



The Watarrka Foundation Social Impact Report 2012 - 2026 10 Years of the Lilla Sports and Storytelling Festival

Supporting remote indigenous education in Central Australia



WATARRKA FOUNDATION
Supporting children of the outback

Watarrka foundation Social Impact Report

10 Years of the Lilla Festival: 2012 – 2026

1. Introduction

The **Watarrka Foundation** was **established in 2012** - previously called the **Lilla Foundation** until 2016 - by **Reg Ramsden** of Remote Tours, together with founding directors, Timothy Hall and the traditional land-owners of Lilla, with a vision of creating a supporting educational foundation for Aboriginal children in the remote Watarrka region of central Australia - the location of **Lilla**, 15km from Kings Canyon in the Watarrka National Park (240km southwest of Alice Springs).

The **Watarrka Foundation** and the **Lilla Sports and Storytelling Festival** was created based on Reg's vision for indigenous school children in the remote Watarrka region to have access to:

- an **education focused program** to build confidence, skills and resilience, with a focus on traditional culture, the benefits of a continuing education and the power of community;
- **education on country** with the building of a school facility at Lilla, and
- vocational opportunities to **stay and work in the community on country** as future leaders of the Watarrka region.

Together with the traditional land-owners of Lilla ([Lilla Story and Guides.pdf](#)), the first **Lilla Sports and Storytelling Festival** was held in 2014 with a clear purpose – *bring the community of the Watarrka region together for culture and connection with the theme 'It's Cool to go to School' and collaboratively provide inspiration for education, sports, healthy eating, community engagement and storytelling on country*. This partnership builds on Reg Ramsden's own connection with the traditional land-owners of Lilla, which spans more than two decades through his work with Remote Tours, and which underpins the welcome and trust extended to the Foundation and visiting school communities each year.

The Festival is described (by ABC journalist Elsie Lange) as '**one of a kind**' [Storytelling, sport, theatre and culture — this remote school camp is one of a kind - ABC News](#)

12 years later in **June 2026**, **Watarrka Foundation** hosted the **10th Lilla Sports and Storytelling Festival**, bringing together 48 children from Papunya, Areyonga (Utju) and Watiyawanu schools.

The Festivals theme '**It's Cool to Go to School**' ignites and excites a shared passion and ambition for the remote Watarrka community. Since the inaugural Festival in 2014, it has grown from a small gathering of two local schools and 18 children into an annual celebration involving remote school communities across Central Australia, including Papunya, Areyonga (Utju), Yipirinya and Watiyawanu. By 2026, the 10th Festival brought together 48 children – a milestone reflecting a decade of steady growth, community trust and a widened circle of participating schools. At each Festival, children come together to enjoy a 'camp' away from their parents for a few days and experience art, drama, cooking, singing, sports, community living, aboriginal culture and storytelling. For many Australian children, going on a school camp is a rite of passage, but for many children in these remote central Australian schools, Lilla festival is their first school camp.

Purpose of this Social Impact Report

This Social Impact Report is being issued at an important time for the **Watarrka Foundation** to showcase: the significant impact which the **Lilla Festival** has achieved in the remote Watarrka community, with the **10th Lilla Festival being hosted in 2026**,

the building of a **community of strategic partners** focused on continuing and building on the foundations of the Lilla Festival's message '**Its Cool to go to School**' and the importance of continuing education for remote Aboriginal school children, and

the Watarrka Foundation's **next big goals and plans** for FY27/28 and beyond with the introduction of a second 'End of Year Alice Festival' and a new vocational program in partnership with **Discovery Parks Kings Canyon Resort** for training Aboriginal school leavers on country for vocational roles in the Watarrka region.

Watarrka Foundation Strategic Partners

Soon after Reg founded Watarrka Foundation in 2012, **Campbell Hudson** of **Dentons** joined as a key board director and **Manny Bell** (a proud Wakka Wakka and Burri Gubba nation man from Brisbane, director and chair of the Watarrka Foundation and a senior lawyer of CBA), who was previously a lawyer in Campbell's team took on the role - which he still does passionately today – of organising of the annual **Lilla Festival**.

Watarrka Foundation has built a number of **strategic partnerships** over the years for the Lilla Festival including strategic and corporate partners, **Dentons, CBA, Remote Tours, Discovery Parks & Resorts, Trident Plumbing, Alpitye Art Studio, FigJam & Co, Manta Bus, Karrke Aboriginal Cultural Experience and Tours**, not for profit partners, **BeMe Movement Education, Have a Ball Foundation** and the **NTAFL** and the schools in and around the Watarrka region, including the **Papunya, Areyonga (Utju), Yipirinya** and **Watiyawanu** schools.

The recent and important strategic partnership formed with **Discovery Parks & Resorts** has embedded the **Discovery Parks Kings Canyon Resort** contributing significantly to the **Lilla Festival** over the past three years. In addition, Luke Johnston and Bradley Kerkman of Discovery Parks joined the Watarrka Foundation Board in 2025. This strategic partnership with **Discovery Parks & Resorts** offers new and greater opportunities for the **Watarrka Foundation** to further its mission for educating young indigenous Australians on country.

At the last three Lilla Festivals between 2024 to 2026; **Discovery Parks** has, amongst other contributions, provided facilities, hospitality and amenity for the Aboriginal school children to enjoy on the first night of the camp - the Kings Canyon light show, a hot shower and dinner at the **Kings Canyon Resort**, in addition to providing its sous chefs for the cooking class at Lilla educating the children about healthy eating and organising the helicopter pilots to land at Lilla and tell their story of the importance of education for their career journeys.

What's coming next in FY27/28

The Watarrka Foundation has big plans for '**what's next**' for the Watarrka community, including:

1. Acquiring and operating a Community 'Watarrka Foundation' bus for transport and logistics for its annual Festival events and community events around Alice Springs, Kings Canyon and Lilla,
2. The introduction of a second annual festival – an annual '**End of Year**' Alice Festival to be hosted at **Discovery Parks Alice Springs** for the Aboriginal school children of Papunya, Areyonga, Yipirinya and Watiyawanu and other schools of the Watarrka region building on the theme 'It's school to go to School' celebrating the completion of the school year, with the first festival planned for term 4 2027, and



3. Hosting a **vocational program, Watarrka Pathways – Discover Your Future (STEP) Program** at **Discovery Parks Kings Canyon Resort** for Aboriginal school leavers, commencing **Nov/ Dec 2026 to February 2027** to provide an educational opportunity for school leavers who wish to stay on country to be trained and educated in vocational roles in the Watarrka community.

In addition, the Watarrka Foundation is planning:

1. A **2027 Art Show** in conjunction with Alpitye Art Studio and Charmaine Pwerle for International Womens' Day in March 2027 at Dentons Brisbane office; and
2. The **Lilla Sports and Storytelling Festival** at Lilla in June 2027, which will be its 11th year of the Lilla Festival in 2027

Fundraising goals

The Watarrka Foundation has been supported financially and non-financially by the generosity and assistance of its strategic partners and donors over the past fourteen (14) years, in addition to fundraising efforts in partnership with the Alpitye Art Studio which has generously donated a percentage of sale proceeds to the Foundation over many years.

Watarrka Foundation has just received its first Government grant, a Community Benefit Fund (CBF) Minor Community Grant, of \$15,000 from the Northern Territory Government (reference MI26R100346) towards the Lilla Sports and Storytelling Festival to be held in June 2027. Watarrka Foundation is extremely grateful to the Northern Territory Government for this grant and will be seeking further funding to operate the Lilla Festival 2027, which is budgeted to cost \$60,000.

Watarrka Foundation is seeking to raise a further **\$45,000** to run the 2027 Lilla Sports and Storytelling Festival.

As highlighted above, the Watarrka Foundation has big plans in Fy27/28 to expand on its community impact and will be seeking to raise funds as follows:

1. **Watarrka Discovery Parks End of Year Alice Festival – Term 4, 2027 – Watarrka Foundation** is planning to host, with **Discovery Parks** at the **Discovery Parks Alice Springs Holiday Park**, an inaugural two day 'End of Year' Alice Festival for school children to celebrate the end of the school year and to connect with culture and community to enjoy learning about different vocations and work opportunities in Alice Springs.

The theme **"It's Cool to go to School"** will be the repeated theme for this end of year festival reiterating and reinforcing the lasting impression and inspiration of the mid-year Lilla Festival.

Watarrka Foundation is seeking fundraising of **\$60,000** to host this two-day festival, which will be hosted and accommodated at **Discovery Parks Alice Springs** and will be a celebration for indigenous school children for completing the 2027 school year, with a focus on the importance of education, storytelling, sports and connection to culture. This festival will involve: (i) sports; (ii) drama and singing; (iii) cooking; (iv) education about safety; (v) education about different career paths and vocations; and (vi) free time to enjoy splash time at the Discovery Parks splash pool.



2. **Community Bus (from November 2026)** – Watarrka Foundation is seeking **\$40,000** to acquire a used bus which will be a Community Bus for all Watarrka Foundation events (and including for maintenance and insurance in the first year). The business case shows that the alternative of hiring of a bus/drivers/fuel for running Watarrka Foundation annual events will be approximately \$80,000 per year going forwards, whereas the costs associated with buying a bus and operating our own Community Bus for our events will cost us \$40,000 in the first year and \$15,000 in the second year, with CPI uplift in ensuing years. The Watarrka Community Bus will be stored at Discovery Parks Alice Springs.
3. **Watarrka Pathways - Discover Your Future (STEP) Program** -Watarrka Foundation is seeking \$75,000 to deliver its 2026/2027 vocational training program with its strategic partners, **Discovery Parks** and **Remote Tours**, planned for **Nov/Dec 2026 to February 2027**. The Watarrka Foundation, in conjunction with Unity College and Areyonga (Utju) School has identified five (5) Aboriginal school leavers who will graduate from year 12 in 2026 and who are seeking to be vocationally trained in jobs which can be applied on country at their place of upbringing in the Watarrka National Park. **Discovery Parks**, together with **Remote Tours**, will be housing, feeding and transporting these interns to and from Lilla and Discovery Parks Kings Canyon Resort to have daily training in work opportunities in resort jobs such as front of house, back office, tour guiding, cleaning, gardening, cooking and kitchen work and guest cultural experiences. This program is designed to support Aboriginal school leavers who are seeking vocational training with mentorship. The Foundation is seeking to raise **\$75,000** which will cover the cost for contracting a senior and experienced mentor for the interns, as well as providing transport, food and accommodation, which initially will be provided by Discovery Parks and Remote Tours, but in the future may be provided at Lilla with mobile housing and a tour operator. The program will partner with Charles Darwin University to deliver a Certificate 1 in Tourism in Australian Indigenous Culture. A summary table of the Watarrka Foundation’s fundraising goals is set out below:

Event	Fundraising goals FY27/28
‘End of Year’ Alice Festival, Alice Springs 2027 An annual festival to celebrate the end of the school year championing the importance of education, different and varied vocational roles and inspiring children to continue in their education. Other activities will be focused on child safety education, sports, singing, dancing, cooking, health eating and community activities.	\$60,000
Community Bus – purchase of a 48 seater passenger bus for transporting the school children of remote areas to the festivals, reducing reliance on third-party hire (currently costing approximately \$17,000 per year for the Lilla Festival alone, and projected to grow as the Foundation’s program expands).	\$40,000
Watarrka Pathways – Discover your Future STEP Program (at Discovery Parks Kings Canyon Resort) – 3 month internship for 5 interns (Aboriginal school leavers) to be trained on country in vocational roles such as front of house, back of house, hospitality, retail, tour guide, horticulture, cleaning, customer service, cooking and kitchen work.-	\$75,000
Lilla Sports and Storytelling Festival – June 2027 (\$15,000 already raised through the CBF Minor Community Grant, reference MI26R100346, from the Northern Territory Government)	\$65,000

A Big thank you

The Watarrka Foundation is proud to tell the story of the last 14 years since its commencement and 10 successful Lilla Sports and Storytelling Festivals (2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2023, 2024, 2025 and 2026 with only a few years' break during the COVID years).

The Watarrka Foundation would like to acknowledge the Northern Territory Government for its provision of a Community Benefit Fund (CBF) Minor Community Grant of \$15,000 (reference MI26R100346) towards the 2027 Lilla Sports and Storytelling Festival.

The Watarrka Foundation Board also sincerely thanks all of the strategic partners who have provided financial resources, volunteers and non-financial resources to the success of the Lilla Sports and Storytelling Festival. The Watarrka Foundation is looking to create greater and more far reaching social impact with its charitable objectives outlined above. We sincerely thank all contributors to helping our cause.

Code for making a donation:



2. Social Impact Report – Executive Summary

The Watarrka Foundation is committed to the creation of thriving, independent and self-reliant Aboriginal communities living on their ancestral land, working directly and collaboratively with like-minded organisations, and delivering programs that support a sustainable environment, education, healthy lifestyles and independent livelihoods for Aboriginal communities in the Watarrka region.

Over the period from 2014 to 2026, the Foundation has sustained and expanded its engagement with remote Indigenous school communities across Central Australia, with specific program activity at and in connection with Papunya School and Areyonga (Utju) School. Its work has spanned infrastructure investment, nutrition and wellbeing initiatives, cultural and sporting programming, and cross-community engagement, all developed and delivered in partnership with traditional land-owners, educators, and local organisations.

Focused on young people, the Foundation delivers programs that support a sustainable environment, education, healthy lifestyles and independent livelihoods for Aboriginal communities in the Watarrka region, operating on the belief that it is by investing in children and young people of the area, and through their leadership that its objectives will be achieved, rather than through programs imposed from outside the community.

This report summarises the Foundation's mission and key activities, and the social impact of those activities on Indigenous students at Watarrka Primary School, Papunya School and Areyonga (Utju) School, and more broadly for the Watarrka community between 2014 to 2026.

3. Mission of the Watarrka Foundation

The Foundation's broader mission is to develop leadership values among the children and young people of the Watarrka region, so that they become the leaders of tomorrow who are equipped to care for their culture and Country. The Foundation operates from a primary address in Alice Springs, Northern Territory, with programs delivered on Country at Lilla and Kings Canyon in the Petermann region. As set out in its Constitution, the Foundation's charitable objects are:



to alleviate and relieve poverty, sickness, destitution and helplessness in the Lilla Community and Watarrka region, particularly among Indigenous Australians;



to carry out projects to relieve poverty, sickness, destitution and helplessness in the Lilla Community and Watarrka region, particularly among Indigenous Australians;



to provide programs to promote life skills, independence and resilience of persons in need in the Lilla Community and Watarrka region, particularly among Indigenous Australians suffering from poverty, sickness, destitution and helplessness for their long-term social welfare; and



to raise money from the public and to secure funds to further these objects

Core Principles

The Foundation's published materials reflect a consistent set of operating principles:



Working directly and collaboratively with like-minded organisations and communities, including the traditional land-owners at Lilla, schools across the Watarrka region, and strategic partners such as Discovery Parks, Remote Tours and Dentons.



Focusing on young people as agents of long-term change, reflected in the Foundation's forthcoming vocational training program supporting Aboriginal school leavers to build a livelihood on Country.



Delivering programs that support sustainable environments, education, healthy lifestyles and independent livelihoods.



Developing leadership values in children and young people, reflected in the 'It's Cool to Go to School' message that children carry back to their communities and classrooms each year.

Supporting education on Country and culturally grounded learning, delivered each year at the Lilla Sports and Storytelling Festival in partnership with the traditional land-owners of Lilla and community Elders.

4. Supporting Remote Indigenous Education

The very remote communities of Central Australia, including communities such as Papunya and Areyonga (Utju) face well-documented and overlapping barriers to educational participation and achievement, including geographic isolation, limited infrastructure, food insecurity, and restricted access to enrichment, sport, and extracurricular activity. The Watarrka Foundation's initiatives, developed in partnership with traditional land-owners, schools and communities, have been designed to directly address these barriers.

The Lilla Sports and Storytelling Festival, held annually at Lilla since 2014 under the theme "It's Cool to Go to School", is the Foundation's flagship initiative in support of its mission. Each year the Festival brings school children from across the Watarrka region together for several days of art, drama, cooking, singing, sport, community living, Aboriginal culture and storytelling on Country, in partnership with the traditional land-owners of Lilla. For many participating children, the Festival is their first school camp, and it is the primary vehicle through which the Foundation delivers education-focused programming, culturally grounded learning, and cross-community engagement each year.

Since its inaugural year, the Festival has grown steadily, with the exception of a pause between 2020 and 2022 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The table to the right sets out the number of children who have attended the Festival each year it has been held.

In addition to running the Lilla festival, the Watarrka Foundation was instrumental in reopening the Watarrka Primary School and has since played a key role in supporting the school and the broader communities of the Watarrka region.

Throughout its existence, the Foundation has delivered a consistent program of practical, on-the-ground initiatives at Watarrka Primary School and neighbouring communities in support of its mission, including:

- Food van - provided to Watarrka Primary School from 2012 to support food access and nutrition.
- Fruit and vegetable gardens - established at Watarrka Primary School in 2013, with further gardens established at Wanmarra, Lilla, Ulpanyali and Areyonga (Utju) Schools.
- Outdoor play and shade infrastructure - provision of jungle gym equipment and a shade structure at Watarrka Primary School from 2014.
- Fat bikes - provided to Watarrka Primary School in 2016, supporting children's fitness and physical confidence.
- Winter Clothing Appeal - an annual appeal maintained which began 2014 to provide warm clothing to children in the Watarrka region during the winter months.

These initiatives, together with the annual Lilla Festival and the infrastructure works described in Section 5, form the practical foundation of the Foundation's work to deliver a sustainable environment, education, healthy lifestyles and independent livelihoods for Aboriginal communities in the Watarrka region

Year	No. of children attending Lilla Festival	
2014		18
2015		31
2016		30
2017		31
2018		38
2019		26
2023		41
2024		30
2025		35
2026		48

5. Impact at Watarrka Primary School

While Section 6 of this report focuses on the schools who have recently attended the Lilla Sports and Storytelling Festival, it is important to note the Foundation's foundational and extensively documented work at Watarrka Primary School, which demonstrates the model and measurable outcomes that the Foundation has applied across its broader regional engagement.

5.1 Educational Achievement

Under Principal Christine Munro and Indigenous assistant teacher Rayleen Limbiari, since its reopening students at Watarrka Primary School progressed substantially. Specifically:

- Students progressed from reading at a five-year-old level to reading at a 12 or 13 year-old level.
- Students developed from writing simple sentences to writing multi-page stories.
- Students advanced from early numeracy - where they struggled to count to 100 - to confidently working with numbers to 1,000,000.
- Students moved from adversarial behaviour to being a cohesive team that supports their peers' development.
- Students transformed from being lethargic and lacking physical confidence to being fit and enjoying sports including riding fat bikes, walking, playing basketball and baseball, and becoming competent swimmers.
- Students are learning at the remarkable rate of 1.5 levels per year and are steadily closing the learning gap with city primary schools.
- The school has shown exceptional attendance rates, with core students when on Country only missing school when genuinely unwell.

5.2 Infrastructure

Following the success of the reopening of the school, in March 2019, the Foundation opened a new classroom facility at the Watarrka Primary School comprising a classroom, kitchen, computer room, library, and sick bay. This new facility allows the top-age children (Years 7 to 10) the opportunity to remain at school on their own Country.

Further infrastructure projects targeted at Watarrka Primary School included a basketball court extension paving project and the installation of an air-conditioning unit.

5.3 Recognition

In 2017, the NT Department of Education recognised the Watarrka Primary School as one of the best performing remote primary schools in the Northern Territory. Additionally, the Department of Education provided approval for the School's Principal to teach the children through to Year 10.



**5 year old level
to 12 or 13 year
old level**



**Advancement
in numeracy**



**Improved
behaviour**



**Increased
attendance
rates**



**Purpose built
school facilities**



**Best performing
remote primary school**

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“Camp Lilla was an enriching experience for both students and teachers alike. The camp allowed students to get out on Country and connect with their own cultures as well as those of others. It also helped to strengthen relationships between students and teachers, and allowed teachers to see their students learning in a different context in which they could explore their own interests and demonstrate their pride in their cultural knowledge and identities. The camp also allowed students to consider the ways in which attending school could broaden their horizons, showcasing a range of career pathways from rangers to pilots.” - Teacher Laura Egan

“The children leave with such an abundance of knowledge about different careers, while also developing a deeper connection to their own culture and community. They were so excited to share their incredible experiences with their friends and teachers back at school, and no doubt with their families as well.” - Fellow teacher, Tegan Titman



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6. Impact at Schools who have attended the Lilla Festival

6.1 Papunya School (2023 –present)

Sports and Storytelling Festival Participation

Papunya School has been a participating school at the annual Lilla Sports and Storytelling Festival since 2023, and in 2026, Papunya School once again participated in the Festival, attending alongside Areyonga (Utju) and Watiyawanu schools, from 9-11 June 2026.

Cultural Engagement

The Foundation's partnerships extend to artists and cultural leaders from the Papunya region, including Charmaine Pwerle, who was a special guest and artist at the Foundation's 2026 International Women's Day event. Charmaine shared stories of her grandmother Minnie Pwerle and her mother Barbara Weir, both extraordinary artists who have passed on their knowledge, culture and storytelling through art. This reflects the Foundation's broader commitment to celebrating and sustaining the cultural heritage of the Papunya region.



“

“From the moment we arrived, Reg and his team made our students feel welcome and valued. Kids who are normally quiet around strangers were relaxed, confident and proud to share their culture and stories. The workshops opened their eyes to new possibilities. Maybe a few seeds were planted... a future chef, ranger, tour guide or helicopter pilot.” –

Tom Middleton, area Principal for Papunya, Areyonga (Utju) and Watiyawanu Schools, reflects on the schools’ time at the Lilla Festival

The children leave with such an abundance of knowledge about different careers, while also developing a deeper connection to their own culture and community.” - A fellow teacher, from Areyonga (Utju) School echoed this sentiment



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6.2 Areyonga (Utju) School (2015–present)

Sports and Storytelling Festival Participation

Areyonga (Utju) School has been a participating school at the Lilla Sports and Storytelling Festival since 2015. As with Papunya, this participation provided Areyonga (Utju) students with access to enriched sporting, cultural, and peer learning experiences beyond those available within the school day.

Areyonga (Utju) School also operates a two-way learning model integrating Pitjantjatjara cultural knowledge with the Australian curriculum. The Foundation's Festival programming - with its emphasis on storytelling, cultural expression, and on-Country learning - is directly aligned with and complementary to this educational philosophy.

Nutrition and Wellbeing

The Foundation also established fruit and vegetable gardens at Areyonga (Utju) Primary School, addressing food access challenges at the school while embedding hands-on nutrition education into everyday school life. The gardens give students regular, practical exposure to growing and preparing fresh food alongside their classroom learning.



7. Impact Outcome (2014 – 2026)

The following table summarises the key documented impact areas across the Foundation's work at Watarrka Primary School and its engagement with the schools who have attended the Lilla festival over the 2014–2026 period.

Impact Area	Key Activity	Evidenced Outcomes
Education & Engagement	Reopening of Watarrka Primary School	The Foundation was instrumental in reopening Watarrka Primary School, bringing on-Country schooling back to the community and enabling the sustained educational gains documented in Section 5, including students progressing at 1.5 levels per year.
	Lilla Festival; "It's Cool to Go to School!" messaging	Children return from the Festival more engaged with school and motivated to attend; the Festival's messaging is designed to encourage attendance and help close the school attendance gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students, and teachers use Festival experiences throughout the year to reinforce the value of education.
Sport & Physical Activity	Multi-day sporting programs at the Lilla Festival	Sport and physical activity is embedded across the Festival and motivates the children to attend both the Festival and school more broadly. The Festival also provides the children with access to visiting sports volunteers and role models not otherwise readily available in these remote communities.
	Watarrka Primary School – fat bikes, basketball court, and related sport infrastructure at Watarrka Primary School	The fat bike program at the Watarrka Primary School was introduced specifically as an incentive to increase student enrolments and attendance, alongside the basketball court extension and paving project. Together these initiatives have supported children's day-to-day fitness, physical confidence, and enjoyment of school.
Cultural Strength	On-Country festivals; storytelling; Elder engagement; First Nations artist partnerships	Cultural storytelling, art, and community connection with Elders and traditional land-owners is emphasised throughout the Festival, and reflected in teacher testimonials describing students' pride in sharing their culture
Cross-Community Connection	Multiple schools attending the annual Festival	The Lilla Festival brings together students from different schools and communities across the Watarrka region each year, giving children the opportunity to connect, build friendships and share experiences with peers from other remote communities that they would not otherwise meet.
Nutrition & Wellbeing	Fruit and vegetable garden at Areyonga (Utju)	Direct investment in food access and nutrition at Areyonga (Utju) School, embedding hands-on nutrition education into the school environment and supporting improved student wellbeing and concentration.
Infrastructure	Watarrka Primary School - New classroom, kitchen, library, computer room, sick bay; basketball court; air conditioning	New classroom facility opened in March 2019 for Watarrka Primary School, enabling Years 7–10 to remain on Country, with additional infrastructure projects at Watarrka Primary School including a basketball court extension and an air-conditioning unit installation

8. Sustainability and Long – Term Value

The Foundation's work over the 2014–2026 period reflects several features that contribute to long-term impact:

- **Community-led and community-validated programming.** The Foundation works directly and collaboratively with like-minded organisations, delivering locally relevant programs rather than externally imposed solutions.
- **Repeatable, scalable program models.** The annual Lilla Sports and Storytelling Festival has operated as a continuing and much-loved tradition, maintaining its core "It's Cool to Go to School!" theme across successive years.
- **Enduring institutional partnerships.** The Foundation's Festival model draws on a broad coalition of corporate, community, and educational partners, demonstrating a sustainable fundraising and delivery model.
- **Focus on leadership development.** The Foundation's ultimate aim is to develop leadership values amongst children, creating the leaders of tomorrow who are inspired to care for their legacy and show others the way - an explicitly long-term vision that anchors its program design.
- **Mentorship for older youth.** The Foundation launched a Mentorship Project for young Indigenous people in the Watarrka region, demonstrating an evolution in program scope to serve adolescents as well as primary-age children.



9. Governance

The current Watarrka Foundation Board is represented by many of its strategic partners. Founding director **Reg Ramsden** has served continuously since the Foundation's registration in 2012, and **Manny Bell** has been involved in organising the Lilla Festival since its inauguration in 2014. The remaining four directors: **Michelle Segart** (Dentons), **Jacob Davidson** (FigJam & Co), **Bradley Kerkman** (Discovery Parks) and **Luke Johnston** (Discovery Parks) were all appointed in February 2025, with **Nathan McAuliffe** (Trident Plumbing) appointed shortly after in December 2025. This coordinated renewal brought the majority of the current Board on at the same time, deliberately aligning the Board's composition with the Foundation's key strategic partners and its expanded vision for the region. All Board members work on a non-paid/volunteer basis and the strategic partners of the Lilla Festival provide the volunteers and resources for the management and support of the administration and activities of the Lilla Festival.

The Foundation also has a governance framework in place which includes a Code of Conduct addressing respect for Indigenous culture, integrity and accountability, inclusivity, child safety, environmental stewardship and professional conduct, an Advisory Group Charter adopted to bring additional expertise into the Foundation's governance, and a dedicated Lilla Festival Risk Register covering event-specific hazards, most recently reviewed in May 2026.



8. Conclusion

From 2014 to 2026, the Watarrka Foundation has made a sustained and verifiable contribution to the educational and social wellbeing of Indigenous students in remote Central Australia, including students at Watarrka Primary School, as well as students from schools in neighbouring communities, including Papunya School and Areyonga (Utju) School. Through culturally grounded programming, practical infrastructure and nutrition investment, a consistent "It's Cool to Go to School!" message, and a strong commitment to community partnership, the Foundation has worked to create learning environments and enrichment experiences where children are more engaged, healthier, and proud of their cultural identity.

The Foundation's mission - to deliver programs that support a sustainable environment, education, healthy lifestyles and independent livelihoods, and to invest in children and young people as the agents through whom its objectives will be achieved - remains as relevant in 2026 as it was at the Foundation's founding.

The measurable outcomes documented at Watarrka Primary School, including students learning at 1.5 levels per year and steadily closing the learning gap with city primary schools, offer a compelling model for what sustained, community-partnered investment in remote Indigenous education can achieve, and provide a meaningful benchmark for the Foundation's ongoing engagement with the neighbouring communities.

Some reflections from children who have attended the Lilla Festival

"I been two times. I see the water... and ranger. I want to go again."

"My favourite was eating jammies and going to look the water."

"I like the hands on the rock"

"Holding the snake"

"I liked hamburger and chips for dinner and when we been go to rock hole and we see the lights."

"The little house where we camp, I liked that. And where we eat dinner."

"They got the rainbow serpent."

"I liked playing football."

"I liked going to the rock."



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