

Red
Room
Poetry

Poetry in
Meaningful Ways

POETRY IN FIRST LANGUAGES 2019 REPORT

We share fireflies and night jasmine, passing them between us like conversation



Gunhinarrung learns to sow seeds gathered – to return to
Country what it gave – to gather is to release

— Jeanine Leane ‘Gatherers’ *Poetry in First Languages* Wiradjuri

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**‘These poems are the first publications
in Gumea Dharawal. A historical
moment for our family and it adds fuel
to the fire. Thankyou.’**

— Jacob Morris, *Poetry In First Languages*, Language Custodian



*Jacob Morris, Language Custodian
Poetry in First Languages
Photo Tad Souden*

REFLECTION

nga gamiri your
trembling limbs ache to shake
in tangara
and hear your lungs as they gasp yoongaba

—Kirli Saunders, 'Disconnection' *Poetry in First Languages* Gundungurra

Due to my family's history of dispossession and relocation, I was raised without language and culture, resulting in a cultural capital as a child that didn't allow me to feel pride and confidence in my identity. As a teacher, I saw this shame often in First Nations students in the classroom. *Poetry in First Languages (PIFL)* came to me during time along the Shoalhaven River as one solution to eradicate this shame, promote pride and support our writers and students to learn their languages with community on Country and to self-express in healing ways.

Since 2018 *PIFL* has quickly evolved seeing more than 60 workshops across Dharawal, Gundungurra, Gumea Dharawal, Arrernte, Gadigal and Ngunawal Countries. These workshops have engaged 671 First Nations students, provided 73 employment opportunities for First Nations Elders, Custodians, teachers and creatives. Poems by 34 First Nations writers have also been commissioned in Arrernte, Gundungurra, Dharawal, Gumea Dharawal, Barkindji, Ngunawal, Gadigal, Yugembeh, Wiradjuri, Dhurga, Pintupi-Luritja and Djapu languages. These poems, alongside 298 student poems, have been published on the Red Room Poetry website, trains, buses, in large scale art installations and performed in community, at Festivals, NAIDOC events and for Professional Development workshops reaching audiences upwards of 420,000.

I feel deeply honoured and grateful to work so closely with so many dedicated communities across the nation, to teach, learn and share First Nations language and culture and to honour the land in heartfelt ways.

It has been the highest privilege to sit with Elders around a fire on Country and to hear their stories, to see students utter their first words in language, to witness community teach dance, write song and plant trees for endangered species like the glossy black cockatoo.

Managing this project in NT, NSW and ACT with 50 dedicated partners and supporters has helped me grow exponentially. The opportunity to be mentored by Senior Directors at Red Room Poetry has allowed me to take a dream from conception to delivery, providing more skills than any degree ever could.

I am excited to deliver *Poetry in First Languages* in the South East regions of NSW in 2020 and to continue to support our mob to feel connected and proud.

— Kirli Saunders
Lead, Poetry in First Languages
Red Room Poetry

2019 OUTCOMES



PIFL Gadigal workshops. Image: Tad Souden

'It has been the highest privilege to sit with Elders around a fire on Country and to hear their stories, to see students utter their first words in language'

— Kirli Saunders

395

First Nations students

39

workshops

116

student poems published in 6 languages

64

poems commissioned and republished in 11+ languages

50+

employment opportunities

30+

generous partners and supporters

8

professional development programs

200,000+

community members reached via performances, festivals, publication on buses, trains, murals and more

WHEN LIGHTS FLASH **40**

I see garrall (*black cockatoo*)
 eating duwi (*Dreaming*) nuts
 as it slowly goes into its home
 the budan (*bird*) tells me it needs help
 to live,
 we must plant she-oak

Jake, Yr 5 Bowral Public School
Garrall (Black Cockatoo) Gundungurra

NSW
 Copyright Agency Cultural Fund
 DO NOT OVERTAKE TURNING VEHICLE
 7144-MO
 NEW SOUTH WALES

WHEN LIGHTS FLASH **40**

She tongay (*cries*)
 and tongay about daoure (*earth*)
 and all that's left is char and sand
 Loud cries the lost garrall (*black cockatoo*)
 for it seems it's her time too.

Bailey, Yr 10 Moss Vale High School
'Budai' (Bird), Gundungurra

52

SEAT 61
 STAND 29

NSW
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 6593-MO
 NEW SOUTH WALES

WHEN LIGHTS FLASH **40**

Talk with me about the bawa (*bush*), karrat (*rain*)
 and canbe (*fire*).
 Speak with me about the Garrall budan (*black cockatoo bird*)
 that brings duwi (*dreaming*) of the karrat and canbe.
 'We must protect them' says Mother Daoure

Grace, Yr 12 Moss Vale High School
'Yongatha garrall budan' (to sing black cockatoo bird) Gundungurra

Photography:
 Kay Keen

NSW
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 NEW SOUTH WALES

New First Nations
 and night jamine, passing them between us like conversation

Young First Nations poets, Grace and Jake in front of buses showcasing their poems in Gundungurra in the Southern Highlands, NSW 2019

2019 PROGRAMS

WORKSHOPS

Gundungurra

(Southern Highlands NSW)

18 - 20 March 2019 Cultural Day and workshops with Aurora Southern Highlands Steiner School, Berrima Public School, Bowral Public School and Moss Vale High School in partnership with NSW Department of Planning, Industry and Environment and Wingecarribee Shire Council delivered by Kirli Saunders with Gundungurra Elder, Aunty Sharyn Halls and Custodian, Aunty Trish Levett and Jacob Morris, resulting in poetry published on buses.

Dharawal (Illawarra NSW)

7 - 8 May with Figtree Public School, Port Kembla Public School, Warilla North Public School, Oak Flats High School and Dapto High School, in partnership with Merrigong Theatre and Wollongong Art Gallery delivered by Ethan Bell and Nicole Smede, and Custodians, Aunty Trish Levett and Jacob Morris.

Arrernte (Alice Springs, NT)

13 -14 May with Centralian Senior College and Ltyentye Apurte Catholic School in partnership with NT Writers Festival led by Declan Furber Gillick, with Arrernte Language Custodians Aunty Jannette McCormack, Carmel Ryan and linguist, David Moore

16 May Student performances at NT Writers Festival alongside commissioned poets

Gumea Dharawal

(South Coast, NSW)

19-21 August with Bomaderry High School, Vincentia High School and Nowra East Public School in partnership with Bundanon Trust led by Ethan Bell, Nicole Smede, Kaitlen Wellington and Gumea Dharawal Custodians, Adrian Webster and Jacob Morris

Dharawal (Mt Annan, NSW)

1 November with First Nations NASCA students in Years 7-11 from South West Sydney Schools, in partnership with the Australian Botanic Garden, Mount Annan and NASCA delivered by Ethan Bell and alongside Yuin woman, and Dharawal Language Custodian, Jodi Edwards.

Ngunawal (Canberra, ACT)

11 November with Mount Stromlo High School and Dickson College delivered by Ngunawal Custodians, Tyronne Bell and Jai Bell and poets, Ethan Bell and Nick Paton.

Gadigal (Sydney, NSW)

18 November with Alexandria Park CS, Tempe High School, Mt Allan, Laramba and Hermannsburg Schools, delivered by Gadigal poet, Joel Davison and Aboriginal Educators in partnership with The Royal Botanic Garden, Sydney, Art Gallery of NSW and NASCA.

EVENTS AND PRESENTATIONS

— Writing NSW 2019 International Year of Indigenous Languages panel featuring Kirli Saunders, Nardi Simpson, Jacinta Tobin and Donna McLaren chaired by Cathie Craigy

— Poetry in First Languages performances at the NT Writers Festival featuring Kirli Saunders, Declan Furber Gillick and Paul Collis

— NAIDOC event in Southern Highlands featuring student poems from PIFL Gundungurra

— Student poetry from PIFL Gundungurra published on bus backs, to celebrate language and care for country

— Reconciliation Australia Professional Development Digital Webinar Series delivered by Kirli Saunders and Stephanie Woerde

— Reconciliation NSW, Digital Workshops reaching 1240 students from 37 schools delivered by Kirli Saunders and Yvette Poshoglian

— Queensland Poetry Festival, Poetry in First Languages panel featuring Ellen Van Neerven, Melanie Mununggurr-Williams, Jim Everett and Grace Lucas Pennington, chaired by Kirli Saunders

— ACTATE annual conference Poetry in First Languages Keynote and Workshops delivered by Kirli Saunders featuring Paul Collis

— PULiiMA International Indigenous Languages Conference Keynote and Workshops delivered by Kirli Saunders

— Momentum, in partnership with Urban Theatre Projects features commissioned PIFL poets, Joel Davison and Kirli Saunders

— Prime Ministers Migration Awards features commissioned poet, Nicole Smede

— Winepress panel in partnership with Southern Tablelands Arts features poet Ethan Bell and Kirli Saunders

Poets, Artists, Educators Elders and Custodians

Nga gannganyun wahlu
Ganngaleh wunga gawal?
And when you really listen
Is your listening deep?

— Ellen van Neerven 'Yugambeh and Proud' *Poetry in First Languages*

Poets

Ethan Bell
Paul Collis
Declan Furber Gillick
Matthew Heffernan
Melanie Mununggur Williams
Nicholas Paton
Nicole Smede
Kryton Stewart
Ellen Van Neerven
Adrian Webster
Kaitlen Wellington

Editor

Jeanine Leanne

Elders, Custodians and Educators

Tyronne Bell
Jai Bell
Joshua Brown
Darren Charlwood
Shaun Davies
Joel Davison
Jodi Edwards
Ali Furber
Sharyn Halls
Lavinia Heffernan
Uncle Larry Hill
Trish Levett
Jannette McCormack
Jacob Morris
Barayuwa Mununggurr
Carmel Ryan
Kiri Saunders
Wesley Shaw



DHARAWAL LANGUAGE DICTIONARY

Integrated Cultural Enrichment Program
© Dharawal 1976 (revised February 2017)
© Aboriginal Cultural Awareness Program 2016, the Yanderra Public School 2017
© Arthur, Nelson & Sarah Murray, First Nations 2016

English	Gumbi Dharawal	Dharawal
little	imamus	imamus
big	Carraway	gavan
one	mabbong	maka
two	Bulla	balar
three	Bulla Mabbong	
good	Nia	tiagan
bad	Balar	gabina
very good	Badgerri	gaboon
old	Dhombah	
black	Njumbah Gooon	nada
yesterday	Buagin	
tomorrow	Intochu	
today / now	Nanen	
meeting place	Burrago	

Student with Dharawal Language Dictionary
Poetry in First Languages Dharawal
Photo Tad Souden

POEMS (excerpts)

as a darudan (bird) lands on the only tree
that's only been burned a bit that I can see
she tongay (cries) and tongay about daoure
and all that's left is char and sand
loud cries the lost garrall (black cockatoo)
for it seems it's her time too

~ Bailey, Yr 10 Moss Vale HS, 'Budan' for PIFL Gundungurra

Ngai Ngara Budjaang Yanggum Kundugaa
The woori and Boonirah making the Kundus gali
And the Kandah surrounding Ngai

I hear Birds sing in the trees
The sun and wind making the trees Dance
And the smoke surrounding me

~ Alyssa and Savannah, Year 11, 'Ngai Ngara Budjaang Yanggum Kundugaa'

Bomaderry HS, for PIFL Gumea Dharawal

I can hear the wind blowing through the bushes
The aweme rleke arnelke wernentyehenge
I feel the wind blowing on my face
Ayenge awelheme inngerre atyenhe rleke awenerleng
The old people teach me to do culture tools
Akngerre-pate-areyele ayenge akaltyntheme arne iltye-kenhe mpwaretyeke
I am Arrernte
Ayenge Arrernte.

~ Shaquille, 'Ayenge Arrernte', Santa Teresa School, PIFL Arrernte

TESTIMONIALS

I feel enriched by learning language and culture. I truly believe learning about our culture would be thoroughly beneficial to both Indigenous and white Australians. I would love to return and learn more.

~ **Secondary Student, PIFL Gumea Dharawal Workshops 2019**

Kids in difficult Year 10 classes actually self-directed to take over leadership of their History class to explain the day and its value to their peers. Some of those kids are 10 feet tall this week.

~ **Zac Morgan, Head Teacher, HSIE, Nowra HS**

PIFL is a great tool to engage students with their educational attainments and strengthening their cultural identity and instilling a great sense of cultural pride. PIFL projects have also generated a stable network of language custodians and knowledge holders across NSW to learn, share and help each other reconnecting intercommunal relationships across the state, plus so much more! I am very grateful and humbled to be apart of these projects.

~ **Adrian Webster, Gumea-Dharawal Language Custodian**

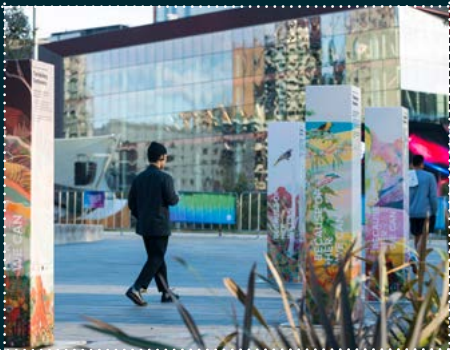
I feel the children gained a lot of confidence in who they are as Indigenous peoples. The poetry element of the program is so so good for us to heal and grow. The process of creative writing allows us to reflect on our past experiences, we can connect with each other over our shared histories and draw strength.

~ **Ethan Bell, Dharawal based Ngunawal, Gamilaraay poet**

The Department of Planning, Industry and Environment (DPIE) is partnering with Wingecarribee Council, Red Room Poetry and Gundungurra Aboriginal Heritage Association to foster the exchange of intergenerational Cultural Knowledge in this project. We are working alongside Gundungurra Elders and First Nations writers to provide an opportunity for young Indigenous students to re-connect with Country and iconic species like koalas and glossy-black cockatoos, ultimately building their capacity to achieve great environmental and heritage outcomes into the future."

~ **Simon Tedder, Community Engagement Officer,
Department of Planning, Industry and Heritage**

Murray remembers hotup, biel and ballee smoke the crow. Wangy, watches this young fire



Clockwise from top:
 Poetry in First Languages smoking ceremony
 Jeanine Leane, Red Room Poetry Fellow and Editor of Guwayu
 Workshops at Bundanon Trust
 Cookaroo Flow sound installation, Royal Botanic Garden, Sydney
 Tumbalong Gatherers lightboxes with Lendlease
 Gundungurra poems on Southern Highland buses





In human time we will have shed whole versions of ourselves

SELECTED MEDIA

In 2019, news regarding *PIFL* spanned a range of print and digital mediums including written publications, radio/podcasts and television to comprise 50.4% of RR's total media coverage. *Poetry in First Languages* media reached audiences across Australasia and into Southeast Asia.

21 March: *Books+Publishing*, *Arts News Portal* and *ABC Sydney Radio*, *Southern Highland News* (online feature) '[Red Room Poetry expands Poetry in First Languages schools program to QLD, NT, ACT](#)'

21 March: *Narragunnawali* (webinar) '[First Languages, Education and Reconciliation](#)'

21 March: *SBS Online*, *National Indigenous Times* (online feature) '[The poet who wants all students to be well versed in Aboriginal languages](#)' – annual reach 240,000

22 March: *Southern Highland News* (online feature) '[Poetry in the First Language](#)' – annual reach 135,621

26 March: *National Indigenous Times* (online feature) '[Songlines are our poems, they are the maps of our journeys](#)' – annual reach 240,000

10 April: RTR FM 92.1 (radio) '[International Year of Indigenous Languages: Kirli Saunders](#)' – annual reach 3.1 million

10 April: *Copyright Agency* (online/newsletter) '[Poetry in First Languages program expands](#)'

11 April: *Narragunnawali* (webinar) '[First Languages, Education and Reconciliation](#)'

20 April: *ABC AWAYE!* (online feature) '[Unlocking the Poetry of our First languages with Daniel Browning](#)'

23 April: *Southern Highlands News* (online feature) '[A foggy day for the 17th annual Koori flag raising and Mirror Flash](#)' – annual reach 135,621

26 April: *ArtsHub* (online feature) '[The secret Australian poetry revival](#)' – annual reach 1.4 million

8 May: *WIN News Illawarra* (TV broadcast) '[Poetry in First Languages on Dharawal land](#)'

14 May: *ABC Radio Darwin* (radio) '[NT writers' festival: In conversation](#)'

29 May: *3RRR* (radio) '[The Glasshouse](#)'

22 May: *Koori Mail* (print feature) 'Poetry Brings Out First Nation's Pride'

27 May: *National Indigenous Times* and *SBS Online* '[Kirli Saunders bares us to bright moments in debut poetry collection](#)' – annual reach 240,000

1 June: Centre for Stories (online feature) '[Between the Lines: Kirli Saunders](#)'

1 July: *G'Day Ethiopia* (radio) 'Indigenous Languages'

1 July: *NSW Department of Education* (online feature) '[Aboriginal students practise culture](#)'

Once-sleeping languages are waking up to poetry

By NICK PATON



THE bell's are sounding in a new era of custodial responsibility through a poetry program focused on Aboriginal languages, and their message of cultural obligation is ringing loud and clear.

Traditional Owner and Ngunawal (noo-nah-wah) language custodian Uncle Tyrone Bell, accompanied by son Jai, led the Poetry in First Nations Languages workshops, alongside the expertise of Ngunawal educator and poet Ethan Bell.

The workshops were held on Ngunawal country, in Canberra, across the second weekend of November.

Bringing with them many thousands of years of inherent cultural knowledge, passed down through millennia of generations, the fellas were well equipped to deliver ancient Ngunawal language to an eager class of over 20 students.

The popular poetry program has been developed with meticulous attention to detail by Guna! woman Kirli Saunders, an internationally published and award-winning author, passionate poet, educator, and program developer at Red Room Poetry Organisation in Sydney.

Ms Saunders said the program is like family to her and has been constantly evolving and taking shape for over 2 years, with over 35 workshops being run through schools this year alone.

"Although it has taken us a substantial amount of time to bring this workshop to fruition here on Ngunawal country, it's all been worth it," she said.

"We know as Aboriginal people, and especially through our experience with the delivery of our poetry programs on Gundungurra, Gadigal, Dharawal, Guna!, Dharawal, Arrernte, Yui, and Bundjalung country already, that there are serious and important cultural protocols to abide by when working alongside our Indigenous communities and counterparts," Ms Saunders said.

"Things like seeking permission, and being honest, and building trust, and showing and gaining respect, are crucial elements to building meaningful relationships between our communities, and for some of the students undertaking the workshop, Ngunawal is their family language, so it's also about treading lightly."

"For us to finally be delivering this program on sacred Ngunawal country, in collaboration with the staff and Aboriginal students from Mount Stromlo High School here in Canberra, after such long consultation with Uncle Tyrone, a revered Ngunawal language custodian, makes my heart want to explode!"

Uncle Tyrone said he was thrilled to be working alongside his son Jai and his cousin Ethan, as part of the poetry program.

"For Jai, his Ngunawal culture is his classroom, and for Ethan, educating comes naturally so his Ngunawal culture is his classroom too," Uncle Tyrone said.

"Jai and Ethan are emerging as



Mt Stromlo High School students taking part in the Poetry in First Languages program were welcomed to Ngunawal Country by Ngunawal Custodian Uncle Tyrone Bell at the Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve's Outdoor School, Birrigai.



Ngunawal poet Ethan Bell, Uncle Tyrone Bell and Guna! woman Kirli Saunders are passionate about awakening our languages.

the next generation of custodians, and they are both here today helping me to teach other young Aboriginal students from our Ngunawal community some poetry, and to help these students better understand Ngunawal language and culture."

Before any program activities commenced, Uncle took the students, staff, and facilitators out on to country and welcomed them to attune themselves to Spirit, and learn about some of the aspects of cultural symbolism that the area has always provided for the Ngunawal people.

"I am just so proud of all the students and the way they engaged so positively with the program, in particular the young men," Uncle Tyrone said.

"We know as men it can be hard at times to tap into our emotions without feeling like we'll be teased."

"It's been amazing to see all of the students being so vulnerable and so self aware in being able to translate their thoughts and feelings and emotions into Ngunawal language and poetry."

Son Jai Bell said he always feels a great sense of pride when he is asked by his Dad to be involved with anything to do with honouring his Ngunawal culture.

"It's about being able to freely speak our language, and free to walk out on our Ngunawal country in a spiritual way, and these are probably two of the most powerful things a father and son can do together, when building on their relationship," Mr Bell said.

"I am passionate about continuing the revitalisation of my Ngunawal language and culture, and the big thing for me is the opportunity to be a teacher, and educator of my culture and language."

"Our language was told it had to go to sleep once before, and it will be my life mission to make sure it's never forced asleep again," Mr Bell said.

"But you need to have that fire in your belly, and that desire to get it back and see it thrive. You've got to have the burning desire in your heart first, because that's where it all starts."

Along with founding Ngunawal culture awareness business, Dhawura Tours, Uncle Tyrone is also heavily involved in educating members of the Australian government on Ngunawal culture through his company, Thunderstone Aboriginal Cultural Services, and is frequently found in and around Parliament house



Ngunawal Traditional Owner Jai Bell stands proudly alongside his dad, Uncle Tyrone Bell.

conducting an official Welcome to the visitors standing upon his country.

"And I do this because I don't have a choice," Uncle Tyrone said

"I think for the continuation of a strong Aboriginal culture in Australia in the future it is crucial that each and every Indigenous community right across the continent strive to revitalise and reinvigorate the language that belongs to that particular nation or country," he said.

"Because our nation is our heart, and it's our soul, it's our entire existence, and although our language was forced to go to sleep for a very long time, we know its well and truly awake today. This is all for country."

"A program like Poetry in First Languages helps us to fulfill our obligation as custodians of our own information, and we need to stand up, together, all nations, united, and revitalise this precious information together."

"We know that this isn't just language and that's because for Aboriginal people our language is, for the most part, critical life lessons and important education and knowledge systems that we know have, for tens of thousands of years, kept us, our country, and our

children safe," Uncle Tyrone said.

"We are the keepers of a vault of cherished and priceless cultural treasure, and we need to protect it, and keep it strong so that all Australians can benefit from it."

Uncle Tyrone said Indigenous languages can help to educate everyone, not just Aboriginal people.

"And I would like to see every person who is standing on what is Aboriginal soil involved in learning our native tongue," he said.

"It is very important that the wider community acknowledge and begin to build a greater respect for the many Indigenous languages that exist around Australia," he said.

"We are only here for a short time," Uncle Tyrone said.

"So its extremely important that we all learn to build up our cultural knowledge, no matter where you call home, so that you can pass this invaluable information on to the next generation, just like I am doing with my cousin Ethan and son Jai."

For information on how your school can access the Poetry in First Languages program visit redroompoetry.org

To experience the true Australian culture visit thunderstone.net.au

SELECTED MEDIA

through writing’

5 July: *Mirage News* (online feature) [‘Flow’ carries Indigenous voices to world’](#)

8 July: *Southern Highland News* (online feature) [‘Poetry in language to reach community’](#) – annual reach 135,621

11 July: *Mirage News* (online/radio) [‘First nations students use poetry to celebrate language and threatened species for NAIDOC’](#)

15 July: *NSW Department of Communications and Arts* (online feature) [‘IY2019: Teaching language to kids through poetry’](#)

29 July: *Industry Coid* (online feature) [‘Penyair dan Pengarang Cerita Anak Asal Australia Kunjungi Indonesia’](#)

30 July: *Bali Tribune* (online feature) [‘Dorong Minat Baca Anak, Kirli Saunders Kunjungi SD 5 Mengwitani dan Anak-anak di Desa Guwang’](#)

31 July: *National Indigenous Times* (online feature) [‘Gunai poet reconnects with culture to take home Indigenous literary award’](#) – annual reach 240,000

4 August: *Jakarta Post* (online/print feature) [‘Author Kirli Saunders brings her Aboriginal roots into the limelight’](#)

13 August: *NSW Government* (newsletter) [‘Winter 2019 Glossies in the Mist Newsletter’](#)

20 August: *Gippsland Women’s Health* (newsletter) [‘Change Making and Truth Speaking’](#) (p. 6)

26 August: *Koori Mail* (print feature) ‘Kids conservation project hits the back of buses’

24 September: *ArtsHub* (online feature) [‘Blak writing you should be reading’](#) – annual reach 1.4 million

4 October: *NSW Department of Communications and Arts, Mirage News* (online feature) [‘Special Artbank poetry reading’](#)

20 November: *Koori Mail* (print feature) ‘Once-sleeping languages waking up to poetry’

28 November: *Yass Tribune* (online feature) [‘First Nation poet celebration in Murrumbateman this weekend’](#)

7 December: *ABC Radio National* (radio) [‘Back to the multilingual future’](#)



PIFL back of bus with young poet, Victoria. Photo by Tad Souden.

A First Nations poetry program is teaching the younger generation to create poetry in language, liberate ideas of identity and culture, and learn about the environment.

Red Room Poetry’s ‘Poetry in First Language (PIFL)’ program was the vision of the organisation’s Poetic Learning Manager and Gunai woman, Kirli Saunders.

It was a vision born on the banks of the NSW Shoalhaven River.

“I could hear some ancestors singing and I wanted to know what they were saying. So, I called up my aunty and she said, ‘Well that’s what they’re saying—they want you to go and learn language,’” Ms Saunders said.

From top to bottom:

Copyright Agency
online article

National Indigenous
Times feature

EVALUATION Poetry In First Languages

In 2018, RR commissioned an independent evaluation of our *Poetry in First Languages* (PIFL) pilot program by BYP Group. Key findings of this report inform PIFL and all aspects of RR Poetic learning programs for future expansion and improvement.

Executive Summary

THE NEED

PIFL addresses a clear gap in the educational and cultural offer for First Nations students in NSW. The program was a one-of-a-kind opportunity for almost all of the First Nations participants. 95% of the schools and communities involved in PIFL had no other access to First Nations language programs.

THE EXPERIENCE

The overwhelming majority of participants reported a positive experience of the program (94%). Participants learned new First Nations language skills, cultural knowledge, and how to express themselves through poetry. The fun and engaging nature of the program meant that students transitioned from 'unsure' or 'nervous' at the start of the workshop to happy, 'loud and proud' by the end.

THE IMPACT

The program instilled confidence about their language, identity and culture in First Nations children. Many participants shifted from feeling a general disinterest and lack of confidence at the start of the day, to feeling engaged, confident and more knowledgeable about themselves and their culture by the end of the workshop. Some children discovered family relationships as a result of the workshop, and are continuing to deepen these connections.

For the Elders, poets and Custodians involved in the program, PIFL was deeply affirming of culture and language, and offered hope that these would be passed on to the next generation.

THE PROCESS

Participants reported a positive experience of the process, and many hoped to do the program again. When asked what they liked about the program, 54% reported that they liked the sense of connecting with Country, Elders and poets.

'It was the best experience I have ever had. Now I know more about culture...'

— North Nowra PS, *Poetry in First Languages* student

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

BYP Group recommends that PIFL be continued and deepened to allow longer or repeat engagement with the program by students, and expanded to reach more communities. We recommend that Red Room Poetry:

- Maintain the model of working closely with Elders, Language Custodians and poets and continue to use multiple poetic artforms ranging across dance, poetry and all the creative arts
- Continue to publish and perform the poetic works of poets and students, as this amplifies the sense of pride and self-value experienced by participants
- Continue to hold programs offsite in locations which allow for outdoor activities and connection with nature and Country

Full report [redroomcompany.org/media/uploads/pifl_report_\(red_room_poetry_x_byp_group\)_.pdf](https://redroomcompany.org/media/uploads/pifl_report_(red_room_poetry_x_byp_group)_.pdf)



Poetry in First Languages Gundungurra workshop tree planting to support Black Cockatoo habitats

PARTNERS AND SUPPORTERS

Irriti ngurra Warumpila ngayulu nyinapayi. Pulinguru walpangku ngyunya yunpa pampunu.

A long time ago, I lived on the land of my people, Warumpi. From the mountains, the wind would blow and caress my face.

—Mathew Heffernan 'Ngurrparringu (Forgotten)' *Poetry in First Languages*

Poetry in First Languages is generously supported by many partners, philanthropists, Oranges & Sardines Foundation, and other key partners below:

Aboriginal Affairs NSW; Australia Council for the Arts; Create NSW; Copyright Agency Cultural Fund, Department of Planning, Industry and Environment, Bundanon Trust, AECG Northern Illawarra, Wingecarribee Shire Council, Torch Media, NT Writers Centre, QLD Poetry Festival, ACTATE, Merrigong Theatre Company, Nelson Meers Foundation, Wollongong Art Gallery, Miromaa Language Centre, Urban Theatre Projects, Artbank, Aboriginal Health TV, NASCA, Royal Botanic Garden Sydney, Art Gallery of NSW, Reconciliation Australia, Reconciliation NSW, ReFrame Tahmoor and Magabala Books.





Poetry in
Meaningful Ways

Red Room Poetry

Joynton Avenue Creative Centre
3A Joynton Ave, Zetland, 2017

ABN 35 103 464 446

(02) 9319 5090

contact@redroomcompany.org
redroomcompany.org

