

Yuwa—Art for wellness, welcome and way-finding

Alicia Michalanney¹, Kim Gibson²

¹WA Country Health Service—Goldfields, ²Curtin University and independent consultant

Abstract

The use of art to improve health and healing environments in our hospitals is widely demonstrated. This case study explored the use of art in hospital redevelopment to achieve culturally appropriate, culturally safe and ultimately culturally effective design that positively impacts on the healing environment, and on patients and the broader hospital community.

It highlighted the value of community consultation and engagement guiding art creation and purpose consistent with the needs of the local community.

In the rural setting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are a significant part of the community and account for a disproportionately high number of patients through the hospital doors. The important part that art plays in aboriginal culture and social fabric means that it can contribute even more to the welcome of these patients into the unfamiliar hospital environment.

In this project, consultation with community groups identified that use of natural light, access to outdoor sitting areas, use of plants that are indigenous to the region, use of art and imagery, especially aboriginal art that was by local artists, would all assist greatly in helping aboriginal clients feel more comfortable accessing health services. It was also discussed that for many aboriginal clients in the region English was a second language and that traditionally characteristics of the land were used for way-finding rather than signs and writing (even if written in language).

This critical feedback guided the health service to work with a group of local artists forming a community of arts and health practice for the life of the project and beyond. Themes representative of the region reflect safety, wellness and welcome drawing on local aboriginal imagery, motifs and stories. These were incorporated in sculptures, exterior decorative design, paintings and most importantly into way finding vinyl designs for the floors throughout the building. The sense of welcome was further enhanced by continuing imagery across other media such as t-shirts of staff members, pamphlets and banners.

This project was funded by the WA Country Health Service (WACHS) through its capital redevelopment program and started as part of the Percent for Art Scheme. However, it was so successful that the WACHS Goldfields continued its investment in arts and health beyond the initial required outlay implementing a consistent community and artist engagement strategy across all redevelopment work and beyond the initial campus to other areas of the service. Art and health practice is now integral to campus redevelopment and part of hospital life.

Using the term Aboriginal: Within Western Australia, the term Aboriginal is used in preference to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, in recognition that Aboriginal people are the original inhabitants of Western Australia. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander may be referred to in the national context and Indigenous may be referred to in the international context. No disrespect is intended to our Torres Strait Islander colleagues and community.

Introduction

The use of art to improve health and healing environments in our hospitals is widely demonstrated. Arts and Health is now internationally recognised as an important part of healthcare delivery. The publication in 2014 of a National Arts and Health Framework was acknowledged by Australian, state and territory governments of the important role of arts practice in improving both patient experience and health outcomes⁽¹⁾.

The framework cites the growing body of evidence that arts and health activity can promote health and wellbeing for all community members noting that the effects can be achieved through experiencing the arts as an artist or creative, as a participant or audience member and in experiencing the environment affected or provided by artwork.

Visual art has been displayed in hospitals for centuries and is just one way that the arts have been employed to improve healing environments. A 2016 report into the use of the arts to improve health and healing in WA hospitals found visual art to be the most likely art form to be used, with art on the walls reported by every hospital across the state⁽²⁾.

Incorporating good design and artwork into the way hospitals and their surrounds are designed has been proven to impact both patient and staff experience and wellbeing as well as creating a shared sense of ownership of the hospital environment. Evaluation of Kings Fund Enhance the Healing Environment Programs in the UK found that benefits went beyond the physical environment to professional development of team members and development of innovative patient and community engagement strategies⁽³⁾.

The **Yuwa—Art for wellness, welcome and way finding** case study presented here is consistent with this international evidence of contemporary arts and health practice. It explores the use of art in hospital redevelopment to achieve culturally appropriate, culturally safe and ultimately culturally effective design.

The project highlights the value of community consultation and engagement guiding art creation and purpose consistent with the needs of the local community. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are a high proportion of the community for an Australian rural health service and Kalgoorlie is no different.

The importance of art to Aboriginal culture and social fabric, in particular art as part of traditional healing and health promotion, means the potential impact on the healing environment, and on patients and the broader hospital community in terms of wellness, safety and welcome was significant.

The Yuwa project owes its genesis, at least in part, to the Percent for Art Scheme.

Percent for Art Scheme

A Western Australia (WA) State Government scheme which commenced in 1989, the Percent for Art Scheme, requires all large-scale public capital works projects (greater than \$2 million), be they new build or renovation, to invest up to one percent of the construction budget on commissioning and installing public artwork. The program targets employment of Western Australian artists, preferably from the community local to the project, incorporating artwork into the design and fabric of the build⁽⁴⁾.

The WA Country Health Service (WACHS) has been actively engaged in the Percent for Arts Scheme through its \$1.5 billion capital works and redevelopment program. In some instances the service has invested in art and design over and above the required allocation. This has resulted in many strong arts and health examples on WACHS campuses across the state from the Kimberley to the Great Southern. Not only have all projects incorporated artwork into their capital program, many have had a common thread of engaging the local aboriginal community through its art ensuring a link to local culture and country, with this consultation led by the WACHS project staff.

Other WACHS Percent for Art and additional art projects

Year	Site	Project
2016	Kunururra's Ochre Health Centre	A collaborative project by nine Waringarri artists from the local Miriwoong People worked on this preservation and celebration of bush medicine. Large scale collaborative artworks were completed and and digitally reproduced to create a 33x3metre 'Bush Medicine Wall'.
2016	Esperance Health Campus	Created by local artist Phil Shelton, Spiritus recentes is a 30metre long stainless steel sculpture decorated with blown glass, polished granite and etched panels with Flinders' charts of the local coastline. Representing the natural environment around Esperance, and its healing power, such as the sea breeze and the water and the marks they leave behind which is in turn reflective of the mark that people can also leave like staff who work in the health service and the impression they have on the lives of their patients
2016	MidWest Cancer Centre, Geraldton Health Campus	Inspired by the native Quandong tree, local artist Rose Holdaway's vibrant mural wraps around the northern façade of the Midwest Cancer Centre. The artwork, entitled Quandong Trail, is composed of laser-cut corten steel and acrylic panels that have been visually integrated into the building fabric. The artwork provides visual interest to the hospital's entrance, contributing to a sense of arrival and identity.
2016	Carnarvon Health Campus	Local artists created artworks reflecting the rugged beauty and stories of the Gascoyne River. Bonni Ingram's paintings of Yamatji Country are digitally fused with visual artist Anton Blume's aerial photography to create a unique visual language of local images. These glass entry walls celebrate local culture and country, welcoming visitors and patients to the new Carnarvon Health Campus. The magnificent river gum images act as a visual transition from river life to marine scenery, celebrating the beauty of the natural attributes of the Shark Bay World Heritage area. The bush medicine leaf is a recurring healing motif that floats through the artworks, along the Gascoyne River from the plantations, through pastoral country, to the desert outback around the Kennedy Ranges and the catchment beyond.
2015	Busselton Health Campus	Two beautifully crafted piece of work which use timber from the site's recycled peppermint trees. The laminated wood has been mounted in steel frames and fits perfectly in its surroundings drawing on the natural light from the campus's entrance atrium. Based on the wind currents along the coast where the campus is situated, the Busselton jetty, the curling tail of the resident possums and the coiling snake representing the Hippocratic Oath.
2013	Albany Health Campus	Two large-scale fused glass artworks were commissioned for the interior public areas of the new hospital building awarded to local artists Mark Hewson and Paris Johansen of Torbay Glass Studio. The foyer-café area houses <i>Summer Breeze</i> , a 9x7 metre wave-form artwork evocative of the artists' enjoyment of their daily immersion in their coastal workplace location—summer breeze refers to the locally named 'Albany Doctor'. The 50 metre long, exuberant, <i>Flight of Joy</i> is located along the glass wall of the Ambulatory Care services walkway depicting twenty-one species of Australian birds indigenous to the Great Southern region.

Year	Site	Project
2013	Critical Care Redevelopment South West Health Campus	Artist Rick Vermey was commissioned to design a screen for the ambulance set-down area, and another, for the Main Waiting Area windows. He developed his designs by using the universal symbol of the hospital cross. From a distance, the glazing of the windows, show a tranquil garden scene. Close up, each dot, contains a hospital cross, with the overall result permitting a filtered but visible view through the windows. The screening of the ambulance concourse is patterned with individual elements of the hospital cross that increase and diminish in size.
2012	Mental Health Unit and Paediatric Wing, Broome Hospital	Jo Darbyshire, Judy Mengil and Peter Newry designed artworks that imbue a 'sense of country' and familiarity as patients are drawn from a vast area across the Kimberley and Pilbara. An image representing a waterhole, at Binjin-Buckett Springs acts as a marker, in the vinyl floor, a reminder of the value of water and its replenishing effects on people and environment. The story of the flowing creeks running into the Keep River in 'the wet' in Peter Newry's country, are traced on glass doors. A second image from this painter appears on glass screens. A more playful approach was adopted in the Paediatrics Courtyard where screens are powder coated in bright, bold colours, characteristic of the region using fauna and flora imagery is intended to appeal and be easily recognised by young patients.
2010	Hedland Health Campus	Artists Arif Satar and Audrey Fernandes-Satar created the artwork in collaboration with the traditional owners of the land in South Hedland as well as further consultations with other Indigenous community groups in Roebourne and Karratha. This collaboration resulting in the creation of three artworks titled Water, Land/Country and Sky was developed with the architectural project team to be integrated within the design of the overhead pergola structure covering the internal gardens and breakout areas between the two main buildings. The artwork is also intended to interact with the landscape developing over time in the two garden areas.
2010	Denmark Health Service	The artists interpreted Denmark's sense of strong community and its beautiful natural environment. For the external artworks at the front of the building and in the internal courtyards, Kati Thamo sandblasted intricate botanical designs onto the polished surface of local granite rocks, evoking the biodiversity, complexity and fertility of the local bush. The brightly coloured, multi-media artwork in the entry foyer by Arif Satar and Audrey Fernandes-Satar takes a wider view of the landscape, using satellite imagery and aerial photography to look at the topography of the site and observe local bird life and cloud formations. Kate Campbell-Pope, whose work is in the Residential Care Facility, interviewed residents and carved poetic fragments of their personal histories and stories of Denmark into the wood. One resident's own embroidery was photographed and directly referenced in the artwork. For all of the artists, interpreting Denmark's very strong community, and sense of place was the most important driving force behind the development of their artwork.

Our project

Yuwa—Art for wellness, welcome and way-finding was born out of the need to improve the accessibility of clinical services for the Aboriginal communities of the Goldfields and the opportunity realised through the redevelopment of the Kalgoorlie Health Campus.

Kalgoorlie, named after the Karkurla (pronounced gull-gurl-la) or silky pear that grows in the area and provides both food and bush medicine, is the region's largest centre with the Kalgoorlie Health Campus supporting health care services across the entire region. Located in the bottom right hand corner of WA the region stretches from the red and dry arid reaches of the western desert in the north to the cool and temperate pristine aqua blue coast in the south. The region is significant in size and at more than 760,000 square kilometres is more than three times the size of Victoria and covers approximately one third of the WA land mass.

The Aboriginal people of the region are diverse with many traditional language and family groups. Some of the larger groups include the Wongatha/Wangatha people, from the area around Kalgoorlie up to the northern goldfields and the western desert. Further north across to the Northern Territory border are the Ngaanyatjarra people. Esperance in the south of the region is on the edge of the Noongar nation, which stretches across the state's south west and up to Perth. And in between are Coolgardie and Norseman traditionally areas of the Ngadju people. Of course these are only some of the main groups, with smaller tribes and language groups also living here for many thousands of years⁽⁵⁾.

The \$59.6million Stage One Kalgoorlie Health Campus Redevelopment was announced in November 2008 and construction began on the project in 2009. Due to the fact that the project involved the redevelopment of an operating hospital the project was undertaken in several stages each of which was designed and constructed separately in order to be both as efficient as possible with resources and to ensure the ongoing provision of safe and effective clinical services to the Goldfields community.

During the clinical services planning for the project it was identified that the aboriginal people who made up 12.1percent of the Goldfields population were greatly over represented in occasions of service provided (45.5percent)⁽⁶⁾. With clinical reform a major objective of the redevelopment project it was essential to ensure that the needs of the aboriginal community were addressed in all aspects of the planning and design.

Consultation with the community was always a vital part of the design process for each phase of the project. In the early stages this was done through meeting with local service groups and as part of design user groups.

Initially the design for the first clinical stage of works was discussed with local Aboriginal staff members in pairs and small groups. This was because this stage involved construction of a palliative care wing to the hospital. Conscious of cultural safety, much care and sensitivity was taken when discussing the death of loved ones and the care provided in the lead up and immediately following.

There were several strong themes that were identified as important for the local aboriginal clients such as the importance of natural light, access to the outside, even or perhaps especially in a person's last days and the use of plants that are indigenous to the region. As a result each room was built to face northward to allow for the best light, facilities were provided for families to share last meals together and each room accessed directly onto a private courtyard.

This early, small-scale consultation was positively received so in 2011 a meeting was held to give the Aboriginal people the opportunity to talk through their ideas, suggestions, objectives and concerns. The meeting was well attended and the group was grateful to have the opportunity to be heard and involved. Out of this meeting, an Aboriginal Reference Group was formed to serve as a point of contact through the remainder of the design process.

Many of the components identified in the initial phase were discussed again and incorporated into the overall designs, such as the use of natural light and visibility of the outdoors, access to gardens and courtyards for external sitting areas and the use of plants that are indigenous to the region. This ensured that the outdoor areas looked, smelt and felt familiar, particularly to patients who were from the far reaches of the region.

One matter that came up repeatedly was the fear that Aboriginal patients often felt when attending health facilities—especially hospitals—that were unfamiliar and associated with the sickness and death of loved ones. Members of the group talked about how to make people feel safer and more culturally secure, however the ideas were not always agreed upon, with what was comforting for a person of one language group not always reciprocated by other groups.

Language was also identified as a barrier. The Aboriginal Reference Group pointed out that English was a second (or third or fourth) language for many Aboriginal people. They also pointed out that in Aboriginal cultures, it is the *characteristics* of the landscape, rather than specific names or words that are most commonly used for giving directions and way finding on Country.

When the conversation turned to the use of art and imagery, especially art by Aboriginal artists, this was unanimously agreed upon as a clear way to demonstrate welcome and acceptance. The group identified themes promoting cultural safety and reflecting healing, wellness and local people and places. It was agreed that art could be an effective way to help Aboriginal people feel more comfortable about coming to the hospital and that using artists from across the region would show that all were welcome.

This honest and open conversation with the Aboriginal Reference Group led to an innovative collaboration with the Percent for Art Scheme project. The Percent for Art Scheme lead artist, Mr Tony Pankiw, was willing to work with local artists and incorporate local imagery and themes into his structural steel screens sculpture and designs on the floor.

A group of eight local artists was formed along with a local curator/gallery owner. The group met with Tony and the redevelopment team, who commissioned seven paintings with themes of wellness, healing, safety and the Goldfields. The group talked about the paintings being displayed at that hospital and the intent to use motifs and elements from the paintings.

As the project progressed, the impact that the art would have in promoting inclusion of the Aboriginal community became more and more apparent. The designs for the floor evolved into the idea of strategically positioning them to provide way finding and directional markers and identifiers, using elements of the natural environment just as the Aboriginal Reference Group had identified.

The project was an aesthetic and practical success. The WACHS Goldfields decided to expand the project into the next phase of redevelopment and commissioned more way-finding designs. The project was even been extended to facilities being redeveloped in other towns in the region. More local artworks were commissioned and more local artists became involved, forming a flourishing and collaborative community of arts and health practitioners. This had now moved beyond the required Percent for Art project and onto an initiative that was being driven and owned by the local project team and the local community.

The unlikely partnership of the health service, infrastructure project team, local Aboriginal people and artists has resulted in an artwork collection that reflects cultural safety, wellness and welcome, drawing on traditional Aboriginal imagery, motifs and stories. The incorporation of these themes into sculptures, exterior decorative design of the facilities, paintings and perhaps most importantly, into way-finding designs for the floors is striking and effective.

This drive to reinforce a sense of welcome and acceptance has been further enhanced by continuing imagery across other media such as t-shirts for staff members, pamphlets and banners and we have found that staff members have been keen to get on board with this approach.

The full Post Occupancy Evaluation, which will include the original Percent for Art project is planned for the Kalgoorlie Health Campus Redevelopment—Stage One following its completion in late 2017.

However the response of the stakeholders and wider community in feedback through the ongoing consultation undertaken for this the project has been overwhelmingly positive. A survey conducted in 2017 following the completion of the new Goldfields Renal Service demonstrated that more than 90% of the respondents thought that art by local aboriginal artist makes hospital more welcoming for Aboriginal clients and visitors.

Local members of the community have described the project as:

‘As an artist it is great to be part of a project that delivers something so meaningful to our people here.’

‘This is my home that I see around me and it makes my heart feel good.’

‘Beautiful, it is so wonderful to see our local community included in the way the hospital has been designed. The designs mean so much to the people here.’

Another notable outcome is that since the first commissions and installations were completed, in November 2012, as part of the construction of the new front entrance, emergency department, high dependency unit and medical imaging it has been noted that occasions for Did Not Waits (DNWs) at the Emergency Department have reduced from eleven percent to nine percent of all Aboriginal clients. Also, the number of Discharged Against Medical Advice (DAMAs) at the Kalgoorlie Health Campus has reduced from three percent to two percent of all Aboriginal patients.

Conclusion

Our experience of the **Yuwa—Art for wellness, welcome and way-finding** project was that open communication and engagement by the redevelopment team with the community provided critical feedback that was then a key part of informing the building design. The commissioning of local artists led to results that extended beyond the original project brief to the benefit of all staff, patients, visitors and the wider Goldfields community.

We recommend that art and health practice be seen as integral to campus redevelopment and part of hospital life. In particular, when meeting the needs of local Aboriginal communities, the process can provide a valid means of inclusion and reconciliation that not only facilitates culturally safe, culturally effective design but creates opportunity for development of an arts and health community of practice.

References

1. Australian Government. National Arts and Health Framework: Department of Communication and The Arts; 2014 [cited Meeting of Cultural Ministers and the Standing Council on Health]. Available from: https://www.arts.gov.au/sites/g/files/net1761/f/National_Arts_and_Health_Framework_May_2014.pdf.
2. Gibson K, Goedhart, L. Examination of the use of the arts to improve health and healing in Western Australian hospitals. Perth, WA: The Chamber of Culture and the Arts, 2016.
3. The Kings Fund. EHE Findings and reports. 2016 Available from: <http://www.kingsfund.org.uk/projects/enhancing-healing-environment/findings-reports>.
4. Government of Western Australia. Percent for Arts Scheme Perth: Department of Finance; 2014 Available from: http://www.finance.wa.gov.au/cms/Building_Management_and_Works/New_Buildings/Percent_for_Art.a.spx

5. Horton D, Map of Aboriginal Australia; Available from <http://www.healthinonet.ecu.edu.au/map-aboriginal-australiatindals>
6. WA Country Health Service. Business Case for the Kalgoorlie Hospital Redevelopment. Perth, WA: Government of Western Australia, 2008.

Presenter

Alicia Michalanney works for the WA Country Health Service (WACHS) as the Goldfields region's Director of Population Health. She lives in the regional centre of Kalgoorlie-Boulder, which links the remote and arid Western Desert in the north with the pristine turquoise beaches of the coastal area around Esperance. Alicia enjoys the diversity of the region and is passionate about delivering safe and accessible health services for its entire population, including the Aboriginal communities, which account for more than 12 per cent. Alicia began her career as a physiotherapist at Royal Perth Hospital before returning to the country more than fifteen years ago with her husband, John. During this time Alicia has led WACHS Goldfields in its clinical service planning, facility redevelopment and clinical reform program. One of the highlights of her career has been overseeing the 10-year, \$125 million redevelopment of the region's two major hospitals and seeing them turned into vital, modern health campuses. While working on the redevelopment program, Alicia had the opportunity to meet local Aboriginal community members to hear their needs and ideas for new health service facilities. These early discussions were the start of what grew into the Yuwa—Art for Welcome and Wayfinding project in Kalgoorlie, an innovative partnership between Aboriginal people, local artists and the health service. This seemingly straightforward project has reaped some surprising benefits and helped to transform the way Aboriginal people relate to the hospital environment. The project was so successful it has been repeated across all the redevelopment projects in the Goldfields.