

Esperance Yarning & Healing Dolls



*This publication is dedicated
to everyone who had a hand
in this project.*

Introduction

Esperance Yarning and Healing Dolls was inspired by the Yamitji 'Dolls and Yarning' project, run in Geraldton and Northampton in 2012, and brought to our attention by Megs Sims (Escare). This was one of many projects informed by workshops focussed on traditional Aboriginal craft techniques run in 1994 by Nalda Searles and Pantjiti Mary Maclean for the Narrogin Aboriginal Corporation and the Town of Narrogin. The doll-making techniques were revived again in Narrogin in 2010 as part of Community Arts Network WA's Wheatbelt program. The Esperance project was led by Narrogin-based Noongar artists Geri Hayden and Marcelle Riley who made four visits over twelve months, to teach decades-old Noongar doll-making techniques, basket-making and eco-dyeing. Over 100 people of all ages from a range of backgrounds participated. In between Geri and Marcelle's visits, participants also had opportunities to meet together to continue their work with local facilitator Colleen Frost.

All participants were invited to exhibit their dolls at the end of the project. A pop-up gallery was established for three weeks in an empty shop space in the centre of town and 45 individual dolls were displayed with a selection of woven baskets and eco-dyed fabrics. Participants were also invited to share stories about their dolls for the exhibition. These are included in the catalogue alongside the images and an important part of the healing process associated with the project. The dolls were also exhibited at the Esperance Public Library and Esperance Community Arts Space.

The workshops encouraged community members to come together, to celebrate their families, to build solid relationships and to create beautiful, unique dolls and other handmade treasures. This project has been a wonderful collaboration between artists and participants, supported by Esperance Community Arts, Escare Incorporated, Seawater Families and a number of other community organisations. Funding was provided by Department of local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries (Culture & Arts WA) and by Lotterywest.



Colleen Frost

As a local facilitator, when I first started I had no experience in doll-making or eco-dyeing. I learned eco-dyeing first. That was amazing; once I started, I didn't want to stop and I've enjoyed every aspect of the learning process. The first little doll I made was practice, then I made my Nana doll. She turned out solid. I made 3 dolls altogether.

The Esperance Yarning and Healing Dolls project has made a positive contribution to our community. Having a lot of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people show up and participate was good. It gave everyone involved an opportunity to express their creativity and encouraged them to share their stories through the amazing dolls they created.

I hope being able to tell a story from their life experiences brought the ladies some healing, as it did for me. Thanks to Geri and Marcelle for providing us with their experience and all their knowledge.



Esperance Community Arts

Esperance Community Arts offers administrative and mentoring support to our members and to other individuals and organisations engaged in arts-related community projects. We facilitate, and contribute to, a variety of arts programs that aim to increase community participation by supporting community members to work together, access local resources, expand social networks and express creativity, identity and belonging.

We believe the arts can be an important vehicle for community health and wellbeing and we collaborate with our local and external partners to support those outcomes. It has been a great privilege to work with our all partners and with the artists and participants involved in the Esperance Yarning and Healing Dolls project. There have already been a number of requests to continue and extend this project, strong evidence that has been well received.

We look forward to supporting similar projects and partnerships in the future.

Escare

Escare Incorporated is a not-for-profit community organisation that has been supporting the Esperance community for 35 years. Our mission is: "To increase the capacity of individuals and families, to assist with daily living challenges, and to enrich community life". Our philosophy is that "All people are different but equal and have the right to be treated with respect and dignity".

The Esperance Yarning and Healing Dolls is the result of a partnership between Escare and Esperance Community Arts. This project is so much more than yarning! It was a vessel to increase awareness and create opportunities for people to build relationships and have conversations which is vital to a strong and vibrant, inclusive community.

Escare is proud to be a part of this amazing project contributing to building a community that recognises, appreciates and has respect for the uniqueness and value of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and their cultures. Congratulations to all involved!

Artists

Colleen Frost
Lynne Symes
Marcelle Riley
Isabel Trneny
Charlene Eacott
Annie Dabb
Wanika Close
Jaimie Laing
Roslyn Rivers
Olivia Rumball
Hayleigh Graham
Nicky Whitby
Gaynor Blackley

Jo Matchitt
Briana Williams
Jennell Reynolds
Jo Eather
Geri Hayden
Bernice Masters
Shonelle Lynch
Brenda Stevens
Barbara Henry
Vicki Graham
Meg Sims
Veena Johnston
Lateesha Bonney

Yarning and Healing
Dolls
Exhibition

Djinda

My dolls name is Djinda (Nyoongar language meaning Shooting Star.)

Growing up I have always loved the Walt Disney Princesses, so I thought I would make my own Nyoongar Princess Djinda!!

She is made using Eco-dyed fabric (dyeing plant on fabric) and sewn and recycled materials, wool!!

Marcelle Riley



Dumbaart (One)

This name was given to me by my old Borwan (old man) on the Narrogin Reserve (Rifle Range Reserve) 60yrs ago. I'm proud of this name and when I was 35yrs old my Mum took me aside and told me about the name and why I was named "DUMBAART."

Geri Hayden





Culture Doll

This doll represents my Aboriginal culture. I grow up learning a lot about my culture and I'm very proud to be an Aboriginal. I have lots of memories growing up in the bush with my mob and listening to my elders telling stories.

Colleen Frost



My Nanna

I grow up around my nana she is a strong and loving woman. She taught me a lot growing up and seeing her have a big heart makes her so special. I'm very thankful to still have her in my life, she is now 70yrs old and still caring with her big heart. Thank you, Nana.

Colleen Frost

My Sweet Neice

Hayley is a beautiful sweet girl and every time I see her she just makes me happy. She is always dressed up in a dress.

Colleen Frost





Pila Nguru (Spinifix Story)

This is about my Mummy Darlene Stevens
My mum was in the 1950's
Maralinga Atomic Bomb my mum was only
12yrs when this happened.
My mum and family were poisoned by the
explosion and some of her family have never
been found.
So that's my story on
My Mummy doll that I made.

Brenda Stevens



Oliver Carson

Oliver was really nice and kind he was important to me because when someone was mean to me he would always be there and help me.

Veena Johnston

Sienna Boyns

Sienna was my best friend and moved to Perth to stay with her mum. She was very important to me because I was her very first friend ever and we had the best friendship ever. We would all play but she said she would stay for year 3 but she didn't. She left on all surprised I was a little sad but all happy.

Veena Johnston



Aboriginal Dreaming Dancers

My dolls story is about the Aboriginal
Dreaming Dances.

How the elders pass it down to their
sons and they passed it down to their
sons.

Reminds me of my brothers who are
Dancers as well.

Hayleigh Graham





My Mother In-Law Sandy

My doll is my mother-in-law Sandy. She is passionate about so many things in life and is bright, happy, positive influence on our whole extended family. I love her very much.

To Eather

The Inside of Me

This is the inside of me where I can feel the sun in my bones and the sand in my toes as I walk the endless beach and lose myself into the deep blue ocean

To Eather



My Yarning Dolls

My dolls are based on my daughter and my little brother. Jorja and Max have so much of my heart.

I had my little brother living with me and my daughter on and off since he was tiny, till he was about 2 and a half. He has just always been my little man. My daughter-my mini-me, is always making me smile. I am loving watching them grow up, even though sometimes I miss them being those tiny little humans, barely talking properly and walking around in their nappies.

Jaime Liang





My Story

She wears the colours originally designed for movement, the beginning of change for her people. She wears her colours black it represents her people, yellow it represents the sun the protector and the red it represents her spiritual connection to her mother earth. She wears her colours because she identifies with them and they represent her.

Johnine Graham

Reconciliation



My story is about reconciliation. My daughter was eight when I left the marriage because of domestic violence. My ex-husband had custody of my children. I lived in the same town but I never saw much of my children.

My daughter was fifteen when I was given custody of her again. When she was eighteen she told me she was pregnant and keeping my grandchild.

She is nearly eleven she has a brother and step-brother. Having my grandchildren has opened up the family that I can be proud of. The three little dolls are my grandchildren and my step-grandchild. I remember giving my daughter a card that says: Daughters, here's wishing you more happiness than there are Stars in the Sky, Sand on the beach and clothes on the floor.

Happy Birthday to my 29-year-old daughter. The doll dressed in orange is my daughter the other large doll is myself. I have five dolls in total I have represented my grandchildren as babies as I am a clucky grandma who loves babies and my grandchildren. It is great to be reconnected to my children and grandchildren.

Lynnette Symes



Lynnette Symes

My Mother

Gladys Onslow Cooper, born in the Pilbara Region in 1916 in the bush. Gladys was taken off her parents and taken to a station to work, mum had two children from the station owner who had abused her one boy and one girl.

The boy was taken off her and they told mum he died just after being born, because the station owners wife couldn't have children that's why they took mum's son and hid him away, he had wanted a son and finally got one.

Mum was one of the Stolen Generation. Mum and the others were put on the ship "The Calinda" and sent down to Moore River Settlement.

Mum had her baby girl with her and her heartbreaking knowing that she was leaving her dead son behind and would never see him again.

When mum was at the Moore River Settlement she fell in love with a man. He had to write to the "Chief Protector of Aborigines" and ask permission to marry they were denied because he had darker skin then mum, therefore they couldn't get married. Once again mum's heart was broken.



cont'd...

Later on, a few years had passed then mum fell in love again and they were allowed to get married and had four children. Mum's husband joined the Army and when he returned he had found out that all his children were put into the "New Norcia Mission" they wrote a letter trying to get the children back but they couldn't.

Years passed mum and her husband parted ways. Mum ended up with two more children from another partner and they were taken also. Mum ended up going blind from cataracts and she only had the use of one arm because when she was younger she got polio in her arm. Mum was a very strong woman even though she had endured heartache in her life and abuse, she was very independent and never let blindness or the use of one arm deter her from anything.

Annie Dabb

Nanna Annie (Shell Princess)

Aboriginal Princess of Esperance.
Midwife, Healer, Medicine
Woman, Law Woman, Mother of
12 children.

Annie Dabb



Love Story

This doll is my wedding gift to my husband Nathan on our wedding day, we were married two months ago; this is the story and the symbolism of this 'Yarn doll', my wedding gift to Nathan. It appears to be ugly in form but therein lies the paradox for my beloved husband; [to] see in me beauty which is hidden from me.

I chose to use the copper solution because I was born on the 'Copper belt in Ndola Northern Rhodesia, dying the fabric in this solution represents and introduces myself into Nathan's life. The plant material used symbolises Australia, Nathan's place of birth and my new citizenship. The day I officially became an



Australian Citizen, the Australian Government gave me a gift of a bottle brush sapling to plant, [and] we have an old bottle brush tree outside our dining room window which brings us much joy every morning as we watch its inhabitants go about their day; it is alive with the sounds of the birds, bees and butterflies that it attracts. The yellow sunflower is my favourite flower and it was Nathan's mother's favourite flower too. it symbolizes joy and warmth to both of us. The colours of the plant material used also symbolise our Christian beliefs and our shared Irish heritage.

Barbara Henry

A Mother of 5

This doll represents a young Aboriginal Mother of 5 children, 2 boys and 3 girls.

She was born and raised in Esperance, where she grew her 5 children up. They learned to love the beach they would go swimming, fishing, and just hanging out with family, and friends down near the beach. She showed her children their Aboriginal background and culture. Going bush camping, fishing, cooking and Dreamtime stories. Mainly the bush food which kids love to eat kangaroo, bardi, goanna etc... They are proud to be Aboriginal.

Shonelle Lynch



Hidden Pain

My doll was made just after I was attacked and injured.

She is sad and in pain. She has bruises on her arm and legs that match the visible injuries I had at the time but most of her pain was hidden. The person who attacked me built a fire next to my gas meter to try and set fire to my house. When I tried to put the fire out they attacked me with a shovel.

This person was a mental health patient a drug addict and an alcoholic. At the time they were tripping on bad Meth. Hidden pain stands for all the people and families affected by drugs and the damage the cause. Drugs Destroy Lives.

Isabel Trneny



Nanna Dot

Nanna was born Dorothy Dimer on the 10th of August 1931 under a tree near Balladonia. Nanna grew up in and around the Esperance/Norseman and Goldfields area she was a strong Ngadju woman, she used to tell us stories about when she was a little girl her mum (nanny Lizzy) would have to hide her and her sibling under her big skirt she used to wear or under the flour bags so they wouldn't get taken off her. Even as a young woman her wadjella boyfriend had to write and ask the chief protector to marry a half cast when she married poppa Gwardda her name became Dorothy Beck. Nanna Dot loved all her grandchildren and would often take us bush to find Gurruup and Bardi grubs. Nanna Dot passed away on the 27th May 2002. I love & miss her very much.

Jennell Reynolds



Connection

This doll represents a connection to culture. Growing up in and around Kepa Kurl/ Esperance my family encouraged us younger generation to respect our country and it's unique and diverse environment. We were taught to connect with culture by being on country. When I look at this doll I will be reminded to go out on country where I feel connected.

Jennell Reynolds

Laurel Cooper

My Dolls name is Laurel Cooper she was taken away when she was very young by the missionaries. She was placed in a mission called "Mount Margret Mission" just outta Laverton (north of Kalgoorlie Boulder). She spent most of her childhood growing up in there and only got to see her mother when she was allowed to come visit her. Mind you Laurel's mother only come to visit twice while Laurel lived in the mission. As the years went by Laurel got older and she was told she could leave and she did. Laurel went back to her land where she remembered she came from and got to know her mother and relatives again. Till this day Laurel lives in the Goldfields still and is 83 years of age but when she was in her mission they put her age down by 5 years so she really is 88 years old and healthier than ever.

Leteesha Benney





Nanna

Nanna was my favourite person in the world and I adored her. She was kind, loving and totally eccentric.

We had a very close relationship and she fondly called me “Angel Face”. I didn’t get to see her very often as she lived in Sydney and me in Perth but we spoke on the phone every week, spent some school holidays together and regularly wrote letters. Nanna was always on my side, I remember the way she waltzed around swishing her skirt with her hand, singing as she went. We laughed, cuddled and had fun. I was by her side with my mum and sent her loving energy as she passed over. I think about my nanna all the time and how important and special she made me feel. I will always be her “Angel Face”

Meg Simms



Kerri

This is my daughter Kerri she went to school in Mukinbudin District High School. I remember when she was in kindy they had a free dress and in a day I made a snow white dress for her and she loved it. We moved from Mukinbudin 8 years ago to Esperance and she loves it here now. Kerri made the outfit for her doll not knowing it's her.

Roslyn Rivers



Kathleen

This is my mother Kathleen she has helped me with my two girls. I am now her full-time carer and now have been doing this for 15 years.

Roslyn Rivers

Patricia

This is Patricia she is my baby girl and everyone knows her as Patty. Patty loves to play dress ups at home she is a child that loves to be outside all the time. If her father is outside in the garden, she will be right outside with Dad helping.

Roslyn Rivers



Dad



This doll represents my father Atitua Pura who I have been recently reunited with after 16 years. He's into motorbikes leathers and tattoos my father inspires me in so many ways by following and chasing everything and anything in life.

Bernice Masters

Nanna

This is my nana Tapu she is from Hawaii and Tahiti. I only got to meet her a few times, but what I can remember is she's everything like me, or I'm just like her in every way. To the ocean, to the flowers, to the voice, I wouldn't change a thing.

Bernice Masters



The Colours of Women

I am daughter, sister, friend,
girlfriend, wife, mother, niece,
aunty, grandmother.
I am me.

Wanika Close



Be yourself, own it.
Only you can change
your future.

Wanika Close

Babies We Never Got to Hold

My doll is a baby, representing the babies that we never got to hold in our hands only in our hearts.

My sister-in-law has had trouble with infertility for the past six years. That is why the baby's eyes, are closed because her babies are sleeping. We believe we will see them in heaven when Jesus comes to takes us home.

Charlene Eacott



Confident Young Girl

A confident
young girl, that's
full of life.

Briana Williams



My Sister

This doll represents my sister because she means the world to me; "the doll" also looks like my sister.

Olivia Rumball



Hazel

This doll represents the similarities of culture with North African and the Australian Aboriginal women, which dates back to the colonisation times.

Vicki Graham



My Moko and Me

Ko Jo Matchitt taku ingoa.
Ko Te Whanau-a-Apanui taku iwi

My Moko and me.
Kiwi, born across the sea.
As ancestors, exploring new
territory

Our home now, far away
from Whanau, we stay.
Maybe we'll return one day

This red country I so love.
So, different from my
green abode.
One foot each side of the Tasman.

Jo Matchitt



The Dark Side

Nicky Whitby



Aunty Rose

My dear old aunty Rose was my Grandma's sister. She was very glamorous and was always dressed fashionably well. She was a buyer of Boans ladies hats and fashion. I have made a nice outfit for her with seaweed hair because if seaweed hair was fashionable she would have had it!

Gaynor Blackley

Exhibition Comment

- “Thank you”. Suzanne P “Thank you to all the beautiful people who come together and shared.” Jo Matchitt
- “Enjoyed the display and the stories”. Kelly “Thank you for sharing, beautiful.” Charmaine Bickers
- “Very interesting, enjoyed the stories and artwork.” Fitzy “Need more exhibitions in town, awesome.” Mel Slade
- “So great to see all the artwork from all of the workshops, come together, so beautifully exhibited.”
- “I liked it.” “Very beautiful and they have great stories about their Dolls.” “It was amazing.”
- “Too deadly!” Kevin Reynolds jnr “What a beautiful exhibition! The stories were incredible!” Lynley Neill
- “Thought provoking.” “A very moving exhibition, lovely.” Carole King “Beautiful stories!” Michelle
- “Awesome display.” “I loved the Nannas and the biker Dad. Ta!” Penny Wood “Great.” Nicky Whitby
- “It was wonderful, empowering and thought provoking to participate in this as the symbolism touches heart and soul.”
- “Just beautiful.” Tammy-Dee Dunn “May this be the first of many, well done!” Barbara Henry
- “Beautiful.” Shirley Schmitt “Lovely dolls, sad stories but positive work.” “Very interesting display.” Marg Gillespie
- “What talented Community Members we have, awesome display.” Natalie Symonds
- “WOW! All the dolls and stories were amazing! I loved it.” Jaimie Laing “Beautiful-very powerful.”
- “If I had not been walking, I would have missed the display, really enjoyed.” Mar B “So lovely, Thank you.”



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Compiled by: Colleen Frost, Jennell Reynolds, Wanika Close
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