

Working to reclaim language

CHARLOTTE MARTIN

A recent 'Speaking Barngarla together' (Barngarlidhi Manoo) workshop led by linguistics professor Ghil'ad Zuckermann saw Port Lincoln students and Barngarla people in the process of reclaiming the language.

Professor Zuckermann worked with Barngarla women Evelyn Walker and Emmalene and Lavinia Richards to have the sessions in Port Lincoln, coinciding with a one-week filming of a new documentary 'Resilient Hearts'.

Ms Walker, a Navigator College Aboriginal education worker, said it was always good to see professor Zuckermann as he had been a strong advocate of Barngarla language reclamation and had worked with the Richards family in Port Lincoln for many years.

"While Ghil'ad was visiting, we had the opportunity to hold a Barngarla Language Community Workshop at Navigator College that was facilitated by him, and we visited the Stolen Generation Memorial at Whait Reserve to connect around the yarning circle," she said.

"As a Barngarla woman and an Aboriginal education worker I facilitated Navigator College's first Resilient Hearts Barngarla Cultural Exchange, an educational excursion for Navigator College and St Joseph's School students, where I was accompanied by professor Ghil'ad Zuckermann, his eldest son Giulio Zuckermann, Port Lincoln History Group president Chris Mantle, Navigator College Pastor Phil Joppich and others.

"I am all about educating our next generation and this was an opportunity to share local history and stories with them."

The excursion included a visit to Port Lincoln foreshore wharf signage for Barngarla and Galinyala (Barngarla word for 'Port Lincoln') and Reverend Clamor Wilhelm Schürmann's original living area in North Shields.

Mrs Walker shared information about Mr Schürmann's relationship with the Barngarla people, and about the history of Boston Island and its name in Barngarla - Goorrilyali.

The signage mentions professor Zuckermann's Barngarla reclamation work, as well as information from anthropologist Sarah Martin, who recorded the Barngarla fish traps around the Lower Eyre Peninsula coast - including fish traps at Boston Island and other surrounding areas. Ms Martin travelled with Barngarla elders from the Croft and Richards family who showed her the fish traps. She recorded them and took photos at each site.

Professor Zuckermann is an author, researcher and language revivalist who holds doctorates from the universities of Oxford and Cambridge. His involvement with the language reclamation for Barngarla began in 2011.

"On 14 September 2011, five Barngarla representatives from Galinyala Port Lincoln, Goodnada Port Augusta and Whyalla came to meet me in Adelaide as I knew they had unfortunately lost their language in 1960 due what I call 'linguicide', that is language killing, due to colonisation and Stolen Generations," he said.

"On the other hand, I found an 1844 Barngarla dictionary at the archive of the National Library, which had been written by Reverend



Port Lincoln History Group president Chris Mantle, Navigator College Pastor Phil Joppich (back), Aboriginal Education Worker Evelyn Walker, St Joseph's School Barngarla student, Giulio Zuckermann, Professor Ghil'ad Zuckermann, Jack Hannemann and Archer Haylock. (Supplied)

Clamor Wilhelm Schürmann, who had taken up, in September 1840, a government position entitled 'Deputy-Protector of Aborigines at Port Lincoln'.

"I asked the Barngarla representatives, 'I know you've lost your language and I know that I can reclaim it with you; the question is whether or not you are interested in the reclamation of this sleeping beauty, dreaming beauty language', they said - 'We've been waiting for you for 50 years.'"

Professor Zuckermann said their response made a huge impression on him and he arranged with Howard Richards to come to Port Lincoln in April 2012 for a three-day revivalistic language workshop at Mallee Park.

"It was exquisite, by 9am everyone was sitting with pen and paper, ready for my spiel," he said.

Luckily, the five languages known by Rev Schürmann - namely German, Greek, Latin, Hebrew and English - were among the 13 languages professor Ghil'ad Zuckermann is fluent in.

It was easy for professor Zuckermann to interpret Rev Schürmann's dictionary and grammar, which had been written from the perspective of a native German-speaking Lutheran missionary.

"What is historically, symmetrically beautiful is that Schürmann wrote the dictionary as a tool to teach the Barngarla people about Lutheran Christianity in their own language, but what we now use his dictionary for is diametrically opposite - to reconnect the Barngarla with their original Aboriginal spirituality," he said.

Since then, the various Barngarla communities of Eyre Peninsula with professor Zuckermann, and the support of the federal government's Indigenous Languages and Arts program, had also developed a free Barngarla Language Dictionary app.

Professor Zuckermann remarked whilst technology killed Aboriginal languages in the past, it was now being used to heal, to reconnect Aboriginal groups with their cultural autonomy, intellectual sovereignty, spirituality and wellbeing.

He also believed while Native Title cases divides communities and damages inter-tribal relations, whereas what I call 'Native Tongue Title' harmoniously unites," he said.

"I personally believe that Native Title divides communities and damages inter-tribal relations, whereas what I call 'Native Tongue Title' harmoniously unites," he said.

"For example, whilst Adnyamathanha and Barngarla people may fight for Native Title, in my Barngarla workshops in Goodnada, that is Port Augusta, I have always invited an Adnyamathanha friend of mine, Robert Wilton, to assist me in teaching Barngarla.

"Personally, I believe that language is much more important than land, that said, I realise that Aboriginal spirituality is often based on a trinity: people, language, land."

Professor Zuckermann said from that perspective, there was no difference between land and language because, "both language and people belonged to the land".

Port Lincoln resident Dr Sonia Tidemann said she had a long background with Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory through her work in ecology and she attended the reclamation workshop.

"I was interested to see what Ghil'ad did in the workshop and how he managed to get people involved and practising the language," she said.

"I think it's important to give Aboriginal people the feeling of power - too much has been taken from them and giving them the ability to use their language puts them in a more powerful position than without it.

"I was glad to see in the workshop he actually structured sentences, which is so important, I was impressed at his total commitment



Professor Zuckermann with Port Lincoln History Group president Chris Mantle.



Filmmaker Sarita Gold, Dr Sonia Tidemann, Judy Menczel and professor Ghil'ad Zuckermann, front.

to reviving the Barngarla language."

Judy Menczel and Sarita Gold were the documentary filmmakers from Sydney's AD Media, also in Port Lincoln filming their upcoming documentary focusing on the impact of intergenerational trauma and the role language played helping to build resilience and healing.

The 'Resilient Hearts' filmmakers followed professor Zuckermann's language reclamation workshops, as well as local Barngarla women.

Ms Gold said the documentary was about resilience and healing.

"It's about Barngarla and the reclamation of the language in terms of the Stolen Generation, the Richards family in particular, from Lavinia, and the experiences and takeaways from Emma and Evelyn as individuals, it's about resilience, healing and coming together," she said.

"Also in a sense how Port Lincoln as a community, it would appear to us, embrace the Barngarla community, the language, the words, there's this lovely sense of community and warmth.

"There's also Emma Richards with her cultural training and running her workshops, and Evelyn Walker at Navigator in terms of education and together, with Ghil'ad they've written a trilogy of books that all focus on Barngarla culture and traditions."

The three books - Barngarlidhi Manoo ('Speaking Barngarla Together'), Mangiri Yarda ('Healthy Country') and Wardlada Mardinidhi ('Bush Healing') - are available to purchase in Port Lincoln from outlets such as the Fresh Fish Place and Visitor Information Centre.

Professor Zuckermann said he would be back in Port Lincoln by September to further work with the Richards family, and all other Barngarla people, to enable further language reclamation, which he strongly believed improved wellbeing, mental health and general health.

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