

mar

storylines

July 2026

Issue Number 001

**Stories of leadership,
creativity and community
from across Australia**

BUILDING DIGITAL FUTURES ON COUNTRY

Closing the gap between
Technology skills and access

CONNEXIONS EXPANDS GTO STATUS

SURF. STORY. CULTURE

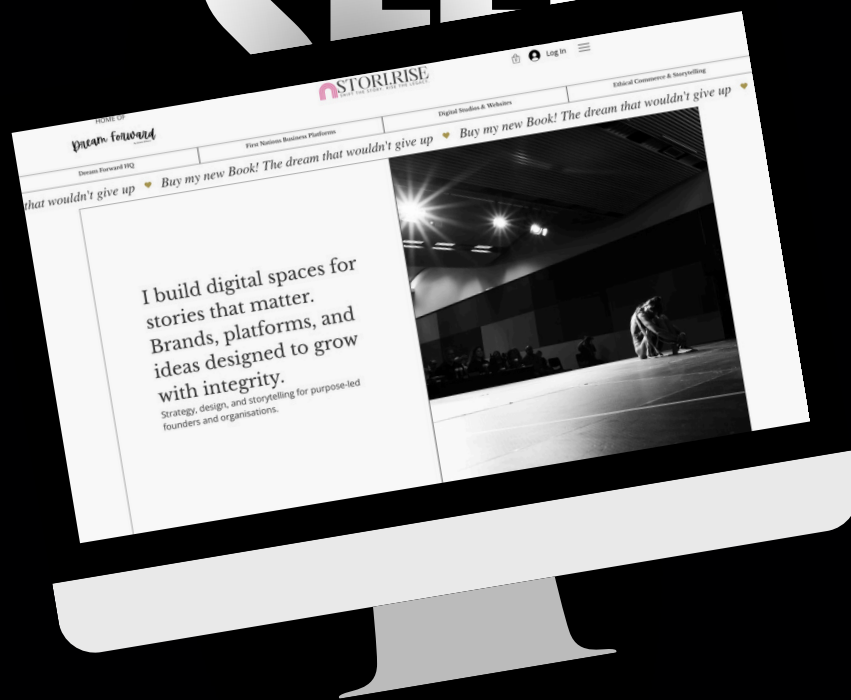
More than a surfwear brand

A WIN YEARS IN THE MAKING

Carol Chong goes PRO

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STORIES THAT DESERVE TO BE SEEN



Stori.Rise helps purpose-driven businesses, organisations and community initiatives build their digital presence through websites, branding, storytelling and strategic content.



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Editors Note

Welcome to the first edition of MAR Storylines.

This magazine was created from a belief that stories have the power to create opportunity.

Across Australia, there are individuals with dreams they want to pursue, community groups creating meaningful impact and organisations working hard to make a difference. Too often, the challenge is not the lack of passion or vision, but the lack of visibility, support and resources needed to take the next step.

MAR Storylines exists to help change that.

Through storytelling, advertising partnerships and community support, this magazine aims to do more than share stories. It aims to create opportunities.

Opportunities for people to be seen. Opportunities for businesses to connect with communities. Opportunities for projects and ideas to grow.

MAR Storylines operates a community funding model. Each time the Community Fund reaches \$2,500, a \$1,000 individual grant and a \$1,000 community grant

are awarded, with the remaining \$500 reinvested into the magazine to support future growth and future funding rounds.

Whether that support helps someone launch an idea, attend an event, deliver a community project, access training or take the next step towards a goal, the intention is simple: to invest back into the people and communities that inspire these pages.

This first edition is the beginning of that journey.

To our readers, contributors, advertisers and supporters, thank you for believing in the power of stories and the impact they can create when they are shared.

Together, we are building something bigger than a magazine.

We are building a platform that celebrates people, strengthens communities and helps turn ideas into opportunities.

Natalie Williams

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF



For Mar

This magazine is named after my grandmother, Doreen Rye Wust (née Smith), who we simply called Mar.

Her influence continues to guide much of what I do today.

Mar was also the sister of the late Aunty Betty McMahon, whose legacy remains deeply respected by many.

Naming this magazine after my grandmother felt right. It keeps her close to the work, the purpose and the vision behind every edition.

This one is for Mar.

MORE THAN A MAGAZINE

readmar.com.au

"I wanted to create more than a magazine. I wanted to create a platform that celebrates community, shares opportunities and gives back to the people whose stories deserve to be heard."

– Natalie, Founder, MAR Storylines

Over the years, I have had the opportunity to work with First Nations communities, businesses, organisations and individuals doing incredible things.

I have met people creating opportunities for young people, building businesses from the ground up, preserving culture, supporting community and finding solutions to challenges that often receive little attention outside the communities they directly impact.

One thing I have learned is that there is no shortage of good ideas.

There is no shortage of people willing to put in the work. What is often missing is visibility.

Many of the people creating positive change are too busy doing the work to tell their story. Others simply do not have access to platforms that can help them reach a broader audience. As a result, some of the most inspiring stories in our communities are never heard beyond the people closest to them.

MAR Storylines was created to help change that.



As a storyteller, digital creator and business owner, I wanted to use the skills I have developed over the years in a way that gives back to community. For me, that starts with creating a platform where stories can be shared, celebrated and preserved.

Stories have the power to connect people. They introduce us to new ideas, new opportunities and new perspectives.

They help us understand each other and remind us that positive change is happening every day in communities across Australia. That is the reason this magazine exists.

The name MAR comes from my grandmother, who we simply called Mar.

She taught me the importance of generosity and looking out for others.

While this magazine is focused on storytelling, those values sit quietly at the heart of everything it aims to achieve.

From the beginning, I knew I wanted MAR Storylines to be more than a magazine.

I wanted it to create opportunities as well as conversations.

I wanted it to actively contribute to the communities and people whose stories fill these pages.

That vision led to the creation of the MAR Storylines Community Fund.

As soon as the Community Fund reaches \$2,500, applications will open for both an individual grant and a community grant.

A total of \$1,000 will be awarded to an individual, \$1,000 will be awarded to a community, group, organisation or project, and the remaining \$500 will be reinvested into the magazine to support future growth and future funding rounds.

Importantly, the decision will not rest solely with a panel or assessment committee.

Applicants will have the opportunity to share their story, explain what they are working towards and outline how the funding would support their goals.

EVERY \$2,500 RAISED CREATES

\$1,000 Individual Grant

\$1,000 Community Grant

\$500 Reinvested Into MAR

Community will then have fourteen days to vote.

The projects and people receiving support will be chosen by the people who read the stories, understand the impact and believe in the vision being shared.

Communities understand their own strengths, challenges and opportunities better than anyone. They see the work happening on the ground every day.

They know which initiatives are creating impact and which ideas have the potential to grow into something bigger.

The goal is not to replace existing funding opportunities. Grants and funding programs play an important role across Australia and many organisations rely on them.

Instead, MAR Storylines aims to create an additional pathway. One that starts with storytelling and grows through community support.

The more businesses, organisations and readers

support the magazine, the faster the Community Fund grows.

Every advertisement helps create opportunities for others.

Every edition contributes towards the next funding milestone.

Every story shared has the potential to connect someone with an opportunity they may never have otherwise discovered.

This first edition is only the beginning.

My hope is that MAR Storylines becomes a place where people can discover inspiring stories, learn about opportunities and feel connected to the incredible work happening in First Nations Communities and beyond.

Most importantly, I hope it becomes a platform that not only tells stories, but helps create new ones.

That community voice is one of the most important parts of the model.



DREAM BIG. DREAM BOLD. DREAM FORWARD

Dream Weavers supports Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people to explore their strengths, build confidence and create pathways towards their future.

Delivered in schools and communities, the program connects students with culture, education, employment and leadership opportunities through engaging workshops, mentoring and real-world experiences.

CONNECT - STRENGTHENING CULTURAL IDENTITY AND BELONGING.

LEARN - EXPLORING PATHWAYS INTO EDUCATION, TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT.

LEAD - BUILDING CONFIDENCE, RESILIENCE AND FUTURE LEADERS.



DREAM WEAVERS

Indigenous Girls Regional Youth Project

Nurturing Potential, Celebrating Culture



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LAND ON HEART FOUNDATION

"For us, digital literacy isn't just about teaching technical skills. It's about empowerment, self-determination, and creating opportunities in a way that aligns with culture and community values."

Lisa Sarago, Founder, Land on Heart Foundation



Building Digital Futures on Country



Pictured: Lisa Sarago, Founder, Land on Heart Foundation



Across Australia, First Nations communities have always been innovators.

Long before technology became part of everyday life, First Nations Peoples were creating sophisticated systems of knowledge, trade, communication and connection.

Innovation is not new to us. What is changing is the way those strengths are being carried into the future.

For Bundaburra Yidinji and Western Yalanji woman Lisa Sarago, that future includes ensuring First Nations Peoples have every opportunity to participate, lead and thrive in the digital economy.

As Founder of Land on Heart Foundation, Lisa has dedicated her work to closing the digital divide and creating pathways for First Nations communities to access the opportunities technology can provide.

When she first entered the technology sector, she saw something many others overlooked.

She saw opportunity. But she also saw a gap.

A gap between the growing demand for technology skills and the access many First Nations Communities had to the training, confidence and support needed to participate.

“Entering the tech sector, I quickly recognised a significant gap between the potential opportunities for employment and economic growth available to First Nations Peoples and communities, and their current access to them,” Lisa says.

For communities living on Country, particularly in remote and regional Australia, technology has the power to remove barriers that geography once created.

It can open doors to education, employment and entrepreneurship without requiring people to leave community or culture behind.

Yet before those opportunities can be realised, access and capability must come first.

For many First Nations Communities, these are still significant challenges.

Rather than accepting those barriers, Land on Heart Foundation is working alongside communities to overcome them.

At the heart of the Foundation's approach is a simple but powerful principle: listen first.

Programs are not designed in boardrooms and delivered to communities. They are shaped through conversations with Elders, community leaders and local organisations. They are built on relationships, trust and respect.

“We don’t walk into communities with a pre-designed solution,” Lisa explains.

“We spend time building relationships, speaking with Elders, local leaders and community members to understand what they actually want and need. Programs are co-designed with the community, not delivered to them.”

For Lisa, digital literacy is about far more than learning how to use technology.
It is about empowerment.

It is about creating opportunities that align with culture, community values and aspirations.
It is about self-determination.

The Foundation also recognises that creating pathways for First Nations Peoples requires more than preparing individuals for the technology sector. The sector itself must be ready to welcome First Nations talent.

Through cultural capability initiatives, Land on Heart Foundation works with organisations to help create workplaces that are culturally safe, supportive and capable of nurturing long-term careers.

Because genuine inclusion is not about opening a door. It is about making sure people are welcomed when they walk through it.

One of the Foundation's most important areas of work is Indigenous Data Sovereignty, helping communities build capability in data governance, data literacy and strategic decision-making.

This work supports communities to tell their own stories, shape their own futures and make decisions based on their own strengths, priorities and aspirations.

It is another step towards ensuring First Nations Communities are not simply included in conversations about the future, but actively leading them.
Looking ahead, Lisa's vision is both ambitious and deeply grounded.

She sees a future where First Nations-led technology skills hubs exist across Australia. Places where people can learn, innovate and build careers on Country.

Places where culture and technology sit side by side.

Places where young people can see a future in technology without leaving behind who they are.

Most importantly, she sees a future where First Nations Peoples are not viewed as participants in the digital economy, but as leaders, creators and innovators within it.

It is a vision built on possibility.

A vision built on community.

And a reminder that when opportunity is matched with access, capability and belief, extraordinary things can happen.

To learn more about Land on Heart Foundation and its work, visit landonheartfoundation.com.



BUILD YOUR FUTURE WORKFORCE

Finding the right apprentice or trainee is only the beginning.

Connexions GTO partners with businesses to recruit, employ and support apprentices and trainees, helping create stronger workforces and long-term employment outcomes.

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EMPLOY

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SUPPORT

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Whether you're employing your first apprentice or expanding your workforce
Connexions GTO is here to help.

**Creating pathways.
Building workforces.
Strengthening
futures.**

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CONNEXIONS
GROUP TRAINING ORGANISATION

CREATING PATHWAYS:

CONNEXIONS EXPANDS OPPORTUNITIES THROUGH NEW GROUP TRAINING ORGANISATION STATUS

Connecting people, opportunity and community through meaningful employment pathways.

"Employment is more than a job. It's confidence, stability, opportunity and the chance to build a future. Becoming a GTO allows us to walk alongside both employers and participants to make that future possible."

Lani Blanco-Francis, CEO, Connexions International

For years, Connexions has worked alongside Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, businesses and organisations to create meaningful pathways into employment, education and economic participation.

Now, the organisation is taking that commitment one step further.

Connexions has officially become a registered Group Training Organisation (GTO) in New South Wales, creating new opportunities for employers, apprentices and trainees across the state while ensuring culturally safe support remains at the centre of the journey.

For CEO, Lani Blanco-Francis, becoming a GTO is more than a new service offering. It is about removing barriers and creating practical pathways that help people succeed.

"We know that employment can change lives, but we also know that many employers need support to take on apprentices and trainees, while many young people need guidance to navigate the workplace successfully. Becoming a GTO allows us to provide that support from both sides."

As a GTO, Connexions employs apprentices and trainees directly before placing them with host employers.

This model reduces administrative and compliance responsibilities for businesses while ensuring participants receive ongoing mentoring, pastoral care and workplace support throughout their employment journey.

The new status strengthens Connexions' ability to work across

industries including business administration, community services, construction, trades and emerging sectors where workforce shortages continue to impact employers.

Importantly, the organisation brings a First Nations-led approach to workforce development.

While apprenticeship and traineeship opportunities exist across Australia, many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples continue to face challenges accessing culturally safe employment pathways and sustained workplace support.

Connexions believes strong relationships, community connection and ongoing mentorship are key to improving long-term outcomes.

The organisation's approach focuses on supporting the whole person, recognising that successful

Creating culturally safe pathways that empower Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples to thrive in work and life.



Pictured: Lani Blanco-Francis,
CEO, Corporate Connexions
International

employment outcomes are often built through trust, confidence and connection.

For employers, the benefits are equally significant. Businesses gain access to a streamlined employment model, ongoing support from an experienced team and the opportunity to contribute to developing a stronger, more diverse workforce.

As workforce challenges continue across regional and metropolitan New South Wales, Connexions sees its role as helping bridge the gap between opportunity and participation.

The organisation is already working with businesses, government agencies, community organisations and industry partners to identify apprenticeship and traineeship opportunities that can create lasting impact for both employers and participants.

For Connexions, becoming a GTO is not the destination. It is another step in a much bigger journey.

A journey focused on creating opportunities, strengthening communities and ensuring more people have the support they need to build meaningful careers and brighter futures.

To learn more about Connexions and its work, visit connexions.net.au.

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- ✓ First Nations Owned & Operated
- ✓ Proven Project Delivery





FAST TEN

WITH EMILY BARNARD

CEO, SHE BURNS

Follow Emily @Sheburns.co

Pictured: Emily Barnard, CEO, She Burns

Emily Barnard is a Kamilaroi woman and founder of SheBurns, a business creating hand-poured soy candles, wax melts and home fragrances designed to bring a little calm, comfort and self-care into everyday life.

Through SheBurns, Emily encourages people to slow down, unwind and create meaningful moments of comfort in their homes and daily routines.

QUESTION 1: Who would you love to have a yarn with, past or present?

Taylor Swift

QUESTION 2: What's your favourite place to spend time?

At the beach or anywhere outside.

QUESTION 3: Who is your favourite First Nations Singer / Group?

Barkaa

QUESTION 4: What's your go-to feed after a long day?

Steak and fries.

QUESTION 5: What's an event or celebration you look forward to every year?

Christmas Eve.

QUESTION 6: What's something from your childhood you'll never forget?

Being able to walk over to my grandparents' house whenever I wanted to see them.

QUESTION 7: Which First Nations Person inspires you most?

My mother.

QUESTION 8: What's your number one talent?

To see the light in all situations.

QUESTION 9: What's something you're passionate about outside of work?

Making time for friends and family.

QUESTION 10: What is your favourite quote?

"Everything you've ever wanted is on the other side of fear." — George Addair



FAST TEN

WITH ANN-MAREE LONG
CO-FOUNDER OF SANDPOPPY WEAVING

Follow Ann-Maree@sandpoppyweaving

Pictured: Ann-Maree Long, Co-Founder of Sandpoppy Weaving

Ann-Maree Long is a Badjala, Woppaburra and Torres Strait Islander woman and co-founder of Sandpoppy Weaving, a small business she runs alongside her mum, Aunty Barb.

A self-described queer neurospicy yeeran (woman), Ann-Maree is passionate about social justice, creativity and creating equal opportunities for community.

Having studied dance and journalism and completed the Yanalangami Program with Tranby, she brings culture, connection and advocacy into everything she does.

Ann-Maree credits the opportunities she has today to the strong Matriarchs who came before her and says, "because of them, we can."

QUESTION 1: Who would you love to have a yarn with, past or present?

Uncle Archie Roach ❤️

QUESTION 2: What's your favourite place to spend time?

On Country weaving with mum - saltwater healing, belly laughs, and listening to the bird songs

QUESTION 3: Who is your favourite First Nations Singer / Group?

Emily Wurramara, Miss Kaninna, Electric Fields, King Stingray, Barkaa and Uncle Charlie Roach! So hard to stop there - our musicians are too deadly...

QUESTION 4: What's your go-to feed after a long day?

Mac & Cheese for real - some things never change

QUESTION 5: What's an event or celebration you look forward to every year?

The Queer Ball on Bundjalung Country! 🌈

QUESTION 6: What's something from your childhood you'll never forget?

Meeting my best friend behind the fence - so grateful that her dog ate my soccer ball, and resulted in a 25 year friendship to date. I was her celebrant for her wedding this year in the same backyard, such a special full circle moment!

QUESTION 7: Which First Nations Person inspires you most?

My deadly mum Aunty Barb - she's my best friend, partner in power, and amazing ma. I count my lucky Diray's (stars) every day for her.

QUESTION 8: What's your number one talent?

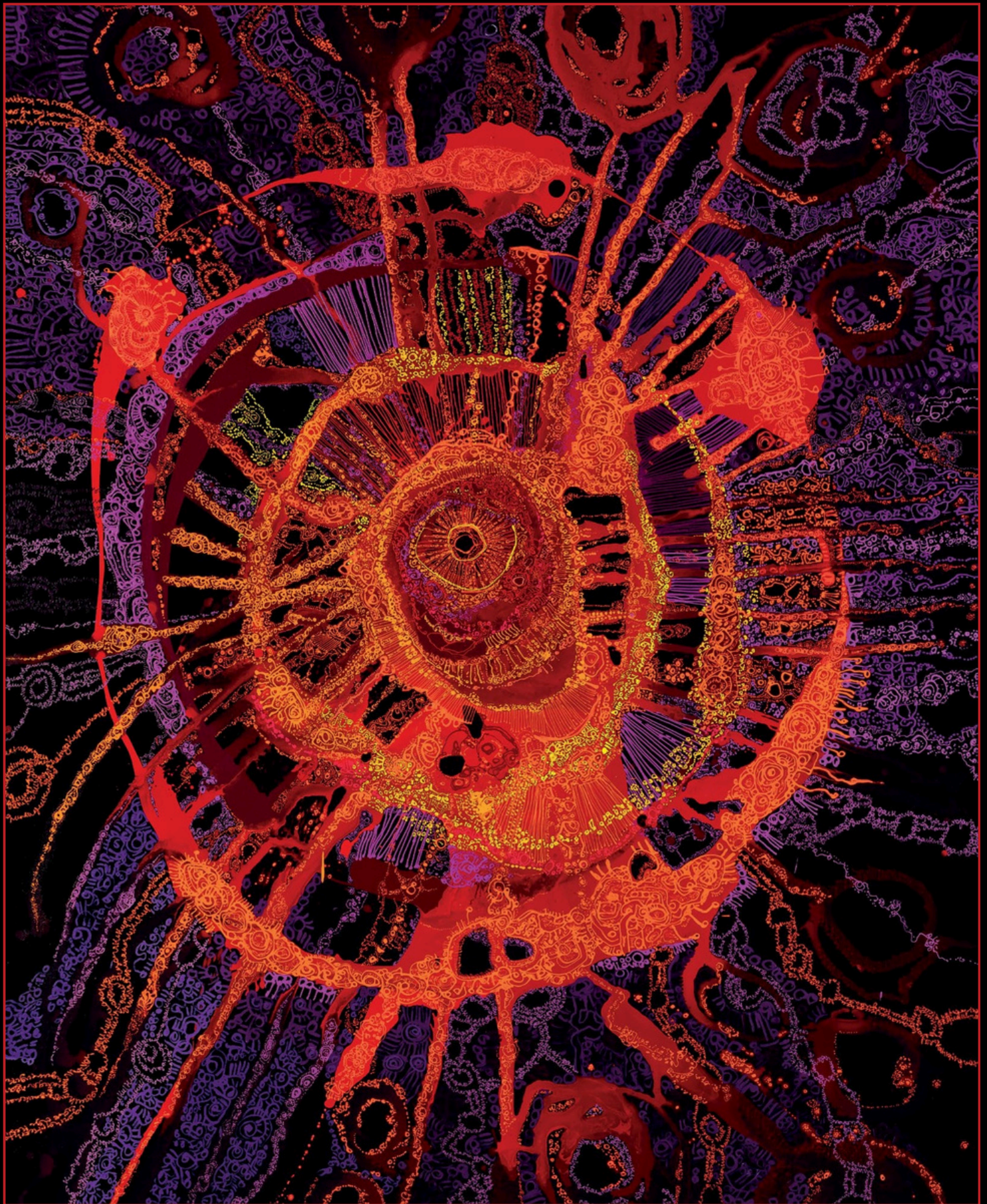
Rapping Dance Wiv Me by Dizzee Rascal at any chance I get

QUESTION 9: What's something you're passionate about outside of work?

Rapping Dance Wiv Me by Dizzee Rascal at any chance I get

QUESTION 10: What is your favourite quote?

"You miss 100% of the shots you don't take"



NAIDOC
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50 YEARS
DEADLY
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***Paralpi* by Zaachariaha Fielding**

Paralpi extends Zaachariaha's acclaimed *Inma* series and reflects a deeply cultural and immersive narrative grounded in Country. The artwork depicts the sounds of *Paralpi*, a significant place just outside Mimili on the eastern APY Lands in South Australia. As Zaachariaha describes, *Paralpi* is a place where people come to embrace and celebrate children, where they are taught by Elders to move and mimic their Clan emblem — for Mimili, this being the maku (witchetty grub).

#NAIDOC2026 #FIFTYYEARSDEADLY #NAIDOCWEEK

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Aboriginal Flag
designed by Mr
Harold Thomas.



Torres Strait Islander Flag
reproduced by kind permission of
the Torres Strait Island Regional
Council, designed by the late Mr
Bernard Namok.



A WIN YEARS IN THE MAKING

Pictured: Carol Chong, Professional Figure Athlete

MORE THAN A PRO CARD: CAROL CHONG'S JOURNEY OF PERSISTENCE, PRIDE AND POSSIBILITY

"I want other First Nations women to see what's possible. The journey wasn't easy and there were plenty of disappointments along the way, but if you keep showing up, keep believing and keep working hard, you never know where it might lead." –

Carol Chong

Carol Chong is a proud First Nations woman with connections to Muluridji Country through her mother's family in Mareeba and Myola Country, while her father's family traces their roots to Wakaman and Kunjen Country, spanning Tate River, Chillagoe and Kowanyama in the Gulf of Carpentaria. Those connections to family, Country and community remain at the heart of everything she does, including her journey to becoming a professional natural bodybuilder.

When Carol Chong stepped onto the stage at the INBA Australia Nationals in Brisbane, she wasn't just competing for a title.

She was carrying years of hard work, sacrifice, setbacks and determination.

Standing proudly with the Aboriginal flag after being awarded her Professional National Bodybuilding Association (PNBA) Elite Pro status, Carol became one of Far North Queensland's few First Nations women to achieve professional status in natural bodybuilding.

But for her, the achievement represents far more than a trophy, medal or pro card.

It represents what can happen when you refuse to give up on yourself.



"The win meant the world to me," Carol says. "I've worked so hard for a lot of years."

That journey wasn't quick and it certainly wasn't easy.

For seven years, Carol has dedicated herself to the sport of bodybuilding, training consistently at Furious Fitness Mareeba and steadily working her way through the amateur ranks.

Along the way came countless early mornings, demanding training sessions, strict nutrition plans and moments where the goal seemed further away than ever.

Like many athletes, there were disappointments.

There were competitions that didn't go to plan, placings that fell short of expectations and moments where the path forward required more patience than certainty.

But each setback became another reason to keep going.

Rather than allowing disappointment to define her journey, Carol used it to fuel her determination.

"I've just been working my way through the categories and continuing to improve," she says.

That persistence paid off in Brisbane, where Carol claimed first place in the Figures Masters category, earning the professional status she had spent years chasing.

She also secured second place in both the Figures Classic and Figures Tall Open divisions, proving her



place among some of the country's best natural athletes.

Yet what makes Carol's achievement truly special is not what happened on stage.

It's what she hopes happens next.

As a proud First Nations woman, Carol sees her success as an opportunity to inspire others within community to believe in themselves, prioritise their health and pursue goals that may feel out of reach.

She hopes her story shows other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women that success doesn't belong to someone else.

It belongs to those willing to keep showing up. "I want to inspire and motivate my mob," Carol says.

**Through training,
she found
confidence, purpose
and a belief in her
own potential.
Today, she hopes
others can see that
same possibility
within themselves.**



Pictured: Carol Chong,
Professional Figure Athlete

For Carol, bodybuilding began as a fitness journey.
What she discovered was something much deeper.

Through training, she found confidence, purpose and
a belief in her own potential. Today, she hopes others
can see that same possibility within themselves.

Whether that means stepping into a gym for the first
time, committing to a healthier lifestyle or chasing a
dream that seems impossible, Carol wants people to
understand that every achievement starts with a
single decision to begin.

Years ago, Carol was simply focused on becoming
healthier and stronger.

Today, she stands as a professional athlete.

And for the next generation of First Nations women
watching from the sidelines, her story is a powerful
reminder that extraordinary achievements are built
through ordinary acts of consistency, courage and
belief.

Because sometimes the greatest victory isn't winning
a title.

It's proving to yourself that you were capable of far
more than you ever imagined.



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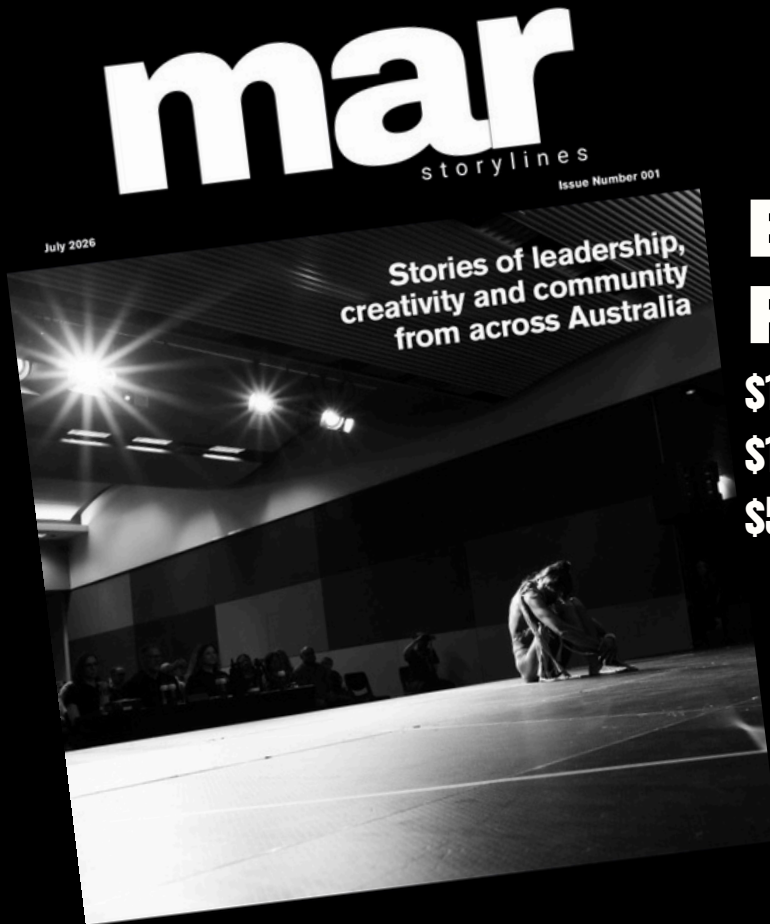
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Ozie Pipe

SURF, STORY, CULTURE

How Leon Brown is sharing culture,
strengthening community and creating
connection through Ozie Pipe Dreaming



MORE THAN SURFWEAR: LEON BROWN'S JOURNEY OF CULTURE, COMMUNITY AND CONNECTION

For Leon Brown, Ozie Pipe Dreaming was never just about creating a surfwear brand.

It was about creating something that carried culture.

A proud Walbunja man from the Wreck Bay community on the NSW South Coast, Leon has spent much of his life connected to Country, community and the ocean.

Those connections continue to guide everything he does today, from his work in community to the growing First Nations-owned surfwear brand he founded.

Known traditionally as Bianji Bunyarinarin, Leon's vision for Ozie Pipe Dreaming was born from a simple but powerful idea, to create a space where Aboriginal culture, storytelling and surfing could come together in an authentic and meaningful way.

"Country, Culture and Community" are more than words for Leon. They are the foundation of the brand and the values that shape every decision he makes.

"Everything starts with connection," Leon says.

"Connection to Country,

connection to community and connection to each other."

That philosophy can be seen throughout Ozie Pipe Dreaming product range, a collection that pays tribute to where the journey began.

From hoodies and crew neck jumpers to backpacks and water bottles, each piece reflects a deeper story, one grounded in respect for Mother Earth and the enduring relationship Aboriginal people have with land, sea and sky.

Unisex Zip Hood

\$120.50



Surfing has long been woven into Australia's identity, but Leon believes there is also an opportunity to deepen understanding of the connection First Nations people have always held with rivers, oceans and coastal Country.



Pictured: Leon Brown, Founder, Ozie Pipe Dreaming



But for Leon, the greatest achievement isn't the products.

It's the opportunity to share culture with others.

Through Ozie Pipe Dreaming, Leon creates opportunities for people from all walks of life to engage with First Nations culture in a genuine way.

Whether someone is purchasing a piece of apparel, learning about the stories behind the designs or connecting through surfing, Leon hopes they leave with a greater appreciation for the world's oldest living culture.

Through Ozie Pipe Dreaming, he is helping tell those stories.

His passion for creating positive change extends beyond the brand itself.

As Founder and Managing Director of Guramaa Global Indigenous Corporation, Leon continues to champion opportunities for community, culture and economic empowerment, ensuring First Nations voices are heard and celebrated.

Those who know Leon often speak first about his generosity.

His willingness to support others, create opportunities and bring people together sits at the heart of everything he does.

Success for Leon isn't measured by sales or recognition. It's measured by impact, the people supported, the stories shared and the cultural connections strengthened along the way.

That big heart is what makes Ozie Pipe Dreaming so much more than a clothing label.

It is a reflection of one man's commitment to Country, culture and community.

A journey built on respect.

A journey built on connection.

And a journey that invites others to walk alongside him.

To learn more about Ozie Pipe Dreaming, visit oziepipe403.com.au



Ozie Pipe



Hooded Tee
\$75.50





Ozie Pipe



String Bikini
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storylines



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