

We walk together as friends: the Shalom Gamarada Ngiyani Yana residential scholarship program

Lisa R Jackson Pulver

Medicine is a huge opportunity for me, I am serious about making a difference and to work with my community, and now I am learning the skills to be a doctor. I have always had the motivation to follow my journey; this opportunity has allowed me to make the journey real. — *Beth Kervin, fourth year medical student*

Beth is one of the first recipients of a unique scholarship program to boost the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students undertaking medical and other health-related degrees at the University of New South Wales (UNSW). She grew up and was educated on Gandangara land in south-western Sydney, but her people are from Guyra in western NSW. Like so many other Indigenous students, Beth is among the first in her family to study at university. She certainly won't be the last, with her younger brother entering UNSW's medical school and the Shalom Gamarada Ngiyani Yana scholarship program in 2007.

The Shalom Gamarada Ngiyani Yana scholarship program sprang from a chance meeting and conversation between Associate Professor Lisa Jackson Pulver, of the School of Public Health and Community Medicine's Muru Marri Indigenous Health Unit, and Ms Ilona Lee, President of the Shalom Institute, on National Sorry Day in 2004. Today, the partnership comprises the UNSW's Shalom College, the Nura Gili Indigenous Programs Unit and the Muru Marri Indigenous Health Unit.

The name of the scholarship program reflects this partnership. *Shalom* is a Hebrew word meaning peace, and the phrase *gamarada ngiyani yana* in the Eora language is translated literally as "friends-walk-we" or "we walk together as friends". The scholarship program is funded by the annual Shalom Gamarada Ngiyani Yana Aboriginal art exhibition and sale. The proceeds of the exhibition are used to fund residential scholarships for Aboriginal students on the UNSW campus. Many of the sales at the first two exhibitions (2005 and 2006) were made to private purchasers; however, the program is enthusiastically supported by corporate sponsors and individuals, in the management of the actual event, in purchase of the artworks, and by the provision of named scholarships in honour of relatives, events or organisations. Each scholarship is valued at \$15000 per year and covers academic tuition and full board at Shalom College on the university's Kensington campus. Each student awarded a scholarship has tenure until they complete their degree.

Shalom Gamarada provides on-campus accommodation and meals to students in a city that is arguably the most expensive in the country. In addition, through the sale of their artworks, many of the artists involved in the exhibition are making a deliberate contribution to improvements in Aboriginal health outcomes.

The exhibition also hosts a panel discussion of Aboriginal health experts, drawing on the skills and experience of health professionals in the field.

"We need Aboriginal doctors to tell us what to do, to provide leadership, guidance and insight in addressing the problems and the causes of the problems Aboriginal people are facing," said UNSW Professor of General Practice and Director of the Centre for Primary Health Care and Equity UNSW, Professor Mark Harris, during the exhibition's expert panel discussion in 2006.

Perhaps the strongest endorsement came from the exhibition's Patron, Professor Marie Bashir AC, Governor of New South Wales: "This program is a strong and eloquent contribution to our journey of reconciliation."

*The Shalom Gamarada Art Exhibition will take place at:
Shalom College, UNSW, Barker St, Kensington
17–22 July 2007, 11 am to 8 pm.
Aboriginal Health Forum, 22 July 2007, 4 pm to 6 pm.
Email: gamarada@shalom.edu.au
Website: <http://www.shalomgamarada.org>*

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(Received 16 Apr 2007, accepted 23 Apr 2007)

Artist: Alkawari Dawson. (Other images appear on pages 512, 538 and 546)



Artist: Rosella Namok, *Secret Dance*.

