

TIW Planning – Fireside Gathering
Foundational Conversations & Emerging Themes
Olive Pink Botanical Garden – 5 May 2026



Listening Before Moving Forward

The development of the KOWS Trauma-Informed Workshops (TIW) and Cross-Cultural Peacemaking Workshops (PMW) did not begin with one meeting or one idea.

These workshops have grown through relationships, conversations, interschool activities, community gatherings, yarning spaces, and shared reflections.

KOWS has continued to listen to, and walk alongside, young people, schools, families, Elders, community organisations and local partners to better understand:

- what young people are saying,
- what communities are asking for,
- what strengths continue to exist,
- and what pathways need to be considered before moving forward.

Throughout this work, one thing has remained clear:

Culture is not an add-on to healing.

Culture is the foundation.

The development of this work has been strongly informed by relationships and ongoing conversations with:

- Yipirinya School,
- Yirara College,
- St Joseph's Flexible Learning Centre,
- and community partners including BlakDoll Role Models, Hoops4Health, Arrernte Boxing, P1 Wrestling and others connected to the KOWS network.

Through **interschool activities**, community conversations and youth engagement work, young people consistently shared similar messages about:

- culture,
- identity,
- safety,
- belonging,
- healing,
- leadership,
- pathways,
- and the importance of being heard.



Keep Our Ways Strong

Young people spoke openly about the importance of:

- learning on Country,
- speaking language,
- culture making people strong,
- having safe places to go,
- strong role models,
- connection to family,
- and opportunities to lead.



There were also honest reflections about:

- shame,
- boredom,
- fighting,
- alcohol,
- disconnection,
- feeling unsafe,
- and not always having the words to explain emotions or experiences.



At the same time, young people repeatedly reinforced that they do not want to simply be consulted or spoken for.

They want to:

- step up,
- lead,
- support others,
- and help shape solutions within their own communities.



A strong message emerging across all conversations was:

This work must be built with community, not delivered to community.

The **Community Voices** conversations, **interschool activities** and ongoing yarning spaces reinforced that:

- healing must be cultural,
- practical,
- relational,
- and grounded in lived experience.

Keep Our Ways Strong

There was strong agreement that workshops must:

- create safe and supportive spaces,
- include relatable facilitators,
- involve Elders and community role models,
- use interactive and hands-on approaches,
- and connect young people to real pathways and opportunities.



Importantly, the conversations also reinforced that trauma cannot be spoken about only at an individual level.

Community members reflected strongly on the ongoing impacts of:

- colonisation,
- racism,
- policing,
- incarceration,
- disconnection,
- and systemic harm.



There was clear recognition that many behaviours often viewed in isolation — including fighting, anger, alcohol misuse, withdrawal, shame and conflict — must be understood within a much broader social, historical and relational context.

At the same time, there was a strong focus on community strengths.

People spoke about:

- leadership already existing within community,
- the importance of role models,
- the strength of culture,
- learning through doing,
- practical knowledge,
- and the knowledge communities continue to carry around healing, mediation and peacemaking.



These conversations reinforced that ***KOWS is not starting from nothing.***

The knowledge already exists.

The leadership already exists.

The care for young people already exists.

The solutions already exist within community.

Keep Our Ways Strong

This work is about creating spaces, relationships and pathways where those strengths can continue to grow.

The Olive Pink gathering held on 5 May 2026 became another important part of this journey — not as a starting point, but as a continuation of many conversations, relationships, knowledges and reflections that have been carried, shared and spoken about across generations.

At its heart, KOWS continues to move with a simple but important understanding:

Healing happens through connection.

Through culture.

Through relationships.

Through listening.

And through walking together.



Introduction

On 5 May 2026, a small group gathered at Olive Pink Botanical Garden in Mparntwe for an important Keep Our Ways Strong (KOWS) planning gathering connected to the future development of the Trauma-Informed Workshops (TIW) - a name that will likely evolve as the work continues to grow.

The day was informal, grounded and deeply relational. People sat together around a fire, cooked damper and roo tail, shared stories, reflected on community experiences, and spoke openly about healing, responsibility, culture, identity, and the future direction of KOWS.

Importantly, the conversations shared throughout the day did not emerge in isolation.

As KOWS members and contributors, we do not come to this space as empty vessels. Each person brings lived experience, cultural knowledge, family history, community relationships, professional experience, and stories gathered over many years and many generations.

The conversations and reflections within this document are therefore not simply a record of one gathering held on one day. They form part of a much broader body of work, relationships, observations and ongoing conversations that have been occurring across our work and the community.

While some conversations occurred as a larger group around the fire, many of the most meaningful reflections emerged more naturally throughout the day — while making damper, cooking roo tail, gathering wood, and sharing quieter yarns in smaller groups.

The reflections captured within this document should therefore not be read as formal resolutions or fixed positions, but as emerging themes, lived experiences, shared observations and ongoing community conversations connected to the continuing development of the KOWS Trauma-Informed Workshops.

Many of the ideas raised throughout the day reinforced broader understandings and shared experiences that have continued to emerge through previous KOWS meetings, workshops, community engagement activities and informal yarning spaces.

At the time of this gathering, many people across community were also carrying significant emotional weight, family responsibilities and community pressures and grief.

These realities are often unseen within formal processes, yet they shape how people come together, connect and move within community spaces.

Even within this context, people still found the time and space to sit around the fire, share reflections and continue conversations about healing, responsibility and community.

While the gathering itself was small in number, the depth of cultural knowledge, lived experience and collective wisdom shared throughout the day was significant.

This document captures some of the foundational themes, reflections and understandings that emerged and is intended as a working reflection to share with those who attended and contributed to the day, and to share with others.

At its heart, the gathering reinforced a simple but powerful understanding:

Culture & Connection is not separate from healing; it is the healing.

Making Our Fire

Doug from Olive Pink brought around a wheelbarrow of paper, twigs, kindling and tree branches. Laid out some small rocks to mark where we'd put the fire. Ashley and Paul arranged the stuff for the fire and started it. It burned nicely across the day, with people finding more wood and adding it when needed. Brought a new billy can. Brought some lemon myrtle leaves, and a billy of tea was put on coals that were forming.



Core Message of the Gathering

A central message throughout the day was clear:

Change must come from within community.

The gathering reinforced that Aboriginal people already hold the knowledge, cultural systems, lived experience and leadership needed to create change.

KOWS was spoken about not as a program that “fixes” people, but as a community-led space that:

- listens,
- strengthens connection,
- supports community voice,
- and helps create pathways for mob to lead change themselves.

Reflection:

“Mob can talk. Mob can make decisions. KOWS can push the story that mob tell us.”

There was strong agreement that:

- community must own the work,
- community must own the conversations,
- and community must shape the future direction.

Building from the Inside Out

A strong theme throughout the day was the importance of building from the inside out, rather than relying on outside systems to dictate solutions.

Reflections

- KOWS can “push from the inside out,”
- KOWS can “build from the inside out,”
- and that the work does not need to become something large or heavily institutionalised to be meaningful.

Instead, participants spoke about creating:

- a strong foundation,
- strong relationships,
- and sustainable community-led work.

There was concern expressed about programs or consultations that:

- ask community to speak,
- collect stories and information,

- and then leave without sustaining relationships or supporting long-term change.

Participants emphasised that KOWS must remain accountable to community and continue listening, learning and walking alongside people beyond the gathering itself.

Community Strength & Self Responsibility

A major focus was the importance of:

- self responsibility,
- collective responsibility,
- and community strength.

Reflections

Aboriginal communities have always had systems for:

- accountability,
- mediation,
- caring for one another,
- and keeping people strong.

There were strong reflections about the importance of:

- mob backing each other up,
- people sticking together,
- and communities moving forward collectively.

The group recognised that many of these systems have been disrupted over time through colonisation, government intervention, racism, disconnection, and imposed policies.

At the same time, the discussion repeatedly reinforced that:

- the tools for healing still exist,
- cultural knowledge still exists,
- and communities still carry strength.

Reflection

“We got the tools to heal ourselves.”

Damper being prepared. People had different recipes. These ones used self-raising flour, water, salt and some powdered milk – mixed together, wrapped in two layers of alfoil. Put on the coals. Turned and tended by a range of people. Eaten with butter and golden syrup.



Cultural Foundations & Peacemaking

There were strong reflections throughout the gathering about the enormous depth of cultural knowledge held within community and the understanding that:

- there is always more than one way to do something,
- and that cultural approaches to healing and mediation already exist.

Discussion included:

- Mawul Rom peacemaking approaches,
- cultural mediation,
- community-led problem solving,
- and the importance of people who can stand “in the middle” of community and help bring people together.

The gathering reinforced that:

- peacemaking is not simply something to talk about,
- it is something to practise,
- live,
- and model through relationships and accountability.

Reflections

There were strong reflections on the importance of creating culturally grounded approaches that:

- strengthen people,
- strengthen families,
- and strengthen community.

Kangintja (Arrernte) and Kanyini (Pitjantjara)– Togetherness & Collective Living

One of the most powerful discussions of the day centred around this word (*thank you Brian*):

‘Kangintja (Arrernte) and Kanyini (Pitjantjara)’

The word was described as:

- an old word,
- a beautiful word,
- and a way of living together.

The word was described as reflecting:

- togetherness,
- collective responsibility,
- making people happy,
- how people should be,
- and a strong way of living in community.

There were reflections on how these older cultural ways created:

- connection,
- accountability,
- support,
- and collective wellbeing.

The discussion reinforced that these systems were:

- not broken,
- not primitive,
- but sophisticated and deeply relational.

Reflection

“Beautiful system. Deadly system. Beautiful word to live by.”

Young People, Elders & Responsibility

There were important discussions throughout the gathering about the changing relationships between young people, Elders, and community responsibilities.

Participants reflected on a time when:

- young people once had important responsibilities to old people,
- communities were more connected,
- and people gathered together more regularly.

Concern was expressed that many younger people no longer have the same opportunities to:

- learn from Elders,
- carry responsibilities,
- or participate in community life in the same way.

At the same time, there was hopefulness throughout the gathering.

Reflections

- someone has to take the first step,
- conversations can create change,
- and KOWS can help create spaces where people reconnect and support one another again.

There was a strong belief that:

- change is possible,
- but it must happen with community leading the way.

The sun warms our skin. Fire warms our soul. Someone said, 'look behind you'. We pause - a kangaroo - not big, not small – stopped in the clearing behind us. Not bothered by our presence – this is Olive Pink Botanical Garden after all. Two big roos jumping fast.....in the distance.



Creating Space

While many conversations happened naturally in smaller groups throughout the day, there was a strong sense that opportunities like this remain important for connection, reflection and community dialogue.

There were reflections about the importance of:

- creating spaces where people feel comfortable to speak openly,
- bringing different family and cultural groups together,
- and strengthening relationships through conversation, listening and shared experience.

These conversations reinforced that healing and community strengthening do not always happen through formal meetings or structured programs alone.

Sometimes they begin through:

- sitting together,
- sharing food,
- being on Country,
- listening,
- and creating space for honest conversations to occur naturally.

Intervention & Ongoing Impacts

The gathering included strong reflections on the long-term impacts of the Intervention and government policy decisions on Aboriginal communities.

Participants reflected on:

- the removal of community authority,
- restrictions placed on Elders and families,
- and the ways communities became increasingly disconnected from decision-making.

One discussion focused on how communities were once able to:

- guide young people,
- discipline respectfully,
- and hold accountability within community structures.

Participants reflected that many of these roles were interrupted or removed, contributing to:

- disconnection,
- frustration,
- and increasing contact between young people and the justice system.

There was also discussion about how many government policies continue to be created without genuine community understanding or leadership.

Reflection

A strong message emerged that future approaches must involve:

- negotiation with community,
- community voice,
- and shared decision-making.

Employment, Community Roles & Local Knowledge

There were important discussions about the loss of meaningful local roles within communities.

Reflections about a time when:

- community members worked in clinics,
- shops,
- service stations,
- and other local positions.

Concern was raised about increasing centralisation and the loss of local community employment opportunities.

Reflections:

There were strong reflections on the contradiction of non-Indigenous organisations receiving “cultural awareness” training from outside providers with limited local cultural knowledge, rather than learning directly from Arrernte people and local community members.

Participants felt strongly that:

- local cultural knowledge should be valued,
 - local people should lead cultural learning,
 - and broader systems should better accommodate Aboriginal ways of being.
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Media, Division & Narrative

Reflections

There were reflections throughout the gathering that:

- Western education systems often prioritise one-way learning,
- and that mainstream media frequently recycles negative stories about Aboriginal people and communities.

Participants discussed how:

- fear,
- division,
- competition,
- and funding structures
can create disconnection between communities and organisations.

Reflection

There were strong reflections that many systems continue to operate through:

- “divide and conquer” approaches,
- rather than supporting collective community strength.

The gathering reinforced the importance of:

- changing the narrative,
- strengthening community voice,
- and supporting people to see themselves differently.

As discussed throughout the day:

- the way people see themselves matters,
- the stories communities tell about themselves matter,
- and the stories others tell about Aboriginal people also have real impacts.

BREAK for lunch and cooking of roo tails.

The men found a spot where the earth was not so hard and rocky. A pit was dug, coals were created. Tails were singed on the flames, fur burned off. Wrapped in two layers of foil. Sweet potatoes and potatoes wrapped in foil. All put on the coals in the pit and then covered with more coals. Left to cook.



Emerging Aim of KOWS

By the end of the gathering, a shared understanding had emerged around the broader purpose and direction of KOWS.

Reflections

There were strong reflections that KOWS aims to:

- create spaces for community conversations,
- support mob to identify what needs to change,
- strengthen connection and accountability,
- rebuild cultural foundations,
- support young people,
- and create pathways for long-term community-led change.

There were also reflections that, over time:

- communities in other places may adopt the KOWS approach,
- but only local mob can lead change for their own communities and Country.

The gathering reinforced that KOWS is not about imposing solutions.

It is about:

- listening,
- strengthening,
- reconnecting,
- and walking together.



Drawing on the Past for a Better Future

Looking Ahead

Many of the conversations, reflections and ideas captured throughout this section did not emerge from one single discussion or moment during the Olive Pink gathering alone.

Rather, they reflect shared thinking, yarning spaces, observations and community understandings that have continued to emerge both before and after the gathering itself — in smaller group discussions, community conversations, planning meetings, informal yarns and everyday moments of connection.

The Olive Pink gathering became another important space where many of these shared ideas, concerns and hopes were reinforced.

Throughout these conversations, there has been a strong and consistent sense that this work is not simply about reflecting on the past, but about drawing on cultural knowledge, lived experience and community strengths to help shape a stronger future moving forward.

There have been ongoing reflections that many of the answers already exist within community:

- through culture,
- through relationships,
- through Elders,
- through lived experience,
- and through the knowledge people continue to carry.

Across these ongoing discussions, there has been strong emphasis on the importance of creating spaces where people can continue to:

- sit together,
- yarn,
- share stories,
- learn from one another,
- and work collectively toward stronger outcomes for individuals, families and community.

The idea of future campfire gatherings, yarning spaces and community-led conversations has continued to emerge as an important way to strengthen:

- trust,
- connection,
- leadership,
- healing,
- and practical community-led solutions.

There have also been ongoing discussions about the importance of developing:

- culturally grounded training opportunities,
- leadership pathways,
- mentoring,
- peacemaking approaches,
- and strategic responses that support both young people and the broader community moving forward.

Importantly, there has been strong agreement that this work cannot happen through one-off programs or short-term responses alone.

It requires:

- ongoing relationships,
- consistency,
- community leadership,
- and a willingness to continue doing this work together.

Across the broader KOWS journey, there continues to be a strong belief that meaningful change is possible when communities are supported to lead, share knowledge, strengthen one another, and create pathways grounded in culture, connection and accountability.

This work is not about going backwards.

It is about drawing on the strength of the past to help build a stronger future — starting now.

Fireside Yarns

Many of the reflections below emerged through smaller conversations and informal yarns throughout the day.

Different Ways of Learning, Knowing & Leading

During one of the fireside yarns, a powerful conversation emerged around intelligence, learning, leadership and the way people are often assessed within Western systems.

One participant reflected strongly on the problem-solving abilities of Aboriginal men and community members, explaining that many of the men sitting around the fire were some of the strongest “solution-finders” he had ever known.

The conversation highlighted that:

- many Aboriginal people carry extraordinary practical intelligence,
- relational intelligence,
- cultural intelligence,
- and adaptive problem-solving skills developed through lived experience, survival, community responsibility and cultural knowledge.

The participant reflected that these strengths are often overlooked because Western systems tend to prioritise:

- written assessments,
- formal qualifications,
- English literacy,
- structured reporting,
- and narrow educational measures of intelligence.

Reflection

“These fellas here are the best solution-finders. They know how to find solutions to any problem.”

The conversation acknowledged that while some people may not always feel confident within formal Western education systems — particularly around written English, paperwork or structured mathematics — this does not reflect a lack of intelligence, leadership or capability.

Reflections

There were strong reflections that many systems fail to recognise:

- practical knowledge,
- observational skills,
- community leadership,
- emotional intelligence,
- cultural knowledge,
- and the ability to navigate highly complex real-life situations.

There was concern that because of these systemic barriers, many highly capable Aboriginal people are:

- overlooked for positions,
- excluded from leadership opportunities,
- or passed over for promotion, despite often being the most suitable people for the role.

The discussions reinforced the importance of creating spaces and programs that:

- recognise multiple ways of learning,
- value lived experience,
- respect cultural intelligence,
- and create pathways for people to lead in ways that are authentic to them.

Reflection

There were reflections that KOWS must continue creating environments where people feel:

- valued,
- heard,
- capable,
- and recognised for the strengths they already carry.

Women yarning

There were also important conversations among the women around young people, education, and different ways of learning.

- One story was about young people and education. Issue of learning on Country, and everything as learning, different ways of learning, other than Australian education system and curriculum
- A story about learning as part of life – going fishing and catching a fish is not simply an activity – it’s also about Country maths, biology, geography, art, culture and responsibility. Not separated out and put in a classroom.
- There were also conversations about alternative approaches to education that focus on the full development of the child as a human being, rather than learning being separated only into classrooms, subjects and testing.

These reflections aligned strongly with broader conversations throughout the gathering about Aboriginal ways of learning — where knowledge, culture, responsibility, observation and life skills are often learned together through relationships, community and lived experience.

The roo and veggies were ready and brought to the table. The roo tails were cut up. Everyone ate. There was still some damper. Added more butter and golden syrup. Ate more of this.

Two young people put out the fire. The fire pit was filled in. Things were returned to how we found them.

Closing Reflection

The 5 May 2026 gathering at Olive Pink demonstrated the strength that exists when people come together in safe, grounded, culturally connected spaces.

Around a fire, while cooking damper and roo tail, there were honest conversations about:

- culture,
- community,
- responsibility,
- healing,
- shame,
- identity,
- government systems,
- young people,
- Elders,
- and hope for the future.

The conversations reinforced that the work ahead is not simply about workshops or programs.

It is about:

- rebuilding connection,
- strengthening community voice,
- restoring cultural foundations,
- and creating spaces where people can move forward together.

Working Reflection

“Only mob who can change things for us, being from this place.”



Conversations Beyond Olive Pink

In the days following Olive Pink, additional thoughts and perspectives were shared as part of the ongoing conversations connected to this work.

One perspective reflected on the number of pressures many individuals, families and communities are often carrying at the same time.

These included:

- educational disadvantage,
- unemployment and economic exclusion,
- mental health,
- poor access to healthcare and services,
- housing instability and overcrowding,
- justice system involvement,
- financial pressures,
- isolation,
- racism and discrimination,
- and family and social pressures.

There were important thoughts shared about how these experiences rarely exist in isolation from one another, and how difficulties in one area of a person's life can often flow into many others.

The perspective reinforced the importance of approaches that recognise the interconnected nature of these experiences, rather than viewing issues separately or in isolation.

There were also important thoughts shared about the role of older generations, families and community leadership in helping guide and positively influence younger generations.

The importance of creating spaces where community members can continue supporting one another, sharing knowledge and strengthening relationships was seen as an important part of creating long-term change.



There were also valuable perspectives shared around the importance of ensuring that culture remains foundational — not secondary — within future trauma-informed and peacemaking approaches.

Understanding that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have consistently articulated the importance of culture, community authority, relational accountability and collective responsibility as central to healing and long-term change.

One person shared that this understanding has existed within communities for generations, and that perhaps these conversations are finally beginning to find stronger space and recognition.

There were also important thoughts shared about governance — not simply as formal structures or organisations, but as ways of organising, relating, sharing responsibility and maintaining balance within community life.

This reinforced that many cultural systems already hold deep understandings around:

- accountability,
- reciprocity,
- fairness,
- collective responsibility,
- mediation,
- and community care.

There were reflections about the importance of ensuring that future trauma-informed and peacemaking work continues to be grounded first within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ways of knowing, learning, organising and understanding the world.

The discussions also highlighted the importance of language, meaning and cultural concepts, and the need to carefully consider how cultural understandings are translated and interpreted within broader systems and conversations.

Earlier drafts of this document included an Aboriginal language term to help describe ideas connected to:

- reciprocity,
- sharing,
- exchange,
- balance,
- collective responsibility,
- fairness,
- and looking after one another.

Through further conversations, KOWS recognised the importance of following appropriate cultural protocols when using language and meanings that belong to particular peoples, Countries and knowledge systems.

While the understanding behind the concept remains deeply important to this work, the language itself has been removed at this time until appropriate cultural authority, guidance and permission can be sought regarding its use and meaning.

This learning reinforced an important principle of Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property (ICIP) — recognising that language, stories, concepts and cultural knowledges are not simply ideas to borrow, but are held within specific cultural, language and community contexts.

In many ways, this process reflects the heart of what KOWS is trying to build:

listening,
learning,
moving carefully,
and doing things in the right way.

There were important cautions raised about ensuring that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander learning systems, governance practices and cultural frameworks do not become overshadowed or repositioned behind external models or approaches.

The perspectives reinforced the importance of:

- moving carefully,
- listening deeply,
- respecting cultural authority,
- and ensuring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people remain central in guiding the direction, meaning and delivery of this work.



With Thanks

Keep Our Ways Strong (KOWS) would like to sincerely acknowledge and thank the people, organisations and community members who continue to support and strengthen this work.

The development of the KOWS Trauma-Informed Workshops and Cross-Cultural Peacemaking Workshops has grown through relationships, conversations, shared knowledge, lived experience and ongoing community support.

This work continues to be shaped by young people, Elders, families, schools, community organisations, cultural knowledge holders, mentors and local leaders who generously continue to share their time, stories, reflections and guidance.

We acknowledge that much of this work has emerged not only through formal meetings or workshops, but through everyday moments of connection — sitting together, sharing meals, listening, yarning and learning from one another.

Community & Cultural Contributors

With gratitude to:

- Elders and community members
- young people and families
- KOWS members and contributors
- cultural knowledge holders
- facilitators, mentors and supporters
- those who continue to quietly guide and strengthen this work behind the scenes

Schools & Community Partners

With thanks to the schools, organisations and community partners who have supported and continue to support the vision and development of KOWS, including:

- Yirara College
 - Yipirinya School
 - St Joseph's Flexible Learning Centre
 - BlakDoll
 - Hoops4Health
 - Arrernte Boxing
 - and the wider KOWS network
-

Gathering Support & Place

A special thank you to *Olive Pink Botanical Garden* for providing a space that allowed the gathering to unfold in a grounded, relational and connected way.

The setting itself became part of the gathering — sitting around the fire, cooking damper and roo tail, gathering wood and sharing yarns in the open air helped create a space of connection, reflection and cultural safety.

We also acknowledge and thank Akeyulerre Healing Centre for their support, generosity and commitment to healing, culture and community.

Ongoing Support & Contributions

KOWS also acknowledges the support of organisations and local partners who continue to assist through encouragement, in-kind support, conversations and relationship-building as this work continues to grow.

We would like to sincerely thank the **Annamila First Nations Foundation** for supporting the 5 May 2026 Olive Pink Gathering and the continuing development of this work.

It is because of all of the support and contributions that we (as KOWS) were able to create the space for people to come together, share knowledge, strengthen relationships and continue important conversations around healing, culture, connection and community-led change.

