

# 2020- 2021

## ANNUAL REVIEW

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Changing lives,  
strengthening communities

Fostering employment opportunities  
in rural and regional Queensland

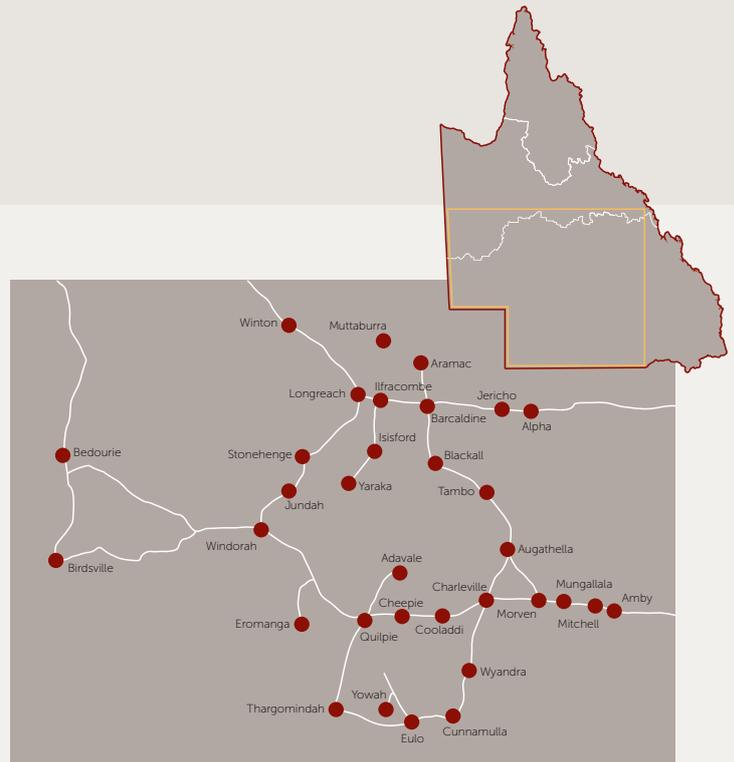
# Our region

**RESQ+ is the employment service provider for Central West and South West Queensland. These two areas form one of Australia's largest and most diverse geographic regions in which community-based employment services are delivered.**

Our program area covers almost 800,000 km<sup>2</sup>, with approximately 20,000 residents from a variety of cultural backgrounds, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Our work is supported by the eleven surrounding regional councils of Barcaldine Regional Council, Barcoo Shire Council, Blackall Regional Council, Bulloo Shire Council, Diamantina Shire Council, Longreach Regional Council, Maranoa Regional Council, Murweh Shire Council, Paroo Shire Council, Quilpie Shire Council and Winton Shire Council.

Over 40 RESQ+ employees work hard to cover this vast region and its varied employment and training needs. Together, they provide vital support services to 32 communities and over 1000 job seekers.



## Board profiles



### **Maria Richards**

**Chairperson, The MaraWay**

Maria Richards has come a long way from her challenging experiences as a schoolgirl. She is now a Director of RESQ+ and the Chair of The MaraWay in Cairns. Maria is passionate about her culture, her family and the community. She believes if you want something in life, you have to work for it.

A former Community Development Employment Projects participant, Maria used the program as a stepping stone to a better education, job and life. Maria has a firsthand understanding of the barriers encountered by Indigenous youth.

Maria has fostered over 65 children and is determined to use her leadership roles to help people embrace life-changing opportunities.



### **Rob Chandler**

**Business consultant**

Rob Chandler is currently working with Sunshot Industries in Barcaldine. Sunshot Industries is charged with seeking economic development opportunities in the greater Western Queensland and Australia.

Prior to this appointment, Rob was a Councillor with the Barcaldine Shire Council from 2000 to 2008, and Mayor for four years. Post the local government amalgamation, Rob was elected Mayor of the Barcaldine Regional Council and served for a further 12 years.

He remains a Director of the Rural Financial Counselling Service, RESQ+ and Red Ridge, and represents the Central West Aboriginal Corporation on the RESQ+ Board. It is in this latter position that Rob sees a bright future for Indigenous people locally and through Red Ridge in the wider Outback Queensland areas.



### **Alicia Gibson**

**Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Skill Centred Queensland**

Alicia is the Board Director of RESQ+ founding partner, Employment Services Queensland (ESQ), and CEO of Skill Centred Queensland, a not-for-profit community-based organisation operating across Queensland. She brings years of experience in organisations supporting long-term unemployed, disadvantaged youth and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

She holds various qualifications, including a Bachelor of Social Welfare (Youth Work) and an Associate Diploma in Welfare Studies. Alicia has a passion for making positive changes in her local community. She serves on several boards and committees across a broad spectrum of activities.

# Message from the Chairman

It is with pleasure that I offer this report to our clients, stakeholders, including government, fellow directors and their organisations, the CEO and staff.

In 2020, they said it was a year like no other. Well, 2021 has been much the same. Regional communities continue to respond to the wide-ranging and hastily imposed government measures in response to ongoing outbreaks of COVID-19 in the metropolitan areas.

Although there have been no incidences of the disease itself in Western Queensland, COVID-19 continues to present a major test of resilience to businesses in the region, particularly in the area of tourism.

The Outback has been the place to go this year as those tourists who normally go overseas have travelled to 'the bush' and beyond. An upsurge in visitors, when combined with a labour and skills shortage born of lower migration and backpackers, has certainly tested the mettle of many business owners.

As it has done in the past, RESQ+ has stepped in and worked with employers to help them address these labour shortages by matching job seeker skills with jobs and providing targeted training and development programs for the individual.

## This year has seen many key achievements:

- Indigenous artist Kirk Mitchell's first gallery showing. The event was held in the Cunnamulla Fella Centre Art Gallery and Museum and was kindly sponsored by the Paroo Shire Council. Kirk produced 27 pieces of art for the exhibition, selling six on opening night and most of his other works over the eight-week show.
- The Indigenous Business Incubator Pilot Program continues to be successful. The program now has two Indigenous businesses up and running in Cunnamulla and Mitchell, with two more in the pipeline.
- RESQ+ and Red Ridge in Blackall continue to deliver original and exciting initiatives. The Red Ridge the Label Indigenous fashion line recently marked the release of its second collection, the Georgina. Sales continue to be strong, replicating the successful performance of the Diamantina collection. Our most recent project, the creation of the Wangkangurru Language Dictionary, will when completed, prove to be a landmark achievement in the area of Aboriginal culture.



Although there have been no incidences of the disease itself in Western Queensland, COVID-19 continues to present a major test of resilience to businesses in the region, particularly in the area of tourism.

- RESQ+ supported the Longreach Show, as well as several sporting clubs and community events across our two regions.
- This year, instead of red benches, blue trees are growing everywhere. The Blue Tree Project encourages regional and rural communities to paint a tree blue to spark conversations about mental health. RESQ+ Supervisor Tim Sorensen led the projects and worked with other community groups to establish blue trees in Longreach, Barcaldine, Isisford and Yaraka.

In closing, I'd like to acknowledge our CEO, Chris Hamilton, who continues to demonstrate his excellent leadership and managerial skills on a daily basis, and equally, all of our staff who carried on with activities as normal, despite the impacts of COVID-19 on the business and our communities. Now, more than ever, an effective job seeker support program is important.

The organisation's achievements are a testament to Chris's and our staff's dedication and commitment, not only to the organisation but to the clients and regions we serve. In closing, I also give recognition to my fellow directors, without whom, the effective governance of the organisation would not take place.

## David Arnold

Chief Executive Officer, Remote Area Planning and Development (RAPAD) Board and Chairman of RESQ+

# Message from the Chief Executive Officer

In last year's review, I mentioned that the key topic of conversation for 2020 was COVID-19 and the impact the raft of restrictions has had on individuals, families and businesses. Well, here we are in 2021 and the conversation goes on!

While those further east continue to struggle with outbreaks, lockdowns and the like, some of the knock-on effects have flowed onto us here in Outback Queensland. Our adaptive and resilient rural communities continue to roll with the punches and take advantage of the positive aspects of the new ways of the world.

There is no doubt that the unprecedented number of tourists passing through our regions has been a great thing for Western Queenslanders. Those businesses that rely on the tourist dollar are thriving, while those organisations that support the frontline businesses are also benefiting.

The downside, and there is always one of those, is that we are experiencing significant labour shortages in many areas. With backpacker arrivals and net migration at zero, and short-term overseas workers returning to their country of origin last year, we're seeing a national net deficit of over 150,000 workers. This means that many businesses are short-staffed and struggling to deliver their normal levels of service.

At a regional and local level, this has been a bonus for RESQ+ job seekers. In essence, anyone who wants to work has been able to choose the work they want, get a well-paid job in that field and stay employed. This is a trend that is likely to continue for at least the next 12–18 months.

While RESQ+'s core focus remains on finding roles for our job seekers and getting them into those jobs, we now have the time to focus more on job seekers who would like to work but have barriers preventing their employment.

The stories in this edition of the Annual Review, show the kinds of things RESQ+'s team of client-focused professionals are doing to overcome these barriers and assist our job seekers in getting the job that they want.

We continue to create a variety of work experiences that are healthy, socially responsible and culturally rewarding, and designed to get people working again. To ensure we remain on the right track, we recently asked our clients to tell us what kinds of activities they want to do and what training and development opportunities they believe would help them gain the skills, confidence and attitude to enter or re-enter the workforce.



While RESQ+'s core focus remains on finding roles for our job seekers and getting them into those jobs, we now have the time to focus more on job seekers who would like to work but have barriers preventing their employment.

At the higher level, our regional Community Advisory Boards help us to identify and co-design programs and initiatives within our communities that assist job seekers to meet those goals previously mentioned.

Once the client gets that job, RESQ+'s quality post-placement support program and ongoing employer liaison helps them stay in employment and identifies any additional training required to help them grow in their role.

We are extremely proud to say that during the year under review, RESQ+ has found employment for 237 job seekers since July 2020 and supported over 32 community organisations. This is an all-time high and real evidence of what a community can achieve if we all pull together.

In the pages that follow, you can read about how we achieved this excellent outcome. There are some great stories here!

**Chris Hamilton**  
Chief Executive Officer, RESQ+

# Building skills and strong communities

RESQ+ continues its strong focus on delivering the Community Development Program (CDP) in South West and Central West Queensland's regional communities.

The CDP is a remote employment and development service funded by the National Indigenous Australians Agency (NIAA). The program helps job seekers in remote Australia build skills, address challenges and contribute to their communities through a range of flexible programs.

As a CDP provider, RESQ+ works with job seekers, employers and host organisations to increase employment opportunities and break the cycle of welfare dependency.

The organisation provides job seekers with training, personal development and specialised support to overcome barriers and open up pathways to employment.

RESQ+ Chief Executive Officer Chris Hamilton said the past year has been a challenging time to deliver the CDP.

"Governments at all levels continue to amend policies and requirements in response to the ever-changing face of COVID-19," he said.

"On top of that, further changes to the CDP program announced as part of the Federal Budget 2021–22 meant that job seekers were no longer required to attend their Work for the Dole group activities.

"These changes had a significant impact on our operations and the way we delivered services to our communities. However, as we have done in the past, RESQ+ has absorbed the hits and quickly adapted to the new way of doing things."

From 12 May 2021, job seekers will volunteer to take part in activities but still need to meet certain compulsory requirements, including attending appointments with service providers and looking for work.

Chris said job seekers gain significant benefits from attending face-to-face activities.

"There's the social impact—getting out of the house, talking to other job seekers and networking, rather than sitting at home," he said.

"They can learn work skills that they may not learn anywhere else. And earn extra money from income-generating activities (IGAs).

"Face-to-face activities also offer significant benefits to the community. Groups that may not have funding to employ people for jobs can get the help they need."

Chris said the RESQ+ team will continue to work with job seekers to create new and engaging activities.

"We're getting people back on the ground and forming routines. We're listening to job seekers and looking for ways to tailor work to their needs," he said.

"We want to see more job seekers reaching out and participating in activities that help build their work-ready skills.

"Regional employers are desperate for workers. There's plenty of work in our remote communities for anyone who wants it."

**For further information about the CDP, get in touch with your local RESQ+ consultant at [resqld.com.au](http://resqld.com.au)**

## Community activities

RESQ+ offers a range of face-to-face activities for job seekers, including:

- Gardening and lawn maintenance
- Woodwork
- Metalwork
- Leatherwork
- Health workshops
- Job preparation workshops
- Resin art workshops
- Cultural weaving workshops
- Textile classes
- Clay jewellery classes
- Indigenous artwork, including painting, didgeridoo making and cultural wood carving
- Community activity support, including setting up for NAIDOC Week, local shows, sporting club events, local race meets and not-for-profit organisations

## Working with real people for real impact

Connecting people with EMPLOYERS

190+

People placed in jobs\*

Connecting with COMMUNITIES

32+

Local communities

Connecting with JOB SEEKERS

1035+

People supported with a pathway to employment\*

\*Since 1 July 2020

# Backing new business in regional Queensland

Over the past year, RESQ+ has been delivering the Indigenous Business Incubator Pilot Program throughout the South West Queensland region.

The pilot is a government-funded program managed through the National Indigenous Australians Agency (NIAA). The program helps local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples establish small businesses and supports them as they stabilise.

As a program provider, RESQ+ has helped seven Indigenous job seekers develop new business ventures. The businesses have established a steady client base and are generating a sustainable income.

RESQ+ Regional Manager Sue Bylett said they adjust the program to the needs of each person.

"We can help people develop business ideas, provide access to grants, get workforce or infrastructure support, or access business mentoring," she said.

"The idea is that with the right support, entrepreneurs build the skills and confidence to take over their business and run it for themselves."

In Cunnamulla, work is underway to establish an Indigenous-owned and operated wholesale nursery. Participants have been making tables and greenhouses in preparation for seed planting.

"This will be the first wholesale nursery in the area," Sue said.

"We've already been approached by people interested in buying Indigenous bush food and medicine plants, and seedlings for revegetation."

Sue is also helping an existing business in Cunnamulla expand from lawn mowing into landscaping.

"Participants are learning how to re-gravel driveways and build sandpits, vegetable patches and planter boxes," she said.

"Helping people start a viable business is so rewarding. And RESQ+ will always be here to support them."



Work is underway to build structures for Cunnamulla's new wholesale nursery and landscaping supplies businesses.



Reina (left) and Raylene (right) McKellar celebrate one year as Cunnamulla Service Solutions.

## Cunnamulla's first cleaning business turns one

Cunnamulla Service Solutions has just celebrated its one-year anniversary. The business was established in 2020 as part of the Indigenous Business Incubator Pilot Program.

Business owners and sisters Reina and Raylene McKellar noticed a gap in the market for a local cleaning service.

"If you wanted a cleaner, you had to book somebody from Charleville," Reina said.

"Our business offers local cleaning services for houses and businesses. We can also clean solar panels, carpets, rugs, mattresses and car upholstery. And our prices are reasonable."

Through the program, RESQ+ was able to help Reina and Raylene purchase cleaning equipment and marketing materials. RESQ+ also organised financial and business training with Many Rivers—an organisation that provides microenterprise development and community economic development support to Indigenous people and other Australians.

Reina said that business is slowly picking up, with a lot of repeat customers.

"We get lots of compliments. People are amazed at the stains we can get out," she said.

With the support of RESQ+, the team is now looking to expand their service into more towns.

"RESQ+ has been there to help when we've needed it. If they know that business is slow, they call to ask what they can do," Reina said.

"Starting a business during COVID-19 was hard. But I'm really liking it now. I like being busy."

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"RESQ+ has been there to help when we've needed it. If they know that business is slow, they call to ask what they can do."



William (Willy) Mitchell's range of colourful products for sale in the RESQ+ Mitchell office.

## Mitchell artist launches new range of products

William (Willy) Mitchell from Mitchell in South West Queensland has been painting ever since he was a child.

In more recent years, William was invited to paint the outside walls of the Work for the Dole Training Centre in Mitchell. It was this vibrant work that drew the attention of Sue Bylett, Regional Manager with RESQ+.

"I first approached William to tell him his artwork was unique. It reminded me of Footrot Flats," Sue said.

"We then came up with the idea to create a range of products featuring his paintings that we could sell.

"We took photos of his artwork and printed them on mugs, calendars, keyrings, cards, bags, coasters and face masks.

"On the back of most products, we've also printed a photo of William with his name."

Tourists can now browse and purchase the items in the RESQ+ Mitchell office.

William said he was 'spun out' when he saw the finished products.

"It feels good to have my art for sale. I've seen tourists looking at my work and it makes me feel proud," he said.

"I'm hoping to have my products and paintings sold in other places."

William said RESQ+ has been an integral part of helping him establish his new business, Willy's Art.

"Sue helped me get the canvas and paints for my work. If I ever need anything, I know I can call her."

Sue is excited about what the future holds for William. She is looking at creating similar displays for Willy's Art in RESQ+'s Charleville and Cunnamulla offices.

"William's confidence has grown enormously since starting Willy's Art," she said.

"I am so proud to see him tackle his barriers with success."



Photo courtesy of Simon Phipps.

Simon Phipps (pictured with his daughter) received employment support from RESQ+ during COVID-19.

## Strength and support in tough times

Like most people across Queensland, Cunnamulla resident Simon Phipps felt the economic impact of COVID-19.

The Workplace Trainer moved to Cunnamulla with his family in 2018. With part-time jobs at Queensland Health and as a local cafe barista, Simon and his family were enjoying the tree change from South East Queensland.

But when COVID-19 restrictions were introduced, work became limited. This is when Simon reached out to RESQ+ for help.

“The team at RESQ+ suggested ways I could create my own work,” Simon said.

“Their advice encouraged me to reach out to past contacts and as a result, I got a four-month contract developing COVID-19 response training for the National Retail Association.

“RESQ+ also helped me develop a plan to deliver first-aid and workplace health and safety training in Cunnamulla.

“They helped me get re-engaged with my first aid and workplace health and safety training, and then engaged me to deliver white card training to their clients.”

Simon now has a full-time job as a Human Resources Officer with Paroo Shire Council. He said RESQ+ helped him maintain his confidence and work routines during restrictions and the shortage in employment.

“Talking with Jasmin at RESQ+ helped me stay focused on the future and the opportunities out there,” he said.

“Sometimes we’d talk three or four times a month, sometimes just once. But she always made time for me.

“RESQ+ looked for ways to help me achieve what I wanted to do. And they provided all the support they could.”

Simon continues to make regular contact with RESQ+, but now it’s a working relationship.

“When I’m hiring people for council, I can talk to RESQ+ about the skills we’re looking for. They can then recommend job seekers with training that aligns with the council’s requirements.”



Job seekers build a wheelchair-accessible ramp for the new toilet and shower block behind Blackall’s Lost Art Centre.

## Job seekers work on upgrades to Lost Art Centre

Blackall’s Lost Art Centre received a welcome upgrade with the addition of a new disabled toilet and shower block.

Red Ridge (Interior Queensland) Ltd secured grant money to fund the materials for the project. Long-term collaborators, RESQ+ was happy to contribute time and energy to help make the transformation.

RESQ+ Activity Supervisor Gerard Bell led a project team of five job seekers to complete the build over six weeks.

A transportable toilet block was brought from Toowoomba and job seekers got to work, digging holes and putting in stumps. As part of their on-ground training, job seekers learned how to mix concrete by hand and use levels, string lines and lasers to achieve a precise finish.

The team also constructed a wheelchair-accessible walkway, ensuring all artists, crafters and visitors have easy access to the toilet block.

Gerard said the project had its challenges, but these provided a good learning opportunity.

“Sometimes, I’d walk past one of the team and see a potential problem,” he said.

“But rather than fix it for them, I’d challenge them to think about it. I wanted them to figure it out for themselves and not give up.

“Working on a project is more than just following instructions—it’s about planning and problem-solving.”

Gerard said the team is proud of what they’ve achieved.

“They’ve gained new skills and seen a project come together from start to finish. They didn’t have to show up, but they did,” he said.

“Most of the time, I had two or three job seekers working with me around their other commitments. I’m pretty lucky with my team.”

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The Lost Art Centre runs programs that actively support job seekers, promoting social inclusion for disadvantaged groups through the teaching of traditional leather craft skills. The program is proudly run by Red Ridge (Interior Queensland) Ltd, who use all profits from the sales of handmade products to fund further local projects.

# Patience reveals art in timber

A builder by trade, Budjiti man Lindsay Hooper now creates art from timber.

Lindsay joined the Community Development Program delivered by RESQ+ in Cunnamulla. In the training centre, he rediscovered his affinity for discerning art within trees.

He now spends time patiently carving coolamons and didgeridoos from box trees.

Lindsay explained that he begins by choosing the right tree to work with.

"I look at the shape and size of a tree, and I can see what's in it," he said.

"It takes a bit of time, but I really enjoy working on the finished product. I don't like doing half a job."

Lindsay also enjoys working with young job seekers, teaching them how to work with timber.

RESQ+ has offered practical support to help Lindsay continue working on his art. But COVID-19 has meant that most of Lindsay's work is now done at home.

Regional Manager Sue Bylett said that RESQ+ has been able to help Lindsay get the right tools to work faster with wood.

"The work Lindsay does looks brilliant. He's good at what he does," she said.

"It will be great when Lindsay and other job seekers can get back into the training centre. Being together again will make it easier for Lindsay to share his skills."

Lindsay's work has been displayed in an art exhibition in Quilpie and is also sold in local retail stores.



RESQ+ job seeker Lindsay Hooper holding a coolamon featuring artwork by fellow job seeker Lorenda Hodges.



James Brown feels great pride in establishing his car detailing business in Charleville.

## Work revs up for car detailing business

RESQ+ job seeker James Brown began washing cars from home to earn extra money on weekends. But as his day job became less reliable, he decided to take his financial future into his own hands.

He saw an unused service station in Charleville that could be the perfect home for his business venture—Warrego Car and Trailer Detailing. After tracking down the owner, he struck up a deal to convert it into a car wash.

RESQ+ put James in touch with Many Rivers, an organisation that provides business consulting and small business loans.

With a loan secured, James committed himself to setting up the business, purchasing equipment, painting the building and planting gardens.

James said there is no other business like it in Charleville.

"I can detail anything and everything—steam rollers, trucks, tractors, graders, caravans and motorhomes. If it's got wheels, I can detail it," he said.

"I was expecting the business to do okay, but it's doing better than I thought. Some days, I work non-stop."

But Warrego Car and Trailer Detailing has provided James with more than a regular income. It's been a life-changing venture.

"I'm very proud of myself for starting this business," James said.

"I used to be depressed and lock myself away. This business is helping me come out of my shell."

"I feel good within myself, especially when someone picks up their car and smiles because of how good a job I've done."

# Celebrating Torres Strait Islander culture during NAIDOC

Schools in Blackall were excited to receive a visit from RESQ+ Employment Consultant Cecele Pitt and her husband, Terry Tapim, during NAIDOC Week in 2020.

Cecele and Terry have strong connections to the Torres Strait Islands. Terry is from Mer (Murray) Island and Cecele and Terry met on Thursday Island.

Cecele is passionate about incorporating Torres Strait Islander culture into NAIDOC Week.

“We’d noticed there were lots of Aboriginal presentations in schools for NAIDOC,” she said.

“But there weren’t any Torres Strait Islander presentations because there aren’t any other Islanders in the area.”

The pair approached local schools and offered to share their culture with the students. Teachers and principals welcomed them with enthusiasm and RESQ+ contributed funds to support the initiative.

They started at Lady Gowrie Early Years Service, then visited Blackall State School before finishing at St Joseph’s Catholic Primary School.

Cecele presented a traditional *Augumwali*, the women’s island dress, and Terry wore a *nesur*, the men’s red skirt.

They showed the students a Torres Strait Islander headdress called a *dhari*. A *dhari* is traditionally made with feathers and can be cut into the shapes of shark teeth and fish tails, each with its own special meaning. *Dhari* designs vary from island to island.

“We were happy to show the students a map of Indigenous tribes and explain the Torres Strait Islander flag,” Cecele said.

They also showed the students an instrument called a *Gor*, a rattle used when dancing.

“The kids were fantastic. They asked really engaging questions and participated in our quizzes.”

Their presentations were so successful that they caught the attention of Ray Wallace from the National Indigenous Australians Agency (NIAA), who praised what they had accomplished.

But Cecele isn’t in it for the praise.

“The main thing I want people to understand is that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures are very different,” she said.

“They are both wonderful, but they aren’t the same. We wanted to give kids a hands-on look at our culture so they can see that for themselves.”

It’s important to Cecele and Terry that their own daughter feels like she can connect with her culture.

“We saw the pride on her face when her friends asked questions and commented on some of the artefacts,” she said.

Cecele understands the value of connecting with family, culture and history.

“NAIDOC Week gives all Indigenous people time to come together and celebrate. And an opportunity for other members of the community to learn how wonderful and beautiful our culture is.”



Cecele and Terry sharing their Torres Strait Islander culture with Blackall State School students for NAIDOC Week.

“The main thing I want people to understand is that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures are very different, they are both wonderful, but they aren’t the same. We wanted to give kids a hands-on look at our culture so they can see that for themselves.”

# Stepping up to get the job done

## Charleville's Work for the Dole team is continuing to help the local community.

Under the mentorship of RESQ+ Activity Supervisor John Bursle, Work for the Dole participant Glenn Long built a loading ramp for the sheep dog trials at the Charleville Show.

Glenn said building the ramp took a lot of trial and error.

"We had to make the ramp to Australian competition standards," he said.

"There were no drawings, so we sourced photos and called professionals for the dimensions.

"The day before the trials, we set it up and let the judge measure it. It was a relief when he told us it was perfect."

Fellow Work for the Dole participant Nicholas Atkin also undertook a big challenge.

He was commissioned to build a custom-size box trailer by John Bursle himself. Throughout the project, Nicholas gained experience in welding and using drop saws, angle grinders and plasma cutters.

Nicholas said he enjoyed the project, but it was the most stressful trailer he's ever built.

"Just as we thought the trailer was finished, we realised the rims for the tyres were wrong. Good thing we could get replacements from the local shop."

The trailer is now painted and ready for use on John's property.

John said he is incredibly impressed with the work that both Nicholas and Glenn produced.

"They did a great job. They're capacity to plan and implement projects of a high quality has improved immensely," he said.

When he's not running activities, John spends his time liaising with local businesses, gaining an understanding of the skills they're looking for in their employees.

He said this helps him design activities that support job seekers in becoming work ready.

"These projects help participants develop valuable skills, while giving them a sense of satisfaction through giving back to the community," he said.

"To see young people come from troubled backgrounds, with no confidence or employable skills, and build something of quality—they grow ten-feet tall.

"We want businesses to know what these people are capable of."



Images left to right: Nicholas Atkin with his custom-built trailer; Glenn Long stands on the loading ramp he built for the Charleville Show sheep dog trials.



# Blue trees spark community awareness of mental health



Over the past year, RESQ+ has been working with community groups across Central West Queensland to activate Blue Tree Project events.

The Blue Tree Project encourages regional and rural communities to paint a tree blue to spark conversations about mental health.

RESQ+ Supervisor and Project Coordinator Tim Sorensen has been involved in planning and facilitating events in Longreach, Barcaldine and Isisford.

In Longreach, he collaborated with Outback Mind Warriors to run a 5 km community walk and tree painting event, culminating in live music, markets and mental health awareness presentations.

“We helped with permit approvals, organising sponsors for the paint and drinking water, and set-up on the day,” said Tim.

Outback Mind Warriors Founder Paris Cox said the event drew a lot of attention and raised money for mental health support in the community.

“It was good to see people step forward and not shy away from sharing their experience with mental health,” she said.

Tim also helped coordinate an event in Barcaldine with Outback Futures, as part of the Barcaldine region’s Head Yakka initiative.

Andy Gore from Outback Futures said children from the local school joined council workers and members of the 60 & Better Program to transform a dead tree at the Blackall Road rest area.

“It’s great to see the Barcaldine community making a highly visible statement that they value mental health and wellbeing,” he said.

In June this year, Tim worked with Longreach Councillor Dale Bignell to organise an event in Isisford.

Tim said the event was one of his favourites.

“Isisford is a town of only 50–60 people and over half of them attended the event. It was an opportunity to show everyone that they’re there for one another,” he said.

With hundreds of blue trees across the state, the mental health message is being spread like never before.

Tim said RESQ+ is proud to sponsor and support these regional events. The team is committed to seeing community events back up and running after the COVID-19 lockdown.

“The Blue Tree Project is a way for people to come together—locals and tourists, young people and old—and have a chat about mental health,” Tim said.

“This is an issue that’s happening in our backyard and we need to talk about it.”

Community members come together to paint trees blue in support of mental health awareness.

# Keeping Wangkangurru language alive

Wangkangurru Elders and community members attended a workshop with a professional linguist in Birdsville. Together with Red Ridge (Interior Queensland) Ltd, RESQ+ helped support this ongoing work to share and preserve the Wangkangurru language.

Elders and language keepers Aulpunda 'Jean' Barr Crombie and Jim Crombie met linguist Eleanor McCall in Birdsville. Joining them by video conference was Elder Anpanuwa 'Joyce' Crombie.

Red Ridge Manager Louise Campbell said that Wangkangurru language was at risk of being lost, with only a few speakers remaining.

"Handing this knowledge on isn't always easy. Family and community need a chance to come together and focus on language," Louise said.

"Wangkangurru people of all ages attended the workshop with the Elders. It was an important opportunity to have conversations about culture, sharing language, stories and knowledge."

Some words had already been documented by Aulpunda's mother, working over a number of years. The workshop builds on this treasured legacy.

Over nine days, an open house allowed family and community members to drop in and participate in the project.

Historic records of photographs, maps, notes and academic papers were also archived and digitised. Oral recordings were made to preserve language, including sentences and cultural context.

The support of an expert in linguistics ensured the language was recorded accurately and in detail.

Following the workshop, a dictionary of 1500 words was prepared and printed, making it easier to share and use. This dictionary will be a living document, growing over time as more words are included.

RESQ+ Chief Executive Officer Chris Hamilton said that he was pleased to support another initiative led by the community.

"We recognise that preserving culture is very significant," he said.

"It's a high priority for Aboriginal communities and we're committed to providing support that's meaningful.

"The majority of the people who participated were RESQ+ job seekers, so we were happy to partner with Red Ridge to fund the activity."



Aulpunda 'Jean' Barr Crombie and Wankangurru Elder Jim Crombie look over historical records during the language workshop. Photos courtesy of Red Ridge (Interior Queensland) Ltd

"Handing this knowledge on isn't always easy. Family and community need a chance to come together and focus on language."

# Kirk Mitchell's first gallery exhibition impresses

Muruwai artist and Cunnamulla local Kirk Mitchell has continued to build a strong reputation for his work.

RESQ+ first engaged Kirk Mitchell through the Indigenous Artists in Residence (IAIR) project, funded by the National Indigenous Australians Agency (NIAA).

When funding ceased in 2020, RESQ+ employed Kirk, ensuring he could continue developing his skills and portfolio while also mentoring other emerging artists in the region.

In March this year, Kirk's first gallery showing took place at the Cunnamulla Fella Centre Art Gallery and Museum, sponsored by Paroo Shire Council. RESQ+ supplied canvases and paint, and helped Kirk set up an ABN so he could receive payment for any sales.

Kirk produced 27 pieces for the exhibition, selling six on opening night and most of his other works over the eight-week show.

RESQ+ Team Leader Jasmin Hickey has seen Kirk's art change over the years she has worked with him.

"Looking at his current work, you can see the style, precision and depth of the painting itself has matured," she said.

"Kirk's biggest and best paintings are landscapes. He's mastered mixing the right paints to bring out the colours of the country."

Since the exhibition, Kirk has been asked by Paroo Shire Council to exhibit in March every year, celebrating the beginning of the tourist season. He has also successfully auctioned a painting at an Isolated Childrens and Parents Association event for \$1000.

Jasmin said that the changes she's noticed in Kirk go further than his artwork.

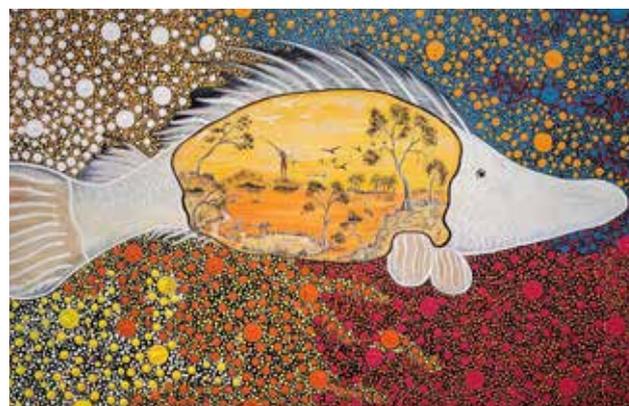
"He's quite a shy person. When I told him our idea for the gallery opening, he wasn't sure he could do it. But once he realised we were there to support him, he was right," she said.

"During the opening, a visitor asked Kirk to explain a painting to him. And I stood back and listened to him talk with a depth and passion that surprised me."

Kirk is now a permanent staff member with RESQ+, with a role as Artist in Residence and Activities Supervisor at the Cunnamulla depot.

"He has so much potential. He's talented, smart and observant," Jasmin said.

"With the support of RESQ+, he's been able to amplify his passion for painting and take that next step."



Images top to bottom: An original artwork by Muruwai artist Kirk Mitchell; gallery supporters, welcome signage on opening night, Kirk Mitchell with his mother, Roberta Thomas, at the gallery opening.

Kirk produced 27 pieces for the exhibition, selling six on opening night and most of his other works over the eight-week show.



# Military adventure camp brings art to young people



In June 2021, 24 high school students from Cunnamulla, Charleville, St George, Toowoomba, Kingaroy and Laidley gathered at Tinnenburra, a property outside Cunnamulla, for the annual Deadly Recruits Camp.

The camp is an initiative of the South West Hospital and Health Service's HOPE Program, supported by Defence Force Recruiting, Cunnamulla Corporation for Health (CACH), Queensland Police Service, RESQ+ and a range of other agencies.

Students spent a week under the mentorship of military personnel. They camped outdoors, ran military manoeuvres and learned navigation and bush survival skills.

Yarning circles with visiting Elders and community partners gave students an opportunity to share stories and learn about culture.

HOPE Program Manager Miriam Airey said the camp has become a proven and supported pathway to employment for young Indigenous people in the region.

"Students gain an understanding of the diverse career opportunities offered by the Australian Defence Force," she said.

"The camp helps young people develop skills and knowledge, and see a positive future for themselves."

This year, RESQ+ partnered with the Deadly Recruits Camp to run an art workshop.

Armed with a box of canvases and paints, RESQ+ Artist in Residence and Activities Supervisor Kirk Mitchell taught students how to mix paint and blend colours. Students were encouraged to create their own artwork as a way of expressing themselves.

RESQ+ Regional Manager Sue Bylett said students raved about the workshop.

"They absolutely loved doing art with Kirk. They wanted to keep painting long after the workshop had finished," she said.

"For many of them, art is a way of connecting with their culture and Country. One student was inspired to use dirt from the landscape in his paintings.

"By the end of the day, the students were calling Kirk 'Uncle'. It was a huge moment, one he was really proud of."



Images top to bottom: Students gather for a yarning circle; mixing paints with RESQ+ Artist in Residence and Activities Supervisor Kirk Mitchell; building friendships; talking with Elders. Photos courtesy of the HOPE Program.

# Wearing Western Queensland's art

Through Red Ridge the Label, Aulpunda 'Jean' Barr-Crombie and Anpanuwa 'Joyce' Crombie have brought their artwork to life in fashion.

The Wangkangurru and Yarluyandi Elders share the stories and culture of their Country in their art, now showcased on tops, skirts and dresses.

The label debuted in August 2020 and has already launched its second collection.

Developing the label to a commercial standard has brought the community together to build new skills.

Red Ridge (Interior Queensland) Ltd Manager Louise Campbell said that artists have learned new ways of working, from concept development to canvas.

"It's not easy to create artwork that will reproduce well on fabric," she said.

"The painting needs to repeat seamlessly when printed on large bolts. It's very different from gallery artwork."

The venture is led by Red Ridge and supported by RESQ+. Bringing the arts together with training is expected to create new, long-term opportunities for the community.

Production experts from Brisbane visited the region to coach and mentor the community. Together, the locals of Birdsville and Charleville have learned how to design garments, cut from patterns and sew commercial-quality garments.

The range is sold online through [redridgethelabel.com.au](https://redridgethelabel.com.au)

"The collection has sold really well," Louise said.

"People love the stories behind the clothing. The art represents Western Queensland beautifully—the landscapes and the culture."

As well as producing a retail range, the more than sixty-strong group has also created unique pieces. These were modelled on the catwalk at events in Charleville and Longreach.

RESQ+ Chief Executive Officer Chris Hamilton said he was really excited by the potential of Red Ridge the Label.

"It's the start of a new manufacturing industry in our region," he said.

"Right now, it's creating training opportunities. And soon, it may well create new jobs.

"We're proud to partner with Red Ridge and co-fund these projects. We believe in the benefits they offer to participants like Jean.

"The label is going from strength to strength. We always look forward to seeing what other creative initiatives Red Ridge has in store."



Photos courtesy of Red Ridge (Interior Queensland) Ltd

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"People love the stories behind the clothing. The art represents Western Queensland beautifully—the landscapes and the culture."

## Cooking traditional food to share knowledge

RESQ+ Employment Consultant Roberta Thomas loves making her famous johnny cakes for the community.

A johnny cake is an Aboriginal bush bread similar to damper, cooked on a grid iron over an open fire.

For NAIDOC Week 2020, Roberta gave a live demonstration, cooking this traditional recipe for Sacred Heart Parish School in Cunnamulla.

On the day of the demonstration, Roberta arrived early to start the fire. She explained that you need plenty of hot coals to cook a johnny cake.

She then showed students how to make the dough from flour and warm water, working and flattening it before dividing it into small portions. Each johnny cake was cooked on wire mesh over the fire.

For many of the students, this was their first time trying a johnny cake. Most found them plain but became more enthusiastic when butter and golden syrup were added.

Roberta gets many requests to demonstrate traditional cooking.

She said she loves doing these presentations because she knows the value of sharing knowledge with others.

“Growing up in Toowoomba, I didn’t know anything about traditional food,” she said.

“We never ate it or made it. I didn’t know what a johnny cake was.

“It was only when I moved back to Cunnamulla and met my partner that I learned these skills. His family taught me how to cook and connect with this part of my culture.

“Once I knew how, I practiced and practiced. I just love it.”



RESQ+ Employment Consultant Roberta Thomas demonstrates how to make johnny cakes during NAIDOC Week 2020.

## Creativity shines in costumes

The Meeting Place in Longreach became a costume design hub in early 2021. Community members came together to design and create unique costumes for the production of *Matya*.

The theatrical performance was produced by Central West Aboriginal Corporation in collaboration with Red Ridge (Interior Queensland) Ltd. It tells the story of the Sun and Moon through song, music, dance and costume.

The costume designers applied newly learned techniques to design artwork that could be printed on fabric. These artists also envisioned the final garment.

Designers and seamstresses worked together at The Meeting Place, the RESQ+ community activity centre at Longreach.

Among the many costumes created were six spirit garments, representing land, water, fire, wind, animals and love.

*Matya* was performed in Barcardine, as part of the Tree of Knowledge Festival.



The costumes in *Matya* were integral to the story of the Sun and Moon. Photos courtesy of Red Ridge (Interior Queensland) Ltd.



## Overcoming challenges to make a home in Charleville

**Paulina Martinez moved to Charleville last year, excited to start working for RESQ+ as an employment consultant.**

Originally from Mexico, Paulina travelled to Brisbane to learn English. She planned to stay for eighteen months.

Paulina said she later decided to study a Master's Degree in Brisbane, focusing on human resource management.

"I worked as a waitress, then a barista, then a cleaner. I studied full-time and I also worked full-time," she said

"It was hard, but I learned that our barriers are internal. Sometimes we are our own worst enemy."

Moving to Charleville was a challenging and exciting experience for Paulina.

"The rest of my life is in Mexico, so I moved to Charleville on my own. I had to build relationships again and find my place in the community," she said.

Paulina joined the local State Emergency Service (SES). She also got involved in sport, completing triathlons in Charleville, Quilpie and Brisbane.

But helping and supporting job seekers is her passion. Paulina has worked hard to become a Team Leader, supporting employment consultants and job seekers in Charleville and Mitchell.

"It's important for me to understand what a job seeker wants to achieve. To understand their culture and their needs, and help them build a pathway," she said.

"It's a big responsibility. There are lots of challenges that people face. And everyone has different personalities, skills and needs. I listen carefully and think deeply about how I can help.

"The culture in Outback Queensland is beautiful. And the community here is strong. I'm glad to be part of it."



## Embracing opportunity across regional Queensland

**After moving back to Longreach in 2012, Jade Smith was looking to get back into the workforce.**

"I'd been a stay at home mum for over 10 years. A friend told me that a newly established employment provider was looking for a receptionist," she said.

"I had the skills they needed and was hired on the spot. At that stage, RESQ+ was just finding their feet. They only had three full-time staff plus me."

Fast forward seven years and Jade is now the Operations Manager for both the Central West and South West Queensland regions. As a long-time employee, she considers herself part of the RESQ+ family.

Her role sees her providing overarching guidance on system requirements, policies and procedures, as well as negotiating host agreements with organisations taking on job seekers.

Jade said the most rewarding part of her job is supporting local businesses.

"It's so important to help businesses stay afloat in regions that have been affected by drought and COVID-19," she said.

"We can help connect employers with funding that's available through the department and our funding agreement. It's nice to be part of the give-back process."

Jade is now based in Yeppoon, working remotely to support her team back in regional Queensland.

"I love the staff I work with. You end up spending more time with your staff than your family—you develop a natural closeness. It's nice to have people you can trust and get along with."

Recently, RESQ+ supported Jade in her professional development, providing funding and time for her to complete a Diploma in business management and leadership. Building these skills is something Jade feels particularly proud of.

"I've had feedback from staff saying they can see the difference in my management style. Other staff now ask me for advice to improve their style," she said.

"You've got to be a person who has problem-solving skills to do this job.

"Priorities can change, and there can be challenges. But that's what keeps me excited and motivated."



## Taking time to listen

**RESQ+ Employment Consultant Atlantis Jones builds relationships with job seekers that are genuine and respectful. But she knows that trust takes time.**

Atlantis explained that she's worked for RESQ+ for five years.

"I've known some of my clients for as long as that," she said.

"I've seen them find work and now I'm continuing to support them in the first months of their new jobs."

Born and raised in Longreach, Atlantis cares about the people in her community. She's conscious that job seekers may also be facing mental health challenges.

"I want people to feel comfortable talking to me, because people often have things they need to get off their chest," she said.

"People can feel anxious about applying for a job or starting work at a new place."

Atlantis is keen to find new activities that can help them.

"Everyone at RESQ+ is really understanding and down-to-earth. We listen to job seekers and create tailored activities that match what they need and what they're interested in.

"We want to help people get involved."



## Finding new ways to support job seekers

**Sue Bylett has always been passionate about creating opportunities in remote Australian communities.**

"I studied political science, majoring in Indigenous studies and community development," she said.

"I guess I've always wanted to help Indigenous Australians access the same employment opportunities as everyone else, with the same opportunities to succeed."

After 30 years living in Brisbane, an opportunity to use these professional skills in regional Queensland came her way.

"I was asked if I wanted to apply for a job delivering the Community Development Program in Charleville. I interviewed and got the job as Regional Manager for Central West Queensland with RESQ+," she said.

Sue started her role in March 2020, right before the first COVID-19 outbreak. Since then, she's been involved in everything from community engagement to problem-solving.

In particular, she has been instrumental in instigating the Work Ready program—a support service that helps job seekers overcome barriers to employment.

"We've connected with Queensland Health and other organisations to provide support for different issues, from drug addiction through to a lack of confidence," she said.

"It's not just about being an employment service. You need to look at healing people on all levels. Once someone has the right mindset, they'll be able to get a job and be part of their community."

Sue said she loves connecting with people and making a difference in their lives.

"It's not about me, it's about them. It's about encouraging job seekers to do the things they want and helping them achieve them."

The move to Charleville has been everything Sue expected and more.

"I like being on the road, with my feet in the dust. And getting a feel of what's happening out there," she said.

"I love the tight-knit community and how everyone cares about each other. It's like one big family."



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