



# CLOSE THE GAP

DENIS PETERS

BRINGING people together, sharing information and taking meaningful action to improve the health of Aboriginal people was the goal at National Close The Gap Day celebrations in the Hamilton Botanic Gardens.

About 200 people attended the event and heard from Winda Mara Aboriginal Corporation and Hamilton District Health Service speakers.

Southern Grampians Shire Council and the Greater Green Triangle University Department of Rural Health were also involved in supporting and coordinating the day.

On the lighter side there was music, face painting, balloons, delicious kebabs and fruit and yoghurt on offer.

Winda Mara health services practice manager Jason Saunders told the gathering that participation in the National Close the Gap Day is a way to demonstrate support for a national movement, working together for health equality.

“National Close the Gap Day gives our community members and organisations the opportunity to show their support for closing the 10-17 year life expectancy gap between indigenous and non-indigenous Australians,” Mr Saunders said.

He said Winda-Mara, which covers an 80km radius from Heywood, has had its 25th anniversary this year and had been working within the Hamilton community for about 13 years.

“Today, Winda-Mara operates within three communities, Hamilton, Heywood and Portland and has ongoing and strong connections with key stakeholders within these communities who are all working equally as hard with Winda-Mara to support our community members to access affordable health care for better health outcomes for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people,” Mr Saunders said. “We are government funded and self-funded like most of the

team employed at Winda-Mara, we are skilled and trained in our fields and we have the best understanding of Aboriginal people and our culture.”

Mr Saunders said Winda Mara’s three-year health action plan revolved around living a healthy lifestyle to limit the risk of developing a chronic disease.

“But it’s about understanding the reasons why our people chose to live an unhealthy lifestyle.

“It can be because of a poor understanding of the risks, poor education, it can be trans-generational issues passed down or undiagnosed mental health issues.

“One of the biggest causes is past and current trauma that our people are facing, risky behaviour, drug abuse, or possibly all of the above.”

Acting WDHS director of Primary and Preventative Health, Fran Patterson, spoke at the event about how WDHS is working to close the gap through local initiatives including an Aboriginal employment plan and monthly social gatherings.

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**LIFESTYLE INFO:** These young people had fun at the social day and also learned about healthy lifestyles: At the back (from left) are Bidy Evans, 13, Thelma Evans, 14 and Bruce Oxtoby, 14. At front are (from left) Triffy Grant, 10, Cheyanne Nelson, 4, Eleanor Densley, 1, Trinity Densley, 7, Xander Densley, 5, and Amelia Knight, 10. 160317bj013



**SPEAKER:**



**BALLOONS:** Making fun shapes with balloons are (from left) Ethan Knight, 12, Brayden Rose, 9, and Kyle Knight, 9. 160317bj012



**ACTIVE:** Painted up and keeping active are 18-month-old Isla Saunders, on the swing, and Kobe Saunders, 3, from Heywood. 160317bj015.



**ELDER:** 12-year-old Ethan Knight reads a message to the audience as elder Aunty Phemia Day, of Hamilton, looks on. 160317bj017

PUBLISHED and unpublished pictures taken by Spectator photographers are available to purchase and can be viewed at the front office: 59 Gray St, Hamilton.



**PRETTY MARKINGS:** Little four-year-old Cheyenne Nelson is very happy with the Aboriginal motifs painted on her face. 160317bj014

**SPEAKER:** Levi Lovett, from Heywood, makes his point while speaking on the day. 160317bj016