

A life-changing pathway into horticulture

Case Study

garinga djimbayang

Dylan Kelly started at Worn Gundidj Native Nursery almost ten years ago and has transformed his life.

He recalls that as a kid in Mildura, "Nan and Pop were always going fishing, going out camping. It's the same feeling that I got from them, that I get here when I'm on land, or when I'm working with nature."

An Indigenous owned and led enterprise

Worn Gundidj Native Nursery in Warrnambool is part of the Indigenous-owned and operated Worn Gundidj Aboriginal Co-operative. Focused on growing Indigenous plants and producing bushfoods. The nursery was established to promote culture, people and place and provide learning and employment opportunities for local mob and the broader community.

It is a thriving wholesale and retail business, engaged in revegetation projects around the community and selling plants to a variety of customers including councils, builders and farmers.

Dylan's life-changing pathway to become a nursery worker

A proud Barkindji Mutthi Mutthi Wangkumara man, Dylan is a valued worker at the Worn Gundidj Native Nursery and has lived in Warrnambool for 24 years. Dylan is an ex-bricklayer, so he is used to physical work.

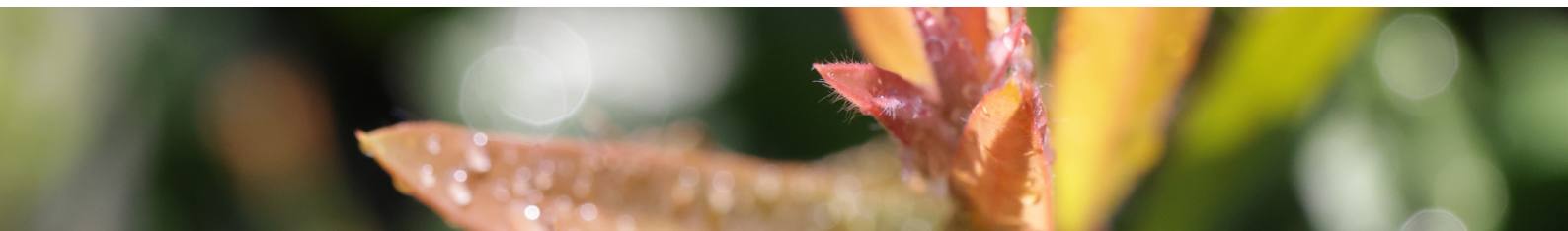
Worn Gundidj has been a positive change of environment for Dylan who describes his new career in horticulture as "very self-rewarding". Perhaps what has been most welcome is the grounding effect working in nature and caring for Country has had on his mind and spirit.

"It feels good to be out here, you know. Breathing in fresh air. Getting your hands dirty. It's actually a good, good feeling to hold and to have."

Eager to supplement his on-the-job training with some studies, Dylan commenced a horticulture course, which Worn Gundidj encourages for many staff, to further skills, knowledge and opportunities.

A safe and welcoming place for First Nations people

Dylan is a valued mentor to other workers and is in his element at the nursery. "I'm enjoying horticulture," he says. "They welcomed me with open arms. It's a good, safe space where no one judges anyone. I originally thought it was going to be a bit easier, but there is some hard and heavy jobs that I've got to do; digging holes, getting down on my knees planting."





Growing native plants and bushfoods

Dylan's work covers every step of the plant-growing process – from gathering seed and harvesting bush foods out on Country, plant propagation and growing, landscaping, bush regeneration and sharing his growing knowledge about native plants and bush foods with the community and customers at the nursery.

"We grow a lot of Indigenous plants to this area. You know, those certain plants bring back the bird cycle, the insect cycle, keeping everything going and flowing."

Dylan is passionate about traditional knowledge and bush foods and enjoys sharing knowledge around native plants as a way of connecting with customers or tour groups. *"We've got Tasmanian mountain pepper, we've got native violet, we've got the lemon myrtle and wattle seed,"* Dylan says. *"It's great having these native botanical plants and sharing with the community and hoping they can share with an even wider community."*

Learning how technology can help in nursery operations

Dylan describes how technology can support plant growing and increase water efficiency through digital irrigation. Worn Gundidj has installed a new watering system that's controlled through an app that can be accessed with a smart phone or tablet.

Using his phone, Dylan says, *"I'll be able to water whatever section, whatever zone I want to water."* When they adjust and manage the settings, Dylan says the system can automatically sense the weather and reduce or add more water as needed to optimise water efficiency and plant health.

Connecting to a better future

Ten years ago, Dylan was afraid of losing his connection with his daughter. Today he is proud and grateful that he can share his growing plant knowledge with her while *"we're out doing our walkabouts on Country. So she knows more about her Country."*

Dylan also acknowledges his ongoing achievements at Worn Gundidj, and how he feels more connected to family, mob and Country than ever. *"Ever since I made the choice to look after myself, it's a more grounded journey. It's helped me provide a better lifestyle for my children and my family."*

Dylan offered some words of advice for anyone thinking about working with plants and giving back to Country, *"Make sure you give it a go. Yeah. Embrace it."*

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For more about Worn Gundidj, visit worn Gundidj.org.au

For more about First Nations peoples' connection to agriculture, visit agriculture.vic.gov.au/garinga-djimbayang