



New(town) Beginnings #37

Dear Neighbour

In this topsy turvy year, next week marks NAIDOC Week – an event normally held in July. According to Google, the occasion which celebrates Indigenous history and culture was formally established in the 70s, although some say it began in 1938 to mark the first Day of Mourning.

Working in events is not for the faint-hearted, let alone when you're managing a high-profile large scale event such as NAIDOC Week, during a pandemic! It's with huge admiration and a true testament to the dedication of the organiser that they've managed to keep NAIDOC Week alive this year when so many other events have endured a less fortunate fate.

One of which is close to our heart: Newtown Festival. This week coincides with what would have been our 42nd festival. We weren't able to deliver a COVID-safe event within the resources available, so instead we've spent these last few weeks reflecting on the impact the festival has had on the community over the years. Check out our Facebook page for lots of terrific photos.

As a lovely synergy between the two events, Newtown Festival has a proud history of inviting local Aboriginal artists and musicians to perform to the thousands of visitors who descend on our suburb every November. It's one of Sydney's biggest annual celebrations and allows Festival curators to showcase the talented Indigenous artists and authors who call Gadigal land home.

Although we're unable to feature musicians on our main stage this year, our commitment to meeting with local Indigenous creatives can at least continue. A couple of weeks ago, a few lucky members of our team were invited to visit the Redfern studio of prominent Aboriginal artist, Nadeena Dixon.

For over an hour, Nadeena shared her family's history, in parts harrowing, and told fascinating stories of what it was like growing up around Alexandria and Erskineville, as well as La Perouse.

She expressed the incredible camaraderie and sense of community she recalls as a child: "People looked out for each other and knew exactly whose house to go to for particular issues."

She told us anecdotes about her valiant and inspiring grandparents and ancestors, and the prominent role her grandfather played in the union movement as a proud activist. All of which strongly influences her art and design practice, resulting in striking, evocative, bold and bright pieces. The meeting was enriching and we all walked away grateful for a deeper understanding of our city and its traditional custodians.

Newtown Neighbourhood Centre

1 Bedford St/PO Box 19, Newtown NSW 2042 | ABN 96 884 462 833

E admin@newtowncentre.org | P +61 2 9564 7333 | F +61 2 9519 2509 | W newtowncentre.org

As we continue developing our Centre's Reconciliation Action Plan, making the special connections to learn and understand forms an integral part of the strategy. We're also excited that we have commissioned Nadeena to create artwork for us that reflects the vibrancy and history of Gadigal land.

These experiences are being complemented by the online Indigenous cultural and history course, YOUR MOB, our staff have been undertaking throughout the year.

Marie, who runs our Seniors Greek Group, had an interesting perspective after completing one of the many comprehensive modules:

"For me it was a huge eye opener and I think it's really important for everyone to be taught more about Indigenous Culture – the injustices that continue to happen and what we hope for the future.

"Working with migrants, as I've done for a long time, I think this learning should not only be part of the schooling system, but also compulsory for people migrating to Australia to help increase a better understanding for all non-Indigenous Australians."

This was seconded by another staff member Jo, who grew up in New Zealand where "the school syllabus is set out so that every child is educated in, and has a basic knowledge of, Maori Culture, the music and an understanding of the basics of language – but more importantly, a healthier respect of the Indigenous people."

She found the online modules "provoking and educational" and now admits she has "a much improved awareness of one of the oldest cultures on earth."

We wish all of our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander neighbours a wonderful 2020 NAIDOC Week and encourage all non-Indigenous people to continue to learn about the history and achievements of Australia's First Nations people.

Always Was, Always Will Be.

Mel
Community Strengthening Team

P.S. – Celebrate the anniversary of Newtown Festival by hosting a Backyard Party this Sunday 8th November. For more information and resources check out our [website here](#).

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