



# UNLOCKED BALUND-A 2018 REPORT

## Red Room Poetry

Red Room Poetry inspires students and teachers to create, perform and publish poetry. We enliven experiences with poetry by bringing contemporary poets into classrooms across Australia to run dynamic writing workshops that awaken imaginations and support creative opportunities.

## Balund-a

The Balund-a Program is an innovative residential diversionary program for male offenders over 18 years of age. Located at Tabulam, within the Bundjalung Nation, the program's aim is to reduce re-offending and enhance skills within a cultural and supportive community environment. The Aboriginal name, Bugilmah Burube Wullinje Balund-a roughly translates as "Be good now you have a second chance down by the river".



*Poetry, music, dance and artmaking all part of the UNLOCKED NAIDOC celebration day at Balund-a*

## About UNLOCKED

**UNLOCKED** is an innovative creative literacy program developed and run by Red Room Poetry in collaboration with poets and educational staff from NSW Correctional Centres. The program unlocks the potential of inmates through the reflective and healing power of poetry, encouraging self-expression that helps people write and share their stories to reconnect with their families and communities.

Since 2010, **UNLOCKED** has worked with over 250 inmates, inviting Australian poets and rappers into NSW Correctional Centres to support intensive writing workshops, working with the students on every stage of the writing process, from the initial exercises and experimentations, through the editing and rewriting process, to recording, performing and publishing their work in meaningful ways.

To celebrate Red Room Poetry's 21st **UNLOCKED** program, from 13th – 17th August 2018, participants at Balund-a (Tabulam) worked with Murri poet, Lionel Fogarty and Murri musician, Joe Geia, to create poetry, music and art for cultural celebrations. Poems and songs written during the week of workshops were translated and recorded in Bundjalung with the support of local custodians and Elders.

On Friday 17 August, the local community visited Balund-a to celebrate the poetic, musical and artistic achievements of participants at the adapted BECAUSE OF HER I CAN NAIDOC-inspired event.

## Lionel Fogarty

A Murri man, Lionel is a leading spokesman for Indigenous rights in Australia, particularly deaths in custody following the death of his brother, Daniel Yock, in 1993. His poetry expresses the need for innovation and urgency. In doing so, it is sometimes surreal, sometimes confronting and includes large amounts of Bandjalang dialect and vernacular and First Nation language.

Lionel Fogarty was born on Wakka Wakka land at Barambah, now known as Cherbourg Aboriginal Reserve near Murgon, Queensland. His traditional background is the Yoogum and Kudjela tribes and he has relations from the Goomba tribe.

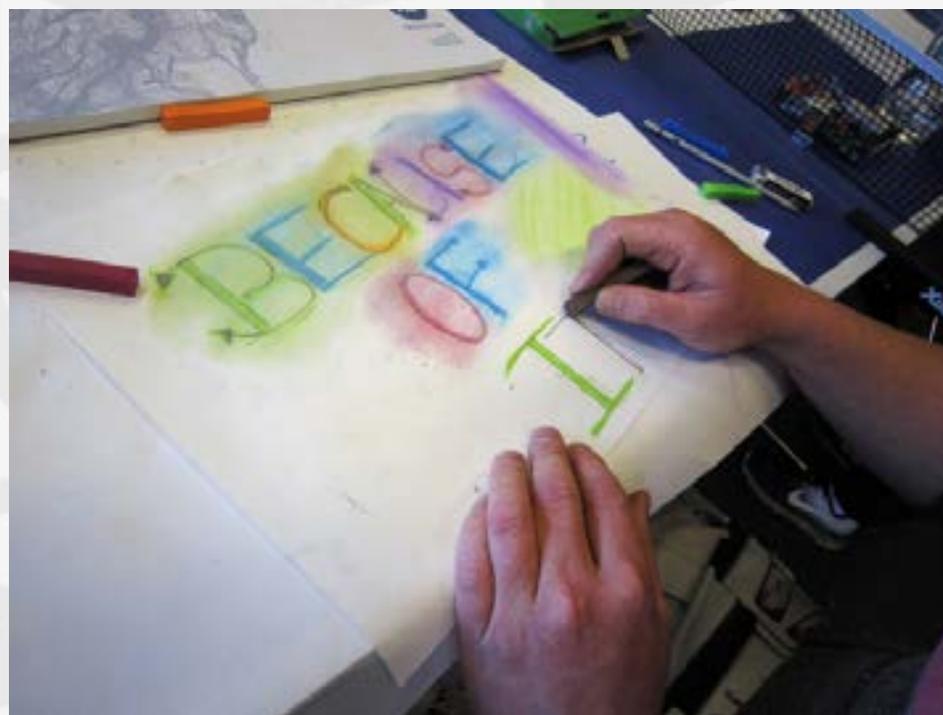
With his involvement in the political struggles of the Aboriginal people, Lionel has been through various organisations including the Aboriginal Legal Service, Aboriginal Housing Service, Black Resource Centre, Black Community School and *Murri Coo-ee*.

## Joe Geia

Joe Geia is an Australian musician of Murri Aboriginal heritage from North Queensland. He is best known as the composer of the song “Yil Lull”, which has been recorded by many other artists including Paul Kelly, Archie Roach, Jimmy Barnes, and most recently by the Singers for the Red, Black and Gold, which included Christine Anu, Renée Geyer, Tiddas, Paul Kelly, and Shane Howard.

*Make the most of what I have left  
Put family first  
Take the right turn  
Get my life back  
My family and love  
Get off that rollercoaster ride  
And live life – family first*

Jason, *RollerCoaster*, UNLOCKED 2018 participant



*Art prepared in the poetry workshops with Jan Lery and Luke Close utilising the adapted NAIDOC theme BECAUSE OF HER I CAN*



*Community enjoys the participants performing their newly written poems and songs with artwork exhibited to encourage pride and emotional expression.*

*My hand is out  
For all my brothers  
My heart breaks to see one of  
Us fall. Stand as one and  
We will be free*

Scott, *Let Us Be Free*, **UNLOCKED** 2018 participant

## Benefits of UNLOCKED

**UNLOCKED** enables offenders to participate in structured programs within a culturally sensitive framework. Programs address specific areas of risk to assist on improving life skills and reintegration into the community. Programs focus are cognitive based and examine drug and alcohol use, anger management, education and employability, domestic violence, parenting skills and living skills. Cultural activities include excursions to sacred sites, music, dance and art. Elders employed by the program provide cultural support and assist residents to recognise, restore, consider racism and value cultural links with their land and history.

## Program Dates

13 - 17 August - working with 20 residents (90% Aboriginal)

### Poets/Artists/Producers

Murri Poet: Lionel Fogarty

Bundjalung language holder, artist, dancer: Lewis Walker

Murri Musician: Joe Geia

ACE Community Colleges artists: Jan Levy, Luke Close

Recording artist: Darren McElroy (DJ Nullius Bay FM and social worker)

Manager Balund-a: Lisa O'Brien

Special Programs Balund-a: Michael Cain

Resident Management: Shantala Ross

Producer: Rob Osborne

Red Room Poetry: Kirli Saunders, Sally Marwood

## Workshop Overview

The theme for this year's **UNLOCKED** participatory program was inspired by the NAIDOC theme: **BECAUSE OF HER WE CAN.**

Workshops were held from 13 August – 17 August

- 3 x days storytelling, poetry writing and creation, Murri poet Lionel Fogarty
- 3 x days of composing music, practice and preparation for performance with Murri musician Joe Geia
- 1.5 x days Bundjalung Elder Lewis Walker
- 1.5 x days of visual art with Jan Levy and Luke Close from ACE Community College
- Final Day of celebration with 120+ family, friends and community

## Engagement

Balund-a participants - **20**

Elders, Artists, and other workshop facilitators - **5**

Staff engaged - **4**

**UNLOCKED NAIDOC**

Performance/Balund-a + community members - **120+**

**TOTAL PEOPLE ENGAGED - 120+**



*Elder and Bundjalung Language Custodian and storyteller, Lewis Walker at the mike with Murri poet Lionel Fogarty on the NAIDOC Celebration Day*

*All my life has been full of drugs  
And crime but I just thought that I had the right  
Which brings me to now  
I'm thankful to be here today  
Now learning and getting another chance  
Not from my people, the white man  
But yes, the Elders, the black man and woman*

*Trevor, Thankful To Be Here, UNLOCKED 2018 participant*

## Testimonials

“Seeing the residents engage in the programs is great; they all usually stand back, for feelings of shame, but when one is engaged, it just flows on. It was great to see them volunteer for dancing; as this requires confidence in themselves & also feeling ‘safe’ to step out & do this. As for the poems, they were also great, as it comes from what they’ve been through themselves & it’s their interpretation of their lives.”

~ **Michael Cain, Co-ordinator Program Support and Security | Balund-a Program Residential Facility**

“ The poems (**created at Balund-a**) are celebratory, conciliatory and optimistic. The event was judged by all present to be a resounding success. The poetry and an excerpt of the song content was broadcast on BAY FM on Friday 17 August with psotitve feedback..”

~ **Rob Osborne, Producer UNLOCKED 2018**

‘We teach respect and new skills through writing and the performing of poetry. We encourage the students to show emotion and to work within their own skill sets (levels of literacy) and to respect themselves so they never get back in to Balund-a.’

~ **Lionel Fogarty, Murri poet**



## NAIDOC group poem and song **BECAUSE OF YOU**

*By Balund-a participants and Joe Geia*

*Bundjalung vocals and translations by Lewis Walker*

Because of you I can  
Because of you I can  
Because of you I can  
Because of you I can

On the darkest night you are my light  
Because of you I am a proud black man  
Able to walk our land  
My culture is strong  
Proud black man

Because of you I can  
Because of you I can  
Because of you I can  
Because of you I can

I'm a white man and have a second chance  
Thanks to the Bundjalung

Because of you I can  
Because of you I can  
Because of you I can  
Because of you I can

Who are they to call us bad?  
Why do we let them make us mad?

Because of you I can  
Because of you I can  
Because of you I can  
Because of you I can

Bugalbeh Balund-a  
Because of her I'm free  
Jingiwalla

Because of you I can  
Because of you I can  
Because of you I can  
Because of you I can

Because of them I'm a dad  
Because of them I'm so happy  
Because of them I'm alive  
Because of them I'm stronger

Because of you I can  
Because of you I can  
Because of you I can  
Because of you I can

But for now I'm just  
Another man from Bligh Park

Because of you I can  
Because of you I can  
Because of you I can  
Because of you I can

Because of the Elders I get a second chance

Because of you I can  
Because of you I can  
Because of you I can  
Because of you I can

I knew this would be the one  
Will you be there? Only time will tell  
Black Red Gold are the colours of my life

Jingiwalla – bugal

Balund-a -----One Love  
Let's get together and feel alright  
Balund-a -----a second chance  
Give thanks to the Warhlubal tribe  
'Cause we're on their land

Let's get together and feel alright  
Give thanks to the Warhlubal tribe  
'Cause we're on their land  
REPEAT

## Partners

Red Room Poetry would like to thank the following partners and individuals for their generous contributions to **UNLOCKED**

- Our poets, musicians, artists and language custodians
- Geoff Ainsworth AM & Johanna Featherstone
- Australia Council for the Arts
- Create NSW
- Department of Corrective Services NSW
- Aboriginal Affairs NSW
- ACE Community College

## UNLOCKED needs support for

- Poet fees
- Musician and visual artist fees
- Elder and Language Custodian fees
- Producer fee
- Publication
- Travel and per diems

Each 4-day Unlocked program costs approx. \$12,000.

For further information contact Sally Marwood on (02) 9319 5090



*Artwork created as part of the 2018 Balund-a UNLOCKED*



redroomcompany.org  
(02) 9319 5090  
contact@redroomcompany.org

PO Box 1105  
Surry Hills  
NSW 2010