



Coota Girls
Aboriginal Corporation

SECRETS OF DAWN EXHIBITION

Dawn Magazine was created by the Aborigines Welfare Board (1940-1969) as “a magazine for the Aboriginal people of New South Wales”, highlighting the work of the Board, sharing photos and stories from stations, reserves and training institutions throughout New South Wales. There are over 100 references to the Cootamundra Domestic Training Home for Aboriginal Girls (1912-1969) across volumes of Dawn Magazine.

The covert purpose of Dawn Magazine was to falsify the reality of the living conditions and wellbeing of forcibly removed children, through cleverly fabricated photo opportunities and articles, promoting to First Nations readers the “advantages” of assimilating into colonised White Australian society “by active and willing cooperation”.

The award-winning Secrets of Dawn Exhibition features content from Dawn Magazine alongside contemporary works from Coota Girls Survivors and descendants, exposing the tactics used under the Aborigines Protection Act (1909-1969) to progress the agenda of assimilation of First Nations people.

Through powerful truth-telling, Secrets of Dawn honours Coota Girls Survivors and all Stolen Generations Survivors who, despite efforts to eradicate First Nations people and culture through assimilation, have resisted and persisted through truth-telling, healing and self-determination.



EXHIBITION COMPONENTS

Secrets of Dawn gives Coota Girls Survivors and descendants the opportunity to share their true stories of the ongoing intergenerational impact of forcible removal and assimilation, contrasted with the lies and propaganda of the Aborigines Welfare Board through Dawn Magazine. This truth-telling and public acknowledgement is an important part of healing for the Stolen Generations community.

Secrets of Dawn features:

- Truth-telling and Educational written work (12x A2 Foam Core Panels)
- Historical Content (Secrets of Dawn images) and Survivor Testimony (4x Fabric Wall Printed Panels)
- Secrets of Dawn Film featuring truth-telling interviews with Coota Girls Survivors Auntie Valerie Linow nee Wenberg, Auntie Gloria Johnston, Auntie Liz Milgate nee Young, and Auntie Jean Carter nee McKenzie (Filmed by Blacklock Media)
- Coota Girls Descendant Artworks:
 - *Strong in Spirit* by Anjikurri Rhonda Radley (Birpai/Dhanggati)
 - *Yindyamarra Mum, Yindyamarra Nan* by Joanne Cassady (Wiradjuri and Yorta Yorta)
 - *Mirii* by Laura Jones (Gamilaroi and Wailwan)
 - *Matriarchs and Bingihng* by Shannon Stacy (Bundjalung)
- Dawn Magazine Reading and Reflection Room
- Dolly Peg Collective Artwork



DAWN MAGAZINE READING AND REFLECTION ROOM

Exhibition attendees enter a dedicated Reflection Room, a space to pause, reflect, remember, and honour Coota Girls Survivors and the broader Stolen Generations after viewing the main exhibit.

Within this space, visitors can engage with replicas of Dawn Magazines featuring stories and images of Coota Girls Survivors, acknowledging both their resilience and the darker truths behind institutional narratives.

According to visitor feedback, 80% identified the Reading & Reflection Room as the most powerful element of the Secrets of Dawn experience, highlighting its success in facilitating deep emotional connection and healing.





DOLLY PEGS COLLECTIVE ARTWORK

The Secrets of Dawn Exhibition features an interactive collective artwork comprising of Dolly Pegs created by Coota Girls Survivors and descendants as a representation of the Coota Girls journey of forcible removal, institutionalisation and domestic slavery.

Through storytelling, we have learnt that Coota Girls Survivors used the limited resources they had to create toys and games such as dolls out of wooden pegs, creating moments of joy, play and sisterhood despite their circumstances of abuse and neglect as stolen and displaced children. The wooden peg doll is also a visual reminder of the domestic labour that Coota Girls Survivors were trained to do as slaves in wealthy non-First Nations households.

The aim of this collective artwork is to highlight the stark contrast of the images portrayed in 'Dawn Magazine' of the Cootamundra Domestic Training Home for Aboriginal Girls (1912-1969) as a place of happiness and opportunity, compared with the reality of neglect and domestic slavery.

Exhibition viewers are invited to contribute to this collective artwork by creating a dolly peg in honour of Coota Girls Survivors.

SECRETS OF DAWN EXHIBITION FEEDBACK

"It's a thoughtful, wonderful and timely reflection on the real-life experiences of our mob shared through a Stolen Generation perspective. Of course, the Coota Girls Home and the girls (now our Aunties and Elders) themselves all have their own unique and important stories to tell. More power to you and them in telling those stories; helping to expand our knowledge and understanding of this truly disruptive part of our peoples' shared history."

"I found it a safe space as it highlighted the strength of all of our Elders who passed through Cootamundra Girls. [It] was eye opening and informative, and I felt culturally safe."

"The word that came to mind was resilience...I'm grateful for the generosity of the Aunties in sharing their stories."

"I had never heard of the Dawn Magazine. The entire experience was enlightening, profound and educational."

"The exhibition was very powerful and communicated the emotions as well as historical facts. Excellent work."

CREDITS

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Curator Dennis Golding (Gamilaraay) and Meagan Gerrard (Gamilaroi/Wailwan)

Artists Joanne Cassady (Wiradjuri), Anjilkurri Rhonda Radley (Birpai/Dhanggati), Shannon Stacy (Bundjalung) and Laura Jones (Gamilaroi/Wailwan)

Videography & Sound Brendan Blacklock (Ngarabal/Birpai) and Luke Agius (Darug/Wiradjuri), Blacklock Media Production dplr

Coota Girls Survivors Aunty Cheryl Parry, Aunty Elizabeth Johnson, Aunty Elizabeth Milgate, Aunty Fay Clayton, Aunty Gloria Johnston, Aunty Helen Waters, Aunty Jean Carter, Aunty Lana Griffiths, Aunty Leonie Griffiths, Aunty Patricia Griffiths, Aunty Lorraine Darcy Peeters, Aunty Rachel Berecz, Aunty Rita Wenberg, Aunty Robyn Lowe, Aunty Roslyn Waters, Aunty Ruth Hawkins, Aunty Valerie Linow, and Aunty Violet West.

Funders & Supporters City of Sydney, Create NSW and Carriageworks.

Coota Girls Aboriginal Corporation acknowledges that the ownership of any Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property (ICIP) in the *Secrets of Dawn* exhibition remains with the traditional owners of the ICIP. We ask that viewers please refrain from taking photos and videos inside the exhibition.