



Launch of the yarning circle at Brush Farm followed a smoking ceremony, when all attendees including Commissioner Peter Severin, AC Carlo Scasserra and Director Josh Sampson entered the circle while a fire pit was lit.

Yarning with respect

Brush Farm Corrective Services Academy's launch of a yarning circle as part of its 30th anniversary celebrations put the spotlight on an ancient cultural tradition that is gaining prominence in CSNSW.

There are now four yarning circles being used by staff and inmates, including two at Emu Plains and one at Mid North Coast CC, with another three in the works, at Cessnock and Tamworth correctional centres and Gundahna at Wellington.

Louise Lynch, Principal Manager Aboriginal Strategy and Policy Unit (ASPU), says yarning circles are an important process within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture.

"Yarning circles have been used by Indigenous peoples from around the world for centuries to learn from a collective group, build respectful relationships and preserve and pass on cultural knowledge," Louise says.

"In a yarning circle, all participants are provided with an opportunity to speak in a safe non-judgmental place and to share their strengths in an inclusive and collaborative learning environment. Yarning together is always focused on strengths and respect and gives staff the opportunity to come together as equals. Regardless of rank, when staff sit around the yarning circle all staff are equal."

Louise says that other centres have made enquiries about having yarning circles. "The ASPU's hope is that every centre will eventually have a yarning circle," she says.

Brush Farm Director Josh Sampson says the BFCSA circle was commissioned to create a different type of learning environment for staff. "We wanted a space that was not confined to a classroom and recognised the different learning styles of individuals while being connected to cultural traditions. In close consultation with the ASPU, a yarning circle was identified as the perfect choice."

The project was commenced in early June and completed in mid-August as an extension of the BFCSA library.

BFCSA Senior Overseer Kevin Ezzy led the construction, assisted by ComCor Field Officers Alan Lowther, Charlie Giteau and Kudzal Mukandwa who were deployed to BFCSA while the Community Service Work Scheme was suspended, and CSNSW musician Pam Withnall who was similarly deployed.

"The ASPU provided advice, guidance and support through the journey to ensure that the design best reflected the ethos of yarning circles. The plants used are natives, most of which were sourced from a local nursery," Josh says.

Josh says both new recruits and existing staff are being encouraged to use the space to share their experiences, build respectful relationships, collectively learn from one another, and preserve and strengthen cultural ties.

For advice on building a yarning circle at your centre, contact the ASPU on ASPU@justice.nsw.gov.au