



WIYI YANI U THANGANI INSTITUTE
FOR FIRST NATIONS GENDER JUSTICE

(re)Storying Series

PEACEBUILDING CO-DESIGN CAMP

Bunuba Country

July 2025

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The Wiyi Yani U Thangani Institute for First Nations Gender Justice

The Wiyi Yani U Thangani Institute for First Nations Gender Justice is Australia's first institute dedicated to advancing the rights, knowledges, and leadership of First Nations women, girls and gender-diverse people. The Institute has found its home at the Australian National University, however it is not bound by walls or place—it is a living, felt space. Our mission is to reweave the social fabric by elevating the voices, knowledges and lived experiences of First Nations women, girls and gender-diverse people.

The Institute was founded by June Oscar AO, who led the landmark Wiyi Yani U Thangani (Women's Voices) project as former Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner at the Australian Human Rights Commission. Throughout all stages of the Wiyi Yani U Thangani project, women have been clear that this work must be more than a report that sits on the shelf—it must result in lasting change. Women everywhere emphasised the need for a genuine mechanism for the representation of First Nations women that legitimises their diversity and affirms their multiple and vibrant identities.

The Institute's approach to First Nations gender justice is an evidence-based methodology that although developed with and for First Nations communities, the principles and ways of working employed are responsive to gender equality generally and caring for women, girls and gender-diverse peoples of all backgrounds. It is grounded in the voices of women and girls, and is a systems change, intersectional, human rights and peacebuilding framework, meaning that when addressing the needs of women and girls, the Institute advocates and supports action that has systemic and structural impacts rather than ones that are piecemeal. This will create sustainable changes with ripple effects beyond immediate challenges or issues. It also deeply values and actively engages with First Nations women, communities and organisations ensuring their voices are central and ongoing to the development of Institute works.

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Acknowledgments

We give special acknowledgment to our Matriarchs—the first mothers of this land—we pay our respects to them and all our Elders past and present who watch over us, our kin, our Countries, waters and skies.

We acknowledge the Bunuba people as the Traditional Owners of the Country that held, taught and transformed us during this Camp. June Oscar AO—our Institute Chair and a proud Bunuba woman— together with her family Welcomed us to their Country, opening their home and hearts to us. As we were held, nurtured and cared for by Bunuba Country and its people, we were reminded of reciprocity—as we listened deeply to Country and its stories, Country guided us toward the transformative change we seek.

We acknowledge the Yawuru people as the Traditional Owners of the Country where our journey began and ended in Rubibi (Broome). We pay our respects to their Elders, and to Diane Appleby for Welcoming us, wrapping her words around us and preparing us for what lay ahead.

We thank Big hART for being our artistic partners on this journey and witnessing our stories with deep cultural respect, care and artistry.

We acknowledge every woman and girl who made the journey to Bunuba Country, all carrying deep knowledge, care, stories and responsibility for their families and communities.

We acknowledge the thousands of women who've contributed to Wiyi Yani U Thangani over many years—sharing stories in consultations, gathering at the Summit, guiding this work. You built the foundation we stand on.

And we acknowledge all First Nations women holding the work of peacebuilding everywhere—in communities, in boardrooms, in quiet acts of care, in loud acts of resistance.

This work is for you,
with you,
because of you.

You are the Institute.

All references made to women and girls are inclusive of Sistergirls and trans women—whose voices, visions and wisdom are central to our work. The Institute is welcoming of, and celebrates, First Nations women and girls in all their diversity.

(re)Storying

This report grows from the Institute's commitment to (re)connecting with, and embodying the ancestral knowledge systems and cultural practices that First Nations communities have held since time immemorial. These ways of being breathe through our Ways of Working and the [Change Agenda for First Nations Gender Justice \(2024\)](#). This report captures the organic nature of the yarns, the stories and transformational thinking that emerged throughout our inaugural Peacebuilding Co-Design Camp on Bunuba Country.

We use yarning as an authentic research practice, surfacing the ways of knowledge sharing that have always existed within our communities. First Nations knowledge has always been shared aurally. Recognising this power of spoken word and story, we also recognise how mainstream outcomes documents often use jargon and 'formal' language that obscures how conversations actually took place. This approach frequently fails to meet the needs of the communities who would most value reading them.

This practice is deliberate and organic. We include half thought ideas, words that flow naturally in conversation over a cup of tea, and expressions that capture the energy of yarning. We embrace the pauses, the laughter, the moments where ideas sparked between us—because this is how knowledge truly moves between people. These are the knowledges that rest in our chests, ready to breathe new air through time on Country and in each other's company.

We use this report as a journal for our collective transformation, a love letter to Country-based learning and evidence of what becomes possible when we trust Indigenous methodologies to guide systems change. While this report captures the methodology and insights that emerged, we acknowledge that nothing can fully convey the transformational power of being present on Bunuba Country. This embodied experience is irreplaceable and we hope in future, you can join us.

Alongside this report, we have released a 6-minute video of the Camp with Big hART. The report and video support each other—different glimpses, different ways to witness—but neither replaces being there. This embodied experience is irreplaceable and we hope in future, you can join us. Until then, we invite you to watch: [Peacebuilding Co-Design Camp Video](#)

"The quiet part, the still part, the listening part. And so, you know, all of those things are there and are taught and learned through our oral tradition heritages as Indigenous peoples."

June Oscar AO



About the Peacebuilding Co-Design Camp

The Camp emerged from the truth that First Nations women have consistently shared through Wiyi Yani U Thangani's 8-year journey: **although the challenges we face are deeply complex, we carry the experiences and knowledges to resolve them.**

First Nations women and girls are constantly weaving change—igniting big ideas and instigating critical services, driving systemic interventions.

The question was not whether women have the knowledge to drive change. The questions were:

- **How do we create the conditions where this knowledge can breathe?**
- **How can we support bold ideas to emerge?**
- **How can we ensure women have the time and space to think deeply instead of just surviving the next crisis?**

Why a co-design camp?

We drew inspiration from 'design labs'—spaces created to grapple with complex issues through innovation, collective creativity and co-creation. We adapted this concept, grounding it firmly in our cultural ways of knowing and being.

The Camp responds to one of the Institute's three Strategic Priorities:

Support and amplify systems change

Why: Patriarchal knowledges and practices weave the social fabric, enabling socio-economic change and forming conditions of peace for human and more-than-human flourishing.

Issue: With minimal or no supports, women and gender-diverse people do all they can to repair the fabric torn at colonisation, while navigating trauma and conflict enforced by structural discriminations.

Response: Our Institute will support gender-just change processes, connecting women in all their diversity, while engaging with non-Indigenous institutions and people to build their capacity for conflict and systems transformation.

(re)Surfacing knowledges

"They will bring themselves here. We will give them some basics around what we would like to be able to do in terms of discussion groups around topics that made sense for them. But they'll fill that space with their voices, from their thoughts, from their hearts and minds and their gut so that they'll make it to suit them."

June Oscar AO

What this looked like

Highly participatory and culturally informed—we used participant led, reflective practices so participants could be the drivers of dialogue. We centred yarning as an authentic research practice, honouring its cultural value.

Space for bold ideas—away from the rush and crisis of everyday life, on Country, women think expansively.

Transformative and peacebuilding—we acknowledged that we all operate within competitive and conflict-prone structures. Transforming these systems requires practices that change individual and societal behaviours.

Grounded on Country—the setting on Bunuba Country was intentional. It was fundamental to how transformation happened. Being on Country, away from the structures and pace of cities, allowed participants to connect deeply with place, with each other and with the ancestral knowledges that guide our work.

This inaugural Camp brought together First Nations women pursuing gender justice continent-wide to co-create tools for building systems to thrive within. It marks the beginning of our staged approach to create a national infrastructure that supports women in their leadership, sharing of knowledge, coordination of efforts across social change work, and builds evidence of how to drive systemic change through a peacebuilding approach.



Peacebuilding as a framework

We want to centre our cultures and knowledges in designing systems that value and enhance the lives of all people and non-human kin. This is the foundation of all our work.

Why peacebuilding?

As First Nations women have continuously emphasised and Wiyi Yani U Thangani unveils: the harms experienced by First Nations women stem from colonial trauma and structural discrimination. We recognise the deep and ongoing impacts of this on our people, that perpetuates conflict across community, institutional and societal levels. This aligns with international understanding that conflict-affected societies need peacebuilding for recovery and stability. At its core, peacebuilding is healing through systemic transformation.

What is often missed and what we are working on shifting, is that **First Nations women are peacebuilders, and have always been.**

We know that reaching just and equal existences demands more than the absence of destructive conflict. It requires the building of respectful relationships, where diversity and difference are embraced as strengths that shape a shared and equitable future.

Our work spans crisis response to transforming conflict. Our matriarchal knowledge systems have sustained societies in balance and reciprocity since time immemorial. These knowledges create systems of care and sustainability, encouraging people to heal divisions and create conditions for both people and planet to thrive.

This framing also highlights the need to approach reconciliation with a peacebuilding mindset—enabling non-Indigenous people to understand living history and effectively collaborate with First Nations groups.



“It’s just the starting point, and I’m interested to see where we will be on this journey, this peacebuilding journey, in the next few years. And I want to be on that journey”
Wendy Anders

What this meant for the camp

Taking a peacebuilding approach shaped everything about how we designed this gathering, it:

- Helped us understand why systems need to change and what we are working towards;
- Gave us critical practices and methods for healing-oriented systems work;
- Centred First Nations women informing peacebuilding approaches;
- Created pathways to connect across diverse stakeholders.

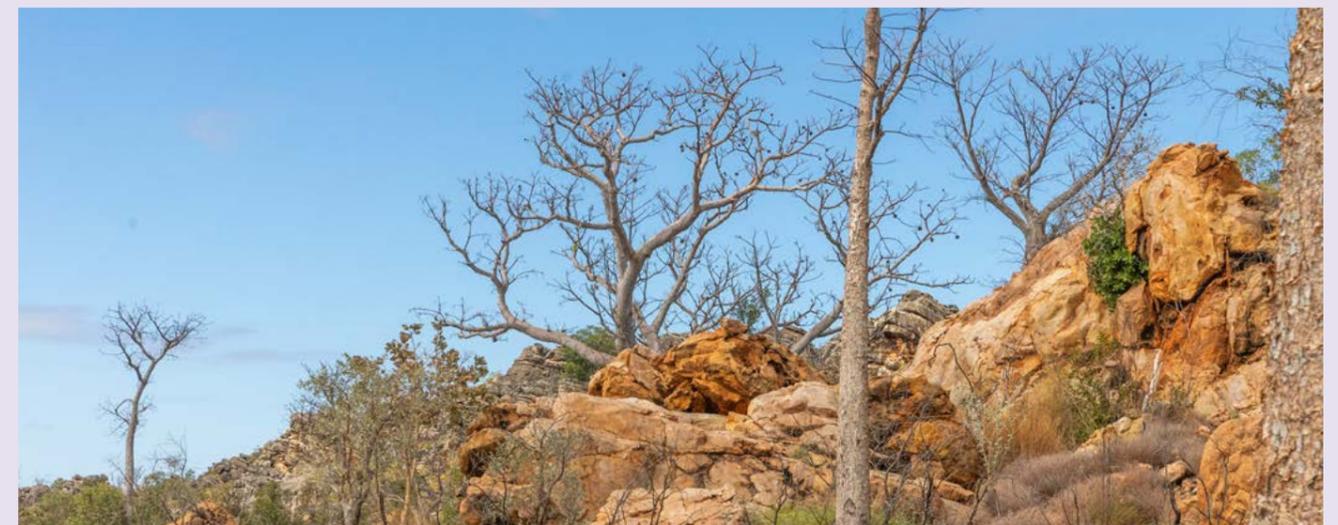
This Camp was our answers to a question we’d been sitting with:

- **How do we create the conditions where genuine transformation can happen?**
- **Where do women feel strengthened in their roles as peacebuilders?**
- **How can we co-create the tools and approaches that will reshape systems from the ground up?**

(re)Surfacing knowledges

“We know that First Nations women have carried peace. And the way that they’ve done peace work for centuries, for millennia. And we think the Institute, working together in a co-creation sense, with women everywhere, can lead in supporting the development of a methodology that drives peace.”

Wiyi Yani U Thangani Institute team facilitation



Our signals for Measurement, Evaluation & Learning (MEL)

Before we take you through the four days on Bunuba Country, we want to show you how we witnessed and measured what happened there. Throughout the journey that follows, you'll notice signals appearing: words women spoke, moments they named, feelings they described. These aren't added reflections or analysis done afterwards. They're what emerged in real time, on Country, as transformation was happening. This is how we do MEL, not as something separate from the experience, but woven through it.

Signals are our tool for witnessing change. They tell us what is being sensed, felt, heard and seen. They show us what patterns are emerging, whether we're moving in the right direction and what might need to be done differently. They're dynamic and interconnected, grounded in our lived experiences, honouring that through the very process of making decisions daily—caring for family, managing Country, responding to community needs—we are constantly measuring, evaluating and learning.

These signals, captured through yarning, creative documentation, daily sensing and witnessing, become our evidence. These signals show the emotions, relationships, realisations, ideas and breakthrough moments, which help us to understand what the ingredients of change actually look like.

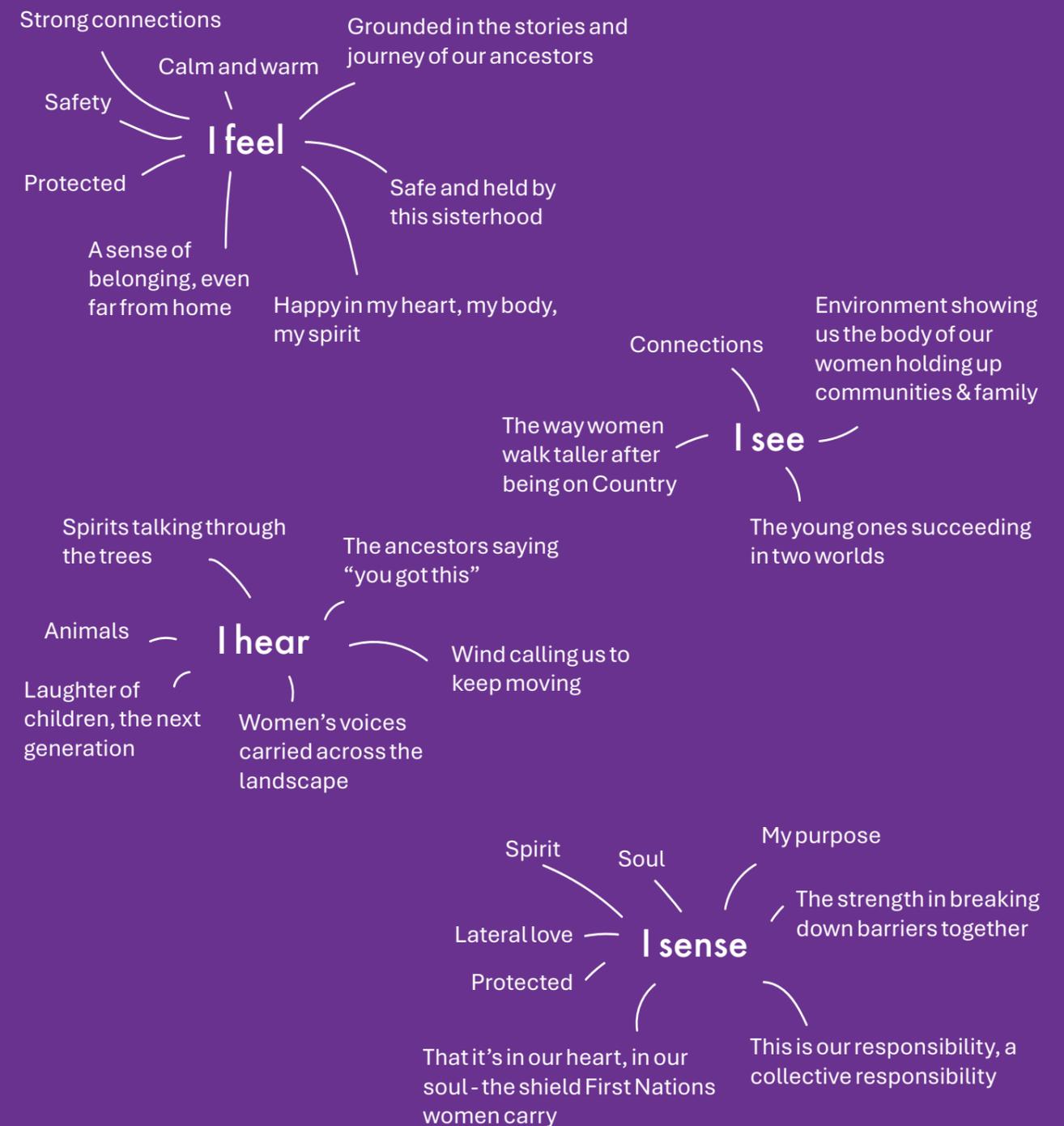


“We don't just sing to Country, but Country sings to us. And part of us learning about Country and understanding matriarchy is to hear that note, to feel the vibration, to sense the waves. And really, maybe it is just trying to figure out what is my note, what is my note that holds me. And I have never articulated it in that way until this camp. And so that was really lovely.”

Miri Raven

What I see, hear, feel, sense or know is emerging...

Below are some of the signals the women and girls shared with us.



As you read through the journey that follows, the signals are there in the story. They are present in women's words, how moments are described and how women sense and experience Bunuba Country.

You can read more about our MEL framework and signals in the **Change Agenda for First Nations Gender Justice (2024)**.

Arriving Yawuru Country

Fifty First Nations women and girls and non-First Nations collaborators accepted the invitation from the Wiyi Yani U Thangani Institute to attend the inaugural Peacebuilding Co-Design Camp, bringing them first to Rubibi (Broome). All recognised for how they lead in their communities, regions, nationally, and internationally, with a commitment to re-weaving the social fabric. Women and girls travelled from every state and territory. Many made arrangements back home to ensure those they care for are safe. Everyone stepped away from their everyday lives when there's always so much to do. All on everyone's minds as we arrived.

But then, Yawuru Elder and matriarch Dianne Appleby's voice wrapped around us, Welcoming us to Yawuru Country. Old friendships sparked back to life, new faces became familiar, shoulders relaxed, and laughter carried through the warm Kimberley air.

Our ancestors knew this is where we needed to be. And we knew it too.



Peace starts with self

"To me, I felt like I was chosen by my gods, by my ancestors to be here because I know how powerful it is. And it's exactly what I needed, what my mind needed, and my spirit needed."

Jasmin Gentle

Day 1 Connections

The morning came early, but energy was high. Cars packed, bulk coffee order made, lunch collected, ice and fuel. The logistics of travelling with fifty women and girls.

Cars travelled in convoy, headed four hours east to Bunuba Country. Soon we said goodbye to the outside world as we no longer had connection on our phones, a moment we were all glad for. The sealed road became red dirt, eagles watched from above and there were no buildings as far as the eye could see—just Country.

The cars were a special place for yarns. Working out family connections, telling stories of home, sharing struggles we face, being vulnerable, the only way we know how.

By the time we reached Mawundu Spring, just off the Fairfield-Leopold Road, relationships had deepened and even if we had just met, it felt like we had known each other for years.



"I feel like a sense of belonging right now. Even though I am so far from my home. But when we connect up with all the strong matriarchal women from all over, all around Australia, it's that sense of safety, it's that sense of belonging. And it gives you a sense of peace."

Bernice Hookey

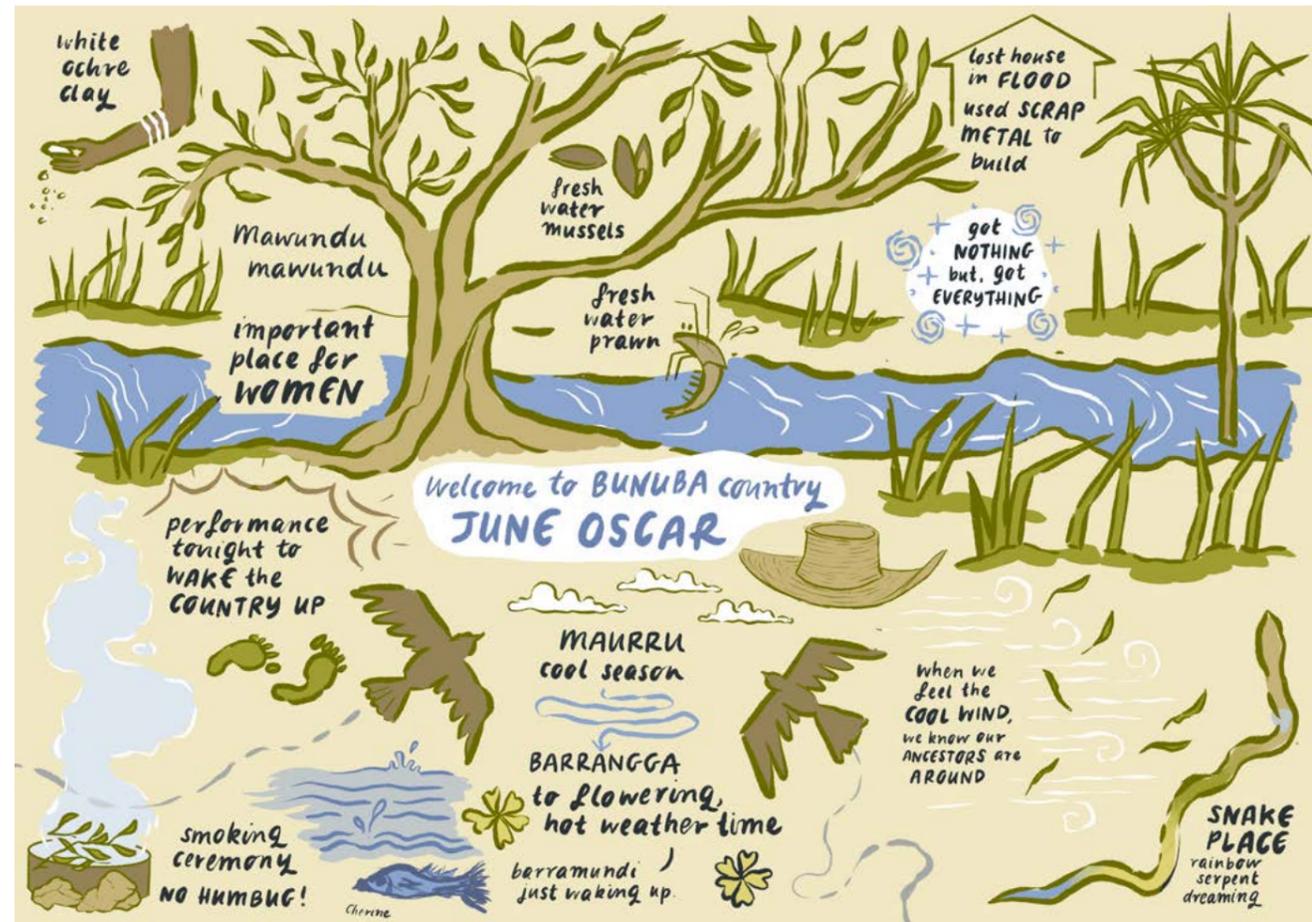


As we arrived, we heard the wind through the trees, the conversations spilling out from the cars and by the waterhole, June Oscar AO and Patsy Bedford singing in Bunuba.

June Welcomed us all to Bunuba Country—her ancestors' Country, her home.

She spoke to the transition of seasons—the flowering of plants, the barramundi awakening. *“When you feel the cool wind, you know,”* June told us, *“Make it your time.”*

She laid the foundation for everything that would unfold — why we were there, what peacebuilding and systems change mean, the importance of safety for us all — First Nations and non-First Nations.



Visual Scribes by Peta Roebuck, on behalf of Big hART, perfectly captured the essence of June's Welcome to Country.

June invited us to introduce ourselves to Bunuba Country, guiding us to the waterhole. There you rub a rock under your armpit, place it in the water and introduce yourself. Let Country know you're here, you're grateful to be held by this place that has held so many before you.

We had been Welcomed, made ourselves known, and could now enter the water with respect, with safety.

Some of us dived straight in. Some sat at the edge with feet dangling, testing the temperature. Some stayed on the rocks, watching, and listening to the flow.

The water washed off more than red dust and travel tiredness. There was something about it—layers coming off that we didn't even know we were wearing. Expectations about what this camp should be, who we should show up as, what we should say or not say, all of it dissolving away.



Safe passage
“This is a very spiritual place ... and we can't just come without being Welcomed.... And we were Welcomed by Aunty June, and we had that strong feeling that we were safe and we were going to be protected. And that's the feeling I get on this trip.”
 Cherine Wally



Day 2 Matriarchs

No alarm clocks, we woke to the sunrise, and went about our morning routines in our own ways—showering in the tin-shed showers, enjoying a cuppa around the campfire, finding a spot to connect to the internet to call home if we needed.

The team invited women and girls to engage in mindful mornings—invitations rather than obligations. Walk mindfully, paint on the Canvas of Signals if something's emerging for you, sit for a portrait with Big hART, journal, or just sit and watch the light change across the landscape.

The Institute team huddled with their own questions to sit with:
What's emerging?
What surprises us?

This is how we held the Camp—constant sensing, constant adjusting, responding to what's happening. MEL in practice. We noticed the agenda was overfilled and over-structured. For this first Camp, we needed to focus less on the agenda and more on holding the space itself, the social field, allowing time for rest, listening to Country, creating conditions for what wanted to emerge. We made changes and huddled regularly to keep adapting.



Peace starts with self

"Helen and Steffi with bush medicines and techniques around that and bringing in the smoking, the clearing, letting go of worries and loads that we might be carrying to just help body and mind, so that we can rest and sleep peacefully."

June Oscar AO

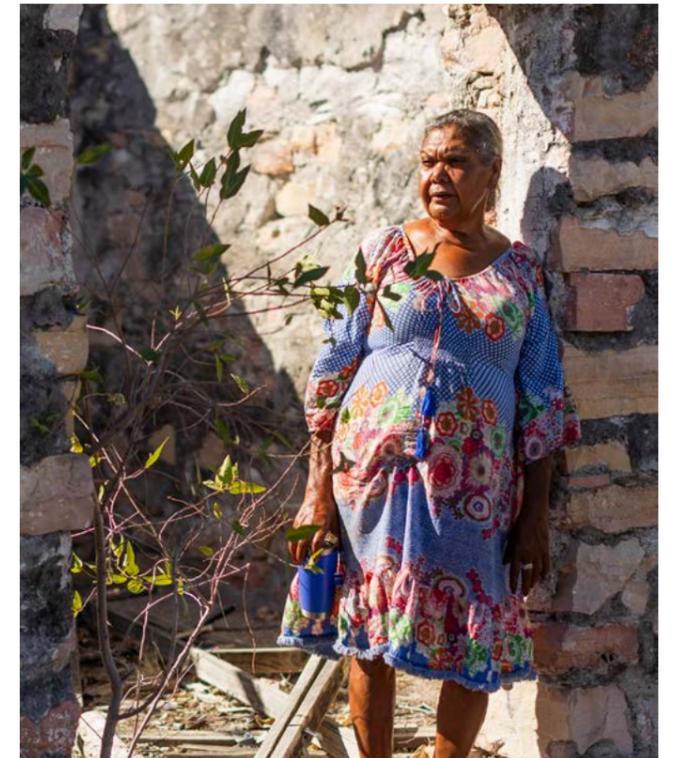
The convoy arrived to see June standing in the place where she lived as a child, on the riverbank by the Old Leopold Homestead ruins.

"This place connects my heart, spirit and mind. This is the place that gives me strength to go out into the world and speak our truth. Very humble beginnings, but very rich, loving, caring, informative, and it's still here today."

June Oscar AO

She told us about growing up in this place, learning from her family and Country, while navigating the brutality of the pastoral industry and its treatment of Aboriginal people. White people lived on one side of the creek while her family worked, lived and learned on the other.

We had a quiet morning tea by the spring and some of us swam while others just sat in the quiet, all of us held by the power this place carries across generations.



"So I could feel and I could picture June, you know, playing as a young kid down by the spring. I could see that. I walked up to the homestead, the old homestead, and I could sort of feel and picture what her old people were doing or had to do, you know, to survive, with little money, if not rations."

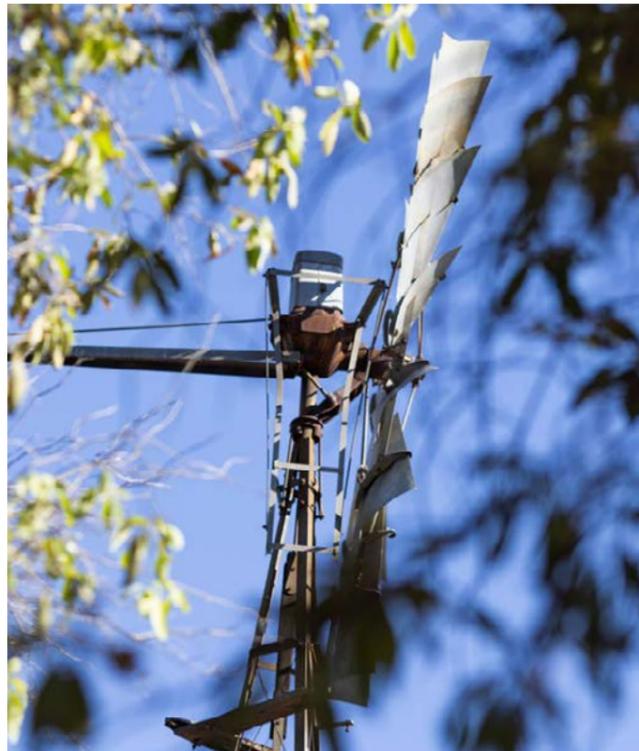
Janine Dureau



The women and girls were invited into small groups to each talk about the matriarchs in their lives—the ones who've held them, shaped them, guided them through all the ways they've had to navigate this world. There was permission to break the box of what a matriarch is, to understand it can be anyone, anything, any idea that's carried us forward.

Stories poured out about mothers, grandmothers, sisters, Aunties, ancestors, community leaders, friends, more-than-human kin. Women named where they draw their strength from, voices layering over each other in recognition and resonance.

Then the bigger questions:
 What is this conversation telling us about who we are today and the work we're all doing?
 What does that mean for what a peacebuilding movement might look like?



"I got really emotional thinking about it yesterday. You know, as we go through our grief and loss with our loved ones that have passed. My Nan was our matriarch of our family... A part of why I do what I do."
 Ellen Wighton



Collective movement

"If we can come together as a whole from all the many nations that we bring together, then there is a pretty powerful system within herself because of the connection of the river streams and the landscapes."
 Bernice Hookey

After lunch, everyone was given clay and invited to find anything Country gifted them—sticks, stones, leaves. The ask was to model the systems they currently operate within and then rebuild them as they could be. The girls from Wagga Wagga seemed to have worked out the activity though, they were already sculpting what a matriarch meant to them and were covered in clay.

There was a moment of stillness as the women looked at the materials before them. They contemplated: What do the systems we operate within actually look like? How do I make visual those feelings, those connections, or lack of?

Before we knew it, that initial block passed and clay took shape as laughter and serious conversation flowed together, sometimes in the same breath.

Systems became tangible in ways the women and girls had never seen before—community connections that sustain, power imbalances that exhaust, the invisible spaces where women's work happens and somehow holds everything together. Too often we're busy surviving within these systems to be able to step back and look at the bigger picture.

Then the transformation began:
 What if matriarchal values were embedded within everything?
 What if we built from abundance rather than scarcity?

"Model the strength of the matriarchs, the different values you've been talking about. This will naturally come to you because it's already been within all your conversations. We just want you to feel it in your hands."
 Wiyi Yani UThangani team facilitation

Groups started rebuilding, hands reshaped clay, moved pieces, created new connections. The conversation shifted from *"This is how it is"* to *"This is how it could be."*

The clay held what words sometimes can't capture, making visible the structures that usually remain invisible, revealing the possibilities that usually remain unspoken. Collective care, reciprocity, abundance—all came through in the shapes taking form.



(re)Surfacing knowledges

"It's important for us to remember that these ways of working and being and thinking aren't new, they're ancient, the old ways, but they're so relevant to life today in this modern reality."
 June Oscar AO

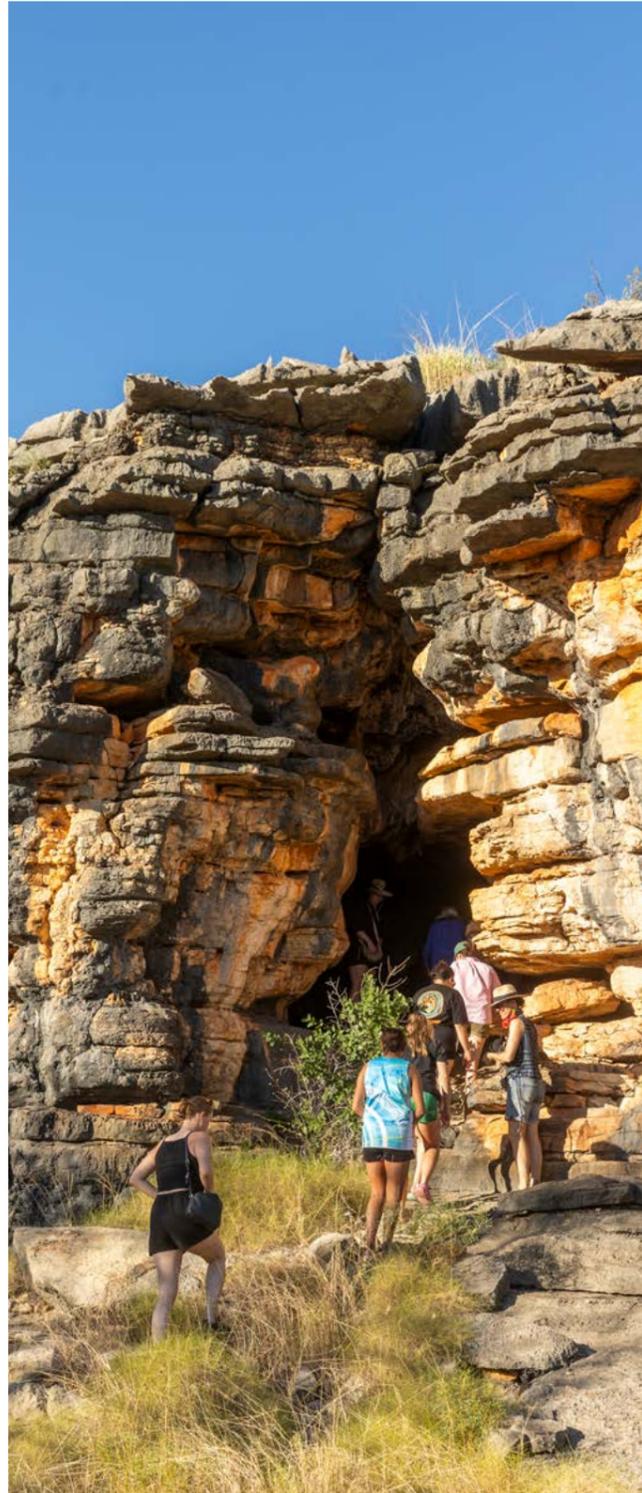


Late afternoon, we travelled to a cave where June and her family would come to escape the station. We huddled inside, feeling the cool against our skin, gazing up at rock paintings above us. June's voice echoed softly, filling the space:

"This is where my mum came with her mother, my grandmother, and they stayed in here. They'd get away from the station, just stay away for a weekend. Take time out from station pressures... They probably felt comfortable speaking language, be free... moonlight time, they'd occupy this place."

June Oscar AO

A place for reprieve—from the heat, from the station, from everything that demanded they be anything other than themselves. You could feel it as she spoke—the freedom that mattered then still matters now.



Back at *Muraga Village* as the sun dropped lower, we were smoked again. The smoke cleansed, grounded, and reminded us we're held by something larger than ourselves.

Then the Bunuba women began singing, their voices spreading throughout the camp, drawing us all in. They were lit by worksite tripod lights, music flowed through a small Bluetooth speaker. We sat on the mats and watched.

One of these songs had travelled from the Northern Territory, June explained, carried across tribal lines through ceremony. These aren't songs that belong to one group or get locked away—they're gifted, shared, performed by different tribes across vast distances.

Some women knew these songs already, recognising them from their own Countries. Others were learning as they went, watching feet and hands, catching the rhythm, letting their bodies remember what their minds might have forgotten.



Day 3

Exploring Peacebuilding

The shift in the women became obvious—walking slower but with purpose, more mindfully. Time started to move differently as we were guided by Country, our bodies and each other. The collective rhythm had shifted.

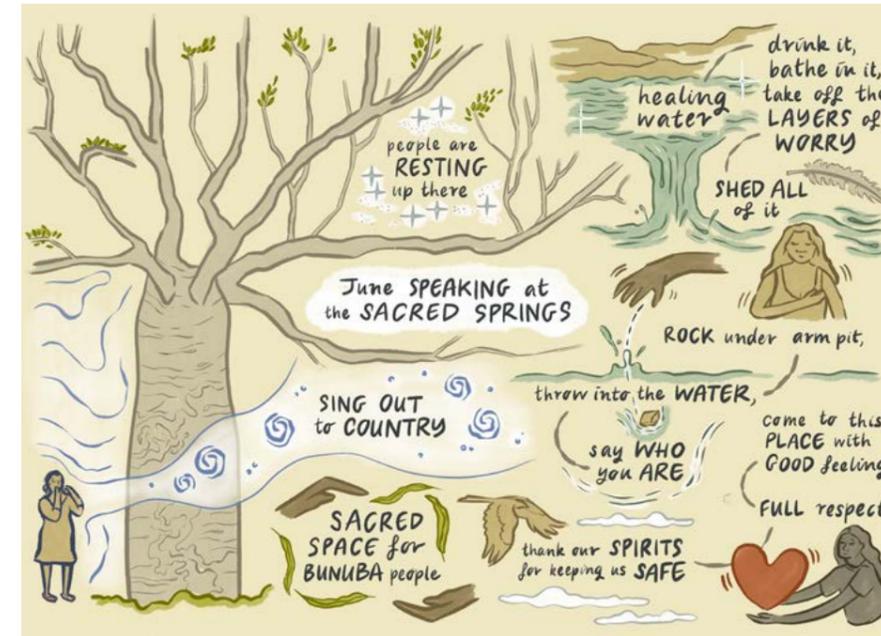
The Institute team sensed this shift and sat with it, reflecting on how to honour it within the day's plans. Again, we stripped back the agenda and landed on an invitation that was simple but profound: **What does peacebuilding mean to you?**

Not as something to respond to immediately, but as collective inquiry and curiosity—something to sit with, to ponder, to let emerge however it wants to.

(re)Surfacing knowledges

“The knowledge that we have, trust that we need every day. And as we grow up, we don't have those old pen and paper to write in. Learn by looking and hearing and then practising it after.”

Annunciata Wilson



Arriving at Wyre Springs, June walked ahead calling out to Country in Bunuba, to old people, to spirits living in the pools above.

“Aunty June started walking in the front and started talking to the spirits to let them know that she's got us all from different areas coming onto the land.”

Annunciata Wilson

Come with good feeling, with full respect.

Selena and Patsy had already smoked a pathway through to the spring—a short walk from where we settled—so nothing followed us to or from this sacred place.

The invitation from earlier remained with us: What does peacebuilding mean to you? Sit with it. Feel it.

We spread out across the grass. Some women stretched out to rest. Others found space to themselves to journal. A few played with the little ones, their laughter carrying across the space. Some made the walk up to the spring, wading into the sacred water.

This was sense-making through the body and through Country—paying attention to what the land was saying, what your body needed, trusting that the two are connected. Each woman found her own way into the question.



Place matters

“Being connected with the ground, with the environment, with the animals, everything around you just brings you back to that centre where you need to be.”

Jasmin Gentle

Under the shade of trees, the answers began to emerge. Not as definitions, but as lived experience. Women shared what peacebuilding meant to them:

"If you have deep listening, then you can have deep understanding. And changing mindsets into lateral love—that's all part of what peacebuilding is for us."
Janine Dureau

"We need to do it so it's peaceful. We need to have the strength to do it that way, because the anger is in all of us. The trauma is in all of us, and we need to be able to get that trauma to settle."
Wendy Anders

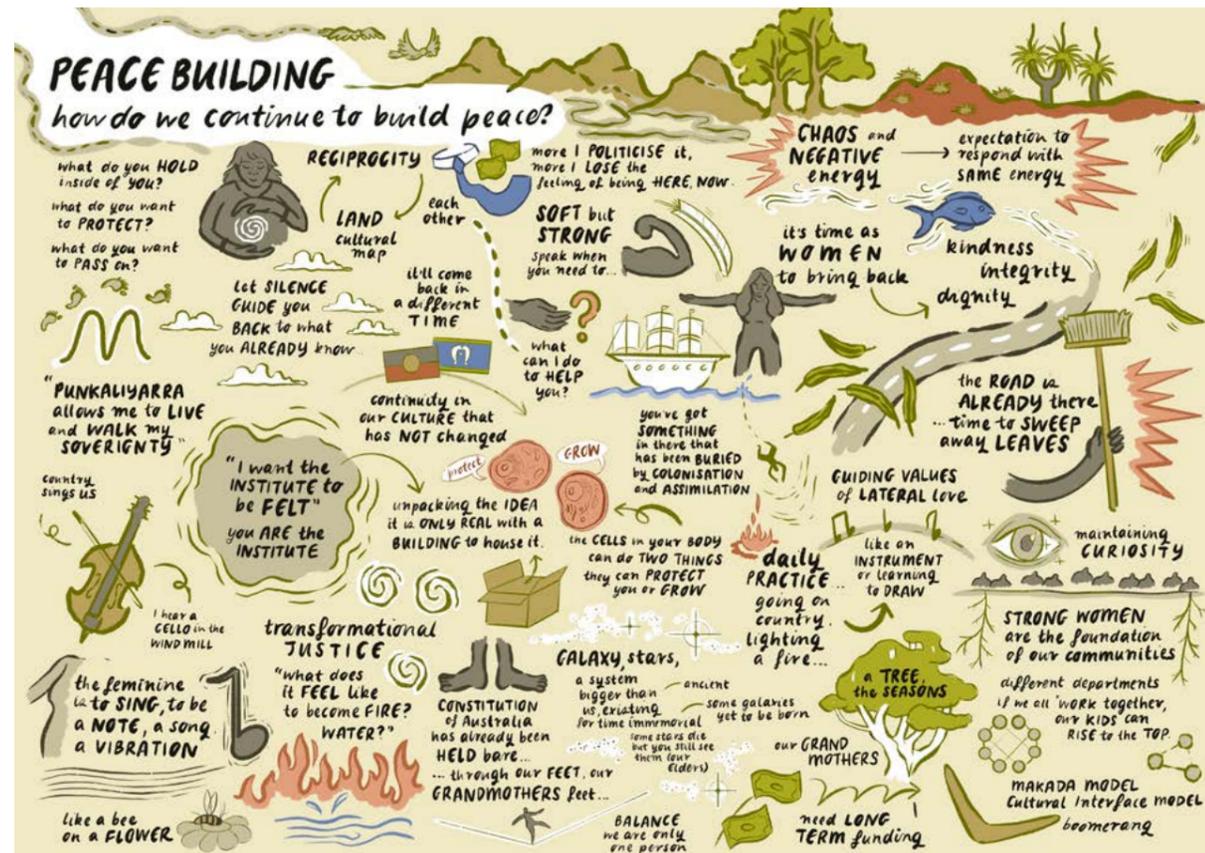
"Since I've been here, it's just been so peaceful. It's time for you to enjoy yourself with other ladies, get to meet them and spend time with them. A blessing. That's how I feel."
Annunciata Wilson

"Yesterday was the most peaceful that I had ever felt because of the love, the knowledge and the sharing of such a sacred site. It was more powerful than anything that any wonders of the world could offer us."
Jasmin Gentle

"[Peacebuilding] means getting in touch with what I'm feeling and what other people are feeling, and not necessarily being quick to react. It's finding curiosity in what's going on with me and what's going on with other people."
Miri Raven

"If we look after our women, society is much healthier. That's that ripple effect."
June Riemer

Women named what peace required: deep listening, lateral love, time to heal, space to think beyond crisis. Conditions where their existing knowledge can breathe and transform systems.



That night the agenda changed again, this time for an unplanned talent show.

There was hesitation at first. But the young women from Wagga Wagga stepped up, joined by Institute team staff to get things started. They were wearing outfits they had made, voguing under the lights with the kind of confidence that made it impossible not to join in.

Poems were shared. Personal stories told.

And just when we thought we had run out of talents to show off, women got up and danced the night away.



"I've learnt how to be more confident and comfortable around these people."
Butterfly Dreaming participant

"It's a great opportunity to spend time with Aunty June and let her tell us all the stories. That's been pretty special, having someone like you to look up to. It's been a great pleasure."
Butterfly Dreaming participant

Intergenerational strength

"There's no way you can calculate the value. This is huge. I mean the value is massive. Especially for the young ones coming to learn, to have love for themselves, love for each other, love for everybody."

Wendy Anders

The women and girls of the inaugural Peacebuilding Co-Design Camp



The women and girls who gathered for this Camp travelled from all corners of the continent, representing many nations—First Nations and non-First Nations alike. They brought with them the strength of their communities, the wisdom of their ancestors and the courage to journey together on Bunuba Country.

Here you can see some of their faces — each one carrying stories, knowledge and the collective power that emerged when we came together in this place.

Day 4 Reflections

Our last morning at *Muraga Village*. Women were invited to do final interviews with Big hART and sit for portraits. Some took up the offers, others just wanted to soak in the last moments.

Packing started quietly. People moved slower than usual, not quite ready to leave. Gradually conversation picked up as we worked—folding chairs, squeezing tents into their bags, loading cars.

June gathered us back by the kitchen area where we had been meeting, the mats and chairs set up one last time. She spoke about holding this vision for years—bringing First Nations women and girls, and non-First Nations collaborators together on Country creating space to think beyond crisis, to remember what we already know.

The space opened for anyone who wanted to yarn. Women spoke about what this time had meant—the transformation they had felt, the connections made and what they were taking home. Deep gratitude flowed for June and her family for inviting us onto their Country, for holding this vision and making it real.

Before we left, there were many hugs, some tears and one last smoking.

Then the convoy formed for the return to Broome. In those cars again, yarning about what stood out, what had shifted, and about next time.



Collective movement

"I know this journey of ours, as matriarchs, we can't do this alone."

Janine Dureau



What Emerged

This Camp was not designed around predetermined outcomes. We created conditions—time on Country, space away from crisis, cultural safety, adaptive facilitation—and trusted what would emerge through women’s knowing and sensing. The Camp was designed to hold this space and enable women and girls to speak from their truths, knowledge, and instinct.

Six interconnected truths surfaced through women’s own words. These aren’t just outcomes—they are evidence of change work happening in real time and clear signals of what sustained investment can achieve.

Peace starts with self

Women are running on empty—responding to community trauma, holding families together, fighting systems that weren’t designed for them. When they run empty, entire communities feel it and the threads of the social fabric—which they are working hard to keep together—fray.

“I run the youth hub and I had 14 youth workers. But when I crash and burn, things don’t keep running. And so to be here and experience this and feel my spiritual cup fill, do my own healing, I feel like I’m going to go back as like a new woman.”

Leanne Sanders

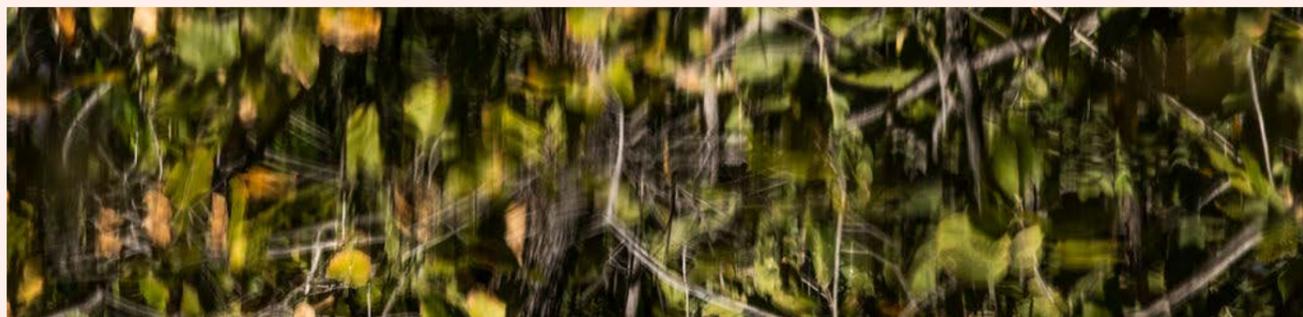
When Leanne’s cup fills 14 youth workers and all their young people benefit. One restored woman impacts hundreds. This is one story of 50.

But this isn’t just about individual healing creating ripple effects. When women find peace within, together on Country—when they can embrace lateral love, collective care, and ground themselves—they’re building and testing the systems change tools we all need. The peace within participants isn’t separate from systems change, it’s the foundation of it.

However, women shouldn’t have to find the time or money for their own restoration while holding entire communities together. Systems that benefit from women’s peacebuilding work have a responsibility to resource it. When funders invest in spaces where women come together on Country, they are funding the practices that transform systems.

“I think this sort of system supports lateral loving rather than lateral violence, because there is a lot of lateral violence happening in our communities, in our workplaces, and learning to deal with it this way, being here together, we can let go of that lateral violence and learn to instead use lateral love.”

Wendy Anders



Place matters

Peacebuilding and systems change require time and space to sense, reflect and be. Country creates these conditions.

On Bunuba Country women could slow down, focusing on their presence. Watching the sunrise before taking a single step. Having the young ones running around at their feet. We followed the flows of the day instead of calendar schedules. Everything we needed, just the basics.

No phone signal. No constant notifications stealing attention. Just space for our brains to process, for bodies to release what they’ve been carrying.

“Country washes off those things that don’t need to be there, but it’s washing in the things that do need to be there.”

Miri Raven

Safe passage

The first place we gathered was in a circle on Yawuru Country. The fire for a smoke was lit in the centre.

Aunty Di gave everyone eucalypt leaves. People started to rub and break them. They felt the waxiness, the crunch as the leaves folded into bits, letting off that distinctive bush smell. This seemingly small act—holding a piece of Country—opened the circle to conversation and connection.

The Camp was designed around these acts, rituals and ceremonies of Welcome. The daily smoking, introduction to water sites, drinking of the local medicinal tea, Wallaba, the billy boiling at each stop allowed women to be settled and feel safe while being on someone else’s Country.

On entering Bunuba Country we stopped at a shaded spring before heading to the Camp.

“Sometimes it’s just being physically present with one another to be able to share our feelings without speaking. And to be able to release. Because what we carry is very heavy work.”

Janine Dureau

Country held the space for this and made this possible.

This transformation requires physical infrastructure on Country—somewhere women can return to, again and again.



(re)Surfacing matriarchal knowledges

When women had time on Country, with peace cultivated within and around them, ancient ways of knowing became accessible. The knowledges have always been there—in stories, relationships and in bodies that remember. They are ways of being and acting to survive, live and thrive by.

“It’s important for us to remember that these ways of working and being and thinking, they aren’t new—the ancient, the old ways—but they’re so relevant to life today in this modern reality.”

June Oscar AO

The methodology itself was ancestral. Yarning as authentic research practice. Deep listening leading to deep understanding.

“Just having yarns. It literally is that simple.”
Ellen Wighton

These aren’t abstract concepts or theoretical frameworks. These ancestral knowledges hold solutions to the complex challenges we face today.

First Nations women have always held these solutions. When the urgency lifts, when the crisis eases, when the performing stops—women can access what their bodies and ancestors have always known.

Collective movement

Individual women working in isolation can’t shift systems. Western funding models pit women against each other, competing for the same limited pots of money.

The Camp broke that pattern—strengthening networks, deepening relationships and demonstrating collective power.

“We link the chain together with each other from the many nations that we come from and where we are going to walk, it will be beyond powerful because you can’t take away the DNA of where someone or where our people and the lineage and that is from.”

Bernice Hookey

“It’s not transactional, it’s reciprocal, and reciprocity in our women and our culture has withstood everything.”
Michelle Adams

This is how systems change happens, through collective power built over time and resourced consistently. Regular gatherings create the connection infrastructure that enables women to move together, to act in coordination, and to shift what seems immovable.



Intergenerational strength

Bringing Elders, women and girls together created powerful opportunities to teach and learn across generations. Young women gained confidence. Elders saw light for the future. Everyone belonged.

“It’s very beautiful to see those young girls just bloom since day one... It’s an acknowledgment that this is what we do it for—the next generation. The next generation deserves that. The next generation deserves the knowledge. They deserve the experience.”

Jasmin Gentle

“I feel most peaceful when we all come together at night-time, around the fire, as one, all together as women.”

Butterfly Dreaming Participant

“Meeting new people and hearing their stories. Learning what they’ve done to come here and how much they’ve sacrificed for their kids.”

Butterfly Dreaming Participant

“When I first got the invitation and I contacted back and said, look, I’ve got to come with my Butterfly girls because I want them, their voices, to constantly be heard and them to see that they are the change.”

Leanne Sanders

When young women see themselves reflected in strong women and Elders, when Elders see their knowledge valued and carried forward, when girls feel their voices matter—this is how movements sustain themselves. This is how knowledge stays alive.



Journeying forward

This inaugural Camp proved what's possible. The women have spoken.

What transformation requires became clear: regular opportunities for women to restore themselves on Country as a vital component of systems change work, time and space for matriarchal knowledges to (re)emerge and guide, connection platforms building collective power across regions, and intergenerational gatherings ensuring this is carried into the future.

This must be met with the necessary infrastructure to sustain peacebuilding and systems change. These are the spaces, mechanisms, tools, and resources that will enable and support the vital work First Nations women are leading, everywhere, towards First Nations gender justice.

The Institute is committed to progressively co-creating this infrastructure with First Nations women and girls over the next several years.

Building Muraga Village

June's block on Bunuba Country — now *Muraga Village*, named after the bloodwood trees known for their healing properties and resilience — is where the Institute's peacebuilding work takes shape.

"We always talk about the glass being half full, but for me, I talk about my heart being full. When my heart feels like it's drained so much, it's kind of been deflated by giving it out to the community. These are the situations that I need to be in to replenish that and to make me stronger to go back to my community."

Jasmin Gentle

Women aren't asking for one-off experiences. They're asking for somewhere to return to when the work gets heavy, when crisis response depletes them, when they need to reconnect with what sustains them. They also want a space to develop and apply the tools, practices and frameworks of a First Nations gender justice approach to systems change and peacebuilding. Throughout Wiyi Yani U Thangani, women have consistently called for systems that recognise and respond to their needs and lived realities.

Muraga Village is our response to that call.

The vision: A culturally grounded, functional, sustainable environment that supports gatherings, workshops, and healing programs led by local women. A Kimberley approach to mindful community living, grounded in First Nations gender just ways of knowing, being, and doing.



Infrastructure that serves the work:

Central facilities for cooking and gathering— outdoor areas for collective use, for preparing and sharing food. Large undercover spaces for yarning circles, meditation, and workshops. Natural cooling systems using spinifex and water, working with Country.

Dedicated spaces for cultural practice—bush dyeing, medicine making, hands-on learning where women can create and take home what they've made. Healing spaces with baths and natural privacy, greywater nourishing medicine trees. A nature playground so caregivers can participate fully. Food gardens, native medicine plants, dust management that works with the land.

Local First Nations women will be supported as facilitators, cultural guides, providers, building local circular economy. Women teaching women. Knowledge flowing. Economies that reinvest in people and place.

Muraga Village will host Institute camps and support local gatherings, immersive experiences, intergenerational healing, local employment — all while caring for Country.

We'll start with what's essential: basic shelter and amenities, cultural protocols and safety embedded from the beginning, capacity for small gatherings that can grow as infrastructure grows. All designed to respect Country.

We're learning from models like Plum Village— spaces that sustain ongoing practice, not one-off events.

The Institute is seeking partners to help build this infrastructure for long-term peacebuilding work.



Methodologies & evidence for First Nations gender just peacebuilding

The Institute plans to work with women in camp spaces and beyond to surface their existing ways of working—how they navigate conflict, respond to and heal from trauma, and strategically approach social and economic reconstruction. This surfacing process will act as a mirror, reflecting back to women what they’re already doing, their strengths and achievements, and the evidence and practices they hold for making change happen.

The Institute team also hopes to develop our own skills to introduce peacebuilding ideas, narratives, framing and practices into these spaces, adapting them to ensure they’re culturally safe and appropriate. This will give us tools to hold spaces where women can openly reflect and consider their work, and help women reframe what they’re doing within the broader context of shifting systems in conflict and post-conflict settings. When women can name their work as peacebuilding, it changes how they understand their power and their right to resources and recognition.

The Institute plans to evidence this work in ways that serve women’s needs. We’ll document the journey while also enabling women to evidence their own work and develop tools from their own learning. We hope to bring researchers in to work alongside women, elevating the work they’re doing so we can use that evidence to advocate for systems change with funders, policymakers and other decision-makers.

Through the peacebuilding camps, dialogue spaces and ongoing engagement with women in their regions, we aim to develop First Nations gender justice peacebuilding methodologies and frameworks. These will emerge from women’s lived experience and practice, grounded in what’s actually working on the ground rather than imposed from external theories or models.

This work requires sustained investment in both the camp infrastructure and the ongoing research and documentation partnerships that will make women’s peacebuilding practices visible and valued at a systems level.



Supporting regional movements

“It’s really lonely when you fight that government fight, but you know, if the Institute could be a place for us to go to just keep filling our cup and being strong and knowing that we’re not alone.”

Leanne Sanders

“It’s something that we all need—something that represents us, where our voices can be heard and elevated to that national level.”

Janine Dureau

Throughout Wiyi Yani U Thangani, we’ve heard and seen First Nations women doing the backbone work of their communities. They’re establishing safe houses, advocating for rehabilitation services on Country, running birthing programs where culturally safe maternal care doesn’t exist, keeping children out of the care and detention systems, and doing healing work with those who’ve experienced trauma. This is peacebuilding in practice. It is the social and economic reconstruction work that’s critical in conflict and post-conflict settings.

Many of these women have been working in isolation, responding to crisis after crisis without the time or space to step back and see the scale of what they’re doing. Now, women are starting to gather regionally, forming collectives that support each other and advocate for their shared needs. In places where women haven’t gathered for years, these movements are creating spaces where women can recognise their rights and their power.

The Institute’s role is to work with women to shift systems and create the enabling conditions for this work. Regional movements know their communities and how to lead them. What they need is support to formalise emerging groups, platforms where movements can connect across regions and share what’s working, and gatherings on Country where women can restore themselves while building collective power.



At the camps on Bunuba Country, women can step back from crisis response and frame their work clearly. They can see it for what it is, reflecting on its impact, and developing agendas to strengthen it and advocate for larger systems reform. Beyond the camps, the Institute continues supporting women to do their work in the regions, elevating their voices and connecting them to resources and decision-makers.

The Institute documents this work using signals and stories that honour Indigenous knowledge systems. Women generate evidence every day through lived experience and community transformation. We translate that into forms that reach funders and policymakers while ensuring women retain ownership of their knowledge and that the documentation serves the movement’s needs, not just external accountability requirements.

This is infrastructure designed to serve the movement rather than constrain it. Support that strengthens regional autonomy because it’s built on trust that women already carry the knowledge and capacity to lead.

The peacebuilding methodology emerging from this work reaches beyond First Nations women in Australia. These approaches, grounded in matriarchal knowledge systems and First Nations women’s leadership, offer pathways for anyone working toward justice and equality.

The invitation

“Hope for the future of the seven generations of women to come, and I see them stronger than myself. I see them walking taller than me, and I see them succeeding in two worlds... To stand with pride, to stand with confidence, and to stand with strong spirit, knowing that, like us, we stand on the shoulders of giants.”

Janine Dureau

This vision requires investment in infrastructure, relationships, and time. It requires trusting that women carry the knowledge to resolve the challenges they face and believing that matriarchal ways of knowing offer pathways for transformation that linear, colonial systems cannot.

“We need to move beyond survival. We need to move into thriving for the greater good.”

Bernice Hookey

This Camp showed what becomes possible when we resource that shift. When women have space to breathe, reconnect with Country, remember ancient knowledge, and build collective power, transformation happens—not just for individuals, but for families, communities, movements, and systems.

We’re practising peacebuilding, living it, and building the infrastructure that will sustain it for generations.

We look forward to walking this journey with you.

