

The Write Road to mental health and wellbeing—the power of story to shape confidence, courage, identity and destiny

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A woman walks into a wooden hall in a small settlement 200 kms from anywhere—bent, huddled over her walking stick, leaning on her husband. Two writing workshops later, she leaves three inches taller, swinging her walking stick.

What happened in those few hours?

The Write Road is a creative initiative that takes writing and communications workshops to people in remote areas. The project makes skills and resources that are readily available to urbanised Australians accessible to the bush and beyond.

Since May, we have partnered with a range of community services to deliver writing workshops to more than 200 people, mostly in NSW's far west.

The Write Road was founded on the belief that to be well, humans must create. Most people long to tell a story—family histories, community anthologies, the sharing of wisdom learned. However, phenomenal numbers of people are immobilised about how and where to start—and this adds to burdens of stress.

Research shows creative expression is vital to wellbeing. Yet even though everyone encountered by *The Write Road* longs to write—most feel that to do so would be 'wasting time'.

On the surface, *The Write Road* offers writing workshops. In fact, the project's currency is optimism and courage.

The processes delivered assist people to clarify their thoughts, solve problems and establish clear pathways for the way forward as they pursue life, family and work goals.

The project works on the principle that there are many ways to tell the same story—it's your story and you can tell it any way you like: *this is true power*.

The workshops develop confidence and open expression in individuals, reinvigorate often fractured social networks and strengthen community connections.

A young Indigenous woman, seven months pregnant and in need of a great deal of support, attended a creative journaling workshop. At the end of the session, she said: "I would like to read my writing." And so she exacted the attention of seven white women and shared her private journey (please, picture that scene). Later that week, she said to her support worker: "I have never felt as calm as I have since that workshop."

A presentation about *The Write Road* would:

- outline the project—philosophy, documented experience, outcomes
- highlight examples—people have gone to astonishing lengths to attend these workshops and/or achieved life-changing results
- reference available research
- showcase the breathtaking quality of writing projects newly underway
- give conference participants a ‘taster’—two brief exercises
- aim to illuminate the importance of creative expression to mental health and wellbeing.

The Write Road is a proactive mental health strategy.

Human beings must create to be well.

We must witness others.

We must share our stories.

The health of remote communities depends on it.