

Cultural centres
 — or **Keeping Places** —
 are an important way
 for Indigenous people
 to preserve, protect and
 promote their culture
 within their own
 community.

There is no one model of what a cultural centre is. Each is unique, according to the particular needs and goals of each community. They reflect the cultural diversity of Indigenous society.

by PETER WHITE

ALTHOUGH SOMEWHAT DOWNPLAYED IN THE CURRENT CLIMATE of economic rationalism, 'culture' underpins society and is linked with social and physical well being.

For example, reconnecting communities, in particular Indigenous youth, with their culture will not only be the catalyst to 'cultural healing' but open up numerous opportunities for Indigenous communities.

An oral history program conducted by youth and recording elders' stories not only preserves an important part of the local intangible heritage, it also reconnects those youth with their elders, forging a stronger community based on ideals paramount in Indigenous culture, that of 'respect'.

Educating the wider community about their local unique Indigenous culture is a way of fostering reconciliation. It also plays an important role in re-positioning a disenfranchised Indigenous community back into the wider community.

The development of strong vibrant cultural programs within cultural centres opens up sustainability opportunities such as employment and economic viability.

Indigenous Cultural Centres: The new challenge

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It has been argued that the social problems many Indigenous people face are linked with a disconnection from their own cultural identity. This is one of the main reasons why many Indigenous people see cultural centres playing an integral part in their own community's well-being.

Due to limited infrastructure, most cultural centres exist as an offshoot from an indigenous organisation such as a Land Council or housing co-operative. These organisations have their own objectives that address issues such as health, housing, education and employment. It is these objectives that often cloud the focus of what the Indigenous organisation's cultural objectives are and where they fit in a broader sustainable model for a cultural centre.

Sustainability is ultimately linked with a myriad of government funding programs designed to address social issues impacting Indigenous people.

The challenge for cultural centres that are part of other Indigenous organisations is to identify social issues as a platform for the broader development of a strategic approach that enables their centres to go some way towards achieving their cultural aspirations.

Cultural tourism ventures can also be developed, however the challenge for a community is not to lose the focus of what the community wishes to achieve to what the market wants.

The next step in this process is to develop a framework that connects individual Indigenous communities' unique needs and cultural aspirations with the myriad of funding programs offered by the three levels of government to deliver a whole of government approach.

This approach is a long term undertaking that needs ongoing commitment and some Indigenous communities have already taken up these challenges. That is the new challenge that we face. ■

Peter White has just taken up the position of Indigenous Cultural Development Officer for the NSW Ministry for the Arts. Prior to that he was an Aboriginal Heritage Officer at the Australian Museum for twelve years. His main duties there entailed the delivery of an Aboriginal Museums' Outreach program.

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May

26 – 28 May

 Orana Country Music Festival
Concerts, busking and hoe downs in
DUBBO Tel 02 6885 0786

27 May

 Gold Country Muster A gathering of
fiber crafts **WEST WYALONG**
Tel 02 6972 2849

Until 28 May

 *Unreal Rock* The photographs of
Jacques L'Affrique. **ALBURY** Regional
Museum Tel 02 6051 3450

28 May – 18 June

 Max Waters *Preview* of the local
artist's landscape paintings.
MUSWELLBROOK Regional Arts Centre.
Tel 02 6549 3880