs Station on the Ord River, she spent most of her life working on cattle stations before settling at Warmun. There she became a respected cultural leader, teaching Gija language and law, supporting land claims, and helping establish what would become one of the most important Aboriginal art centres in remote Australia.

Encouraged by Rover Thomas, Queenie began painting in the late 1980s. Her work mapped the Country she knew intimately—Mingmarriya, Texas Downs, and the surrounding ranges—blending landscape, Dreaming stories, and personal memory. She was known for her distinctive use of natural earth pigments, often creating soft pinks and purples that set her paintings apart within the East Kimberley style.

For Queenie, painting was a continuation of cultural responsibility. She carried deep knowledge of women's law, place names, and ancestral stories, and used art as a way to pass that knowledge on.

Her work is now held in major national collections and she was recognised as a Western Australian State Living Treasure in the year of her death.

"Every rock, every hill, every water, I know that place... It's my country."

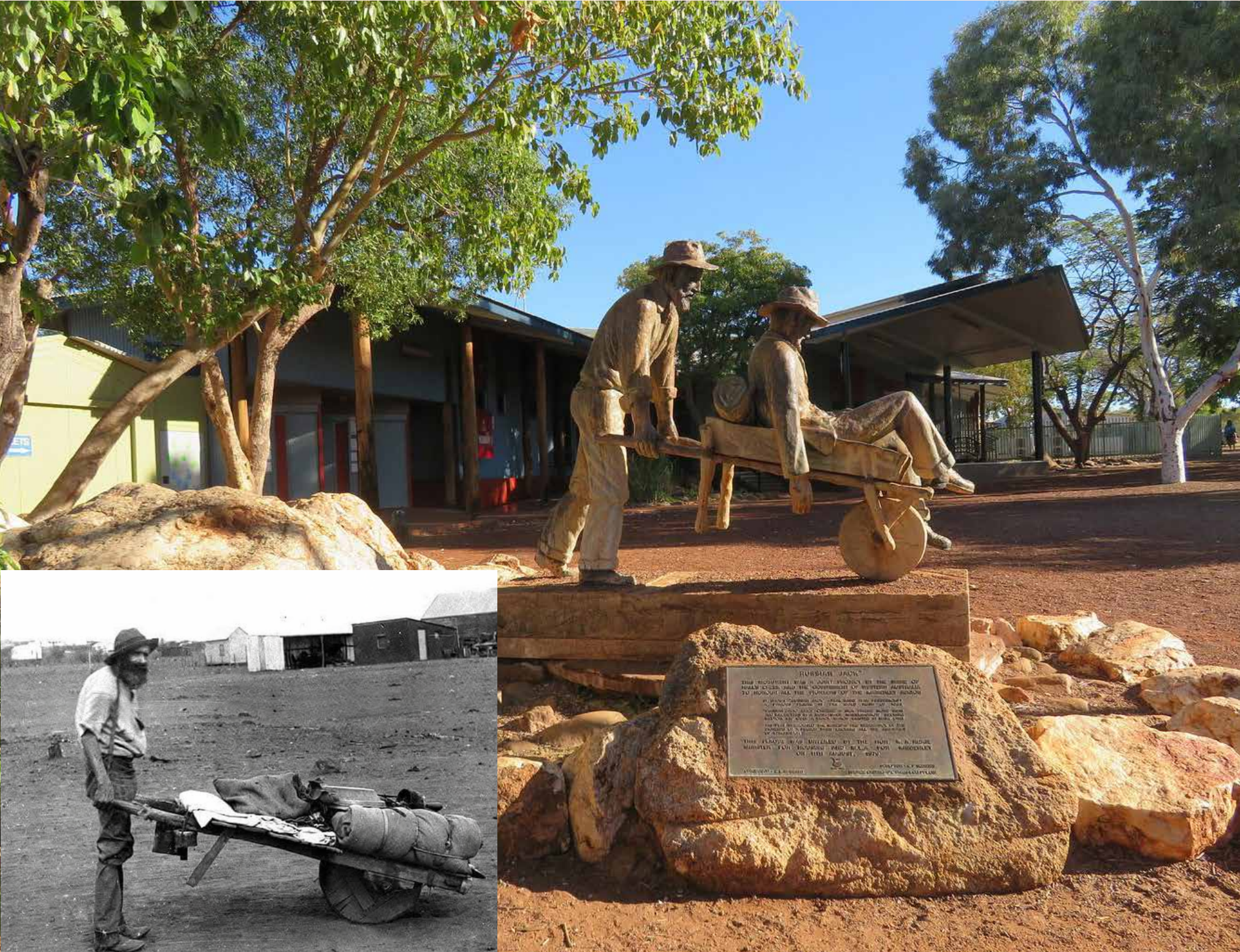
WORDS BY SHIRE STAFF



Queenie (Garagarag) McKenzie. Supplied.



Banana Springs 1996. Credit: AGWA, State Collection



Russian Jack (Archival Photo). Supplied: Shire of Halls Creek Russian Jack Memorial Statue in Halls Creek. Supplied: Shire of Halls Creek

Halls Creek History: The Story of ‘Russian Jack’

Ivan Frederick Kirkoss was a Russian immigrant who arrived in Western Australia at the beginning of the Kimberleys gold rush of the mid 1880's. The man who became known simply as "Russian Jack" established a strong reputation for his strength, endurance and ingenuity, but mostly for his mateship and deeds of kindness.

Russian Jack was born in the White Sea coastal city of Arkhangelsk in Northern Russia in 1852 or 1853. There is some uncertainty as to his full name, but it was believed to be Ivan Frederick Kirkoss.

On arriving in the coastal town of Derby in the north west of Western Australia, "Jack" fashioned a large wheelbarrow for himself, which, loaded with supplies, he used to negotiate the sand-dune country where he went in search of gold.

During one of his first overland journeys, the big Russian is said to have come across a couple of prospectors too exhausted to

carry their swags any further. Jack loaded their swags onto his already heavily laden barrow and helped them to the next settlement. It was for such deeds that Jack's reputation became established. It was one such act of kindness, pushing a sick Englishman named Halliday in his wheelbarrow for 50 kilometres to the nearest medical care, which is depicted in the Halls Creek statue.

Jack was said to be both a good mate and a gentleman - and always behaved politely towards women. The author and anthropologist Daisy Bates, the first person to carry out a detailed study of Aboriginal culture, met Russian Jack on her way to Murchison, about 650 kilometres north of Perth.

She recalled years later that he was a very polite man who told her of his early years.

She said she remembered him telling her of

his early life in a Russian seaport. "He was a tall man," she said, "with a voice like a Bull of Bashan. He arrived in Western Australia knowing only about a dozen words of English."

Russian Jack was an early arrival on the Murchison goldfields. He was also one of the first visitors to Cue at a time when it was only a scattering of tents and makeshift buildings.

In spite of his noble deeds, "Russian Jack" never struck it rich. He was about 50 when he died in a Fremantle hospital, the victim of a hard life and hard drinking. He spent his last years in a shelter for the homeless.

The Halls Creek statue, outside the Halls Creek Shire offices and seen below, keeps the memory of this gentle man alive.

WORDS: COURTESY OF AUSTRALIAN STOCKMAN'S HALL OF FAME & OUTBACK HERITAGE CENTRE 2025

1945 desert drawings reunited with families

An "extraordinary" archive of 810 drawings made by Aboriginal men 80 years ago is being reunited with families across Halls Creek, Balgo, Billiluna and in neighbouring NT communities.

Researchers from the University of Western Australia's (UWA) Berndt Museum have spent four years visiting remote communities in the Shire to identify the stories behind the works. The crayon drawings were created at Birrundudu Station in 1945 by 16 Indigenous men working on the station.

They were commissioned by anthropologists Ronald and Catherine Berndt, with the men taking three months and using a medium that was unfamiliar to them to document their extensive knowledge of Country, ancestral creation, history and ceremonies of the region.

For many local descendants, the research has provided a direct link to their grandfathers.

"We didn't go looking for them. It's like they came looking for us," said Robert McKay, the grandson of Birrundudu artist Paddy Padoon Jangala.

The project, which involved 40 cultural authorities and researchers, culminates

in the Birrundudu Drawings exhibition opening in Perth in February. A delegation of descendants from the region will travel to the city for the launch.

Museum Co-Director Dr Stephen Gilchrist (Yamatji) said the creators produced an "immense gift" of knowledge during a time when heritage was being "deliberately dispersed and destroyed."

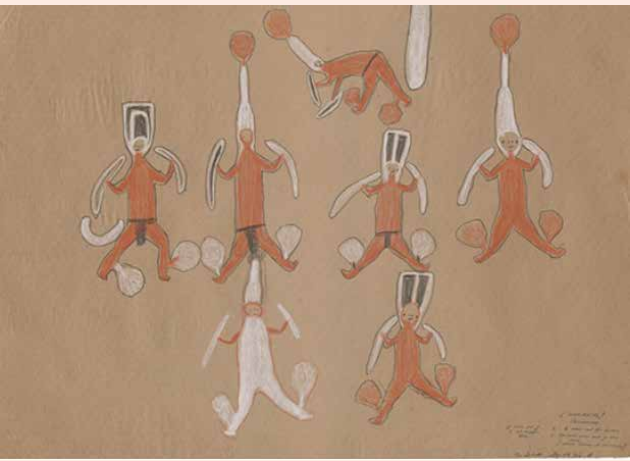
"Now, their descendants and communities can bring the story, song, place and ceremony back to life." Dr Gilchrist said.

Co-Director Dr Jessyca Hutchens (Palyku) described the collection as one of the "most extraordinary archives of Indigenous knowledge in any Australian museum."

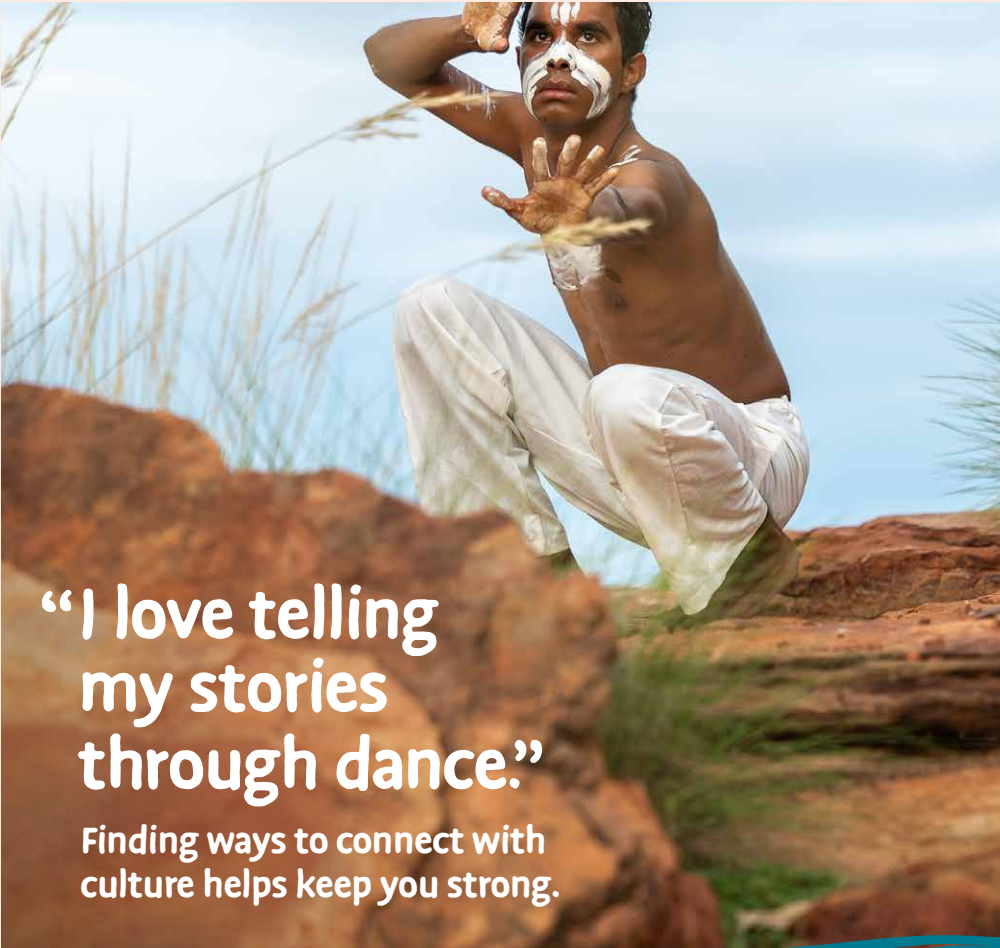
"The lessons we can draw from this vast archive, supported by other senior knowledge holders and their families and communities, is of profound importance." Dr Hutchens said.

The exhibition features more than 100 works and marks the 50th anniversary of the Berndt Museum. It runs at the Lawrence Wilson Art Gallery until April 4, 2026.

WORDS BY SHIRE STAFF



Author Anita Heiss. Supplied: Anita Heiss



"I love telling my stories through dance."

Finding ways to connect with culture helps keep you strong.

**Stronger You
STRONGER MOB**



Thursday Trivia Night

EVERY THURSDAY

JOIN A TABLE

MAKE NEW FRIENDS

TEASE YOUR BRAIN

WIN BAR VOUCHERS

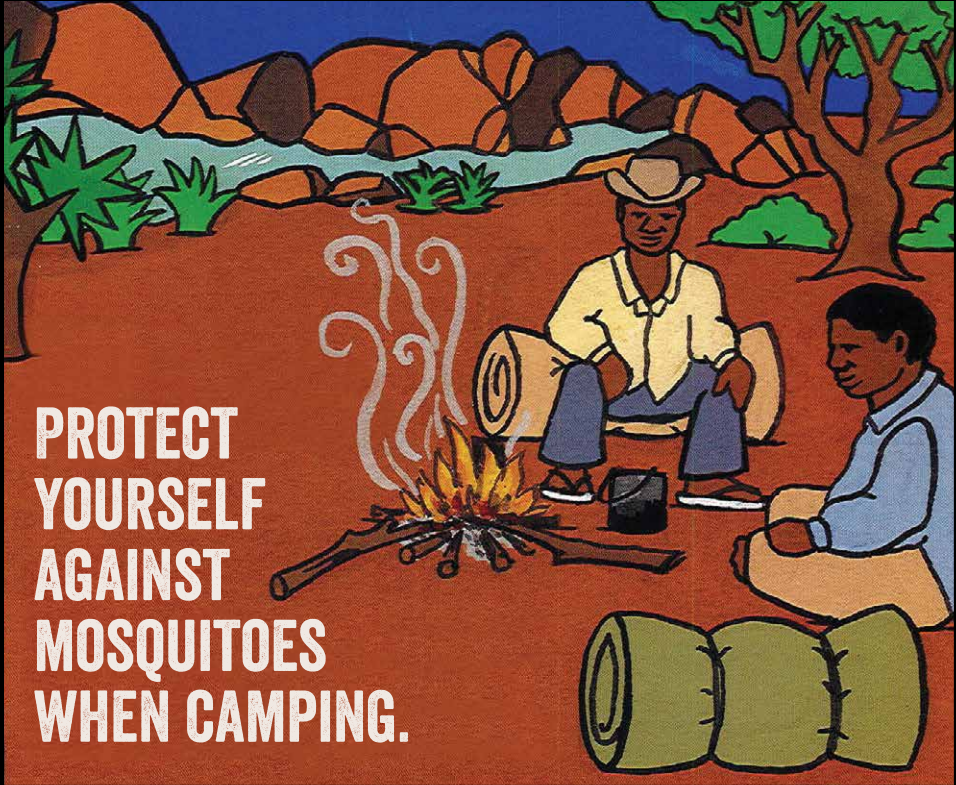
WINNER BRAGGING RIGHTS



KIMBERLEY HOTEL WA



WEAR LONG, LOOSE-FITTING, CLOTHING & USE INSECT REPELLENT.



PROTECT YOURSELF AGAINST MOSQUITOES WHEN CAMPING.



FIGHT *the* BITE

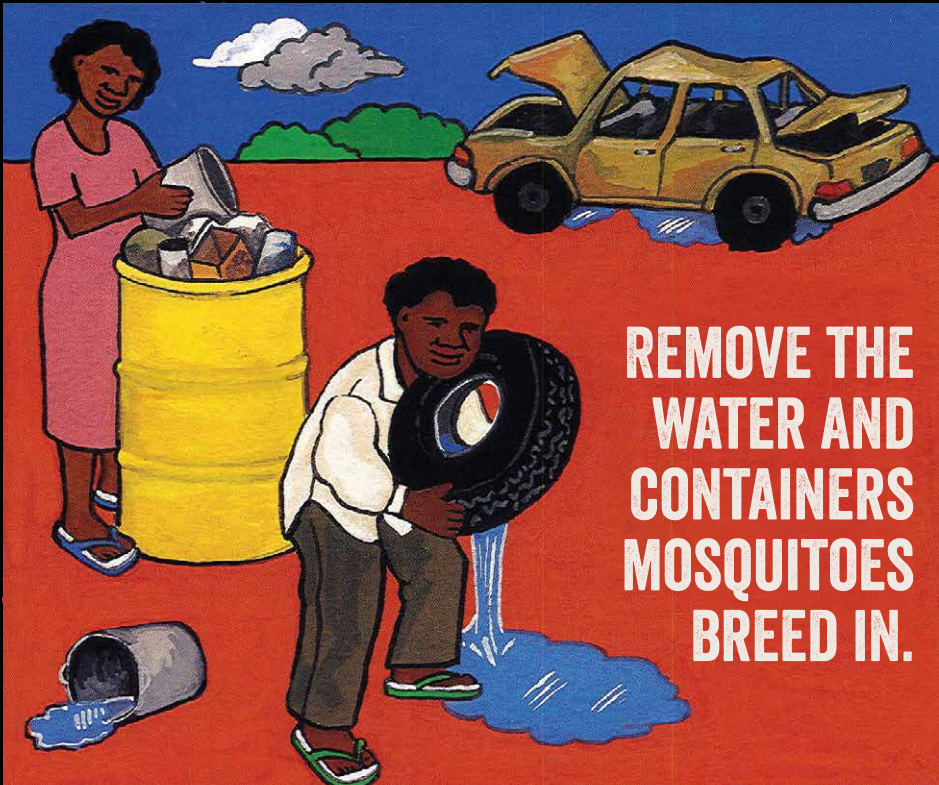
PROTECT YOURSELF

against

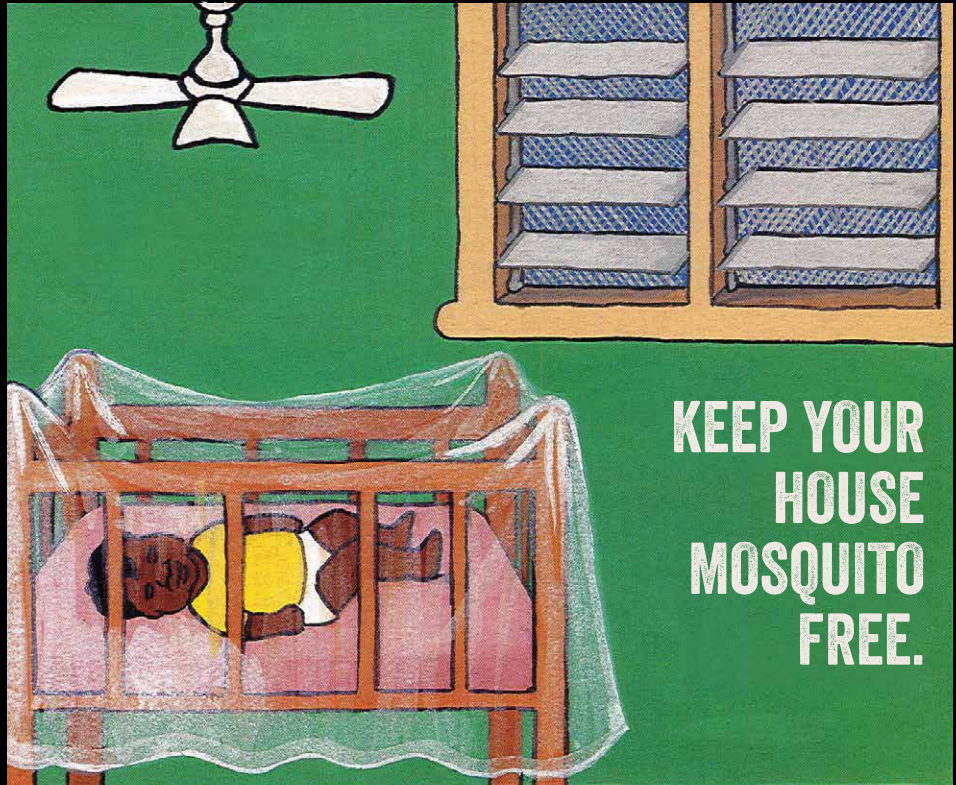
DISEASE-CARRYING MOSQUITOES



★ COVER UP. REPEL. CLEAN UP. ★



REMOVE THE WATER AND CONTAINERS MOSQUITOES BREED IN.



KEEP YOUR HOUSE MOSQUITO FREE.

For more information, contact the Kimberley Population Health Unit 9194 1630, your Community Health Clinic or Aboriginal Medical Service.

www.healthywa.wa.gov.au / **FIGHTTHEBITE**



Government of Western Australia
Department of Health

This poster is supported by the WA Department of Health.
Fight the Bite is an initiative of the Government of South Australia.

Kimberley Land Council staff just walked 11 million steps - how did they do it?

The Kimberley Land Council (KLC) has kicked off a high-energy new tradition, with staff smashing goals in an organisation-wide Step Challenge late last year.

In a massive end-of-year push, KLC crews swapped desk time for track time, clocking up a staggering 11.7 million steps. To put that in perspective, the team walked 8,900 km—enough to travel from Broome to Kununurra and back four times over.

The competition was fierce, with activity levels jumping by 20% as the weeks went on (competitive, them?!). On average,

every staff member covered about 51 km per week. A massive shout-out to the "big walkers" who dominated the tracks:

- **Top Overall Steppers:** Geoff Brook (Paruku IPA Coordinator) and Hamish McAlpine (Regional Fire Officer).
- **Most Improved:** Kaunell Shaw (Gooniyandi Ranger) and Julie Stumpagee (Bardi Jawi Oorany Ranger).
- **Remote Powerhouse:** Julie Stumpagee.
- **Office Champs:** Ben Dunphy (Broome) and Geoff Brook (Kununurra).

- **Consistency Kings & Queens:** Temuera Smiler, Andrew Morton, Brodie Harris, Molly Woof, and Natarsha Babic.

Special mention goes to Geoff Brook, who pulled off a superhuman feat in week four—walking the equivalent of six marathons in just seven days.

WORDS COURTESY OF THE KIMBERLEY LAND COUNCIL



Michael Walters has passed his famous number 10 jumper to close friend Shai Bolton. Credit: Fremantle Dockers

Can the Shire of Halls Creek out-walk the KLC?

The Kimberley Land Council smashed their step goals... but could we go further?

We're calling on Shire crews, health teams, schools and shop staff to take them on. A community step-off is a great way to get moving, build team spirit and maybe earn some bragging rights over the KLC legends.

Think your team is up for it?

Let the Wat Na! team know, we'd love to share your photos and progress in the next edition.

How to Start Your Own Challenge:

Gather Your Mob: teams of 5–10 work best!

Pick a Goal: Can you walk one kilometre every day? Circle your community Or maybe aim for 10,000 steps a day?

Track Your Progress: Use a phone app, a smartwatch, pedometer or paper and pen

Challenge Another Org: Why not challenge the Shire office, Yura Yungi, IGA, Jungarni-Jutiya, or those sport-nuts at Garnduwa?



Melbourne Demons 2026 Official Team Photo Day at the Melbourne Cricket Ground on January 28, 2026. Credit: James Wiltshire/AFL Photos

Pickett cousins already turning heads at Melbourne

Melbourne wedged two more posts in their familial Pickett fence in 2025. First they secured the signature of All-Australian Kysaiah - despite heavy interest from Fremantle - on a reported 7 year, \$12 million deal, and then selecting his cousin, Latrelle, at pick 12 in the National Draft.

They continue a proud family history at Melbourne, with uncles Byron Pickett and Neville Jetta both past players.

The Pickett cousins' first preseason together in Melbourne has received much fanfare, with coaches, players and spectators alike left in awe. It is a welcome dynamic for new Melbourne Demons Head Coach, Steven King.

"When you say instinctively let them play... These guys are doing things that you couldn't draw up if you imagined it," King said.

"To watch those two connect with each other and just wax with each other - it's been really good to watch."

Over the past few seasons, Kozzy has developed into one of the most electrifying players in the AFL, channelling the pace and freak ability of the likes of Cyril Rioli and Eddie Betts, and the ruthless and damaging physicality of his uncle, Byron. Latrelle will do well to attach himself to his older cousin, and learn what goes into being the best.

With Melbourne entering a rebuild of their list and brand of footy, it's safe to say that Kozzy and Latrelle are going to have a big impact on the future of the club.

WORDS BY BILL LUCAS

The next chapter: Patty Mills signs as University of Hawaii's General Manager of Basketball

Patty Mills has achieved a lot in his basketball career. Over 900 NBA appearances, an NBA championship, Olympic bronze and top-5 in all-time Olympic scoring. 'FIBA Patty' is undoubtedly Australia's most accomplished basketballer.

Despite his sporting achievements, off the court may be where he does his best work. Patty is renowned for his character and leadership, and is a strong advocate for First Nations recognition and issues. He is a true role model for the next generation. This was recognised by the Federal Government with an Order of Australia medal for contributions to basketball and Indigenous affairs.

These qualities attracted the University of Hawaii. For the past decade, Mills has spent the NBA off-season on the north shore of Hawaii, saying he finds strong similarities between Hawaiian Pacific Islander culture and his own.

"I'm deeply honored to join the University of Hawaii basketball program as the new General Manager," Mills said.

"Despite being from different parts of the Pacific region, as someone from the Torres Strait Islands, I feel a strong cultural connection to Hawaii, our communities share deep respect and spiritual connection to the land, sea and sky, and the strength of family and tradition."

His new role will see Mills oversee basketball operations, from player recruiting to organisational structure. His experience in elite high-performance environments will be invaluable for the relatively small university. While we wish him the best, we're still hoping we see Patty back in the NBL soon!

WORDS BY BILL LUCAS



Shire of Halls Creek staff on the newly turfed Oval. Credit: Shire of Halls Creek

A greener future for our oval and a new chapter for Halls Creek

Last month marks a major milestone for Halls Creek, our oval has now been fully turfed, with 23,000 square metres of fresh grass laid and taking root. It is a moment many in our community have been waiting for, and one that deserves to be recognised and applauded.

Projects of this scale are never simple, particularly in our climate. The wet season tested timelines, patience and persistence. There were delays — and I know that at times it was frustrating. But what I want our community to understand is this: those delays were not about inaction. They were about getting it right.

Throughout the wet, Shire staff worked tirelessly to prepare the ground properly and protect the investment we are making for the long term. Some of them spent days on their hands and knees pulling out weeds to ensure the turf had the best possible foundation. Others worked behind the scenes coordinating contractors, managing logistics and navigating weather windows that were often narrow and unpredictable.

This has been sustained, practical, unglamorous work — and it speaks volumes about the commitment of our team. I want to sincerely thank every staff member involved. Their dedication has ensured that what we now have is not just a quick fix, but a quality

oval that will serve Halls Creek well for many years to come.

The result is something we can all be proud of. The well-prepared, properly established oval provides a safer playing surface, better drainage and improved durability. It creates opportunities for sport, recreation and community events, and offers our young people a place to gather, train and compete with pride.

An oval is more than grass and goal posts. It is where families sit on the sidelines, where friendships are forged, where community spirit comes alive. It is where we celebrate wins, learn resilience in losses, and come together as one Shire.

There is still work to do to ensure the turf establishes strongly, and we ask the community to respect the space as it continues to settle and grow. Looking after this asset will be a shared responsibility. We are planning a community celebration to mark this significant milestone for our community (and kick a footy around?!) in June. I hope you can join us!

Despite the setbacks along the way, this Oval is a long-term investment in our community’s wellbeing, and one that I believe will make this town proud for decades to come.

Thank you to our staff, and thank you to our community for your patience. This is your oval — and it is looking greener than ever.

- With sincere thanks to external contractors for their skilful contribution to this project.
- Kimberley Surveying for the oval survey
 - Allwest Turfing for laying the turf
 - Ord Valley Turf for supplying the turf and taking some beautiful drone imagery
 - NewGround for their Oval expertise, commitment and energy
 - SWEK for loaning us their tractor
 - Vision Power and MRB for attending to the oval emergency callouts straight away.
 - Russell from House Master Halls Creek for assisting with goal post footings install and free advice



WORDS BY SUE LEONARD,
CEO, Shire of Halls Creek



WAT NA! SPORT



Balgo • Billiluna • Halls Creek • Mulan • Ringer Soak • Warmun • Yiyili

EDITION 4

MARCH 2026



Donated: aquatic goods by RLSSWA, swim gear by Vorgee, swim gear by Funky and swimwear by TYOUB SWIMWEAR . Credit: Shire of Halls Creek

Big brands back Halls Creek pool re-opening

Halls Creek kids are set to hit the water in style this March, thanks to a wave of support from some of Australia's biggest swimwear and water safety brands.

Late last year, a local call-out was sent to several companies to see if they would be interested in supporting our local families with swimgear. The response was better than anyone expected, with many brands jumping at the chance to help our remote community, where purchasing swimgear is often an added strain on already stretched budgets.

Because of their generosity, we have received a wonderful array of new gear, including:

- Children's swimwear (sizes 1–5 years) from Vogee, Funkita, and Tyoub Swimwear.
- 60 pairs of goggles and 20 swim caps.
- Towels and mesh bather bags.
- Jibbitz, drink bottles, and bags from RLSSWA Swim 4 Fruit.

- Two new inflatable lane dividers from Aflex to upgrade our pool games.

"We want to make sure these donations get straight to the kids and families who need them," said Pool Operations Coordinator Amanda Viljoen.

"As the Halls Creek pool prepares for a welcome re-opening from March onwards, we will be running a "first 50 people receive a gift" promotion to welcome everyone back to the water."

The Shire of Halls Creek would like to thank Vogee, Funkita/Funky Trunks, Tyoub Swimwear, RLSSWA Swim 4 Fruit, and Aflex for their generous support.

The Shire is currently coordinating with specialist contractors to complete essential repairs and safety checks following the serious vandalism at the Pool, Gym and Rec Centre in December 2025. Our goal is to reopen the swimming pool between March and April, noting that this timeframe

is dependent on our ability to fully restore the facility to pre-vandalism standards. To make the most of the closure, we are also installing a new shade sail and aim to coordinate the pool's reopening with the completion of this upgrade.

While the pool is nearing its return, repairs to the recreation centre and gym are more extensive and will take longer to fix. We are committed to keeping the community informed as these timelines become clearer.

Shire CEO Sue Leonard acknowledged that the disruption has been frustrating for the whole community, especially during the summer months. "We know how important these facilities are for health, wellbeing, and connection," Ms. Leonard said. "Thank you to everyone for your patience and understanding while we work to get the pool and recreation facilities back to a safe, welcoming standard for the whole community."

WORDS BY SHIRE STAFF