

# Pathways Out-of-Home Care

## INNOVATIVE AND THERAPEUTIC SUPPORT FOR KIDS IN CARE

When Allison heard she'd be attending the Pathfinders Cultural Camp, she thought it would be boring. Even when she first arrived at The Willows in Glen Innes, her only wish was to go back to the residential house she lives in and laze around for the week.

On the final day of the camp, she wished it would never end.

Allison was one of 33 Aboriginal children and young people in Out-of-Home Care who attended the Pathfinders Cultural Camp during the second week of the October 2017 school holidays. The five-day camp was created to address the loss of cultural knowledge from generation to generation.

The kids who attended ranged from eight years to 16 years old and came from a mix of foster care and residential care backgrounds. Five sets of siblings and families reunited and enjoyed the engaging activities with each other as well as with Pathfinders' staff and Elders.

Conversations during the "Who's your mob?" activity and during country, language and totem discussions resulted in some of the children realising they had relatives at the camp they hadn't met before.

For Allison, spending time with extended family was a special aspect of the camp that she wasn't expecting. Between cultural activities and down time, she grew close to a new group of friends and relatives who came from all over New South Wales. Short trips down to the river gave her time to socialise with these young people, who she said she has so much in common with and now considers them her best mates.

Allison's second favourite aspect of the camp was getting to know the Elders, who had insight about her mob that

she hadn't heard before. Because they knew her family and about her culture, she felt they understood her on a level that she doesn't often feel understood.

As a group, everyone participated in the opening smoking ceremony where they painted with ochre; they listened to stories from the Elders and actively participated in the bush walk and site appreciation; they examined Aboriginal artefacts and were shown how to make coolamons.

In addition to culturally based activities, the children participated in swimming, kayaking, football and telling stories around the camp fire.

Sally McLennan, Senior Manager of Out-of-Home Care, said there were special moments throughout the camp that showed the true power of the culturally based conversations and activities.

"The girls yarned for two hours in a women's circle with adults and Elders, and there were children who opened up and disclosed their experiences as a result of that safe space and discussion. Some of these girls have never had that – they've never had a mum or aunt to talk to them, and it was the first time they were able to explore womanhood from a beautiful, cultural perspective."

Sally said Pathfinders' next step is to go back to the children for feedback to inform on how to run the next Pathfinders Cultural Camp.

As for Allison, she said she hopes there's another cultural camp where she can learn more about her mob's language and spend time with her extended family and friends.

\*The young person's name has been changed in order to protect her identity.

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