



AbSec

NSW Child, Family & Community
Peak Aboriginal Corporation

Tamworth Aboriginal Community-Controlled Organisations and the Mara Ngali Partnership


A place-based partnership providing a
seat at the table for shared decision-making:
it's our 'YES' voice

November 2025



T.A.C.C.O

Tamworth Coalition of Aboriginal
Community Controlled Organisations

An aerial photograph of a city, likely Sydney, Australia, showing a dense urban area with many buildings and green spaces. In the background, a range of mountains is visible under a hazy sky. The image is used as a background for the document.

Acknowledgement of Country

AbSec acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of Country throughout New South Wales and their continuing connections to land, waters, and communities. Our head office is located on the land of the Gadigal People of the Eora Nation, in Redfern, and AbSec operates statewide.

We acknowledge and pay our respects to the Traditional Owners of all lands and waters across New South Wales, honouring Elders past, present, and future.

We recognise and respect their enduring connection to Country, their ongoing care for community, and the preservation and practice of their culture for generations uncounted.

We acknowledge the Elders, leaders and advocates within our sector and pay our respects to them as knowledge holders within this space and every space.

AbSec also acknowledge the Stolen Generations who never came home and the ongoing impact of government policy and practice on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people and families.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander readers are warned that the following study report may contain images of deceased persons.



AbSec

NSW Child, Family & Community
Peak Aboriginal Corporation

AbSec is the peak organisation advocating for the rights, safety, and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people, families, and communities in New South Wales.

As an Aboriginal-led organisation, we champion self-determination and work towards a child and family system that is culturally safe, community-driven, and responsive to the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

AbSec leads policy reform, strengthens the capacity of Aboriginal Community-Controlled Organisations (ACCOs), and ensures that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people remain connected to family, community, and culture. We are a key member of the NSW Coalition of Aboriginal Peak Organisations (NSW CAPO) and the primary organisation responsible for Target 12 under Closing the Gap.

Through advocacy, research, and sector leadership, AbSec works to address the disproportionate representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care and promote holistic, community-led approaches to child and family wellbeing. Our commitment is to ensuring that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people grow up strong in culture, identity, and connection.

Our vision is that all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people are looked after in safe, thriving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and communities, raised strong in spirit and identity, with every opportunity for lifelong wellbeing and connection to culture, and surrounded by holistic supports.

In working towards this vision, we are guided by these principles:

- Acknowledging and respecting the diversity and knowledge of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.
- Acting with professionalism and integrity in striving for quality, culturally responsive services and supports for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and communities.
- Underpinning the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to develop our own processes and systems for our communities, particularly in meeting the needs of our children, young people, families and carers.
- Being holistic, integrated and solutions-focused through Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander control in delivering outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people, families and communities.
- Committing to a future that empowers Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and communities, representing our communities, and the agencies there to serve them, with transparency and drive.

Deadly Practice case study

Executive summary



T.A.C.C.O.

Tamworth Coalition of Aboriginal
Community Controlled Organisations

AbSec is shining a light on the Deadly Practice of the first Place-based Partnership of the state signed with the Tamworth Aboriginal Community-Controlled Organisations (TACCO) and the Tamworth Regional Council (TRC). This Deadly Practice case study focuses on:

- The Mara Ngali partnership (our two hands)
- Shared decision making consistent with Closing the Gap aims and initiatives



Members of the Tamworth Coalition of Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (TACCO).

Additional content

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Table of contents

Executive summary.....	4
Introduction	6
• Establishment of TACCO.....	6
• What are Place-Based Partnerships and what is TACCO's role?	8
TACCO Community Development Plan (July 2025)	9
• Closing-the-Gap initiatives	9
• TACCO's Grassroots and Community Outcomes and Achievements	12
Key Achievements	13
• Maarumalda-y Project: Addressing Youth Health Crisis.....	13
• Yilaan.gaal Dhina (Fresh Footprints): Justice and Youth Diversion	13
• Gabi Yarns – Black Coffee: Aboriginal Business Networking.....	14
Outcomes Framework: From Community Voice to Community Action	15
Looking Forward	16
• Challenges to overcome.....	16
Conclusion	17
• Mara Ngali: A Foundation for the Future	17

Introduction



“Place-based partnership providing a seat at the table for shared decision-making, it’s our ‘YES’ voice”

This Deadly Practice case study focuses on the very first place-based partnership agreement in Australia as part of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap (‘National Agreement’) Priority Reform 1 – Formal Partnerships and Shared Decision Making. This took place on Gomeroi / Kamilaroi Country with the Tamworth Coalition of Aboriginal Community-Controlled Organisations (TACCO) and the Tamworth Regional Council (TRC).

On 9 May 2025, the partnership between TACCO and TRC was formalised under the Mara Ngali Partnership Agreement. “Mara Ngali” means “our two hands” in the Gomeroi language. The symbolism emphasises two-way working, as a collective effort and unity between the local Aboriginal community and local government.

Establishment of TACCO

In late 2021, State and Territory Governments, and jurisdictional peak organisations reached out to communities across Australia to gauge interest in a Closing the Gap local place-based partnership. Of the identified communities, the Joint Council formally endorsed six place-based partnership locations – one in each State or Territory. Tamworth was chosen as the NSW site.

TACCO comprises five established Aboriginal Community-Controlled Organisations (ACCOs). They signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) in June 2024 committing to supporting and fostering the social, economic and cultural wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the Tamworth Local Government Area (LGA).



The exterior of the Tamworth Local Aboriginal Land Council office in 2025.

The five ACCOs that make up TACCO are:

- **Tamworth Aboriginal Medical Service–Aboriginal Corporation (TAMS–AC)** (tams.org.au). TAMS–AC was established in the early 1970s and offers culturally appropriate primary healthcare services to Aboriginal people in Tamworth and surrounding regions. This includes bulk-billed medical services designed to enhance health outcomes for Aboriginal individuals and families of the Tamworth region.
- **Tamworth Local Aboriginal Lands Council (TLALC)**, established in 1984. TLALC works to protect the heritage, preserve the culture and advance the best interests of its members and the broader Aboriginal community. By proactively creating opportunities and fostering pride, self-esteem and respect, TLALC contributes to sustainability for present and future generations. Utilising the assets of land, people and culture, TLALC plays a direct role in supporting the wellbeing and empowerment of Tamworth’s Aboriginal community.
- **Birrelee Multifunctional Aboriginal Children’s Service–Aboriginal Corporation (Birrelee MACS)**. Birrelee MACS started in the backyards of community members homes in the early 1970s, with the Childcare Centre on Macgregor Street in West Tamworth being built in 1986. Birrelee MACS provides a culturally safe and enriched early education for children aged 0 to 5 years. As an organisation, they provide a space that encourages learning and development and reflects and strengthens Aboriginal identity within their Tamworth community. Through a holistic approach, Birrelee integrates early childhood, health and family services, aiming to enhance the overall health, wellbeing and quality of life for Aboriginal children and families.
- **Burrn Dalai Aboriginal Corporation**, also known as Tamworth and Armidale Aboriginal Children’s Service (TAACS). TAACS works to create a secure, nurturing space that promotes cultural strength, family ties, and a sense of belonging for Aboriginal children and young people. Supporting birth or foster families to meet each child’s unique needs, TAACS addresses physical, social, emotional, educational and cultural requirements of children and families at risk of or engaged across the child protection continuum including out-of-home care. Their goal is to keep children connected to their families, communities, and Country, while minimising foster care duration, preserving family bonds and empowering Aboriginal communities.
- **Tamworth Aboriginal Education Consultative Group (Tamworth AECG)**. Tamworth AECG works to increase opportunities for the local Aboriginal community by promoting cultural awareness and fostering educational success. The AECG collaborates with schools, families and communities to ensure equitable access to quality education. By advocating for inclusive policies, culturally responsive curricula, and supporting Aboriginal students, the Tamworth AECG improves educational outcomes and empowers the Aboriginal community in the Tamworth region.

In July 2022, Tamworth Regional Councillor Marc Sutherland, one of the first Gomeroi people elected on Council, moved a motion for Tamworth Regional Council to commit the necessary resources to develop a comprehensive Closing the Gap Strategy and Implementation Plan. Councillor Sutherland was clear that the Strategy and Implementation Plan must align with the National Strategy to overcome inequalities between Aboriginal and non-Indigenous Australians.

As the level of government closest to the people, local government has an essential role to play partnering with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to address the priorities of the National Agreement at the local and regional level. This commitment was reinforced at its meeting in February 2025 where the Tamworth Regional Council resolved to endorse the signing of a formal partnership with TACCO. The formal signing ceremony of the Mara Ngali agreement took place at Tamworth Regional Botanic Gardens on 9 May 2025.

What are Place-Based Partnerships and what is TACCO's role?

Place-based partnerships are a commitment under Priority Reform 1 of the National Agreement. The partnerships involve government, Aboriginal representatives, and others (if agreed), that focus on the needs and priorities of the local area. These partnerships are community owned and driven.

Long term community development is one of the key underlying principles of the partnership. As a result, these are intended to be holistic, responsive to community aspirations and local priorities, and be sustainable.

TACCO brings together Aboriginal organisations in the Tamworth region to work collectively toward a stronger, more self-determined future for its people. Their role is to:

- **Bring People Together** – TACCO connects Aboriginal organisations, leaders, and community members around a shared goal: better outcomes for Aboriginal people in our region.
- **Collaborate and Connect** – TACCO proudly works as a collaborator and connector, bringing people, organisations and partners together in ways that honour cultural knowledge and community leadership. While they recognise the diversity of voices across the community, TACCO's strength lies in creating respectful spaces for these voices to come together, build relationships, and lead shared solutions.
- **Lead in Closing the Gap** – Being the first local government partnership of this kind gives momentum and potential to influence practice in other jurisdictions.
- **Support and Share Knowledge** – TACCO offers trusted advice and cultural insight to influence policies, programs, and planning that affect Aboriginal people, ensuring decisions reflect community priorities.
- **Speak Up** – TACCO is a united, representative voice for the community, advocating strongly and respectfully for the changes their people want and need.
- **Keep Watch** – TACCO helps monitor how policies and programs are delivered, calling for transparency, holding systems accountable and making sure community voices continue to guide the way forward.

TACCO's strength lies in their 'ability to bring people together, not stand in their way—because real change happens when we work alongside one another, with community at the centre and culture guiding us'.



Members of the Walaaybaa Rangers conduct a traditional Smoking Ceremony at a community event in Tamworth, 2025.

TACCO Community Development Plan (July 2025)

As part of the place-based partnership, TACCO developed a Community Development Plan (CDP). The CDP guides the priorities for the Tamworth Aboriginal community and its region. The purpose of the Plan is to identify and set out clear actions that aim to improve the overall health and wellbeing of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living and working in the Tamworth Local Government Area and to provide opportunities for equal access to services and foundational supports that encourage and support cultural identity. The CDP was developed following community consultation and endorsed by TACCO in July 2025. The CDP contains TACCOs' vision: "looking 50 years ahead, is one of hope, real change, and celebration – a future our children and their children can embrace."

This vision is guided by five key focus areas:

1. Strengthening Partnerships.
2. Enhance Decision Making.
3. Capacity Building.
4. Cultural Understanding Principles; and
5. Living on Country; Connection, Care, Economy.

Closing-the-Gap initiatives

TACCO aims to secure significant changes in partnership with the Tamworth Regional Council on all 17 socio-economic outcomes set out in the National Agreement. Their key priorities are:

Health

Close the life expectancy gap within a generation; reduce avoidable mortality by 50% by 2031.

Key actions are:

- TAMS-AC is expanding chronic disease programs;
- Council supporting infrastructure upgrades and outreach in smaller towns (e.g., Nundle, Quirindi); and
- Integration of preventive health through schools and youth programs.

Health Workforce

Increase Aboriginal representation in health workforce.

Key actions are:

- TAMS-AC training local Aboriginal health practitioners.

Education (Early Childhood)

95% of Aboriginal children enrolled in early childhood education by 2025.

Key actions are:

- Birrelee M.A.C.S delivering early learning services;
- TRC supporting facilities and transport; and
- Local early years collective planning with schools and early educators.

Housing

Reduce overcrowding by 2031.

Key actions are:

- Joint advocacy to NSW Aboriginal Housing Office for new builds and repairs;
- Council to include Aboriginal housing needs in Local Housing Strategy; and
- ACCOs advising on culturally appropriate housing design.

Employment

Halve the employment gap by 2031.

Key actions are:

- Council implementing an Aboriginal employment strategy (apprenticeships, traineeships, procurement preferences); and
- TACCO working with the local business chamber to co-design an Aboriginal employment and enterprise network.

School Achievement

Increase Year 12 attainment to 96% by 2031.

Key actions are:

- TACCO, Local Aboriginal Education Consultative Group (LAECG) and Council collaborating on attendance and transition programs; and
- Mentoring opportunities via local employers.

Justice / Safety

Reduce incarceration rate by at least 15% by 2031.

Key actions are:

- Partnership with NSW Police Aboriginal Liaison and Youth Justice for diversion programs; and
- Launch of Safe Aboriginal Youth (SAY) Program led by Winanga-Li Aboriginal Child & Family Centre.

Children in Out-of-Home Care

Reduce number of children in OOHC by 45% by 2031.

Key actions are:

- TACCO and Family Services ACCOs co-designing family preservation programs; and
- Council advocacy for culturally safe child protection practices.

Land and Culture

Increase Aboriginal land and sea rights recognition.

Key actions are:

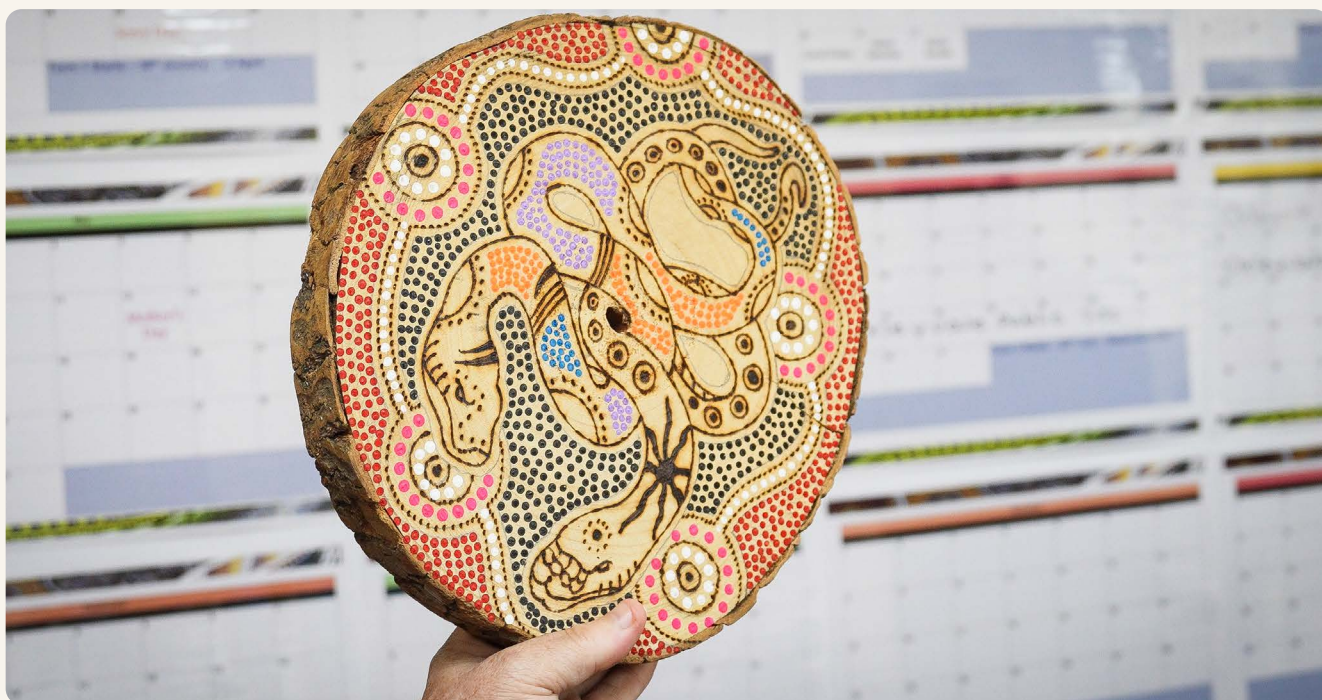
- Tamworth LALC and Council developing joint land-use planning principles;
- Cultural heritage mapping in Council's strategic plans; and
- Community events celebrating Gomeroi culture.

Language and Identity

Increase number of people speaking First Nations languages.

Key actions are:

- Support for Gomeroi language revitalisation through schools and community programs; and
- Signage and naming policy using local language.



Artwork completed by participants of the Tamworth Aboriginal Medical Service (TAMS) Men's Group, 2025.

Digital Inclusion

Equal levels of digital access by 2026.

Key actions are:

- Council expanding public Wi-Fi zones; and
- Partnership with NBN and ACCOs to deliver digital literacy programs.

Economic Participation

Increase proportion of Aboriginal-owned businesses.

Key actions are:

- Council to implement Aboriginal business procurement targets; and
- TACCO to create a business mentoring network and Aboriginal marketplace.

TACCO's Grassroots and Community Outcomes and Achievements

Since TACCO's establishment earlier in 2024, TACCO has already achieved measurable success in translating community-identified priorities into tangible outcomes. Guided by the Tamworth Aboriginal community, TACCO has facilitated collaborative partnerships that directly address critical service gaps and systemic barriers affecting Aboriginal people in the Tamworth region.



Staff from the Tamworth Aboriginal Medical Service (TAMS) hosting a community health stall at the 2025 Koori Knockout

Key Achievements

Maarumalda-y Project: Addressing Youth Health Crisis

One of TACCO's most significant achievements has been securing funding for the Maarumalda-y Project, a direct response to community concerns raised through TACCO's Birrelee MACS and Tamworth Aboriginal Medical Services Aboriginal Corporation.

The Challenge:

Aboriginal young people in Tamworth were facing a 12-month waiting time for occupational therapy services, a barrier that delayed critical developmental support and early intervention for young people.

The Solution:

Through collaborative advocacy involving TACCO, Birrelee MACS, and Tamworth Aboriginal Medical Services Aboriginal Corporation, funding was secured to employ a dedicated Occupational Therapist for Aboriginal youth. This position directly targets the waitlist crisis and ensures culturally safe, timely access to essential therapeutic services.

Community Impact:

Maarumalda-y will reduce wait times for Aboriginal youth requiring occupational therapy. In providing earlier, culturally responsive support tailored to Aboriginal young people this will contribute to their long-term developmental and educational outcomes. This will strengthen partnerships between health, community and multi-agency services.

Yilaan.gaal Dhina (Fresh Footprints): Justice and Youth Diversion

TACCO has played a role in endorsing and supporting Yilaan.gaal Dhina (Fresh Footprints), a project developed by the Tamworth Justice Collaborative, and led by TACCO member Tamworth Local Aboriginal Land Council.

Project Overview:

Yilaan.gaal Dhina is a community-led approach to youth justice diversion, grounded in Aboriginal cultural values. It is designed to provide intensive support for young Aboriginal people at risk of becoming entrenched in the justice system.

TACCO's role:

TACCO's endorsement of the pilot project provided legitimacy and an avenue to raise community awareness and acceptance. By providing formal support, TACCO ensured that:

- Aboriginal voices were included in the initiative's governance structure;
- Local knowledge was integrated into the project's design and direction; and
- The project was aligned with TACCO's broader community development priorities.

Significance:

This endorsement reflects TACCO's commitment to addressing the over-representation of Aboriginal young people in the justice system through prevention, diversion, and culturally responsive alternatives to incarceration. It also highlights TACCO's role as a key community body that helps connect and align efforts across local services and sectors.

Gabi Yarns – Black Coffee: Aboriginal Business Networking

In direct response to feedback from Aboriginal business owners, TACCO has supported the establishment of Gabi Yarns – Black Coffee, a monthly networking event designed to strengthen Aboriginal economic participation and business development in the Tamworth region.

Community-Led Design:

The initiative emerged from conversations with Aboriginal entrepreneurs and business owners who identified isolation, limited networking opportunities, and lack of culturally safe business support as barriers to growth and sustainability.

Partnership Model:

Gabi Yarns – Black Coffee is backed by a collaborative partnership including Regional Aboriginal Partnerships and Outcomes (NSW Government), local nonprofit organisations and TACCO, as community anchor and facilitator.

Purpose and Impact:

Through this monthly event, Aboriginal business owners connect in a culturally safe space to build peer support networks, share knowledge and opportunities, access government programs and mentorship, and strengthen collective advocacy for economic development.

Outcomes Framework: From Community Voice to Community Action

These achievements illustrate TACCO's effectiveness in:

- Listening deeply to community concerns and service gaps
- Facilitating partnerships across government, health, justice, community, and business sectors
- Advocating strategically for funding and policy responses
- Endorsing and legitimising community-led initiatives
- Translating priorities from the Community Development Plan into funded, actionable projects; and
- Creating culturally safe spaces for connection, collaboration, and economic participation.

These outcomes demonstrate that TACCO is not simply a consultative body, but it is an active agent of change. TACCO is ensuring that Aboriginal community priorities drive local service design, funding allocation, and collaborative action in the Tamworth region.



The young crew of the Fresh Footprints initiative in Tamworth, 2025.

Looking Forward

The success of the Maarumalda-y Project, Yilaan.gaal Dhina pilot, and Gabi Yarns – Black Coffee establishes a strong foundation for future community-led initiatives. The TACCO model offers a replicable framework for addressing other priority areas identified in the CDP. These include:

- To deliver measurable change in local Aboriginal outcomes in Tamworth (health, education, employment, housing, etc) by embedding the 17 targets in local planning and services
- To build capacity in the local ACCO sector, enabling further growth of Aboriginal-controlled service delivery
- To strengthen data-driven decision-making, enabling local monitoring and evaluation of outcomes, and thereby increase transparency and accountability
- To create a replicable model: Tamworth's approach can serve as a blueprint for other LGAs and regions seeking to deliver Closing the Gap in a place-based manner; and
- To deepen cultural recognition and truth telling in local government practice (e.g., cultural capability of TRC services).

Challenges to overcome

As TACCO is one of the first place-based partnerships of its kind, to make the most of the opportunities under Closing the Gap, the partnership **also navigate challenges**. As with many policy-commitments, the translation from agreement to real, on-the-ground outcomes can lag. The agreement is not binding and will depend on sustained commitment, resources, and capacity.

- Resource and capacity constraints: Both TACCO and TRC will need sufficient resources (funding, staff, capability) to deliver the Implementation Plan effectively.
- Data and accountability: Ensuring that data is collected, shared, analysed and used locally—and that progress is transparent and actionable—is a complex challenge.
- Avoiding tokenism: Ensuring the partnership is more than symbolic, and that Aboriginal decision-making is authentically shared (not just consultative) is vital.
- Sustaining momentum: Initial enthusiasm can wane; embedding the partnership into structural processes, budgets and long-term planning is necessary to produce generational change.



**Mara-Mara
Community Inc.**



Conclusion

Mara Ngali: A Foundation for the Future



T.A.C.C.O

Tamworth Coalition of Aboriginal
Community Controlled Organisations

The formal Partnership Agreement between TACCO and Tamworth Regional Council, known as Mara Ngali, represents a foundational milestone in Aboriginal self-determination and collaborative governance in the Tamworth region. While still in its infancy, Mara Ngali embodies decades of relationship-building, advocacy, and community leadership by the five ACCOs that form TACCO.

The journey of Mara Ngali is just beginning, but its foundation is strong. Built on the legacy of decades of Aboriginal leadership and community advocacy, it provides a pathway forward, not only for Tamworth, but for communities across Australia seeking to embed Aboriginal voices, values, and governance in local decision-making.

This Deadly Practice case study, highlighting the partnership between Tamworth Regional Council and TACCO through the Mara Ngali agreement, represents a significant step forward in local implementation of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap.

By centring Aboriginal-led organisations, and by formalising the collaboration with local government, the model offers significant promise for a more effective, culturally appropriate, and locally responsive approach.

*Tara Weldon (AbSec, left), Marc Sutherland (Tamworth Regional Council, middle),
& Jocelyn Cockbain (Jigsaw Planning), right.*

Glossary of acronyms

ACCO	Aboriginal Community-Controlled Organisations
AECG	Aboriginal Education Consultative Group
Birrelee MACS	Birrelee Multifunctional Aboriginal Children's Service – Aboriginal Corporation.
CTG	Closing the Gap
CDP	Community Development Plan
LAECG	Local Aboriginal Education Consultative Group
LGA	Local Government Area
NSW	New South Wales
Mara Ngali (meaning our two hands)	Mara Ngali Partnership Agreement
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
NSW	New South Wales
OT	Occupational Therapist
PBP	Placed-Based Partnership
TACCO	Tamworth Aboriginal Community-Controlled Organisations
TAACS	Tamworth and Armidale Aboriginal Children's Service
TAMS-AC	Tamworth Aboriginal Medical Service-Aboriginal Corporation
TLALC	Tamworth Local Aboriginal Lands Council
TRC	Tamworth Regional Council



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