

Indigenous Programs raising Army's Cultural Awareness

As Army's Indigenous pathway programs such as the Indigenous Pre-Recruit Program (IPRP) and the Army Indigenous Development Program (AIDP) gain greater acceptance and appreciation, the Army overall gains greater "cultural competence" according to Army Recruit Training Centre – Kapooka's Indigenous Liaison Officer, Warrant Officer Class two Jack Brunker.

"As an organisation, Army takes pride in being 'culturally competent' on cultures originating from the Middle East, Asia, and the near-Pacific, but it's been heartening to see organisational development in understanding certain cultural aspects associated with that of Indigenous Australians," Warrant Officer Brunker said.

"Kapooka appointed an Indigenous Aunty and Uncle in August 2019, which has provided the kinship and eldership of support to the Indigenous recruits which is deeply seeded with the foundations of Indigenous culture.

"The Aunty and Uncle provide the connection to country and specifically mentorship that is vital in grounding the Indigenous recruits and maintaining their focus on completing IPRP, AIDP and for those that progress; the Army Recruit Course.

"The implementation of a Yarning Circle provided a platform for a culturally appropriate area that is used as a meeting place, ceremonies and corroborees, and an official graduation area.

"The Indigenous Liaison Officer and Indigenous mentor position at Kapooka were filled in 2020 and this has set the conditions for support, advocacy and guidance to all Indigenous recruits and staff.

"Culturally competent staff who understand that diverse backgrounds and history require diverse cultural learning strategies and an understanding that not everyone learns from an Army lesson blueprint.

"I think what has been achieved at Kapooka could be utilised at other training establishments that have a regular intake of Indigenous soldiers.

"Elder Support like our Aunty and Uncle program has proven to be an excellent way to establish the framework and structure of kinship, eldership and guidance.

"Having a yarning circle to provide a meeting and ceremonial place, and having an Indigenous Liaison Officer or Indigenous mentor position for the support, advocacy and guidance to Indigenous soldiers during their IETs has proven very effective.

"Combine these initiatives with culturally competent staff who have received training to better understand Indigenous history, customs and traditions, puts us well on the road to even more success with Indigenous soldiers in the future."

Our Indigenous Military History – We fought together ...

Chris Saunders

Walter Christopher (Chris) George Saunders was from Warrnambool, Victoria. He worked as a groom prior to enlisting on 29 August 1916 with the 10th Machine Gun Company. He later transferred to the 3rd Machine Gun Battalion as a driver.

On 27 May 1916, Chris embarked for service in France and returned to Australia in June 1919.

Chris Saunders' tales of mateship and adventure during World War One inspired his son to enlist in World War Two. His son was Captain Reginald Saunders MBE.

