

# What did Women Say?

*"It felt good doing the tiles and mosaic - it's the first time I've done it. I enjoyed it thoroughly. I didn't want to leave at the end of the day."*

*"Working on the project was the best thing. It gave me the ability to realise I could do lots of different things. It has taught me to recognise skills I didn't know I had. Also the enjoyment the project allowed in meeting all the different women involved including all who donated materials."*

*"To me it's turned into a sanctuary where women can come and feel free to express their emotions working with and talking to the women has been great. The environment has a strong influence that enables me to commune with nature."*

*"It's very calming. Outstanding. It's tapping into what the Aboriginal women in the community can create."*

*"It has been a good experience and a lot of fun. I had good times being here."*

*"Absolutely love it- love the open space and the peace and quietness of it. Loved doing the mosaic. It was great."*

*"To me it's peaceful. I was proud to be involved."*

*"Congratulations on the combined effort by everybody bringing the community together in a caring and sharing way. I have been proud to be involved in the project and enjoyed working as part of the combined team of all the women."*

## The Launch

Ngalawa Wingara was launched with a big opening party that included a traditional smoking. It was opened by Ian Southwell, CEO, South Western Sydney Area Health Service. About 120 people of all ages came to celebrate with us. They included women involved in creating the space, mental health workers, community workers, women's health centre staff, local people, people who helped make the the project a success and people from other places who wanted to do something similar.



## Where to Next?

The most important part of creating the space is to make sure it is used. The next phase of the project is to put a shade/ rain protection awning over the garden. We will then begin running workshops with Aboriginal women and encouraging women who drop in to use the space as they choose.

### Acknowledgments

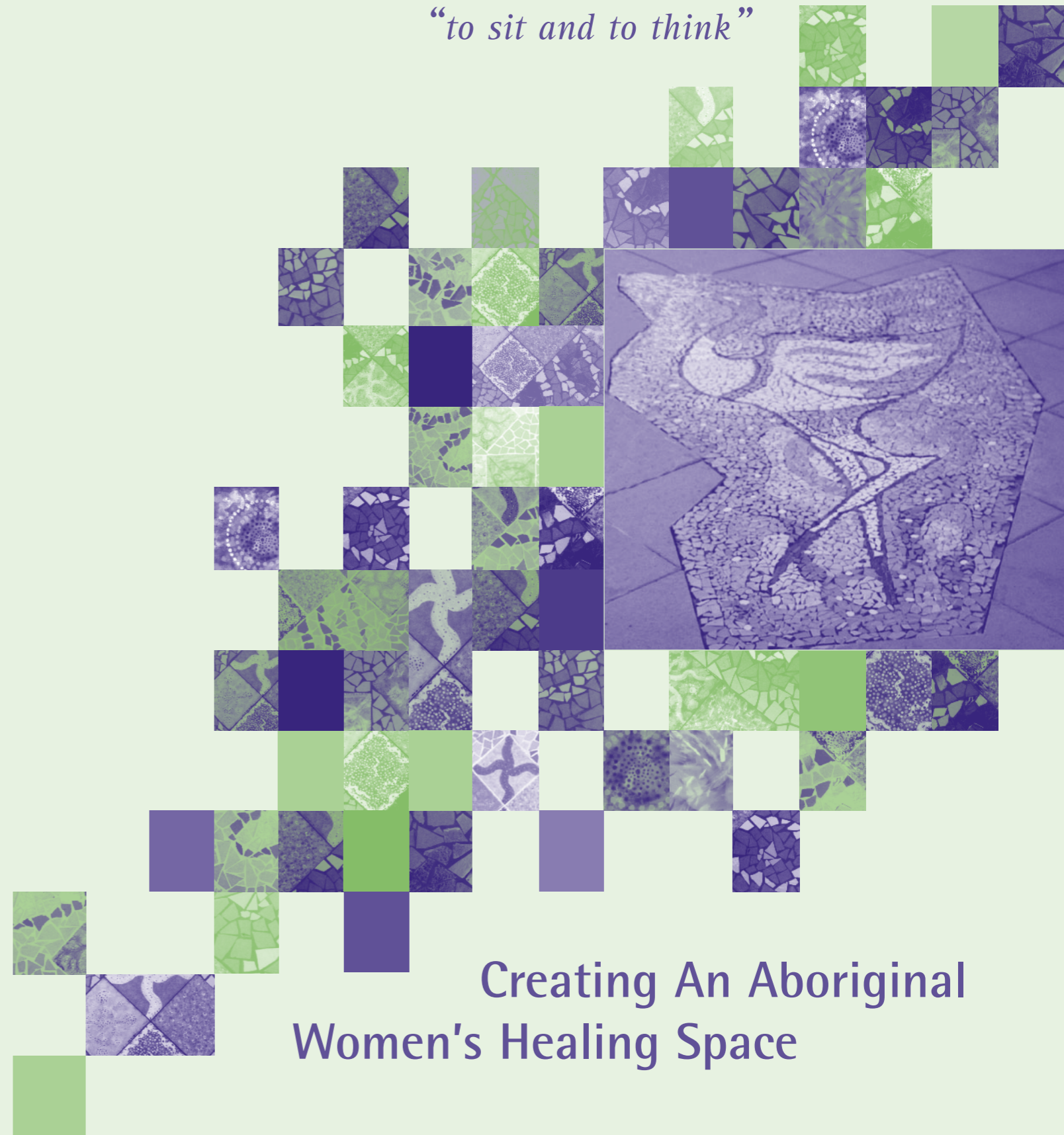
This project was funded by South Western Sydney Area Health Service, Mental Health NGO Partnerships Program. Members of the Steering Committee were Susan Grant, Del Leslie, Kate Nickolas, Karen McNulty, Irene Pearce, Wendy Pomeroy, Margaret Hickie. Many thanks to all the women who participated in all different ways to make this project a success. Thank you to all the organisations who donated time and/or materials to the project.



# NGALAWA

# WINGARA

*"to sit and to think"*



## Creating An Aboriginal Women's Healing Space

# Creating An Aboriginal Women's Healing Space

- ◆ Aboriginal mental health and wellbeing is a problem that has not been addressed well by mainstream organisations.
- ◆ In 2001 Liverpool Women's Health Centre worked with local Aboriginal women on a community arts project to create a healing space in the Centre's backyard.
- ◆ For many years, Liverpool Women's Health Centre has employed an Aboriginal health worker, yet this was not enough to encourage many Aboriginal women to use the Centre's services on a regular basis. In particular, it was rare that ongoing counselling services were used.

*By creating an outside environment that is culturally appropriate and spiritually affirming we wanted to promote mental health and wellbeing for Aboriginal women.*



## A Wholistic Approach to Wellbeing

- ◆ Discussions with Aboriginal workers, management committee and clients showed that adopting a wholistic approach to health and wellbeing is essential for healing to begin. A mental illness focus with an emphasis on diagnosis that ignores cultural aspects of Aboriginal life is alienating.
- ◆ Environment, home, family, identity, history, past experiences, diet, access to employment and income, physical and spiritual health, safety and community are all important to wellbeing.
- ◆ For Aboriginal people, environment and place are culturally significant and play an integral role in identity.
- ◆ The project aimed to improve Aboriginal women's access to the Centre by creating a space that Aboriginal women had designed and would feel comfortable in - to visit workers, to simply seek out a quiet space, to participate in health workshops, to meet with each other.
- ◆ It is a unique initiative using the natural environment to foster healing as opposed to an enclosed clinical environment which can be intimidating.

## What did we do?

- ◆ We talked about the idea with each other. A steering committee was formed with Aboriginal workers, centre representatives, and community arts women before the Centre applied for funding. The committee was actively involved in writing a submission for funding.
- ◆ The project was funded by South Western Sydney Area Health Service, Non Government Organisations Mental Health Partnerships Project. It received the top ranking for funding!
- ◆ Local Aboriginal artist Susan Grant was employed to work with women to create the space.
- ◆ Approximately 30 women of all ages attended workshops to give their ideas on the things they'd like to see in the garden and to talk about what builds mental health and wellbeing. The workshops were held at the Miller Aboriginal Women's Clinic, Hoxton Park Community Health Centre, the women's health centre and the annual Biyani Aboriginal women's camp.
- ◆ The information was put together by the artist and transformed into several designs and the women chose one for the Healing Space.
- ◆ A landscaper was contracted to do the heavy construction work in the garden like removing lawn, paving and putting in garden beds.
- ◆ Women participated over many weeks in making mosaics for the garden, painting, making tiles and planting the gardens. Some women used their skills to get community donations for the project including bush rock, plants, tiles and paint.
- ◆ The steering committee met sometimes fortnightly over the life of the project and helped with the work, with getting women to come, with ideas and with getting donations as well as supporting the community artist.



## About the Garden

The garden was named **NGALAWA WINGARA**. It means "to sit and to think". It incorporates features that are significant to Aboriginal people's identity with the natural environment.

Features include:

- ◆ Significance of water as a life source
- ◆ Use of some plants that are native and herbal
- ◆ Mosaic designs including a brolga which is sacred
- ◆ Water feature with running water to create a feeling of peace and tranquillity
- ◆ Hand painted tiles and designs inspired by women who participated in workshops
- ◆ Beautiful fine red sand from Ngaanyatjarra lands of the Warburton community in Western Australia donated via Casula Powerhouse.
- ◆ Blues, browns and greens used in colour theme.
- ◆ Ramp access from the main building for women with limited mobility.