

Indigenous culture and perspectives are acknowledged, valued, and integrated into curriculum and school life at Loreto Normanhurst: Community space and Art program

Purpose

To heighten visibility of Indigenous culture and perspectives within the Loreto Normanhurst school community through the creation of a prominent community space for Aboriginal students and their families, and the implementation of a Visual Arts program celebrating Aboriginal women. These initiatives were intended to increase awareness and integration of Indigenous culture and foster a greater sense of belonging and inclusion for Aboriginal students within the school community.

Target group

All 17 Aboriginal students enrolled at Loreto Normanhurst in 2020 and their families, 10 students across Years 7-12 involved in the Art program and the wider school community.

Activities

- Creation of a warm and welcoming community space for Aboriginal students and their families, purposefully located in a prominent area of the school and designed to visibly celebrate Aboriginal culture.
- Design and implementation of a Visual Arts program, *Aboriginal Women of Influence*, celebrating strong Aboriginal women as role models for all Loreto Normanhurst students. The program commenced in Term 4 2019 and continued in 2020 and consisted of 90-minute weekly after school sessions. Students selected an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander woman who is either a public figure or member of their local community to depict in a medium of their choosing. A program exhibition was postponed until later in 2020 due to COVID-19.

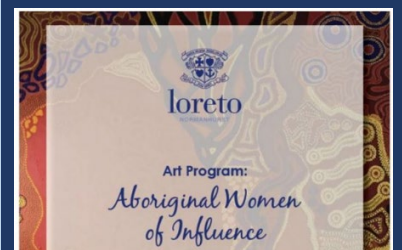
Outcomes

The community space provided a safe place that all Aboriginal students used to connect with each other and the Aboriginal Support Coordinator. Aboriginal students felt a greater sense of belonging and demonstrated greater confidence within the school community. Significant growth in academic outcomes occurred for Aboriginal students, particularly amongst the Year 12 cohort. While there were many contributing factors to students' academic improvement, a correlation with improved sense of belonging and inclusion was observed. Initiatives positively impacted all staff and students through increased visibility and valuing of Aboriginal culture and perspectives within the school.

Learnings

Reinforcement of the need for visible acknowledgement and celebration of Aboriginal culture to ensure that it is in the consciousness of our entire school community. We encourage engagement with stakeholders to ensure needs are heard and responded to and harnessing the promotion and celebration of such projects to raise community awareness and appreciation of Aboriginal culture and perspectives.

"The community space has given our families a culturally sensitive safe place...It has opened up communication between students, parents and staff...often the conversations have allowed the girls to problem solve things before they get too hard to cope with."
(Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Coordinator)



"I believe there has been a change...This has helped inform the girls about the diversity of influence and the importance of figures and role models across various fields." (Visual Arts teacher)

Sample of program artwork:

