

MEDIA RELEASE

10 December 2008



Boost to Indigenous Education as Kitjarra Centre opens at Deakin

Deakin University's commitment to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tertiary education was affirmed today (Wednesday 10 December) with the opening of Deakin University's new 'Kitjarra' Centre. The Centre, which includes residential units and a common room, provides a place for up to 60 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students from different nations around Australia, to come together, share knowledge and learn while in residence for their various courses at Deakin's Institute of Koorie Education.

The Kitjarra Centre was formally opened by Deakin University Vice-Chancellor, Professor Sally Walker, in partnership with the Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated (VAEAI) President and Chair of the Institute's Board, Ms Geraldine Atkinson. The opening ceremony was dedicated to, and in recognition of, the work of many community Elders who have had a long association with the Institute of Koorie Education and were instrumental in its establishment.

Professor Walker said: "The Kitjarra Centre demonstrates Deakin's commitment to Indigenous education and to providing opportunities for Indigenous students from around Australia to enjoy the benefits of a tertiary education. The opening of the Centre is also another example of how Deakin University works with partners to achieve positive outcomes.

"The Institute is a wonderful success story; it provides tertiary study opportunities to Indigenous students from all parts of Australia, including the remotest communities, from the undergraduate level through to the PhD. The Institute has been especially successful in developing its community based learning model and the appointment of the first of two Research Chairs in Indigenous Knowledge Systems this year further enhances its research capacity.

"The Kitjarra Centre is the end result of a true and equal partnership between Deakin and VAEAI which includes a number of community Elders. This opening is dedicated to them and their tireless voluntary contributions that will not be forgotten. Deakin has had a long association with VAEAI and its endeavours to continue to improve Indigenous education opportunities. On behalf of the University and the Institute, I would like to give my thanks and appreciation for this joint effort to create Kitjarra," said Professor Walker.

VAEAI President Geraldine Atkinson said: "We are delighted to have had the opportunity to work with Deakin and Institute staff to develop and complete this excellent project. It will benefit Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students immensely to have a place like Kitjarra to support them when they are studying at Deakin. Deakin was the first University to sign a partnership with VAEAI more than 15 years ago and the Kitjarra Centre is yet another outcome of Deakin's commitment to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education."

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Among the Elders present were Uncle Kevin Atkinson, representing Dr. Aunty Mary Atkinson (dec); Aunty Phemie Day representing Aunty Iris Lovett Gardiner (dec); Aunty Laura Bell, Aunty Melva Johnson and Uncle Phil Cooper. Past Elders Aunty Mary Atkinson and Aunty Iris Lovett Gardiner, along with current other Elders present, are celebrating having Kitjarra Residential Units named in their honour. Delegates from the World Indigenous Peoples' Conference on Education (WIPC:E), being held in Melbourne and hosted by VAEAI also attended the opening.

WIPC:E has been held in Melbourne all week, bringing together 3000 people from 23 countries and setting the stage for the Indigenous world to showcase and celebrate both culture and education in one place at the one time. WIPC:E offers a rare opportunity to experience Indigenous cultures from around the globe.

Deakin University's Institute of Koorie Education provides a holistic approach to education for some 400 students annually using a community-based learning model. Community-based learning involves a combination of both on-and off-campus teaching, designed to enable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to study without being removed from their communities for substantial periods of time. The new Kitjarra Centre is located at Deakin University's Geelong Campus at Waurn Ponds.

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