

the South Sydney Herald

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Ceremony and protest

Australia Day in Sydney unfolded as a moment of contrast, reflection and deep meaning. On January 26, WugulOra at Barangaroo Reserve brought people together in the early morning light for a powerful ceremony grounded in culture, story and continuity. Meaning “One Mob” in the local Gadigal language, WugulOra celebrated the living culture of the Eora nation through dance, song, smoking ceremony and storytelling, offering space for healing, reflection and the hope of reconciliation. The following day, thousands gathered at Hyde Park for the Invasion Day march, organised by the Blak Caucus with guidance from Gadigal Elders. The protest gave voice to ongoing concerns around dispossession, rising child removals, expanded police powers and decisions made about Country without First Nations authority.

Photos: Michelle Haywood



SSH EDITOR'S WELCOME

After our annual summer break, it's great to be back in print for the 25th year of the *South Sydney Herald*. Thank you, as always, to our readers for your continued support. We truly wouldn't exist without you. We wish you a wonderful 2026, filled with joy, laughter and new adventures. To kick off the new year, we've made a few small but exciting changes to the print edition. Our monthly

message to readers now appears on the front page, offering a snapshot of what's inside each issue. We've also introduced a short stories section on page 7, and we'd love to hear from you. Please send in your stories so we can showcase the excellent writing in our corner of the city. Elsewhere in this issue, you'll find all your usual local news and features, including an update on the social impacts of the Waterloo Metro Quarter on page 2,

and a celebration of the Redfern Aunties and their vital community work on page 5. On page 8, our science feature dives into seafood and the important role it plays in the environment. And of course, our much-loved reviews section is thriving more than ever on pages 6 and 7. For even more reviews and local news, head to our website, southsydneyherald.com.au. Enjoy the issue! ~ Ed.

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Mobile phones, driving and the law

LEGAL

ANDREW PAVLI

USING a mobile phone behind the wheel is one of the most common and most misunderstood road offences in New South Wales. With mobile phone detection cameras now operating across Sydney, many drivers are being fined without realising they have broken the rules. Here is a simple guide to what is legal and what is not.

The law in NSW is straightforward. Under regulation 300 of the *Road Rules 2014* (NSW), drivers must not touch a mobile phone while the vehicle is moving or stationary in traffic. That includes stopping at red lights and in congestion. A quick glance down to change music or check a text still counts as using a phone.

There are only a few situations where limited phone use is legal. Fully licensed drivers may use a phone hands-free, meaning

the phone is mounted in an approved cradle or connected to the vehicle through Bluetooth. Even then, the driver may only use it for specific functions such as navigating, making or receiving calls, or playing audio. The key requirement is that the driver does not touch the device at any time.

Learner and P plate drivers face even stricter rules. They cannot use a mobile phone at all, even in hands-free mode. Navigation systems must be built into the car or operated by a passenger.

Penalties are substantial. A mobile phone offence currently attracts a significant fine and demerit points. Many drivers are caught by automated cameras that operate day and night without warning signs.

The safest approach is also the simplest: set up your phone before you start driving. Enter your destination, choose your playlist and put the phone out of reach. A moment's distraction can have lifelong consequences, including a hefty fine.

SSH



Photo: William Hadley

Social impact issues at Waterloo Metro Quarter

URBAN DESIGN

GEOFF TURNBULL

RECENTLY exhibited changes to the Waterloo Metro Quarter raised major concerns about the relationship between the project, the public housing community and service providers.

The developers propose the removal of 994 m² of previously approved space for community facilities without assessing the needs of local NGOs that need such space to deliver services.

The developer also proposes that all remaining facilities space be used for childcare. The project's own Social Impact Assessment (SIA) found the development did 'not create sufficient demand for a new childcare facility' and misreported surrounding childcare services.

Planning NSW's SIA Guidelines say the SIA needs to consider 'how different groups will experience social impacts differently'. Instead, this SIA averaged results from around the site and only compared these to the rest of Sydney. The area averaged included some of the most advantaged and some of the most disadvantaged areas as defined by the Australian Bureau of Statistics. The SIA failed to assess how the project impacts public housing tenants as a 'vulnerable and marginalised group'.

This is not an academic debate. It has real-world impacts. The application ignored its own problematic interaction with locals and street drinkers during the Metro Station build, which saw off-duty police paid to be on site so the project could proceed.

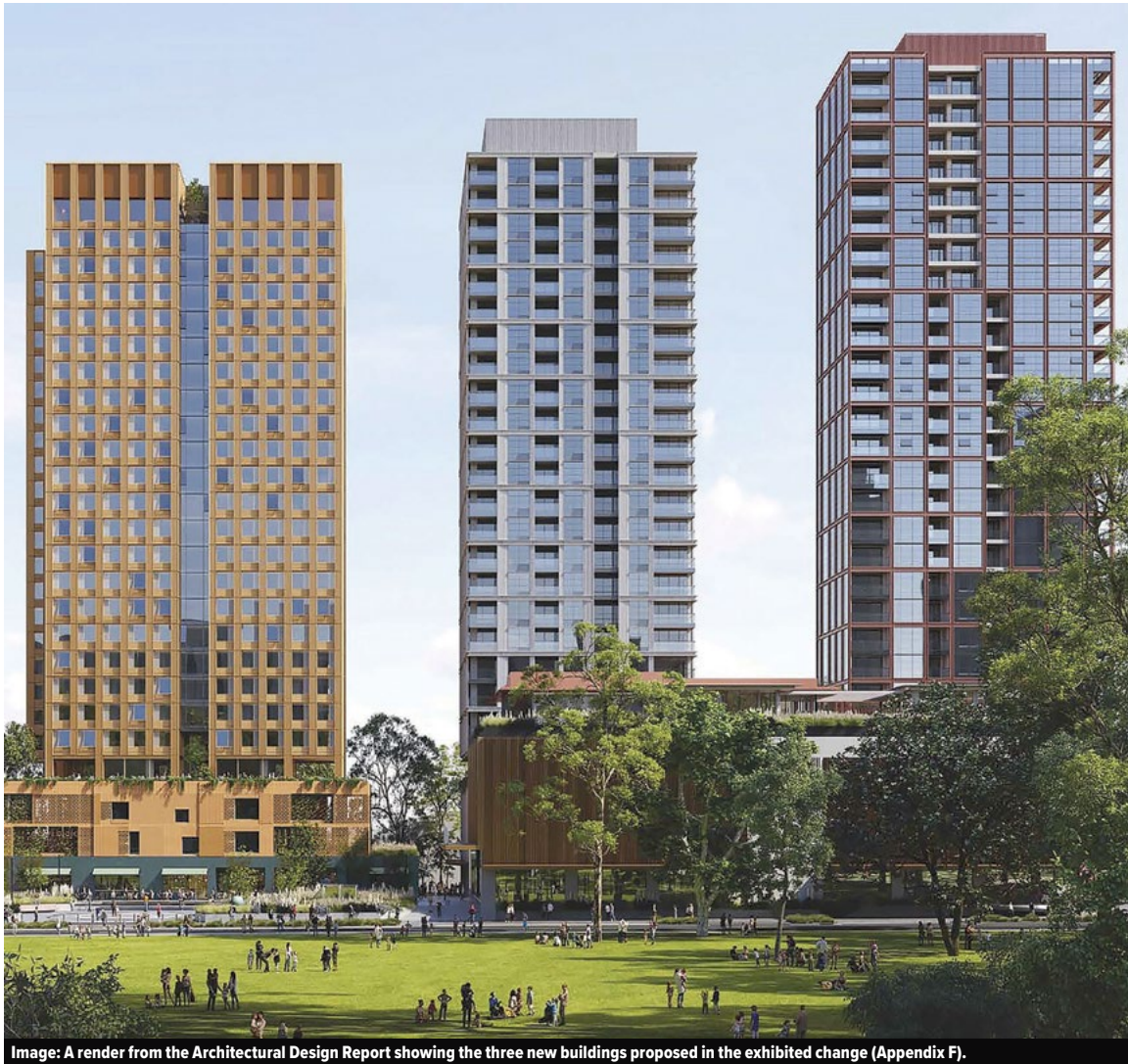


Image: A render from the Architectural Design Report showing the three new buildings proposed in the exhibited change (Appendix F).

SIAs exist to identify such impacts and propose how to manage them, preferably without needing police.

Many of these issues were raised in submissions and the REDWatch's Submission provides a detailed analysis of the SIA issues. REDWatch asked Planning NSW to request a supplementary SIA from the developer but Planning's letter to the proponent did not make this request. REDWatch has now formally requested Planning

to obtain a peer review of the original SIA and any additional SIA information in the proponent's response to submission to make sure the proposal adequately deals with the SIA issues that should inform the project.

While Planning NSW strengthened its requirements for SIAs in 2025, developers often do not give them weight and expect 'on the cheap' desktop reviews. As a result, SIAs often do not

identify social impacts that need to be managed.

In addition, those responsible for assessing proposals often have little understanding of SIA methodologies so do not identify or question inadequate SIAs, their findings and lack of recommendations for impact management.

SSH

Geoff Turnbull is the Spokesperson for REDWatch

Dubbo's first rural MD graduates set to start careers in the bush

They came to Dubbo to study medicine. Now, they're set to make a difference across regional Australia.

SPONSORED

MARK SCOTT

AFTER four years of study, the first cohort of students from the Doctor of Medicine (MD) – Dubbo Stream – is about to graduate and make its mark across regional and rural Australia as country doctors.

The first tranche of graduates from the 24-student intake have completed their degree in Dubbo, learning not just the science of medicine, but the art of practising in country communities.

The Dubbo Stream was created to address a critical need: more doctors in rural and remote areas. Developed under the Australian Government's Murray-Darling Medical Schools Network (MDMSN), the program provides students with immersive clinical experiences across western NSW, giving them firsthand understanding of rural health challenges and the rewards of working outside metropolitan centres.

Dean of the Faculty of Medicine and Health, Professor John Prins, said: "This is a proud moment for our University and the Dubbo community.

"Our MD graduates have spent four years living, studying and working in rural NSW, and many are now stepping into roles that will directly benefit rural and regional communities. The Dubbo Stream was designed to grow a rural medical workforce, and it's incredibly rewarding to see that vision will soon become a reality," said Professor Prins.

"These students have done something special – they've trained as doctors in the region, and now many are staying to serve the communities that supported them. It shows just how powerful local training can be in building a strong, sustainable rural medical workforce.

"When we launched the Dubbo Stream, our goal was to help more students study medicine close to home and, in turn, strengthen healthcare in rural Australia. Seeing this first cohort graduate is proof that this model works."

Head of School and Dean of the Sydney Medical School, Professor Jane Bleasel, said: "From their first day in Dubbo, these students weren't just studying medicine, they were living it. They've been embraced by the community, mentored by local doctors, and seen firsthand the difference that continuity of care makes in rural towns. That connection to place and people is something you can't replicate in the city.

"Our graduates have learned medicine in the same communities



George Smith and Lauren Wild. Photo: Lauren Murphy

where they'll now be making a difference. They've developed strong ties with local health services, schools and families, and that sense of belonging is what keeps doctors working in the bush. It's been inspiring to see them grow into part of the fabric of western NSW," she said.

The Dubbo Stream gives students the chance to complete their MD entirely in a regional setting, supported by modern facilities and clinical placements at the redeveloped Dubbo Hospital. The curriculum goes beyond textbooks, immersing students in rural life, building community connections, and teaching them how to deliver health services where access can be limited.

Many of the graduates are stepping straight into local and regional roles, returning to the communities that raised them or heading to towns that need their skills. Most have deep rural roots. Some grew up on farms, others in small country towns, and a few have come full circle after studying in the city – all bringing with them fresh perspectives and a commitment to country practice.

George Smith

Hailing from Warragul, Victoria, George Smith followed the example set by his parents – both doctors who chose to live and work regionally – by electing to study medicine.

George felt studying in Dubbo enabled a hands-on experience not always available to future doctors training in the city.

"It's pretty special to look back on a four-year journey of medical education that has taken

me to far corners of rural and remote Australia. I now have an opportunity to give back to the regional communities who helped train me," he said.

He said the local community also welcomed his involvement in a life outside of study, especially in the local sporting scene.

George will take up an internship at Ballarat Base Hospital next year, alongside his partner and fellow Doctor of Medicine Dubbo Stream graduate Lauren Wild.

Lauren Wild

Lauren, originally from the coastal town of Burnie, Tasmania, also has a strong connection to rural life. She and George met as biomedical science undergraduates at Monash University in Melbourne, actively seeking training programs in rural areas when applying to study medicine.

Rural-based medical training helped Lauren to appreciate the flexibility and range of thinking required to work as a rural practitioner.

"Our classroom and hospital tutors demonstrated, by example, their broad knowledge of the many aspects of medicine required to practice rurally. Exposure to the challenges of truly remote medical care has prepared us for our internships," said Lauren.



Authorised by Vice-Chancellor and President Prof. Mark Scott.
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JENNY LEONG MP
MEMBER FOR NEWTOWN



Back to school packs available for local families



Public education should be fully funded.

It seems like a no-brainer, but our Federal and State Labor Governments don't seem to think so – instead choosing to provide massive handouts to elite private schools at the expense of adequately funding public schools across NSW.

This means that public schools end up passing the hidden costs of education along to families who are already facing a worsening cost-of-living crisis.

That's why the Australian Greens have called on the Government to adopt their plan to fully fund public schools.

But until then, we know that at this time of year, families are starting to make difficult decisions about how to pay for things like essential school supplies and 'voluntary' contributions.

That's why we're offering school-aged children in our electorate a free back to school pack to ease some of the pressure households are facing.

Each pack contains a backpack, pens, highlighters, ruler, pencils, notebook, pencil case, eraser, and sharpener.

Packs are available for collection from our Electorate Office located at 383 King St, Newtown – just get in touch using the details below to make sure we still have some available for you.



Jenny Leong

Jenny Leong MP
Greens Member for Newtown

Authorised by Jenny Leong MP. Funded using parliamentary entitlements.

TANYA PLIBERSEK MP

Federal Member for Sydney



Dear SSH readers

The Albanese Labor Government welcomed the new year by delivering on election commitments to help Australians with the cost of living.

1800MEDICARE

Whether you need expert health advice or reassurance, the registered nurses at 1800MEDICARE are there 24/7 to provide free advice and refer you to the service you need, whether that's your regular GP, the local hospital or a Medicare Urgent Care Clinic.

On weekends and weeknights, **between 6pm and 8am, if you need urgent GP care** that can't wait for your regular GP to be available, the **triage nurses can connect you to a free telehealth session with a 1800MEDICARE GP** via phone or video.



A 1800MEDICARE GP can provide the free care you need, like an emergency prescription for your regular medication, or treatment for an illness or injury. Just call **1800MEDICARE (1800 633 422)** or download the app above.

Cheaper medicines

The Albanese Labor Government has delivered the biggest cuts to the cost of medicine since the creation of the Pharmaceutical Benefit Scheme by a Labor Government in 1948.

Having cut the cost of a general script from \$42.50 when we were elected to \$30 in January 2023, medications listed on the PBS now cost no more than \$25 per script. The last time PBS medicines cost \$25 was 2004 – more than 20 years ago.

Pensioners and concession cardholders will continue to pay just \$7.70 until 2030.

This is in addition to: a 25 per cent reduction in the number of scripts a concessional patient must fill before the PBS Safety Net kicks in; and 60-day prescriptions for millions of Australians with ongoing health conditions.

Better and cheaper health for women

We've added new medications for contraception, menopause, endometriosis and IVF treatment to the PBS.

We've also boosted Medicare support for IUDs and implants, to train more doctors in menopause care, to open new specialist endometriosis and pelvic pain clinics, and to tackle longstanding health gender bias.

These are some of the biggest PBS upgrades in decades and will help women save hundreds of dollars.

Medicare Mental Health Check In

The Albanese Government's Medicare Mental Health Check In is now online, delivering free, early support for Australians experiencing mild mental health challenges.



Run by St Vincent's Health Australia, the service will initially provide evidence-based resources to help people manage symptoms.

From 30 March, the service will include low-intensity cognitive behavioural therapy, delivered by trained professionals via phone or video.

Better and Fairer Schools Agreement rolls out

In 2026 students and teachers across Australia will begin benefitting from the biggest new investment in public schools by the Australian Government ever.

The funding - \$16.5 billion over the next 10 years - is tied to real, practical reforms including: year one phonics and numeracy checks; evidence-based teaching practices; and more individualised support for students who need it, such as with small group tutoring.

We want to reduce the number of students who need additional support for literacy and numeracy, and help students who fall behind to catch up, keep up and finish school.

Anti-Bullying National Plan

This year the National Anti-Bullying Plan will also roll out. This includes a key recommendation that schools take action within 48 hours of a complaint or incident.

LGBTIQA+ media

The Albanese Government is delivering on its \$78,000 election commitment to support LGBTIQA+ news outlets.

The funding was provided through the LGBTIQA+ Community Connection Program to deliver on the government's election commitment to support community connection, participation and empowerment by lifting up LGBTIQA+ media and voices.

Tanya

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Federal Member for Sydney

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Authorised by T. Plibersek, ALP, 1a Great Buckingham Street, Redfern 2016

Kindness as resistance

Lonnie & Kankawa Nagarra at Sydney Festival

RELIGION & ETHICS

ANDREW COLLIS

SINCE 1979, Lonnie Holley has devoted his life to improvisation. A survivor of Jim Crow-era Alabama, his practice was born from struggle and has grown into a lifelong expression of resilience and imagination. Across drawing, sculpture, music, film and performance, Holley transforms the everyday into something sacred.

That devotion to creation was palpable on Saturday January 10, 3-4pm, at ACO On The Pier, Dawes Point, when Sydney Festival offered a rare kind of shelter: an hour of improvised music that felt like prayer – unshowy, unhurried and fiercely alive. The staging was stripped back: four chairs, a piano and synth, no light show, no spectacle. The focus was presence.

Holley – legendary for sculptures and assemblages made from found and discarded materials – brought that same spiritual practice to the stage: making something tender from what the world throws away. His voice carried the warmth of a street-corner prophet, greeting the room as “sisters and brothers ... friends”, speaking of Mother Earth and Mother Universe in a language that refuses hierarchy.

“The Kind Spirit has brought us together,” he said – not a slogan, but an invitation.

Holley’s songs moved in one- and two-chord loops: open forms that could hold grief, humour, warning and praise. In one piece, he kept returning to the word “hallelujah”: a human response to pain or need, less triumph than truth. Then came the hard paradox – “the baby

or the bomb” – a stark question about what we choose to build, what we choose to worship, and how empire trains our priorities. In Holley’s hands it wasn’t moral theatre; it was lament and clarity braided together.

On this occasion, Holley was joined by celebrated musician and activist Kankawa Nagarra, a Walmatjarri Elder from Wangkatjungka in the Kimberley, whose debut album *Wirlmarni* won the 2024 Australian Music Prize. Her songs carry deep ground and steady grace: blues, country and gospel infused with Walmatjarri songlines and a clear-eyed care for people and Country.

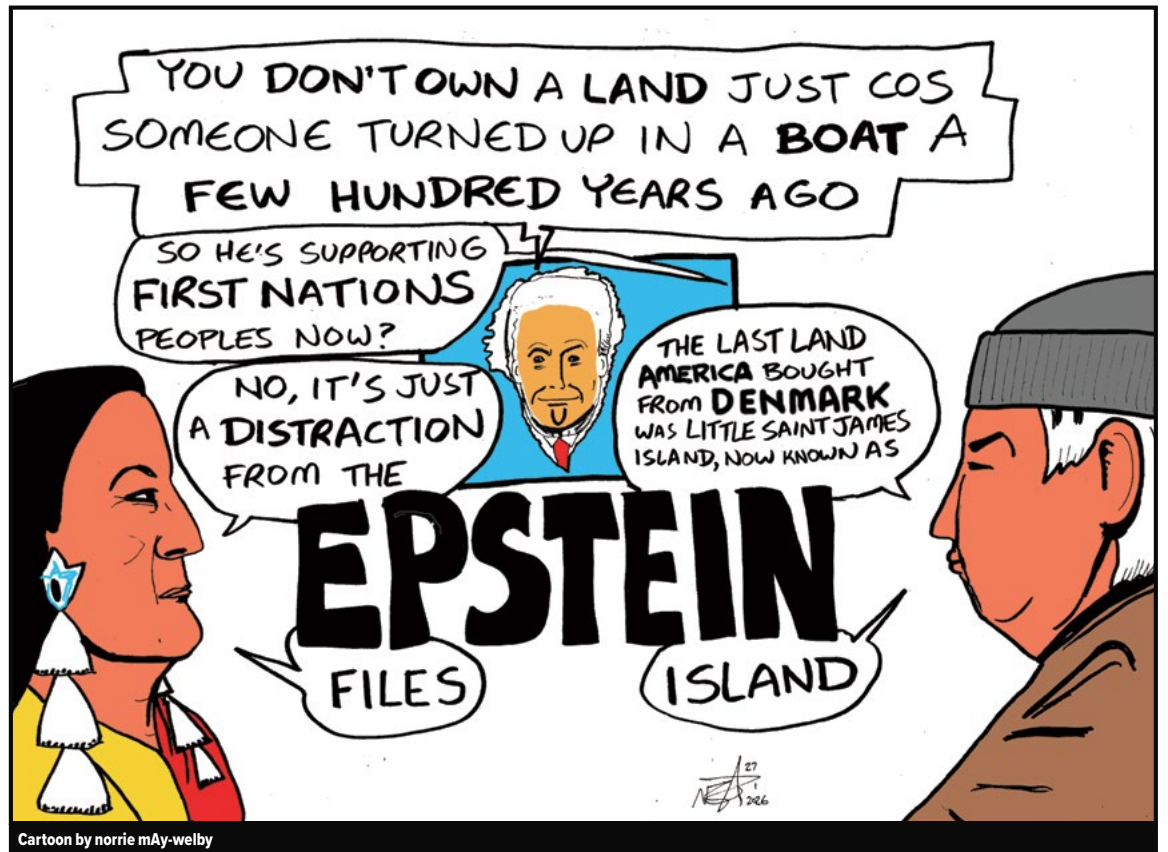
“I speak three languages,” she told us with a gentle smile. “English is one of them.” Her voice carried both tenderness and iron.

Standout songs included “Wirlmarni” (“disappearances”), “Tell You a Story” and “Dollar Sign” – a protest against pastoral exploitation and the destruction of Country. Holley listened closely, adding percussion, high harmonies and whistles in unobtrusive ways, praising Nagarra as a bold and faithful artist.

Beside them, collaborators Darren Hanlon (who produced *Wirlmarni*) and Lee Bains (guitar, vocals, percussion) coaxed lead breaks, shakers, suitcase bass drum and soft textures into the mix – humble, gently encouraging, shaping the music without pushing it.

By the end it felt like nourishment: two wise artists from different continents, aligned in compassion, insisting – with hard-won integrity – that creativity can still be kindness, and kindness can still be resistance.

SSH



Cartoon by norrie mAy-welby

Aunties' voices at Women's Reconciliation Network (WRN) Redfern

FIRST PEOPLES

LORETTA PICONE

LATE last year, the WRN organised a celebratory yarning with Redfern Aunties at the National Indigenous Centre of Excellence, which concluded with Aunty Beryl's delicious lunch. In the heartland of Redfern, the gathering recognised the truth-telling and leadership of grassroots community advocates. Hosted by WRN and co-led by City of Sydney's Tracey Duncan (Gomerioi), members listened to an impressive line-up of Aunties.

Aunty Millie Ingram AM, a Wiradjuri woman from central New South Wales, continues more than 65 years of community-building work. She is the recipient of the 2024 NAIDOC Female Elder Award and was recognised in the 2025 Order of Australia honours list for her lifelong commitment to Aboriginal communities across the state, following the establishment of Murawina, the first childcare centre in Redfern. Aunty Millie said: 'We are to recognise our Aboriginal history, bear witness, stand up to racism and address the continuing damage of the White Australia policy.'

Aunty Donna Ingram, elected to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) for Sydney, continues to educate communities about local history and its challenges. Through Redfern Aboriginal Walking Tours, she provides culturally safe tours that create community opportunities. Growing up on The Block in Redfern, her life's work connects her with Mudgin-Gal Women's Place, Wyanga Aged Care, Tribal Warrior, the Metropolitan Local Aboriginal Land Council and Murawina.



Aunty Dolly Brown, Tracey Duncan, Aunty Donna Ingram, Jarin Ingram Baigent and Aunty Millie Ingram AM (seated). Photo: Loretta Picone

Aunty Margaret Campbell, an Eora Elder, calls on her people to use their voices locally, across New South Wales and at the federal level. An official participant in Sydney's 1991 NAIDOC Week, she now provides cultural experiences through Dreamtime Southern X cultural tours at sites across Sydney, including Dhumbalong (Darling Harbour). She also leads structural reform through Reconciliation Action Plans, creating opportunities for students to engage with First Nations businesses and communities.

Jarin Ingram Baigent is the CEO of Wyanga Aged Care, a community-controlled, not-for-profit organisation providing culturally safe care. Wyanga has secured the site for Redfern's Aboriginal-run residential aged care facility through the City of Sydney. Donations are welcome via wyanga.org.au.

Aunty Dolly Brown, a Dunghutti, Yuin and Dharawal woman, comes from a family that escaped being 'taken' and later settled in the Illawarra. A long-standing founder of the Gandangara Local Aboriginal Land Council since 1982, she speaks on Country, advocates for First Nations rights, serves as an advisory chair for Sutherland

Shire Reconciliation and is a recognised artist. She engages communities in learning about Dharawal culture and participates in events including Harmony Day, the Rainbow Serpent Picnic and NAIDOC Week.

Aunty Beryl Van Oploo OAM, a Gamilaroi woman, grew up with 'no rights' under the Aboriginal Protection Board after the death of her mother. Guided by her mother's love and knowledge of native foods, her determination led her to pioneer bush foods and influence some of the world's leading chefs. Alongside her close friend, restaurateur Kylie Kwong, she has helped 'reignite the women's revolution'. She heads Barrgay and Yaama Dhiyaan, leading cooking and hospitality programs in Redfern. While it was Sorry Business, she persevered, saying: 'No time for crying, we will make it happen.' During the Dhinawan Yarning and Entertainment cultural performance, Raff Gramatkovski played the yidaki (didgeridoo) and aptly noted: 'There is only one thing more powerful than an Aboriginal woman, and that is a group of them.'

SSH

WRN Redfern welcomes new members in 2026. Next yarning circle: Thursday, 26 February 9.45-11.45 am at the Redfern Community Centre or via zoom. More info at wrnredfern.org.au.



Hyde Park rally marks 10 years since death of David Dungay Jr in custody

On Sunday 18 January, a protest was held at Hyde Park to mark the 10-year anniversary of the death in custody of David Dungay Jr and to draw attention to Aboriginal deaths in custody. Police prevented the group from marching and later directed the crowd to disperse, with no arrests reported. The rally took place amid ongoing national concern, with 33 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people recorded as having died in custody during the 2024-25 reporting year, including 12 in NSW, the highest number of Indigenous deaths recorded since national monitoring began.

Text and photo: Florian Craissac

Experiment, revolve, create: Redfern’s new artist-run space

ART
ALKY AVRAMIDES

STEP out of the Little Eveleigh Street exit of the newly upgraded Redfern Station, take a left and walk a few metres. Among the tightly packed terraces and behind a brightly painted roller door, a new artist-run gallery has opened for business. Daryl Lo’s brainchild, Revolve Gallery, aims to be a place for experimentation, for conceiving and implementing.

It’s a multi-use concept, combining a coffee shop, an artist-supply shop, an artist workshop and studio hire into a wonderful exhibition and event space where young and emerging artists can have the time and space to spread their wings and realise ideas their passions dictate.

Its name hints at the gallery’s dynamic approach to an expanded idea of an exhibition. Open to everyone, including the uninitiated, Revolve encourages exhibitors to look at their proposals from different viewpoints. Hanging works from a wall is one approach. What other ways can an artist show their works? Move around your initial concept, revolve it. You may see an unexpected aspect that can speak to a new and



Photo: Alky Alvrarnides

unrealised possibility. This is the avant-garde’s garden of dreams and a place where an artist can try out and break out. Failure is not an option as it is the least of all concerns. In fact, experimentation – trying out new ways of doing things – is in the DNA of this gallery, and there will always be a process of re-evaluation.

Revolve Gallery had its first show in late December 2025. Curated by Amelia Rand, one of its collaborators, it expressed the theme of Revolve: to show a series of works that iterate around one idea or composition. This is at the heart of all art-making and expresses the importance of process in an artist’s oeuvre.

Continuing this approach, where the theme mirrors an aspect of art-making, the gallery’s second show, opening February 13, ‘Second Serve’, asks artists to present at least two works that show the transformation of an initial work into something entirely new – a kind of before-and-after transformation.

The analogy, of course, is that one can have a second serve in tennis and hopefully score an ace. There are no double faults at Revolve Gallery, so come and play, sit in the wings and watch, have a drink, buy some art materials, or maybe just fix the leg of that coffee table!

Young poets and authors look great on paper



Story Factory students Janan, Rashmitha and Prisha with their published books. Photo: Natasha Capstick

BOOKS
ANNA ZABOW

YOUNG writers from Story Factory have celebrated their emergence as published authors and poets, with the launch of 13 novellas and 10 poetry collections at the University of Sydney.

The proud writers shared excerpts from their work and signed copies of their books – as professional authors do.

Ranging from Years 7 to 12, the students came from across Western Sydney for weekly workshops in Story Factory Parramatta’s Year of the Novella and Year of Poetry programs.

In workshops, and between them, students used their writing tool

of choice – scraps of paper, scrolls, the Notes App, even a letter board. Week by week, they workshoped their ideas, wrote (and re-wrote) their drafts, and learned from visiting authors and professional editors. They supported each other on their writing quests, and cheered each other on.

‘Over the past three years, every Thursday I travelled from Penrith to

Parramatta,’ says Oliver Muzzatti, a Year 12 student who has published his third book with Story Factory.

‘I’ve had the great pleasure of calling Story Factory Parramatta my home. I found love and passion for the art of storytelling.’

Across both programs, each student brought a unique writing style and voice. Poets conjured up hip hop-tinged verse, hilarious conversational lines, and personal vulnerability. Novelists together wrote more than 25,000 words across genres from fantasy to historical fiction and sci-fi.

The workshops were a transformative experience for all participants.

‘What Story Factory does with all our programs is particularly evident in Year of the Novella and Year of Poetry,’ says Jerry Ray, who led the programs. ‘The students really identify as a writer, they become a writer.’

Dr Catherine Keenan AM, Executive Director and Co-founder of Story Factory, echoes this sentiment.

‘What we’re really celebrating with the publication of these books – what is, I think, truly special, and what I am most proud of – is something that’s harder to see than the books themselves,’ she says.

‘The book is just the end product. The thing that matters is that each and every one of your young writers has found their voice and used it.’

Excerpt from *Gulp* by Oliver Muzzatti, Year of Poetry 2025

If only
they thought about
teaching the grey withering men
in charge of the world we’re in
Not thinking about
the children
of tomorrow land
But rather
more concerned
with lining their
pocket books
That’s a check-mate
A dollar in their croaking hand
But we can’t say nothing
We’re too quiet
Even though they’re
the ones
from the silent generation
If we shout together
we could stop
the damnation
of our nation

.....

Year of Poetry 2025 was supported by Create NSW, The University of Sydney, the Jibb Foundation and the City of Parramatta. Year of the Novella 2025 was supported by Create NSW and The University of Sydney. Purchase a copy of the students’ work through Story Factory’s online book shop.



Five-and-a-half

SHORT STORIES

HOLLY HAISMAN

I met her when I was seventeen walking home from school in my starchy uniform, which seemed to be shrinking with age.

She was so small, standing in her driveway in a pink jumpsuit, one hand clutching a toy rabbit, the other waving at me. I tried to wave back but I was carrying my laptop in one hand and a water bottle in the other, in a desperate attempt to make my backpack lighter. I wasn't sure whether to say hello, knowing that she might get in trouble for talking to strangers, so I gave a half-nod instead, hoping she would notice. I shouldn't have worried because soon enough she started talking to me. Asking me questions.

'Why are you walking past my house?'

'Do you go to school?'

'I'm five-and-a-half, how old are you?'

'I think I've seen you before.'

She had a confidence that I instantly admired, a confidence that I couldn't seem to match. It sounds strange, reflecting on this now, being slightly intimidated by a five-and-a-half-year-old.

'I'm your neighbour. I live about three doors down', I replied, gesturing vaguely with my water bottle.

She was silent for a few seconds, just staring and smiling. And then she started to laugh. At me or at her own private joke, I wasn't sure. I smiled back and wondered whether to stay or keep walking. I did a quick scan-there was no one else around, and I didn't want her standing so close to the road all by herself. We had only just met, but already I felt the need to protect her. I stepped away from the road, onto her grassy front lawn, hoping she would copy me.

'This is a lavender bush', she said instead, pointing at the giant bush near her front steps

filled with bright, purple flowers.

'Oh yeah, it is.' I inched towards it. 'It's a very pretty bush.'

And that was it. She proceeded to spend the next five minutes explaining the history of the lavender bush: how her dad planted it, and her sister watered it, and her grandmother always picked the lavenders whenever she came over and used them to make her clothes smell nice. She talked and she talked, and whenever I tried to say something, she just kept on talking. It was like adding fuel to an engine.

She was about to tell me about her second-best friend's new cat when a woman emerged from the front door, presumably her mum. She was dressed in blue nurse's scrubs, her eyes heavy with fatigue and all the things she had seen that day.

'Ivy, I told you to come inside ten minutes ago!' she said. She sounded strained, putting all her efforts into being patient with her ever-talkative daughter.

Then, seeing me standing on her front lawn, awkwardly balancing my belongings, the woman gave me a knowing look, and shrugged her shoulders as if to say, *What am I supposed to do with her?*

I'm so sorry you've had to listen to all of that. Ivy's a bit full-on.' As she said this, she smiled like I was part of some inside joke.

I smiled back. 'I don't mind, she's fun to talk to.'

'Ha, well you're very patient with her!'

I laughed but I felt hot suddenly, like I was somehow betraying Ivy by talking about her with her mum. I watched as she led Ivy back inside, waving before she closed the front door. I remember just standing there, unable to stop smiling. Talking to Ivy felt like drinking a glass of cold water after too much salt.

And as I walked home, my seventeen-year-old world hit me with a newfound dullness.



How to find a long lost song

MUSIC

JOEL O'CONNOR

WHEN I was a kid DJ in the early 1990s, I used to trawl the 'releases' section of the community radio station where I broadcast. One song stayed with me: a plaintive, haunting chorus that went, 'Living out on the street / on only \$25 a week / try to make the rough ends meet / you've got to keep your fingers crossed.'

The album cover was something like a *We Are the World*-style collaboration. There was a large group of singers, Deborah Conway among them, and I was pretty sure the same release included a cover of AC/DC's *Rock 'n' Roll Damnation*.

The song appealed to my innate sense of social justice, even as a kid, and my belief in supporting people doing it tough. I related to its depiction of hardship, given my own background, and I was taken by the beauty of the vocal delivery.

Over the years, as the song came to mind again, I became determined to find it but internet lyric searches never turned up the words. It seemed to have dissipated beyond the annals of collective memory.

Last year, my girlfriend's 50th birthday gave me a reason to contact Deborah Conway, who is a favourite artist of hers. Deborah generously agreed to help with a small serenade, which was a beautiful experience. Afterwards, I asked

her about the song I'd been searching for, but she had no recollection of it, noting that the 1980s were something of a haze.

I later stumbled across a reference to *Everything to Live For*, a 1986 recording by a group called The Rock Party. It featured an extraordinary cast of performers, including Deborah Conway, and was created around a social justice cause. When a copy finally turned up online, I was stoked, of course.

It's a great song, but it wasn't THE song.

Another lead followed, this time to *Big Choir Sings*, a 1984 project which did a recording involving a wide range of Australian performers, celebrating punk spirit and challenging elitism in the music scene. I found a rare copy for sale. There was 'Rock 'n' Roll Damnation' on the track list.

Then came the real breakthrough.

I remembered that I had taped my radio shows as a 15-year-old on 3CCC FM. After some careful fast-forwarding and rewinding, I heard my teenage self-introduce the song as *Fingers Crossed* by Noel's Cowards. I'd had the answer all along.

Fingers Crossed (Living Out on the Street) was recorded by Phil Judd and Noel Crombie, with Wendy Matthews and Vika Bull on vocals.

Finding it closed a long circle of curiosity. I knew the song now that had stayed with me all these years, but I also now have the music for a whole lot of other songs and projects that are a doorway into the social justice side of Australia's music scene in the 1980s.

Book Review by Melinda Kearns



Flesh
David Szalay
Penguin Books, 2025

The Booker Prize-winning *Flesh* by David Szalay details the story of Istvan, who at the beginning of the novel is a young man lacking direction and impetus. Unfortunately (or fortunately for him), Istvan does not achieve any kind of autonomy as his life goes on throughout the text, and he is content to exist as an amoral mediocrity.

Istvan is living and working in London and, despite no obvious positive personal attributes, has a series of encounters which begin his upward social trajectory. As the driver of a very rich businessman, Istvan catches the eye of the businessman's wife, marrying her after the death of the businessman. He embarks upon some questionable business ventures of his own and achieves a modicum of success, which is negatively regarded by the businessman's first son, who comes to understand the questionable financial arrangements that Istvan has entered into.

Istvan rides the currents of life, seemingly having no personal beliefs, ambition or motivation. The novel creates a tale about a purposefully

nebulous character. Istvan is a cypher, with no discernible characteristics, following pleasure where it presents itself and coping with pain in more or less the same way. The scene in which Istvan watches his wife's first son shoot up and overdose, and then debates whether he is going to call an ambulance, demonstrates the apathetic way that Istvan moves through life.

The novel is interesting and engaging, reflecting meaningfully on what should motivate us and what we expect from the people in our lives. It explores the lack of engagement and purpose that someone can have. A compelling story that is well told.

Theatre review by Yvonne Hocothee



The Murder of Roger Ackroyd
Director: Ali Bendall
Writer: Agatha Christie
Genesian Theatre, Rozelle
January 23-February 28, 2026

The Genesian Theatre's first production for 2026 is based on possibly the most famous of Agatha Christie's murder mysteries. Adapted for stage by Philip Grecian, it's a delightful treat for all whodunit fans, serving up an entertaining mix of intricate plot, colourful characters, humour and of

course, an ability to keep the audience guessing till the end.

The narrative of the play is so dense with twists, turns and red herrings that the audience is advised to pay careful attention as the play progresses. When affluent Roger Ackroyd is found murdered in his locked study, it becomes a case for Hercule Poirot to solve. Although retired, he is drawn into the case by his neighbour, Caroline Sheppard, the sister of the local doctor. The lively Caroline is au fait with everything that happens in the village of King's Abbot and her conversations with her brother expose a lot of the recent goings-on in the community. Roger Ackroyd's mansion is inhabited by the usual cast of retainers and relatives, all of whom are likely suspects, each with his or her personal secrets and hidden connections. These, Poirot gradually unearths through his customary unorthodox methods. His revelation of the murderer is, naturally, an unlikely surprise.

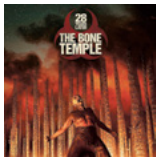
Director Ali Bendall is to be congratulated on maintaining a pacy momentum in a play which requires about twenty-two scene changes. One of Genesian's strengths in presenting period plays is creating an authentic sense of the time. This, they have managed by keeping props to a minimum and masking parts of the stage with curtains. The use of the auditorium doors and stairs also gives the audience a more inclusive experience of the play.

Mention must be made of the large and excellent cast: Peter David Allison is Hercule Poirot to the tee, Roslyn Hicks plays Caroline Sheppard with

great verve and humour, Nathan Moss as Dr Sheppard is believably calm and professional, while David Stewart-Hunter as Inspector Raglan is both slightly comedic and bumbling.

As well as a creatively designed show programme, Genesian's cast and crew have excelled themselves in a very entertaining presentation of an Agatha Christie classic. It's a great start to the theatrical year and fans should make a point of giving this whodunit treat a viewing.

Film review by Lindsay Cohen



28 Years Later: The Bone Temple
Director: Nia DaCosta
Starring: Ralph Fiennes,
Jack O'Connell, Alfie Williams
Genre: 28 zombies

This review was originally going to be of *28 Years Later* (2025) and its sequel *28 Years Later: The Bone Temple*. But much to my surprise, the films were very different, though both were great examples of excellent zombie films that aren't specifically about zombies.

The Bone Temple and the original *28 Days Later* (2002) are more similar to each other – both very post-apocalyptic, demonstrating the challenges to humanity once only a small fraction of

humans survive the apocalypse (alas, *28 Weeks Later* (2007) was much less interesting and less relevant). Other examples of zombie shows not really about zombies include *Night of the Living Dead* (1968) which is about the benefits and dangers of capitalism, while *The Walking Dead* TV series (2010-2022) is mostly about man's inhumanity to man (humans were the real monsters).

The Bone Temple does feature a few standard zombies and one extraordinary and monstrous zombie in particular. But it focuses mostly on the critical challenge of competition between the remaining humans struggling to survive post-apocalypse by living semi-normal lives or thrive in violence and chaos. Admittedly that's a deep and meaningful interpretation. Most viewers will simply enjoy and/or be freaked out by the horrific battles and torture scenes between the humans and the drug-friendly efforts by legendary Dr Kelson (Ralph Fiennes) to 'befriend' and 'cure' the extreme 'Alpha' zombie.

Fiennes's performance is extraordinary, to the extent that he's now being rightfully considered for an Academy Award. He's slightly unhinged, very British, insightful, perceptive, and a great performer who loves Duran Duran. That's both Fiennes in person and the role he's playing and why he deserves the award.

The good news is that there's another *28 Years Later* sequel on its way, while anticipation of other subsequent films in 28 decades and 28 centuries is also hoped for.

Rating: Five futures

The secret life of Sydney's seafood

ENVIRONMENT

EMMANUELLE BOTTÉ

SUMMER in Sydney means different things for different people, but if you consider food, chances are that many will think about seafood. With the recent opening of the new Sydney fish market adding fresh energy to the city's food scene, seafood is firmly in the spotlight. And while taste and texture delight the palate of seafood fans, bivalves in particular do a lot more for all Sydneysiders than first meets the eye.

Oysters, mussels, scallops and clams are all bivalves. Sydney Harbour has hosted bivalve species for thousands of years, and Aboriginal populations have consumed the iconic Sydney rock oyster for at least 10,000 years. More recently, we have learnt to exploit the biology of these animals to



Customers at the opening of the new Sydney Fish Market enjoying some oysters. Photo: Michelle Haywood

monitor water quality, a practice referred to as biomonitoring.

Put simply, bivalves can be the aquatic equivalent of canaries in a coal mine, as their health status can act as powerful

warning systems, alerting us to potential issues (for ourselves or the environment) in the water that they inhabit. Oysters and mussels are particularly important "sentinels" worldwide,

as they live attached to rocks, filtering hundreds of litres of water per day, and are therefore exposed to the pollutants, bacteria and viruses present in the water.

Because they cannot move, bivalves constantly accumulate contaminants. In effect, we use them as passive "samplers" that can be analysed for the presence of dozens of environmental indicators. For example, metals such as zinc, copper, or lead are difficult to quantify directly in the water, as their concentrations are often too low for detection. But since bivalves can neither escape nor excrete them, concentrations in their tissues increase over time. In Sydney, oysters and mussels are used to assess the presence of these metals, among others, providing a means to detect pollutants otherwise untraceable.

Bivalves can also help us detect high levels of harmful bacteria such as *Escherichia coli* or *Vibrio* species, and to a certain extent, other pollutants such as pesticides and microplastics.

For those who consume seafood, this very word often rhymes with good times spent with family and friends around a platter. It is also nice to remind ourselves of the other benefits that nature provides us with, perhaps in a more discreet fashion, but with clear positive outcomes for all Sydneysiders. SSH



Photo: Steve Hillebrand

Low-cost mood lifters

HEALTH

GILL ROBSON

IF you're feeling tired, cross, out of sorts, too hot or just plain blue, here are four ways to boost your mood that will cost nothing or next to nothing:

1. Move your body. Go for a walk, go for a run, take a tin of beetroot out of the cupboard and pretend you're on the Shake Weight infomercial (*ahem* *cough* I have never done this. Repeat: this has never happened), put some dance music on Spotify and clean your kitchen floor with that ratty scourer that needs to be thrown out anyway. Note to self one: this post is now far too personal. Note to self two: Must buy new scourers. Move your body.

2. Socialise. Call a friend. Text a friend. Email a friend. Go to church. Go to a meeting. Join a group. Organise a party. Be political. Volunteer. Go sit in the park and make friends with the pigeons. Note to self three: Harry said he wanted more birdseed last time we spoke. Socialise.

3. Set a goal and move towards it. Set a big goal. Set a little goal. Set one hundred goals. Set one goal. Make a to-do list. Make a have-done list. But decide something you want to achieve and take some step towards it for a reasonable period of time. Note to self four: must get into training to swim the English Channel. Note to self five: When I get to England, must look up where to see badgers. Note to self six: Must find out how normal it is for a 140kg

woman to swim the English Channel. Wouldn't want to step on any toes.

4. Give someone a hug or a pat. If you've got a spouse, hold them close. If you've got a pet, pat them gently. If you're alone, moisturise and use a body brush on your skin. It will make you feel warm and tender and relaxed.

Those are four simple ways to make yourself feel better for zero dollars. For those looking for low-cost exercise, Fr Dave Smith does boxing in Mundine Gym on Tuesday and Thursday nights. For those looking for social connections, South Sydney Uniting Church is open with services at the Factory Community Centre every Sunday at 10am. There's a free feed every week and groceries to take home. SSH

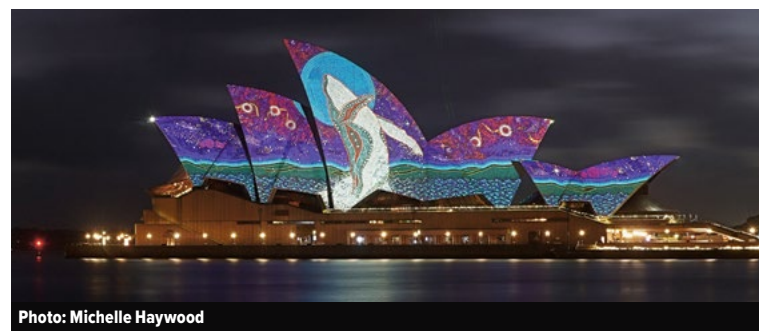


Photo: Michelle Haywood

Out & About – February 2026

PAT CLARKE

WELCOME to 2026, and the 25th year of the South Sydney Herald, online and in print! It is also the Chinese Year of the Fire Horse, which means energy, change and dynamism, starting on February 17 and ending on February. Colours for good luck are green, gold and white.

What better way to celebrate the Lunar New Year than with the **Haymarket Street Festival – February 14, 5pm-10pm from Chinatown to Thaitown**. There will be lion dances, street food, markets and traditional and contemporary performances.

Hay Street will also light up with 12 Lunar Lanterns of quirky zodiac animals by Erika Zhu. Find them opposite Paddy's Markets light rail stop, every day from Wednesday, February 11 until Sunday, March 1.

Family Lunar New Year Craft Workshop at Green Square Library
Monday, February 16 (355 Botany Road, Zetland), 2.30-4.30pm
Arts and crafts with a Lunar NY theme for families with children over five years. This is a free event, but bookings are essential.

Sydney Gay & Lesbian Mardi Gras Festival, February 13-March 1
There are some 80 events in this

year's festival, themed 'Ecstatica', culminating in the Parade along Oxford Street on Saturday February 28.

Belvoir St Theatre Unwaged Performance Program 2026

Always in our February issue I publish the **Belvoir Unwaged Program** for our theatre-loving volunteers and readers for the coming year. Unwaged performances for 2026 are on **Thursdays at 1pm** and to claim your ticket visit the Belvoir Box Office from 11am on the day of the performance. Pensioner, Health Care Card, Vets Card with photo ID. (MEAA and Equity cards also accepted).

March 19: *The Mirror*
April 9: *Drive Your Plow over the Bones of the Dead*
June 4: *The Birds*
Sept 3: *Runt*
Oct 15: *A Room with a View*
Dec 17: *The Coconut Children*

Welcome to our newest volunteers 2026.
Sasha Imada: series reviews and local interviews;
Murray Gillet: short stories and local interviews and
Joel O'Connor: stories from the past. We look forward to your contributions in 2026.

Pat Clarke
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volunteers@ssh.com.au

SSH