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## Bush Babies return to birthplace

BEING born in the bush with no doctors or hospital facilities around was a reality for the 'bush babies' born at the Badjaling Aboriginal Mission near Quairading in the 1930s.

A number of the 'bush babies' returned to Badjaling recently for a reunion organised by local Aboriginal elder Winnie McHenry, who was born at Badjaling in 1935.

She prepared a massive feast for the 50-60 visitors that attended the event.

The day involved bringing together those born at the reserve, their descendants and descendants of the Noongar midwives to share their stories and celebrate the midwives and the bush hospital they built at the reserve.

A film crew from FTI's Indigenous Communities Stories program was on hand to assist people to capture their stories on archival quality film as well as oral historian Mary Anne Jebb who has been working closely with Badjaling community and Community Arts Network (CAN WA) to develop the project.

Photographer Brad Rimmer ran photo-

graphy workshops with young people throughout the day who later took portraits of Elders and helped to document the event.

The story sharing day is one of the activities developed as part of the Bush Babies project.

In the lead up to the event several of the women with connections to the reserve visited the Batty Library and meet with DIA collections and heritage staff to source archival images and documents.

Photograph album workshops were later held in Kellerberrin and Quairading with albuming expert Raelee Cook.

The workshops provided people with the opportunity to collate their photographs and exchange images and stories. The Bush Babies program is funded by FaHCSIA and forms part of CAN WA's Eastern Wheatbelt Strategic Partnership Initiative, supported by Healthway - Respect Yourself Respect Your Culture, the Department for Culture and the Arts and the Australia Council.



**Birthplace:** Muriel Winmar, Charlotte Winmar Smith, Janet Hayden, Winnie McHenry, Muriel Yarran, Ety Winmar, Dorcus Pickett, Fred Pickett and Myra Jetta gather for their reunion at their birthplace, Badjaling. Picture by Brad Rimmer.

**Baby photos:** Myrtle and Yolande Yarran with a photograph album they created using family photographs at the workshop held in Quairading (right).

## School cutbacks unjustified: standing committee

THE Department of Education's decision to remove funding for year 11 and 12 courses at 21 District High Schools in regional WA has been rejected by a standing committee who reviewed the decision recently.

The schools affected included Mukinbudin, Narembeen, Corrigin, Southern Cross and Wyalkatchem district high schools.

The cuts would force senior students in those towns to travel huge distances each day or leave home to complete school.

The Standing Committee on Estimates and Financial Operations conducted research into

the decision and announced their recommendations on Thursday, July 1, more than a month earlier than expected. The report found that cost savings to the Department of Education under the changes were minimal and far less than the costs that will be imposed on other departments to provide bus services and subsidise children living away from home.

It also found the department undertook no consultation with schools and their communities prior to making the decision to remove the funding. The report stated the department poorly communicated its decision to the affect-

ed district high schools and communities and the broader economic and social consequences of removing the funding had not been considered.

Committee deputy chair and Agricultural Region Member Philip Gardiner said the committee's findings only echoed significant dissatisfaction with the department's decision from the schools, families and communities affected.


"As a member of the committee I heard firsthand how in many regional towns the communities are deeply involved in the vocational

education pathways offered to local year 11 and 12 students," he said.

"In many of these towns no viable education alternative exists. Sitting on a bus for two or three hours each day is certainly not the best road to a quality education."


Mr Gardiner said that isolation should not be an impediment to quality education.

"I strongly encourage the Minister for Education to heed the calls and continue the courses, acknowledging the unique circumstances that apply to some families in regional communities," he said.



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