Country Arts Support Program — 2025 Wrap-Up Outcomes

Grant outcomes from three community arts projects across the New England North West

This report brings together the outcomes of three Country Arts Support Program (CASP) grants delivered across the New England North West in 2025 and 2026. Each project was run by a local community arts group with CASP funding administered by Arts North West. The following pages cover what each group set out to do, how their workshop or project unfolded, and what came out of it for participants and the wider community.

Weemelah Cushion Making Workshop

A day of stitching, stories and scatter cushions

Mungindi Men's Shed Inc • Mungindi, NSW • 19 April 2026



Finished scatter cushions from the workshop

With the support of a Country Arts Support Program (CASP) grant, Mungindi Men's Shed Inc ran a one-day scatter cushion making workshop at Weemelah, giving members a hands-on introduction to professional-standard sewing, sending everyone home with two finished cushions of their own.

A Day Well Spent

Every participant successfully completed two cushions each — pieces now taking pride of place in lounge rooms around Mungindi. The group was clear that there was nothing they'd change: people were happy with what they made and with the day itself, spent working alongside others in the community.

The workshop's reach extended beyond the hall. Tom Healy, from the Mungindi Men's Shed, entered his cushion in the Goondiwindi Show and took out second place — a nice piece of recognition for a skill picked up in a single day.

From Hobby Stitching to Professional Finish



Some participants had made cushions before, but always their own way rather than a professional way. The workshop closed that gap, giving the group proper cushion-making technique from start to finish and, with it, a real sense of pride in the result.

That pride showed in how people talked about the day afterwards — the excitement and joy of leaving with a genuinely professional product, sewn by their own hands, was, by all accounts, overflowing.

> *"The Weemelah Cushion making workshop gave participants a real sense of achievement and joy to have a professional product after sewing their cushion covers."*
>
> **— Mungindi Men's Shed Inc**



One of the finished cushions, ready for its new home

PROJECT DETAILS

Applicant: Mungindi Men's Shed Inc **Contact:** Tom Healy, President

Funded through the Country Arts Support Program (CASP), delivered by Arts North West.

Ceramic Christmas Decorations & Figurines

Hand- and slab-building small sculptures for the festive season

Deepwater Art and Pottery Group • Deepwater, NSW • October 2025



With the support of a Country Arts Support Program (CASP) grant, Deepwater Art and Pottery Group welcomed ceramicist Marianne la Cour of Colours on Grey (Glen Innes) for a full day of hand-building and slab-building. Members shaped stoneware clay into Christmas trees, birdhouses, angels, stars and figurines — skills the group has kept building on ever since.

Oversubscribed — In the Best Way

The workshop's biggest success was also its biggest challenge: demand outstripped the places on offer. Anticipating some last-minute drop-outs, the group accepted two extra participants as a buffer — but Marianne's workshop proved too good to miss, and everyone, extras included, showed up. With some quick reshuffling of seating and the demonstration table, the venue comfortably absorbed the larger group.

The experience has already shaped how Deepwater Art and Pottery Group runs future workshops: attendee numbers will be capped, a waiting list introduced, and a 24-hour cancellation window put in place so spots can be offered on to those waiting.

Skills That Stuck



Long after the workshop ended, participants kept exploring the techniques Marianne taught — particularly slab rolling, small sculptural detailing and the use of templates. All three are highly transferable, and members report folding them into their pottery practice well beyond Christmas decorations.

Marianne's emphasis on safe work practice has had a similar afterlife. Attendees now remind each other, and members who weren't at the workshop, about tool care and keeping a clean workspace to minimise inhaling dry clay dust — a safety habit that's proven easier to reinforce with an expert's words behind it.

Reception & Reach



The rush to secure a place said as much about member appetite as anything else, and those who missed out will get first option on future workshops. Feedback afterwards was strongly positive — the majority of attendees said they'd gained new knowledge and skills, and everyone enjoyed the day.

- A couple of more experienced members felt it ran a little basic — fair, since it was designed as a skill-building session for a group that's largely less experienced, and the group chose not to exclude anyone by skill level.
- Facebook engagement on the day was warm and encouraging.

- The timing proved fortunate: Marianne has since had hip surgery and is currently not taking on workshops.

Beyond the Grant

A modest leftover from the project's contingency fund didn't just sit unused — Deepwater Art and Pottery Group put it toward a free community pottery and felting day at the Deepwater School of Arts Hall during Seniors Week 2026, self-funding and sponsoring the bulk of the event themselves. A CASP-funded skills day for members ended up seeding a second, free event for the wider community.

> *"Marianne la Cour's secrets to and intricacies of small sculptural design and slabbuilding, delivered during a festive filled skills-building workshop, provided a firm foundation for more ambitious pottery projects and are now regularly incorporated into pottery practice."*
>
> **— Deepwater Art and Pottery Group**



Glazed ceramic Christmas trees from the finished collection

PROJECT DETAILS

Applicant: Deepwater Art and Pottery Group **Contact:** Trudy Williams **Facilitator:** Marianne la Cour, Colours on Grey (Glen Innes)

Funded through the Country Arts Support Program (CASP), delivered by Arts North West and funded by Create NSW.

Prints of Armidale

Telling stories through print, press and exhibition

Black Gully Printmakers • Armidale, NSW • April – September 2026



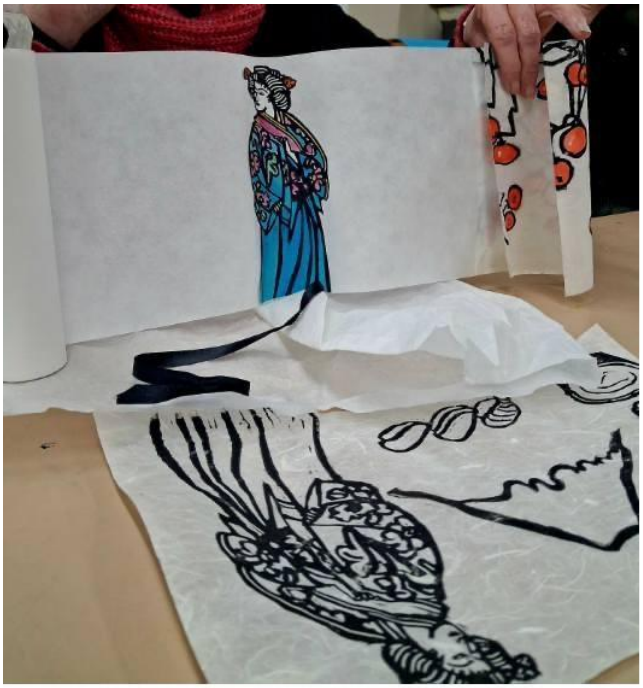
With the support of a Country Arts Support Program (CASP) grant, Black Gully Printmakers (BGP) brought together members of the Armidale community — including three participants from the local refugee community and a multicultural student group — to turn personal stories into hand-printed artist books, using printmaking techniques new to the group.

Bringing Community Voices Together

The project opened with micro storytelling workshops led by local author and illustrator Trish Donald. Ten community members with multicultural backgrounds took part, using short writing exercises to find and share their own voices — among them three members of Armidale's refugee community, whose stories included one about music and another written at length in the author's own language.

Sustaining that early momentum proved to be the project's central challenge: work, sport and church commitments meant the original group narrowed to three participants who carried the project through to printing and bookmaking. Black Gully Printmakers responded by widening the project rather than scaling it back — running a second storytelling workshop for BGP members, and partnering with Anne Blair-Hickman, NERAM's Education Officer and a BGP member, to bring a variation of the artist-bookmaking process to a multicultural student group at Armidale Secondary College.

New Skills, New Solutions



The project extended BGP's printmaking practice and its mission to promote printmaking across the New England region, introducing three new techniques to the group. An unplanned setback — the indefinite closure of the Museum of Printing, which removed access to letterpress — pushed participants toward creative alternative ways of getting text onto the page.

Process varied participant to participant: for some, stories came quickly from a paid facilitator's prompts; for others they developed over weeks. A number of participants found the story taking shape only after the visual work — objects, images, memories — was already on paper, with text added last. Some stories grew from flat, two-dimensional pages into three-dimensional printed blocks and scrolls.

Lessons for Future Community Projects



BGP identified concrete ways to deepen engagement with multicultural communities in future projects:

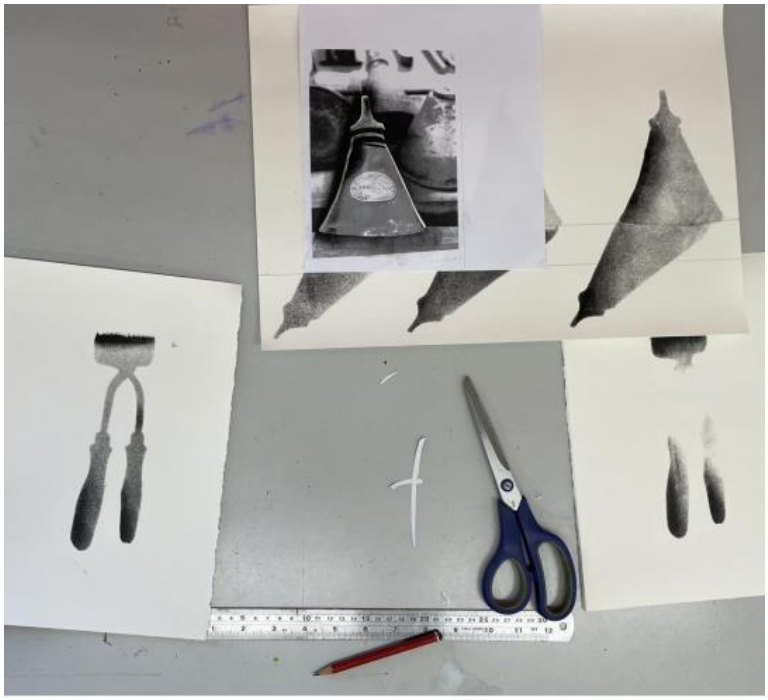
- Connect with the local refugee agency earlier to identify community members interested in storytelling or artmaking.
- Talk with the agency in advance about culturally appropriate ways of engaging with individuals.

- Involve interested community groups from the developmental stage of a project, not just delivery.
- Extend future invitations to UNE's international student networks, including MOSAIC, the International Hub and the International Ladies Group.

Looking Ahead

The finished artist books will come together in an exhibition planned for September 2026, with discussions underway to host the display at Armidale Library — bringing the project's artist books, and the medium itself, to a broader public audience. One participant from the very first storytelling workshop has already carried the project forward independently, continuing the work with her own art community outside Armidale.

> *"The opportunity to work with community members to help them articulate their personal stories through printmaking has been the impetus to create original artists' books from scratch with people who may not have engaged with a creative process for a long time, if ever."*
>
> **— Black Gully Printmakers**



Test prints and tools from BGP's printmaking sessions

PROJECT DETAILS

Applicant: Black Gully Printmakers **Contact:** Emily Simson, President **Instagram:** @black_gully_printmakers

Funded through the Country Arts Support Program (CASP), delivered by Arts North West.

Arts North West is assisted by the NSW Government through Create NSW and the partnership of 12 local government authorities in the New England North West.



Arts North West acknowledges Aboriginal people as the traditional custodians of the lands we work on; we recognise the strength, resilience and capacity of Aboriginal people and respect the Aboriginal Elders past and present.