Worawa Aboriginal College acknowledges that educational achievement is underpinned by what occurs at home and in the community as much as by what happens at school. Improving attendance, retention and safeguarding the health and well-being of students require partnerships between the school and parents/family/community.

A key role of Worawa is in building relationships and communicating the vision of what the school is about and in developing and maintaining a productive partnership between the school and students’ parents and communities. The value of such partnerships is recognised as integral to student commitment to school and engagement with learning. Worawa seeks the informed input and involvement of parents and community leaders from the communities from which the students come in shaping the learning journey of the young people.

We believe that to be productive, relationships must be grounded in open and effective communication in which the vision, values and beliefs of the school are communicated explicitly to parents, and in which parents are able to contribute to and develop an understanding of desired student’s outcomes.

Developing such knowledge and understanding is important in itself; its real worth however lies in the extent to which it informs choices about curriculum and pedagogy, and discourse between the school and students’ parents and communities.

We truly value the input of parents/families. Our annual School – Community Forum is aimed at strengthening partnerships, capturing the aspirations that parents/communities have for their girls involving them in shaping the learning journey of the young women.

Lois Peeler, 
Worawa College Executive Director & Elder
Monday 8th December 2014 Topics of discussion:

**Program:**

| Welcome & Smoking Ceremony at College Dreaming Trail |
| Introductions and Community Greetings/ Messages |
| Map entries |
| Worawa Story – Our shared responsibilities Cultures & Values |
| Worawa Aboriginal College Choir Performance |
| Worawa Education & Boarding Programs – An Overview |
| Cultural foundation, Learning Centres, Boarding, Well-being, Health, Community Liaison |
| Worawa Pathways and Transitions – An Overview |
| Further Education, Careers, Vocational Learning |
| What Communities Want – Culture, Programs, Well-Being, Health, Careers, Pathways & Report-back |
Worawa Aboriginal College

Worawa is Victoria’s only registered Aboriginal school, located near the Yarra River in outer eastern Melbourne on culturally and historically significant land of great natural beauty. The 65 hectare College is an Aboriginal community initiative, governed and managed by Aboriginal people.

Worawa provides a quality education for students in the critical middle years of schooling, Years 7 – 10, in a safe, culturally supported boarding school environment for up to 70 Aboriginal young women from urban, regional and remote communities throughout Australia.

**Harnessing the Talent of Girls**

Worawa is proud to be a school that caters specifically for Aboriginal young women. Worawa directly targets and redresses several risk factors for Indigenous disengagement from education:

- It provides gender-specific education, health and wellbeing services.
- It focuses on the critical middle years of schooling.
- It focuses on improving literacy learning thereby ensuring opportunities for progress in and enjoyment of all other learning areas.
- It provides personalised teaching to small groups of up to 16 students.
- A comprehensive health and wellbeing support program enables students to focus on learning and education.
- Relationships with students’ families and home communities is fostered through regular communication, via community visits, telephone, Skype, newsletter and an annual School Community Forum.

The College curriculum is delivered from an Aboriginal perspective and is specifically tailored for girls.

**Culture**

The College is situated on land that once formed part of the Coranderrk Aboriginal Station and is rich in cultural resources with people, place, story and spirit.

The curriculum is shaped to recognise the validity and integrity of the traditional knowledge system, Aboriginal cultural protocols and the cultural authority of Elders. Students live and study in an atmosphere that fosters positive identity, cultural pride and individual potential.

The Cultural Program is led by the Council of Elders and is designed to provide students with understanding and appreciation of Aboriginal values, history and their place in Australian society as First Peoples.

A resident Aboriginal Elder provides guidance and support and enables maintenance of links with parents, guardians and communities.

Aboriginal spiritual beliefs in relationship to land and responsibility for Caring for Country are expressed in campus care and development.
Culture, history, Aboriginal languages, Caring for Country, the Worawa Dreaming Trail and Art Gallery provide a rich cultural background to the Worawa Cultural Connections curriculum program and The Worawa Way pedagogy, that combines Indigenous perspectives with mainstream validated pedagogies.

Four Aboriginal core values of Relationship, Respect, Responsibility and Rigour in learning connected to country, community and culture inform College life and the curriculum. The Worawa Way pedagogy model is based on these values which inform all aspects of College operations.

Along with the core academic program, emphasis is placed on nurturing and celebrating Aboriginal culture as a crucial aspect of student self-esteem and wellbeing.

Worawa’s education program aligns with the Indigenous Education Action Plan (IEAP), which identifies six key areas that will improve outcomes for Indigenous students:

1. students are ready to learn;
2. attendance at school;
3. quality teachers and inspirational leadership and workforce development;
4. a focus on literacy and numeracy; and
5. parental and community engagement and connections
6. pathways to real post-school options.

The Worawa curriculum strongly emphasises foundation studies in literacy and numeracy while providing a breadth and depth of learning experiences across all key disciplines/learning areas.

The Creative Arts

The Worawa Creative Arts program embraces all forms of the arts including traditional and contemporary dance, a media program, a strong visual arts program where students are learning the business side of art and how to prepare for exhibitions. Student art has been incorporated into College sports uniforms and exhibitions held in Holland and New Zealand in 2014.

Worawa Creative Arts productions have included a highly successful Debutante Ball, the ‘Stylin’ Up’ fashion parade featuring the artwork of our students digitised on fabric - taking out an award at the Deadlies and a blockbuster school production of The Sapphires.

Health and Wellbeing

Students have access to an on-site Wellbeing Coordinator who is a credentialed mental health nurse. This service provides students with a means to address personal issues that may negatively affect their ability to focus upon their education and limit their sociocultural development. Health education and clinical care are key components of the Worawa health and wellbeing program. On site qualified health staff and experienced House Parents ensure that the students’ health needs are addressed promptly and consistently and that their education also extends to areas of personal health and development. The College offers a weekly on-site GP Clinic with a female doctor, oral health, audiology, optometry and immunization services are provided through a range of professional partnerships with community organisations.

Boarding

Through an education based around mainstream subjects and augmented by Aboriginal teachings and principles, students learn to succeed not only through their studies, but also through the values integrated into the routines and activities of College life. They develop not only intellectual and physical ability, but also moral, emotional, mental and spiritual capacity.
Where do our students come from?

Worawa Aboriginal College is unique as the sole Victorian Aboriginal school and the only Australian boarding school specifically catering for Aboriginal girls.

Worawa Aboriginal College provides families and communities with the choice of an education in a different place, and in a safe and supportive, respectful learning environment. As one parent stated of her daughter:

“She needs to go to a school away from problems in town. It’s hard for bush kids to have a good education because there is no high school here in community. I hope she will do well and have good English when she comes back.”

Families and communities also select the College for the education of their young people because it offers a holistic education program. One of the grandparents reflected:

“Only Worawa offers the holistic approach, the opportunities for the students to explore the different areas of social and academic life that they might enjoy later, in a safe well-guided and moral atmosphere, in terms of learning citizenship as well as history as well as all the cultural aspect of their lives.”
Student life at Worawa

Worawa is located on culturally significant land of great natural beauty. The Worawa Dreaming Trail is a focal point for the celebration of Aboriginal culture and tradition. Students learn about Aboriginal technology and science as well as the history of the Aboriginal tribes and clans connected to this important site. Access to the river and natural bushland provides for the teaching of cultural knowledge from Elders.

Relationships with students’ families and home communities are valued and are critical to students’ wellbeing and learning. The College emphasises building and maintaining relationships with students’ families and home communities. The College holds an annual one day School, Community Forum where families workshop their aspirations for their girls with Worawa staff.

The following day, parents and guardians participate in parent, student, teacher interviews and have consultations with the College Wellbeing Coordinator, School Nurse and Residential Team. Then join in the celebration of achievement.

Natasha elaborated on the long-term cultural advantages of such a model for her daughter:

“If she grows up here in this environment, keeping two sides strong, she goes back and is respected by both sides – Indigenous and non Indigenous- respected culture-wise and in mainstream work-wise and by work colleagues. She can get respected in two worlds and that’s why I think Worawa is the best for her. They have the two-world mind and way of thinking.”
Celebrating Aboriginal Culture

Living communities and cultural identity are central to Worawa’s focus upon Aboriginal histories and cultures. At Worawa, Aboriginal language, art, song, dance and storytelling give expression to Aboriginal identity and are embedded in the curriculum.

The College has meaningful relationships with the communities that students are from and Aboriginal Elders regularly visit as cultural teachers.

Our Languages Centre acknowledges ancestral languages and our Creative Arts Centre provides a space for cultural expression of traditional and contemporary dance, music and song.

Students participate in Visual Arts, Dance, Theatre/Drama, Media, and Music. Indigenous role models and participation in Indigenous events ensure ongoing connection and involvement with contemporary Aboriginal community activities.

The Worawa Cultural Program, whilst nurturing the pride and identity of each student’s attachment to the Country from which they originate, assists students to gain knowledge of the history of Victorian Aboriginal culture, the Kulin Nation and the land of the Wurundjeri on which the College is situated.

This leads them to understand the world around them and the place of the Indigenous community in the local, regional, state, national and international political and economic systems.

Culture, spirituality and wellbeing are inextricably linked. Reciting the school poem written by Founder Hyllus Maris, helps foster student spirituality and cultural identity.

**Spiritual Song Of The Aborigine**

I am a child of the Dreamtime People
Part of this Land, like the gnarled gumtree
I am the river softly singing
Chanting our songs on my way to the sea

My spirit is the dust-devils
Mirages, that dance on the plain
I’m the snow, the wind and the falling rain
I’m part of the rocks and the red desert earth

Red as the blood that flows in my veins
I am eagle, crow and snake that glides
Through the rain forest that clings to the mountainside
I awakened here when the earth was new

There was emu, wombat, kangaroo
No other man of a different hue
I am this land
And this land is me

I am Australia.
Health, Well-Being & Personal Development

The strong emphasis on student wellbeing is one of the reasons guardians and parents choose to send their young women to Worawa. Guardians and parents are often aware that complex well being issues are preventing young women from enjoying and meaningfully engaging in education and identify that this needs to be addressed in order for students to develop in an academic environment.

Worawa provides a systematic whole school approach to student wellbeing. The Wellbeing Team meets once a week to coordinate and respond to wellbeing at the College.

The Wellbeing team is involved with students from the very beginning of contact with the College. The Worawa enrolment form seeks information on health and wellbeing to alert College personnel to a prospective student’s needs. Applications are carefully assessed to ensure that resources a new student may need are available for successful transition to Worawa.

Liaison may occur with the student’s previous school and health clinic to assist understanding of the student’s needs. On arrival at the College the wellbeing team meet with guardians and chaperones as well as the student to build a relationship and assess any wellbeing needs that may need to be addressed.

The holistic nature of the College program ensures an integrated approach between the residential and academic programs and wellbeing is threaded through all aspects of the program. Emphasis is placed on ensuring a safe and stable environment for students to work through wellbeing issues including previous trauma experiences.

- Attending daily Circle Gathering, held every morning. Here Worawa staff and students sit in a circle to convey important information and provide an orientation to the events of the day
- Providing a Wellbeing Room adjacent to the recreational area so students have easy access to and become familiar with Wellbeing Staff
- Encouraging students to contact the Wellbeing Team if they have anything they would like to bring up
- Building trust and safety with students
- Being available to liaise and support other Worawa staff with student wellbeing
Pathways to Womanhood

The Pathways to Womanhood Program consists of a series of modules that lead the young women through a pathway of developmental activities, nurturing self-esteem, pride in Aboriginal identity and developing confidence and ability to ‘Walk in both Worlds’ connecting to leadership roles within the school and wider community.

The program lays the foundation for young women to take their place as future leaders.

Post-College Pathways

As a College for the middle years of schooling, Worawa aims to build a firm foundation for further learning pathways for all students, thus assisting them to reach their personal learning goals and the aspirations of their parents and communities.

With this end in mind, the College is continuing to build relationships with external organisations and partner schools to give students every opportunity for a smooth and meaningful transition post-Worawa.

Through our regular shared programs with partner schools in Melbourne, students have the opportunity to explore the possibility of a Years 11 & 12 education experience in a mainstream secondary school.

The College also maintains links and builds relationships with schools in the students’ home communities to ensure the students’ smooth transition to complete their senior years of schooling in their home communities or the world of work in a community setting.

Through our partnerships with local and other community organisations, students experience the world-of-work and have opportunities to engage in Certificate courses; some of which are tailored to the students’ specific needs and interests.

Students have had the opportunity for regular work experience at Melbourne Museum, Healesville Sanctuary, Yarra Valley Lodge, Healesville Harvest and other local businesses.

Each student engages with the College’s Careers and Pathways program which introduces them to the possibilities available for further education or work opportunities.

Many of the College’s departing students go on to further studies in High Schools, Colleges or TAFE institutions in Melbourne or in the home communities/towns, or into jobs in their communities.

The program is aimed at developing:

- Self-care
- Self-esteem
- Self-awareness
- Self-acceptance
- Self-confidence
- Social interaction
- Pride in Aboriginal identity
- Communication, Trust, Hope

The approach is one of action learning and reflection, based on individual development plans where the girls establish clear goals they wish to achieve as part of their Pathway to Womanhood.

An event is held at the end of the program to celebrate the students’ completion of the program and acknowledge the important steps that have been taken toward adulthood and ability to walk with confidence in both the Aboriginal and Western world.
Work Available in Communities

- **Art Galleries** – management, artists, cultural advisors, admin, translators
- **Health clinic & Hospital** – nurses, interpreters, doctors, aged care workers, mental health
- **Trades** – plumbing, building, mechanics, agriculture
- **School & Adult education** – teachers, translators, admin, literature production, library
- **Council office & Centrelink** – accountancy, management, government advisors, security
- **Store** – book keeping, management, shop assistant, trainer
- **Bank** – tellers, accountants, admin
- **Recreation** – sport coordination, youth work, health & fitness, coach, pool attendant
- **National Parks & Cattle Stations** – rangers, managers, jillaroo, conservation
- **Police station** – policing, admin & legal aid work
- **Community enterprises** – gardening, fishing, craft, management, cooking, IT & repairs, hairdressing, mentoring, interpreter
- **Mining Industry** – drivers, managers, admin
- **Travel** – travel agent, pilot, airport worker

“We want our daughters to go to University”
Parent/Guardians Statements

“We want our children to be politically active in their thinking, as well as having historical awareness.”

“We want for our children, what many community elders didn’t have — a good education.”

“We want our girls to learn how to learn.”

“We want our kids to explore and learn about the world beyond their communities.”

“We want to bring together the ‘Western’ way and our cultural ways.”

“We want our ‘sleeping’ languages to be strong again and we want our girls to be learning them.”

“We want our children to learn independence.”

“We want to be kept informed about what the students are doing at Worawa and we want them to show us when they come home, about what they have learned.”

“We want our children to know about how to care for their elders and for their culture and for their country.”

“We want our daughters to go to University.”

“We want our children to be the managers and the leaders in our communities, not just the workers.”

“We want our daughters to have a good, broad, strong, transferable skills base that can be adapted to the our community work situations.”

“We want our daughters to have the confidence and the skills to set up their own businesses and to help communities set up community businesses.”

“We want the girls to learn how to work with a mentor, and how to be one.”

“We want our children to have passion for the job they choose to do in the future.”

“We want our girls to engage in work experience.”

“We want our kids to work over the holidays.”

“We want our daughters to be strong, proud, black women.”

“We want our girls to be sharing and caring of each other across cultures.”

“We want the girls to take the routines they learn at WAC, back home to communities and to continue good life habits.”

“We want our daughters to maintain a healthy and happy lifestyle when they return to their home communities.”

“We would like some of the health information that the girls learn, to be translated into our languages.”

“We want our children to learn about eating - how to make healthy choices and to take this health knowledge back to our communities for our future generations.”

“We want our girls to have support when they have ‘sorry business’.”

“We want our children to know about problem solving and how to listen, how to manage their anger, and how to take the consequences if they do the wrong thing.”
Worawa Aboriginal College listens to parents and community representatives’ feedback to help shape our academic and cultural programs.

Aspirations for students

- Practice speaking English & using appropriate language for specific contexts
- Do not forget their languages and that they have the chance to use their languages in the school program and to teach each other their languages
- Have an appreciation of cultural diversity
- Learn how to research, do projects, write grant applications, advocate for others, use time management
- Express their culture through Art, Language, Dance, Music, Story
- Continue the core subjects, as well as the extra curricular activities such as Choir, after school Sport, Camping, Shopping etc.
- Study the many Aboriginal seasons and difference in understanding of weather for the different regions of Australia
- Prepare some presentations about what they learn, to show to the elders in communities
- Learn to cook some recipes that they can cook at home
- Learn about the cultural symbols for Aboriginal Art
- Learn entrepreneurial skills
- Have opportunities to do Certificate courses—VET, TAFE, & VCAL courses
- Continue opportunities for gaining skills in hospitality, hairdressing & Rangers programs, but extend these to include bush tucker, business skills, entrepreneurial & budgeting knowledge
- Chance to do Year 11 & Year 12 at Worawa, locally or Melbourne schools
- Opportunities for work experience and volunteering; locally & in Melbourne
- Learn home-making and parenting skills
Worawa Aboriginal College would like to thank the following parents and community members for participating at our forum on Monday 8th December 2014.

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<tr>
<th>Parent/Guardian</th>
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<tr>
<td>Jan Douglas</td>
<td>Victoria</td>
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<td>Cecily Granites</td>
<td>Yuendumu NT</td>
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<td>Kelly Graham</td>
<td>Darwin NT</td>
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<td>Lorraine Williams</td>
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<td>Patricia Nascivera</td>
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<td>Sheryl McCann</td>
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<td>Daria Croker</td>
<td>Darwin NT</td>
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<td>Beth Inkamala</td>
<td>Hermannsburg NT</td>
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<td>Margaret Clayton</td>
<td>Darwin NT</td>
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<td>Martha Bennett</td>
<td>Beswick NT</td>
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<td>Josephine Byrnes</td>
<td>Tiwi Islands NT</td>
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<td>Morrazita Foster</td>
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<td>Janet Gordon</td>
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<td>Pauline Jackson</td>
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<td>Ethel Mamarika</td>
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<td>Christine Multa</td>
<td>Haast Bluff</td>
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<td>Rachel Nambula</td>
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<td>Natasha Pozzana</td>
<td>Elcho Island NT</td>
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<td>Bonita Thompson</td>
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<td>Joanne Tipiloura</td>
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<td>Melissa Wungung</td>
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