

CREATIVE RESPONDERS

Podcast Transcript: Season 3, Episode 3

Acknowledgement of Country: We would like to acknowledge the Traditional owners on whose land this podcast was produced and pay our respects to their elders past and present. We would also like to acknowledge the commitment and sacrifice of First Nations people in the preservation of Country and Culture. This always was and always will be Aboriginal land.

Roxanne: This is eight mile, and this is pretty much our special place where family members would come down. We would come down with our grandparents, do a lot of fishing, swimming, like spend a whole day and like in the afternoon. This is like most every weekend coming down.

Roxanne: These are my memories at eight mile and I have a lot of story to this place.

Scotia: This is Roxanne Oakley, she's an artist living in Woorabinda. She's showing me around 8 Mile, which is a short drive out of town.

Roxanne: I'm actually born here as well. I'm originally from country from Blackwater. So Black Diamond, that's Ghangalou country as well. So but I have a bit of a relation to this country as well being born on this soil, so being very blessed from this place.

Roxanne: There is a lot of water still soaked underneath...pretty dry. I would love to see it running again because when we in this river as well, like fresh clear water, low as you see the sand, we see all these little fishes

Roxanne: So it was all about fun. It's fun, then the river and the bush. You don't need any playgrounds to be happy. So the bush made it pretty much a sacred place.

Scotia: In addition to being a prominent artist in the community, Roxanne has also taken on the role of sharing Traditional knowledge and stories about the area and her people, something she's passionate about sharing with the younger generation...

Roxanne: My role is becoming a person just to help my people out to get on the right path and also teach them about their culture.

Um yeah, pretty much. Just to help them get on the right track, find yourself, get on the right path.

Roxanne: Sometimes I do it when like, it's some sort of days because I see them wandering around the streets. And I just say youse wanna go down the creek for a while, for a walk or something? Let's go check some good places out and they know that it's very dry and they know they're not going to find any water in the place, but they get so fascinated of the stories that I would tell them what it's really meant to us and them.

Scotia: Sharing stories is also an integral part of Roxanne's work as an artist...

Roxanne: Becoming an artist, all my paintings are really all about this river, my mother river. So that's where all the storylines came from, this river itself. And yes, I've become an artist for Woorabinda. It was so special for me to carry on for my ancestors.

Roxanne: I had a break for a while and I tried to find my way...what kind of person I really am so a few years down the track back in 2015, I got involved with some youth groups, so they was trying to find somebody to help out that can help them with some design. So I put my hand up and I said I'll volunteer for any of these kids, any time for anything. And I took on a role of doing design in 2015 for our festival. It was their first festival. From then on 2015, I just went skyrocketing. I couldn't leave that artwork, though painting, so I stuck with it because it was like a blessing for me. Yeah

Scotia: Roxanne also has a role with the Woorabinda Arts and Cultural Centre, where she conducts workshops and is part of their small team of arts workers.

In her own work, she uses recurring marks and themes that speak about her connection to Country and the importance of family.

Roxanne: So coming to...part of my workshop is all about healing. So I've been through a tough role myself, being in a car accident and losing my sister just on top of the hill here,

Roxanne: And I look back to painting and the artwork like this is really a pretty healing

journey, and it's pretty much for our black people to understand. It really helped me out. I wasn't on any white man medication. I didn't see any counselor. All my time and thoughts went straight to my artwork and culture. This is where I am now

Roxanne: Taking me back to country. Yeah.

[Theme music starts]

Scotia: I'm Scotia Monkivitch and this is Creative Responders, a podcast from the Creative Recovery Network about how the arts and creativity can support and strengthen communities as they prepare, respond and recover from the impacts of disasters.

In this episode, we're taking you to Woorabinda - an Indigenous community in Central Queensland on Wadja Wadja and Ghungalu land.

We'll be hearing about the healing capabilities of Country and Culture and we're going to meet some of the community members who are sharing their cultural knowledge with younger generations.

We'll be exploring the challenge of preserving and passing down cultural knowledge in the face of the massive disruption brought about by colonisation - and how arts and culture can be a pathway to restoring some of these lost connections.

[Theme music ends]

Scotia: Woorabinda is in Central Queensland - about a two hour drive inland from Rockhampton.

It was established as a reserve in 1926 by the Queensland Government as a replacement for the Taroom Aboriginal reserve which was being shut down to make way for agricultural development.

Most of the residents of Taroom were made to walk the two hundred kilometres North to Woorabinda to the new reserve located on fifty five thousand acres in the Duinga district.

Between 1927 and 1970 the population grew substantially as a result of the

government's ongoing forced removal of large numbers of Aboriginal people from their Traditional lands. The people at Woorabinda came from many different language groups from as far away as New South Wales and the Northern Territory.

Uncle Stephen: Yeah. Well, yeah, 52 tribes we reckon that were removed from all areas of Queensland. There's probably even more now you know from different places.

Uncle Stephen: G'day there, this is Steve Kemp. We're sitting at Woorabinda at a place called Lily Creek,

Uncle Stephen: Oh we come here to Lily Creek for the sake of the trees that are round us here, for instance the leaves that are shimmering in the sun right now, they're called Poplar Box. They're very special tree for us.

Scotia: Uncle Stephen's connection to this area goes back a long way. His Father was a child in Woorabinda in the 1920s, when it was known as Waroona Station, before the new reserve was established...

Uncle Stephen: Dad wasn't born here, he was born, over at Duaringa in Rosewood scrub behind the hall over there. But that was our association and we didn't we were never removed from Country. And so he was born in 1921, so he was six years of age when people came in.

But we eventually we had to come under the Act.

Scotia: The Act Uncle Stephen refers to here is the 1897 Aboriginals Protection Act which created government held positions of so-called Protectors of Aboriginals.

This gave the Chief Protector, as well as individual Protectors in each region, enormous control over almost all aspects of the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

This included the power to remove them from their Traditional lands to reserves as well as moving them from one reserve to another.

Uncle Stephen: And then when people came into Woorabinda, there was no houses. There's no hospital. There's no food in the first couple of years or I don't know how long, but people had to build their house or the shelter. So that's what we used as Budgeroo tree so the Budgeroo tree grows here a fair bit, you know?

And it only grows in this particular area. So Dad reckons that's why they chose this site here at Woorabinda, because of the Budgeroo and because of the permanent water in the Mimosa Creek. So therefore, people put the bark huts up.

At the same time, they didn't have the hospital. So Dad's old uncle, his name is Uncle Charlie Mummins was the medicine man, and he used to cure people of all the diseases at that particular time tuberculosis, sexually transmitted diseases, common colds, you name it. He had a medicine for everything. And at that time in 1938, I got a photo on the wall of old Uncle Charlie Mummins, and he was a fair age then he would have been 70 80...

but at 80, he couldn't ride a horse really that good. So you've got dad at the age of 10 or something? Actually, dad would have been in 1938 he would have been 17. But prior to that, 10, seven years before that Dad started learning when he was about 10, said, go get the medicine for Uncle Charlie ride it out to here at Lily Creek and get this medicine, ride it out to Pearl Creek or whatever you know, and get the medicine. Then he observed Uncle Charlie making the medicine to cure all these different types of diseases, so he had that knowledge.

Scotia: Uncle Stephen's Father was showing and telling him about these Traditional ways since he was a child and he was given another opportunity in recent years to share in his deep knowledge and connection to the past...

Uncle Stephen: Dad passed away in 2016, but in the last couple of years of his life, he came to live with me and the knowledge that came out of him then when he came back to Country to die. So he's buried up in the cemetery there. He wanted to get buried next to his mother, so. But in that five years while he was here, oh my God, the information that we got out of him

Scotia: Since then, Uncle Stephen has made it his life's work to document and share the knowledge passed down to him from his Father, including everything from language and bush medicines to carving and traditional hunting methods.

But the immediate and lasting impacts of government intervention and control created a deep disruption to the way knowledge was shared pre-colonisation - and much has been lost....

Uncle Stephen: And even though they put us on the mission, we were told never to practice our dance, never talk our language. You weren't allowed to talk language. Yeah, you had to wear clothes and go to church and all this sort of stuff. I've got nothing

against church, but, you know, so that's how it was bred out of us too you were allowed to be..

Scotia: so it's pretty precious that you have even the small amount of words that you do remember from your dad?

Uncle Stephen: Well, we probably started out with probably a hundred hundreds or 200 words from dad but when he came out in the last five years, yeah, picked up quite a few. So I think we went from from linguist lists and from what we were up to 600 words.

Scotia: A new study into the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples is articulating the link between cultural practice and language on health and wellbeing.

The Mayi Kuwayu Study from the Australian National University has been created by and for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

It's a longitudinal study looking at how wellbeing is linked to things like connection to Country, cultural practices, spirituality and language use.

The definition of health as it relates to these communities goes beyond the physical wellbeing of individuals - it includes social, emotional and cultural wellbeing of the whole community.

It's clear that the prevention of practicing culture, speaking language and visiting Country contributes to a huge sense of loss...

...and conversely, that cultural revitalisation can act as a buffer against the negative impacts of racism and trauma and can protect wellbeing, especially around mental health.

So in a community like Woorabinda, the work that Uncle Stephen and Roxanne are doing, along with others in the community who you'll meet soon, is having a direct and meaningful impact.

[We hear the sound of keys in the door and footsteps walking around the arts centre]

Scotia: I'm standing in an old Country Women's Association hall. The space is now home to the Woorabinda Arts and Cultural Centre in Duaringa, it's in a small town of about 200 people

Nickeema: The show that's up at the moment is called Stories on Country, and we've got several artists in this exhibition on our main feature wall. As you walk in, we've got an artwork by Delphine Williams.

And then on our feature wall, we've showcased Uncle Anthony Henry with his landscapes and paintings that depict spaces in Woorabinda.

Scotia: I'm being shown around by Nickeema Williams, the Director of the Arts Centre...

Nickeema: I'm an Aboriginal and Torres Strait and South Sea woman, so my mob's from Koa, which is out near Winton and then Cook and Yalanji country up near the Daintree, Yarrabah and my dad's family's from the Torres Strait, from Stephen Island. And then we've also got some Southsea in the family that were moved down to Yarrabah from Ambran island.

Scotia: Nickeema's an artist in her own right with a background in photography and digital art as well as youth and community services. In her early visits to the community to visit her mother around 2013, she noticed there seemed to be a lack of infrastructure and support for the arts...

Nickeema: The communities up north in Queensland most of them do have an arts center or have like a Land Council or a council who do a lot of artistic programs or galleries that they work with, and it was just kind of strange, like thinking, Why isn't there anything here?

Scotia: Nickeema's regular visits led to her moving to Woorabinda permanently in 2015 when she took on a position with Red Cross as a youth worker.

She began to expand the existing connections she'd made with the local community who were working together to initiate arts-based programs ...

Nickeema: So we started getting some small grants and doing like artist camps and getting materials in and like from doing that back in April to June 2019, we ended up having like over 100 people in the community starting to paint and make artworks, so I was like, This is this is a really critical thing because most of the people who are coming are either young people or elders who just want to be outside socializing but also playing with color and paint is also a way for them to get things out of their body.

Whether it is like trauma or mental health, or just physically like feeling better or expressing yourself, it's so important.

Scotia: The programs were gathering momentum, but the logistics were challenging without a central location to run them from...

Nickeema: it's a tricky thing because like, we started doing some projects and it was just here and there because there was no infrastructure. And so there was nowhere to house your equipment or to have a base where you can regularly go to.

Scotia: The wheels were put in motion to establish something more permanent that could function as a multi purpose space for exhibitions, workshops and community gatherings

Nickeema: And this building that we're in is an old Country and Women's Association hall, and it's been sitting here for a long time being unused.

Scotia: The Woorabinda Aboriginal Shire Council purchased the building from the neighbouring Central Highlands Council and the refurbishment process began to transform the space into an arts hub.

The project was set up as a partnership between the Woorabinda Council, the Central Queensland Regional Arts Services Network and Central Queensland University.

In March 2021, stage 1 was officially opened with an exhibition of works from local artists, including Roxanne who we heard from earlier.

Nickeema: So the spaces, we've got a couple of different rooms in this building that we're still in early phases of development. So once they're set up, we'll have a gallery shop and outside we've got our little pop up shipping container and we're still working on building a seating area and a space where we can have visitors hang out. Because once you have those spaces, kind of your opportunities just endless. You can do workshops, you can have talks.

Once we get the sand for the dancers to have their dance grounds, they can be doing performances. We can have fires like conversations sitting around the fire. We can have musicians. So it's just once you build and add on to that, it just keeps growing.

Scotia: Nickeema is already seeing how the Centre is providing opportunities for

connection to culture and identity...

Nickeema: But it's in our blood like. Our art and stories and dance and song, it's it's it's our culture, it's a part of our identity, so it's kind of just once you get to know people and you, you can kind of see that in them, it's easy to try and get encourage them to just try because that's the thing, like, it doesn't have to be good. You can just play with some color and see what happens. And we most of the people hadn't tried before, and once they experimented, they realised they were really amazing at painting. We haven't even like taught them. We haven't gotten any expertise on painting. Just this is a talent so far, which is crazy.

Nickeema: Like one of our key artists in this exhibition nicknames Big Uncle Uncle Anthony Henry. He is always a passionate like person for advocating about Woorabinda.

So since February this year, like he didn't know he could paint, and now he's like, really well known in the community, but he even just his personal journey, he's come in leaps and bounds in terms of just his confidence, his pride, and he actually calls himself an artist now before he was too shy. And he is a big advocate for the power of art for healing because he said that it's really crucial for his mental health and his depression. And he openly talks about that all the time. And you can see that people who are around him, they're also changing the conversation because that's the thing. It's like bringing an art in is a way that other people in their families can see something positive, that they're talented, and it's changing the conversations from being surrounded by something negative as well.

Scotia: The opportunity for community members to re-engage in cultural practices is also strengthening their connection to Country

Nickeema: Yeah. Like, art's another powerful way for you to start reclaiming your culture. Especially for communities that were set up as missions, so big Uncle, like he while he's been painting, he's been learning some of his language words. He sings when he paints and he physically can't go out bush. But he says that he can connect back to country by painting it. And that's really powerful.

And then other people like the ones who are learning how to make artifacts, they're going out bush, their sourcing wood and all their resources and materials from the community and from where they are and young people are going with them, and it's just

about just continuing that so that the next generation can start picking up these skills and watching their aunties and uncle paint makes them want to paint. And it just keeps the cycle going. And just allowing them to do projects that they want to do is really important

Scotia: The cycle of sharing knowledge between generations is a crucial part of the revitalisation process.

As these cultural practices return, so too do the histories, stories and environmental knowledge that they carry.

And the process of reclaiming this connection impacts the wellbeing of both elders and young people alike.

Here's Roxanne Oakley again...

Roxanne: Oh yeah, with this big uncle that been coming along a lot. And he said he hadn't been painting for thirty years, but since I got my workshop out there, we started getting, we see this amazing talent, people coming in that haven't had the brush like for 30 years.

And seeing this old guy due to all these fascinating trees gum trees he's like he'd been painting for years. But he's he's only picked up the brush after thirty years.

Roxanne: And I said to him, one day you really inspired me, and he said, no you really inspired me because you made me put my hand on the brush again. And so it sort of sort of touched me and I said, Are you for real because you have said, You're my, you're my one of my oldest elders, and he said, no, but you're the you're the right person for this right job.

[We hear the sound of wooden artefacts being moved around]

Uncle Stephen: That's a bullroarer from Mackay, Yuwibara country never seen one like that before and I haven't spun it yet, but I will.

Scotia: Back at Uncle Stephen's place in Woorabinda, he's showing me around his wood carving workshop and his native plant nursery - where he researches, relocates and propagates native plants used in traditional medicines

Uncle Stephen: That's a lavender and I run out of lavender so I threw musk in so it's lavender and musk. That's the latest latest one.

Uncle Stephen: What else have we got?

Scotia: He also has a distillery where he produces soaps that are sold through the family company, called Yarbun. The business is an opportunity to take family out on Country to collect resources and teach younger generations as another way to keep culture alive

Uncle Stephen: All my soaps contain Gumby Gumby flecks and maybe a lemon scented gum fleck in there as well. Lemon scented gum has anti-bacterial anti-viral Gumby has most magical powers.

Scotia: Gumby Gumby is widely known as an anti-oxidant, and for its anti-bacterial and anti-viral properties...

Uncle Stephen: Gumby is a native tree. It's Pito Spotum is the first Latin name of it. And it's just the only way you can recognize it really is. Once again, the trees that surround it and the color of the soil know. The first thing, the second thing would be to take the leaf and you bite into the leaf, and it's nice and smooth and, you know, easy to chew and you haven't got a taste. So very unusual. The next minute, 20 seconds later, the taste comes through. So when I look for trees and medicine, I'd taste the leaf or feel the leaf. Look at the vegetation, look at the dirt and then this all checks, you know? Yeah, that's there, that's there, that's there. Yes, this must be it.

Scotia: Uncle Stephen's knowledge of Gumby Gumby and other traditional medicines is drawing attention from the scientific community and he's currently working on a major research project with Central Queensland University.

The collaboration has been set up in a way that ensures the intellectual property rights and any potential commercial opportunities stemming from the project, remain with Uncle Stephen as the custodian of this knowledge.

Like the arts centre, it's another community-led pathway to develop new enterprises based around cultural practices with direct benefits to the community.

Scotia: Along with the University research and his involvement in the local Indigenous ranger program, Uncle Stephen's focus on education also benefits the youngest members of the community through his work with the Woorabinda State School...

Uncle Stephen: All my life, I really wanted to talk to young people, you know, so went down there and we developed a program with the school

Scotia: The program is geared towards giving younger community members access to culture and language from an early age...

Uncle Stephen: and we started off with body parts to get the kids just a picture of a person up there and what's his eye, what do we call that and where's his ear? And what do we call that? And the kids at a ball doing that one? And then we did body parts. We did animals. We created songs like The Hokey Pokey. You know, we didn't create hokey pokey, but we put our words into the hokey pokey. Say you put your left hand in, so you put your murra in. You put your murra out at your hand, you'd put your dinner in and you dinner out for your foot. But all the kids are waiting for the last one, you know your bunti which means your backside you put your bunti in you put your bunti out, put your bunti in and shake it all about but they just couldn't wait for that one. So that was some of the fun we had with them.

Uncle Stephen: I say in the pre preps, in the prep and the ones and twos, that's the best time to teach kids, not just in relation to language, but in relation to use your eye, use your hearing, use your smell, use your taste, all the all the senses that we used to use

So when I say the kids, we're going to the bush. But hey, you fellas talking too much. If they talk too much, will we see anything? To the other kids, nooo. Well, that's why you got to be quiet. We got to make hand signal.

And that's way we had to hunt the kangaroo because if you were talkin and if you yelled out hey theres a kangaroo well too bad.

Uncle Stephen: So once again, it goes back to observation knowledge of old people. And that's they're learning, so people will learn better out here, and they'll probably enjoy it more.

Uncle Stephen: So we teach them, teach them all that.

Scotia: Milton Lawton is another person with firm roots in the community who is widely respected like Uncle Stephen, as a custodian of Traditional knowledge and is passionate about sharing it with the younger generation...

Uncle Milton was also part of developing a program for Woorabinda State School called 'On Country' classes that combine natural science and First Nations culture.

He's instrumental in Woorabinda's Junior Ranger Program and is currently authoring a series of books about the life cycles of local animals and their connection to place.

[The sound of travelling inside a car]

Milton: So I've been walking this Country for 35 years with my mothers, fathers and grandfathers, my uncles. To understand. What this place is all about.

Scotia: We're in the car, making the 2 hour journey from Duinga into Carnarvon National Park.

I've visited Woorabinda a number of times now and ahead of this trip, was incredibly privileged to be invited by Uncle Milton to walk on Country with him.

Milton: I absolutely love coming out here. It's my university. It's my cathedral. It's where I come to nourish my spirit. Already, I can feel the pain leaving my body.

Scotia: Hidden within the rugged ranges of Queensland's central highlands, Carnarvon Gorge is a region of towering sandstone cliffs, vibrantly coloured gorges, diverse flora and fauna and is also home to several significant sites of ancient Aboriginal art.

Scotia: Uncle Milton has a role entrusted to him by his ancestors to care for this Country

Milton: Well, My old people have asked me to do this from a very early age. To ensure that we're still singing those songs, we're still healing the country and looking after it you

know. I try to do something every day of my life to benefit the land, and that in turn benefits me. I wouldn't be here today if I didn't. If I wasn't on this journey. I could be doing something totally different with my life but I was asked to do this by my own people.

Scotia: Carnarvon National Park is in the top 4 most visited national parks in Australia.

The area we are walking through today is well known for the natural amphitheater - a spectacular 60 metre deep chamber inside the rock walls of the gorge which is a sacred cultural site

Milton: Where we're going today was used for all sorts of purposes. Some of the big ceremonies in this region happened here. And so they traded here. Marriages, initiations.

Milton: Most people come to Carnarvon and they experience that visual thing but there's more to it than what they actually see. There's a really powerful spirit. But if it's if you tap into, it can be so beneficial.

Scotia: Uncle Milton has worked closely over the years with the Qld Parks and Wildlife Rangers in the area and is an advocate for the importance of Indigenous ranger programs.

He also believes strongly in educating non-Indigenous visitors and workers about its cultural significance as a way to ensure its protection...

Milton: They've a role to play too in ensuring that this stuff is kept alive and strong. After all, we're all one mob. All a part of humanity. And we have a we have a word for this here in this country, Yunthulla, it means 'as one in the one place', it's a spiritual connection between all living things and Mother Earth. So being as one with the land was key to our very existence of thousands of thousands of years and is still very relevant today.

Milton: It's a matriarchal story that sits over this country here. So women have big status here. As they should everywhere. Because they carry the story. We, as men can tell the story, but it's women who carry the story for us.

Scotia: Roxanne is also on the journey with us today. She was invited by Uncle Milton to

join in this richest of classrooms, among the trees and rivers, to learn and share in the responsibility of caring for this Country and the stories it holds

Milton: I'm so grateful that you've come because and Roxanne, you in particular, darl, you probably don't fully understand what you're doing for me today, but I can tell you now it's I'm very grateful for you to come along.

Roxanne: Thank you

Milton: So from this point onwards, this is the last time I'll come to Carnarvon. My time here is finished. I've done what I've needed to do and now it's time for me to move on and pass those responsibilities back to those people that should be carrying them in my family.

Milton: Our culture's not lost. It can't be because it's so intrinsically linked to our environments, and we had a deep association with country and that's not lost on us.

That's why I'm so glad Roxanne's joining me on this walk today. It's an opportunity for me to transfer some stuff to her, and it won't be in an oral way, it's a spiritual thing that's gonna happen. It's important that what Roxanne's doing with her art and telling her story about her journey in life, it's linked into this stuff here this place here, it truly is.

[Sounds of the bush atmosphere and the footsteps of the group walking on the track]

Scotia: We start out on what will be a six hour trek. It's a warm December day and the bush is lush and green from the recent heavy rains. The creeks are full and flowing and as we walk, Uncle Milton is a font of knowledge - full of generosity in sharing a wealth of stories and information - prompted at every turn by a particular tree or bird and other details in this Country he clearly knows so well...It would be impossible to play you all of the amazing things he shared with us. Be it about figs...

Uncle Milton: Birds will get to these before we get so as kids we'd come and take the fruit just before ripening and we wrap them in bark and bury them under the ground and come back a week or two later and it's ripened, it was our only chance. We used to do that with a lot of the Bush tucker as kids.

Scotia: ...the maclazonias...

Uncle Milton: They take the fruit off it and they'd sit it in their dilly bags in the flowing creek let the water flow for a couple of weeks leech all the toxins out and then they'd

pull it out and prepare it in the fire and it was high in starch but it's also strong medicine.

Scotia: ...or the Moreton Bay Ash.

Uncle Milton: So we call him Buri Bundana, the fire carrier. So my grandson is six years of age. He's been prepared to carry that responsibility in the family, so all fires will be lit by him. No one else in the family when we go onto Country and what what he'll be doing will grab a stick say about I don't know, maybe two two inches in diameter, six foot long, stick one into the fire and light it up and we'll carry it all day.

So within these roles, there was those responsibilities, and the discipline attached to that would ensure that it was done properly. Otherwise, they were, he was held accountable if that fire went out. If it rains it, he'd stick it up a hollow log or an a bit of kangaroo hyde over the top. like a sock

Scotia: to keep the coal...

Uncle Milton: Keep it smouldering and it'll just smoulder and smoulder and smoulder so he's a special tree that one.

Scotia: Uncle Milton is concerned about environmental damage from the high number of visitors and new areas of erosion that he's noticed along the way...

Uncle Milton: I talked to the Rangers. And they said since COVID, we've seen an increase of over 400 percent. Visitors to this place. And if that continues, we're not going to have a place to come and nourish our spirit, it'll disappear pretty rapidly. So that's why it's important that we be given an opportunity to educate people about these spaces. And that's really what's lacking is education.

Scotia: We're a few hours into the walk when Uncle Milton decides to take a break and let Roxanne and I branch off the main track into a sheltered side gorge that leads up to the moss garden. We're surrounded by cycads and palms, moss-covered rocks and soaring cliffs.

Roxanne: So we're going to the right spot?

Scotia: It's one of the most challenging parts of the walk so far...

Roxanne: No wonder he didn't want to walk, you caught me a good one Uncle!

Scotia: We reach the boardwalk that leads to the moss garden viewing platform. We can hear the sound of the waterfall and as we reach the end of the boardwalk, are met with a breathtaking sight.

A waterfall cascades over the sandstone ledge, collecting in a clear pool, lined with colourful rocks and water-carved boulders. The walls are a bright verdant green that look like velvet - and tree ferns create delicate shadows on the carpet of lush mosses.

The temperature is cool and refreshing after the summer heat of the main track...

Roxanne: Wow. This is the moss garden, and one that's very sacred.

Roxanne: Wow.

Probably it could have been their little lay nap for the day where they wash themselves, bathed, back to where they have a camp area. But this look like a bathing area where they bath. Take their kids. Look at the colour of it!

Scotia: We sit for a while to take everything in and after some time, I ask Roxanne how she's feeling about being here today...

Roxanne: Oh, I'm feeling pretty blessed today coming back because I didn't know what this trip was all about. But now that it sort of cuts me, coming through here now and I can see like Uncle Milton was like saying you're good for a role model to be in this place and I can feel that I'm really touched already by the spirit.

So I'll be pretty stoked if I do get to the point where I know how to carry the stories on for 'em which I would love to do for the rest of my life

Scotia: It's a big responsibility isn't it when you say carry those stories

Roxanne: Yes, it is. It is. It is actually, in a way, like I

Scotia: How do you manage that?

Roxanne: How do I manage? Well, just by having my space and spending time with the communities and the elders. That's get back to my paintings, whatever I love doing. That's the kind of balance that keeps me in the balances, my painting, my artwork, my

stories.

Scotia: We head back to meet Uncle Milton...

Milton: How was that?

Roxanne: Thank you. Beautiful. I was stoked. I just couldn't get over that little spot for that little bathing part.

Roxanne: It was beautiful. Thank you, Uncle, for that bringing me back and take my mind to refresh me and

Milton: Thank you for bringing me. Yeah, because that's what you're doing

Roxanne: I'm feeling really excited and happy.

Milton: Is the water flowing over the pools?

Roxanne: Yes

Scotia: Uncle Milton effortlessly navigates the hike back, as if this country were a part of him, and will always be that way... and as we reach the end of the trek he takes a moment to say goodbye...

Uncle Milton: I'm gonna be last to cross, thank you if you don't mind. Well, wethereng withergung boondiyani...

Garble. Goobewari... Oh. Gahboul, gahboul, gahboul.

Scotia: Uncle Milton has shared a lot with Roxanne today - and she's looking forward to getting back to the arts centre to continue her own work of sharing knowledge and stories with the younger members of the Woorabinda community. Soon she'll be starting art workshops with kids and hopes to see growing participation from the community in the coming years.

Roxanne: Oh, my vision would be like to see more locals step up and to make this thing happen because I don't know down the track in five years, I just love to see the locals, some more locals, just to step up and come and. That's it. Yeah. So that's my thing. In five years time.

Roxanne: Yeah, hopefully I will engage them in that five years with some cultural stories

and get the old people so they need to really know about their ancestors because their ancestors, that's the leaders.

Scotia: Back in town, it's easy to see how the Woorabinda Arts and Cultural Centre is central to maintaining this connection to culture. I asked Nickeema what was needed to continue this work into the future...

Nickeema: So I guess the whole basis of this arts centre is inclusion. And how do we leverage on that?

You know, we don't want the young people to have to wait. We want them to find out what they're interested, what their passions are and just go and have people in the community that they can look up to be mentored by.

There's a whole world out there for them and just having a space where we can one just have a platform to tell stories that the community want and the artists want, but also to sell stuff and to sell products and sell artworks.

Scotia: The arts centre is an example of how an authentically community-led initiative like this creates so many other possibilities for Indigenous-led enterprises

Nickeema: Like even just the simple fact that we own this building is crazy, like an indigenous council own this building and all of our staff are from the community like, that in itself is empowerment.

It's not just about making money and making jobs, it's about like making change.

We don't want to have these young people still going through the struggles that their parents or their forefathers have gone through. We want them to be able to dream big and actually get those dreams.

We want to have our own products in the gallery shop that are made by Woorabinda people. We want the young people to make the coffee and work in the cafe. We want the artists to do the murals or to be the tour guides or to do all these things, and it's possible.

So it's all about what are the other indigenous businesses that can link in with us and how do we help them grow at the same time as us?

A lot of our culture was taken away or we weren't allowed to practice it. So having a moment where people can start practicing, start dancing, start singing, start painting is all that kind of road to healing.

Scotia: Uncle Stephen is busy working on the native nursery, intent on preserving the knowledge handed down to him by his father. He also has a community garden project in the pipeline...

Uncle Stephen: But also I have been approached by Blackwater council in regards to a garden and that's going to run from the swimming pool, the old swimming pool down to where the big mining shed is.

And what they're talking about is going to a path and it's going to be winding down there and it's going to look like a rainbow serpent or rainbow snake. And beside when you go to this circle and have chairs around and you have this is the sandalwood circle and we use this tree for this and this and this

Scotia: the plants in the garden will be accompanied by QR codes that visitors can scan to access audio recordings of Uncle Stephen and his Father talking about each species and its traditional uses

Uncle Stephen: If we put all our medicine plants in there we will pretty well guaranteed that they're going to keep that going. So this is probably the best way that we could preserve it.

Well, that's one thing I can say I can leave all the knowledge of my tribe. I wouldn't say all the knowledge, but a good percentage of language, medicine, artifacts, wood. So, I feel really good that I was on the Earth for a purpose.

[Theme music comes back in]

Scotia: Creative Responders is an initiative of the Creative Recovery Network hosted by me, Scotia Monkivitch.

We'd like to thank Uncle Stephen Kemp, Uncle Milton Lawton, Roxanne Oakley and Nickeema Williams for being a part of this episode and we'd also like to thank Julie Barrett for her assistance.

If you'd like to know more about the Woorabinda Arts and Cultural Centre and follow along with the great work they're doing, you can find them on instagram and facebook

This episode was produced by myself and my Creative Recovery Network colleague, Jill Robson.

Sound recording in Woorabinda was by Boe Spearim with additional recordings by Josh Burton who was also the field recordist for our trek in the Carnarvon Gorge.

Uncle Milton: Josh, well done mate you've done a great job carrying that all day!

Scotia: Studio recordings by Tiffany Dimmack. Our Sound Engineer is Glen Morrow. Original music composed by Mikey Squire.

Special thanks to Sam Loy, Kate Montague and the team at Audiocraft.

This season of Creative Responders was made possible through the support of Bank Australia's Community Customer Grants program which supports projects that create a positive impact in the world.

We dropped in to our local branch in West End, Meanjin, Brisbane to chat to Area Manager John Lowther and Customer Service Manager Lisa Heard about what makes Bank Australia different to other banks -

John: We figure where people put their money really matters and people making more decisions around where they do choose to bank. So first and foremost, we put customers at the center of our thinking in everything we do. And we will make sure that we make good decisions that actually have a positive impact on communities and also the planet and the environment.

John: as a customer owned bank one of the things that we do regularly is we talk to our customers about what are the issues that they want to see their bank act upon, and this

is how we determine which projects that we do get involved with through our impact fund.

Lisa: one way Bank Australia is making a positive impact on the planet is we are the only bank in the world with a conservation reserve, our reserve is home to two twenty five native and 234 native animal species. And we're also making tangible steps towards reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians through our relationships and actions on the reserve. So it's more than just a conservation, and you can read more about our ten year strategy for the reserve and how we offset the total estimated emissions from the vehicles we finance with our car loans for the life of the loans on our website.

Scotia: We are very grateful to Bank Australia for their support of this initiative.

If you'd like to access past episodes, transcripts and resources related to the themes we explore in the podcast go to our website [www dot creative recovery dot net dot au](http://www.creative-recovery.net.au).

We'll be back next month with another episode of our In Conversation series and hope you can join us then.

Thanks for listening.