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Weaving stories of belonging and healing during environmental disasters

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Transcript:

Kaya, Yaama everyone. Hi my name is Danni Cameron. I'm a proud Yuibera woman living in Bundjalung Country. I'm a research fellow, the co-lead of Connecting Our Way and a lecturer in Indigenous health at the University of Sydney.

Today, I want to yarn with you about some work I'm deeply passionate about, work that resonates to a growing and urgent health concerns in our community and highlights the importance of Indigenous ways of knowing, doing, and being.

These ways reflect holistic, relational, cultural, grounded worldviews that's center connection to land, ancestors, community, spirit, and story. That on a knowledge holding, passed through generations guide how we act and relate to others and shape who we are and how we walk in the world, especially working in community during and after natural disasters.

When I first moved to the Northern Rivers, I saw firsthand the limited services, the reduced access to supports, and the rising levels of mental health distress across our region, from mild to acute.

What I witnessed and saw was a call for action, for connection, and for cultural grounded, community led responses. This is where our community driven, trauma informed Aboriginal disaster relief work began, and which I was able to be part of.

Out of the collective need for safety and support, the Healing Hub created by Associate Professor Carlie Atkinson emerged. It wasn't clinical or complicated, it was human. It centered grounding, cultural trauma, informed practice and the power of simply showing up for one another deeply embedded in the work teachings of Aunty Judy Atkinson.

Alongside this, incredible leader stepped forward Naomi Moran, the Koori Mail team ensuring families had food, clothing, relocation support and connection to Elders and knowledge holders. Dave Edwards and the WellMob learning team delivered virtual and vital online wellbeing resources and training. Associate Professor Veronica Matthews expanded the work around climate change, caring for Country and the understanding of long term impacts of devastation in regional and rural areas

From the foundations weaving circles began to grow, weaving has been carried through our communities for generations, but during this time it became something even more. It became a way of re-weaving our stories of strength, identity and belonging when everything else around us felt broken.

Young and old sat together, weaving not only just baskets, but stories of hope. Over time, the healing hub these circles became places where people connected, self-organised, listen deeply and rebuilt.

And as one of our great trauma informed heroes actually tells us, Madrona, Milla Madrona actually reminds us we live storied lives, we are born into stories, and when we learn to weave our stories began weaving us back together, healing our relationships with each other, with Country and with ourselves.

So building on these foundations of successful in securing of funding, which supported the delivery of Aboriginal mental health first aid free to our community, some more than 250 people have now completed this training, strengthening a peer based network and growing, local capacity, confidence in carers from within. Families was supported, empowered to seek help early and to recognise signs of mental health concerns, to respond with confidence and to speak about things that felt too heavy or too shameful to name.

The training emphasised early intervention reduce stigma and strengthening community connection, ensuring support reached people across urban regions and remote areas. These sessions created a resonance structure for storytelling, lifting spirits, restoring hope and threading new intergenerational stories of home, identity and family post devastation. We are also working alongside workplaces, offering respite and culturally grounded tools to support staff navigating complex challenges during recovery.

This is why I do the work because as a community and because who we are, we are all here to weave together our culture, our stories, our strengths.

We create spaces where healing becomes possible and where our community can rise again, stronger and more connected than ever.

Thank you so much. It was deadly to yarn with you all today.