



Lived experience of wellness: photovoice and learning conversations in an Aboriginal community

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A holistic approach to wellness places greater emphasis on spirituality, culture, and identity of individuals, family and community than traditional clinical models of health and illness.

The participatory action research project into the lived experience of wellness within the Aboriginal community of Condobolin NSW was supported by the Memorandum of Understanding between the Wiradjuri Condobolin Corporation and Charles Sturt University who share a vision of wellbeing for Aboriginal people of the inland communities we each serve.

The aim of the study was to conduct cooperative, culturally-appropriate, community supported research to increase knowledge and understanding of what helps create positive change that benefits the lives of Aboriginal people and their experience of living in Condobolin. Elders and community representatives were actively engaged in developing the research project, which involved photovoice and learning conversation methods of enquiry. The questions explored were: 1) What is wellness and a good life for Aboriginal people in this community?, 2) Why do some Aboriginal people experience wellness and a good life in this community while others do not?; and 3) How could wellness and a good life be experienced by more Aboriginal people in this community?

Photographs were taken of places and objects around the town that were thought to affect the wellness of Aboriginal people. Elders and a range of community groups came together in a series of learning conversations in which the photographs were discussed and key themes identified as being associated with wellness in the community. Further photographs were suggested and discussed in an iterative manner. Key themes identified included:

- Identity—link in the young people
- Reclaiming history—returning to culture
- Education, work and skills—positive engagement.

The project was unique in that it involved the community in ethical and practical research; identified strategies that could help close the gap in Indigenous disadvantage; and has some transferability to the wider Wiradjuri Nation and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population of other regions of Australia.